

On June 25, 2014, a Louisiana judge overturned the conviction of Nathan Brown after results from DNA testing of crime scene evidence proved Brown is innocent. The DNA evidence matched an alternative suspect, a man currently incarcerated in Mississippi who lived only a few blocks away from the crime scene. Brown served roughly 17 years of a 25-year sentence for a crime he did not commit.

In August 1997, a woman walking through the courtyard of her apartment building in Jefferson Parrish, Louisiana, was attacked from behind. The attacker bit the victim's neck, ripped her dress, and took her purse before she was able to fend him off. The victim, a Caucasian woman, told police she had been attacked by an African-American man wearing black shorts and no shirt and who had a very strong body odor. The victim thought her attacker lived outside the apartment complex, but a security guard at the complex directed the police to Brown, one of a small number of African-American residents of the complex. Police knocked on Brown's door just minutes after the crime. He was wearing pajamas and rocking his young daughter to sleep. The officers then conducted a highly suggestive one-on-one show-up identification procedure in which a single suspect is presented to the eyewitness at either the site of the arrest or near the site of the crime. Brown was told to get dressed and was taken outside to the victim who was waiting in a patrol car. The victim then identified Brown as her assailant. Though Brown did not have a strong body odor and indeed smelled of soap, the victim explained at trial she believed he must have taken a shower and that meant he was her attacker.

The defense attorney hired by Brown's mother was ill-prepared for trial, meeting Brown for the first time on the day his trial was to start. In spite of four relatives who were at home with Brown that night testifying as alibi witnesses, Brown was convicted in less than a day. Brown was sentenced to 25 years in prison without possibility of parole for the crime of attempted aggravated rape.

Post-conviction, Brown consistently maintained his innocence. The Innocence Project became involved with Brown's case and with the consent of the Jefferson Parrish District Attorney's Office, DNA testing of a stain on the shoulder of the dress the victim was wearing was conducted. The stain tested positive for saliva and yielded a full male DNA profile that excluded Brown. The DNA profile was consistent with male DNA found on other areas of the dress, including the front where the assailant had ripped it open. The profile was entered into the federal DNA database and

there was a match to an offender convicted of a felony in Mississippi who, at the time of the assault, lived within blocks of the complex where the victim was attacked. Misidentification by eyewitnesses remains the single biggest cause of wrongful convictions. An eyewitness misidentification has been involved in roughly 75 percent of the 316 convictions overturned through DNA testing.