



Bloodsworth: The True Story of the First Death Row Inmate Exonerated by DNA

Tim Junkin

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Charged with the rape and murder of a nine-year-old girl in 1984, Kirk Bloodsworth was tried, convicted, and sentenced to die in Maryland's gas chamber. From the beginning, he proclaimed his innocence, but when he was granted a new trial because his prosecutors improperly withheld evidence, the second trial also resulted in conviction. Bloodsworth read every book on criminal law in the prison library and persuaded a new lawyer to petition for the then-innovative DNA testing.

After nine years in one of the harshest prisons in America, Kirk Bloodsworth was vindicated by DNA evidence. He was pardoned by the governor of Maryland and has gone on to become a tireless spokesman against capital punishment.

Bloodsworth: The True Story of the First Death Row Inmate Exonerated by DNA Details

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From Reader Review Bloodsworth: The True Story of the First Death Row Inmate Exonerated by DNA for online ebook

Wanda Keith says

This is an amazing story of Kirk Bloodsworth who was the first death row inmate to be exonerated by DNA. Bloodsworth was convicted on circumstantial evidence which was extremely weak. He spent almost nine years in prison, much of it on death row, fighting to prove his innocence. The crime he was convicted of was the brutal rape and murder of a nine year old girl. I tried to put myself in Bloodsworth's position as I read what he went through but it was impossible to imagine. The justice system against him was criminal in their prosecution of a man who they chose to be the perpetrator of this crime and they fit the evidence to convict him. Evidence was withheld from the defense and witnesses were led to identify a man the prosecution had chosen for the gas chamber. Like most people on death row, Bloodsworth did not have money for a proper defense and the state had limitless funds to prosecute. While reading in prison he came across a book by Joseph Wambaugh about a new process called DNA that was used in a case in England. From there Bloodsworth was constantly on his legal team to use this new process because he knew it would exonerate him. Since Bloodsworth was exonerated due to DNA there have been 156 other death row inmates who have been exonerated as well for murders they did not commit. Just imagine being on death row and knowing you are innocent! I have read other books recently dealing with this same subject. 'The Sun Does Shine' by Anthony Ray Hinton who spent 30 years on death row and was exonerated was another great book on this subject. These books are powerful and need to make us all take a serious look at our justice system and how unfair it is to the less fortunate in this country. Either abolish the death penalty altogether or put serious limits on it. Above all, see to it that all people, regardless of race or financial conditions, have the same rights to a defense as the wealthy. Writing Congressmen or joining in organizations like the Equal Justice Initiative is a start that anyone can take. Highly recommend this book.

Marina Shipley says

This book absolutely broke my heart and made me so mad at the same time! How could the prosecutors disregard so many signs and put this young man behind the bars for something he hadn't done??

Kathleen Brunnett says

Such an array of emotions as I read this book... Angry at the sloppy and negligent police work. Incredibly sad that this man had to endure this horrific treatment knowing full well he was innocent. Relieved and proud that there were people who believed in him and worked tirelessly to prove his innocence. Can't wait to discuss this with my faculty book group this fall.

bup says

A real page-turner of a book that imparts a really important message: CORRECTLY DETERMINING AND CONVICTING PERPETRATORS OF BIG CRIMES - WE'RE REALLY BAD AT IT.

I read another excellent book called *False Justice* several years ago that has more stats and more argument - for instance, now that DNA has exonerated a bunch of people who were condemned or serving life, we shouldn't be complacent, because DNA evidence only exists for about 10% of cases. This book makes the same point, but because it's one person's compelling story, maybe it will resonate better. It was a minor miracle they found any DNA to test for Bloodsworth, because the FBI had told police there was no DNA on the victim's clothing. Nine years after his conviction Bloodsworth found a defense attorney who was willing to spend money to look anyway.

Or: eyewitness testimony is unreliable because after people decide someone is a person they've seen before, they get more and more confident as time passes even though logic dictates they should become less certain. Again, the case is made here because the convicted man was wrongly ID'd by 5 different people, one of whom had called in a tip about *someone else she thought might have committed the crime*, before she testified at trial she had seen Bloodsworth with the victim and was certain of it. And all the adults (two of the witnesses were children) had seen Bloodsworth on TV already before they were asked to pick him out of a lineup.

Also, juries and prosecutors feel more pressure to convict the larger the crime is. People don't want to let a possible murderer free, and they often figure, hey, if the police say he's the guy, good enough. Here, we see that when the foreman of the jury after the trial said he was glad to be done and glad the jury wouldn't be doing the sentencing, because "the whole thing was based on very weak evidence." That's the *foreman of a jury that convicted him in less than three hours*.

So yeah. People respond to stories better than they do to statistics (at least, that's what I'm told. I guess I'm a robot). This book tells one man's story in a book that's hard to put down, and shows how the system is broken.

Diana Sung says

The shocking miscarriage of justice, Bloodsworth's own honesty in the recounting of this book and his willingness to use his pain and suffering for the benefit of fighting injustice, and the Maryland-ness of this book all deserve high marks. Places in the text itself dragged and there were parts of the writing--especially about the initial criminal investigation--that felt forced and without conviction. I realized in the acknowledgments Junkin was unable to interview the original detectives, perhaps causing some of the disconnect in the writing there, but it made the first half of the book slow to read.

The nightmare endured by Kirk Bloodsworth should inspire everyone to question the value of the death penalty and the nature of our prisons because it shines a light on how very, very flawed our criminal justice system can be. We can do better than we have done.

Danielle says

Could not put it down...such a shame but inspiring

Ann says

This is an amazing book!. In 1984 Kirk Bloodsworth was convicted and sentenced to death for the rape and murder of a young 9 year old girl in Rosedale, Maryland. He appealed and was convicted again. After almost 10 years, he was found innocent when DNA proved that he could not have committed the crime. The injustice of the prosecutor's office and the police to rush a man to conviction to get the crime solved with little or no evidence was absolutely criminal. It took another almost 10 years to test the DNA against the database of convicted criminals to actually put a person on trial for the actual murder. Mr. Bloodsworth wasn't a model citizen but he wasn't a murderer and he kept telling everyone over and over that he was innocent until he finally got someone to listen. I could not put this book down.

Nancy Karwatka says

This book was the One Maryland - One Book selection for 2018. Since the author was going to be at our local library I decided I wanted to read it. It's just shocking to see how a person can be arrested, convicted not once but twice and to be completely innocent of the crime. It's amazing how a prosecutor who is hell bent on a conviction can utilize faulty eyewitness testimony with no physical evidence to secure a conviction. The book was an unbiased analysis of police records and court testimony. It is a beautifully written book that kept my attention from beginning to end.

Mark Fallon says

As Curtis Noble Bloodsworth reminds us, his story is proof that the system doesn't work. And if you believe "this couldn't happen to me", you're deluding yourself.

stella Lee says

2018 Maryland One book, as usual, it did not disappoint me; and it is filled with terrible injustice, anguish frustration, and persistence that eventually prevailed. TRUE story! I cannot wait till meet the author Tim Junkin and hear him personally. Although this story had a happy ending, how many cases of death row inmates had gone to unfair punishment of Death without ever being clearing their names... I do not want to know.... I am thankful for the scientific advancement such as finger printing and DNA evidences that can be used nowadays. This book was written straightforward and journalistic style quoting all sources objectively and allowed me to revisit circumstantial evidences and American judicial system and its loop holes... Setting is in Maryland, where a lot of places so familiar, Great choice Maryland One!

Eden says

So proud to have worked on the One Maryland One Book this year when Bloodsworth was selected!

Julie says

I liked the straightforward reportage and the objective story that Junkin told, well-sourced from interviews with those affected as well as news stories from local journalistic sources like the now-defunct News American and the Essex Times. It did not surprise me to learn that Junkin is a lawyer as well as an award-winning writer.

This was clearly a huge story in Maryland when I was a teenager, with which I had little knowledge or familiarity. The book is a fascinating tour through the justice system, demonstrating how a few mistakes, whether unwitting or deliberate, can make or break a case against an innocent person, in this case, Chesapeake waterman Kirk Bloodsworth. The book group I attended had a thoughtful discussion about the faults of our justice system, whether the death penalty is an appropriate deterrent, and how life-changing an experience prison is for the guilty and the innocent alike. One thing we all agreed on is that Kirk Bloodsworth is an incredibly forgiving man and, despite the horror of what happened to him, his experiences changed him in a way that impacted so many other lives for the better. His advocacy and contributions to justice reform are inspiring and impressive.

This was the One Maryland One Book selection for 2018, and the author is doing an eight-stop book tour, where he will be joined by Kirk Bloodsworth for two stops, including the Baltimore Book Festival. Highly recommended for nonfiction book group discussions.

Ruby says

"This is an extraordinary tale of terrible injustice, of anguish and frustration, of courage and fortitude. It's a tale of a truly good and inspirational man. And of the true power of DNA."

"Curtis had always believed in authority. He'd been a decorated marine, loyal to his country, and had worked for Tidewater Fisheries, which served as the local marine police. He trusted law enforcement, trusted figures of authority, believed they knew what was best. He was conflicted now. Torn between this system he'd always believed in and the word of his son."

"There is a strain of hubris that affects certain people in power, people with authority. It can be slow to develop, like a dormant infection. If not guarded against, it can breed an unhealthy arrogance, a cocksureness that their judgments are beyond fallacy. Such self-righteousness allows them to close their minds to new possibilities. It can cause right-thinking people to do terrible things."

Tori says

Kirk Bloodsworth was tried and convicted for the brutal murder and rape of a 9 year-old girl and sentenced to death row. Long professing his innocence, he tried every avenue possible to prove he had been wrongly convicted. Going on a wing and a prayer, and questionable information from a detective novel, he became the first man to be exonerated by DNA.

Kirk Bloodsworth is my uncle.

I was so young when the crime actually happened, that by the time I was cognizant of my incarcerated uncle, I was so far removed from the details. All I knew is that he wrote me often, and signed all of his cards "A.I.M."-An Innocent Man. I imagined the life he lived, but really never knew the minutia until he sent me a signed copy of this book. To say it was eye-opening would be an understatement. Heart-breaking, gut-wrenching, terrifying...that's more like it. For all parties involved in the crime.

Despite my bias, I believe this is a book worth reading. This review could go on forever, I'll let you formulate your own opinion.

Jessi says

This is a very interesting book. I first learned about this book from a program called One Maryland One Book. Every year, in October, a book is selected and libraries across Maryland have book discussions and events related to that book. This was the book selected in 2018 and I decided to give it a read. This is the real life story of Kirk Bloodsworth who was convicted and sentenced to death row for the rape and murder of 9 year old Dawn Hamilton in the mid 80's. As the book went on, I cringed at the evidence that was supposedly against him (not to mention the horrible crime itself) and at how he was eventually convicted...twice. I'm gonna stop my review there so that you, yourself, can read the story -if so do chose to. This story is well worth the time.
