

DNA Evidence and Crime-Solving

“DNA links patrolman’s killer to unsolved rapes,” Plain Dealer (Cleveland) March 4, 2005.

Cleveland Police are hoping to convict Quisi Bryan, a Cleveland man who was sentenced to death in the murder of a patrol man in 2000, of two unsolved rapes from 1994. Investigators ran Bryan’s DNA through the CODIS system after he was convicted and linked him to the rapes.

“Wisconsin death has Lefkow tie; Man who shot self left note, cops say,” Chicago Tribune March 10, 2005.

A Wisconsin man who committed suicide Thursday, left behind a note claiming responsibility for the murders of U.S. District Judge Jean Lefkow’s husband and mother. Investigators says that they now have enough physical evidence to compare DNA from the alleged murderer to the slayings.

“DNA links 7 rapes, but tip is needed to nab attacker,” Plain Dealer (Cleveland) March 10, 2005.

Cleveland Police have been baffled by a serial rapist who has raped at least seven women in the area since 1996. Due to conflicting descriptions of the attacker, police did not realize that the rapist was one man until DNA evidence from the rapes was submitted to CODIS linking all of the cases to one perpetrator.

“DA opens trial in elderly woman's slaying,” The Denver Post March 9, 2005.

In the murder trial of Danny Pommerville, 24, who is accused in the murder of his 64 year-old grandmother, prosecutors are using DNA evidence found at the crime scene to try to convict Pommerville of first degree murder.

“Jury begins hearing first Seward County murder trial since 1926,” Omaha World-Herald (Nebraska) March 9, 2005.

In the first murder trial in Seward County since 1926, Lara McKinney is charged with murdering her sometimes boyfriend back in 1998. McKinney was linked to the crime through DNA evidence left at the crime scene.

“Police: DNA Unmasked Robber; 2nd Man Sought In Church Holdup,” Sun-Sentinel (Fort Lauderdale, FL) March 9, 2005.

A Fort Lauderdale man, Jason Taylor, 24, has been charged with 3 counts of armed robbery after DNA on a mask found at one of the crimes was matched through CODIS to Taylor, a convicted felon.

“DNA expert links victim, suspect; Skin cells found under dead man’s nails,” Times-Picayune (New Orleans) March 8, 2005.

Jesse Montejo, the man accused of murdering Louis Ferrari, is on trial after DNA found beneath the murder victim’s fingernails matched that of Montejo.

Controversies Concerning DNA Databanks and Laboratories

“Forensic testing review ordered,” Courier Mail (Queensland, Australia) March 4, 2005.

An independent review is looking into the quality and management of DNA work at the state government’s forensic laboratories after an internal report was leaked to the press. Forensic biologist Deanna Belzer was concerned that DNA evidence was inaccurate and that she and others were breaking the law by declaring it accurate.

“Watchdog warns against DNA profiling of babies,” The Guardian (London) March 5, 2005.

The Human Genetics Commission has considered the case for profiling DNA samples for every newborn baby and holding the profile in a national DNA database. The Commission decided to hold off on the initiative due to ethical and financial issues.

DNA Database Funding and Backlog

“Evidence caught up with man, police say,” St. Louis Post-Dispatch (Missouri) March 9, 2005.

Le-Gree Edwards, 40, has been charged with statutory rape and molestation after raping a 13-year-old girl in 2000. The girl notified police after the rape and Edwards was arrested, but was released after prosecutors failed to issue charges. 2 years later, the victim notified police again, claiming that Edwards had raped her and her friend. Police took Edward’s DNA and submitted it to the crime lab where it took nearly a year to get results. Edward’s DNA was eventually linked to the rapes. Police say that DNA backlog caused the delay.

Expanding the DNA Databank

“Expanding the DNA Databank : Assembly Digest,” The Baltimore Sun March 4, 2005.

The Maryland House has approved of a bill to allow the collection of DNA samples from convicted felons, fourth degree burglary and breaking and entering a vehicle. A similar measure is being considered by the Senate.

“Court upholds DNA profiling; Goal is to solve more crimes,” The Atlanta Journal-Constitution March 6, 2005.

The Atlanta Court of Criminal Appeals has unanimously ruled that collecting DNA samples from incarcerated felons does not violate constitutional guarantees against unreasonable search and seizure.

DNA-Based Post Conviction Challenges

“Hearing is set on DNA in '86 rape; Judge now decides to consider testing Chicago Tribune March 8, 2005

A Lake County judge has given permission to go ahead with the evidentiary hearing in the case to exonerate Bennie Starks, a man serving a 60 year prison sentence for a rape he claims that he did not commit. With the aid of an attorney for the Innocence Project, Starks’ lawyer hopes to use untested DNA evidence that was thought to be lost, but recently found, to exonerate Starks.

“Jailed 24 years, freed by DNA; Innocence Project key to exoneration in Louisiana rape case,” Chicago Tribune March 7, 2005.

New DNA testing of evidence from a 1981 sexual assault and beating case have led to the exoneration of Michael Williams. Williams was arrested when he was 16 and spent 24 years behind bars for a crime he did not commit.