



Department of Justice



Office of Justice Programs

EMBARGOED UNTIL 2 P.M. ET
TUESDAY, APRIL 21, 2015

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Justice Department Honors “Picking Cotton” Authors for Sustained Heroism in Addressing Wrongful Conviction

WASHINGTON—The Department of Justice will recognize Ronald Cotton and Jennifer Thompson with the Special Courage Award for their sustained heroism in speaking out about the miscarriage of justice from the perspectives of a victim of rape and of wrongful conviction, during the National Crime Victims’ Rights Service Awards ceremony Tuesday, April 21, in Washington, D.C.

Jennifer Thompson was brutally raped as a 22 year-old college student on July 29, 1984. Her testimony and eyewitness identification sent a young man, Ronald Cotton, to prison for a life term for a crime he did not commit. Cotton persistently maintained his innocence, but Thompson did not learn she was mistaken until 11 years later, after advancements in DNA testing identified the rapist as Bobby Poole, a man at Cotton’s second trial that Thompson had testified she had never seen. DNA exonerated Cotton in 1995.

Thompson asked Cotton for his forgiveness, which he gave. Since then they have advocated as a team for fairness and accuracy in the criminal justice system. They co-authored the *New York Times* best-seller, *Picking Cotton: Our Memoir of Injustice and Redemption*, and have appeared on PBS Frontline, CBS 60 Minutes, and in hundreds of talks before community groups and legislative committees, where they show how to reduce wrongful convictions by explaining aspects of a criminal investigation prior to conviction and revealing the problems with traditional photo identification and police lineups.

At the April 21 ceremony the Justice Department will also recognize 11 other individuals and programs for their outstanding efforts on behalf of crime victims. Descriptions of the honorees are available at the Office for Victims of Crime’s Gallery: <https://ovcnvrvw.ncjrs.gov/Awards/AwardGallery/gallerysearch.html>.

The Department’s Office for Victims of Crime leads communities across the country in observing National Crime Victims’ Rights Week and hosts an award ceremony each year. President Reagan proclaimed the first Victims’ Rights Week in 1981, calling for greater sensitivity to the rights and needs of victims. This year’s observance takes place April 19-25, with the theme *Engaging Communities. Empowering Victims*.

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About the Office of Justice Programs (OJP)

The Office of Justice Programs (OJP), headed by Assistant Attorney General Karol V. Mason, provides federal leadership in developing the nation's capacity to prevent and control crime, administer justice and assist victims. OJP has six components: the Bureau of Justice Assistance; the Bureau of Justice Statistics; the National Institute of Justice; the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; the Office for Victims of Crime and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering and Tracking. More information about OJP can be found at www.ojp.gov.

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