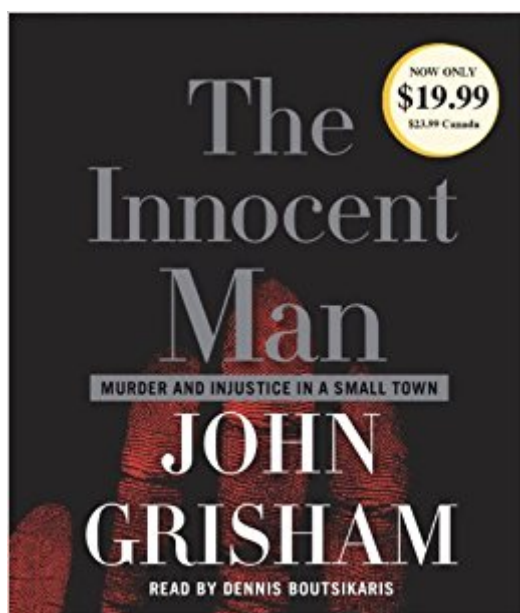


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# The Innocent Man: Murder And Injustice In A Small Town (John Grisham)



## Synopsis

In the major league draft of 1971, the first player chosen from the State of Oklahoma was Ron Williamson. When he signed with the Oakland Athletics, he said goodbye to his hometown of Ada and left to pursue his dreams of big league glory. Six years later he was back, his dreams broken by a bad arm and bad habits—drinking, drugs, and women. He began to show signs of mental illness. Unable to keep a job, he moved in with his mother and slept twenty hours a day on her sofa. In 1982, a 21-year-old cocktail waitress in Ada named Debra Sue Carter was raped and murdered, and for five years the police could not solve the crime. For reasons that were never clear, they suspected Ron Williamson and his friend Dennis Fritz. The two were finally arrested in 1987 and charged with capital murder. With no physical evidence, the prosecution's case was built on junk science and the testimony of jailhouse snitches and convicts. Dennis Fritz was found guilty and given a life sentence. Ron Williamson was sent to death row. If you believe that in America you are innocent until proven guilty, this book will shock you. If you believe in the death penalty, this book will disturb you. If you believe the criminal justice system is fair, this book will infuriate you. From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

John Grisham tackles nonfiction for the first time with *The Innocent Man*, a true tale about murder and injustice in a small town (that reads like one of his own bestselling novels). *The Innocent Man* chronicles the story of Ron Williamson, how he was arrested and charged with a crime he did not

commit, how his case was (mis)handled and how an innocent man was sent to death row.

Grisham's first work of nonfiction is shocking, disturbing, and enthralling--a must read for fiction and nonfiction fans. We had the opportunity to talk with John Grisham about the case and the book, read his responses below. --Daphne Durham 20 Second Interview: A Few Words with John Grisham Q:

After almost two decades of writing fiction, what compelled you to write non-fiction, particularly investigative journalism? A: I was never tempted to write non-fiction, primarily because it's too much work. However, obviously, I love a good legal thriller, and the story of Ron Williamson has all the elements of a great suspenseful story. Q: Why this case? A: Ron Williamson and I are about the same age and we both grew up in small towns in the south. We both dreamed of being major league baseball players. Ron had the talent, I did not. When he left a small town in 1971 to pursue his dreams of major league glory, many thought he would be the next Mickey Mantle, the next great one from the state of Oklahoma. The story of Ron ending up on Death Row and almost being executed for a murder he did not commit was simply too good to pass up. Q: How did you go about your research? A: I started with his family. Ron is survived by two sisters who took care of him for most of his life. They gave me complete access to the family records, photographs, Ron's mental health records, and so on. There was also a truckload of trial transcripts, depositions, appeals, etc., that took about 18 months to organize and review. Many of the characters in the story are still alive and I traveled to Oklahoma countless times to interview them. Q: Did your training as a lawyer help you? A: Very much so. It enabled me to understand the legal issues involved in Ron's trial and his appeals. It also allowed me, as it always does, to be able to speak the language with lawyers and judges. Q: Throughout your book you mention, *The Dreams of Ada: A True Story of Murder, Obsession, and a Small Town*. How did you come across that book, and how did it impact your writing *The Innocent Man*? A: Several of the people in Oklahoma I met mentioned *The Dreams of Ada* to me, and I read it early on in the process. It is an astounding book, a great example of true crime writing, and I relied upon it heavily during my research. Robert Mayer, the author, was completely cooperative, and kept meticulous notes from his research 20 years earlier. Many of the same characters are involved in his story and mine. Q: You take on some pretty controversial and heated topics in your book--the death penalty, prisoner's rights, DNA analysis, police conduct, and more--were any of your own beliefs challenged by this story and its outcome? A: None were challenged, but my eyes were open to the world of wrongful convictions. Even as a former criminal defense attorney, I had never spent much time worrying about wrongful convictions. But, unfortunately, they happen all the time in this country, and with increasing frequency. Q: So many of the key players in this case are either still in office or practicing attorneys. Many family members

and friends still live in the same small town. How do you think *The Innocent Man* will impact this community and other small rural towns as they struggle with the realities of the justice system? A: Exonerations seem to be happening weekly. And with each one of them, the question is asked--how can an innocent man be convicted and kept in prison for 20 years? My book is the story of only one man, but it is a good example of how things can go terribly wrong with our judicial system. I have no idea how the book will be received in the small town of Ada, Oklahoma, or any other town. Q: What do you hope your readers will take away from *The Innocent Man*? A: A better understanding of how innocent people can be convicted, and a greater concern for the need to reimburse and rehabilitate innocent men after they have been released. --This text refers to the Audible Audio Edition edition.

Grisham's first work of nonfiction focuses on the tragedy of Ron Williamson, a baseball hero from a small town in Oklahoma who winds up a dissolute, mentally unstable Major League washout railroaded onto death row for a hometown rape and murder he did not commit. Judging by this author-approved abridgment, Grisham has chosen to present Williamson's painful story (and that of his equally innocent "co-conspirator," Dennis Fritz) as straightforward journalism, eschewing the more familiar "nonfiction novel" approach with its reconstructed dialogues and other adjustments for dramatic purpose. This has resulted in a book that, while it includes such intriguing elements as murder, rape, detection and judicial injustice, consists primarily of objective reportage, albeit shaded by the now-proven fact of Williamson's innocence. The absence of dialogue or character point of view could make for a rather bland audio. Boutsikaris avoids that by reverting to what might be called old-fashioned round-the-campfire storytelling, treating the lengthy exposition to vocal interpretations, subtle and substantial. He narrates the events leading up to the 1982 rape and murder of a young cocktail waitress with a mixture of suspicion and curiosity, moving on to astonishment at the prosecution's use of deceit and false testimony to convict Williamson and Fritz and, eventually, elation at the exoneration of the two innocent men. Throughout, he maintains an appealing conversational tone, an effect made all the more remarkable by the book's nearly total absence of conversation. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Audible Audio Edition edition.

The way Grisham develops each character and the raw emotion he paints these scenes with is simply mesmerizing. I literally felt like I was in the story being escorted through each scene like my own personal tour of life on death row all the way to the final moments leading to the execution. Just

an awesome book. I actually felt myself grieving for this man as I read the final few chapters, praying for a miracle just like his lawyer/grandson. This is a winner that does not disappoint....enjoy!

This is a real page turner which I expect from John Grisham novels. There is some racist language, but the characters who say it are the villains in the novel. I am in a minority and was not offended by the language. To have "washed" the language to avoid offending people would have made the characters artificial and vanilla. Bottom line, if you are easily offended and prefer your books politically correct, John Grisham already is not your favorite author. However, if you prefer your characters to seem real, you will enjoy this book.

I've been stuck on John Grisham's books for awhile now. I can't remember how many I have read now, but I do know that I have yet to find one I didn't like. The story lines and characters are so well thought out. I really enjoyed the chamber with the main story line of a young lawyer trying to save his grandfather that he never met. The back stories are excellent. John Grisham does an amazing job in showing the characters progress, such as how the main character on death row goes from being a hateful bigot to feeling and showing remorse for his past sins. Anybody that loves to read period, I would recommend this book and any other book by John Grisham.

More of a journal of events and too much detail about sports. What I found devastating was the injustice of the legal system - just unbelievable in the way it operates, how it can be manipulated and how it doesn't protect the very citizens in the way it's supposed to. I'm sure it is not peculiar to the US but I can say (from an inexperienced eye) that I have not come across this dreadful state of affairs in Europe - but I'm sure it must exist in one form or another. The book made me angry along with other emotions. Extremely well written and documented, it must have taken a 100 years of research. But... I was looking for a final round up of persecution of the guilty, new reforms and procedures that have been put in-place to, at the very least, put roadblocks on manipulations, contrivance, hiding of evidence and such like

This is John Grisham's best book. He tells the story of a man who tries to take advantage of his athletic ability, fails, then is diagnosed with mental illness. After that he is convicted of murder due to a crooked prosecution and spends 12 years on death row. This is a true story.

Before I read the Author's note at the end of this book, I have totally no idea that's a true story.

Primarily it is a result of my ignorance before I brought the book, but as an ugly facts, it's also because such a story is so beyond our normal perception. Not only the life of Ron before his trial was so up and down, but more importantly the total derail of justice in one of the most advance country like USA for its area of protecting human rights. It alert me that Justice is game, it's a very fragile game with a set of rule that's so complex and bias to the state by their almost absolute power during any criminal investigation. When a defence can only find the truth by objecting the result of an investigation with a purposeful incrimination on a person, I feel innocence until proven guilty in court is more like an notion than a practical principle. Police are so dangerous if they are only equipped with the resource and force, but not a straight value of their works. Sadly, with Ron, Dennis, Tom and etc, seem it's somehow more than a knowledge for people live in the less civilised part of the world, but it does happens all over the world even in our modern age...

A non-fiction by John Grisham tells the story of Ron Williamson, a budding baseball star from the small town of Ada, Oklahoma, who was framed by the Ada police for the murder of Debbie Carter. Convicted, sentenced to death and almost executed, Ron spent close to 20 years on death row until he, and his co-accused, Fritz, were exonerated through DNA evidence. This is a horrific tale of wilful miscarriage of justice and the mental destruction of Ron Williamson. Grisham's deeply researched book lays bare the travesties of justice, life in death row and mental illness. Can this happen again, the sad answer is, most likely.

I read quite a few John Grisham books after college and just recently started reading his books again. This book covers a lot of territory. It gives you a look at the way things were decades ago regarding the mistreatment of blacks and the agenda of the KKK. I could have lived without all the legal jargon but it definitely made me think about the death penalty more than I ever have before. I also enjoyed the friendship/relationship that grew between son and grandfather over the short time they had together. Overall a great book and one that you wanted to keep reading at the end of each chapter.

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