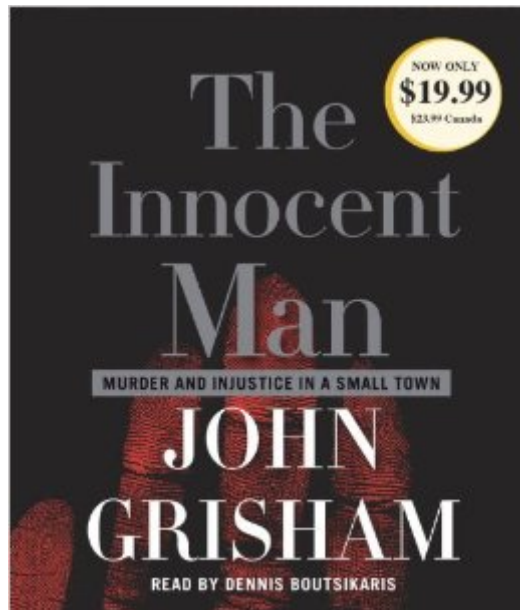


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# The Innocent Man: Murder And Injustice In A Small Town (John Grisham)



## 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

The phrase "Grisham book" and word "important" aren't often found in the same sentence, but John Grisham's 2006 non-fiction book, "The Innocent Man", allows me to state that Grisham has now written the most important book of his mega-successful career, and one of the most important I've

read by any author. The book recounts two murders in the small town of Ada, Oklahoma. Both victims are young women. In both cases, the local and state police investigating the case are stumped. But with a toxic blend of extremely circumstantial "evidence", shocking crime scene photos, junk science, inept experts, jailhouse snitches and critical "dream confessions" induced by near-torture tactics, the police pin the murders on four young men of the area, two per murder. The "innocent man" of the title is 30-something ne'er-do-well Ron Williamson, a schoolboy baseball star whose dreams of playing in Yankee Stadium dissolve in the low minors in a mix of arm injuries, booze and the onset of mental illness. By the time of the murder that consumes most of Grisham's tale, Williamson has washed up back home in Ada, and deservedly earned a reputation as a loudmouth loose cannon of sorts. Still his worst crime is passing a \$300 phony check. Skipping forward quickly, Williamson becomes the focus of the police's investigation and ultimately finds himself on death row in an Oklahoma criminal justice system whose aim seems to be to continuously reduce the amount of respect shown to death row inmates until it reaches zero. Shrewd detectives that they are, the police "know" that there's a second killer because of a misspelled warning message written in catsup at the scene, "dont chase us or ealse."

Justice sometimes get to be a commodity, rationed not by need but by wealth. This dirty secret is something all lawyers, including myself, know. The justice system itself is designed to protect the truly innocent even at the cost of protecting the guilty. Thus a lot of safeguards are built into the system because experience has shown that once an injustice is done, it is very difficult to undo it. Criminal lawyers, and although I am a trial lawyer I practice solely in the civil courts, will tell you that their greatest nightmare is to represent the truly innocent client. This is because although the law presumes the client is innocent, trial counsel, jaded by thousands of lies from clients, does not. If your lawyer does not truly believe in you, and you are truly innocent, can you get a fair trial? The answer to this question is explored in what may be the best true-crime work since *In Cold Blood*. Ron Williamson, former minor league prospect, now burdened with incurable mental illness is targeted by the police and prosecutors in Ada, Oklahoma as the killer of Debbie Carter. Another man Dennis Fritz, whose real crime was to be a friend to Ron, is also targeted. When the police fail to turn up a killer in nearly five years of investigation and an author puts the spotlight on the local police for a highly questionable conviction in another murder case, the cops and prosecutors press forward against Fritz and Williamson, using perjured evidence, discredited forensics, high emotion, and active concealment of exculpatory evidence. The trial judge tolerated the abuse of the defendants constitutional rights to the point of scheduling a Brady motion ( a hearing to punish the

state for not turning over exculpatory evidence) after the trial, when it could do no good.

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