

God Is Just Article

In one of the worst travesties of American justice, four young men from Chicago with no history of violence were convicted of kidnapping, rape and double murder. The bullet-riddled bodies of the young couple were found on May 12, 1978. Acting on an anonymous telephone tip, the police arrested Dennis Williams, Verneal Jimerson, Kenny Adams and Willie Rainge. News reports declared that the crime had been solved. The men were soon convicted and two were sentenced to death row. Appeals failed and all looked hopeless.

In September 1981, a tattered envelope with a return address of the “Condemned Unit,” Menard, Illinois, arrived at the offices of the *Chicago Lawyer* magazine. That letter led Rob Warden, editor and publisher of the *Chicago Lawyer*, and Dennis Protes, professor at Northwestern Medill School of Journalism, to investigate the case. They uncovered substantial evidence that exonerated the four convicts, including the first use of DNA to prove that multiple defendants were excluded as suspects in a rape case.

On July 2, 1996, more than eighteen years after the murders took place, Judge Thomas Fitzgerald ended the defendants’ fight against an unjust sentence by reading, “All convictions are vacated.”¹ The four prisoners were free! The next day, the state attorney’s office charged the real killers.

¹ David Protes and Ron Warden, *A Promise of Justice* (New York: Hyperion, 1998), p 222