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DEATH PENALTY INFORMATION CENTER

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THIRTY YEARS AFTER TWO BLACK TEENAGERS WERE SENTENCED TO DEATH IN NORTH CAROLINA, JUDGE DECLARES THEM INNOCENT

Henry McCollum and Leon Brown Become the 145th and 146th on the Exoneration List

Washington D.C. – On September 2, 2014, North Carolina Judge Douglas B. Sasser threw out the convictions and sentences in one of the oldest and most notorious death penalty cases in the state's recent history. **Henry McCollum** and his half-brother **Leon Brown** had been convicted in 1984 of raping and killing an eleven-year-old girl in Robeson County. Both men were sentenced to death based primarily on confessions they had given after grueling interrogations without an attorney. Both men have been identified as intellectually disabled, with IQs measuring below 70.

At trial, both defendants renounced their confessions as coerced and have steadfastly maintained their innocence for 30 years. Recently, the North Carolina Innocence Inquiry Commission found that DNA evidence from the crime scene belonged to another man who had been convicted of a similar violent crime in the same county and around the same time as the McCollum-Brown case. Robeson County District Attorney Johnson Britt did not oppose the brothers' release and said no further prosecution would be pursued because the state had no case.

Richard Dieter, Executive Director of the Death Penalty Information Center, said, "This case illustrates so many of the problems that plague the death penalty: young minority defendants, often with a history of mental problems, are convicted and sentenced to death based on highly suspect evidence. It then takes thirty years and enormous luck to find out the truth. If these men had been executed years ago, we almost certainly would have never learned of this grave injustice. It is no wonder that the use of the death penalty is disappearing in most states."

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According to statistics kept by the Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC), McCollum and Brown are the 145th and 146th former death row inmates to be exonerated and freed since 1973, bringing the total number of exonerations in 2014 to three. North Carolina has had nine (9) people freed from death row with all charges dismissed since 1973. During that same time, it has carried out 43 executions.

In order to be included on DPIC's Exoneration List, defendants must have been convicted, sentenced to death, and subsequently either (a) acquitted of all charges related to the crime that placed them on death row, (b) had all charges related to the crime dismissed by the prosecution, or (c) granted a complete pardon based on evidence of innocence.

To speak with Richard Dieter, DPIC's Executive Director, call 202-289-4022, or email at <dpic@deathpenaltyinfo.org>. For specifics about the North Carolina cases, contact the Center for Death Penalty Litigation, 919-956-9545, or Gerda Stein <Gerda@CDPL.ORG>.

The Death Penalty Information Center (www.deathpenaltyinfo.org) is a non-profit organization serving the media and the public with analysis and information on issues concerning capital punishment. DPIC was founded in 1990 and prepares in-depth reports, issues press releases, conducts briefings for the media, and serves as a resource to those working on this issue.