

N.O. jury awards \$14M to exonerated man

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A federal jury awarded \$14 million Friday to a former death row inmate who came within weeks of execution but was exonerated.

John Thompson, 40, maintained through 18 years in prison that he was innocent of killing hotel executive Ray Liuzza, 34, during a robbery in December 1984.

In 1999, weeks before Thompson was to die, a defense investigator found a crime lab report that cleared him of the robbery charge. The blood type of the robber, found on the victim's pants, did not match Thompson's.

A judge resentenced Thompson to live in prison without parole, but the murder conviction stood until a state appeals court overturned it and ordered a new trial. Thompson was found not guilty in the retrial.

Jurors in the civil trial ordered the Orleans Parish and several current and former prosecutors to pay Thompson, said Gordon Cooney, who along with fellow attorney Michael Banks worked 14 years to have Thompson retried and acquitted.

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