

By SAM HATCHER

A telephone call from NBC News Monday afternoon brought back a vivid reminder about how bad it can be when our judicial system makes a mistake.

NBC was doing a story on the man in Texas who was freed Tuesday after serving 30 years for crimes he did not commit.

Cornelius Dupree Jr. was convicted three decades ago on charges of rape and robbery. Recently presented DNA evidence has proven him to be innocent of each of these crimes.

So, after spending some 30 years behind bars in Texas, Mr. Dupree was set free. According to Texas law, he is eligible for \$80,000 in compensation for each year he spent incarcerated. He reportedly could receive a lump sum payment of \$2.4 million. But can money, any amount of money, repay this man for the wrong he has suffered?

NBC called *The Wilson Post* yesterday for permission to use photos and certain material we published on Oct. 28, 2009 in a similar story written by Ken Beck. In that story we told about Lawrence McKinney, 54, of Lebanon, being imprisoned wrongly for almost 32 years on charges of rape and burglary.

As in the Texas case, Mr. McKinney was proven innocent by DNA evidence presented by his attorney Jack Lowery. But even so, Mr. McKinney spent more than half of his life behind bars. He was arrested on Oct. 7, 1977, on charges of rape and burglary, and from that day until July 20, 2009, his freedom was taken.

Can there possibly be a more tragic story to be told than for a man to spend days, years, and decades in a prison for a crime he did not commit?

And perhaps there is. Putting someone to death for a crime they did not commit.

When the system fails, what could be worse?

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