



JOHN CREUZOT
CRIMINAL DISTRICT ATTORNEY
DALLAS COUNTY, TEXAS

**Official Statement and Position of the
Dallas County District Attorney's Office**
Re: *State of Texas v Tommy Lee Walker/ Cause No. 5213H*

Under the leadership of Dallas County Criminal District Attorney John Creuzot, and in collaboration with the Innocence Project of New York and the Northeastern University School of Law's Civil Rights and Restorative Justice Project, the Dallas County District Attorney's Office's Conviction Integrity Unit conducted extensive research in its review of *the 1954 murder conviction of 19-year-old Tommy Lee Walker/ Cause No. 5213H*.

The case was submitted for review by counsel for Mr. Walker's son, his only descendant and is the oldest case investigated to date by the Conviction Integrity Unit. Given the age of the case, the overwhelming majority of related witnesses are deceased and much of the relevant evidence was either lost or never collected.

Despite these limitations, the State reviewed historical materials, including offense reports, news articles, video footage, and court records. Through this review, the State obtained credible information that undermines the integrity of not only the original investigation, but also the conviction and subsequent execution of Mr. Tommy Lee Walker.

After careful and diligent review, the Dallas County District Attorney's Office makes the following official statement:

In observance of the constitutional rights afforded to all citizens and in consideration of newly available scientific evidence, the Dallas County District Attorney's Office, could not and would not have prosecuted Tommy Lee Walker for the rape and murder of Venice Lorraine Parker.

BACKGROUND

Like many cities in the United States during the 1950s, Dallas was shaped by racial injustice, segregation, and bigotry. In that environment, widespread reports of a Black *Peeping Tom* terrorizing women intensified existing divisions, generating heightened fear, division and animosity – especially between white and Black residents.

THE OFFENSE

At the height of this panic, on the night of September 30, 1953, Venice Parker, a white, 31-year-old wife and mother, was brutally attacked on her way home from work and ultimately died. Although she immediately received help, multiple witnesses testified that she did not and could not speak due to her injuries. Nevertheless, a single white responding police officer claims to have heard her describe her attacker as a Black man.



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INVESTIGATION

Armed with this limited physical description, Dallas police, faced with mounting scrutiny for their failure to capture the city's *Peeping Tom* or "Negro Prowler" as he was nicknamed, launched an aggressive search over the next few months in hopes of capturing Ms. Parker's assailant. White Dallas community members also joined in the search with a goal of restoring peace amongst a city on-edge. During this time, it was even opined that perhaps Ms. Parker's killer and the "Negro Prowler", were one and the same.

As racially charged fear and hysteria intensified, tips poured in from concerned citizens. Based on little more than the color of their skin, hundreds of Black men were rounded-up, detained, and questioned about the murder but ultimately released. Just as public frustration began to peak, with armed citizens taking matters into their own hands, a vague "tip" received months after the Ms. Parker's murder, placed 19-year-old Tommy Lee Walker at the forefront of the Dallas Police Department's investigation.

ARREST/INTERROGATION/PROSECUTION

The arrest and interrogation of 19-year-old Tommy Lee Walker led to what the media called "...the most sensational trial in the history of Dallas County".

Mr. Walker, a Black teenager, was interrogated by white Klansman and Dallas Police Department Homicide Bureau Captain J. Will Fritz who used coercive questioning tactics to maintain his reputation and deliver an "open and shut" case to the Dallas County District Attorney's Office.

From that point forward, Mr. Walker was unfairly, improperly and unlawfully prosecuted through investigative and trial practices that, under present-day standards, would warrant disciplinary action at a minimum. Adding to Mr. Walker's woes, evidence was introduced at trial that is now known to be unreliable. Whether fueled by overzealousness, racism or both, Mr. Walker's conviction was obtained through false or improper evidence and repeated violations of his constitutional rights.

ISSUES WITH THE CASE

A. Due Process Violations

- Jury Composition
 - The US Constitution affords individuals the right to a jury of your peers, yet Mr. Walker's jury consisted of 12 white men.
- Brady Violation/Misconduct
 - The State, through its sponsorship of witness testimony, suppressed evidence that the perpetrator wore a hat--a key exculpatory fact that created a discrepancy between physical crime scene evidence and what witnesses described and testified to.



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- The State allowed misleading presentation of evidence through its improper questioning of Tommy Lee Walker, including but not limited to repeatedly implying that Mr. Walker failed a polygraph examination—an investigative tool, very well-known to be inadmissible.
- District Attorney Henry Wade became witness to this offense when he, himself took the stand on rebuttal and improperly testified to his personal belief of Mr. Walker's guilt. After his testimony, Wade continued in his role as lead prosecutor in this case.

B. New Scientific Evidence

- False Confession
 - Tommy Lee Walker's interrogation and subsequent confessions were riddled with what we have now learned are **strong indicators of coercive interrogation tactics, which have led to wrongful convictions** including but not limited to:
 - Minimization
 - Threat of death penalty
 - False evidence ploy
 - Tommy Lee Walker provided two statements confessing to the offense.
 - The first statement included details that **could not have been and were not possible**. Once realized by officials, another statement from Walker was obtained. This second statement conveniently reconciled those impossibilities.
 - Tommy Lee Walker testified that faced with threats and after witnessing the assault of an African American individual in custody by white police officers, he signed both statements out of fear.
 - Multiple individuals testified to seeing Tommy Lee Walker during the time of the offense, as his girlfriend was in labor with their son who would eventually be born the very next day.
- Eyewitness Identification
 - It was not until 20-30 years later that the unreliability of eyewitness identification was first studied. Indeed today, we are aware of several factors that undermine an eyewitness' identification, many of which were present in this case.
 - Visual Acuity
 - Delayed Identification
 - Cross-racial Identification



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The criminal justice system is designed to provide accountability to offenders, justice to victims and safety to the public. It is imperative these goals are only accomplished with integrity and fairness. Indeed, fairness is the bedrock of the justice system and includes ensuring that all cases are prosecuted using legitimate evidence in a way that preserves the rights granted in the US Constitution.

Tommy Lee Walker's conviction is based on false evidence and unethical prosecution. Despite tenacious and capable attorneys who were steadfast in their defense of Mr. Walker, his case was riddled with missteps, racial bias and a blatant disregard for the constitutional rights that are the very essence of the values this country was founded upon.

The Dallas County District Attorney's Office is committed to defending the rights of all parties to a criminal case, regardless of race, gender, socio-economic status, religion, etc. While the policies and procedures of this Office have drastically changed over the last 70 years, as have the times, our duty to the Dallas County community—*every member* of the Dallas County community—has not. We are committed, in both our day-to-day actions and our overall mission, to seeking justice for all. If we are ever unable to ethically obtain a conviction using sound evidence, we will not pursue that cause of action. While today's administration is not responsible for this grave injustice, after our review of this case, we *are* responsible for acknowledging the truth of Mr. Walker's wrongful conviction.

With the evidence available to us and the knowledge we have obtained over decades of scientific study, **the Dallas County District Attorney's Office of today would not have pursued a criminal case against Mr. Tommy Lee Walker for the sexual assault and murder of Venice Parker.**

In asserting this position, our sincere hope is that through our collaborative efforts with the Innocence Project and the Northeastern University's School of Law, our position on this matter provides closure to all involved, restores faith in our criminal justice system and provides a path for healing.