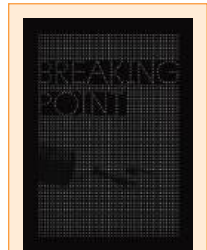


Left: Raymond Santana, who falsely confessed to a 1989 rape. DNA testing and a confession from the real perpetrator saw him released after five years.

Below: Christopher Ochoa, falsely confessed to a rape and murder in 1988. After 12 years in prison, DNA testing exonerated him.



Breaking Point by Robin Dahlberg
£45, Kehrer Verlag,
Hardcover, 184
pages, ISBN:
9783969002223

False confessions and wrongful convictions

What can happen when coercion, isolation and intimidation forces people to confess to crimes they didn't commit

This shocking book takes a bleak look at wrongful convictions due to false confessions in the United States.

Between 1989 and 2024, 13% of documented exonerations included false confessions, with people of colour being much more likely to be disproportionately affected.

In this book, more than 75 black and white photographs, showing portraits, interiors and still life examine how isolation, deception, intimidation and prolonged questioning can lead to a terrible outcome.

The photographs in the book are taken by Robin Dahlberg, whose work is held in some of the biggest and most distinguished collections in the world, such as the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Interestingly however, she also spent twenty years working in the National Legal Department of the American Civil Liberties Union where she designed

and led campaigns to reform the criminal justice system.

For this book, she has worked in collaboration with exonerees. Alongside the portraits and images featured, there's also transcriptions, screen captures from real-life interrogations that produced false confessions and written summaries of cases from arrest to conviction.

It's an astonishing read, which is disturbing – but also somewhat hopeful in places – and is very much worth taking a look at if you've got an interest in long-term documentary, social justice and the criminal justice system, especially in the US.

The portraits are captured tenderly, while the book itself has clearly been put together with great care, with an interesting binding, paper choice and design throughout also lending to the blunt aesthetic. Highly recommended.

Amy Davies

