

# Framed by forensics

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## *Aeon:*

In 1992, Juan Rivera was arrested for the rape and murder of an 11-year-old girl in Waukegan, Illinois. On the night of the murder, Rivera was wearing an electronic ankle bracelet in connection with unrelated burglary charges, and this bracelet showed he'd been at home. Yet, based on a tip, police decided to arrest him.

Rivera had a low IQ and a history of emotional problems, which psychologists knew would make him highly suggestible. The police chose to ignore that when they grilled him for several days and lied to him about the results of his polygraph test. By the end of the fourth day, having endured more than 24 hours of round-robin questioning by at least nine different officers, Rivera signed a confession. His first confession was inaccurate, however, so police kept questioning him until he got it right.

Confessions have extraordinary power, so police believed it despite a lack of physical evidence. So did a jury, which found Rivera guilty; and a judge, who sentenced him to life without parole. In 2005, DNA tests excluded Rivera as the source of the semen recovered from the body. But the prosecutor devised a theory that the 11-year-old victim had had sex with another man previously, and that Rivera did not ejaculate when he raped her after that. A jury found Rivera guilty a second time. Finally, after another appeal in 2011, Rivera's lawyers were able to set him free. He had been wrongfully imprisoned for nearly 20 years.

Read the whole story: [\*Aeon\*](#)