

Dead Man Walking

When two Philadelphia lawyers took the case of a man on death row, they had one goal: to save his life. After years of work, they discovered they'd been fighting the wrong battle all along

ALITTLE AFTER MIDNIGHT ON DECEMBER 6, 1984, Ray Liuzza had just parked his BMW on a New Orleans block when he noticed a young black man approaching. The man held a .357 Magnum revolver. Just feet from his apartment door, Liuzza frantically reached into his pocket. "Here, man, take my wallet," he begged. "Take my watch. Take it, man. Take it." The young black man fired his gun. And then he fired it again, and again—five times in all. Liuzza fell to the ground, screaming for help, bleeding from holes in his back. The man grabbed Liuzza's wallet and a gold pinkie ring. Still holding the gun, he ran down the street. Within minutes, a policeman arrived. "Why did he have to shoot me?" Liuzza rasped. "Why did he have to shoot me?" He died at the scene.

A few weeks later, at 11 p.m. on December 28th, three New Orleans teenagers were climbing into their father's Honda when a young black man shoved in after them. He held a gun to the driver's head—a .357 Magnum. "You can have the car," the driver, Jay Legarde, begged. "Just leave us alone." But the man told Legarde to start the car and turn right. Legarde turned left instead, and crashed into another car. "You're a fool, I'm gonna kill you," the man shouted. But Legarde pushed him out of the car, and he ran off.

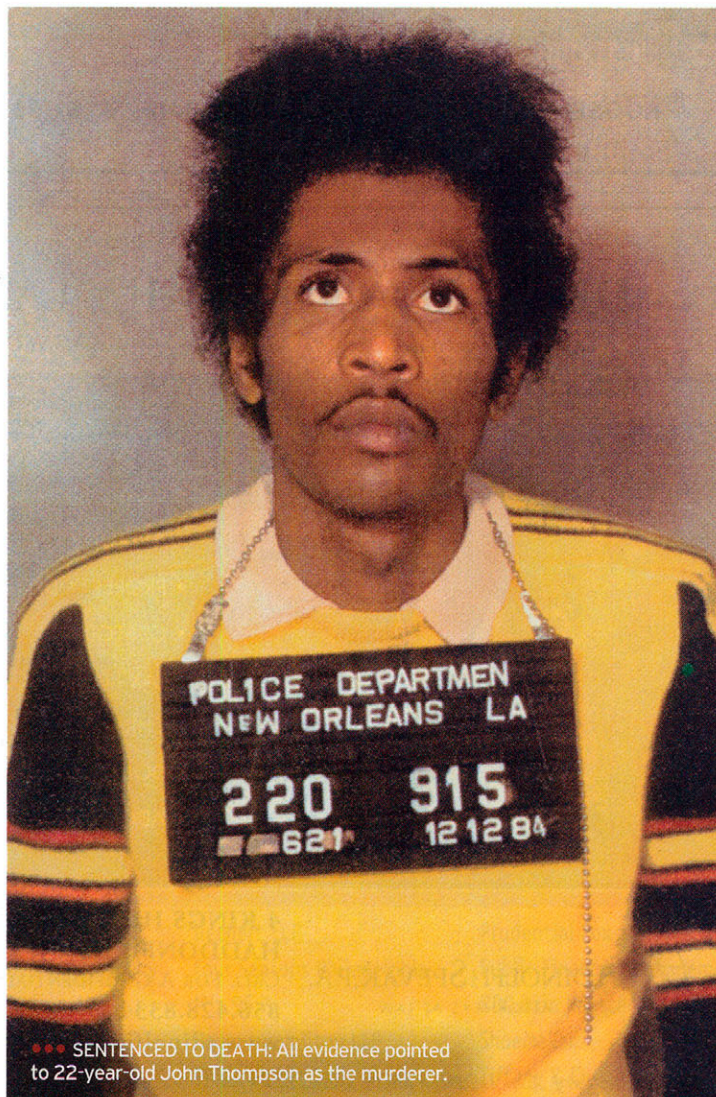
On January 17, 1985, cops arrested John Thompson for the murder of Ray Liuzza. Thompson was just 22 years old, a low-level street thug who peddled PCP-laced marijuana, stolen property and guns. He'd been arrested before, for carrying an unlicensed gun. When his picture appeared on the front page of the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* the next day, the Legardes called the police: He looked like the man who'd tried to carjack them.

On April 12, 1985, Thompson was convicted of attempted armed robbery for the carjacking.

A month later, district attorney Harry Connick—father of the famous jazzman—put Thompson on trial

for the murder of Ray Liuzza. The prosecution's witnesses placed Thompson at the scene. One, who said he was with Thompson that night, recounted seeing him pull a gun from his pocket, shoot Liuzza five times, and run away. Another testified that Thompson later sold him a .357 Magnum and Liuzza's pinkie ring. Thompson knew that if he took the stand, the D.A. would question him about the carjacking, and the jury would know he'd been convicted of a violent crime. So he never testified. The jury found him guilty of first-degree murder and sentenced him to death.

Sitting in his death-row cell at Louisiana's infamous State Penitentiary at Angola, Thompson wrote letters to 200 lawyers all over the country. He



*** SENTENCED TO DEATH: All evidence pointed to 22-year-old John Thompson as the murderer.

told them all the same thing: "I didn't do it." None wrote back. But in late 1988, a New Orleans capital-defense lawyer sent the convicted murderer's file to two young associates at Philadelphia's Morgan, Lewis & Bockius who were eager to take on a pro bono capital case. They didn't believe Thompson was innocent. But they were determined to save his life.

JORDON COONEY AND MICHAEL Banks hardly knew where to start. As they pored over John Thompson's files in their Center City offices, they recognized this much—they were in over their heads. Cooney was a 29-year-old mid-level associate at Morgan Lewis, with Fortune 500 clients and a handful of small pro bono civil cases. His only criminal law experience came from two years of clerking for a federal judge. He'd never even given much thought to the death penalty—he just believed the punishment should fit the crime, so long

The lawyer asked Thompson about the murder. "I don't know," he answered. "I wasn't there."

as the law was applied fairly. Still, Cooney had followed his father into law because he wanted to make a difference, to help those who most needed it. In John Thompson, he saw a man who desperately needed good lawyers.

Michael Banks, on the other hand, had opposed the death penalty ever since his days as a human-rights activist at Cornell. In 1976, the Supreme Court lifted its ban on executions, and Banks was horrified by the first state killing that followed, when Gary Mark Gilmore chose death by firing squad in Utah rather than appeal his death sentence. Now, more than a decade later, Banks thought his activist days were over. At 32, he'd been married for six years, and had a toddler. He was on the verge of partnership in Morgan Lewis's employment division, and his pro bono work had been limited mainly to family court cases. But with Thompson's case, he saw an opportunity to get back in the game—the chance to get a man off death row in Louisiana, a notoriously execution-friendly state.

Late in 1988, while Cooney stayed in

Philadelphia, boning up on criminal case law, Banks flew to New Orleans to meet their client. In his lawyerly blue suit and cuff links, Banks waited at the barbed-wire gate in front of Angola, a vast prison complex three hours north of New Orleans. Machine gun-toting guards ushered him in and searched him several times. They led him down a fluorescent hallway, into a private room divided down the middle by thick bulletproof glass. A moment later, a skinny man in a bright orange jumpsuit plopped into the chair across from Banks. He introduced himself as John Thompson, then looked away, his body hunched over a hard plastic chair, his elbows on his knees, his hands clasped. His words were a mumble of New Orleans street slang, virtually indecipherable to the Philadelphian. All Banks could make out was Thompson's repeated protest: "I don't know what happened. I wasn't there."

Through a wire-mesh opening in the glass, Banks asked Thompson about his childhood, searching for anything in his client's past that could help him. Was he abused? Banks even wondered if he was retarded, unable to understand the proceedings. He asked again about those two violent nights in December 1984. Thompson muttered the same answer: "I. Don't. Know. I. Wasn't. There."

Finally, Banks gave up and returned to Philadelphia. "He gave us nothing," he told Cooney, who nodded and looked at his calendar. Thompson was scheduled to die on February 22, 1989. That gave them three months to save him, though they barely had a minute to spare to work on the case. Both lawyers already had heavy caseloads that kept them at the office 12 hours a day, six days a week. Banks's wife was expecting their second child, and they were in the process of moving from East Falls to Villanova. Cooney, a handsome, fair-skinned urbanite, hardly had time to train for his triathlons. Still, they spent hours reading case law and sample appeals, and calling capital-defense lawyers for advice—all for a man Banks had met once, whom Cooney had never met, and who wasn't even willing to help them. They thought of Thompson as a name on a file, not as a real man on the verge of death. To do otherwise was too overwhelming, a responsibility unlike anything in their limited legal careers. They combed through the court records and trial transcripts—the only information they had on which to base the appeal. And, immediately, they realized they had something: John Thompson's trial wasn't fair.

First of all, there was the timing. Even though the murder had occurred a few weeks earlier, Connick's office tried Thompson for the attempted carjacking first. That way, Thompson already had a violent criminal record, which the D.A. used in the penalty phase of the murder trial to sway the jury toward death. "There's nothing illegal about that," Banks notes. "But it is extremely aggressive." They discovered that the aggressiveness didn't stop there, either. Prosecutors did everything they could to keep African-Americans off the jury—even to the point of violating a 1986 Supreme Court ruling against jury discrimination. And Banks and Cooney learned from Thompson's original lawyer that prosecutors hid the fact that reward money was offered to some witnesses who gave damning testimony against Thompson. At the end of the trial transcript, the lawyers found yet another misstep: A lone holdout juror was

"They've scheduled your execution," the lawyer said. "At this point, it's either up to the governor or a miracle. And a miracle's more likely."

actually berated by the judge into voting for death. Without the unanimous vote, Thompson would have gotten life in prison.

With just 11 days left before Thompson's scheduled execution, Banks and Cooney filed lengthy appeals of both the murder and carjacking convictions, asking for new trials. Two days later, a clerk from Judge Patrick Quinlan's office called to say he was sending a fax. At his desk, Banks quickly read through the memo: Judge Quinlan agreed to temporarily postpone Thompson's execution while he reviewed the arguments. "We did it!" Banks exclaimed to Cooney. "We got the stay!" They awaited the judge's next move—a hearing, perhaps, or a call for discovery or more details. But they heard nothing for nearly three years—not from the judge, nor from Thompson. They weren't worried. It seemed unlikely, given what they'd found in the transcript, that Thompson would ever be put to death.

Finally, in November 1992, Judge Quinlan's clerk sent another fax to Morgan Lewis. In it, the judge denied every

argument the lawyers had made. Thompson would not get a new trial. Instead, he was again scheduled to die, on January 18, 1993.

SOME 1,300 MILES AWAY, ON Louisiana's death row, Thompson kept hearing how lucky he was to have Banks and Cooney behind him. But he was skeptical. From his one meeting with Banks, he'd decided the Northerner seemed just like the handful of lawyers he'd already had, feeding him through the system until they ran out of money or stamina or courage. He knew it wasn't popular in Louisiana to take on a death case, especially one of Harry Connick's. Even in New Orleans—with the highest homicide rate in the country, and a murderously corrupt police force—Connick stood out for his ruthlessness. On his watch, prosecutors had sought the death penalty in every case possible, and they had a well-earned reputation for doing whatever it took to secure a conviction. It was a point of pride: A few years after Thompson's trial, the deputy D.A. who had prosecuted him displayed on his desk a 3-D model of the electric chair on which

he'd pasted head shots of the five men—including Thompson—he'd sent to death row.

For five years now, Thompson had been there, in virtual solitary confinement, in a six-by-eight-foot cell for 23 hours a day. He spent his time reading law books and case filings, listening to the radio, staring into space. He knew his fellow inmates mostly by voice. Friendships didn't last long—especially when he first got there, in 1987. That year, Louisiana executed eight men, even more than trigger-happy Texas. One day, when Thompson returned to his cell after another unsuccessful appeals hearing in New Orleans, he found his best friend's belongings piled on his bunk. A few days earlier, the man had been taken from his cell and driven deep into the heart of Angola, past tormentingly beautiful farmland, to the Death House. He'd stayed there for three nights. When the call from the governor never came, he was strapped to a gurney

and injected with sodium pentothal, Pavulon and potassium chloride. First his lungs collapsed; then his heart stopped. Then he died. The man had left everything he had to Thompson—some clothes, a radio. Thompson would rather have had the chance to say goodbye. He was certain he'd end up like his friend—dead on a gurney, alone. So he wasn't at all surprised when his lawyers told him that he was again scheduled to die.

But in early 1993, his execution was once more postponed, by the state Supreme Court. And this time, the judges also ordered a hearing to determine if the promise of a reward may have tainted some testimony. By now, Cooney and Banks had tracked down two witnesses who admitted getting money after the trial—including one man who later said he changed his testimony several times to fit the D.A.'s case. They also had proof that prosecutors had lied about the rewards. So when Cooney arrived in Judge Quinlan's courtroom, he was certain they had enough for a new trial. He put witness after witness on the stand. The D.A.'s office didn't dispute a single claim. After the hearing, Cooney stepped into the hall-

"Don't worry," Cooney said, steadier now. "We'll keep fighting." As the lawyer laid out the next steps in the appeal, Thompson realized for the first time how much work Cooney and Banks had put into his case—and how much more they planned.

A few days later, Thompson called Cooney in his office to check in. Then he called Banks. Soon he was calling several times a week, to ask a question or offer an idea for his defense—a far cry from the unhelpful convict who'd sullenly stared at Banks through the glass several years earlier. The lawyers, startled at first, soon warmed to his enthusiasm. On Mondays, he'd phone Cooney to razz him about that weekend's Eagles game. He'd tell Banks about his latest visit with his son, who'd been just three when he was arrested. Banks, a father of three now, always hung up amazed that Thompson had managed any relationship with John Jr., let alone a close one. "He started to become a real human being to us," Banks recalls.

THOMPSON'S THIRD DEATH WARRANT came over the fax machine at Morgan Lewis in 1995. By then, Banks and Cooney were both partners, with big offices, their own secretaries, and plenty of associates under them. Cooney was ensconced in a multi-state, multimillion-dollar asbestos case on its way to making legal history, and he'd just run into an old college friend who would soon become his wife. Banks represented multinational employers in labor disputes and had joined the board of a nonprofit juvenile justice agency. Meanwhile, Thompson sat in a small jail cell in Louisiana, becoming an old-timer on death row.

The lawyers filed one appeal. Then they filed another. And they kept uncovering more evidence of misconduct, like police reports that had never been given to Thompson's defense lawyers. But nothing convinced the courts. "Guilt or innocence is not supposed to be the standard for a new trial," Cooney says. "The constitutional violations should have been enough. But they never were." As court after court turned the lawyers down, Judge Quinlan faxed the death warrants—one in 1996, another in 1997. The two lawyers started to lose hope. Banks's son was just old enough to start asking questions about Thompson, and the lawyer had no idea what to say. How could he explain to his child that a man, another boy's father, might die because the courts refused to



... FATHER AND SON: Thompson's son was just three years old when his father was arrested.

way, all smiles; he patted Thompson on the back. "Things went extremely well," Cooney said. "I think we've proven it."

A few months later, Cooney called Thompson. "John," Cooney said. "The judge ... he ruled against us. I'm so sorry." Cooney's voice quivered. Thompson wasn't surprised by the news. But he was surprised by his lawyer: Never in eight years had an attorney taken his case so personally. Never had he felt that a lawyer actually cared about what happened to him.

acknowledge that he'd had an unfair trial? "It made me question the whole criminal legal system," Cooney recalls.

Finally, in 1999, they reached the end. A federal court rejected Thompson's last appeal, and Banks and Cooney knew the U.S. Supreme Court was unlikely to take the case. As a last resort, Cooney called a private investigator in New Orleans. "We're looking for anything," he told her, "a needle in the haystack that we might have missed." Then, on April 19th, their fax machine rang again, with a "warrant for execution of person condemned."

John Thompson would die by lethal injection on May 20, 1999.

THAT EVENING AT ANGOLA, THOMPSON walked into the prison's open visiting room, where only a few years ago he'd shaken his lawyer's hand for the first time. Now he saw Cooney's and Banks's pale faces and teary eyes, and gave them each a long hug. Then he stood back.

"They've scheduled your execution for 30 days from now," Cooney said.

Thompson hung his head. "Is there anything more you can do?"

"At this point, it's either up to the governor or a miracle," Banks said. "And a miracle's more likely."

"Can we move the date?" Thompson asked. "That's the day before my son's graduation. I'm ready to die, if that's what God has in store for me. But my son's not ready."

The lawyers thought they were prepared for any reaction—crying, screaming, even anger at them for failing him. But they hadn't expected this—that Thompson wouldn't be concerned with his own death, but with his son.

"The date is set," Cooney said.

"Okay, I know you guys did what you could," Thompson said, hugging them again. "I appreciate that."

Banks and Cooney left the prison in tears, and started the three-hour drive to New Orleans to tell John Jr. of his father's impending death. As Banks drove slowly down the long road out of Angola, Cooney pulled out his cell phone and listened to a voicemail message from their private investigator.

"I've got very important news," she said. "Call me right away."

IN THEIR NEW ORLEANS HOTEL ROOM several hours later, Banks and Cooney tried to make sense of the 14-year-old memo their investigator had dug up in the police archives. Addressed to a deputy D.A., the memo explained that type B blood had been found at the scene of the attempted carjacking—blood that pre-

sumably belonged to the assailant. But no blood evidence had been presented at Thompson's trial. Which probably meant one thing: Thompson's blood didn't match. So ... he wasn't the carjacker. And the prosecutors knew it when they used the carjacking to get him a death sentence.

But the lawyers needed Thompson's blood type to be sure. And they had to work fast. If they ordered a blood test through the courts, they'd tip off the D.A.—and they weren't ready for that yet. So, first thing the next morning, they Fed Ex'd Thompson a blank piece of paper stapled to a short note with instructions. Thompson ripped off the staple, poked his finger, and bled on the paper. Then he Fed Ex'd it back to his lawyers at their hotel. Meanwhile, Banks and Cooney approached a local hospital, looking for records on Thompson. They found what they needed without having to test his blood: proof that he was type O. They looked at each other, in shock. Thompson hadn't done it. He *was* innocent, at least of the carjacking.

Later, at the New Orleans courthouse, they tracked down Bruce Whittaker, the deputy D.A. mentioned in the memo, who was now a defense lawyer. They showed him the memo and the results of the blood test. "Can you help us?" Cooney asked.

Whittaker shook his head. He said he couldn't remember anything about the case. Back in Philadelphia a few days later, Cooney answered his phone. It was Whittaker: he'd mentioned the situation to his partner, another former D.A. And the partner had remembered something.

"He says he had a conversation with the junior prosecutor sometime after the carjacking trial," Whittaker said. "And the prosecutor said that they'd intentionally hidden the blood evidence in the John Thompson case."

Cooney couldn't speak. "Hid it?" he finally stammered. "Intentionally?"

"Yes."

Within the hour, the lawyers were on a plane to New Orleans, where they picked up a sworn affidavit from Whittaker's partner. (The junior prosecutor had since died.) They took the memo, the affidavit, and Thompson's blood results to the D.A. In Harry Connick's spacious office—surrounded by pictures of his famous son—the Philadelphia lawyers offered the D.A. an ultimatum: Agree to postpone Thompson's execution while you investigate our claims, or we take what we have to court without you and make you look bad.

Connick didn't flinch. "I have to congratulate you," he drawled. "What fine work you've all done. I tell you what—not only are we gonna *not* oppose your

stay of execution, but I am *personally* gonna go in and talk to the judge with you tomorrow morning."

True to his word, Connick sat in Judge Quinlan's chambers the next day, explaining regrettably about rogue prosecutors—once favorites of his—who'd hidden evidence that could have saved John Thompson from more than a decade on death row. With 18 days left before Thompson's scheduled execution, Judge Quinlan quickly agreed to a stay and ordered a hearing. Finally, the full story came out. Not only did the prosecutors hide the results of the blood evidence; they never told defense lawyers there had been a test, and they destroyed the blood and the test results. Connick insisted the carjacking conviction be thrown out.

Quinlan agreed. He wiped the carjacking from Thompson's record. (No one has since been charged with that crime.) He also agreed, finally, to hold a hearing on all new evidence, to decide once and for all if Thompson deserved a new trial, life in prison, or death. Thompson, who'd

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moved from Angola to Orleans Parish Prison for the hearing, was allowed to stay in his new cell, which he shared with three other men on a crowded tier. He was, for the first time in years, mere minutes from home.

THE STORY MADE THE FRONT PAGE of the *Inquirer*, and the lawyers' friends started calling to congratulate them—all the same people who for years had wondered why they bothered wasting their time on a murderer. But Banks and Cooney had no time to celebrate. The jury-tampering and evidence-hiding and rewards—it was damning stuff, incontrovertible proof that Thompson got an unfair trial. But it wasn't enough. It still didn't prove that Thompson hadn't killed Ray Liuzza. That's what they were fighting for now—but even they couldn't be absolutely sure without hard evidence. They needed to start, again, from the beginning.

They hired another New Orleans private eye, Maureen Kelleher, to reinvestigate Liuzza's murder. Within weeks, she

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found a woman who'd lived across the street from Liuzza and saw the killer leave the scene of the crime—a tall, stocky black man with close-cropped hair. Thompson was only a slight five-foot-eight. And the lawyers had seen pictures of him from then; he'd had a three-inch-tall Afro. But his friend Kevin Freeman, the man who'd claimed he saw Thompson shoot Liuzza that night, was tall and stocky. And his hair had been so short that friends called him "Kojak." When the woman saw Thompson's picture in the *Times-Picayune* the morning after his arrest, she knew immediately it wasn't the right man. "She never testified because the police didn't ask her to," Kelleher said.

A few weeks later, Kelleher called with more news. She'd found a couple in Massachusetts who'd also lived across the street from Liuzza. The night of the murder, they'd heard gunshots, footsteps running toward their house, a car door opening, a car door closing, and a car speeding away down the street. "They called it the getaway car," Kelleher said. But Freeman had told the police Thompson *ran* away after shooting Liuzza. If there was a getaway car, Freeman had been lying.

All of this fit with what Thompson had been telling his lawyers for years—that he had the gun and the ring because he'd bought them from Freeman. "That's what I did," he'd said. "I bought stuff from him all the time." Thompson said he had no idea the gun had been used in a murder, and that he'd sold it to another friend, who eventually went to the police and received a \$10,500 reward after the D.A. put him in a room with Freeman and threatened to arrest them if they didn't coordinate their stories. Freeman, meanwhile, was the prosecution's star witness against Thompson. And, subsequently, Freeman had died. "It was so clear," Cooney recalls. "The whole story had been made up by Freeman to save himself. He had killed Ray Liuzza. John wasn't even there."

ON OCTOBER 26, 2000, COONEY and Banks took up their usual places in Quinlan's wood-paneled courtroom—at a long table facing the judge, with Thompson on the end. The courtroom was almost empty—just a couple reporters and a few interested lawyers. Banks first laid out the evidence they'd unearthed and the conclusions they'd drawn. Then he called the first neighbor to the stand. Cooney called the other neighbors. Then Robert Glass, a local defense attorney Cooney and Banks had brought in on the case, put Thompson's former friend—the one who'd bought the

gun from him—on the stand to show he'd changed his story about the murder. Finally, Thompson himself walked to the witness stand, put his right hand up, and swore to tell the truth.

"On December 6th of 1984, did you rob Ray Liuzza?" Banks asked.

"No."

"Did you kill Ray Liuzza?"

"No."

It was the first time he'd ever had the chance to say it in court.

When the prosecutor took his turn, he reminded Quinlan of all the times the judge had denied Thompson a new trial. No matter what the lawyers had shown, he said, "There is no alibi. If there is no alibi, there is no relief."

Cooney and Banks left the courtroom convinced they'd won and expecting Quinlan to grant a new trial immediately. But the year ended with no news. Then the winter came and went. Still no news. Finally, in June 2001, Quinlan faxed over his decision: Their client wouldn't be returned to death row. But neither would he get a new trial. John Thompson would spend the rest of his life in prison for the murder of Ray Liuzza.

Robert Glass was the first to call the lawyers. "Congratulations!" he exclaimed. "You've saved a man's life!" But Cooney and Banks saw nothing to celebrate. They knew Thompson was innocent and felt that they'd failed their friend. They called Thompson with the news.

"So, what next?" he asked. They appealed to Louisiana's Fourth Circuit Court.

On July 17, 2002—both Banks's and Cooney's wedding anniversary—a *Times-Picayune* reporter called Banks in his office. "What do you think about the court order?" she asked.

"What order?"

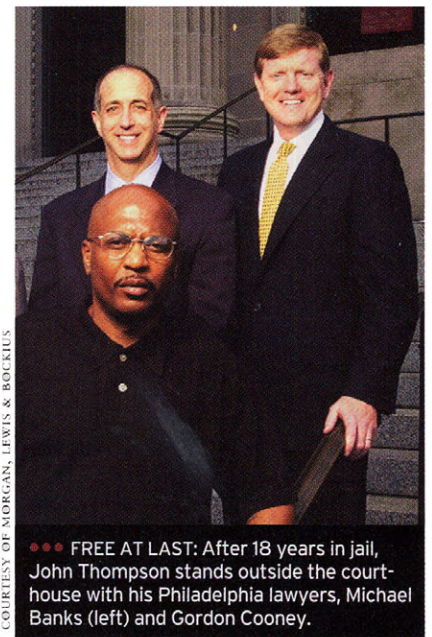
"Well, I was hoping you could explain it to me," she replied, then read the last page of the document. Banks heard only the words he'd been awaiting for 14 years: "... new trial..." Sobbing, he called Cooney in his office four floors above. At first, Cooney could only make out the sound of Banks screaming. Then, from somewhere in the incoherence, he understood: Thompson got a new trial. "Holy shit!" Cooney screamed. He hung up the phone and ran downstairs. They called everyone who had ever cared about the case—their wives, their associates, the lawyers in New Orleans, Thompson's mom. And, of course, Thompson. He took the news soberly. He knew better than to hope.

ON MAY 6TH OF THIS YEAR—18 YEARS to the day since Thompson's first trial—Cooney and Banks met their client in the same New Orleans courtroom where his ordeal had begun. He wore the white shirt and khakis they'd bought him; his head, newly shaven, shined in the light; a thin moustache lined his lip.

This time around, the courtroom was packed with observers. Behind the prosecutor's table sat the Liuzzas and their friends. Behind Thompson sat his mother and his 22-year-old son. Cooney and Banks, at the table with Robert Glass, stared at their notes, too nervous to survey the crowd.

The prosecutor began. "Eighteen years ago, the man seated right over there"—he pointed to Thompson—"snuck up on Ray Liuzza as Ray was coming home from a date, snuffed out his life over a wallet full of credit cards and a ring." He then called 15 witnesses who told pretty much the same stories that they had in 1985. Because Freeman was dead, Judge Quinlan instructed a court reporter to read his testimony. It pointed to Thompson.

But then Glass stood up, turned to the



♦♦♦ **FREE AT LAST:** After 18 years in jail, John Thompson stands outside the courthouse with his Philadelphia lawyers, Michael Banks (left) and Gordon Cooney.

empty witness box, and read the questions Thompson's lawyers should have asked Freeman in 1985. "Isn't it true that you killed Ray Liuzza?" Glass said. "Isn't it true you did this alone?"

Again, Thompson's lawyers put him on the stand.

"Did you commit the murder?" Glass asked him.

"No, sir."

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About two hours later, the jury left for its deliberations. In the courtroom, Cooney and Banks sat back to wait, wondering if John Thompson would ever walk out the front door of that courthouse. They thought about how much had changed, how close they'd come to losing Thompson just as they'd learned to trust him. "It was luck," Cooney recalled. "Our investigator found the blood evidence by sheer luck. How scary is that?" It was enough to turn him against the death penalty altogether, like Banks.

After 35 minutes, the jury filed back in and handed a slip of paper to the bailiff. "In the matter of the *State v. John Thompson*," he bellowed, "the jury finds him...not guilty."

A quiet pause fell over the courtroom. Then Thompson raised his fists to his shoulders—a silent "Yay!"

The next day, at 3 p.m., Thompson walked out of prison with Cooney and Banks on either side of him. His son ran toward him, hugging him as a free man for the first time in 18 years. A reporter asked Thompson what he thought had happened on December 6, 1984. Thompson smiled. "I don't know," he said. "I wasn't there."

