

University of Houston Law Center professor, students explore wrongful convictions in new book;

Event will be held at UH Law Center August 24 to launch *American Justice in the Age of Innocence*

August 17, 2011 – Texas Senator Rodney Ellis, a champion of criminal justice reform, will headline a luncheon hosted by the University of Houston Law Center on August 24 celebrating the publication of *American Justice in the Age of Innocence*, a book which explores the circumstances surrounding wrongful convictions. Sen. Ellis will discuss legislative reforms that have already been enacted in Texas and the importance of the book in advancing the legislative agenda. Cornelius Dupree Jr., a man who served 30 years in prison for a crime he did not commit, will also be in attendance.

American Justice in the Age of Innocence is co-edited by University of Houston Law Center Professor Sandra Guerra Thompson, one of the nation's leading criminal justice scholars, and two of her top students, Hillary K. Valderrama and Jennifer L. Hopgood. Written for judges, lawyers and scholars alike, the publication is a collection of essays which examines the most common causes behind breakdowns in the legal system.

"With the exoneration of over two hundred falsely accused individuals across the United States, this book comes at a time when legislatures around the country are engaged in the subject," Thompson said. "Wrongful convictions result in multiple tragedies—innocent people are wrongly punished, their families suffer greatly as well, states have to pay compensation if and when the innocents are exonerated, and true culprits remain at large to prey on society again."

According to Thompson, *American Justice in the Age of Innocence* will help prisoners like Cornelius Dupree Jr. After serving 30 years of a 75-year sentence, Dupree was declared innocent of a 1980 conviction for aggravated robbery, which was alleged to have been committed during a rape in Dallas in 1979. Prosecutors cleared him of the crime after a test of his DNA profile did not match the evidence from the case.

"Dupree spent more time in prison in the state than any other inmate who had been exonerated by DNA evidence," Thompson said.

The book was written by Thompson's students as a project that emerged from one of her classes which coincided with her work on the Timothy Cole Advisory Panel on Wrongful Convictions. Thompson represents Texas public law schools on the advisory panel created by the Texas Legislature to give lawmakers guidance on statutory changes that could help discover and prevent wrongful convictions.

"It is a rare thing indeed for law students to publish and edit a book while they are in law school," Thompson said.

The luncheon will be held in the Hendricks Heritage Room at the University of Houston Law Center at noon on Wednesday, Aug. 24. The event is open to the public. For more information: Contact Carrie Criado, 713-743-2184, ccriado@central.uh.edu; or John T. Kling, 713-743-8298, jtkling@central.uh.edu.

About the University of Houston

The University of Houston is a comprehensive national research institution serving the globally competitive Houston and Gulf Coast Region by providing world-class faculty, experiential learning and strategic industry partnerships. UH serves more than 38,500 students in the nation's fourth-largest city, located in the most ethnically and culturally diverse region of the country.

About the University of Houston Law Center

The University of Houston Law Center is the leading law school in the nation's fifth-largest legal market. Founded in 1947, it is a top-tier institution awarding Doctor of Jurisprudence (J.D.) and Master of Laws (LL.M.) degrees. The Law Center is fully accredited by the American Bar Association and is a member of the American Association of Law Schools.