

Digging Deeper

Tools and techniques in four investigations

INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING IN THE DIGITAL AGE



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EXPLORE LIES & OMISSIONS

Case Study no 1: The Congressman Who Failed to disclose his income



Later he disclosed his salary as coming from a company that did not exist. How did we know?

- The company was not registered.
- It had no website.
- It was mentioned only on the congressman's personal website.

Case Study No 1: The Congressman Who Failed to disclose his income



Initial sources:

- Google [advanced searches](#),
- Stockman's Congressional [financial disclosures](#)
- The [Wayback Machine](#)

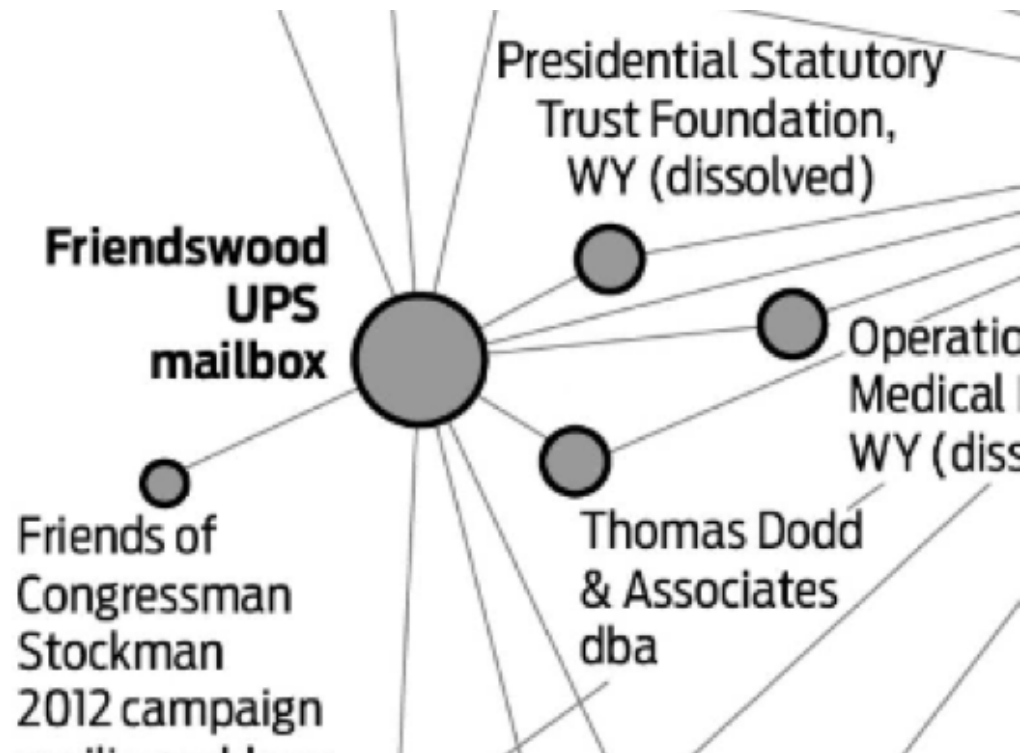
The Congressman also failed to disclose his businesses...



We found and mapped them. Sources:

- Corporation Wiki
- Secretary of state websites
- County Clerk's offices (for fictitious business names/dba registries.)

Red flags showed up in our spreadsheets. His businesses and his campaign funds shared the same P.O. Boxes.

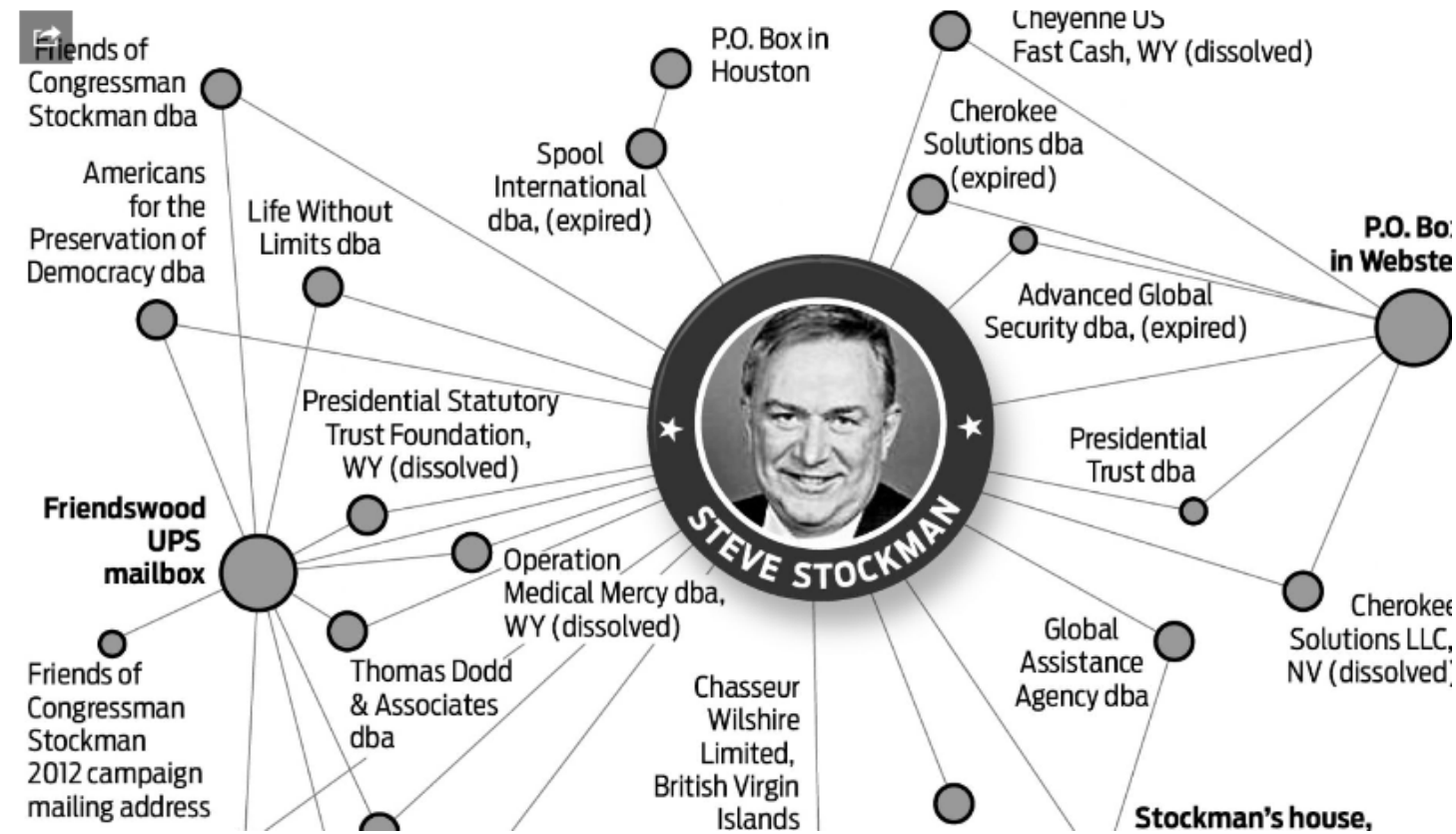


His ex-campaign treasurer and former house employee was also his business partner.



Stockman's filings don't explain his income

Congressman only Texas member not to file a disclosure in 2012



Houston Chronicle Graphic.

SOURCE: <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/politics/us/article/Stockman-s-filings-don-t-explain-his-income-5006941.php?t=e7e7844f8f4d372650>

Do it yourself:

Create a simple spreadsheet that answers key questions

1. WHAT business names do they use?
2. WHO are their business partners
3. WHO are their employees?
4. WHO are their family members?

Do it yourself:

Create a simple spreadsheet that answers key questions

6. WHAT addresses do they use?

7. WHO else is associated with those addresses?

8. WHAT RULES or LAWS did they break?

Key tools for research:

- [Corporation Wiki](#)
- [Open Corporates](#)
- [Investigative Dashboard](#)
- Federal election commission filings [fec.gov](#) & sites for campaign finance <http://www.fecinfo.com/>

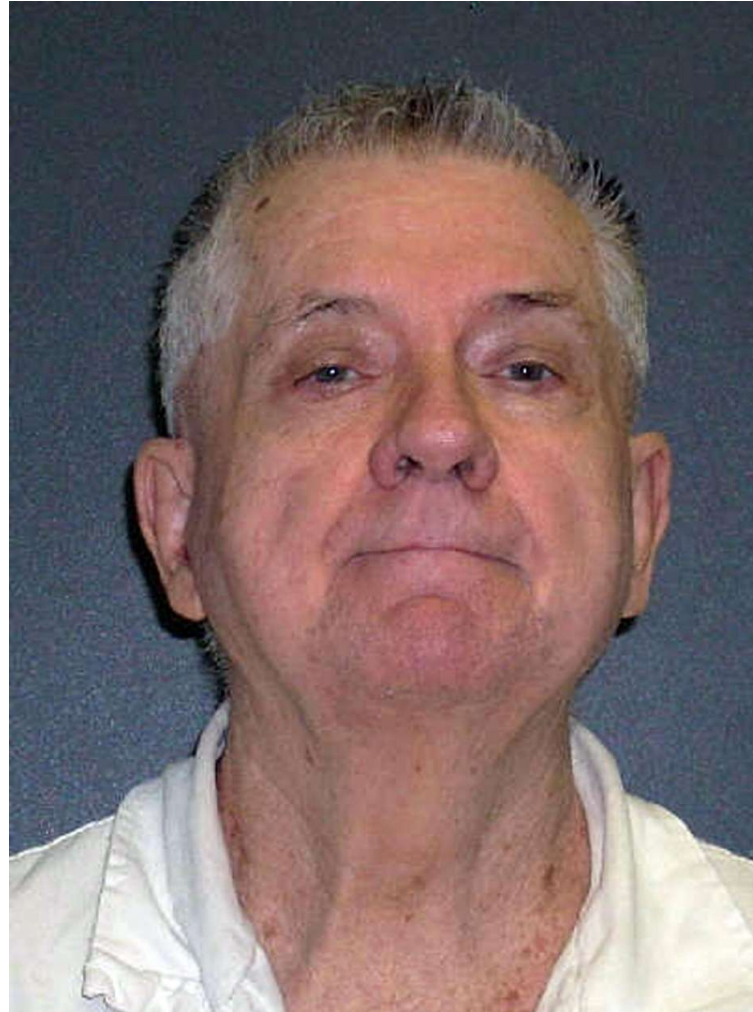
Key tools for research:

- Social media accounts
- Business websites and LinkedIn
- Wayback machine (to see older version of websites)
- Our own reporting archives –organized in [Document Cloud](#) and listed in Excel/Google Sheets

BUILD CHRONOLOGIES

BUILD CHRONOLOGIES:

Case study no 2: The prisoner who claimed he'd killed 11 girls in the 1970s.



By building two sets of chronologies, we set out to determine if prisoner Edward Bell could be a serial killer – or not for the A & E series The Eleven

1. Where did he live and when?
2. Where did he work and when?
3. Where was he arrested and when?

We compared the Bell chronology to his victims' lives and deaths.

1. Where and when were they abducted?
2. Where and when their bodies were found?
3. Where and when were living victims abducted or attacked?



Key sources for criminal's chronology:

- Old police records
- Property records
- Business records
- Interviews with criminal's friends, neighbors and business associates.
- Court files
- Interviews with police
- Organized in spreadsheets, locations mapped and visited.

Key sources for victims' chronology

- Interviews with murder victims' families and friends
- Interviews with other living victims.
- Visits to homes and crime scenes
- Medical examiner's reports
- Police reports
- Crime scene photos and diagrams

Investigative question: Was Bell in the right places at the right times to have committed these crimes?

Conclusion: Bell could be a serial killer. He lived or worked very near where nine of 11 victims were abducted or where their bodies were dumped. He admitted to being the last person to see two of the 11 victims.

But we could neither exclude him as suspect, nor tie him closely to every crime.

EXPLORE CONNECTIONS

EXPLORE CONNECTIONS:

Case study 3: How did a sex trafficker remain in business after a federal raid forced him to flee to Mexico?



After the bust, there were more calls for help from victims. One young girl called 911 from this house.



EXPLORE CONNECTIONS: WHO OWNS THE PROPERTY? What else do they own?



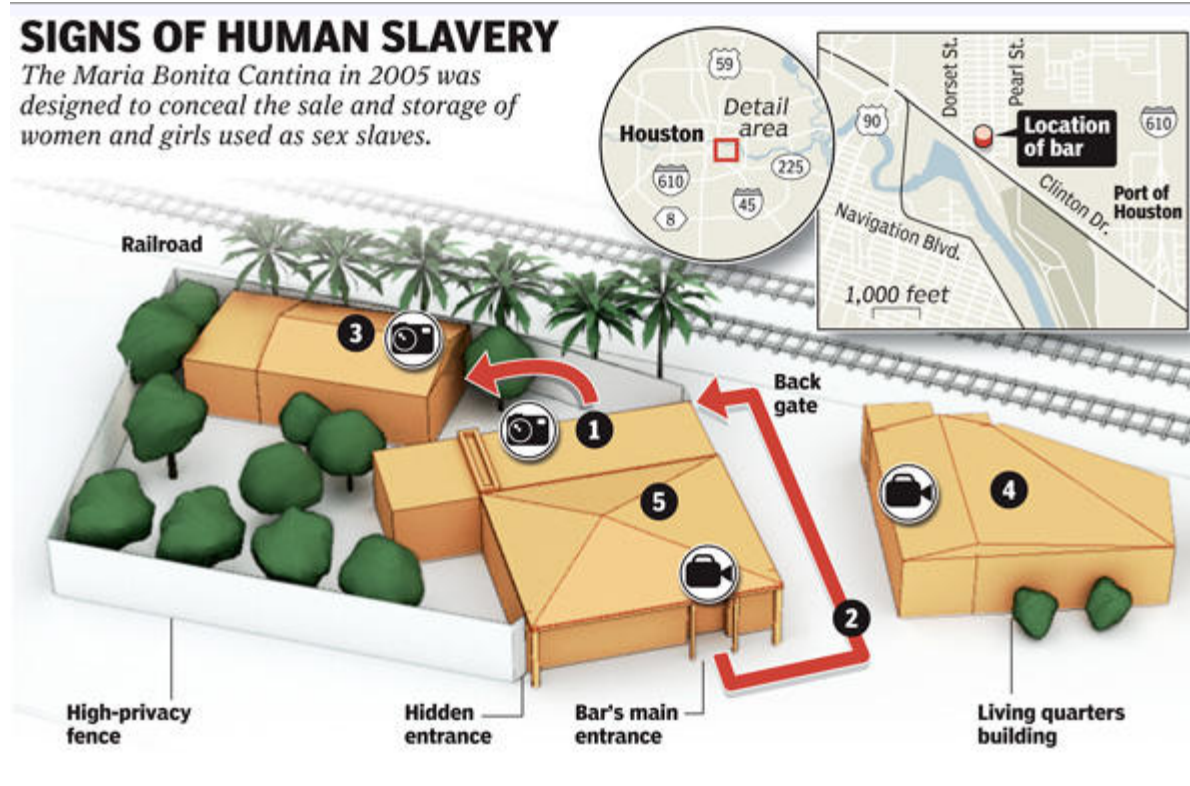
Exploring cantina connections:

- The house, where a young woman was held captive was owned by a woman who operated a bar linked to El Gallo's ring...
- The bar owner also had been arrested in the 1990s for prostitution with another bar owner linked to the ring.

Despite crackdown, Houston cantina sex trade persists

Bars that were bases for sex ring still open for business

LISE OLSEN



Houston Chronicle

<https://www.chron.com/news/article/Despite-crackdown-Houston-cantina-sex-trade-1646123.php>

Key documents

- Property ownership records
- 911 tape
- Interviews with police
- State court files (for old arrest)
- Federal court files
- Liquor license and inspection records for the bars.

SOURCES: License and inspection records exist for all kinds of businesses and occupations

- Key questions: Licensed or not? Pays taxes or not? Registered or not? Fined recently? Inspected recently?



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TABC License/Permit Public Information

The Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission requires alcoholic beverage manufacturers, distributors, retailers, etc. to apply for licenses and permits before they may operate in the State of Texas. The TABC currently provides some information regarding licenses/permits to the public in various formats such as 8 1/2" X 11" printouts, compact discs, and files sent via e-mail for a fee. **This information is updated on our web site on a weekly basis** and is available through the internet for free.

The information supplied includes CLP (license/permit number), tradename, owner/corporation name, street and mailing addresses, and business phone. For a detailed layout of the data records, take a look at "[License/Permit File Layout](#)".

All of the information is in a comma-delimited ASCII text format. All files have been compressed with a ZIP program. You can obtain an UNZIP utility by clicking on the "[Compressed and zipped files](#)" link below.

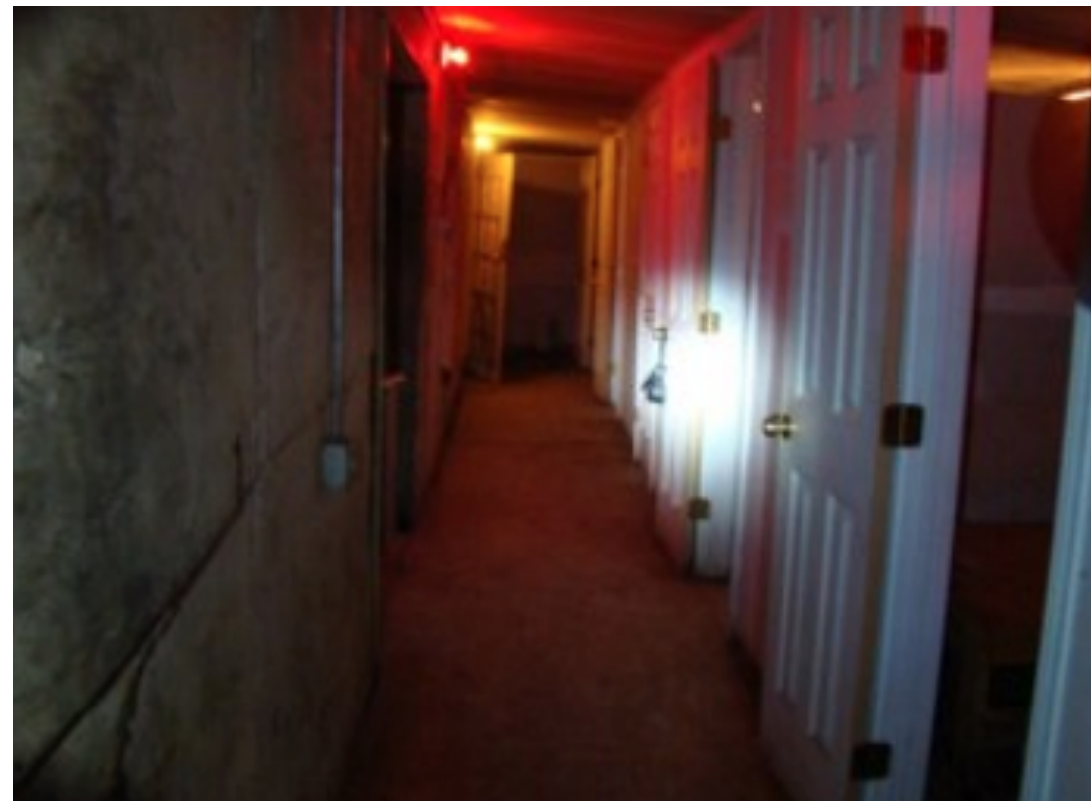
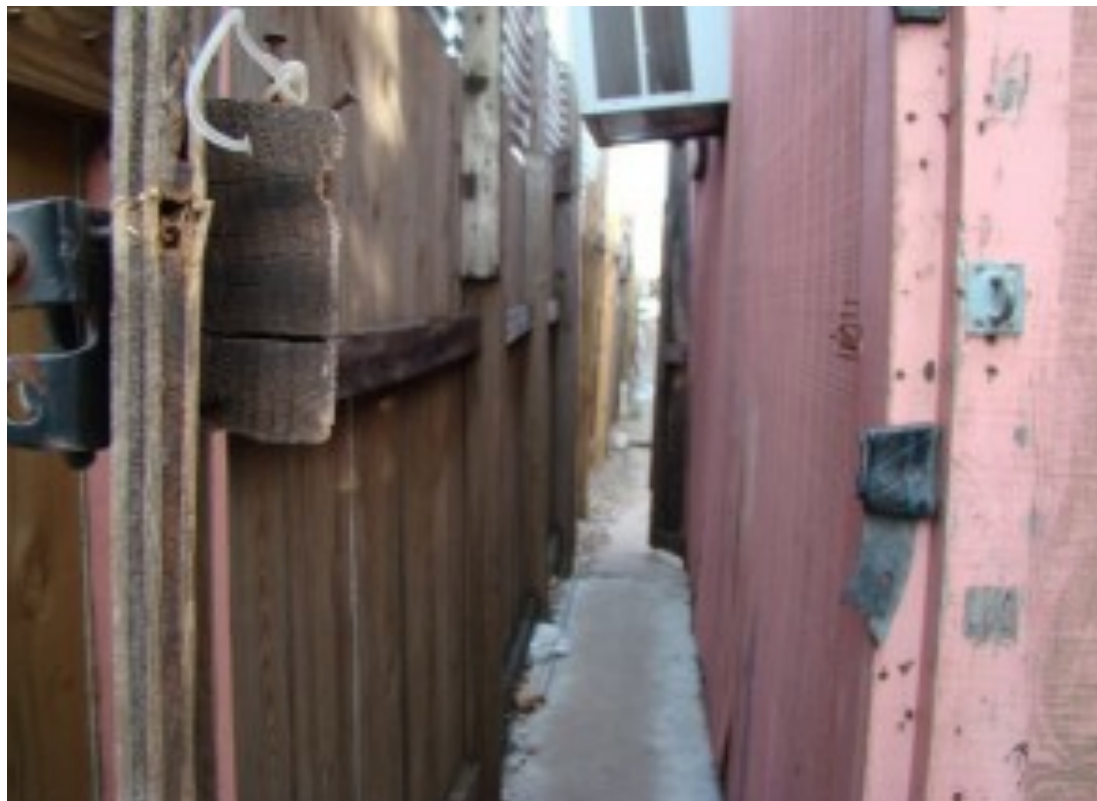
The data is organized in four different ways. First, you can [download the entire database as one file \(all.zip\)](#) OR [download the entire database as one file \(all.zip\) in a new sort order \(by location address\)](#). Secondly, you can [download the data by license/permit type](#) OR [download the data by license/permit type in a new sort order \(by location address\)](#). This is good if you want to get all license/permit holders of a particular type of license. The third option is to [download data by Texas county](#) OR [download data by Texas county in a new sort order \(by location address\)](#). This is a great way to quickly obtain data needed for a demographic study of a particular area of the state. The fourth option is still Texas county files, but is organized by [Metropolitan areas](#) OR [Metropolitan areas in a new sort order \(by location address\)](#).

Once you have downloaded the files and unzipped them, you can then import the data into your favorite database, spreadsheet, statistics or word-processing package. **TABC cannot be responsible for the conversion or use of the public information provided.**

If you have special information requests, or require data in another format, see "[How to order special listings](#)" for the steps, formats and fees required.

Include images in public record requests: Photos, videos, PowerPoints...

Bar photos showed: Secret passageways, hidden bedrooms...



Request images:

Bar inspection photos showed: escape hatches; an altar to the Santa Muerte.



Inspection photos showed: Secret hallways, hidden passages...

Explore connections on social media: Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter – even YouTube



Case erases romantic facade obscuring cantina culture

Singer awaits sentencing after his wife is convicted of sex trafficking at the businesses

By **Lise Olsen** and David Dorantes Updated 11:07 pm, Friday, May 4, 2012



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One Houston
traffickers posed
his song on YouTube...

<https://www.chron.com/news/houston-texas/article/Case-erases-romantic-facade-obscuring-cantina-3536202.php>

Key questions:

Explore ties between people and places

- Search property records. Who owns the property? What is it worth? Who pays the taxes?
- Marriage and divorce data: Who's married to whom?
- Visit or view addresses on a map. Who are neighbors? What businesses are there now? What was there before?
- What calls for services have been made at those addresses to police?

Key questions:

Explore ties between people and places

- Are the businesses licensed?
- Who licenses/inspects the businesses? Do inspectors have photos, videos? Reports?
- What other names are/were used by people and by businesses?
- Search state, federal and court records under all individual and business names.

CROWDSOURCING & COLLABORATIONS

Case study 4: An investigation of abuse inside the Southern Baptist convention begins when *Houston Chronicle* reporter Robert Downen, notices a civil lawsuit, does some Google searches and gets 500 hits...



Initial sources:

1. Civil court records
2. Newspaper archives – especially niche publications on Baptists/Christians
3. Clergy abuse whistleblowers and Baptist bloggers
4. A Google alert with key terms related to the investigation.

Steps in the Abuse of Faith investigation.

1. Editor Steve Riley formed a team.
2. We built internal lists
3. We requested public records nationwide
4. We archived and shared public records via Document Cloud.

<https://www.houstonchronicle.com/local/investigations/abuse-of-faith/>

A CHRONICLE INVESTIGATION

Abuse of Faith

In the past 20 years, a disturbing number of Southern Baptists with formal church roles have engaged in sexual misconduct, a new investigation by the Houston Chronicle and San Antonio Express-News reveals. They were pastors. Deacons. Youth pastors. They left behind more than 700 victims. Read and hear the stories of those victims, and learn the depths of the crimes and misconduct of the church leaders they trusted.

PART 1

Southern Baptist sexual abuse spreads as leaders resist reforms



In the past 20 years, about 380 Southern Baptist church leaders and volunteers have faced allegations of sexual misconduct. They were pastors. Deacons. Ministers. They left behind more than 700 victims.

The Abuse of Faith team ultimately found:

- More than 300 Southern Baptist church leaders publicly accused, sued or prosecuted for sex crimes/abuse with 700 + victims
- 1,536 public records in 20+ states.
- And we shared data for more than 270 cases on the internet for the public and other reporters.

Abuse of Faith data:

<https://projects.houstonchronicle.com/2019/southern-baptist-abuse/>

ABUSE OF FAITH: A CHRONICLE INVESTIGATION

Search our database of Southern Baptist church pastors, leaders, employees and volunteers who pleaded guilty or were convicted of sex crimes.



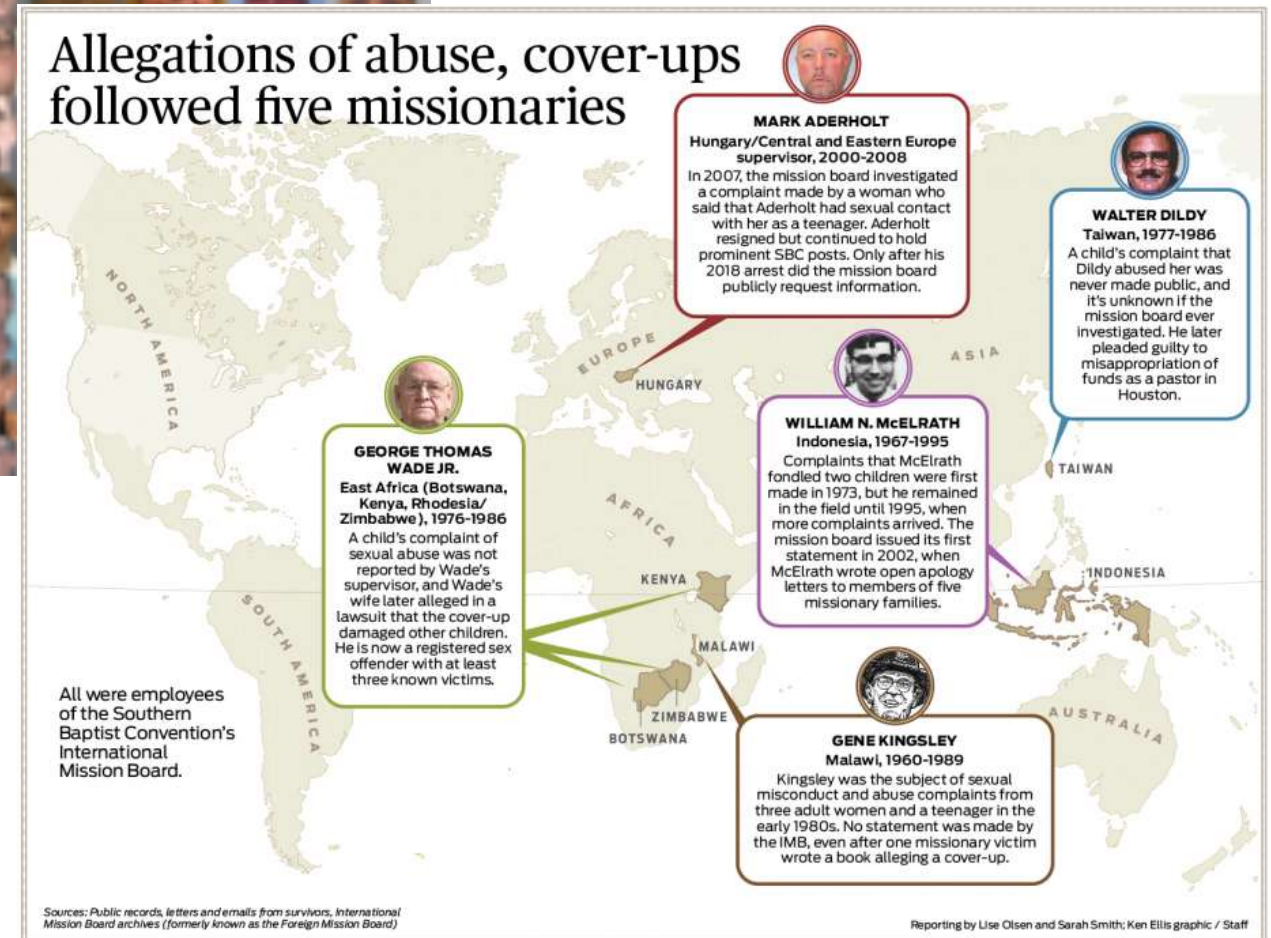
By Lise Olsen, Robert Downen, John Tedesco, Jordan Rubio, Matt Dempsey, Joyce Lee and Rachael Gleason.

The Southern Baptist Convention has declined to keep a list of key church officials and volunteers convicted of sex abuse crimes. The Houston Chronicle compiled this list of records and information; it is current as of December 2018.

Search the database below. To read our series, [go here](#).

Questions, updates or feedback about this database? [Click here to fill out our feedback form](#).

Reader tips were especially valuable for finding documents about missionaries.



SERIAL SEXUAL ABUSE BY MISSIONARIES

We built a simple google form to seek tips from readers:

Abuse of Faith: Help us investigate

We appreciate you sharing your story and we take your privacy seriously. We will not share your information with anybody without your permission. And even with your permission, we will always contact you before publishing anything about your story.

* Required

Name (optional)

Your answer

What is your email address? *

Your answer

Where does this story take place? *

Your answer



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