

## FILM: Under Pressure Innocent Teens Confess in Central Park Case



Around 9 PM on April 19, 1989, a 28-year-old, female jogger was brutally beaten, sexually assaulted and left for dead in a wooded area of Central Park located off the beaten path. Because she was an investment

banker with an Ivy League pedigree, the NYPD felt the pressure to apprehend the perpetrators of the heinous crime ASAP.

Within hours, cops had extracted confessions from Anton McCray, Kevin Richard-

son, Korey Wise, Yusef Salaam and Raymond Santana, Jr., teenagers who had been denied their right to an attorney. Although none of the five had ever been arrested before, they were all convicted of rape and attempted murder on the strength of those incriminating admissions alone.

Part of the explanation for the legal lynching was that the victim was a wealthy white woman while the accused were poor black kids from Harlem. The press was all too willing to exploit the hot button issues of color and class, and the media sensationalized the case's lurid details, coining the term "wilding" to describe the alleged behavior of the defendants.

Real estate magnate Donald Trump even took out full-page ads in every New York City daily newspaper, calling for the death penalty and saying that the boys "should be executed for their crimes." In the face of the vigilante-like demand for vengeance, no one seemed concerned that the suspects' DNA failed to match the only semen found at the scene.

Sadly, they were only exonerated in 2002 after having completely served sentences ranging from 6 to 13 years when Matias Reyes, a serial rapist whose DNA was a match, confessed to the crime because of his guilty conscience. This gross miscarriage of justice is recounted in *The Central Park Five*, a riveting documentary co-directed by the father-daughter team of Ken and Sarah Burns.

The film features reams of archival footage, including videotapes of the framed quintet's coerced confessions. Mixed in are present-day reflections by them, their lawyers, and relatives, as well as by politicians, prosecutors and other pivotal players.

A heartbreaking expose' about a rush to judgment which ruined five, innocent young lives.

Excellent (4 stars)

Unrated

Running time: 119 minutes

Distributor: Sundance Selects

## Foxx

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world, Will Smith, was going to work with Quentin Tarantino. And I was like, "Damn! There's another project I didn't know nothing about." But luckily, I somehow got a chance to meet Quentin and read the script which I thought was brilliant. Next thing you know, I was in a room talking with him about trying to make it happen.

KW: Did you have any reservations?

JF: I didn't have a knee-jerk reaction like some people did to the language and the violence. My stepfather was a history teacher at Lincoln High School in Dallas. So, I was already familiar with the N-word and the brutality of slavery. What I was drawn to was the love story between Django and Broomhilda and how he defends and gets the girl in the end. I thought it was just

an amazing and courageous project.

KW: Children's book author Irene Smalls says: In this film you turn the docile stupid black man myth on its head. You also portray the enduring love of a black man for his woman.

JF: Most definitely! When you see the slave who's been chained and whipped with no way out, and he finally catches up to this, some people call that revenge. But I say, "No, it's righting a wrong at that time." You've been wronged for so long, and here's your karma personified, standing in this funny blue suit. And on the end of that suit is your maker. You've never seen that in a movie before, at least not when it comes to slavery. Ordinarily, when the slave gets a chance to hold the whip or the gun, they start singing a hymn or doing the speech about "If I do this, I'll be as bad as you." We come out with a mix-tape, and that's it. But with Quentin Tarantino, it's just like a regular Western. The bad guy has to pay, and the

good guy gets his woman.

KW: Have you seen the film with a black audience? Were people talking back at the screen?

JF: Yeah, they were yelling like crazy.

KW: Irene also says: In both your stage name and your career choices you've paid homage to great black artists who have come before you. Is this film another acknowledgement of that legacy?

JF: Absolutely! I know this might sound strange, but some of the people I actually studied for this film were a little more contemporary. Of course, I started with the original film *Django* and Clint Eastwood's *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*, but I also watched Wesley Snipes in *New Jack City*, and Denzel Washington in *Glory* and *A Soldier's Story*. Those performances moved me in a way that I cannot explain. So, you're seeing me tip my hat to those guys in this film.

KW: Film student Jamaal Green says: Jamie, you are such a talent in so many areas, it seems like there isn't anything you can't do. Is there any chance that directing will be something you may try next?

JF: We're doing a directing thing with Canon and Ron Howard, a special where we have people send in pictures. I would also like to direct some comedies with people like Chris Tucker, Kevin Hart and Mike Epps, and go to work with them on some

fun stuff.

KW: Nick Antoine was wondering whether you're ever going to get around to doing *Skank Robbers*, that long-rumored film based on the characters Wanda and Sheneneh that you and Martin Lawrence played on *In Living Color*?

JF: No, that's not going to happen.

KW: This question is from your co-star Kerry Washington: If you were an animal, what animal would you be?

JF: Wow! If I were an animal, I would be an eagle.

KW: The Melissa Harris-Perry question: How did your first big heartbreak impact who you are as a person?

JF: Guys don't adapt as well as women do to getting their heart broken for the first time. It's tragic. I really wanted to be in love, get married, have kids and buy a wood-paneled station wagon for the family. But it didn't work out, and, boy, it wrecked it!

KW: Would you mind coming up with a Jamie Foxx question I could ask other celebrities when I interview them?

JF: Hmm... [Thinks] If you only had 24 hours to live, what would you do? Would you do the bad stuff, you never got a chance to do, or would you do good stuff to make sure you make it into heaven?

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