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The Central Park Five: The Untold Story Behind One Of New York City's Most Infamous Crimes



Synopsis

In this spellbinding account of the real facts of the Central Park jogger case, Sarah Burns powerfully reexamines one of New York City's most notorious crimes and its aftermath. On April 20th, 1989, two passersby discovered the body of the "Central Park jogger" crumpled in a ravine. She'd been raped and severely beaten. Within days five black and Latino teenagers were apprehended, all five confessing to the crime. The staggering torrent of media coverage that ensued, coupled with fierce public outcry, exposed the deep-seated race and class divisions in New York City at the time. The minors were tried and convicted as adults despite no evidence linking them to the victim. Over a decade later, when DNA tests connected serial rapist Matias Reyes to the crime, the government, law enforcement, social institutions and media of New York were exposed as having undermined the individuals they were designed to protect. Here, Sarah Burns recounts this historic case for the first time since the young men's convictions were overturned, telling, at last, the full story of one of New York's most legendary crimes.

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Customer Reviews

"Riveting. . . An important book. The Cleveland Plain

Dealer "Burns's gripping tale may serve as an allegory for some of the most pressing criminal justice issues of our time. The New York Times Book

Review "This is a controversial and important book, presenting a powerful argument that the minority youths who are convicted of raping and nearly murdering the Central Park

Jogger were innocent of that crime (though not necessarily of other violent crimes committed in Central Park that night). It demonstrates that our justice system is far from full proof even in the face of alleged confession, eyewitness and forensic evidence. Were these false convictions based on understandable mistakes? Or were they based on racial stereotyping? Read this fine book and make up your own mind.

Alan M. Dershowitz, author of *The Trials of Zion* "Burns is a calm, lucid, and concise writer."--NPR

"Gripping from start to finish, *The Central Park Five* is an unvarnished look at one of the most infamous crimes in New York City history. You may think you know the true story of the Central Park jogger, but you don't. Sarah Burns tells a harrowing story, in which her only allegiance is to the truth.

Kevin Baker, author of *Dreamland* "Remarkable | Straightforward, thought-provoking reportage.

Booklist "A riveting retrospective.

News Blaze

Sarah Burns graduated from Yale University in 2004 with a degree in American studies and went on to work for Moore & Goodman, a small civil rights law firm based in New York. She is now producing a documentary film with Ken Burns based on this book. She lives in Brooklyn, New York.

I purchased this book because I had to do a research paper and I really don't regret at all. Good story, the writer did a great job.

This book recounts the steps that led to a horrible injustice done to five teen aged boys who are referred to as the Central Park 5, who were convicted of raping the Central Park Jogger in 1989, and whose convictions were vacated completely after they served their full sentences. I lived in NY at that time, and the book is a fair recounting of the frenzy around the case as well as the details that led to overturning their convictions. The book and film are the work primarily of Sarah Burns, daughter of documentarian Ken Burns, and show the background research and production values of a Burns project. It's an easy and effective read, and highlights the ineffectiveness of the justice system when it is deliberately perverted by those in control of the process. I used the book and DVD in a class on how racial conflict is presented in the mass media focusing on the racial elements of the story, and found it very effective and balanced. Greater coverage of how the minority media covered the ongoing story would have strengthened the project, since the few references that are included indicate the coverage was very different, and especially since the five teenagers were all members of minority communities. Chapter titles would also have been handy. The whole mess is

sad and frustrating and infuriating, and the interviews with the now-grown men reflect the pain and injustice of lives that cannot really be recovered. These kids were put into prison for years when they were not guilty and simply wanted to play baseball, create some art, and go to the prom. The impact of the film and book have been significant; for the first time in about ten years, the NY City government is starting to negotiate with them on compensation for unlawful imprisonment.

Was a very good read. The differences in the facts and what actually happened were amazing. So many people involved really made it interesting.

Well written, and a fairly balanced review of a horrible, highly publicized crime and its outcome for five young men who were convicted but innocent. Disturbing look at how all levels of society pre-judge crime situations without all the facts. How those who are responsible for our safety abuse their power. How those who are responsible for protecting the innocent protect their own careers instead. How those who are supposed to report the news accurately distort the facts, are too lazy to get the facts, or are too busy trying to sell newspapers with sensationalism to get it right. Yet another example of how we humans fail over and over again to learn our lessons from past experience. For another recent example, read *Zeitoun*, by Dave Eggers.

I'm still amazed that most people don't know this story yet. Sarah Burns took on an overwhelming task in trying to change the collective recollections of a city that was raving after the Central Park Jogger was assaulted. And I hope that people who think they know the story will give her book a read and learn what really happened. While these were young teens, adults have succumbed to the persuasive tactics of authorities and "confessed" to crimes they did not commit. So the book serves as a warning for the innocent. I was most struck by Khorey Wise - who left the park long before the jogger was attacked. He served the most amount of time because he was older than the other convicted "Five." But ironically, if he had not been convicted and met Matias Reyes, the true rapist, one wonders whether Reyes would ever have come forward and cleared the teens. Indeed, Reyes said that he confessed because he met Wise and felt bad because Wise was serving time for Reyes's crime. The book was, however, biased. These kids were involved in several assaults in the park that night. That the police believed they could also have committed the assault on the jogger was not a stretch. But Burns downplays the crimes and the "Five's" motives, conduct and behavior that night. They certainly did not deserve to go to prison for the many years they did. But they were not simply in the wrong place at the wrong time. They had other crimes on their hands.

Amazing book.

I had just left NYC when this incident happened, and I remember the initial coverage and trial of the young men who were convicted of the rape. I remembered less well, when their conviction was overturned so many years later. A great book to read to gain an understanding of how a conviction can be railroaded with little or no evidence. And a sad reminder that justice in this country is not blind. It has a lot to do with money and/or connections--whether you can afford a decent lawyer--which none of these young men had.

Very well-written account of what really happened that night in Central Park. Like most people, I read the various newspaper and magazine stories regarding the tragic rape and assault of the jogger in Central Park. This is what really happened and it's an eyeopener. No matter how many times we learn about false confessions, human nature dictates we believe that people don't confess to horrific crimes they didn't commit. Juveniles, in particular, don't comprehend the consequences of "confession". The young men in question didn't all have competent counsel and served many years in prison for a crime they didn't commit.

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