



The Big Lie in the Central Park Jogger Case

April 10, 2003

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It's Time For Justice To Be Paid

Three weeks ago, in mid March, the young men who were defendants in the Central Park Jogger case became potential plaintiffs by filing a Notice of Claim in federal court of their intent to sue the city of New York, the New York Police Department, individual police officers and the Manhattan District Attorney's office. The former defendants are claiming, among other things, a denial of their civil rights by the city for, as you probably know by now, their wrongful arrest, convictions and incarceration. They are seeking millions in damages, as they should, from the City for the terrible injustice done to them. In response to their Notice of Claim and intent to sue, the City of New York has publicly vowed to fight the lawsuit and to prove once again that they were involved in the rape, assault and attempted murder of the Jogger along with confessed rapist, Matias Reyes.

This, despite Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau's admission of a miscarriage of justice and a court ruling vacating their wrongful convictions on December 19, 2002 for good and sufficient cause, supports the DA's judgment. If the city of New York makes good on its promise to fight the lawsuit, it will be perpetuating a fictional account of what happened on the night of April 19, 1989, as advanced by the police and former prosecutor Linda Fairstein.

A Little History Is In Order

On the night of April 19, 1989, New York City police rounded up more than thirty Black and Hispanic teenagers whom they suspected had been part of a park rampage they called "wilding" and were involved in the vicious rape, assault and near murder of a white 28 year old banker – forever to be known as the **Central Park Jogger**. The Jogger was near death when police found her in a puddle of mud and blood, and was in a coma for twelve days. She did not remember the attack when she regained consciousness.

Five black and Hispanic teens, ranging from age 14 to 17 years old, were eventually isolated and identified as the attackers. By now their names be familiar: **Kharey Wise, Kevin Richardson, Antron McCray, Yusef Salaam and Raymond Santana**. Their names have been seared into our consciousness. They have become known as the **Central Park Jogger Five**. The teens, under relentless pressure from the New York Police Department and Assistant DA Linda Fairstein of the Manhattan District Attorney's Office, eventually "confessed" to the attack. We were told that their confessions were not coerced and that there was DNA evidence linking them to the crime. **We were told lies**. Unfortunately, the young men were eventually tried and convicted in 1990 and 1991 amidst a lynch mob mentality by the press, politicians and prominent citizens in the city such as real estate mogul Donald Trump. Trump even took out a full-page ad in all of the New York newspapers at a cost of \$85,000 calling for the restoration of the death penalty. *"They should be forced to suffer . . . I want them to be afraid"*, suggested Trump in the ad. Politicians, like then Mayor Ed Koch, called for a national movement for more draconian laws against predator juveniles and for the treatment of juveniles, as young as 11 years old, as adults in the criminal justice system.

Scottsboro Boys Revisited Up North

What happened on the night of April 19, 1989 in New York City reverberated all across the country and affected black and brown communities, and their children. We, as a community, had our doubts about their guilt and the evidence used to gain their convictions. "Something", we kept saying, "was not quite right with their arrest, confessions and convictions". We were powerless to do anything about it since our system of justice had found them guilty of the crime. The dilemma of the Central Park Jogger defendants was reminiscent of the *Scottsboro Boys* case in 1931. The *Scottsboro Boys* case involved nine young black boys who were accused of having raped two white girls while on a freight train heading to Huntsville, Alabama. The

