

GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

Written by
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April 19th, 1989. Shortly before 9pm Trisha Meili exited her upper east side apartment to go for her routine run, as she jogged through central park she was dragged off the road under the cover of trees and was raped and violently assaulted within an inch of her life and was left to die. Unknown whether she would live, the NYPD were sent out to locate the person responsible as the whole of the city went into a frenzy.



After 12 days she woke up from a coma, her body covered in temporary and permanent injuries to remind her of the trauma she incurred. The only problem was that she suffered partial amnesia, Trisha Meili had suffered so much head trauma her memory from that night was gone.

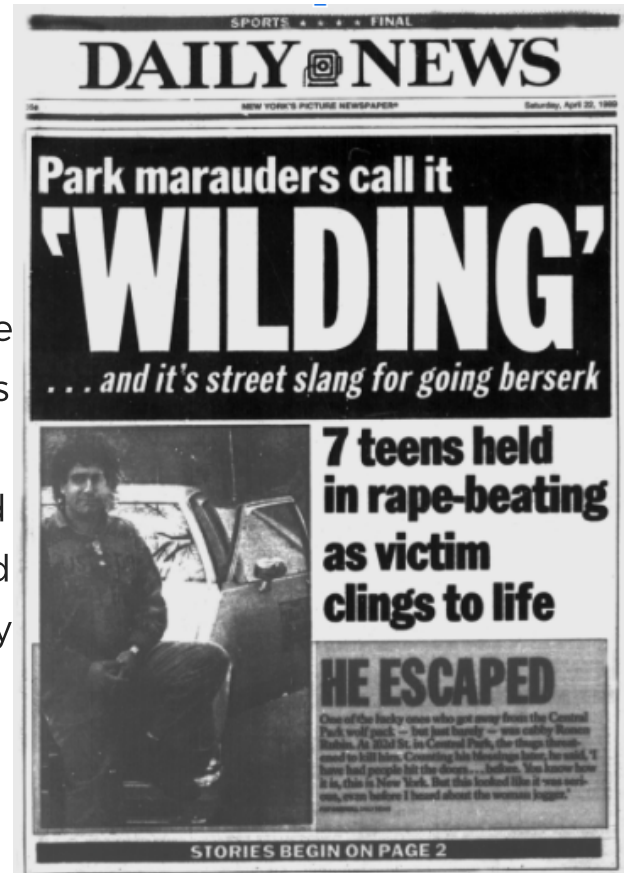
By the end of 1990, a group of five black and hispanic boys were found guilty of the attack on Trisha Meili by an all white jury. Four of the boys were sent to juvenile facilities while the eldest (being 16 at the time) was sent to an adult prison. They spent a combined 41 years in jail. For nothing.

They were all innocent.

At 1.30am, the early hours of April 20th, Trisha Meili had laid unconscious in a shallow ravine for multiple hours following her vicious and savage attack. As the streets of New York were dimly lit by street lights, the darkness flooded through Central Park, the trees were so dense not even the moonlight could get through. All hope was lost as it was unlikely she wouldn't be found until it was too late. With a sprout of luck two men wandered upon Trisha's naked, gagged and tied up. Covered from head to toe in her own blood she was hastily taken to hospital. Although she was found, Meili's prognosis from doctors was that she would soon die from her injuries. She had been beaten so severely her eye was

dislodged from its socket and fractured in 21 places. Due to the severity of the attack and the critical hypothermia Meili endured she was placed in a coma in the hopes of letting her body heal.

From the moment she was found immense pressure was placed upon the NYPD to locate the perpetrator. Frenzy became widespread throughout the city, every woman feared for themselves and every man feared for their mothers, wives and children. This sent the detectives handling the case into a hue of panic, they struggled to know what to do. How would they know who entered the park that night? Once looking into the night they quickly discovered that police had detained over 15 boys that night over multiple complaints of a 142 or as they put in the initial police report 'wilding out'. Little did they know this term would be used as the headline to some of the biggest newspaper outlets in America connecting them to the rape of Trisha Meili.



Sunday, April 16th 1989

At 7.30pm four boys between the ages of 11 and 15 dragged a 12 year old girl into a hallway and continued to rape her one by one.

Monday, April 17th 1989

A 22 year old girl was visiting her friend when at 4.30am he forced her into his bedroom where he raped and robbed her.

Tuesday, April 18th 1989

In the early hours of the morning four men (two were brothers) approached a 20 year old woman on the streets in brooklyn heights. They forced her onto a rooftop where each man took turns in continually raping her.

Wednesday, April 19th 1989

This was the day Trisha Meili was brutally beaten, raped and left to die in Central Park. Earlier this day a 15 year old girl was accosted in the street by a man, he pulled out a pistol and forced her to a building where two other men were waiting for her. They each raped her.

Thursday, April 20th 1989

At 4pm an 8 year old girl was raped by a 50 year old acquaintance.

Friday, April 21st 1989

In the late afternoon a 13 year old girl was in an elevator, a 15 year old boy riding the elevator with her forced her onto the roof with him. When they arrived he raped her multiple times.

Saturday, April 22nd 1989

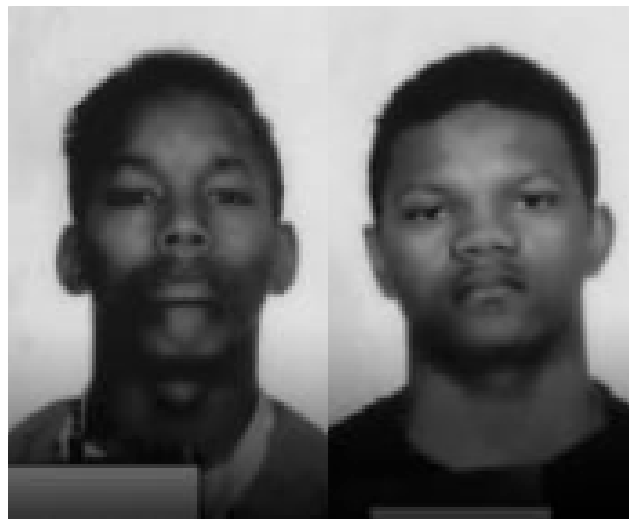
At 6AM two young men approached a young woman on the streets in Brooklyn, they raped her on the street.

While this a condensed version of the rapes committed on this week in 1989 it was reported that 17 blacks, 7 hispanic women, 3 caucasian and two asians were raped during these dates. Men and women.

It is important to stress that these are only the number of REPORTED rapes meaning the real number of rapes could be significantly higher. According to F.B.I statistics in 1989 a rape was thought to be committed every 6 minutes.

From the 15 boys initially brought in three other people; Antron Mccray 15, Yusef Salaam 15 and Korey Wise 16, after being identified as being at the park by the boys. As well as these three being singled out, Raymond Santana 14 and Kevin Richardson 14, were also singled out from the original 15 boys brought in. The reason for this is unknown.

The five juveniles, who later became known worldwide as being part of the Central Park Five, were all interrogated separately for at least seven hours each without being accompanied by a parent or guardian despite all being minors. During these interrogations they were mentally manipulated and physically abused by police officials, they were each told another boy had said they had raped Meili and the only way they could get out of trouble was if they blamed it on another one of the boys. This was how they got their 'confessions', albeit confusing statements as each one convicted a different person but once all put together the police has five confessions tapes saying each boy had taken part in the rape and attempted murder.



Despite this case being a shocking reality for some people, police brutality and negligence was not uncommon during this time, especially in America which still sees police brutality run rife. The rift between the police and the black community is not hidden nor subtle.

Eight years following the Central Park Case Abner Louima went on a night out with his friends during a warm summer night in Brooklyn. He attended the club Rendez-Vous when a fight broke out between two female girls, to ensure no one was hurt Louima stood between both women trying to keep them apart. Shortly after this, police officers from NYPD's 70th precinct arrived and arrested Louima believing him to be the person who was committing the disorderly conduct.



Upon travel back to the station Louima was brutally beaten by the police officers with both their fists, hand held radios and nightsticks leaving him bloody and broken. Although police had beaten Louima he still voiced his innocence when arriving at the

station, this was when Volpe (one of the arresting police officers) took him into a bathroom sexually abused and raped him. With Louima's hands still handcuffed behind his back they sodomized him with the handle of a toilet plunger, he then continued to push the plunger into his mouth and down his throat, choking him. He was left alone in a cell for the rest of the night. The following day he was taken to Coney Island Hospital where he was found to have severe damage to his colon and bladder and multiple broken teeth due to the abuse inflicted upon him. Police officers tried to hide the abuse by

telling doctors the injuries were due to 'abnormal homosexual activities' but one ER nurse was suspicious of these claims and called both Louima's family and the NYPD internal affairs bureau. Action was taken and Officer Volpe was found guilty of assault in December 1999, being sentenced to 30 years in prison without the possibility of parole.

Efforts to get confessions from the five boys by police soared once the timeline of the crime was put together. Trisha Meili was an established and experienced runner, with her boyfriend saying she does a steady eight minute mile, she was recorded leaving her apartment on 83rd Street at 9.05pm meaning it was 9.15pm when she reached the location of her attack at the top of Central Park. At the exact same time all five boys were reported as hassling a 52 year old man at the opposite end of the park, not only this but each boy had alibi's between the times of 9.00pm to 9.50 as the big group of 15 teenage boys were all seen harassing people between these times. Although this alibi doesn't throw the most positive light on the boys it is an alibi placing them 2 miles away at the time of and around the rape. The clear disregard of this information and the abuse inflicted upon the boys to indict them into the story shows that they were not targeted in pursuit of the truth but they were targeted because of the colour of their skin.



We cannot be shocked at the clear racism running through the American police force as the president at the time of the crime had had blatant racist conversations with previous presidents. In 2019 writer Tim Naftali released audio of exchanged racist conversations that had happened between Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, who was

president at the time of The Central Park Five Case. In this article, Naftali included short audio clips of President Nixon using racial slurs in a telephone call to future president Raegan, referring to African leaders at the United Nations as 'monkeys' saying 'they're still uncomfortable wearing shoes', these racist comments are accompanied by Raegan's laughter and agreement. Later on in the exchange Raegan is heard describing the UN as a 'kangaroo court' filled with 'bums'. Once released in 2019, his comments hit an already raw nerve as racist presidency had already been in headlines due to Donald Trump coming into power. But at the time comments like these were not uncommon nor unheard of, the use of these racial slurs by leaders can be an explanation, but not an excuse, for the racist behaviours seen throughout America at the time.

On June 25th 1990 the first trial of Antron McCray, Yusef Salaam and Raymond Santana had started while the second one didn't start until 22nd October of the same year where they tried Kevin Richardson and Korey Wise. Before both trials, the council of each boy had



tried to remove their confession tapes off of pretrial evidence as they claimed they were lied to, intimidated and coerced into making false confessions but they were used anyway to gain an unfair advantage. This was not the only incorrect information included in the trial, DNA analysis concluded that none of the boys DNA matched the DNA found at the crime scene (Meili's cervix and a running sock that contained semen) meaning they were concluded to have not been the person/people who rape her. Despite these findings the prosecutor and police claimed the results came back as 'inconclusive', lying to the jury.



Following the first trial all three were sentenced to 5-10 years each in a juvenile correctional facility, the maximum sentence allowed for juveniles, for the sexual assault and rape of Trisha Meili. During the second trial the Richardson and Wise's defense attorneys tried their best to get the confession tapes

thrown out due to both boys having mental disabilities meaning they had limited intellectual ability and were incapable of making written or videotaped confessions. Despite this Kevin Richardson was sentenced to the maximum 5-10 years in a juvenile correctional facility while Korey Wise was sentenced to 5-15 years in Adult prison due to him being 16 years old. After the verdict was read out Korey Wise shouted at the prosecutor:

**'You're going to pay for this.
Jesus is going to get you.
You made this up.'**

In 1944 the bodies of Betty June Bennicker and Mary Emma Thames were found brutally beaten to death in a ditch on the African American side of Alcolu. Prior to their murder they had ridden past the Stinney household and stopped to ask George and his sister Aime where to find maypop flowers, they then moved on to go look for the flowers. While the girls moved on both George and Aime stayed in their house until the following day when the girls were found. In the following days George and his older brother Johnny were arrested but his brother was later released and George stayed, reason for both arrest and the release of his brother but not George are unknown.

According to the acting officer on the case, in a handwritten statement the officer claimed that Stinney had confessed to him, still to this day there is no known physical confession by George but he did claim that the police starved him and tried to use food to bribe him to confess.

Following his arrest George's dad was fired from his job and the family moved out of town as they feared for their safety due to fellow members of the town and police threatening to lynch their children if they did not vacate. This meant his family did not get to see George before his trial during his 81-day confinement from the day he was arrested as he was questioned alone without a parent or attorney.

In contrast to current time, where murder trials can take up to countless months to dispute, George's trial (which included the jury selection) only lasted one day with the all white jury taking only taking ten minutes to sentence him to death. All white juries were common at the time as people of colour were still disenfranchised and prohibited from voting. Although we know that his final sentence was execution there is no transcript of the trial to analyse the evidence given and despite his innocence there was no appeal filed by his defence attorney.



Three months after the murders of the two girls George Stinney Jr was executed, becoming the youngest person to ever be executed by state in America at 14 years old. Standing at only 5 foot 1 .

inches and weighing just 90lbs George had to sit on a bible as he did not fit the chair and his head didn't reach the electricity cap.

He was pronounced dead after 8 minutes of lethal electricity being applied, by this time his face mask had slipped off as he was too small, revealing his burnt scalp and the tears streaming down his face. In the end George's teeth were smoking and he had one eye missing.

In 2013 the case was reopened and just a year later Stinney's conviction was vacated and he was pronounced innocent.

Puerto Rico, 1971, Matias Reyes was born. Growing up in Puerto Rico as a young boy he was the victim to sexual assault which he claims occurred over a long period of time. Once he was 16 he moved to New York with his mother. This and all previous life events leading up to this were all catalysts for the death of one woman and the rape of many more but how did he get away with one of the most famous and publicised crimes of the century?

Reyes was only a teenager when he started committing brutal crimes against women leaving them with lifelong trauma, the crimes also only added to the hysteria and fear that wreaked havoc across the city with a quickly growing crime rate. Only a year after his move to New York, in the spring of 1988 he committed the first of many crimes, this was his first attempt at raping a woman. Although he held her down and threatened her with a knife she managed to talk him out of it and eventually he let her go, she walked away unharmed and he walked away still innocent.

Luck was on the victims side this time but it wasn't long before he managed to go through with his plan, it also became significantly easier for him to commit crimes with him growing more vicious and stronger as the weeks went on and with every assault he lost another piece of humanity.



Only 3 months later in June of 1988 Reyes raped and killed a woman named Lourdes Gonzalez while her children quietly hid in the back bedroom, hearing everything that was happening in the next room. He stabbed Gonzalez nine times in the chest and abdomen and once in the face. Once he left the eldest two boys managed to alert a neighbour who rang an ambulance, she was taken to the hospital but later died that evening along with her unborn child which she and her husband had found out about and celebrated less than 24 hours prior.

A year later in spring on 1898, just previous to the high profile and publicised case of Trisha Meili, Reyes attempted to rape another woman in Northern Central Park. He began to viciously beat her to make her weak enough, once finished he continued to rape her, he was stopped as a member of public spotted him leading him to flee. Following the rape, the victim reported the rape to the New York Police Department, when in questioning she recalled that he had fresh stitches on his chin - a lead. Following this up the lead investigator at the sex crimes unit sent an inquiry to every hospital in the New York area, despite the slim chances a name came up. MATIAS REYES. Notwithstanding this being the solution to the crime the investigator was moved off of the case and the victim was never contacted by the police again, without momentum behind the crime, nothing was followed up nor solved. Reyes was free to carry on committing the same horrific crimes and implementing the same pain on more women and families.

3 months succeeding the Central Park Rape, Reyes' crimes had become so infamous and recognisable he was known as the 'East Side Slasher' as prior to his assaults and rapes he would make his victims choose between their eyes or their life. It wasn't until a sweltering afternoon in August 1989 when he broke into woman's apartment and proceeded to rape and assault her, spotting a small window of hope when he left her to ransack the apartment she managed to escape and ran down to the lobby where she was met by a porter and a neighbor. Reyes shortly followed after to try to follow her, the men tackled him to the floor and kept him there until the police came to arrest him.

Once in custody the police managed to connect him to a series of other crimes which he would later admit to in interrogation. He was quickly sentenced to 33 years to life in prison for all of his crimes but one. During his early years in prison he was placed in Rikers Island jail which at the same time co-inhabited Korey Wise, they came to blows over a TV, once separated they werent to see each other for over a decade. During this time Korey Wise was brutally beaten and harassed by fellow inmates leading to him being put into isolation for years at a time for his own protection. They again crossed paths in 2001 at Auburn Correctional Facility. They got on well and although the meeting was only brief this prompted Reyes to confess the truth to the operating jail inspection in the facility.

Matias Reyes was guilty of the rape of Trisha Meili. His guilt was confirmed by his in-depth knowledge and account of the rape with details which werent made public, his DNA also matched the sample evidence found inside of Meili 'to a factor of 1 in 6,000,000,000 people'. By this time the statute of limitations had passed meaning Reyes couldn't be prosecuted for the rape but it does mean that his life sentence will be lived out as his parole hearing, planned for 2022, will undeniably be declined.



Following the shock confession by the real assailant, Korey Wise (who was the only one left to finish his sentence) was instantly released. District Attorney Robert Morgenthau recommended vacating the convictions of the five defendants although this was not enough for the five men who had their whole lives ripped away from them by the State Of New York, a place they called home.

In the reinvestigation it was found that the confession videos bare significant conflict to the home facts of the crime which was not explored in the trial meaning the jury were convicting them on false information. In the final writeup of the investigation, Morgenthau's office wrote:

"Ultimately, there proved to be no physical or forensic evidence recovered at the scene or from the person or effects of the victim which connected the defendants to the attack on the jogger"



On December 19th 2002 Raymond Santana, Kevin Richardson, Antron McCray, Yusef Salaam and Korey Wise were vacated of all crimes they had been convicted of, they were also removed of the New York State's sex offender registry.

In June 2014, under a newly elected mayor Bill de Blasio, New York City announced a settlement of \$40 million

due to Richardson, McCray and Santana suing the city for malicious prosecution, racial discrimination and emotional distress in 2003. It took the city over a decade to settle the suit but they refused to admit to any wrongdoing. As of 2016 they received a total of \$3.9 each in damages from the state, but still a refusal to admit wrongdoing.



To this day we still see a lack of justice for the men and women who have been at the receiving end of racial discrimination, but the bigger issue is the lack of punishment for law officials who inflict this type

of abuse upon innocent people, like Linda Fairstein who allowed for the abuse and the coercion of the five teenage boys to continue while she knew the key facts of the crime made them simply, innocent and unable to commit the crime. But this case is not an outlier, it has become an anomaly. Police brutality and false convictions are undeniably higher amongst racial minorities but how can we be surprised when racism is laced within the social hierarchy, racism is in the workplace, racism occurs in the education system. It surrounds us.



As we live in a democracy this allows for racism to seep into our political system, at this current moment in time the leaders of Britain and America (two of the most powerful countries in the world), Boris Johnson and Donald Trump, have made clear racist comments before and while guiding our countries. With Johnson comparing Muslim women to letterboxes and calling black people 'piccanies with watermelon smiles' while Trump attempted to have muslim's banned from entering the US and defened putting up a wall between the

US and Mexico by calling all Mexicans 'rapists'. Let's call this what it is. Outright racism.

Although this may seem shocking this says a lot more about the people around us than the men themselves as we have been the people to vote them in, allowing them make critical decisions for our countries. Whether you make a placard and protest outside Downing Street or whether you simply pull up a friend family member on 'banter' which was rigged with casual racism,



**THE
CHANGE
STARTS
WITH
US**