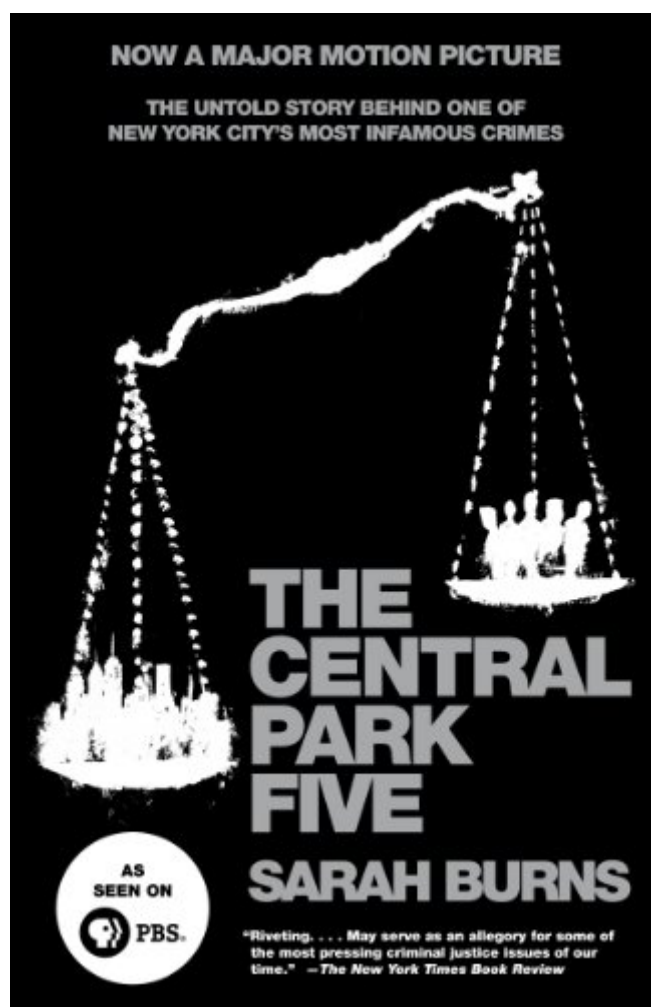


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The Central Park Five



Synopsis

A riveting, in-depth account of one of New York City's most notorious crimes. On April 20, 1989, the body of a woman is discovered in Central Park, her skull so badly smashed that nearly 80 percent of her blood has spilled onto the ground. Within days, five black and Latino teenagers confess to her rape and beating. In a city where urban crime is at a high and violence is frequent, the ensuing media frenzy and hysterical public reaction is extraordinary. The young men are tried as adults and convicted of rape, despite the fact that the teens quickly recant their inconsistent and inaccurate confessions and that no DNA tests or eyewitness accounts tie any of them to the victim. They serve their complete sentences before another man, serial rapist Matias Reyes, confesses to the crime and is connected to it by DNA testing. Intertwining the stories of these five young men, the police officers, the district attorneys, the victim, and Matias Reyes, Sarah Burns unravels the forces that made both the crime and its prosecution possible. Most dramatically, she gives us a portrait of a city already beset by violence and deepening rifts between races and classes, whose law enforcement, government, social institutions, and media were undermining the very rights of the individuals they were designed to safeguard and protect.

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Customer Reviews

I doubt that my experience of taking in news about the 1989 rape and near-fatal beating of the "Central Park Jogger" is unusual. I remember the incident, and remember horrifying news reports of kids who were arrested for it, kids who were "wilding" (a new term for me), and I remember the kids being found guilty and sent to prison. I remember such things because the crime was spectacular. Less spectacular but just as worrisome is that the kids were innocent, and I have to admit I don't have any distinct memories of how the reversal in their convictions came about. Their exoneration certainly didn't come with huge, scary headlines as the crime and accusations themselves did. How the boys gave their confessions, were found guilty, and then were found to have nothing to do with the crime is the astonishing story within The Central Park Five: A Chronicle of a City Wilding (Knopf) by Sarah Burns. This is Burns's first book; she happens to be the daughter of the documentary filmmaker Ken Burns, and with him will be making a film about the case. The famous crime and punishment have been written about voluminously before, but this is the first book-length evaluation written after the convictions of the boys, now all young men, were vacated. As such, it provokes profoundly disturbing ideas about race relations and police procedures at the time, none of which have changed much in the subsequent years. Burns sets the geographical, social, and temporal scene of the crime in the financially struggling, crime increasing New York of 1989. The Central Park Five kids, all between fourteen and sixteen years old, who were in the park that night weren't there to work on their merit badges. They were making trouble, harassing and assaulting runners and bikers, throwing stones, and so on.

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