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Timothy Sullivan. *Unequal Verdicts: The Central Park Jogger Trials.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992. 335 pp. $23.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-671-74237-9.

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This book, which is written by a journalist and describes events taking place between 1989 and March 1991, will not be considered history by many readers. I must confess I read it for leisure after a hard summer of researching and number crunching, during a break before classes began. Sullivan's work is more the raw material for history than history itself; someday, someone will use the events herein described to tell us something about ourselves not now apparent. Nevertheless, I think this book is worth reviewing on a history list, because it clearly provides source material for analysis. There is a lot here about race and the law that is provocative to read, especially in light of Eric Foner's recent publication, *Freedom's Lawmakers*, which describes Reconstruction as a failed experiment in truly democratic lawmaking.

Any reader of the *New York Times* is familiar with the basic facts of the "Central Park Jogger" case. On April 19, 1989, a gang of black and Hispanic youths went "wilding" in Central Park, attacking cyclists, male joggers, and raping a young female investment banker. The attackers gang-raped the banker, smashing her head with a metal bar and covering her body with bloody wounds. Police picked up and interrogated several, but not all, of the attackers. Detectives and prosecutors questioned the young men (ages 15 to 18) repeatedly, finally videotaping their confessions. Several of the teenagers made highly incriminating statements intended to be exculpatory on camera. They learned only later that, so far as the law is concerned, a defendant acting in concert with a rapist has committed rape too. Although prosecutors had virtually no evidence other than these videotaped confessions, all the defendants were convicted except one, ironically the most violent of them all, who pleaded guilty to robbery to avoid trial.

The Central Park Jogger trials offer evidence of just how racially polarized Americans' attitudes toward our criminal justice system have become. The white media refused to publish the Central Park Jogger's name (Sullivan uses a pseudonym) but the black media did. A group of persons Sullivan calls the "Supporters" regularly crowded the courtroom. They wore shirts and carried signs proclaiming the defendants' innocence and hurled racial epithets at court officials, indicating their conviction that the white power structure was scapegoating the nonwhite defendants. At one point Rev. Al Sharpton escorted Tawana Brawley into court in an attempt to illustrate that whites in power privilege white rape victims over blacks.

Timothy Sullivan, son of a justice the New York Supreme Court, editor for the Courtroom Television Network, and former editor for *Manhattan Lawyer* researched *Unequal Verdicts* primarily by interviewing the two prosecutors, Elizabeth Lederer and Arthur Clements. He also interviewed eight defense attorneys, two private investigators, eleven jurors, and others, but this book privileges the prosecution over the defense. A color photo of Lederer and Clements appears on the back of the book, an indication of where the author places his sympathies. He confirms this with his critiques of the performances of the lawyers–most of the defense lawyers come up considerably short on that score while the prosecutors appear professional and competent. Even one prosecutor's "flat and dry" speaking style is a strength, according to Sullivan. (p. 208) By contrast, one defense lawyer, Sullivan reports, "seemed certain always of where he wanted to take a case politically, [but] he was shockingly deficient in many fundamental provisions of criminal law" (p. 234). Such a statement makes Sullivan's later praise for the same attorney sound like a grudging concession.

This book documents blacks' lack of confidence in the judicial system. Sullivan pointedly corrects early false reporting that the defendants came from middle-class homes, refusing to allow this to become a story about the state of youth in New York. If the defendants had been

middle class, then the story might be understood as one of "good kids" gone bad. But this story is about race. Sullivan marvels at length at the Supporters' refusal to believe the defendants might actually be guilty of the crimes to which they confessed. But he also quotes a white cop's explanation of the defendants' willingness to confess: "In that race, in that society, rape is no big deal. It's only a big deal when she doesn't get her five dollars" (p. 296). For their part, many blacks subscribed to the specious "boyfriend theory" which holds that the Jogger's lover committed the crime. In fact, as Sullivan concludes, even today many residents of East Harlem continue to believe in the innocence of the young defendants. Many blacks do not regard the criminal justice system as legitimate. To them it is exploitive and they automatically assume the innocence of black defendants.

Central Park Jogger Rape Trial, New York, N.Y., 1990. Trials (Rape)–New York (State)–New York. Trials (Assault and battery)–New York (State)–New York. KF224.C435 S85 1992

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