

# WHEN A WITNESS RECANTS



Directed by Dawn Porter

Running Time: 117 minutes

## **Sundance Screening Schedule**

Thursday, January 22, 2:00PM MT: Press & Industry Screening (Holiday 2)

Tuesday, January 27, 5:30 PM MT: **\*\*World Premiere\*\*** (Park City Library Theatre)

Wednesday, January 28, 8:15 AM MT: Public Screening 2 (The Ray Theatre)

Thursday, January 29, 3:00 PM MT: Public Screening 3, Open Captions (Broadway Centre Cinemas 6)

Saturday, January 31, 9:00 AM MT: Public Screening 4 (Megaplex Theatres Park City at Redstone 1)

Sunday, February 1, 7:30 PM MT: Public Screening 5 (Megaplex Theatres Park City at Redstone 1)

### **PR Contacts**

HBO Documentary Films

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## **SYNOPSIS**

In 1983, noted author Ta-Nehisi Coates remembers learning that a 14-year old boy was murdered in the corridor of his Baltimore middle school. Revisiting the case as an adult, he learns the truth about the three innocent teenagers who were convicted and sentenced to life. After 36 years in prison, it was revealed that false testimony led to their imprisonment. *WHEN A WITNESS RECANTS* explores the collateral damage the handling of this case had on the community, the wrongfully accused, and the young witnesses pressured to betray them.

## **DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT**

I've been making films about the criminal legal system for more than a decade now, but nothing has moved me more than the story of the Harlem Park 3. Collectively the HP3 spent more than 108 years in violent prisons, the longest combined wrongful conviction in American history. Their experience illustrates an ongoing national crisis -- the racially charged reality of police misconduct. This case demonstrates just how fragile justice can be.

I was shocked to learn that Ta-Nehisi Coates - a person I consider to be one of the most important thinkers of our time --had a personal connection to the case. Ta-Nehisi was a child in Baltimore at the time of the murder, and as he recalls, this crime shocked the community, straining bonds that had been forged over decades. When a community loses trust, it also loses its means of support. Doors that were once open to all neighborhood children were locked. Neighbors were unsure of who to trust. The community was literally torn apart.

There were many challenges to bringing this story to the screen. The men were incarcerated for almost 40 years – there were few photos, and no footage. And then there was the issue of the witness. Ron Bishop held the key to their freedom, but he also contributed to their incarceration. Yet it was undoubtedly clear that he was the victim of police misconduct. How to tell his story with the humanity he deserved. The answer came from all four men themselves – they wanted to meet face to face. They had not seen each other since they were teenagers. Now in their 50's, they each had hopes that this meeting would somehow bring some closure. They let us capture this all on film.

This is an all too familiar story about police misconduct, over incarceration and a flawed criminal legal system. But it is also the story of a fearless journalist who wrote about it with humanity and compassion, a progressive prosecutor who was determined to free

the men after the facts became clear, and ultimately a cautionary tale. This is my fourth Sundance Film, and I could not be prouder for it to premiere in the Sundance lineup. I am so grateful to everyone on my team who helped bring this story to life.

## **FILMMAKER BIOGRAPHIES**

### **DAWN PORTER | Director, Producer**

Dawn Porter is an acclaimed American documentary filmmaker and founder of Trilogy Films, known for her storytelling on social justice, history, and cultural icons. Her celebrated documentaries, including *Trapped*, *John Lewis: Good Trouble*, and *The Lady Bird Diaries*, air on platforms like HBO, Netflix, Amazon, Apple, CNN, PBS and others. Another film from Porter's recent work, *Luther: Never Too Much*, highlights the life and legacy of Luther Vandross. Produced with Sony Music Entertainment, Jamie Foxx's *Foxxhole*, and Colin Firth's *Raindog Films*, this intimate portrayal of the Grammy-winning artist was recently released in theaters and premiered on CNN/MAX on January 1, 2025. Her recent work, *The Sing Sing Chronicles* won the Best Documentary Emmy at the 46th annual News & Documentary Emmy Awards. Porter's achievements are widely recognized. A three-time Sundance film festival Alum, her film *Gideon's Army* was nominated for an Emmy and an Independent Spirit Award and won the prestigious Ridenhour Prize as well as the American Bar Association's Silver Gavel Award. *Trapped* also earned a Silver Gavel, as well as a Peabody Award and the Sundance Special Jury Prize for Social Impact Filmmaking, while *John Lewis: Good Trouble* won the 2021 NAACP Image Award. She received the Critics' Choice Impact Award in 2022 and Gracie Awards in both 2022 and 2023. Recently, Porter was awarded the National Humanities Medal by former President Joe Biden, elected to the American Academy of Arts & Sciences, and received the IDA Career Achievement Award.

### **JENNIFER OKO, MIRIAM WEINTRAUB | Producers**

Production partners Jennifer Oko and Miriam Weintraub are award-winning journalists, writers, and filmmakers known for blending investigative rigor with intimate, character-driven storytelling. Their work spans both short and long-form documentaries for outlets such as *Retro Report/The New York Times*, PBS, HBO, and WETA. They have collaborated multiple times with director Dawn Porter, including on *Vernon Jordan: Make It Plain*, *John Lewis: Good Trouble*, *American Reckoning (FRONTLINE)*, and most recently, *When A Witness Recants*.

Before joining forces, Miriam spent more than a dozen years as a producer for CBS News' *60 Minutes*, and later developed and produced the HBO documentary *Life*

According to Sam, which won a Peabody, a Christopher Award, and a Primetime Emmy. Jennifer's career began at ABC News' Moscow bureau, and she went on to produce features and specials across the major networks. She is also a novelist, with several critically acclaimed books, including her newest novel, *Just Emilia*. They are currently in production on a feature-length documentary for Netflix.

### **TA-NEHISI COATES | Executive Producer**

Ta-Nehisi Coates is a principal at Maceo-Lyn Productions and an award-winning author and journalist. His books include [The Water Dancer](#) and [The Message](#). He is currently a contributing editor at Vanity Fair and the Sterling Brown Endowed Chair in the English department at Howard University.

### **KENYATTA MATTHEWS | Executive Producer**

Kenyatta Matthews is a principal at Maceo-Lyn Productions, LLC, where she produces film and television projects that center underrepresented artistic voices. She is an accomplished editor with more than 20 years in publishing, specializing in editorial management for a range of publications, including Ms. magazine, Parenting, and Suede magazine.

### **KAMILAH FORBES | Executive Producer**

Kamilah Forbes is an award-winning director, producer, and cultural executive shaping the future of film, television, and live performance. She is Executive Producer of the historic Apollo Theater, where she has led a decade of transformative programming and new work development. A Principal of Maceo-Lyn Productions with Ta-Nehisi Coates and Kenyatta Matthews, currently developing scripted and unscripted projects for HBO, Amazon, and FX, including *The Water Dancer* (MGM) and *WITNESS* (HBO). Her work includes the HBO adaptation of *Between the World and Me* (NAACP Image Award and Critics Choice Award nominee, Gracie Award recipient). Forbes is also an Emmy, Peabody, and NAACP Image Award winner for projects including *The Wiz Live!*, *The 1619 Project*, and *Def Poetry*. A pioneer of hip-hop theater and a member of the CUNY Film Advisory Board, she is widely recognized for curating the "canon of tomorrow" and amplifying bold, Black-centered storytelling.



HBO Documentary Films Presents

A Maceo-Lyn Production

In Association With Trilogy Films and Sony Pictures Television – Nonfiction

A Film By  
Dawn Porter

WHEN A WITNESS RECANTS

Directed By DAWN PORTER

Edited By JESSICA CONGDON

Graphic Animations Created By DAWUD ANYABWILE

Executive Producers TA-NEHISI COATES  
KENYATTA MATTHEWS  
KAMILAH FORBES

Executive Producer JENNIFER GONNERMAN

Executive Producers NANCY ABRAHAM  
LISA HELLER  
SARA RODRIGUEZ

Executive Producers ELI HOLZMAN  
AARON SAIDMAN

Based on the New Yorker article by Jennifer Gonnerman

Supervising Producer SUMMER DAMON

Producers DAWN PORTER  
JENNIFER OKO  
MIRIAM WEINTRAUB

Supervising Producer AMANDA GOSCINSKI POTVIN

Line Producer ADAM GOLDBERG

Original Score Composed by Osei Essed

Co-Producer LINDSEY MILLER

Director Of Photography BRYAN GENTRY

Archival Production Provided by Archival Ninjas

Archival Producers MANDI ROBINSON  
HEATHER WILSON

Additional Archival Producers MEGHAN GEIER  
ALANA SAAD

Post-Production Supervisor CHRISTINE MALLIA

Associate Editor KAYLA SKLAR

Music Supervisor AURELIA BELFIELD

Additional Cinematography BRYANT FISHER

Camera Operator SHANE ALCOCK

First Assistant Camera MILTON GUANGA  
ZACH DRECHSLER  
AIDAN GREY

Second Assistant Camera SAGE LARSON  
NATASHA MARSHALL  
KYLE SANDHOFF

Gaffers MICHAEL WILSON  
WRANGEL LUBIN  
NICK BERTRAM  
FOREST ERWIN

Grip MICHAEL CRUSE

Sound Recording/Audio Mixers RODRIGO SALVATIERRA  
BRIAN GARFIELD  
CHANDLER HARKEY  
ALEX JENNINGS  
MICHAEL MOOTE

Production Assistants VERA EVANS  
BERGEN HOFF

ELI GRAFF  
DEREK SMITH JR.

Intern MIA RUSSMAN

**MUSIC**

“Happy Feelin”

Performed by Earth, Wind & Fire

Written by: Al McKay, Lorenzo Dunn, Maurice White, Philip Bailey, and Verdine White

Published by: EMI April Music Inc.

Courtesy of Columbia Records

By arrangement with Sony Music Entertainment

Graphics PHLEA TV  
Designers MOLLY SCHWARTZ & LINDSEY  
MAYER-BEUG  
Graphics Producer LISA MUÑOZ

Animation Production Services provided by Big City Entertainment, Inc.

Production Consultant GUY A. SIMS  
Business Affairs/Production Coordinator SARAH CHRISTMAS  
Motion Graphics Supervisor NDOSI ANYABWILE  
Business & Legal Affairs JOHN F. CHRISTMAS

Post and Sound Services Provided By TRAILBLAZER STUDIOS  
SVP of Post SCOTT ROY  
Colorist, CSI ALAN MAYNARD  
Online Assistant Editor IAN JOSEY  
Supervising Sound Editor ERIC W. JOHNSON  
Sound Designer, Re-Recording Mixer WILLIE ELIAS RIVERA, CAS  
Sound Editor DAVID HILL  
Dialogue Editor LUKE BECHTHOLD  
Sound Designer SAM MCDONALD

Lead Production Accountant RIKKI MCKERNAN  
Assistant Accountant DANIEL GUTIERREZ

Production Legal DREW PATRICK LAW PLLC  
DREW PATRICK  
MICHAEL MCCORMACK  
SARAH BYRNE

Clearance Counsel DONALDSON CALLIF PEREZ  
CHRIS PEREZ

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**Special Thanks**

FABIO BERTONI  
CARLA BLUMENKRANZ  
MICHAEL COLLINS  
KOBIE FLOWERS OF BROWN, GOLDSTEIN & LEVY, LLP  
ELI GRAFF  
WILL GRAFF  
DAVID GRAFF  
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FILMS

