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Dr. Natalie Byfield, St. Johns University

St. Johns University sociology professor Natalie Byfield will discuss her scholarship and journalism on the infamous 1989 Central Park jogger rape case at the fifth annual Gloria Harper Dickinson Lecture on March 17, 2014 in the TCNJ

Library auditorium. The event is cosponsored by the Department of African American Studies and the TCNJ Black Student Union.

Byfield is the author of Savage Portrayals: Race, Media and the Central Park Jogger Story (Temple University, 2014). She is also featured in the acclaimed Ken Burns documentary, Central Park

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Five. The event, which is free and open to the public, begins with a reception and book signing at 4:30 pm and a lecture at 5:30 pm. Copies of the book will be available for purchase.

Here, Byfield discusses her book:

“Natalie Byfield’s Savage Portrayals deftly deconstructs how race, sex, and class warped the media coverage of the Central Park Jogger case and contributed to the wrongful convictions of five innocent black and Latino teenagers.

Byfield’s personal recollections as a reporter for the Daily News make her analysis uniquely powerful and insightful.”

—Sarah Burns, filmmaker and author of *The Central Park Five*

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Byfield was a young reporter for the *New York Daily News* in April, 1989 when she became part of the reporting team covering the brutal rape and beating of a young investment banker who was jogging in Central Park. In the media and political frenzy that followed, five black and Latino teenagers were arrested and ultimately convicted of the crime, despite fundamental holes in the prosecution's case and evidence pointing to a different perpetrator. The accused young men, who became known as the Central Park Five, served a decade in prison before being exonerated when the real rapist was ultimately found.

While working on the story at the Daily News, Byfield became disturbed both tone and the direction of the press coverage at her paper and at other news outlets. She also became frustrated by the relative inattention to a similarly harrowing story of the beating and rape of a black woman in Harlem, as well as to claims by black and Latino males that they were being harassed by police in the wake of the arrests. These concerns ultimately led to the scholarly research detailed in this book, which places the Central Park Jogger case in the larger context of sociology and journalism history. As Byfield writes,

“This case became an extreme example of how new narratives about racial groups based on the notion of color-blind racism make it possible for the use of racist tropes from the past and the existence of unequal racial outcomes to be dismissed by mainstream institutions as having little or no relationship to the country’s historical and material foundations of racial

inequality.”

Natalie Byfield, Savage Portrayals

The Gloria Harper Dickinson lecture was established in 2009 to honor the scholarly legacy of a founding members and past chair of TCNJ’s African-American Studies Department. In addition to her contributions to TCNJ, where she worked for more than 30 years, Dr. Dickinson was president of the Association for the Study of African-American Life and History from 2001-3, as well as the former secretary and international director of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority.

The lecture series draws attention to scholarly work and intellectual activity consistent with Dr. Dickinson’s interest in Africana women, African diaspora cultures, new media pedagogies, and in strengthening and modernizing African American civil society.

Filed Under: Events, Gloria Harper Dickinson lecture



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