

VICTIM / SUSPECT

A MOTTO PICTURES / CENTER FOR INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING STUDIOS PRODUCTION



Director: Nancy Schwartzman

Producers: Julie Goldman, Christopher Clements, Alice Henty, Rachel De Leon, Amanda Pike,
Nancy Schwartzman

Editors: Inbal B. Lessner and Kim Roberts

Cinematographer: Jenni Morello

Co-Producers: Tracy Elizabeth Jarrett, J. Daniel Torres

Story Producer: Sabrina Schmidt Gordon

Composer: Morgan Kibby

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LOGLINE

On her first solo investigation, journalist Rae de Leon travels nationwide to uncover a shocking pattern: Young women tell the police they've been sexually assaulted, but instead of finding justice, they're charged with the crime of making a false report, arrested, and even imprisoned by the system they believed would protect them.

SYNOPSIS

Victim/Suspect chronicles journalist Rae de Leon's investigation into a disturbing pattern: young women report sexual assault to the police but instead of the perpetrators being brought to justice, the women are arrested for filing a false report. Working for The Center for Investigative Reporting, de Leon's exhaustive research uncovers a surprisingly large number of these cases nationwide. Re-examining law enforcement investigations, de Leon unearths telling recordings of police interviews with victims. Featuring firsthand accounts from numerous young women as well as interviews with police, investigators, and legal experts, *Victim/Suspect* raises crucial questions about how the criminal justice system views and treats sexual assault victims.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Victim/Suspect is a film that follows Rae de Leon, a journalist working at The Center for Investigative Reporting, as she discovers a surprising number of legal cases nationwide that involve women reporting sexual assault to the police, only to be accused of fabricating their allegations. Embarking on her first solo investigation, Rae gathers firsthand accounts from numerous young women and interviews police and legal experts. Simultaneously, de Leon re-examines elements of the initial police investigations, unearthing telling recordings of police interviews of women reporting their sexual assault.

I was instantly drawn to Rae and her work, because I love telling stories about women who are working outside of established structures, who are emerging in their fields, with hurdles and obstacles to overcome. My prior film *Roll Red Roll* is an immersive thriller that uncovers the deep-seated and social-media fueled "boys will be boys" culture at the root of high school sexual assault in America. It follows a social media sleuth and blogger, Alexandria Goddard, who unearths evidence of rape culture that divides the town of Steubenville, Ohio and forces them to reckon with the rampant misogyny in their schools and larger community.

In *Victim/Suspect* we examine police protocols and behavior using elements from reports, interrogations, and recorded interviews to reveal widely accepted beliefs about sexual assault that belittle women and minimize a victims' experience. De Leon works to address a national problem by concentrating on the harrowing individual stories from women who report they've been sexually assaulted and then turned into suspects after reporting. And we bear witness to women of *Victim/Suspect* as they navigate the trauma of their experiences and embark on their fight for justice.

At the core, this film is a love letter to investigative reporting; The carefully crafted relationship with a source, the slammed doors and dead end calls in an effort to get answers, the unrelenting effort to hold those in power to account. Filming de Leon on the ground, putting in the investigative work that police failed to do, was both fascinating and enraging. She investigates how systemic policing practices, often relying on faulty statistics or rape myths, motivate detectives to treat victims like suspects, creating a chilling effect for other survivors of violence.

STATEMENT FROM RACHEL DE LEON

Victim/Suspect follows my journey as I report on my first solo investigative story. While working at The Center for Investigative Reporting – the oldest investigative nonprofit newsroom in the country – I found a headline that I couldn’t believe or understand. A young woman reported being raped, and yet, she was the one who was facing years behind bars.

In the spring of 2018, my editor Amanda Pike and I decided I should fly out to Long Island to meet this young woman, and see whether her legal team’s arguments were as damning as they sounded over the phone. It turned out her story was so much more than the headlines made it out to be, and she wasn’t alone.

We ditched the idea that this would be a one-off story about a single unusual case, and began to look for others. I met Dr. Lisa Avalos, the only researcher I could find dedicated to this niche area, studying alleged victims who are accused of lying and criminally prosecuted. Dr. Avalos told me there were more.

As of today, I’ve collected more than 180 cases reported by the media nationwide.

During this search, I met a young woman who changed the trajectory and scope of my reporting. She was a freshman at the University of Alabama when she reported being raped in the early morning hours after a football game.

Five days later, she was the one in handcuffs. I watched the footage of her police interview – she looks exhausted, defeated, and despite the fact that she says again and again that the sex was not consensual, she apologizes to the detective for wasting his time.

I didn’t understand how she got there. So she gave me permission to dig in. I knocked on doors, left voicemail after voicemail, and even sued the sheriff’s office for records they refused to share with me.

What struck me in the course of my reporting is how culpable some journalists and reporters can be in contributing to the pain and retraumatization these young women experience. Because the police don’t consider them a “victim,” local newspapers abandon their ethical guidelines to hide their identities. They publish their arrests, mugshots and full names. I’ve found that some fail to do the bare minimum to corroborate details in the police’s report.

I believe that exposing these young women to the public, without their consent, is irresponsible. With their names in the press they are often branded as liars or whores, and have their lives turned upside down. Rather than shaming these young women, who are adamant that they were assaulted, it seemed to me and my editor that the spotlight should instead be turned to the police and their investigative process.

My intent was never to answer whether or not someone was raped. Instead, I focused on the police, and whether their investigation was thorough and followed best practices. The risk of police getting this wrong is too high. The standards should also be high.

I am so grateful to the women who shared their stories on the record. I am also grateful to those who didn't. A victim's fight for justice and survival does not all look the same. For those whose fight is loud, I hope the public listens.

- Rachel (Rae) de Leon

FILMMAKER BIOS

NANCY SCHWARTZMAN, DIRECTOR & PRODUCER

Nancy Schwartzman is a Peabody-nominated documentary filmmaker for her debut documentary **Roll Red Roll**, which garnered 7 best documentary awards, received 100% on Rotten Tomatoes and premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival and Hot Docs. She is the author of the New York Times notable non-fiction book based on the film, **Roll Red Roll: Rape, Power and Football in the American Heartland**. Her short films including **One Shot One Kill**, for Mother Jones and Anonymous Comes To Town, co-produced with the Tribeca Film Institute and Gucci's Chime for Change, have garnered over 5 million views. She directed the CineReach short film **xoxosms** for POV and **The Line**. In her past life, she was a tech founder and the winner of awards from the Obama/Biden White House and the United Nations. She is currently directing an original nonfiction project with XTR studios for Freeform/Disney+.

RACHEL (RAE) DE LEON, JOURNALIST & PRODUCER

Rachel de Leon is a reporter and producer for TV and documentaries for Reveal from The Center for Investigative Reporting. Her work has been recognized with Emmy, duPont, National Murrow, and Loeb awards. In 2014, she completed her first short documentary, "Cab City," for her master's thesis in the documentary program at the UC Berkeley Graduate School of Journalism. De Leon is based in the Bay Area.

JULIE GOLDMAN, PRODUCER

Julie Goldman is an Oscar-nominated and Emmy Award-winning producer of documentary feature films and series. Julie is the first documentary producer to receive the Amazon Studios Sundance Institute Producer's Award and the Cinereach Producer's Award. She produced **Victim/Suspect**, **Cassandro**, Nanfu Wang's Peabody-winning **In The Same Breath**, and Todd Haynes' acclaimed **The Velvet Underground**, and Academy Award nominated films **Life, Animated** and **Abacus**. Julie executive produced **The Eternal Memory**, Academy Award nominated **The Mole Agent**, Peabody and Emmy-winning **A Thousand Cuts**. Julie is developing a new slate of films and series with directors including Roger Ross Williams, Isabel Castro, Pernille Rose GrønkJær and Maite Alberdi.

CHRISTOPHER CLEMENTS, PRODUCER

Christopher Clements is an Emmy and Peabody Award-winning producer and partner at Motto Pictures. He produced **Victim/Suspect**, **The Return of Tanya Tucker featuring Brandi Carlile** and **American Pain**. Nanfu Wang's Peabody-winning **In The Same Breath**, and Sundance Grand Jury Prize winner **Once Child Nation**, and Todd Haynes' Oscar Shortlisted **The Velvet Underground**. Christopher executive produced **The Eternal Memory**, Academy Award nominated **The Mole Agent**, Peabody and Emmy Award winner **A Thousand Cuts**. Christopher has a slate of films and series in development and is currently producing films with directors including Roger Ross Williams, Isabel Castro, Pernille Rose GrønkJær and Maite Alberdi.

ALICE HENTY, PRODUCER

Alice Henty is an award winning producer and partner at Maylo Films. She produced **Welcome to Chechnya** [2020], which won the Grand Jury Prize for editing in US documentary competition at Sundance and three awards at Berlinale, including the Panorama Audience Award. It went on to win several awards including a BAFTA and a Peabody as well as Producing awards at Doc NYC and Cinema Eye. Prior to that she produced **The Work** [2017], which won the Grand Jury prize at SXSW, the Audience Award at Sheffield and was a Gotham Award nominee. Previous credits include **Skyladder, Happy Valley, Citizen Koch, Beware of Mr. Baker, Buck** and **The Tillman Story**. She is a Sundance Creative Producing Fellow.

AMANDA PIKE, PRODUCER

Amanda Pike is an Emmy, Peabody and duPont Award-winning journalist and the Director of TV and Documentaries at The Center for Investigative Reporting. She recently produced **The Grab**, which premiered on opening night of the 2022 Toronto International Film Festival. She executive produced the Oscar-nominated short documentary **Heroin(e)** for Netflix. She was executive producer of the inaugural year of the Glassbreaker Films initiative, supporting women-identifying filmmakers and journalists. Before joining CIR, she spent several years reporting and producing documentaries around the world for PBS, CBS, ABC, National Geographic, A&E, Lifetime and The Learning Channel, among others. Pike also has dabbled in fiction filmmaking, producing the short film **On the Assassination of the President**, which premiered at the Sundance Film Festival.

INBAL B. LESSNER, EDITOR

Victim/Suspect is Inbal's latest in a list of documentaries she edited dealing with sexual assault, including "Brave Miss World" (2014, Emmy-nominated,) and "SEDUCED: Inside the NXIVM Cult," (2020, ACE Editing Award nominee). Her other credits include "I Have Never Forgotten You," about Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal, NAACP Image Award nominee "The Two Killings of Sam Cooke," and seven episodes of CNN's Emmy-nominated "Decades" series, including the ACE Award nominee "The Nineties: Can We All Get Along." Inbal has been a Visiting Professor of Film Editing at UNCSA and is currently on the Faculty of AFI Conservatory.

KIM ROBERTS, EDITOR

Emmy winner and five-time nominee Kim Roberts has directed, written or edited documentaries for over two decades, most notably directing and editing **COUPLES THERAPY** on Showtime, writing and editing **FOOD, INC**, and editing over two dozen feature documentaries including **WAITING FOR SUPERMAN, THE HUNTING GROUND, UNREST, THE SILENCE OF OTHERS** and **INEQUALITY FOR ALL**. Her filmography includes ten Sundance films, two Sundance Grand Prize winners, three Peabody recipients, and three Oscar nominees. She's won the WGA award for Best Documentary Screenplay, and the Sundance Award for Best Documentary Editing. Kim is an active member of the American Cinema Editors (ACE), and the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts & Sciences. She received her Masters in Documentary Film & Video from Stanford University.

JENNI MORELLO, CINEMATOGRAPHER

Jenni Morello is an Emmy-nominated documentary cinematographer. She received critical acclaim for her cinematography on Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady's *ONE OF US*, (Netflix, 2017) Beth Aala's *MADE IN BOISE* (PBS 2019), and Paula Eislet and Tanya Lewis Lee's *AFTERSHOCK* (Hulu/Onyx 2022.) Expanding on a strong foundation of advocacy-driven storytelling, Jenni recently worked on; *They Call me Magic* a series on Apple TV+ and a feature documentary about

beloved author Judy Blume. She holds an MFA from the School of Visual Arts in social documentary film and was named to DOC NYC's 40 under 40 list in 2018.

TRACY ELIZABETH JARRETT, CO-PRODUCER

Tracy Jarrett is a Peabody and Emmy-award winning documentary filmmaker whose vérité style storytelling has documented some of the most high-profile stories of the last decade. Her work on the HBO special, "Charlottesville: Race and Terror," earned 4 Emmy awards, a Peabody Award, and was TIME's 2017 TV episode of the year. She has most recently worked as a Producer on MTV Studios and Motto Pictures' "The Fire That Took Her," a soon to be announced series for Concordia Studio and Netflix, and is now Directing her debut feature film.

J. DANIEL TORRES, CO-PRODUCER

J. Daniel Torres first joined Motto Pictures in 2017. Daniel was an associate producer on Emmy-nominated **Bully. Coward. Victim. The Story of Roy Cohn**, directed by Ivy Meeropol, and Todd Haynes' Oscar-shortlisted **The Velvet Underground**. He is the co-producer of **Victim/Suspect**, which is premiering at the 2023 Sundance Film Festival, Kathlyn Horan's **The Return of Tanya Tucker: Featuring Brandi Carlile**, winner of the 2022 SXSW Film Festival Audience Award, and HBO's upcoming Donna Summer documentary directed by Roger Ross Williams and Brooklyn Sudano. He is currently developing and producing a number of new projects with Motto Pictures.

SABRINA SCHMIDT GORDON, STORY PRODUCER

Sabrina Schmidt Gordon is a documentary filmmaker and impact strategist from NYC. Since her Emmy-winning editing debut, she has distinguished herself as a producer, editor, and director. Sabrina is a Women at Sundance Fellow, recipient of the Dear Producer Award for excellence in independent filmmaking, and a member of The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Sabrina is the producer of the critically-acclaimed *QUEST* and *TO THE END*, both of which premiered at Sundance. She is the co-director, producer and editor of the Emmy-nominated *BaddDDD Sonia Sanchez*, and producer and editor of *DOCUMENTED*, which had record-breaking viewership on CNN.

MORGAN KIBBY, COMPOSER

A classical pianist, cellist and vocalist, Morgan Kibby has soloed with orchestra internationally and toured globally as a core member of french band M83. Kibby has co-written, performed and produced on multiple Grammy nominated & number 1 albums including Panic! at the Disco, Harry Styles and Lady Gaga.

A 2016 Sundance Composer Lab Alumna, Kibby has gone on to score numerous projects for Amazon, Netflix, Hulu & the CW, as well as narrative features premiering at many international festivals including the official competition at Cannes. Her most recent OST releases include "Mothering Sunday" Starring Josh O'Connor and Olivia Coleman, Netflix's "The Watcher" and the BBc's "Am I Being Unreasonable".

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