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Description

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Just Mercy is a 2019 American biographical legal drama film co-written and directed by Destin Daniel Cretton and starring Michael B. Jordan as Bryan Stevenson, Jamie Foxx as Walter McMillian, Rob Morgan, Tim Blake Nelson, Rafe Spall, and Brie Larson. It explores the work of young defense attorney Bryan Stevenson who represents poor people on death row in the South. Featured is his work with Walter McMillian, who had been wrongfully convicted of the murder of a young woman. The film is based on Stevenson's 2014 eponymous memoir, in which he explored his journey to making his life's work the defense of African American prisoners.

Just Mercy, which had its world premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival on September 6, 2019, was theatrically released by Warner Bros. Pictures on December 25, 2019. The film received positive reviews from critics and grossed \$50.4 million. Foxx was nominated for Outstanding Performance by a Male Actor in a Supporting Role at the 26th Screen Actors Guild Awards. Both he and Michael B. Jordan won NAACP Image Awards for their respective roles.

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SYNOPSIS: In 1989, idealistic young Harvard law graduate Bryan Stevenson travels to Alabama hoping to help fight for poor people who cannot afford proper legal representation. Teaming with Eva Ansley, he founds the Equal Justice Initiative, then travels to a prison to meet its death row inmates. He meets Walter "Johnny D." McMillian, an African-American man who was convicted of the 1986 murder of Ronda Morrison, a white woman. Stevenson looks over the evidence in the case and discovers it hinges entirely on the testimony of convicted felon Ralph Myers, who provided highly self-contradictory testimony in exchange for a lighter sentence in his own pending trial.

Stevenson's first move is to ask prosecutor Tommy Chapman for aid; Chapman dismisses him without even looking at Stevenson's notes. Stevenson then asks McMillian's family friend Darnell Houston to testify that he was with a witness who corroborated Myers' testimony the day of the murder, which would cause the prosecution's case to fall apart. When Stevenson submits Houston's testimony, police arrest him for perjury. While Stevenson is able to get the perjury charges dismissed, Houston is intimidated into refusing to testify in court. Shortly afterwards,

Stevenson is intimidated by two sheriff deputies who remove him from his car at gunpoint and illegally search the car. They refuse to tell him why he was pulled over and let him go.

Stevenson then approaches Myers himself, who eventually admits that his testimony was coerced after police played to his fear of being burned and threatened to have him executed by electric chair. Stevenson appeals to the local court to grant McMillian a retrial and successfully convinces Myers to recant his testimony on the stand, but the judge nevertheless refuses to grant a retrial. Distraught, Stevenson vents his frustrations about the case to Ansley. He appears on 60 Minutes to rally public support in favor of McMillian, and then appeals to the Supreme Court of Alabama. The Supreme Court overturns the circuit court's decision, and grants McMillian his retrial. Stevenson then moves to have the charges dismissed entirely. He confronts Chapman at his home and tries to convince him to join him in his motion; Chapman angrily ejects him from his property. The day of the motion comes, and Stevenson appeals to the judge. Chapman agrees to join him in his motion, the case is dismissed, and McMillian is finally reunited with his family.

An epilogue notes that Stevenson and Ansley continue to fight for justice to the present day. Until his death in 2013, McMillian remained friends with Stevenson. A follow-up investigation into Morrison's death confirmed McMillian's innocence and posited that a white man was likely responsible; the case has never been solved. McMillian's former cellmate, Anthony Ray Hinton, remained on death row for 28 years until Stevenson was able to have all charges dropped and Hinton was eventually released in 2015.