

Glasgow Film Fest – Tales of the Grim Sleeper (Nick Broomfield, 2014)



Documentary filmmaker Nick Broomfield is no stranger to the hectic, hedonistic world of American crime. Known for his intimate portrayals of the prolific Floridian female serial killer Aileen Wuornos, he now points his camera a little further west to a community that, unbeknownst to the majority of the public, spent the best part of three decades living in fear of a vindictive serial killer.

Documentarian Nick Broomfield visits South Los Angeles, California, intent on uncovering the story of 'The Grim Sleeper' – a serial killer who haunted the area for nearly 30 years.

Broomfield's documentary doesn't intend to uncover any potential suspects in the case. Instead, it focuses directly upon Lonnie Franklin Jr., a local, well liked man who has been charged by the LAPD with ten counts of murder and one of attempted murder. It should be noted that Franklin hasn't officially been put to trial, and thus the entire film works as a piece of collated evidence that he is, in fact, the killer. It does so convincingly, scouring the suburban streets of Franklin's neighbourhood, meeting people who speak highly of him at first, but gradually begin to expose their bizarre experiences with him. Broomfield's unstaged directorial style makes the viewer feel ominously like a resident in this blistering, often squalid city; visiting the alleyways in which the victim's bodies were discovered, and darkened 'crack houses' in seemingly regular streets.

It would be almost idiotic to put the film's effectiveness

down to Broomfield's intense research on the topic of The Grim Sleeper. While his stylish hand makes the film visually intriguing, it's the women that are depicted that make it such a riveting watch. At one point, he admits to almost handing over the production to Pam – an ex-prostitute and former crack cocaine addict who spent a lot of time with the supposed killer. She single-handedly points Broomfield towards the area's most knowledgeable figures when it comes to the case. She's incredibly well humoured and wise – a welcome break from something that seldom rises from an understandable gutter of despair.

The women that feature are all African American women living in Los Angeles. Each and everyone of them telling unbelievable stories, some excruciating to listen to. Often, the stories of these women's encounters with 'The Grim Sleeper' are told with such honesty that it feels like this is the first time they've ever spoken about it – more than likely, this is the case. They succeed in building an irrefutable image of a man with no conscience, proving who truly has the upper hand here.

Tales of the Grim Sleeper is a film as much about the objectification and ignorance towards the black women of South LA as it is a jigsaw-like portrait of a serial killer. Melancholic, remarkable and morbidly fascinating, this is undoubtedly the best work Broomfield has put his name to.



Tales of the Grim Sleeper played at Glasgow Film Festival on February 20th and 21st. More information [here](#).