

Jeffrey Epstein: Filthy Rich reviews life, crimes and death of financier

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The four-part Netflix original series *Jeffrey Epstein: Filthy Rich* is based largely on interviews with a group of women who recount their sexual abuse and exploitation at the hands of the late billionaire and New York City socialite. Epstein died under suspicious circumstances in a Manhattan jail cell on August 10, 2019.

In a true-crime documentary style, each victim explains how she was coerced—with the alleged assistance of Epstein’s girlfriend Ghislaine Maxwell—into having sex with the money manager and then, in many cases, sexually trafficked to his elite associates for cash and other gifts beginning in 1996.

In most cases, the abuse took place when the women were teenagers. Dozens of working-class middle school and high school girls, mostly from West Palm Beach, were offered \$200 to come to Epstein’s 14,200 square-foot waterfront mansion in the elite Palm Beach island community to give him a “massage.” Several of them then also helped to recruit others to become part of what became a pyramid scheme of scores of teenage girls.

The underage girls in the network were then hired out for the purpose of providing sex to Epstein’s circle of wealthy friends at get-togethers at his other residences: a 40-room townhouse on Manhattan’s Upper East Side, a 33,000 square-foot ranch in Santa Fe, New Mexico, a 78-acre private island called Little St. James in the US Virgin Islands and a luxury flat on Avenue Foch in Paris, France near the Arc de Triomphe.

In their interviews, Marie and Annie Farmer, Michelle Licata, Shawna Rivera, Haley Robson, Courtney Wild, Virginia Roberts Giuffre, Sarah Ransome and Chauntee Davies all explain how Epstein and Maxwell used the lure of money and the opportunity to meet famous and influential people to place them in situations where, almost invariably, they could not back out.

The series jumps back and forth in Epstein’s life, interspersing the comments of the victims with television news clips, photos and interviews with journalists, professional associates, attorneys and law enforcement officials. Epstein is presented as a man who was at once narcissistic, cunning and ruthless, but also something of an enigma. The only opportunity to hear him speak comes during several court depositions, caught on video, in which he comes across as smug and arrogant.

Much of the series’ narrative revolves around the now infamous 2008 non-prosecution agreement struck between Epstein’s legal team and then-US attorney for the Southern District of Florida, Alex Acosta, which also involved the FBI and was organized in a series of off-the-record meetings at the Marriott Hotel in exclusive Palm Beach.

Acosta and Palm Beach County state attorney Barry Krischer worked with Epstein’s lawyers, including Alan Dershowitz, to block

the accusers from testifying against him and prevented local police chiefs, detectives and private investigators—all of whom are extensively interviewed in episodes two and three—from bringing a case based on a trove of evidence they had collected over many months.

In exchange for a guilty plea on state charges of solicitation of prostitution and procuring a minor for prostitution, Epstein ended up serving 13 months of an 18-month sentence in a private wing of the Palm Beach County stockade and was permitted to come and go as he pleased for 12 hours a day, six days a week, including taking trips to his private island in the Caribbean.

Many of the survivor stories have been told previously in other documentaries or have been published in news reports and legal documents associated with the cases against Epstein in 2008. Last January, for example, ABC News aired a special entitled *Truth & Lies: Jeffrey Epstein* that includes interviews with three victims as well as the same Palm Beach law enforcement officials and follows the same pattern as the Netflix series.

While *Jeffrey Epstein: Filthy Rich* does not add anything fundamentally new about the man and his crimes, it does succeed in providing a conscientious summary of what is known about him. To some extent, however, the program reinforces the corporate media and political establishment presentation of Epstein as a super-wealthy sexual predator and deviant monster, a “bad apple” among the otherwise generally decent crowd of American billionaires and international power brokers.

The series goes over a well-trod and limited list of Epstein’s relationships, mentioning and showing photos of the billionaire with individuals such as Donald Trump, Bill Clinton, Prince Andrew, Harvey Weinstein, Kevin Spacey and Chris Tucker. In episode four, the insufferable Dershowitz is afforded the opportunity to loudly deny ever having sex with minors, contradicting a direct accusation by Virginia Roberts Giuffre that he [Dershowitz] abused her “six times” when she was 17.

For the first time, a former Epstein employee at Little St. James Island, Steve Sculley, confirms that he saw Prince Andrew at a pool “grinding” on a topless teenage Roberts Giuffre. The prince has been vehemently denying he had any relationship with the girl since she said in 2019 that Epstein trafficked her to Andrew on three occasions.

One would think that Netflix, with its almost unlimited financial resources, would have been able to investigate or shed new light on Epstein’s *unexplored* relationships instead of focusing on those associations already widely reported in the media.

After all, a “black book” of contacts that belonged to Epstein in 2005 was leaked to Gawker in 2015 and published online. There are

hundreds of names in this address book, including leading political figures such as former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, US Senator Ted Kennedy (who died in 2009), former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, US Senator Charles Schumer, former independent counsel Kenneth Starr and former US Treasury Secretary Lawrence Summers.

Perhaps the lack of original investigative content is related to threats of lawsuits by powerful individuals who did not want their names mentioned in an Epstein documentary. In an interview with *Entertainment* magazine, director Lisa Bryant was asked about leaving things out “due to legal vetting” and she replied, “There’s always a little bit, but I can’t go into too many specifics.”

The Netflix series shies away from claims that Epstein was an FBI informant, a fact that might help explain why he managed to avoid prosecution for so long. Even though a former business associate named Steven Hoffenberg—who spent 18 years in federal prison for securities fraud—asserts in episode two, “Jeffrey Epstein told me he was a cooperating witness with the United States government in the past,” the program does not pursue the issue.

The Netflix series also fails to address the unsubstantiated claim by the self-professed former Mossad agent Ari Ben-Menashe in a recent book that Epstein and his girlfriend Ghislaine Maxwell were Israeli spies who used the underage sex ring as a tool for political blackmail. In the book *Epstein: Dead Men Tell No Tales*, by Dylan Howard, Ben-Menashe says that Robert Maxwell, the British politician, publisher and father of Ghislaine, who died under mysterious circumstances in 1991, was also an Israeli spy or double agent.

When asked about these reports by the *Entertainment* interviewer, Bryant dismissed them all as “conspiracy theories,” remarking unhelpfully, “We tried to approach it from a documentary, journalistic standpoint, and we touched a little bit on some of the conspiracies. ... So, without hard facts, we tended to stay away from them and keep in mind this was for a global audience for Netflix, and many people around the world probably have never heard of him.”

Although the series is loosely based on the 2016 book by James Patterson, John Connolly and Tim Malloy called *Filthy Rich: A Powerful Billionaire, the Sex Scandal that Undid Him, and All the Justice that Money Can Buy: The Shocking True Story of Jeffrey Epstein*, it leaves out important material about the social and political context within which Epstein emerged.

With its emphasis on the interviews with his victims and Epstein’s psychology, the series is vague about his emergence as a self-proclaimed billionaire whose friendship was sought after by all kinds of high-society personalities. Although there are plenty of repetitive aerial and video zoom shots of Epstein’s opulent residential properties, the question of precisely how he came into his fortune is never really addressed.

It is suggested that Epstein built his portfolio from the 40-plus million dollars he stole from the founder of Limited Brands clothing empire, Leslie Wexner, for whom he was a primary “wealth manager” in the 1990s. Yet, there is no attempt to connect Epstein’s rise with the murky and criminal world of the Wall Street equity markets that produced the dot-com bubble and crash of the early 2000s or the mortgage-backed securities collapse that produced the great recession of 2007-2009.

A passage from Patterson’s book makes an important point about how a gifted young math whiz from a working class neighborhood in Brooklyn emerged as a corrupt and influential figure on Wall Street beginning in the 1980s. By lying his way into a personal relationship with CEO Ace Greenberg, Epstein joined Bear Stearns in 1976 as a

low-level junior assistant to a floor trader and worked his way up to being an options trader helping investors avoid paying taxes.

As Patterson explains, “The Reagan era, when deregulation kicked into high gear, was still on the horizon. But there was already a decreasing amount of government oversight on Wall Street, and a new breed of bare-knuckle traders had begun to push every available limit. It was the age of corporate raiders, and with Ace Greenberg looking out for him, Epstein had no reservations when it came to throwing his weight around. The golden boy’s gift for working the numbers earned him a place in the special-products division, where he worked on extremely complex tax-related problems for a select group of Bear Stearns’s wealthiest clients—an elite within the elite.”

Precious little of this analysis by Patterson, Connolly and Malloy makes its way into the Netflix docuseries. Apparently influenced by the identity politics of the #MeToo campaign, director Bryant and executive producers Joe Berlinger, Jon Duran and Jon Kamen (CEO of the series’ production company Radical Media) seem content to provide the female victims a platform from which to express their personal pain. The latter deserve to be heard and the pain is real enough, but Bryant and company devote themselves to this to the exclusion of virtually everything else.

While Epstein’s exploitation of working class high school girls from West Palm Beach—some of whom were homeless runaways—is a heinous and despicable crime, his tendencies were nourished and the abuse became possible because of changes in American social life. The “filthy rich” Epstein, one of the billionaire parasites who rose to prominence during this period, picked on girls who “didn’t count” as part of a larger process in which tens of millions in America who “didn’t count” were experiencing increasing deprivation and hardship and were looked upon with contempt by the powers that be.

Meanwhile, the US government engaged in numerous illegal, neocolonial wars of aggression abroad, sanctioned the torture of so-called “enemy combatants” and launched a frontal assault on democratic rights at home.

Apart from an understanding of this broader decay of American capitalist society, it is impossible to answer the question of why Jeffrey Epstein’s criminal activities were protected by the US political and judicial establishment for so long or how his apparent murder in prison became a necessity for these same interests, much less grasp the social component of his depravity.



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