

INJUSTICE AIMS TO ROCK THE SYSTEM -- BBC News

BBC News Entertainment Reviews by Cindi John

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Brian Douglas' last words to his family were "sort it" - to make accountable whoever was responsible for his death. It is, in essence, what the film *Injustice* attempts to do. Mr Douglas died in 1995 after a 'stop and search' by two police officers in 1995 culminated in him being rushed to hospital with massive head injuries. A pathologist said the blow inflicted by a police baton was the equivalent of him falling 11 times his own height onto his head.

Since 1969 more than 1,000 people have died in police custody but not a single officer has ever been convicted of murder or manslaughter. That, say film-makers Ken Fero and Tariq Mehmood, was one of the key reasons behind their decision to make *Injustice*. It focuses on some of the high profile cases of deaths in custody in recent years, particularly the deaths of black people including Joy Gardner, Shiji Lapite, Brian Douglas and Ibrahima Sey.

Unlawful killings

Photographs and home video footage shows the real people behind the images presented by the press with commentary by relatives adding to the picture of the real people behind the headlines. So for instance we learn that Brian Douglas was a snappy dresser who loved a good night out. Shiji Lapite and Ibrahima Sey are shown to be devoted fathers of young families. It is a documentary but the stuff of which dramas are made. So we see a succession of relatives, grief-stricken at the death of their loved one but confident initially that those responsible will face the due process of law. But this is no Hollywood movie with the textbook ending where justice eventually prevails. Archive footage - much of it uncomfortable viewing, showing families in the depth of despair - charts the relatives' painful progress from grief to disillusionment and finally anger. In spite of inquest verdicts in two cases of unlawful killing, the people responsible for the deaths of fathers, brothers, sons, husbands, it seems to their loved ones, will get away scot-free. The anger that realisation has generated among the relatives is palpable in the film.

'Street justice'

It is the sort of anger which leads Brian Douglas' sister Brenda to remark that after so long any sort of justice is better than none, even "street justice". The Metropolitan Police Federation has said that comment is an incitement to violence against the officers involved, all of whom are named in the film. That decision to name names has led to several cinemas pulling out of screening the film after the threat of libel actions by the federation. The film is inevitably one-sided given the lack of any form of a statement from the police officers involved in the incidents. But the names of the officers are largely an irrelevance - the film's strength lies in its indictment of the system. It is scathing of the practice of one police force investigating another and the failure of the Crown Prosecution Service to act on verdicts of unlawful killing even after the intervention of an Appeal court judge.

Inquiry

The bleak film does have a positive message. It shows the families of victims joining together to work for a common goal. The United Families and Friends organisation's aim is for a Stephen Lawrence-style public inquiry into the deaths. In one notable scene, members of the organisation are filmed successfully demanding access to a police conference on deaths in custody from which they have been excluded. "There is no other way we can get justice but to fight for it," says Myrna Simpson, the mother of Joy Gardner who features in the film. Joy Gardner died in her own front room after police and immigration officials attempted to remove her for deportation bound and gagged her with 13 foot of tape.

The film's over-riding message is that the struggle goes on. And the filmmakers are adamant that the showings will also go on in spite of threats of legal action.

Injustice opens at the Ritzy cinema in Brixton on 21 September.