Under 650-word review of Time (2020).

If you're looking for a traditional documentary film of talking heads and miles of Ken Burns B-roll pulled straight from museum archives, *Time* (2020) isn't it. If I had to mine a linear narrative, *Time* follows Sybil Fox Richardson, who goes by Fox Rich, and her battle to get parole for her incarcerated husband Robert Richardson. But rather than scratch the epistophilic itch of true crime, director Garrett Bradley fashions a shifting artifact of waiting and perseverance for a Black family marked by an indelible absence.

As a blur of documentary and narrative art film, *Time* strength lies in what it doesn't say. Robert's absence is excruciatingly felt in his substitutions: an old letter; a timed phone call; a life-sized cardboard cutout nailed on the wall – all echoes of a man vanished by prison. "To do time" wholly transforms the incarcerated and their families, for whom time becomes distended; a long shot bears the weight of nearly two decades when Fox waits on hold with the parole judge's office. The film is graded entirely in black and white, from Fox's fuzzy DVR diaries to the crisp footage of current day, causing events to meld and eddy around one another. Remington, one of the couple's children, is a toddler in one clip and a dental school graduate in the next – a heartbreakingly simple metric of Robert's incarceration period. Current-Fox understands the importance of appearances: one scene shows her carefully filming an ad for her car dealership, and before a current parole hearing for Robert, she makes sure to straighten her hair. "Them white folk already don't like you," says Fox's mother, recounting when she advised her daughter to press her natural hair and wear a dress to court, advice that went unheeded back then. There's an unspoken implication: And don't give them an excuse to hate you.

Time never rests on weighing guilt, with Fox constantly reminding us of her decision in armed robbery, and this clarity provides profound breathing room for Bradley to humanize the totaling effects of incarceration. Fox accepted a plea deal of five years and was released after three and a half years, but Robert did not and was sentenced to 60 years in the Louisiana State Penitentiary. His reasons for going to trial are never fully explored, but we can theorize about maligned access to sound legal advice and the disproportionate conviction rates of Black men. Never mind that they botched the

robbery, never mind that no one was hurt – in the American criminal justice system, justice is understood as shoving a societal problem into a dark cell and throwing away the key. Faced with a failing business and a growing family to support, Robert and Fox had a last resort. “Desperate people do desperate things. It’s as simple as that,” says Fox, a weary, brief admission that lingers throughout every phone call she makes to parole offices.

But what kind of lesson is 60 years in prison? Why default to punishment instead of rehabilitation? And if justice is to right a wrong, what about reparations for victims? *Time* begets questions it never fully explores, but that’s material for another several films, and these are questions every American must grapple with: how do we construct “the criminal”, and how might we, too, be complicit in feeding the prison industrial complex.

As a young Black filmmaker who focuses on incarceration, Bradley operates in a field newly dominated by exposé-type documentaries about inhumane prison conditions. But how do you reduce an incarcerated loved one to pure interviews and statistics when their absence can hardly be articulated in words? Documentary, at least in public reception, is often mistaken for The Truth (capitalized) in audiovisual format. But truth and memory are always fraught and faceted, and the fluidity of documentary film as exemplified by *Time* can serve as the empathetic link otherwise lost in clinical recollection.