

“Those people made up a goddamn story” – Michael Jackson’s estate executor considers suing ‘Leaving Neverland’ creators

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Michael Jackson performs during the 'Bad' Tour at the Los Angeles Memorial Sports Arena on January 1989 in Los Angeles, California Credit: Kevin Winter/Getty Images

Pop

“They wanted money”

A co-executor of Michael Jackson's estate has spoken publicly for the first time about what he claims are falsities in *Leaving Neverland*.

John Branca was on a panel titled 'Trial by Media: Guilty Until Proven Innocent' at Harvard earlier this month in which he said that the documentary's two participants are liars.

“Those people made up a goddamn story because they wanted money and we will not allow that to go unchecked,” Branca told *Billboard* after the event. “It’s that simple.”

Branca was referring to Wade Robson and James Safechuck, the two men in Dan Reed’s documentary who allege that Jackson sexually abused them as children. During his lifetime, Jackson repeatedly denied any such wrongdoing.



Michael Jackson and Wade Robson.

The co-executor added that the estate was put in a stranglehold by the team behind *Leaving Neverland* because the film was made “in complete secrecy”. Neither HBO nor Reed gave the estate an opportunity to counter the claims detailed in the documentary.

Branca was joined at the event by two of the other members of the estate’s legal team, Howard Weitzman and Bryan Freedman. *Billboard* adds that the estate’s lawyers are now considering legal action directly against Reed.

In February, the estate also filed a \$100-million lawsuit against HBO saying that it violated a non-disparagement clause contained in a 1992 agreement to premiere Jackson’s concert film, *Live in Bucharest: The Dangerous Tour*.

A HBO spokesperson told *Billboard*: “Dan Reed is a proven, award-winning filmmaker and we have full confidence in his film.”



'Leaving Neverland' director Dan Reed

Elsewhere, Reed has defended his film against a biographer’s claims that newfound evidence could disprove some of the paedophilia allegations levelled at Jackson. The main point of contention is an inconsistent recollection of dates by Safechuck in relation to the construction of Jackson’s Neverland train station– Safechuck claims he was abused in the station’s upstairs room.



Reed responded: “James Safechuck was present at Michael Jackson’s Neverland Valley Ranch both before and after the construction of the train station there. The two still photographs of the train station shown in the documentary were taken by Safechuck and provided to the film-maker by him. Safechuck’s testimony in the film is that he was abused by Jackson in multiple places over several years, into his teens.”