

Discussion Questions

“When They See Us” Four Part Series on Netflix

Questions taken from Director Ava DuVernay Learning Companion

Link: [Learning Companion](#)

Episode One:

1. What strategies (social mores) do the youth and their families use to navigate the arrest and interrogation successfully?
 - a. How do these strategies highlight the options/lack of options available to people of color when encountering law enforcement?
2. How did perceived media pressure inform the prosecutorial team?
3. What role does music in the opening and closing scenes play in retelling the story of The Exonerated Five?
4. How did the power dynamics displayed during the police interactions disrupt the typical parent/ guardian and child relationships?

Episode Two:

1. How does the opening of this episode, narrated by media coverage at the time, reveal dominant perceptions of the teens specifically and youth of color, in general?
 - a. How did the prosecutors' language shape the trial and the teens' experience?
2. Describe Antron's relationship with his father?
 - a. How does the experience impact Antron and his father during the trial?
3. How is evidence used in this case, specifically, how does the prosecutorial team handle the evidence?
4. How does the quality of legal representation impact the trial at different moments?

- a. Is there a difference between accused persons using a public defender vs. a paid attorney?
5. Discuss how the filmmaker uses the juxtaposition of media stories right as the trial was beginning to expose the narratives surrounding the case?

Episode Three:

1. The mothers of Kevin, Yusef and Korey discuss their sons' incarceration in a scene while handing out fliers.
 - a. What does their interaction reveal about how each family is handling the incarceration?
 - b. How does it also further the idea that The Exonerated Five is a story of four plus one?
2. Describe the relationship between Kevin and his sister Angie.
 - a. What life lessons can we infer that Angie learned while her brother is incarcerated?
3. What cinematic moments stand out in the retelling of The Exonerated Five's reentry into society?
4. How did the challenges of reentry impact Raymond?
 - a. Why does he resort to dealing drugs and ultimately end up reincarcerated?

Episode Four:

1. What cinematic choices do the filmmakers use to highlight the use of solitary confinement and its effects on Korey?
2. How does Korey manage to hold on to a sense of hope throughout his incarceration?
3. Why do you think Korey chooses not to attend his later parole hearing?
 - a. How does this represent Korey's mindset at the time?
4. What is the reaction of the original law enforcement involved in The Exonerated Five's case when they learn of Matias Reyes' confession?

- a. Why do they react this way?

Overarching Discussion Questions:

1. How do we see the topics of race, class, power and privilege woven through each episode?
2. What does this tell us about the way our criminal justice system was set up to work?
3. How is blackness criminalized in WHEN THEY SEE US and how do we see this still happening today?
4. What cinematic strategies were employed by the filmmaker?
 - a. How did they work to provide depth and richness to the story?
5. What can be done to affect a more positive outcome when the same injustices happen today?