DuVernay, Ava. *When They See Us.* Netflix, 2019.

The series *When They See Us* details the story of four Black teenage boys, Antron McCray, Yusef Salaam, Kevin Richardson, and Korey Wise, and one Latinx boy, Raymond Santana Jr., who were falsely accused of the rape and beating of a white female jogger, Trisha Meili, at Central Park in New York City in April of 1989. This Netflix production is directed by Ava DuVernay, a graduate from UCLA with a double major in both English Lit-erature and African American Studies. She is also known for the Netflix documentary *13th*, which argues for a direct link between the end of chattel slavery and the emergence of mass incarceration of black bodies.

Also known as the "Central Park Five," DuVernay shows the perspectives of the five boys and their families in their des-perate, but ultimately hopeless, attempt to defend the boys in their separate trials. The New York City Police Department played a major role in dehumanizing the accused teenagers. During the interrogations, desperate to solve the case by any means nec-essary, NYPD coerced the Black youths into confessing under false pretenses without the presence of an attorney or a guardian, with the exception of McCray and briefly, Santana. The media also played a part in the dehumanizing efforts through a narrative of danger about the boys.

The five boys' experiences during the trial, their incar-ceration, and after their release illustrate institutional racism and discrimination. During McCray's interrogation, with his parents present, tensions arose between McCray and his father, Bobby, who insisted he tell the police exactly what they wanted to hear so that the police would release them. This highlights that Bobby and his son could not resist the overwhelming pressure to confess, despite him actually being innocent of the crime. In fact, all five boys were innocent, however, the detectives engaged in intimi-dation and other tactics to take advantage of the boys and breaking laws in the process, as they were being held for hours without food or sleep and forced them to make up stories about what happened during the assault, resulting in each boy confessing to allegedly being involved and telling on each other for the crime. An ex-ample of the damaging narrative painted by the media is when

Donald Trump infamously took out an ad in May 1989 calling for the death penalty against the boys for the alleged crime.

In their incarcerations, McCray, Salaam, Richardson, and Santana all served between six and seven years in prison after their convictions of the attack, while Wise served the longest, thirteen years, due to him being the only one out of the five charged as an adult. McCray's sentence was the least compared to the other four; he served six years incarcerated. Salaam's time in prison took a different turn compared to the others, as he became Muslim, then studied his faith throughout his time there. He served nearly seven years in juvenile hall. Richardson served seven years behind bars. Santana served nearly seven years before reuniting with his father and moving in with him and his new wife, Estela. Life following prison was difficult for Santana, as he was mistreated by Estela because she firmly believed he committed the crime in which he and the four others were accused of. He was also the only one to be reincarcerated due to him violating his parole over drug charges; he was then released in 2002. Not only was Wise's sentence the longest, but also the most difficult. In order to stay as close to his home in Harlem, New York as possible, throughout his sentence he requested a transfer to a closer prison which led to him moving to one much further than the previous; this happened several times. Earlier in his sentence, he often faced hostility from other inmates including a staged attack by a guard. He requested solitary confinement through his whole sentence in order to avoid further assaults. In 2002, he was released from prison after thirteen years when the actual perpetrator confessed and gave details to the crimes for which the five boys were falsely convicted.

The series has four parts, each at least an hour long, with the fourth and final part being roughly an hour and a half. DuVernay tells the story chronologically, occasionally touching back to a specific moment in one of the boys' lives to help explain a situation or dialogue. Part One begins with all five boys living their own lives in New York City in the hours of the night the female jogger was assaulted, followed by their firsthand experiences under hours of continuous interrogation without parental supervision, or any meals. Part Two progresses into the separate trials of the boys, where DuVernay portrays the public outrage from both sides of the conflict. On one side, the boys are supported by

their communities while the parents rally their attorneys. On the other side, the prosecutors representing the City of New York work to convict the boys using any piece of evidence, although the exhibits are shown to be controversial and questionable as no piece of DNA was conclusive. Part Three of the series follows the boys, except for Wise, as they try to navigate their sentences at juvenile detention as well as transitioning back to society years after incarceration. They all go through hardships as they are unable to find proper jobs as ex-convicts and registered sex offenders. And the final part, mostly focusing on Wise, starts off with the dramatic sentencing of the boy which initially puts him in disarray. In this part, DuVernay demonstrates his harsh sentence behind bars at several adult prisons. She also portrays the deterioration of his mental health, despite befriending a guard at one of the institutions and reflecting on his past with his mother and recently deceased transgender brother, Norman. This was due to the extended periods of time spent in isolation. Him thinking back to that fateful night when he was dragged to go out with Salaam, with whom he was friends with prior, is a critical point as he fantasizes what would have happened had he not gone to the park with his friend. His sentence ends with the exoneration of all five accused men in 2002 when the actual perpetrator confessed to the crime.

Following their exoneration in 2002, the now freed five men sued the City of New York for their false convictions and racial discrimination. They ended up receiving a settlement from the city for forty-one million dollars in 2014, in which the sum was divided evenly among them. The series finishes off with updating its viewers about the current lives the five men are living since their exoneration and settlement. McCray, now living and working in Georgia, is married with six children, and the first of the accused men to leave the city of New York. Living in Georgia as well, Santana has one daughter, and founded an apparel company named after his hometown called Park Madison NYC. Salaam, a resident of Georgia, is married with ten children, a published author and public speaker, in which he advocates for criminal justice reform. Richardson, who now lives in New Jersey, is married with two daughters, and was honored with a high school diploma in 2017 by the Bronx Prep Academy. Wise, the only one to never

leave New York City, funded the Korey Wise Innocence Project in 2015 with help from the settlement cash to help the wrongfully accused by providing them pro-bono legal counsel.

The intended audience for this series is not only scholars of social history and criminal justice but also a general audience interested in social justice and mass incarceration. Despite the efforts of their communities, the five boys stood no chance against the overwhelming power of the damaging narratives of the media and oppression by the NYPD, all of which were fueled by institutional racism and discrimination. The series addresses the issues of the U.S. criminal justice system, and hardships the boys endured under false accusations during their trials, incarcerations, and lives after prison before their exonerations, and teaches viewers about a new side to a story they thought they knew well.

Ryan Lopez