



“When They See Us” Series

Over two Friday nights in early July MTYBA used the unfortunately named “Netflix Party” to watch “When They See Us”, a dramatized retelling of the Central Park Jogger Case.

Through the four episodes we used the chat function to discuss the case and the emotional scenes which were displayed as five young black men were framed for raping and leaving for dead a young white woman in Central Park, NYC in the late 80’s.

The way in which the police constructed the story and picked their targets for prosecution was alarming and evidence of the systemic racism in the NYPD at the time. Our conversations turned to the age of those accused, we could not believe how young these boys were and how easy it was for the police to see them as criminals. We considered the heartache for their families and how any family could survive such circumstances.

As we watched our hearts broke, as we saw the hope drain from the boy’s eyes and the reality sink in. No one believed in their innocence. From these few hours of viewing it became apparent that very few young people know their legal rights when being interviewed by police and in this instance the police were so aware of this fact. They held young boys in terrible circumstances until they cracked and gave false confessions. They encouraged them to turn on each other with promises of freedom.

Whilst watching this series it was easy to think of it as being another Netflix drama but the stark reality of it being a true story was harrowing to say the least. There is no excuse for the injustice that was committed by the detectives involved in this case and this was a reminder that strong and fearless persistent advocacy pays off – but often it is too late to restore the years lost by young people caught up in the criminal justice system.

