

CCJ 4224: Miscarriages of Justice
Film Analysis Assignment Instructions
Due: by 11:59pm Friday April 30th

Purpose

The purpose of this assignment is to learn more about wrongful convictions and the factors that can contribute to them. Two of the films, Tulia, Texas and Witch Hunt, are about mass exonerations – something that we did not discuss in class. The other films, The Central Park Five and West of Memphis focus on well-known wrongful conviction cases and highlight how public fear can cloud investigations.

Instructions

You should watch one of the (excellent) documentaries listed below and write an essay summarizing and responding to the film. **Your answer should be written in essay format and not just answering the listed points in sequence.** Your essay must include the following (anything listed for you to “consider” are suggestions, not required components):

1. Summarize the case, but **do not give an extensive** plot summary. Also *consider* the following:
 - a. Why/how were the suspects identified or come to police attention in the first place?
 - b. How well did the police investigate the case?
2. Discuss specific factors that contributed to the wrongful conviction(s) and incorporate class material. Also *consider* the following:
 - a. Is there any one factor that you believe played the biggest role in the wrongful conviction? Why this factor was so influential?
 - b. Was there evidence of tunnelvision?
 - c. What role, if any, did race/ethnicity play?
 - d. What role, if any, did the media play?
 - e. Is there any evidence of *intentional* police or prosecutorial misconduct?
 - f. How credible was the evidence used for arrest or conviction?
3. How was the wrongful conviction uncovered? If discussed in the film, provide information on any compensation awarded and what was the process by which the compensation was obtained. Was the compensation difficult to obtain?
4. What is your reaction to the case/to the film? This should be woven throughout the essay. For example, if while discussing the police investigation you were particularly shocked at an egregious error on behalf of the police. Also consider:
 - a. Did you learn anything new from the film?
 - b. How well does the film supplement class material?

The film should be the primary source for your answers, but you may use your class notes. You do not need to provide citations. **No other sources are allowed.** You are not allowed to use online resources including blogs, Wikipedia, film summaries or reviews, etc. You should not confer with any other student: this Assignment should be done independently and be based on your own individual assessment.

Witch Hunt, 2009 – A film about John Stoll and several other men and women who were wrongfully convicted in child sex abuse incidents – many of which never even occurred. The film is narrated by Sean Penn and is approximately 1 hour 30 minutes.

Tulia Texas, 2008 – Follows the arrests of 46 residents of Tulia, Texas for a massive cocaine ring. The arrests were entirely based on the word of one undercover “agent,” Tom Coleman. The film is about an hour.

West of Memphis, 2012 – Tells the story of three teens from West Memphis, Arkansas who were convicted for the murders of three local boys and their long fight for exoneration. Their convictions were largely based on a (false) confession and local fears that the teens were part of a satanic cult. One of the teens was sentenced to death. The film is about 2 hours 30 minutes. Note, this film is particularly graphic.

The Central Park Five, 2012 – A film about five young Black boys who were wrongfully convicted of raping a White woman in the last 1980s. The case got national attention, in part because of widespread concerns at that time of violent juvenile “superpredators” and “wilding”. The film is about 2 hours. This film can be accessed through the USF library online (search by title).

Style guidelines

Your summary and discussion responses should be as well written as possible. Your answer should be in the form of an essay and not a sequential list of answers (e.g., 1a., 1b., 2a...). Be sure to check your grammar and spelling; egregious spelling and grammatical errors will result in a grade reduction.

Answers can be single or double-spaced with 1-inch margins. Do not skip a line between paragraphs. Please use any legible font no larger than 12-point. **There is no page or answer length requirement, but typically the strongest assignments are 4 to 5 pages.** Minimize the use of any quoted material. Answers that rely too much on quotes will be marked down.

Submission

You will submit your assignment on Canvas through TurnItIn. TurnItIn is a plagiarism detection device; it will compare your submitted answer to the work of other students, published work, and the internet. Answers that show evidence of plagiarism, copying, or not submitting original work, will not be graded. My advice, always use your own words! If you are unsure what constitutes as plagiarism, please contact

me. You are responsible for submitting the correct file; I will not accept late assignments because you uploaded the incorrect one.

Hints to do well

- Provide enough detail to prove to Dr. Boggess that you watched the entire documentary and did not just search the internet for answers.
- You are allowed and encouraged to include your personal opinions and assessments of the case, but be sure to back up your opinions with facts from the film.
- You must incorporate class material. You do not need citations but you must be explicit (e.g., “According to the National Registry of Exonerations...”).
- Do not use any other source.
- Double-check your spelling and grammar. Hint: A “trail” is not the same thing as a “trial.”
- There is no page length requirement so do not manipulate your font and page formatting so that your answer looks longer than it really is; Dr. Boggess finds this to be particularly annoying.

Things I’ll look when grading

Following directions and style (25%)

- Student has not used any source besides class material and the film
- Answers have few grammatical mistakes and no misspelled words
- Answers are clearly written in full sentences with proper capital letters and punctuation
- Answer is written as a cohesive essay and not “chunked out” point by point listed above
- Answers minimize the inclusion of any superfluous or unnecessary information
- Answer minimizes quoted material

Answer quality (75%)

- Answers provide accurate facts pertaining to the film
- Student has provided sufficient evidence that they watched the documentary
- Answers provide enough detail to address each component of the assignment
- Opinions are backed up with evidence from the film or from class
- Essay incorporates class material

Note: There are no film-specific questions. These instructions apply to all films.

The Film Analysis is worth up to **25% of your final grade.**