



Discussion Points for “Evolution of a Criminal”

As you watch “Evolution of a Criminal,” consider the politics and ethics of Darius Clark Monroe’s portrayal of himself, his family, and his community. How are young minority males who become entangled in the criminal justice system and their social relations generally represented in nonfiction media? How would they like to be portrayed?

With that in mind, here are some discussion points that might be helpful as you watch the documentary.

Young minority men are often portrayed as either **good or bad**, with their being **nothing in between**. Even redemption stories are presented as an individual’s movement from one extreme (bad) to the other (good). Is Darius’s tale different? Why is it so hard to present young minority men as **complex three-dimensional subjects**? Is the source of the problem a deficiency in our contemporary storytelling culture?

It appears that Darius’s foray into crime was motivated by two insecurities? One stemmed from the **economic precariousness** of his family and the other came

from some notion that it was his **responsibility** to rectify it. Can we explore the sources and impact of these insecurities in young minority men and the way they are or should ideally be presented in documentary media?

How do young minority men come to terms with the economic inequality they experience? Does it interfere with their **development into manhood** and force them to assume adult roles that set them up for failure? Failure includes self-hate.

This raises the question of how the families of young minority males should be portrayed. Darius's mother says that perhaps she should not have shared information about the family's financial affairs with him. It is never clear what happened to the money that he got from the robbery; did his family use it? What are the **ethical obligations** that an autobiographical filmmaker owes his family and his community? Would a documentary filmmaker who was not a family member have been able to go as far?

Darius committed his crime with two **friends**. Were they really "friends" in the sense of being folks he could rely on or folks whose regard for or emotional connection to each other was true and strong? What sorts of friendships do young minority men have and what sorts of friendships do they need?

Institutions and organizations provide structure and order to people's lives. Maybe prison does that for some people. Darius seems to have found it in film school. Are young minority males finding such **structure and order** in unexpected places?

Of course, some of the security Darius found at NYU was predicated on his not disclosing his past to some of those he interacted with. Is this a variant of the **masking** that blacks have long employed?

At the end of the film and what we know followed it, "Evolution" can be read as the story of a young black man on his way to achieving a future that promises **self-made, socially meaningful success** as an independent filmmaker. The ideal is to create your own opportunities and pursue ventures that will result in **financial security**, give back to your community, and make your family proud. That is an American ideal. What happens when young minority males hold it?

Participants on Post-Screening Panel

Our moderator, **Michael Lee, Esquire**, is a practicing human rights attorney in Philadelphia, PA. A graduate of Central High School, George Washington University, and the 2009 inaugural class of Drexel Law School, Mr. Lee co-founded Philadelphia Lawyers for Social Equity, a Pennsylvania not-for-profit legal aid organization. As managing attorney for its keystone project, the Criminal Record Expungement Project, Mr. Lee has trained pro bono attorneys, organized hundreds of community education events, argued thousands of expungement and redaction petitions, and advocated for progressive criminal record reform.

Darius Clark Monroe, Director of “Evolution of a Criminal,” is a MFA graduate of NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. He is a National Board of Review, HBO Short Film, and Urbanworld Best Screenplay award recipient. Most recently, Mr. Monroe was selected to the prestigious Screenwriters Colony, and chosen as a fellow at the Sundance Institute Screenwriters Intensive. “Evolution of a Criminal,” which is his first film, was a recipient of, among other honors, a Spike Lee Production Fellowship and a Warner Bros. Film Award.

Darren Brown is a 2009 graduate of Sayre High School in Philadelphia and a participant in PowerCorpsPHL, a program that combines environmental stewardship initiatives as well as youth workforce development and violence prevention. His hobbies include reading, sports, and social media.

Hiram Rivera is the Executive Director of the Philadelphia Student Union, a youth organizing organization fighting for high quality public education in the city for 20 years. Prior to coming to PSU, Hiram worked in New York City for Brown University's Annenberg Institute for School Reform. He is a native of New Haven, CT and has been organizing young people around issues of education and youth incarceration for 10 years.

Shawn L. (“Frogg”) Banks was born and raised in North Philadelphia. He attended Community College of Philadelphia. After a five-year stint as a drug dealer which led to his serving time in jail and being the victim of violent armed robbery that he miraculously survived, he moved to the West Coast where he pursued a career as a model and an actor. Today, he is the head of Philly-Wood Entertainment which is involved in film and music production and Philly-Wood 7, Inc., a nonprofit which provides conflict resolution and mentoring services to

youth. He directed and produced the documentary “Close to Death” which looks at street violence from the perspective of victims and perpetrators seeking redemption.

Cornell Drummond was born in Philadelphia and is 26 years old. He attended Overbrook High School. Roughly seven years ago, he was shot and paralyzed from the waist down while involved in the drug trade. He spent time in federal prison, came home, and turned his life around. He works for the Third Circuit Court of Appeals and serves as a volunteer mentor with the Philadelphia Federal District Court’s Supervision to Aid Re-Entry (STAR) Program.

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The Panelists who generously gave of their time to prepare and present today

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