

WHY EVERY SHOW NEEDS TO BE MORE LIKE *THE WIRE* ("NOT JUST THE FACTS, MA'AM")

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The Wire (HBO, 2002-2008) upends the traditional police procedural by moving past basic plot points and "twists" in the case, diving deep into the lives of both the cops and the criminals they pursue. It comments on today's America, employing characters who defy stereotype. In the words of creator David Simon:

The grand theme here is nothing less than a national existentialism: It is a police story set amid the dysfunction and indifference of an urban department—one that has failed to come to terms with the permanent nature of urban drug culture, one in which thinking cops, and thinking street players, must make their way independent of simple explanations (Simon 2000: 2).

Given the current political climate in the US and internationally, it is timely to revisit the *The Wire* and how it expand-

ed the cop-drama universe. It was a pioneering season-long procedural. Here are my top 10 reasons why Every Show Needs to Be More Like *The Wire*.

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1. "THIS AMERICA, MAN"

As David Simon explains:

In the first story arc, the episodes begin what would seem to be the straightforward, albeit protracted, pursuit of a violent drug crew that controls a high-rise housing project. But within a brief span of time, the officers who undertake the pursuit are forced to acknowledge truths about their department, their role, the drug war and the city as a whole. In the end, the cost to all sides begins to

suggest not so much the dogged police pursuit of the bad guys, but rather a Greek tragedy. At the end of 13 episodes, the reward for the viewer—who has been lured all this way by a well-constructed police show—is not the simple gratification of hearing handcuffs click. Instead, the conclusion is something that Euripides or O'Neill might recognize: an America, at every level at war with itself (Simon 2000: 3).

"Each wiretap ultimately proves as discomfiting to the authorities as it does to those targeted. This is world in which knowledge is always a double-edged sword" (Ganz 2016: 109-10). We see this immediately in the teaser of the pilot. Detective Jimmy McNulty (Dominic West) is at the scene of a shooting, questioning a Witness (Kamal Bostic-Smith) on the murder of a boy from "round the way" nicknamed "Snot Boogie". McNulty and the Witness go back and forth on the origin of "Snot Boogie's" nickname at first. Until the Witness explains what happened:

MCNULTY
So who shot Snot?

WITNESS
I ain't going to no court. Motherfucker ain't have to put no cap in him though.

MCNULTY
Definitely not.

WITNESS
He could've just whipped his ass, like we always whip his ass.

MCNULTY
I agree with you.

WITNESS
He gonna kill Snot. Snot been doing the same shit since I don't know how long. Kill a man over some bullshit. I'm saying, every Friday night in the alley behind the cut-rate, we rolling bones, you know? All the boys from around the way, we roll till late.

MCNULTY
Alley crap game, right?

WITNESS
And like every time, Snot, he'd fade a few shooters. Play it out till the pot's deep. Then he'd snatch and run.

MCNULTY
—Every time?

WITNESS
—Couldn't help hisself.

MCNULTY
Let me understand you. Every Friday night, you and your boys would shoot crap, right? And every Friday night, your pal Snotboogie he'd wait till there was cash on the ground, then grab the money and run away?--You let him do that?

WITNESS
—We catch him and beat his ass. But ain't nobody ever go past that.

MCNULTY
I gotta ask you. If every time Snotboogie would grab the money and run away why'd you even let him in the game?

WITNESS
What?

MCNULTY
If Snotboogie always stole the money, why'd you let him play?

WITNESS
Got to. This America, man.

We're not given any good cop, bad cop back and forth. There's no steel table with a single bulb dangling above it, no surprise evidence being slammed on the table (although *The Wire* is not opposed to that). Our first scene of the series shows McNulty questioning the Witness by understanding the culture of their environment and the connection between these boys, who play craps every Friday night. It also shows the criminal in a different light, sensitive and moral. You can beat up "Snot Boogie" for stealing the money, but shooting him isn't right.

The Wire exists in a post-9/11 and to some extent, a post-war-on-drugs world (it's unwinnable). No longer are large resources being spent on taking down drug dealers and inner

city gangs. The money is funneled towards counter-terrorism. This is shown in an exchange between McNulty and his friend in the FBI, Special Agent Terrance 'Fitz' Fitzhugh (Doug Olear) in the Pilot.

[McNulty and Fitzhugh watch a live video of a stash house on Homer Ave.]

FITZHUGH
That's about \$3,000 of raw on the table today. We followed it all the way from New York.

MCNULTY
You're up in New York on this?

FITZHUGH
We could be. We're backing into some Dominicans up there. We could have a Title III on them right now if we wanted.

McNulty gives Fitzhugh a confused look.

FITZHUGH
Wrong war, brother. Most of the squad's been transferred to counterterrorism. This thing's the last drug case we got pending and I gotta shut it down by the end of the month.

MCNULTY
You guys are getting out of drugs?

FITZHUGH
Yeah, for a while. We just don't have the manpower to stay on anything big. Not since those towers fell.

MCNULTY
What, we don't have enough love in our hearts for two wars? Joke's on us, huh?

FITZHUGH
I guess so. Still, you give great case, brother. I wish you could've worked it with us.

We have another example of the impact of the shift towards counter-terrorism in Season 1, Episode 3: "The Buy":

[Fitzhugh, McNulty, and Detective Kima Greggs (Sonja Sohn) watch the video of a stash house being busted.]

FITZHUGH
This little thing is the smile of the week. Watch this.

[Plays video of a FBI bust on a crack cocaine operation.]

FITZHUGH
Career case. Not that my boss would give a damn at this point.

GREGGS
Why not?

FITZHUGH
Why not?
[Jimmy and Fitz exchange a look.]

FITZHUGH
All of those mopes in bracelets, not one of the named Osama.

This America, man. *The Wire's* sharp observations remain relevant today.

2. PLAYING AGAINST STEREOTYPES

As David Simon foresaw in his early series bible—

Structurally, each season of *The Wire*—be it nine or thirteen episodes—exists as a standalone journey. Some characters may progress to the following season for continuity; most others will have their stories resolved in a single season (a design that allows for greater latitude in casting) [...] Nothing should happen on screen that hasn't in some fashion happened on the streets, and the show will utilize a series of veteran detectives and Baltimore street figures for story lines and technical assistance. As [HBO miniseries] *The Corner* is to every other inner city melodrama, so should *The Wire* be to any other presentation of police work (Simon 2000: 2-3).

The characters may simply be the vehicles through which we understand police work, the war on drugs and today's America, but none of them conform to stereotypes. Here's are some of the key figures from the course of the series:

Omar Little (Michael K. Williams). It's ironic that the most fear and damage is wreaked upon our intimidating drug dealers by a gay, shotgun-toting stick-up boy. The added irony that even though everyone in Baltimore is trying to kill Omar Little, it's an eight-year old child who ends up succeeding.

Detective Shakima "Kima" Greggs (Sonya Sohn). Kima is a key player on the cop side of the investigations. Shown as the first other cop in the detail McNulty has any respect for as "natural poh-lice". Kima is black, female, and lesbian—making her an outsider in the entirely male and majority white Baltimore PD. While undercover as a stripper, Kima is shot towards the end of Season 1 ('The Cost', 1.10). This brings up the subject that black cops are more often sent undercover and thus put into more dangerous situations.

Felicia "Snoop" Pearson (Felicia Pearson). Tough, fearless female gang lieutenant whose gender is rarely, if ever, mentioned or a point of discussion. (As opposed to Omar's homosexuality, which makes his success in robbing Avon Barksdale (Wood Harris) even tougher for Avon to swallow.)

Russell "Stringer" Bell (Idris Elba). Avon's second in command, who is constantly searching for a way to legitimize their business, taking night classes in economics. This type of "intelligent gangster" character has become more and more common post-*Wire*.

Brother Mouzone (Michael Potts). The deadly assassin sent from New York to protect Avon's interests—who also happens to be a stodgy, bookish brother of Islam.

It's also important to note the show's subtle treatment of race, which transcends stereotypes. As Professor Stephen Shapiro of University College Dublin explains:

It is an unusual and ambitious urban crime show in the perspectives and layers it brings to characterization and plotting, and in the nuanced portrayal of race conflict, city politics, and the moralities of urban criminality and policing. It references many other urban crime narratives—literary, cinematic and televisual—yet develops its own distinctive sub-genre, the urban procedural, a fabrication of urban spatial relations that intercuts worlds usually unrelated in political and social studies never

mind television cop shows. More consistently than any other crime show of its generation, *The Wire* challenges viewers' perceptions of the racialization of urban space and the media conventions which support this.

It reminds us just how remarkably restricted the grammar of race is on American television and related media, and of the normative codings of race—as identity, as landscape—across urban narratives, from documentary to entertainment media. The typical mise-en-scene, of black kids dealing drugs on ghetto corners, is an everyday snapshot of the structural impoverishment and isolation of an underclass whose hypervisibility in other media frames (including gaming) is either manifestly exoticized and pathologized or only momentarily made visible through instances of spectacular disaster, like Katrina, rather than as a long-standing, structural presence (Shapiro 2012).

In today's America, shows such as *The Wire* are invaluable, as they have the ability to dissolve harmful stereotypes, fostering connection instead of divisiveness—and better understanding of one another. *Orange Is the New Black* (2013-) has had similar success in this regard.

3. THE SEASON-TO-SEASON PIVOT

Each season-long procedural faces the challenge of writing themselves out of a corner in new and surprising ways. The British cop drama *Broadchurch*, for example, pivots from murder-mystery in Season 1 to season-long trial in Season 2. Other shows pivot by introducing a new crime or central mystery and staying the course with the same cast, deepening and/or shifting focus to other characters, such as *The Leftovers*, Season 3. *The Wire* pioneered the season-to-season pivot, around five key themes and areas:

SEASON 1: DRUGS. The first season introduces two major groups of characters: the Baltimore Police Department and a drug-dealing organization, run by the Barksdale family. The investigation is triggered when detective Jimmy McNulty meets privately with Judge Daniel Phelan (Peter Gerety), following the acquittal of D'Angelo Barksdale (Lawrence Gilliard Jr.) for murder—after a key witness changes her story.

SEASON 2: PORTS. The second season, along with its ongoing examination of the drug problem and its effect on the urban poor, examines the plight of the blue-collar, urban working class as exemplified by stevedores in the city port, as some of them get caught up in smuggling drugs and other contraband inside the shipping containers that pass through the port. In a season-long subplot, the Barksdale organization continues its drug trafficking despite Avon being imprisoned, with Stringer Bell assuming greater power.

SEASON 3: POLITICS. In the third season, the focus returns to the street and the Barksdale organization. The scope, however, is expanded to include the city's political scene. A new subplot is introduced to explore the potential positive effects of de facto "legalizing" the illegal drug trade, and incidentally prostitution, within the limited boundaries of a few uninhabited city blocks—referred to as Hamsterdam.

SEASON 4: SCHOOLS. The fourth season expands its scope again to include an examination of the school system. We enter this world through formerly loose-cannon cop turned code breaker, Roland "Prez" Pryzbylewski (Jim True-Frost), who is forced to resign after he accidentally shoots another cop. Prez begins teaching middle school math in inner-city Baltimore. Other major plots include the mayoral race that continues the political storyline begun in Season 3, and a closer look at Marlo Stanfield's (Jamie Hector) drug gang, which has grown to control most of western Baltimore's trafficking.

SEASON 5: MEDIA. The fifth season focuses on the media, and media consumption. The show features a fictional depiction of the newspaper *The Baltimore Sun*, and in fact elements of the plot are ripped-from-the-headlines events and people who work at the paper. The season deals with which stories get told, which don't and why it is that things stay the same. Issues such as the quest for profit, the decrease in the number of reporters and the end of aspiration for news quality are addressed, alongside the theme of homelessness.

4. PULLING BACK THE CURTAIN: JUGGLING PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL LIVES

Predecessors *Hill Street Blues* and *NYPD Blue* both cover work and home to some extent, but use the case-of-the-week structure, versus *The Wire*'s more narrow, slow-burn, delib-

erative season-long procedural approach—which lends itself best to streaming/binge-viewing.

Over the course of *The Wire*, we watch as our POV character Jimmy McNulty destroys his life, then rebuilds it, only to destroy it once again. In Season 4, McNulty is largely absent from the drama of the professional world. He's been sentenced to a walking beat in West Baltimore and has moved in with Beadie Russell (Amy Ryan) and her two boys. We are led to think the heavy-drinking, drug-busting Jimmy is gone. But it's not long until the lure of a rising drug gang, that appears to be taking over without dropping any bodies, pulls Jimmy from his charming, happy home life and back onto the corners of Baltimore.

5. SETTING AS CHARACTER

From the corners to the courthouse, from the docks and the schools to Hamsterdam, Baltimore is really the main character of *The Wire*. The connection the characters feel for their parts of the city, whether that be "the towers" or city hall, pushes much of the drama and conflict in the series. David Simon, who used to be a crime beat journalist in Baltimore, knows the city and its idiosyncrasies well:

The city is poor, undereducated and struggling with a huge heroin and cocaine problem. There is a sense that much of the population is gone, fled to the suburbs. Vacant houses often seem to outnumber rowhomes in the worst parts of the city. Factories and warehouses stand empty [...] Winters are cold, summers hot. And despite all the problems inherent, there is a deep if peculiar affection for the city felt, though rarely expressed, by its residents. The past is always present here, unlike the new metropolises of the West. We are in a remnant of old America as it struggles to make itself into part of the new (Simon 2000: 5).

Bodie Broadus (J.D. Williams), who remains one of the last of the Barksdale crew left standing, dies as a result of refusing to back down from his corner during an assault ('Final Grades', 4.13). He's already seen the towers he grew up in demolished by corrupt politicians to make way for fancy developments; he won't be pushed off his corner as well.

Characters are hopelessly tied to their city and their circumstances, just like in real life. Stringer Bell cannot transi-

tion from gang leader to businessman. His desire to move up gets him pushed out. Often a character's desire to stay in Baltimore leads to their demise; after informing on Stringer to the police, Wallace (Michael B. Jordan) is sent to the country to stay with his grandparents, where he'll be safe. However, Wallace has never been out of Baltimore City and grows restless with the country quiet. Even though he returns at his own peril, Wallace cannot stay away from the life he knows ('Cleaning Up', 1.12). This is even true away from the corners. At the end of Season 2, Nick Sobotka (Pablo Schreiber) enters the Witness Protection Program, but by the series finale, he has left the Program and reappears in Baltimore at the port ('The Dickensian Aspect', 5.06).

6. TRUE GRIT AND AUTHENTICITY...

The language and culture of *The Wire* are so authentic and unique to the city of Baltimore, they create a realistic and nuanced portrayal that transcends the usual "urban street" dramas. From the "pit beef sandwiches" and Omar's ominous "Aye Yo!" to the network of pagers, pay phones and whistles the corner boys use to move product, David Simon pulled from his background as a police journalist to build a true-to-life Baltimore in the show.

It's important to note that dialogue is not real speech. Meaning that, even in the most realistic, grounded, gritty series such as *The Wire*, where people do speak in ways that sound very natural and faithful to who they are as characters, the dialogue is still heightened. There's poetry in the words. The writers not only play around with how the more educated, erudite characters speak, but they also give disenfranchised characters a specific slang that's their own private language. Speaking to a class at UCLA recently, David Simon explained how the vernacular used among the "corner boys" was a by-product of his own years sitting out on a West Baltimore corner. He also said that he would not attempt to write *The Wire* set in today's Baltimore because the language on the streets, in his view, has changed completely.

...POETICS, SOLILOQUIES, ARIAS AND THAT SCENE OF ALL FUCKS

The Wire is often compared to Shakespeare. The poetic but straightforward nature that Simon and his team use to tell their story of a Baltimore drug war demonstrates that char-

acters are given respect and intelligence, no matter what part they play in the system. The writing is perceptive, whether it's McNulty and his partner Detective William 'Bunk' Moreland (Wendell Pierce) discovering damning evidence in a scene entirely composed of variations of the word "fuck", or this scene in the pilot where Detectives Greggs, Ellis Carver (Seth Gilliam) and Thomas 'Herc' Hauk (Domenick Lombardozzi) discuss police bureaucracy and end up making a thoughtful point about the war on drugs. Their dialogue leaps from the page.

GREGGS
What's up?

LT. DANIELS
Deputy's throwing some kinda piss-fit.

GREGGS
Major know?

LT. DANIELS
He's up there now.

CARVER
With a mouthful of piss, probably.

HERC
Like our major don't know what that tastes like? It's the chain-of-command, baby, the shit always rolls downhill.

CARVER
Motherfucker, we talking about piss.

HERC
Piss does too, think about it.

CARVER
Shit rolls, piss trickles.

HERC
Downhill, though.

CARVER
You don't know that for sure--

GREGGS
Not to change the subject on you two charmers but why are there only two ECU numbers?

HERC
Dope and guns.

GREGGS
—Two guns, right? —That's three.

HERC
Fuck it, Kima. You want a job done right, you gotta do it your own self.

CARVER
He means that we are an effective deterrent on the war on drugs when we are on the street.

HERC
Fucking motherfuckers up, right?

CARVER
Indeed.

HERC
Fuck the paperwork.—Collect bodies, split heads.

CARVER
Split them wide.

HERC
The Western District way.

CARVER
All right.

GREGGS
You heroic motherfuckers kill me. Fighting the war on drugs one brutality case at a time.

CARVER
Girl, you can't even call this shit a war.

HERC
Why not?

CARVER
Wars end.

Some dialogue is written to feel naturalistic; the writers don't want to draw any attention to it. They want us to

feel as if we're eavesdropping on realistic situations—such as in the infamous scene of “all fucks” from *The Wire*. As they keep using the word over and over again, it becomes almost like a game between the two detectives. And then they want the only words to be the f-bomb in the scene. So it starts with the writer's agenda; the audience then starts to realize, “Oh, wow, these are the only words that are being spoken in the scene”. Then the detectives start to play off each other, and it becomes that game. It's a fun, interesting, unique way to show the relationship between the two detectives, to make it more than a typical, dry procedural that we've seen a million times. Since *The Wire* was an HBO show, the writers had the freedom to use the f-word. And this was fairly early in premium cable. A cable show is not limited by Standards and Practices, which controls what curse words can be said on a network. So it's possible to cut the characters loose and let them talk the way they really would. For good measure, here's the playful scene from episode ‘Old Cases’ (1.04):

[McNulty and Bunk arrive at an apartment building, to investigate the shooting of one of Avon's girlfriends.]

MCNULTY
Will you explain to me again why I'm about to rework a six-month-old crime scene?

BUNK
Look at this narrow-ass file.
Keeley didn't do shit on this.

MCNULTY
He did the scene, though.

BUNK
This is Keeley we're talking about.

MCNULTY
Fucking Jay and his leaps of logic. This case is nowhere near anything we're doing.

BUNK
So? Give it a shake or two anyhow.
—Make a sergeant happy.

MCNULTY
Whatever. Do you know Lester Freamon?

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BUNK

A little. Why?

MCNULTY

He's with us on this Barksdale thing.

BUNK

I thought you said they gave you humps.

MCNULTY

He looks like a hump, he acts like a hump, sittin' there, playing with his toy furniture.

BUNK

Jimmy, he makes more money off of that shit than you do off of this job.

—Don't let Lester fool you.

MCNULTY

He did already. Today in roll call, he showed something.

BUNK

Hey, he's natural police. He used to be Homicide.

MCNULTY

—Why did he leave?

BUNK

—Ask him.

MCNULTY

—This is the one?

APARTMENT SUPER

—Yup. Hasn't been rented since.

Bunk and McNulty enter the apartment. Bunk looks at the crime scene photos.

BUNK

Ah. Fuck.

MCNULTY

Motherfucker.

Bunk lays out the crime scene photos on the kitchen floor.

BUNK

Fuck fuck. Fucking fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

McNulty examines the autopsy file.

MCNULTY

The fuck?

BUNK

Fuck.

A tape measure snaps back on McNulty's fingers.

MCNULTY

Fuck!

Bunk places a photo on the window. Circles the spot of the bullet hole. Jimmy stands in the middle of the kitchen trying to measure where the gun would have had to have been held to get the victim's entrance and exit wounds. It doesn't make sense.

BUNK

Fuck.

MCNULTY

Fuck it. Mother fuck.

Bunk looks back to the photo on the window and the bullet hole he's drawn.

BUNK

Mother fuck.

Bunk notices the glass is on the INSIDE of the window, not the outside. The shooter was outside.

MCNULTY

Ah, fuck. Ah fuck.

McNulty leans up to the window to test the theory. Yep.

MCNULTY

Fuckity fuck fuck.

BUNK

Fucker.

McNulty and Bunk begin to search for the bullet.

MCNULTY

Ah fuck.

BUNK

Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck.

In the crime scene photos they see some plastic debris by the body.

BUNK

Mother fucker.

McNulty finds a lump in the fridge door.

MCNULTY

Fuckin' A.

McNulty uses some pliers to pick at it.

MCNULTY

Fuuuuuuck.

They find the bullet.

MCNULTY

Mother fucker.

BUNK

Fuck me.

They line up the shot to see where the casing would have landed. They step outside to find it. McNulty taps on the glass as if recreating the shot.

MCNULTY

Pow.

Bunk measures from McNulty's gun to find the casing. They dig in the grass. There it is!

7. THE ON-SCREEN LINE OF DIALOGUE IN EPIGRAPH AS FORESHADOWING

Each episode opens with a meaningful line that's going to occur in the episode, and part of the fun is figuring out how it's going to tie into the story. In 'Alliances' (4.05), the line of dialogue was:

"If you with us, you with us".

—Chris Partlow

Foreshadows: The various factions and alliances built within the episode and the show. Tommy Carcetti's (Aiden Gillen) political connections, as well as Chris Partlow's (Gbenga Akinnagbe) efforts to recruit Michael Lee (Tristan Wilds) into the Stanfield organization. It's really driven home by the later episode when Partlow helps Michael kill his abusive father.

'Mission Accomplished' (4.13):

"...We fight on that lie".

—Slim Charles

Foreshadows: The success of McNulty closing the Avon Barksdale case, as well as Brother Mouzone and Omar's success of finally killing Stringer Bell. David Simon also noted that Season 3 was supposed to be symbolic of the Iraq War.

Thoughtful epigraphs add to the poetry and genius of the show.

8. ANYONE CAN DIE ANY TIME

Viewers have become more sophisticated over time; the intelligent TV viewer knows that characters can die in the penultimate episode or season finale. But early on, *The Wire* set up the expectation that any character could die at any time (a precursor to that other famous HBO show). Though he was one of our main POV characters for the Barksdale organization in Season 1, D'Angelo "D" Barksdale is unceremoniously killed midway through the second season ('All Prolouge', 2.06).

The same could be said for the almost unkillable Omar Little, who fans were sure would stick around until the series finale, but is shot down while buying cereal by a young corner boy ('Clarifications', 5.08). *The Wire* never fails to surprise.

9. BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

The Wire interweaves a myriad of social problems into compelling storylines. The show succeeds in capturing a snapshot of life, which is complicated and messy. It takes the time—the slow burn—over episodes and seasons to break down the challenges for the urban poor. The success of the social/story approach has resulted in esteemed sociologists William Julius Wilson and Anmol Chaddha teaching *The Wire* at Harvard University:

Our undergraduate students will read rigorous academic studies of the urban job market, education and the drug war. But the HBO series does what these texts can't. More than simply telling a gripping story, *The Wire* shows how the deep inequality in inner-city America results from the web of lost jobs, bad schools, drugs, imprisonment, and how the situation feeds on itself.

Those kinds of connections are very difficult to illustrate in academic works. Though scholars know that deindustrialization, crime and prison, and the education system are deeply intertwined, they must often give focused attention to just one subject in relative isolation, at the expense of others. With the freedom of artistic expression, *The Wire* can be more creative. It can weave together the range of forces that shape the lives of the urban poor.

These storylines draw students into important academic research, such as sociologist Bruce Western's book *Punishment and Inequality in America*. His analysis shows that widespread incarceration of the urban poor aggravates economic inequality, masking the hardship in urban communities and producing a growing population of ex-convicts unable to find stable jobs to support their families (Chaddha and Wilson 2010).

The show has broken down barriers in story and its approach to addressing complex social issues. Creator David Simon even won a MacArthur fellowship—a "genius grant" that is normally intended for pioneering scientists and social scientists. *The Wire* "was an opportunity to tell stories about where we are as a society using narrative fiction to make some of the arguments we would have made with journalism," he said.

10. GRAY AREAS—AND NO EASY ANSWERS

The Wire gives plenty of characters the "choice between two wrongs", but a father's decision to help his son by informing on some very dangerous people is at the top of the list. In 'Bad Dreams' (2.11), after Ziggy Sobotka (James Ransone) shoots and kills an associate of The Greeks, he faces life in prison. His father Frank (Chris Bauer) feels immense guilt over pulling his son and his nephew Nick into this high risk life of crime. Frank approaches the FBI about informing on The Greeks in exchange for a softer sentence for Ziggy. This choice leaves Frank dead and the FBI no closer to catching The Greeks.

As Harvard's Wilson and Chaddha point out:

The Wire is fiction, but it forces us to confront social realities more effectively than any other media production in the era of so-called reality TV. It does not tie things up neatly; as in real life, the problems remain unsolved, and the cycle repeats itself as disadvantages become more deeply entrenched. Outside the world of television drama, sociologists aim to explain what causes certain social conditions and then assess the merits of competing theories. The solutions, however, are usually less clear. *The Wire* gets that part right, too.

Trying to steer the young Dukie away from the crime and drug trade in his neighborhood, former gang member Cutty tells him that the "world is bigger than that". With a tinge of hope that his life might be different, Dukie asks, "How do you get from here to the rest of the world?" The response: "I wish I knew" (Chaddha and Wilson, 2010)

Consistently brilliant during its run and standing the test of time over a decade since the series finale, *The Wire* will continue to be the benchmark to meet, or better, for generations to come.

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