

Ethical Considerations of True Crime Entertainment on Victims' Loved Ones

By Jordan Ori

True-crime media is rapidly increasing in popularity. Scholarship often labels the genre as “unethical” without offering a solution. In my paper I analyze 3 mediums of true-crime entertainment—dark tourism, television, and podcasting—through 3 case studies.

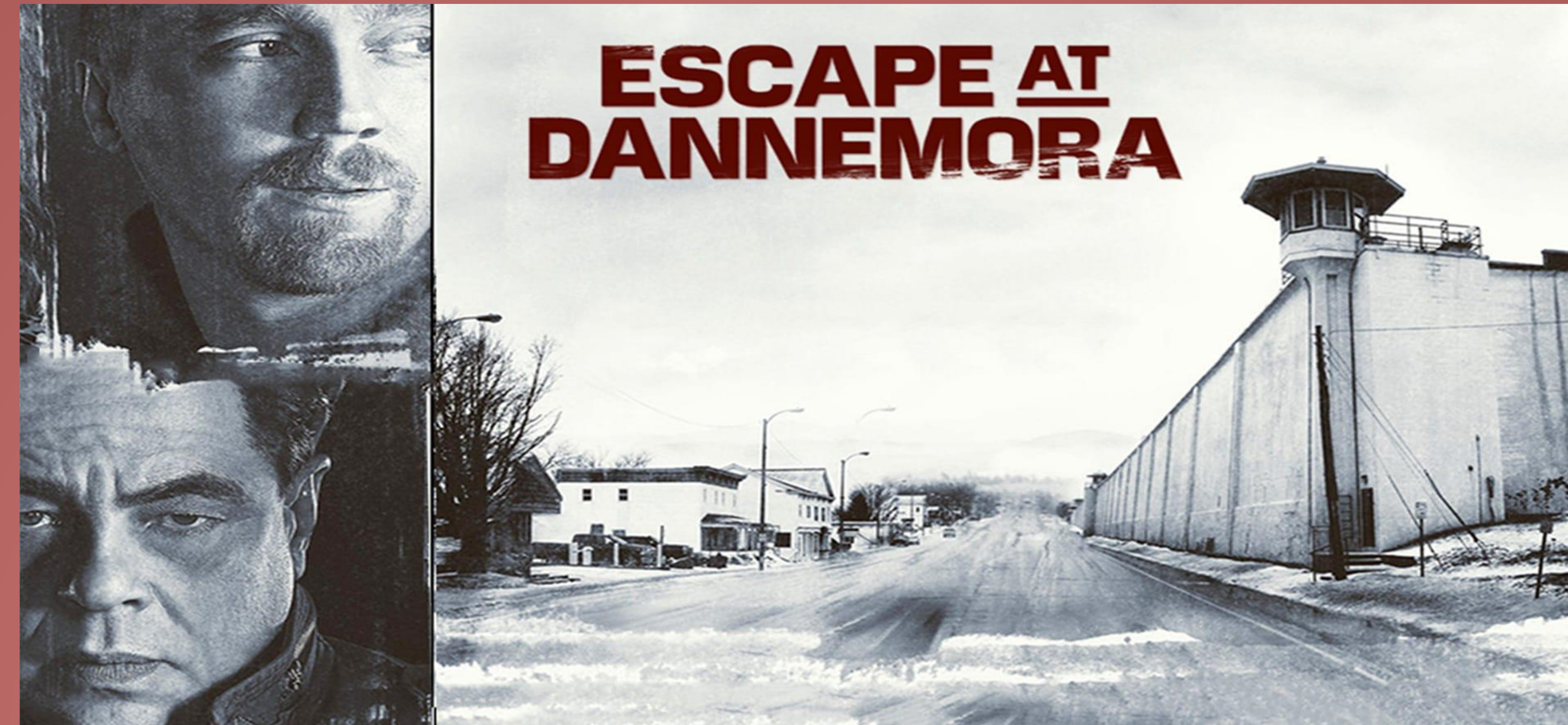
Case studies:

1. Dark Tourism: The Lawson Family Murders and their cultural legacy on Stokes County
2. TV: *Escape at Dannemora* and the impact on Tarsia's friends and my interviews with them.
3. Podcasts: *Serial*, social justice, and the differing opinions of the Syed and Lee families

Analysis:

1. When done respectfully dark tourism can be used to grow local economies and provide a community with a shared cultural history.
2. True-crime television shows should make an effort to donate a portion of the profits to non-profits, community organizations, or the families themselves.
3. We owe it to victims and their loved ones to be hyper-critical of what we choose to consume. Before pressing play, we have an ethical responsibility to ask: Who is making this podcast, and why?

True-crime entertainment should be shifted to raise awareness and foster *Victim Advocacy* to reduce the harm done to loved ones



example of VICTIM ADVOCACY:

Deputy Kevin Tarsia Memorial Scholarship

- Yearly \$500 award
- Open to residents of Broome County
- For graduating high school seniors
- Pursuing a criminal justice career



Scholarship Link



References & Full Paper



INTERVIEWS WITH FRIENDS OF KEVIN TARSIA

Renee Swan and “Jane,” friends of Kevin Tarsia whose murder was depicted in the show *Escape at Dannemora*:

Question: Do true-crime shows desensitize or educate us?

Swan: “They could open up conversations around some really harsh subjects, like murder, like why that would happen in the first place, and discuss the mental health disorders that are out there. I'm not against talking about things in an adult conversation. I do believe that's not being done with many of these”

Jane: “I don't know about the “education” part - is it educating people on ways to kill somebody? It's probably more desensitizing in my opinion, as it happens quite often, and seems like more and more everyday.”

Question: What, if anything, do the creators of true crime media owe to the loved ones of victims?

Swan: “If they're going to report on something that's tragic, they should have a funding site or donation site available.”

Jane: “I think maybe they should pay the loved ones of victims every time they air any of it.”