

# **I Am the Night – Color Me Black**

Season 5, Episode 27

## **Theme**

This episode deals with the themes of racism and capital punishment. It was written in reaction to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, and as an indictment on racism in the American South.

## **Synopsis**

In a small town, a man named Jagger is about to be executed, after being found guilty of murder. Sheriff Koch is conflicted about the situation. Deputy Pierce reflects the attitude of the town people, who hatefully look forward to the hanging of Jagger. Jagger has killed a Klan White Knight, and there is some dispute as to whether or not Jagger should have been convicted of murder, or if he killed the bigot in self-defense.

On the morning of the execution, the sun does not rise, and it is still dark out as 9:30, the time of the execution, approaches. Koch discusses the darkness with Colbey, a newspaperman, who reports that people are beginning to panic and speculate as to the cause. Reports indicate that only their town is affected by the darkness.

Colbey challenges Koch and Pierce on Jagger's guilt; it is revealed that the victim was a violent, dangerous racist, and that there were clues at the crime scene that renders Jagger's guilt uncertain. Colbey also speaks to Jagger and tells him that despite the victim's behavior, it was not up to him to dispense justice.

The town gathers to watch the execution. Rev. Anderson is asked if there might be a theological explanation for the darkness but the minister has no clear answer. As the townspeople clamor for Jagger's death, Rev. Anderson acknowledges that Jagger was attempting to defend the black community by killing a racist; Jagger retorts that he'll please everyone by

suffering and dying in front of them, and he refuses to apologize for his actions.

The reverend beseeches him not to return their hate, and asks how Jagger felt when he killed the man. As it is revealed that Jagger enjoyed killing the racist, the reverend announces that he is, then, guilty. Jagger is hanged, and the crowd watches, subdued.

The reverend tells the crowd that they are all as doomed as Jagger, and that the darkness is a result of their hatred and cruel behavior. As Koch, Pierce and Colbey discuss whether the sun will shine again, the radio reports that other areas of the world are going dark as well.

Note that one of the areas of darkness listed is Dallas, TX, as this episode was written as Rod Serling's reaction to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy.

## Lesson Summary

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| 1. | Opening  | 10 minutes |
|    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Welcome, especially new students or guests.</li><li>• Pass out nametags.</li><li>• Light chalice.</li><li>• Repeat opening words.</li><li>• 1 minute of silent meditation. Begin and end with the gong.</li><li>• Check in</li></ul> |            |
| 2. | Briefly introduce episode and show it  | 30 minutes |
| 3. | Zone to Zone   | 5 minutes  |
| 4. | The Discussion Zone  | 20 minutes |
| 5. | The Fifth Dimension (optional activity)  | 10 minutes |
| 6. | Closing  | 1 minute   |

Total Class Time:

76 minutes

## **Zone to Zone**

Have participants gather in the center of the room. Designate one corner of the room as “agree” and the other as “disagree”. Read the following statements and have the participants go to the corner that best describes their belief.

- Racism is still a problem in the United States.
- Capital punishment should be against the law in all circumstances.
- More people practice hate than practice love toward others.
- I have prejudices.
- If someone kills another person, s/he should also die.

## **The Discussion Zone**

- There are questions raised as to whether or not Jagger received a fair trial. He killed a racist and it is clear that the racist’s views, and not Jagger’s, more accurately reflect the views of the majority of the townspeople. What does this say about the criminal justice system’s ability for fairness when prejudices are the norm and a community is biased? What are the implications for a justice system with a jury of society members, if the society itself is fundamentally “unjust”?
- What does Sheriff Koch mean when he says, “Here we are, gentlemen, treading water in a sewer.” How did personal biases and ambitions play a part in the outcome of Jagger’s trial?
- Rev. Anderson attempts to bridge the divide between men of different faiths and different color. Why didn’t Jagger want to talk to him at all?

- Do you think Jagger was guilty of murder?
- Why did Rev. Anderson proclaim that Jagger WAS guilty of murder?
- Jagger states, "It's important to get with the majority, isn't it?" and Rev. Anderson responds, "That's all there is, just the majority. The minority must have died on the cross two thousand years ago." What did Rev. Anderson mean?
- What was the darkness? How do you think hate really affects our lives? Which is easier: love or hate?
- What do you think the majority of people think about race today? How has this contributed to practices and social habits that have become the norm?
- Why do people listen to others who espouse hate? Why do they sometimes follow people who promote hate, contempt and malice toward others?
- Is the group of people who are not afraid to stand up in behalf of others a minority? Are those that choose love over hate a minority? Are you in the majority or minority?
- What do you think about capital punishment? Do certain crimes deserve capital punishment?
- Rod Serling's closing narration: "A sickness known as hate; not a virus, not a microbe, not a germ - but a sickness nonetheless, highly contagious, deadly in its effects. Don't look for it in the Twilight Zone - look for it in a mirror. Look for it before the light goes out altogether." What does he mean?

## **The Fifth Dimension** (optional activity)

Darkness was used to symbolize hatred in this episode, cleverly used to place the state of the country and the world in context during this era. As the episode concluded, darkness had been noted in other parts of the country and world:

- a busy street in Dallas (the Kennedy assassination)
- the Berlin Wall (communism vs. democracy)
- Birmingham (race riots)
- North Vietnam (at this point, an under-reported and escalating conflict)
- Budapest (Soviet invasion)
- Chicago (race riot)

Have the class research and discuss one or more of these events in context of this episode.