

## Nine for IX Film Discussion Guide: *Venus VS.*

### Key Concepts:

- Racism
- White Privilege
- Social Class
- Intersectionality
- Role Model
- Gender Equality
- Gender Pay Gap
- Male Power
- Sexism
- Hegemony
- Sport And Politics
- Sport Marketing & Sponsorship

### Discussion Questions:

1. How did the “unconventional” Venus Williams challenge the traditionally White and upper-class establishment of tennis? In what ways was she discriminated against because she did not fit the traditional mold of tennis players?
2. Discuss the multiple ways in which Venus Williams was/is a pioneer, role model and an agent of social change? What is Venus Williams’ legacy to tennis and women’s sport?
3. How did Venus use her socio-political capital to achieve equal pay at Wimbledon? How was the fight for equal pay similar and different for Venus (and the other women players) in the 2000’s compared to Billie Jean King’s fight in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s? What role did men, and specifically former Women’s Tennis Association CEO Larry Scott, play in the fight for equal prize money?
4. Why were the individuals in positions of power at Wimbledon reluctant to provide the women equal pay? How might their reluctance be related to gender and power?
5. What reasons did some of the male players give as to why women didn’t deserve equal prize money? Are these reasons justifiable? What kind of knowledge or ways of knowing might the men be basing their opinions (i.e., personal theory, scientific evidence, method of authority)?

6. For the women and their advocates who were fighting for, and believed in equal pay, what was their rationale for asking for equal pay? Can you think of other reasons not mentioned in the film to support or refute the idea that women tennis players should be paid the same as their male counterparts?
7. When Venus was criticized for wearing beads in her hair and subsequently penalized for a hair bead falling onto the court, many argued it was an example of racism. Alternatively, Nancy Spencer (2004) wrote “Others dismiss charges of racism in women’s tennis by noting that it cannot be about racism because there are Black players who have been welcomed onto the tour in recent years—for example, Zina Garrison, Lori McNeil, and Chanda Rubin.” How can constructs such as race logic, scientific racism, commodity racism, or cultural racism be applied to Venus Williams in general and the “bead incident” specifically?
8. In what ways in the film is the idea of hegemony present?
9. Who is responsible for fighting for gender equity? Why might some athletes be reluctant to fight for gender equity, social justice, or other politicized issues?
10. While the tennis establishment has historically excluded people of color and was hesitant to accept the Williams sisters, how did tennis benefit from their subsequent endorsements, commodification, and marketability?
11. Sport is one of the most powerful social institutions worldwide and often influences societal trends. Given all the four tennis Grand Slam tournaments offer equal pay for men and women, what explanations can you give that would help explain why a gender pay gap persists in other sports and in workplaces outside of sport?
12. Can you think of examples in other sports where the Key Concepts list at the beginning of this guide are present?

**Additional Readings:**

Douglas, D.D. (2005). Venus, Serena and the Women’s Tennis Association: When and where race enters. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 22, 256–282.

Douglas, D. D. (2002). To be young, gifted, black and female: a mediation on the cultural politics at play in representations of Venus and Serena Williams. *Sociology of Sport Online*, 5(2). Retrieved from <http://physed.otago.ac.nz/sosol/v5i2/v5i2.html>

Flake, C., Dufur, M., & Moore, E. (2013). Advantage men: The sex pay gap in professional tennis. *International Review for The Sociology Of Sport*, 48(3), 366-376.

Hilliard, D. C. (1984). Media images of male and female professional athletes: an interpretive analysis of magazine articles. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 1(3), 251-262.

Schultz, J. (2005). Reading the catsuit: Serena Williams and the production of blackness at the 2002 U.S. Open. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 29, 338-357.

Spencer, N. E. (2004). Sister Act VI: Venus and Serena Williams at Indian Wells: "sincere fictions" and White racism. *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, 28(2), 115-135.

Vincent, J., Pedersen, P. M., Whisenant, W. A., & Massey, D. (2007). Analyzing the print media coverage of professional tennis players: British newspaper narratives about female competitors in the Wimbledon Championships. *International Journal of Sport Management & Marketing*, 2(3), 7.

#### **Additional Activities:**

1. What is Venus Williams currently doing both on and off the court?
2. Investigate other African American tennis pioneers, both male and female.
3. Google images of Venus and Serena Williams, and White tennis players such as Maria Sharapova and Victoria Azarenka. Are there differences and similarities in how they are portrayed?
4. Read the letter Venus Williams wrote and published in *The Times* (London) before Wimbledon in 2006 and that British Prime Minister weighed in on during a Parliament session: <http://people.tribe.net/shawnfassett/blog/55a72e04-157d-4757-acf4-55314b6357ee>

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