

Not Us – Pitch Deck

A Cinematic Case Study by Kenye “De’one Foster” Rollins

LOGLINE: When four teens from wildly different worlds are sentenced to a juvenile program, their stories of survival, privilege, pain, and rebellion begin to collide. Together, they discover that healing is louder than silence—and sometimes, the system is the villain hiding in plain sight.

One-Page Summary

'Not Us' is a raw, emotional ensemble drama following four teens—Jamal, Emilia, Wilbert, and Audrey—who meet at a youth rehabilitation program. Each arrives carrying a storm: Jamal hides bruises from a fractured home, Emilia evades ICE while feeding her siblings, Wilbert battles identity under the rule of a conservative father, and Audrey masks her privilege with pills and perfection. Their lives slowly interlock as they're forced to confront who they are, how they got here, and whether the world will ever allow them to be free.

What begins as punishment becomes resistance—against generational trauma, broken systems, and inherited shame. The title 'Not Us' is a double entendre: a declaration from youth refusing to be stereotypes and a haunting question—how can this be the 'land of the free'? Not this system. Not this silence. Not this suffering. Not us.

Sociology Meets Cinema

As a sociology student and storyteller, I believe film is one of the most powerful tools for examining the structures that shape our lives. 'Not Us' is not just a screenplay—it is a cinematic case study. Each named character serves as a reflection of a different systemic burden: immigration, generational trauma, poverty, policing, homophobia, and privilege.

Not Us isn't just the next film I want to make—it's the film I need to make. As a storyteller rooted in sociology, I've spent years studying the systems that shape our lives. As a Black Southern filmmaker, I've lived through many of them. Not Us is where those two roads meet.

This script was born from observing the real stories unfolding around me—kids criminalized for being poor, for being undocumented, for being too quiet, too loud, too queer, too Black. Every character is a study in survival. Every scene is stitched with truth. I didn't write this film to offer an answer, but to ask the right questions: What happens when healing is punished? When silence is protection? When the system is the villain?

Made with the same heart and discipline that brought Grandma's Sweet Potato Pie to life for under \$2,000 in just three days, this film is my next step—not in budget, but in boldness. *Not Us* is a cinematic case study and a mirror. It's both a resistance and a reach. A cry from the youth saying, 'We are not who you think we are,' and a cry to the nation: 'Not us—not this country. Not this pain.' I'm not making this film to prove I can. I'm making it because I must.

Every Character Is a Case Study

- Jamal: The son of addiction and abandonment, learning to break generational cycles.
- Emilia: A working-class undocumented teen balancing survival and silence.
- Wilbert: A queer Southern boy drowning in silence under a conservative roof.
- Audrey: A girl born into privilege but emotionally neglected—wrestling with inherited guilt.
- Each youth's story isn't just fictional—it's a dramatized sociological profile.

Every named character in 'Not Us' offers a layered, emotionally demanding role. From Ms. Go to Hank, from T'Layah to Sonia—these are roles that challenge, transform, and spotlight emerging talent. The script offers rare opportunities for a fully diverse ensemble cast to shine across age, race, and identity.

Story Arcs

- Jamal: A protector shaped by pain. His arc is about redefining manhood and choosing empathy over violence.
- Emilia: A fighter buried by duty. Her arc is about surrendering silence and learning to accept help.
- Wilbert: A quiet creator under siege. His arc is about reclaiming expression and rejecting shame.
- Audrey: A privileged outsider unraveling. Her arc is about shedding perfection, confronting guilt, and becoming an ally.

How I Write Villains

I don't write villains—I write systems. The true antagonist of 'Not Us' isn't a person but a network: poverty, racism, family cycles, immigration law, and performative allyship. Every character who causes harm—Hank, Big Joe, ICE, Mike at the store—is not cartoonishly evil, but shaped by their conditioning. The story challenges the audience to question what happens when we stop blaming individuals and start dismantling environments.

Why a Budget Matters?

'Not Us' doesn't need a budget to have meaning—but it deserves one to elevate its power. This is already a cinematic story. The script carries the emotional gravity, the visual symbolism, and the authenticity. Production funds would not create the magic—they would help reveal the magic that already exists on the page.

I am seeking \$25,000 in pre-production funds to bring 'Not Us' to life with the care, craft, and clarity it deserves. This investment will not go toward excess—it will go toward justice, visibility, and unforgettable art. Help us not just make a film—help us make a statement.

Visually, 'Not Us' balances realism with poetry:

- Warm tones for Ms. Go's kitchen. Harsh fluorescents in Junvie Center. Static wide shots for T'Layah's home.
- Inspired by Barry Jenkins' use of stillness, Ava DuVernay's social lens, and the ensemble heart of 'The Chi.'
- Close-ups capture vulnerability. Color shifts subtly reflect emotional changes (gray in youth center, golden hues during moments of hope).

The title *Not Us* is a layered statement. On one level, it's their collective rejection of the stereotypes projected onto them—'we are not who you think we are.' On another, it's a quiet scream toward a failing nation: *Not us. Not this country. Not the home of the brave. Not the land of the free.* The film becomes an elegy and a battle cry: a plea for a better 'us.'

Proof of Execution: Grandma's Sweet Potato Pie

My debut film, 'Grandma's Sweet Potato Pie,' was produced on a \$2,000 budget and filmed over just 3 days. It has already earned festival nominations, secured Prime Video distribution, and spotlighted my ability to stretch a dollar without compromising artistic integrity. I don't waste money—I multiply it.