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BELLY OF THE BEAST

A FILM DIRECTED BY ERIKA COHN



COMMUNITY DISCUSSION GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

This guide is designed to help you lead a discussion of *Belly of the Beast*, to engage more deeply with issues in the film, and to present options for further learning, discussion, and action. *Belly of the Beast* offers an entry point into conversations around reproductive justice, medical ethics, human rights, and the law. Today's focus on institutional racism and the criminal justice system makes now an especially relevant time to engage in conversations about the systemic denial of the rights of people who are incarcerated.

Whether you are a system-impacted individual, a member of an affected community, or a student learning more about systemic racism and the carceral system, leading a discussion of *Belly of the Beast* may be challenging. The film is likely to expose you to new issues and may test your beliefs and perceptions about race, class, and justice.

The film also exposes issues that may impact your politics about the prison system and those living within it. You may believe there should be an end to state systems of incarceration and policing, or you may be seeking concrete ways to reform the system that exists. As you identify with people who are most affected by this debate, there may be moments when you change your mind. Be open. We hope that hearing the stories of those who have faced injustice, including the formerly incarcerated, persons living with disabilities, women of color, and trans people will offer an opportunity for real dialogue.

Finally, the film raises topics that are not easy to discuss. Issues relating to health and bodily autonomy may be taboo in many communities. Stories of forced sterilization bring up the inherited trauma of physical abuse that dates back to slavery and the Eugenics era. A hysterectomy is a personal and often painful matter. Similarly, the decision to have a child raises deeply spiritual, physical, and emotional concerns that are personal to each individual. We hope that, as you watch, you can be gentle with yourself and others as you bear witness to, discuss, learn more, and explore possible avenues for action.

ABOUT THE FILM

Film Synopsis

When a courageous young woman and a radical lawyer discover a pattern of illegal involuntary sterilizations in California's women's prison system, they take to the courtroom to wage a near-impossible battle against the Department of Corrections. With a growing team of investigators inside prison working with colleagues on the outside, they uncover a series of statewide crimes – from dangerously inadequate health care to sexual assault to coercive sterilizations – primarily targeting women of color. But no one believes them. This shocking, real-life legal drama captured over seven years features extraordinary access and intimate accounts from currently and formerly incarcerated women, demanding our attention to a shameful and ongoing legacy of Eugenics and reproductive injustice in the United States.



Film Team Bios



Erika Cohn is a Peabody, Emmy and DGA Award-winning filmmaker who Variety recognized as one of 2017's top documentary filmmakers to watch and was featured in DOC NYC's 2019 "40 Under 40." Most recently, Erika completed *The Judge*, a Peabody Award-winning and Emmy-nominated film about the first woman judge appointed to the Middle East's Shari'a courts, which premiered at the 2017 Toronto International Film Festival and was broadcast on PBS' 2018 Independent Lens series. She co-directed/produced, *In Football We Trust*, an Emmy award-winning, feature documentary about young Pacific Islander men pursuing their dreams of playing professional football, which premiered at the 2015 Sundance Film Festival and was broadcast on PBS' 2016 Independent Lens series. Erika studied at Chapman University (California) and Hebrew University (Jerusalem) and has degrees in Film Production, Middle East Studies, and Acting Performance. In 2013, Erika founded Idle Wild Films, Inc., which has released three feature documentaries and produced numerous branded content and commercial spots, including Gatorade's "Win from Within" series, for which she received a 2016 Webby award nomination. *Belly of the Beast* is her third feature-length documentary. Erika is represented by APA.



Angela Tucker is a writer, director and Emmy nominated producer who works in narrative and documentary genres. Her directorial work includes "All Skinfolk, Ain't Kinfolk", a documentary short which aired PBS' Reel South about a mayoral election in New Orleans; *All Styles*, a narrative feature currently available on Amazon; "Black Folk Don't", a documentary web series that was featured in Time Magazine's "10 Ideas That Are Changing Your Life"; and *(A)sexual*, a feature length documentary about people who experience no sexual attraction that streamed on Netflix and Hulu. She is in her ninth year on the PBS strand, "AfroPoP", now as a Co-Executive Producer, and is the producer of *Belly of the Beast* (dir. Erika Cohn) which broadcasted on PBS' Independent Lens in the fall of 2020. Her production company, TuckerGurl, is passionate about stories that highlight underrepresented communities in unconventional ways. A Visiting Professor at Tulane University, Tucker was a Sundance Institute Women Filmmakers Initiative Fellow. She received her MFA in Film from Columbia University.



Christen Hepuakoa Marquez holds a BFA in Film and Video Production from New York University's Tisch School of the Arts. In 2011 she Produced the narrative feature film *Two Shadows*, which went on to win the audience choice award for Best Feature Narrative at the Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film festival. In 2012 she completed her documentary directorial debut in partnership with PBS Hawai'i on an hour-long program called *E Haku Inoa: To Weave A Name* which was nominated for Best Documentary at the 2013 Los Angeles Asian Pacific Film Festival. The film premiered nationally on PBS in 2013. Her work has been supported by Cal Humanities, The Independent Television Service (ITVS), and Pacific Islanders in Communications. Her work has been broadcast by Discovery, Nat Geo, PBS, Oxygen, and Netflix.



Nicole Docta is a documentary producer who has focused her career on socially impactful projects and BIPOC stories. She Co-Produced the Emmy-nominated *As Goes Janesville* (Independent Lens 2013). Nicole was the Outreach and Engagement Coordinator for the Emmy award-winning *In Football We Trust* (Sundance 2015). She Associate Produced the Peabody Award-winning and Emmy-nominated *The Judge* (TIFF, DOC NYC, IDFA 2017), which aired on Independent Lens in 2019. She is a Producer on *Belly of the Beast* (HRWFF 2020) Directed by Erika Cohn and Co-Producing *Through The Night* (Tribeca 2020) by Director Loira Limbal. Nicole is also a Special Initiatives Producer at Firelight Media.



Kelli Dillon is the Co-Chairperson for the Empowerment Congress Southeast Neighborhood Council. She is a survivor of domestic/gang violence and an advocate for violence prevention and intervention programs. Kelli found herself incarcerated at the age of 19 and was sentenced to serve a 15-year sentence. Her case intensified from a domestic violence incident, in defense from preventing an attack from her abuser. While in the California Department of Corrections, she began her advocacy and community social work, assisting fellow inmates with counseling and social justice issues. Since that time, Kelli continues to advance in education and has received certifications of training in the areas of Anger Management, Domestic Violence, Batterer's Intervention Program, Art Therapy, HIV/STI Education and Peer Advocacy, Homeless prevention,

and Sociology. In 2014, Kelli worked as an advocate with Justice Now, Inc. alongside Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson on the SB 1135 Anti-Sterilization Bill. Her testimony was key in helping the Senate and Gov. Jerry Brown pass this bill into law, to ban unlawful and non-consensual sterilization of California prisoners. Kelli has received several awards for her passionate work and continues to volunteer her time in the community of Los Angeles. Kelli is now the Vice President of the Empowerment Congress Southeast Neighborhood Council and newly appointed Commissioner and Board Member for the Department of Community and Family services. In addition, she is the founder and executive director of Back to the Basics, a community empowerment organization and outreach program.



Cynthia Chandler has dedicated her life to achieving gender and racial justice while challenging violence in all its forms, including imprisonment. Cynthia is an always-bold founder, coach, and life-learner with over 25 years' experience as a social entrepreneur, activist, academic and attorney. In collaboration with HIV-positive activists in prison, she founded the first organization advocating for HIV-positive women in prison. She co-founded Critical Resistance and Justice Now, early prison industrial complex abolitionist organizations influencing the Black Lives Matter network. She has coached the launch of dozens more social ventures. As an attorney, her practice is equally innovative: when law does not allow the relief she seeks for her clients, she changes it. She helped create the compassionate release legal process through loopholes in the law, representing the

first terminally ill people granted release from prison in California. Her cases became the case studies used to codify the process in California, and later nationally. She uncovered California's coercive sterilization of women in prison through 2012, and led efforts to pass successful legislation to stop it. Cynthia maintains a legislative practice, contributing to key legislation aimed at shrinking imprisonment. In all her work, she serves as an ally and coach, supporting disenfranchised people in realizing their own solutions for freedom. Cynthia has received numerous awards for her innovative work, including: California Women Lawyers' prestigious Fay Stender Award, 2015; Women's Health Activist Network's Top 30 Activist for Women's Health, 2005; Ford Foundation Leadership for a Changing World Award, 2001; and California Law Business' Attorney to Whom California Can Be Most Grateful, 1997. Cynthia received her JD from Harvard Law School and a MPhil in Criminology from University of Cambridge. She is the mother of two artists and scholars.

Letters from the Team

Letter from Director/Producer Erika Cohn

Centering the narrative around the experiences of those inside the “belly of the beast” shifts the lens through which we view crime, punishment, and rehabilitation. Amidst a time of exploding prison populations, disproportionate incarceration of people of color, privatization and overcrowding, our criminal justice system is in crisis. Women of color are the fastest growing prison population, yet there’s a profound lack of resources and dedicated attention to and interest in women’s incarceration. Additionally, the immense dehumanization and fear of retaliation often inhibits incarcerated people from voicing their stories, further marginalizing an already “near-invisible population.” Until now, this film has remained undercover both to protect the privacy of participants inside prison and to preserve campaigns to end sterilization abuse. It is my hope that by shining a light on the healthcare and human rights abuses inside prison, ***Belly of the Beast*** will become a rallying point to call attention to other instances of modern-day Eugenics and reproductive injustice.

For many of us, prisons are so far out of sight, out of our consciousness, far from our physical reach – we are rarely granted access to worlds behind bars that aren’t dramatized or sensationalized. I wanted to reimagine how we visualize imprisonment, using imagery that evokes memory and passage of time, contrasting confinement and freedom...viscerally placing the viewer within intimate, vulnerable and uncomfortable spaces. From the shots of anxious feet dangling from the pelvic exam table, to the first-person POV gurney shot rolling into surgery, to the camera peering down the shower drain – water droplets splashing in swirling slow motion – our team pursued a cinematic language that conjured the notion of consent...how can informed consent be obtained behind prison walls?

Turning back the clock to 2010, when attorney Cynthia Chandler and I first met:

I was incredibly inspired by her compassionate release work and intrigued by Justice Now, one of the only – if not the only – US organizations with board members in prison. I was haunted by their “let our families have a future” campaign, which exposed the multiple ways prisons destroy the human right to family, one of the most heinous being the illegal sterilizations primarily targeting women of color.

This screamed Eugenics. As a Jewish woman, the phrase “never again” was always profoundly in the back of my mind. Cynthia invited me to volunteer for Justice Now and I became a volunteer legal advocate, providing direct service needs for over 150 people in California’s women’s prisons. Without their mentorship, support and wisdom – this film would not exist.

A few years later, Kelli Dillon and I met in Los Angeles, where she was working as a community intervention specialist on domestic violence prevention and gang intervention. We began collaborating on a variety of projects, including ***Belly of the Beast***. The more I learned about her experiences as a survivor, her courage and selfless advocacy for others, I felt the film really needed to center around her story. As we reveal in the film, Kelli’s discoveries catalyzed Justice Now to begin investigating the illegal sterilizations in prison, through which we meet other survivors.

We are witnessing population control and systemic racism through policing, imprisonment, the immigration detention system and lack of access to healthcare. I believe ***Belly of the Beast*** is a part of the broader conversation that highlights these injustices, advocates for lasting change, and calls for immediate redress. I truly believe if we hold our institutions and state actors who have committed harm accountable, we can prevent future abuses from happening. We are literally at the precipice of creating lasting change. We have to confront our eugenic history and prevent a new genocide from occurring.

Letter from Producer Angela Tucker

Thousands of Black women have been sterilized without their knowledge or consent through state enforced Eugenics programs. This is a history that most people do not know about, but it is an open secret in communities of color. As a Black woman, I had heard these stories. I always knew someone should make a film about modern day Eugenics practices to bring these injustices to light. Then, in 2017, I met filmmaker Erika Cohn at the Sundance Film Festival. She reached out to meet up about her project, *Belly of the Beast*, which needed a producer. In our meeting, she told the story of Kelli Dillon and I was immediately hooked. Kelli is truly unique. She has a way of being so tough but exhibiting so much vulnerability all at the same time. She is a true warrior and I knew her story – the stories of women fighting for justice – needed to be told. The journey to make *Belly of the Beast* has been truly life altering.

Letter from Kelli Dillon

Someone in prison has to put their freedom on the line, risking their parole date, or potentially adding time to their current sentence, by funneling out (through an underground system) information to make sure that people in the “free world” know what’s going on. I have found that men are more willing to make these sacrifices, because women have the disadvantage of worrying about our children, our parents. By nature, we are givers of life and preservers of life. If I want to take the chance to get information out, the one thing I’m going to think about is that they might not allow me to see my kids, and that might stop me.

I’m hoping that audiences will be invoked to demand justice for the survivors and ensure that the unlawful and non-consensual sterilizations don’t continue throughout our country. That people will look into the prison system and practices in their own state. I want them to actually see our faces and understand the human side of what’s happening. In the climate of the Trump administration and the no longer hidden racism that’s so proudly expressed on all forms of media, I’m anticipating that we’re going to have some viewers who applaud the fact that these things have happened to people of color. Some might say, “they don’t deserve to have children anyway.” I hope the takeaway when we hear those types of comments will further expose the true heart of America – the racist, power hungry America that uses horrific practices such as Eugenics, biological experimentations, and murder to maintain control. We proclaim to be the champions of the American Dream, liberation, and equality, yet, we are the wolf in sheep’s clothing. We invite people in to eat them alive or enslave them and strike the whip of discrimination upon their back to get production out of them.

In light of *Belly of the Beast* being released during the COVID-19 pandemic, I hope we can talk about the disproportionate amount of Black people and people of color who are not receiving the level of care that allows them to have a better quality of life or healthcare needed to survive this particular outbreak. The sterilizations in California state institutions mirror the same medical negligence, as well as the medical inequality and unfairness that most people experience in prison. Whether it’s sterilization abuse or withholding medical care in order to reduce the population of people of color, it’s another strategy, an octopus’ multiple tentacles that all lead to the nucleus head of racism, discrimination, and population control.

Right now, I am working on the California reparations bill AB1007, which provides justice and compensation for the survivors. Should it pass, it is evidence that California has a willingness to acknowledge the medical injustices, the medical malpractices, and the lack of respect for human life for people of color, in which they have suffered at the hands of the people who were supposed to preserve it and protect it. I believe the actual financial compensation that survivors will receive is a mere humble peace offering that should be handed with a public and sincere apology.

Letter from Cynthia Chandler

When I was 9-10 years old, my elementary school class showed up to school with permission slips for a circus field trip. Instead, we were taken on a scared straight trip to a local maximum-security youth facility. I lived in a racially divided town. The debasement of the caged children, who were all Black, was so gross, and the facility so blatantly inhumane and racist, that I left there knowing this system could not go on and I had to do something to stop it. The adults thought they were shaping us to live the straight and narrow. They birthed an abolitionist.

What an honor it has been to watch myself, my family, my work, and my movement grow over a decade on film! It also has been a challenge. Lawyers objectify their clients all the time - we reduce people's lives and experiences to small paragraphs of facts. This process has pushed me to reflect on the ways policy campaigns and legal arguments objectify spokespeople to caricatures through soundbites, and to see how that process can be done more or less violently and with more or less care. I am in awe of Erika Cohn's ethics; she worked tirelessly to ensure everyone in the film, especially people in women's prisons, was respected throughout the process, even as we were vulnerable or exposed.

The silence on imprisonment of women echoes the deafening silence on the disappearance and death of women, girls, and transgender people of color. The invisibility of people in women's prisons is emblematic of a lack of value placed on the health and well-being of women and transgender people of color and impoverished people of all races.

I feel that my and Kelli's relationship both embodies and transcends racism in America. We met as two young women. But for racism mixed with gender oppression, Kelli would not have been in prison for defending herself from violence, nor would she have been sterilized without her knowledge. But for racism, I would not have had access to educational privilege and been able to decipher what happened to her. Working across those divides to work to erode that system is arguably one of the most radical things we will ever do.

I hope people walk away from the film with a better understanding of the dangers of Eugenics and questioning the reliance on imprisonment as a go-to solution for many of our most intractable social problems. I hope there is a growing awareness of how destruction of the right to family - the denial of the right to create a future for oneself, one's family and one's community - is an insidious form of state violence and part and parcel of imprisonment and systems of slavery. Lastly, I want people to demand that people in prison who were sterilized have a right to know that that was done to their bodies, and no one should ever suffer denial of the right to bodily integrity.

We are not merely experiencing a pandemic; we are living in a eugenic moment of rising fascism: politicians and business owners are flippantly demanding the sacrifice of elders and people with preexisting medical issues for the betterment of capitalism and the State. "Essential" has become the adjective to sugar-coat the expendable working class, which is disproportionately women of color.

By giving a history to the dangers of eugenic policy and modeling modern struggle, I hope the film inspires activism and resistance. I hope it inspires people to make a better world - for, if people work together and persevere, greatness happens.



TIPS FOR FACILITATION

Belly of the Beast raises issues that may provoke difficult conversations. As a facilitator, you can create an atmosphere in which people feel safe, encouraged, and respected, making it more likely that participants will share their ideas openly and honestly. Here's how:

Preparing Yourself

- Identify your own hot-button issues. View the film before the event and give yourself time to reflect so you aren't dealing with raw emotions at the same time that you are trying to facilitate a discussion.
- Be knowledgeable. You don't need to be an expert on the issues, but knowing the basics can help you keep a discussion on track and gently correct misstatements of fact.
- Be clear about your role. You may find yourself taking on several roles for a single event, including host, organizer—even projectionist. If you are also planning to serve as facilitator, be sure that you can focus on that responsibility and avoid distractions during the discussion.
- Know your group. Issues can play out very differently for different groups of people. Is your group new to these issues, or are there members of your group already familiar? Factors like geography, age, race, religion, gender identity, and socioeconomic class all can have an impact on comfort levels, speaking styles, and prior knowledge. Take care not to assume that all members of a particular group share the same point-of-view or that the persons most impacted are represented in the group.
- To ensure a respectful and inclusive conversation, educate yourself on the most appropriate terminology to refer to system-impacted persons. For example, “incarcerated individuals” is currently preferred over “prisoners.” Others will follow your lead.
- Think about what biases you might possibly have and then examine them, knowing that you may not recognize them all. Be honest and open to discovery.
- Create community guidelines to disrupt potentially incorrect or otherwise problematic beliefs/statements.



Before Facilitating a Discussion:

- Watch the film beforehand and think about what questions and prompts might be most meaningful and effective for your community. If you are inviting others to facilitate a discussion, set up a preview screening for them beforehand.
- Think about who would be best to facilitate or co-facilitate a discussion. Reach out to local groups resources and experts to see who else might be available to join the discussion. For example, a local group might be working on this issue. Compensate people for their time.
- Set specific goals to help you design a powerful experience for your community and then refresh yourself on your goals prior to the discussion.

Additional Strategies for Leading a Successful Discussion:

- Problematic/inappropriate reactions - Decide beforehand how you might handle the situation if something problematic comes up. Feel free to listen and engage as appropriate, but try to keep the larger discussion focused. You can offer to talk with an individual in more detail after the discussion or ask others what they think about the question or comment that was made.
- “I don’t know” is okay - It is best practice to offer community members at least one very local resource, and a national resource for information and/or support. Always offer to follow-up with anything that you cannot answer in the moment.
- Disclosures - If a viewer is motivated to disclose their own experiences during the discussion or even afterwards, one-on-one, be prepared. Have resources, listen respectfully to what is being shared, and create a safe space in which voices and experiences are respected and valued.
- Secondary traumatic stress - When an individual hears about the first-hand trauma experiences of another, they might feel upset, or have difficulty processing the reality of these experiences. ***Belly of the Beast*** could be describing a personal experience for some students. In order to keep everyone safe, it is important to practice trauma-informed care, according to at least four basic principles:
 - Realize the prevalence of traumatic events and the widespread impact of a trauma such as domestic and government violence.
 - Recognize that someone seeing the film may be deeply impacted.
 - Respond by making sure that you let persons know beforehand that the film contains content that might be difficult to process. Make sure persons know that they can come to you if they need to step out or talk after or during the showing of the film.
 - Resist re-traumatization. Never force the issue. If you notice that the person is upset, affirm them and have them excused as appropriate.

RECOMMENDED QUESTIONS BEFORE WATCHING

Asking certain questions prior to watching the film can help participants take inventory of what they already know, what they learned, and how their perspectives shift.

1. What is your level of familiarity with incarceration and its effects? How do you think that will inform how you view the film? Do you have any impressions about incarceration and people who are imprisoned? What experiences have informed these beliefs?
2. Conversations about reproductive rights in the United States frequently center on the right to have (or not to have) an abortion. However, 'reproductive justice' is a term created in 1994 by a group of black women, who recognized that the women's rights movement, led by and representing middle class and wealthy white women, could not defend the needs of women of color and other marginalized women and trans* people. What does the term reproductive justice mean to you?

DISCUSSION TRACKS (BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION PROMPTS)

Discussion tracks are included here to isolate important themes and information. Each track contains background information and discussion prompts. You can choose to focus your discussion on one of these themes or expand the conversation further. These tracks are intended to help you identify and distill essential ideas and can be a useful reference point.

Kelli's Story: A Look at Incarceration and the Destruction of Family

Background

- In 2006, the Federal Courts placed the California state prison system in court receivership to bring it up to constitutional standards.
- Attorney Cynthia Chandler helped Kelli Dillon access her medical records and discovered that Kelli had been sterilized without her consent. It was extremely difficult to obtain these medical records, which Kelli had a right to access.
- As a result of Kelli's organizing inside prison, Justice Now uncovered hundreds of cases of persons being sterilized during unrelated surgeries, around the same time as Kelli.
- In 2006, Kelli became the first sterilization survivor to sue the California Department of Correction and Rehabilitation (CDCR) for damages in hopes of holding them accountable. Justice Now secured one of the top law firms in California to represent Kelli pro-bono.
- The state audit of CDCR and prison records reveal that nearly 1,400 sterilizations occurred in California prisons between 1997-2013. A sterilization is one of a number of medical procedures that intentionally leaves a woman or man unable to reproduce.
- The doctors who operated on Kelli while she was incarcerated removed her ovaries and a portion of her fallopian tubes. She did not have any emergency requiring this, and the sterilization was performed without her consent.

Background Continued

- Dr. James Heinrich, a Valley State Prison Ob-Gyn from 2005-2012, reportedly made a habit of eating while he was performing pap smears on incarcerated individuals. He also had a history of lawsuits that resulted in settlements.
- Kelli Dillon is Black, and the jury in her original case was predominantly White. They believed the doctors' version of events, found CDCR not guilty, and did not award Kelli any damages.
- Before Kelli's trial, a whistleblower sent the minutes of a then-recent CDCR Gender Responsiveness committee meeting to Justice Now. The minutes revealed that the committee discussed the cost-effectiveness of sterilizing incarcerated people during labor and delivery.
- While Cynthia Chandler and Justice Now advocated for reproductive rights for individuals incarcerated in women's prisons, they were met with comments like, "Well, those women wouldn't really want to have more children anyway, would they?"

Discussion Prompts:

- Do you have experience with medical racism? How does that inform how much you trust those who give you medical care?
- Do you believe it is possible to give consent to medical procedures in a carceral environment? Why or why not?
- Why do you think that people who are incarcerated are frequently referred to by numbers instead of names? How does this practice contribute to patterns of abuse?
- In the film, Kelli tells us that she first reached out to the police, but they did not view her as a victim and therefore did not help her.
 - How do race and class affect how police treat women when they report domestic violence? Can you find news articles relating to this issue?
 - Discuss Kelli's quote after the trial: "As a Black woman, my life wasn't sh*t."
- Kelli was sentenced to prison for killing her husband, who had hurt her and her children. In the film, we learn that 92% of women who are incarcerated are survivors of abuse. Does this surprise you? Do you know of any services and programs to help address this problem in your community?
- How do you view Cynthia and Kelli's relationship? What did you notice about the way that Cynthia approached her work?
- Discuss the significance of Kelli's graduation. Why do you think this was included in the film?
- In what ways does the process of imprisonment itself place limits on reproductive freedom or act as a form of reproductive oppression?
- What do you think are the most urgent changes needed to the criminal justice system?

A History of Eugenics

Background

- There was a major eugenics movement in the United States before and after World War II that sought to “rid the country of the feeble-minded.” By the 1930s, over 30 states had passed laws allowing for coercive sterilization.
- Between 1909 and 1979, California sterilized over 20,000 people, more than any other U.S. state (one third of all 60,000 sterilizations).
- Nazi leaders came to California to study the state’s sterilization program and then used the lessons to create their Eugenics program in Germany.
- After World War II, population control, enacted through welfare and birth control policies targeted at women of color, became the new version of eugenics.
- There were government-sponsored campaigns to sterilize Indigenous, Puerto Rican, Chicana, and Black women.
- In the decades after World War II, doctors around the country performed hysterectomies on Black women simply to practice the surgeries.
- In 1979, the 1909 California law that authorized the use of sterilization by state homes and hospitals for those deemed “unfit for reproduction” was repealed.
- Many women who had C-sections performed by CDCR between 2006 and 2009 also received “tubal ligation additions.”
- When incarcerated individuals speak out about abuses, they often fear retaliation.
- Despite a federal ban, correctional facilities across the U.S. still sterilize people for birth control purposes. The full extent of the problem is unknown.

Discussion Prompts

- In the film, we learn that Nazis came to California to study the state’s sterilization program and apply their learnings to the Nazi’s Eugenics program. Did you know that? How does that make you feel?
- Dorothy Roberts says that after World War II, “the Eugenics movement went underground” and became an issue of population control enacted through welfare policy and birth control policy targeted mostly at women of color. What do welfare and birth control policies share with eugenics? How do these policies perpetuate institutional racism and injustice? How do they act as a form of reproductive oppression?
- Besides imprisonment, what other policies and systems exist in the United States that are subtle (or blatant) manifestations of modern-day eugenics?
- In what ways has motherhood been and is criminalized in communities of color?
- What did you learn from the film about medical experimentation in communities of color?
- After viewing the film, who do you feel is valued and not valued in U.S. law and culture?

Advocacy and Policy Change

Background

- In 2013, Corey Johnson of the Center for Investigative Reporting began researching the history of eugenics in California. Johnson worked with Justice Now to get access to data and individuals inside the prisons.
- The Center for Investigative Reporting reported that 150 tubal ligations occurred in California prisons between 2006-2010.
- Following the Center for Investigative Reporting's article and as a result of the hearings in the California legislature, the state audited Prison Health Care Services.
- CDCR officials used a cost-benefit analysis as a justification for sterilization procedures, arguing that the end of saving tax dollars justified the means.
- The whistleblower who sent the minutes from a CDCR committee meeting to Justice Now aided the passage of the Prison Anti-Sterilization Bill (SB 1135).
- Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson sponsored SB 1135 with the intent of making it clear that sterilization was illegal. This "sunshine bill" highlighted existing law and legal precedent banning sterilization for the purpose of birth control in correctional facilities - already illegal under state, federal, and international law.
- The state audit of CDCR and prison records reveal that nearly 1,400 sterilizations occurred between 1997-2013.
- In 2014, SB 1135 passed with bi-partisan support and was signed into law by California Governor Jerry Brown, bringing an end to forced sterilization.
- After the passage of SB 1135, people in prison began experiencing retaliation through denial of medical care and removal of visitation rights. None of the CDCR doctors or officials faced consequences for their actions.
- In 2019, California legislators introduced a bill to provide reparations for people who were involuntarily sterilized under California's previous Eugenics laws from 1909 to present day.



Discussion Prompts

- Corey Johnson of the Center for Investigative Reporting wrote an exposé in 2013 that helped to bring awareness to the issue of forced sterilization and spurred the statewide audit of CDCR's health services and the passage of SB 1135. What role does journalism play in activism and social change?
- In a recent case, Dawn Wooten, a nurse at an U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detention center in Georgia, acted as a whistleblower when she revealed a pattern of medical neglect and unwanted hysterectomies. What parallels are there between what happened in the ICE detention center and in *Belly of the Beast*? What is a whistleblower? How can they affect change? What potential consequences do whistleblowers like Dawn Wooten face?
- Erika Cohn, the film's director, volunteered as a legal advocate for years before making the film. Her involvement in the movement gave her access to information and people that others would not have had. In addition, Cohn involved Kelli Dillon and Cynthia Chandler in the film and the production process. Discuss the role of building trust and having access to people, information, and places in telling a story.
- In the film, one of the women who testifies on behalf of SB 1135 states that it is a fundamental human right to make all decisions regarding one's reproductive concerns. In your words, what is a human right? Why do you think the United Nations identify reproductive choice as a human right?
- Discuss why the film's protagonists are fighting for a reparations law to be passed in California. What are reparations? What role do you think they play in healing processes? North Carolina was the first state in the nation to pass a law providing reparations to survivors - however, many sterilization survivors were left out due to a technicality. Learn more about the North Carolina law [here](#) and discuss how this model could be improved and implemented in other states. Discuss what justice could look like for Kelli and other survivors.



DELVE DEEPER

- Read about The Hyde Amendment on p. 34 in the [Reproductive Justice Briefing Book: A Primer on Reproductive Justice and Social Change](#) and Abortion Matters to Reproductive Justice! on p. 79 in the same book. Research the term 'reproductive justice' and explore how abortion and sterilization are both issues of reproductive justice.
- In the film, after the passage of SB 1135, we learn that CDCR began blocking advocates from coming in to visit with incarcerated individuals. This backlash grew after the COVID-19 pandemic revealed problems with healthcare in California's prison system and the prison officials blamed the insufficiencies on Kelli's lawsuit. Listen to this [Democracy Now! episode](#) to learn more. Research how activist initiatives are frequently met with backlash.
- Research the reparations bills that have been passed in North Carolina and Virginia to compensate survivors of forced sterilization. Decide what worked well about these bills and what needs to be added or removed.

Delve Deeper Continued

- Research the history of forced sterilization in the United States. Be sure to research which populations have historically been subject to sterilization and what laws have been passed to allow for or prohibit the practice. What do your findings tell you about who is valued and who is not valued in U.S. law and culture?
- Read the academic articles [The New Eugenics: Black Hyper-Incarceration and Human Abatement](#) by James C. Oleson and [Reproductive Justice Disrupted: Mass Incarceration as a Driver of Reproductive Oppression](#) by Crystal M. Hayes, Carolyn Sufrin, and Jamila B. Perritt, and watch [this lecture with Dorothy Roberts](#) from 52:25 – 54:34. Then have a discussion with peers about mass incarceration and reproductive oppression. Record the discussion and write a reflection about your own thoughts.
- [Read the decision](#) in the Supreme Court case of Buck v. Bell and the article [The Supreme Court Ruling that Led to 70,000 Forced Sterilizations](#). Conduct additional research on Buck v. Bell. Organize a discussion with your peers about the precedent-setting role of Buck v. Bell in the country's history of forced sterilization.
- Research the connections between the Prison Industrial Complex and slavery. Read [5 Ways America's Prison System Mimics Slavery](#) and [History Is a Weapon: Slavery and Prison – Understanding the Connections](#). Discuss your findings with your colleagues.
- Read [Policing the Womb: Invisible Women and the Criminalization of Motherhood](#) by Michelle Goodwin. Research local organizations that are working to end the criminalization of motherhood in communities of color and identify their theory of change. Volunteer if you are interested in supporting the work.
- Read about [the Relf sisters](#), African-American women who were forcibly sterilized at the ages of 12 and 14. [Watch the video](#). The Southern Poverty Law Center filed a lawsuit on their behalf, exposing widespread abuse. Engage in discussion with your peers about its legislative and policy impact.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Background Statistics

- Between 1980 and 2017, the number of incarcerated women increased by more than 750% (The Sentencing Project).
- Although many more men are in prison than women, the rate of growth for female imprisonment has been twice as high as that of men since 1980 (The Sentencing Project).
- Nearly 80% of incarcerated women are mothers (Vera Institute of Justice).
- Three quarters of incarcerated women are of childbearing age (between 18-44 years) (Bureau of Justice Statistics).
- 92% of people in California's women's prisons are survivors of abuse (ACLU). The demographics in women's jails are: 44% African American, 36% White, 15% Hispanic, 5% other (Vera Institute of Justice).
- The majority of women who are incarcerated are non-violent offenders and imprisoned for crimes of survival (Prison Policy Initiative).

Background Statistics Continued

- An estimated 92% of women in California prisons have been “battered and abused” in their lifetimes (ACLU).
- The US has the largest prison population in the world at 2.3 million incarcerated people, the highest per-capita incarceration rate, and the highest incarceration rate for women across the globe (Prison Policy Initiative).
- There are 231,000 women currently incarcerated in the U.S. and 1.3 million women under the supervision of the criminal justice system, including those on probation and parole (Prison Policy Initiative and The Sentencing Project).
- The vast majority of women (82%) are in jail for nonviolent offenses: Property Offenses 32%, Drug Offenses 29%, Public order offenses 21% (Vera Institute of Justice).
- The filmmaking team sent Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to states across the country, which confirmed that at least 8 states still perform sterilizations under certain circumstances. The full extent of the problem is unknown. (*Belly of the Beast*)
- Between 2006 and 2009, CDCR performed 222 cesarean sections (or C-Section, an invasive surgical operation for delivering a child by cutting through the wall of the mother's abdomen) out of 393 births, a rate of 56%. Comparatively, in 2009, the C-section rate was 32.9% in the general U.S. population. (*Belly of the Beast*)

Definitions

Carceral - related to prison or imprisonment

Eugenics- Advocates for reproduction by populations deemed “desirable” and works to stymie reproduction by those deemed “undesirable”

Hysterectomy - a surgery involved in sterilizations in which a person's uterus is removed

Informed consent - permission granted by a person having full knowledge of the possible consequences, typically that which is given by a patient to a doctor for treatment with an understanding of the possible risks and benefits

Medical Racism - the systematic and wide-spread racism against people of color within the medical system; includes both the racism in our society that makes Black people less healthy, the disparity in health coverage by race, and the biases held by healthcare workers against people of color in their care (as defined by the YWCA)

Reproductive justice - the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities (as defined by the nonprofit SisterSong)

Reproductive rights - rights that rest on the recognition of the basic right of all couples and individuals to decide freely and responsibly the number, spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health; also includes the right of all to make decisions concerning reproduction free of discrimination, coercion, and violence (as defined by the World Health Organization)

Reparations - a state remedy to repair a harm, such as serious human rights abuse suffered by a population or group of victims; in legal terms, the act of making amends, offering expiation, or giving satisfaction for a wrong or injury; types include restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and/or guarantees of non-repetition

Tubal ligation - a medical procedure involving the closing of the fallopian tubes, either by burning a small section of each tube (electrocauterization) or by placing a band or clip on each tub

BOOKS, PAPERS AND FILMS

- Alexander, Michelle. [The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness](#)
- Center for Women Policy Studies (2012, May). [Sexual Rights as Human Rights: Informing a Domestic Reproductive Justice Agenda](#)
- Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. [Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California.](#)
- Goodwin, Michele. [Policing the Womb: Invisible Women and the Criminalization of Motherhood.](#)
- Levi, Robin and Waldman, Ayelet (Ed.). [Inside This Place, Not Of It: Narratives from Women's Prisons.](#)
- Lombardo, Paul. [Three Generations, No Imbeciles.](#)
- Molina, Natalia (2006, March). [Fit to be Citizens? Public Health and Race in Los Angeles, 1879-1939 \(1st Ed.\)](#). Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press Berkeley
- [Reproductive Justice Briefing Book: A Primer on Reproductive Justice and Social Change](#)
- Roberts, Dorothy. [Fatal Invention: How Politics, Science, and Big Business Re-create Race in the Twenty-first Century](#)
- Roberts, Dorothy. [Killing the Black Body.](#)
- Ross, Loretta J. [The Color of Choice: White Supremacy and Reproductive Justice.](#)
- Western States Center. [Reproductive Justice 101: A Select History](#)
- Washington, Harriet A. [Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present](#)
- Oleson, James C. [The New Eugenics: Black Hyper-Incarceration and Human Abatement](#)
- Perritt, Jamila B. [Reproductive Justice Disrupted: Mass Incarceration as a Driver of Reproductive Oppression](#)
- Crenshaw, K. W., Ocen, P., Nanda, J. [Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced, and Underprotected](#)

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

POC Led Organizations Focused on Reproductive Justice

BLACK WOMEN FOR WELLNESS

Black Women for Wellness is committed to the health and well-being of Black women and girls through health education, empowerment and advocacy.

BLACK WOMEN'S HEALTH IMPERATIVE

BWHI targets the most pressing health issues that affect Black women and girls in the U.S. through investments in evidence-based strategies, bold programs and advocacy outreach on health policies.”

CALIFORNIA LATINAS FOR REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

California Latinas for Reproductive Justice (CLRJ) is a statewide organization committed to honoring the experiences of Latinas/xs to uphold our dignity, our bodies, sexuality, and families. We build Latinas'/xs' power and cultivate leadership through community education, policy advocacy, and community-informed research to achieve reproductive justice.

NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN'S HEALTH EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER (NAWHERC) REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE PROGRAM

Through the Reproductive Justice Program, NAWHERC works with a national, broad-based, and diverse coalition of Native American, women's health, and civil liberties organizations to move forward in an agenda to protect our health and human rights.

SISTERREACH

SisterReach is an advocate for the reproductive autonomy of women & teens of color, poor & rural women, LGBTQ+ and gender non-conforming people.

SISTERSONG

SisterSong is a Southern-based, national membership organization; our purpose is to build an effective network of individuals and organizations to improve institutional policies and systems that impact the reproductive lives of marginalized communities.

SPARK REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE NOW!

SPARK Reproductive Justice Now! is an organization dedicated to building new leadership, changing culture, and advancing knowledge in Georgia and the South to ensure individuals and communities have resources and power to make sustainable and liberatory decisions about their bodies, gender, sexualities, and lives.

POC Led Organizations Working to Support and Advocate for Women, Transgender Non Conforming People and People of Color Impacted by Incarceration

CALIFORNIA COALITION FOR WOMEN PRISONERS

CCWP is a grassroots social justice organization, with members inside and outside prison, that challenges the institutional violence imposed on women, transgender people, and communities of color by the prison industrial complex (PIC). We see the struggle for racial and gender justice as central to dismantling the PIC and we prioritize the leadership of the people, families, and communities most impacted in building this movement.

CALIFORNIANS UNITED FOR A RESPONSIBLE BUDGET

Californians United for a Responsible Budget (CURB) is a statewide coalition of over 75 grassroots organizations that is reducing the number of people in prisons and jails, shrinking the imprisonment system, and shifting public spending from corrections and policing to human services.

THE PROMISE OF JUSTICE INITIATIVE

The Promise of Justice Initiative is a non-profit organization that advocates for criminal justice reform, civil rights protections, the abolition of the death penalty, and ending other excessive inhumane punishments. PJI works alongside impacted men and women seeking fair and just treatment under the law.

THE WOMEN & JUSTICE PROJECT

The Women & Justice Project (WJP) advances the leadership and builds the power of women directly impacted by incarceration to transform the criminal legal system.

YOUNG WOMEN'S FREEDOM CENTER

Young Women's Freedom Center (YWFC) is a leadership and advocacy organization led by systems-involved young and adult women and transgender gender non-conforming (TGNC) people of color who have grown up in poverty, worked in the underground street economy, and have been criminalized by social services such as foster care, welfare, and the mental health systems. By offering safety, sister- & siblinghood, economic opportunities, accessible education and healing, we build self-determination, confidence and self-worth.

Organizations Working to Establish Community Resources and Advance Freedoms for POC within the U.S.

BACK TO THE BASICS

Founded by Kelli Dillon, Back to the Basics' Mission is to rebuild and restore community empowerment, safety, and economic wellness by providing education and resources that are accessible and offered to all members. We offer life education and management workshops that will assist to rebuild and re-empower lives.

PROJECT SOUTH

Project South was founded as the Institute to Eliminate Poverty & Genocide in 1986. Our work is rooted in the legacy of the Southern Freedom Movement, and four primary work areas achieve our mission of cultivating strong social movements in the South powerful enough to contend with some of the most pressing and complicated social, economic, and political problems we face today.

TAKE ACTION

Sign the Petition

[Sign the petition](#) to provide reparations for California forced sterilization survivors.

Host a screening

Interested in hosting a screening or discussion of ***Belly of the Beast*** for your community? After filling out a form with some details about your event, our team will follow-up to share resources and details with you on how to make it happen. [Sign up here](#).

Support an Organization

Join an organization in your local community working on issues of reproductive justice, racial justice and human rights. Not sure where to start? Look at our partner list above.

Spread the Word about the Film

The world needs to know about these abuses. Get the word out to your community via social media by using [our toolkit here](#).

Advocate

If you are moved by the issues in the film, contact your state representatives and local advocacy organizations for ways to support.

HOW TO ACCESS THE FILM

Belly of the Beast

The official website for *Belly of the Beast* where you will find information on upcoming screenings, how to host screenings in your own community, opportunities to take action, and more.

Women Make Movies

Visit our educational distributor for licensing information and to purchase a copy of the film with public performance rights.