

Peace Productions Presents



WAR

on the Family

**Mothers in Prison and the
Children They Leave Behind**

STUDY
GUIDE

www.peaceproductions.org

"I am convinced that our only hope of halting the onslaught of state violence that is crushing poor women of color, their children, and communities is to shine a spotlight on these mothers' daily struggles and courageous acts of resistance."

-Dorothy Roberts, Northwestern University School of Law

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A Note to Teachers

To be honest, until Renny Golden approached us in late 2003 with the proposal of adapting her book, *War on the Family*, into a documentary film, the idea of telling the story of incarcerated mothers hadn't even occurred to us. We had recently completed a film about the death penalty, and the two of us were active in various organizations and non-profits that addressed in some capacity the issue of criminal justice in the United States. And still, the story of incarcerated mothers was unknown to us. Who were these women? What happened to their children? After reading Golden's book, a combination of haunting first person accounts from incarcerated women and their children, and brilliant social analysis from the author, we both jumped at the opportunity to produce *War on the Family: Mothers In Prison and the Children They Leave Behind*.

The resulting film, like the book, is both desolate and sobering. This is not a feel good movie. It is not, however, without hope. Perhaps the greatest evidence of this lies in the fact that so many women were willing to share their stories and their lives with us. Over the course of production, we filmed over a dozen women and met many more. The stories they told us reflected staggering individual struggle against the societal obstacles of poverty, racism, and sexism. Often on camera for the very first time, they spoke of their shattered childhoods, the many abuses they have suffered, the horrors of prison, the torment of being separated from their children, and the shame associated with being labeled a criminal. But they are still here.

The fact that they are still here, they still tell their stories, speaks to something about the resilience of human spirit that is profoundly encouraging.

The trust and courage these women displayed to us, along with the astute insight given by various experts involved in this issue, made this film possible. We as filmmakers are deeply grateful to them. This film wasn't made to simply tell a story, however. Why did these women, many of whom had never met us before, agree to sit down with us and share their lives? We think it's because they knew that to begin addressing a problem as deep and as large as this, people must begin seeing, and then understanding, the tragic effects of what society has done to these women and their families. For too many, and for too long, they have been an invisible population.

Argentine filmmaker Fernando Solanas once said of his work, "The important thing is not the film itself, but that which the film provokes." We invite you as an educator to screen the film with your students and provoke further research, discussion and debate.

Thank you for your interest in this film and in this issue.

Sincerely,

Jackie Rivet-River
John Lyons
Filmmakers

ILLINOIS STATE LEARNING STANDARDS met by viewing **WAR ON THE FAMILY**

STATE GOAL 14: Understand political systems, with an emphasis on the United States.

Middle/Junior High School

14.A.3 Describe how responsibilities are shared and limited by the United States and Illinois Constitutions and significant court decisions.

14.C.3 Compare historical issues involving rights, roles and status of individuals in relation to municipalities, states and the nation.

14.D.3 Describe roles and influences of individuals, groups and media in shaping current Illinois and United States public policy (e.g., general public opinion, special interest groups, formal parties, media).

14.F.3a Analyze historical influences on the development of political ideas and practices as enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, the United States Constitution, the Bill of Rights and the Illinois Constitution.

Early High School

14.C.4 Describe the meaning of participatory citizenship (e.g., volunteerism, voting) at all levels of government and society in the United States.

14.D.4 Analyze roles and influences of individuals, groups and media in shaping current debates on state and national policies.

14.F.4a Determine the historical events and processes that brought about changes in United States political ideas and traditions (e.g., the New Deal, Civil War).

Late High School

14.A.5 Analyze ways in which federalism protects individual rights and promotes the common good and how at times has made it possible for states to protect and deny rights for certain groups.

14.C.5 Analyze the consequences of participation and non-participation in the electoral process (e.g., women's suffrage, voter registration, effects of media).

14.D.5 Interpret a variety of public policies and issues from the perspectives of different individuals and groups.

14.F.5 Interpret how changing geographical, economic, technological and social forces affect United States political ideas and traditions (e.g., freedom, equality and justice, individual rights).

STATE GOAL 16: Understand events, trends, individuals and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States and other nations.

Middle/Junior High

16.A.3a Describe how historians use models for organizing historical interpretation (e.g., biographies, political events, issues and conflicts).

16.B.3c (US) Describe the way the Constitution has changed over time as a result of amendments and Supreme Court decisions.

16.C.3b (US) Explain relationships among the American economy and slavery, immigration, industrialization, labor and urbanization, 1700-present.

Early High School

16.A.4a Analyze and report historical events to determine cause-and-effect relationships.

16.D.4a (US) Describe the immediate and long-range social impacts of slavery.

Late High School

16.A.5a Analyze historical and contemporary developments using methods of historical inquiry (pose questions, collect and analyze data, make and support inferences with evidence, report findings).

16.B.5a (US) Describe how modern political positions are affected by differences in ideologies and viewpoints that have developed over time (e.g., political parties' positions on government intervention in the economy).

16.B.5b (US) Analyze how United States political history has been influenced by the nation's economic, social and environmental history.

16.C.5b (US) Analyze the relationship between an issue in United States economic history and the related aspects of political, social and environmental history.

STATE GOAL 18: Understand social systems, with an emphasis on the United States.

Middle/Junior High School

18.B.3a Analyze how individuals and groups interact with and within institutions (e.g., educational, military).

18.C.3b Explain how diverse groups have contributed to U.S. social systems over time.

Early High School

18.B.4 Analyze various forms of institutions (e.g., educational, military, charitable, governmental).

Late High School

18.A.5 Compare ways in which social systems are affected by political, environmental, economic and technological changes.

18.B.5 Use methods of social science inquiry (pose questions, collect and analyze data, make and support conclusions with evidence, report findings) to study the development and functions of social systems and report conclusions to a larger audience.

STUDY QUESTIONS

INITIAL REACTIONS

What was your reaction to learning the majority of incarcerated women have been abused before they went to prison?

What did you think of the first hand descriptions of life in prison?

What was your impression of the children's visit to see their mothers in prison?

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

What is your interpretation of the poem that Pamela began and ended the film with?

What were some of the effects of the signing of the 1986 Anti-Drug Act?

How are US drug laws related to the prison industry?

Kathleen Kane-Willis said in the film, "The idea of incarcerating your way out of a drug problem is like treating AIDS by digging graves." What did she mean?

Pat Schlosser compared certain types of prison labor to "plantation labor." What is she referencing and why?

What impact did the removal of their mothers have on Stephanie and Donna?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What role do race, gender and class play in the criminal justice system?

What effect has the War on Drugs had on American society?

What effect has mandatory minimum sentencing for drug offenses had on American society?

Is imprisoning a non-violent drug offender effective? Why or why not?

Does society punish only certain kinds of addiction?

Should drug addiction be treated as an illness or a crime? Why?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

BOOKS

Golden, Renny. *War on the Family: Mothers in Prison and the Families They Leave Behind.* Routledge, 2005. The book on which the film is based, a powerful combination of first person accounts from formerly incarcerated women and piercing social analysis from Professor Renny Golden.

Magnani, Laura and L. Wray, Harmon. *Beyond Prisons: A New Interfaith Paradigm for Our Failed Prison System.* Fortress Press, 2006. A comprehensive look that offers an alternative approach to the crushing effects of the American prison system. Coauthored by Laura Magnani, who appears in the film.

Ritchie, Beth E. *Compelled to Crime: The Gender Entrapment of Battered Black Women.* Routledge, 1995. A devastating book that chronicles the experiences of African-American women in a New York correctional facility.

ADVOCACY GROUPS

The Justice Policy Institute

1003 K Street NW, Suite 500

Washington, DC 20001

202-558-7974

www.justicepolicy.org

The Community Renewal Society

332 S. Michigan Ave Suite 500

Chicago, IL 60604

312-427-4830

www.communityrenewalsociety.org

Chicago Legal Aid to Incarcerated Mothers (CLAIM)

70 East Lake Street, Suite 1120

Chicago, IL 60601-5959

312-675-0911

www.claim-il.org

Families Against Mandatory Minimums

1612 K St. NW, Suite 700

Washington, DC 20006

202-822-6700

www.famm.org

Grace House/St. Leonard's Ministries

1801 W. Adams

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312-733-5363

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