

THE CARRIER

ONE WOMAN'S STORY OF HOPE AND RENEWAL



A FILM BY MAGGIE BETTS

WRITTEN, DIRECTED AND PRODUCED BY MAGGIE BETTS. EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: BEN SELKOW. EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: ROLAND BETTS. PRODUCED BY JOEDAN OKUN AND BENJAMIN PRAGER. CAST: MUTINTA CHISEKO. COSTUME DESIGNER: KAT WESTERGAARD. EDITOR: DANIEL MILLER AND DAVID DELLA SANTA. EXECUTIVE EDITOR: CAMERON DINGWALL AND CAROLINE PENDER. EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: FLAVIA DE SOUZA. EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: CRAIG HOLZER. EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: SEETA GANDHIR. EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: DAVID HOGG.



The Carrier Discussion Guide

Director: Maggie Betts

Year: 2010

Time: 83 min

You might know this director from:

THE CARRIER is the first feature-length documentary film from this director.

FILM SUMMARY

The destructive power of AIDS has long been understood, but THE CARRIER is a film concerned more with the future than the past. Filmmaker Maggie Betts takes us into a remote village in Zambia, deep within sub-Saharan Africa that is the hotbed of HIV, introducing us to one family's plight against their allegedly doomed destiny.

28-year-old Mutinta Mweemba is an HIV-positive middle of three wives, pregnant with her fourth child. THE CARRIER takes us into her daily life, where we meet the HIV-positive husband and father named Abarcon, his two other HIV-positive wives, Brenda and Matildah, and the children who are at the mercy of their caretakers' fate. When Brenda loses her life to AIDS, the sorrow cuts deep. What will happen to the remaining members of this polygynous family? Will Mutinta and Matildah's unborn babies also be subject to early death sentences?

Traveling across the landscape of the tribal Africa, THE CARRIER places motherhood and the African female experience on center stage. Women care for women at the health center, tend to the house and children, and bear the burden of their seemingly uninformed husbands. As the village council - comprised only of men - meet to discuss their plight, the film speculates whether those deciding a community's fate truly understand the gravity of the situation. Ultimately, THE CARRIER manages to inject hope for an HIV-free world into a grievous tale of one family who represent a whole global community.

FILM THEMES

The vicious cycle of AIDS keeps spinning in sub-Saharan Africa. The factors perpetuating this deadly disease are many, but the outcome of the disease remains singular and sorrowful.

REAP WHAT YOU SOW

Mutinta and Abarcon's marriage is built on untruths. Abarcon's disloyalty and penchant for betrayal nurture a trail of ill fortune, including the death of his first wife Brenda, poor crop yield in his fields, and the contraction of HIV by his two other wives. And yet, Abarcon still doesn't adjust his behavior. Instead, he woefully ponders the cause of suffering in the lives of his family members, acting as a victim. In reality, the signs are glaringly apparent that his devious, dishonest ways are perpetuating the dark shadow cast upon his family members.

A MOTHER'S LOVE

The story of Mutinta and Matildah, both of who are HIV-positive and pregnant, is a tale of motherhood and the lengths a woman will go to for her child. Not wanting to punish her future children with the HIV virus, Mutinta decides to take birth control, unbeknownst to her husband. Falling pregnant nonetheless, her overwhelming concern rests in the well-being of her unborn child. We rarely hear about the health difficulties that Mutinta experiences herself, as she focuses all her energy on the life that is ahead, hoping in possibilities yet to be. While Abarcon carried on as if everything was as it should be, Mutinta and Matildah bear the burden of the future within them, revealing a mother's endless love and complete, selfless devotion.

MAN'S APPETITE

Laws governing the Keemba village in Zambia went unchallenged for years. According to the chief and village council who meet to discuss the HIV plight plaguing their community, men possess an uncontrollable sexual appetite. However, villagers are dying all around them, as the men - many of whom are married to multiple women - continue spreading this fatal disease to those helplessly at their mercy. Having first heard of AIDS back in 1979, the chief and council believe it is time to modernize the village's system of polygamy and free love for the insatiable male appetite. Polygamy, once considered a God-given right, is now understood to be bringing much more death than life.

ONE BABY'S DIAGNOSIS

When Mutinta finds out that she, an HIV-positive woman, is pregnant, so much becomes suddenly at stake. Besides being deeply concerned about the health and survival of her baby, a greater question arises: can they as a family, as an extended community, carry on with the grip of AIDS around their throats? In this sub-Saharan community, where HIV and AIDS hold the tightest grip, baby Maggie Mweemba's clear, healthy diagnosis brings hope and becomes symbolic of the community's future.

“This disease is real. If you choose to deny it, you're just killing yourself.”

Mutinta Mweemba

“The mom has to make sure she stays alive, otherwise the child will never make it because men don't care.”

Mutinta Mweemba

“If I die early, what will happen to this family?”

Abarcon Mweemba

FILM FACTS:

- Director Maggie Betts grew up in a wealthy community in New York, and her parents were friends with the George W. Bush family. Having graduated from Princeton University with a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature, and spending most of her time “unfocused and self-absorbed,” Laura Bush sat Betts down and told her it was time to become engaged with life, which led to her traveling to South Africa. Since then, she has advocated for the rights of women and children living with HIV and AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. Barbara Pierce Bush, daughter of George and Laura Bush, currently rents Betts’ West Village townhouse in New York City.
- Having screened *THE CARRIER* to family and friends, director Maggie Betts found that people unanimously expressed anger towards Abarcon.
- Portuguese explorer Francisco de Lacerda was the first European to visit Zambia, arriving in the late 1700s. Explorer David Livingstone was the first to see the waterfall on the Zambezi River, which he named Victoria Falls. Accounts of his travels throughout the region motivated missionaries, visitors, and traders to visit Zambia after his death in 1873.
- In 1964, Zambia became independent of the United Kingdom, which had declared it a colony in 1897. English is still the official language.
- Christianity is the official religion in Zambia, but a number of religious traditions are practiced.
- The population of Zambia is just over 14 million. Approximately 1 million Zambians are currently living with HIV/AIDS.
- 36 million people worldwide have died an AIDS-related death since AIDS was first recognized as a disease in 1981. Over 35 million people are currently living with HIV/AIDS, 3.5 million of them children. Nearly 70% of those living with HIV/AIDS are in sub-Saharan Africa, and the life expectancy in these countries is increasingly declining due to this continued epidemic.
- Polygyny, the form of polygamy where one man has a number of wives, is more common in Africa than anywhere else in the world. Proponents of polygyny state that the practice has a number of benefits: women are safer in a large household, a larger family can better cultivate the land in agricultural communities, men are ensured sexual gratification, and women are allowed time to rest between bearing children.
- There is a 15–45% chance that a mother with HIV will pass the virus on to her child if she does not take antiretroviral (ARV) medication. If a woman takes ARVs, the transmission risk drops to 5%.
- In 2005, 1 million Africans were receiving ARVs. That number jumped to 7.1 million by 2012 and during that same period, new HIV cases in sub-Saharan Africa decreased by 25%. HIV/AIDS is, however, still the 2nd leading cause of death in low-income countries.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Share this film. Give others the chance to be touched by its story.
2. Donate supplies, funds, or volunteer your time to [Develop Africa](#) - an organization that provides many different opportunities to help in the fight against HIV in Africa.
3. Support [the Global Fund for Women](#). They provide grants to advance women’s rights in sub-Saharan Africa.
4. Support [Stop AIDS Now!](#) - an organisation that provides a wealth of information on the extensive battle against AIDS.
5. Stop the spread of HIV in your community. Practice safe sex, use clean needles, and get tested. [Act Against AIDS](#) provides resources for people in the U.S.

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In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.