



Trapped Discussion Guide

Director: Dawn Porter

Year: 2016

Time: 90 min

You might know this director from:

Spies of Mississippi (2014)

Gideon's Army (2013)

FILM SUMMARY

Back in 1973, the infamous *Roe v. Wade* legal battle hit the U.S. Supreme Court, where a landmark decision legalized abortion across the country. The Constitution and its Amendments were combed through, and the highest judicial body in the nation ruled that abortion, at least under the first two trimesters of a pregnancy, was a legal action. Over 40 years later a number of TRAP laws (Targeted Regulation of Abortion Providers) are passed, particularly in the Southern States, and women's reproductive rights are once again under fire.

TRAPPED takes us to Mississippi, Texas, and Alabama, treading through the Southern picket lines of pro-lifers and into the clinics that are fighting tooth and nail to stay open. Lawyer-turned-director Dawn Porter, who became a filmmaker after her frustration at the lack of positive imagery of African-Americans in the media, presents a simultaneously heart-wrenching and heart-warming account of this battle. The rights many of us take for granted risk being revoked by the conservative religious right, and TRAPPED awakens our knowledge of the belief systems threatening equality and freedom.

This film is not a contentious 90-minutes of statistics, but rather a raw, bold look at the reality unfolding in the Deep South. As the battle reaches the globe-trotting Center for Reproductive Rights in Manhattan, ramifications for the entire U.S. are presented and a Supreme Court case—*Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt*—is prepared. As Dr. Willie J. Parker states, "We didn't want a lawsuit, but we're also not afraid to do all we can on behalf of women." As an active meditation on the behalf of individual rights, TRAPPED is a powerful film.

FILM THEMES

As abortion legislation passed over 40 years ago is placed on the butcher's block, a number of Southern U.S. States fight to provide a level of basic constitutional service to all women. Issues of race, financial status, and faith systems are unearthed as justice is threatened.

CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS AND UNDUE BURDENS

A woman's right to obtain an abortion was classed as constitutional law in 1973. But laws are rarely left unchallenged, and in the case of abortion, many people are fervently on the opposing side. In 1992's *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*, the term "undue burden" was added to lawbooks. By forcing clinics to close down and offering women very few abortion options, current TRAP laws endanger liberty by adding unnecessary stress. "Each year we have new legislation that attacks women's rights and reproductive rights from different angles," states Alabama Representative Napoleon Bracy.

POLITICS V. MEDICINE

TRAP laws do precisely what they set out to do. As June Ayers of Alabama's Reproductive Health Services puts it, "The purpose is to regulate us out of business. The function is a trap." By fabricating abortion health risks and turning a routine health procedure into a deeply contentious political issue, abortion providers are forced to turn away women in immense need. "They're letting politics trump medicine," states Dr. Willie J. Parker. By drafting legislation out of political wants, rather than tried-and-tested medical proof, a system is threatened and lives are often devastated as a result.

RACE, POVERTY, AND ABORTION

While anti-abortion laws are primarily enacted by wealthy white men, they mainly affect [poor and low-income women](#). While no racial or ethnic group makes up the majority of abortion patients, Hispanic and African-American women together represent [53 percent of these patients](#). Consequently, restricted abortion access should be viewed with the intersection of gender, race, and class in mind. In the film, Doctor Willie J. Parker links the heritage of slavery and having one's life controlled by somebody else with women's bodies and their reproduction being controlled. For him and many women, there is a correlation between abortion and the heritage of slavery whereby the freedoms of certain groups of people are controlled.

FAITH AND REPRODUCTION

The Christian Bible and its teachings are held up by pro-lifers as moral weapons of truth, proof that a person is created at conception, and that abortion is always murder. But as a group of abortion providers pray together in the name of a Christian God, fueling themselves with faith to fend off the pro-life protesters another day, religious beliefs are put to the test. It suddenly seems that religion is often (mis)interpreted to suit certain agendas. In the words of abortion provider Doctor Willie J. Parker, "The compassion that comes out of my Christian understanding is what has propelled me into action to do this work."

"I have a daughter. I want her to have a choice. That keeps me going."

Marva Sadler, Whole Woman's Health

"Constitutional decisions are about all of us. What it means to be human and to live in a free society is that each of us gets to make these decisions for ourselves."

Nancy Northup, Center for Reproductive Rights

FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:

1. What did you find to be the most compelling aspect of TRAPPED? What was the film’s greatest strength?
2. Do you have any personal experience with abortion? Discuss your present views on abortion. Do you remember how you first learned about abortion, and if it was presented to you in a positive or negative manner? Did this impact upon your present view?
3. Are you aware of the present state of abortion laws where you live? Is abortion a hot topic in your community?
4. Pro-life beliefs are more often than not connected to faith systems, primarily Christianity. Why does the church so adamantly argue a pro-life standpoint? Are the abortion providers in the film acting outside of their Christian faith by offering the services they do?
5. What was the lasting feeling you were left with once the film had finished? Were you compelled to action? Were you discouraged? Do you feel TRAPPED has the potential to steer any pro-lifers into the pro-choice camp? What positive impact can the film have?
6. Many people say that reproductive rights are fundamental human rights. Discuss. If a woman is unable to decide for herself whether or not to have a baby, how are her other rights affected?
7. TRAPPED focused primarily on abortion issues in the American South. Why do you think reproductive rights are so hotly contested in this part of the country?
8. In a separate article, Doctor Willie J. Parker of TRAPPED states, “I come from a heritage of people who know what it’s like to have your life controlled by somebody else. What’s most proximate to that reality right now is the direct control of women’s bodies and their reproduction.” Discuss the correlation between slavery and abortion.
9. The majority of women seeking an abortion in the U.S. are poor and either Hispanic or African-American. What could be some of the motivating factors for these trends?
10. Money and the control of wealth is often a motivating factor behind many political decisions. Is there any way in which you feel money factors into and/or fuels the pro-life movement?

NOTES:

FILM FACTS:

- TRAPPED premiered at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival, where it won the Special Jury Prize for Social Impact Filmmaking, in addition to being nominated for the Grand Jury Prize. The film also went on to be nominated for and awarded a number of other accolades, including the Stanley Kubrick Award at the Traverse City Film Festival.
- Director Dawn Porter was born in New York City, where her father was one of the only black photographers in the 1970s. After practicing law for five years, Porter felt that a creative aspect of her life was missing, which led her to work for ABC and A&E. Bothered by not seeing any positive images of black people, she moved into filmmaking. “I left my very cushy direct deposit job with health insurance and did something that meant something to me. My work now is truly an expression of who I am,” she stated.
- Legal restrictions applying only to abortion clinics are named TRAP laws (Targeted Regulation of Abortion Providers). There are three main types of TRAP laws: those requiring abortion clinics to be state-licensed and adhere to medical regulations; those requiring clinics to meet standards of ambulatory clinics; and those requiring doctors who perform abortions to receive local hospital privileges.
- [59%](#) of U.S. women obtaining abortions are mothers, and [49%](#) live below the poverty line.
- U.S. abortion was legalized nationwide in 1973.
- The Center for Reproductive Rights was founded in 1992 in New York City by Janet Benshoof, an American human rights lawyer, and describes itself as “the world’s only global legal advocacy organization dedicated to advancing women’s reproductive health, self-determination, and dignity as basic human rights.” Its work has altered reproductive policy in over 50 countries.
- In the case of *Whole Woman’s Health vs. Hellerstedt*, which was settled in June 2016, the U.S. Supreme Court reversed Texas law HB2, as it deemed the provisions of the law to present an undue burden on women and therefore be unconstitutional.
- Between 2010–14, global statistics show that 56 million abortions took place on an annual basis, equating to 25% of pregnancies ending in abortion. The Guttmacher Institute goes on to state that restrictive abortion laws do not equate to fewer abortions: where abortion is illegal, the rate is [37 per 1,000 women](#), as compared to 34 per 1,000 women where it is legal.
- Each U.S. state has its own abortion laws, but generally speaking, abortions are not performed after the 24th week of pregnancy. During the first 10 weeks, the abortion pill is administered. After that, an in-clinic abortion is performed.
- Six nations—the Holy See, Malta, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Chile—do not allow abortion under any circumstance.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Donate** to the [TRAPPED campaign](#), as the filmmakers work to bring their film to as many communities as possible in order to educate Americans on what is currently very much at risk in their own country.
2. **Spread** the word on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. The TRAPPED film [website](#) offers a number of ready-made tweets and social media entries you can copy and paste.
3. **Share** the film with your community. Regardless of how liberal abortion laws are in your society, take the time to reflect on how much has been done and how much is left to be done—locally and internationally.
4. **Watch** [VESSEL](#), another film addressing the extent women fight in order to receive help in ending an unwanted pregnancy in countries where abortion is illegal. An in-depth look at how alive the fight remains.

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