



feature documentary

NOTICE OF INTENT:

**THE PERIL
OF
THE BLACK WOMB**



Writer/Director

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WGA #: 2220599

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The Peril of the Black Womb

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OVERVIEW

If professional tennis player Serena Williams and superstar Beyonce were at risk of dying while giving birth, does the average black woman in America stand a chance? Notice of Intent: The Peril of the Black Womb explores the unbelievable maternal health crisis that currently exists in the United States of America, one of the wealthiest countries in the world. The film details the birthing experiences of two Black women. Unbeknownst to the audience, one is a physician and Harvard graduate, and the other is a struggling model and actress. What do the two have in common? Despite their station in life, they both nearly died while giving birth.

Based on qualitative research designed to highlight the personal stories of women and their experiences during the birthing process, poor maternal health outcomes among Black women cannot solely be attributed to social determinants like low income, educational attainment, or even access to health care. This film delves into tenets of structural racism and implicit bias within the government and healthcare system that create and memorialize policies and practices that ensure poor maternal outcomes for women of color.

A notice of intent is a legal document that outlines in detail why a person has cause to hold another accountable for their injury. As a nurse and lawyer, I read these notices to determine any culpability and possible compensatory measures. Telling these stories alongside the evolution of United States (U.S.) reproductive law and healthcare history, allows the audience to come to their own conclusion about why this is happening and what should be done to affect change.



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SCOPE OF FILM

- An overview of the maternal health crisis in the United States is discussed juxtaposed with the incredible improvements made in other countries. The disproportionate high morbidity and mortality rates for Black Women, in particular, is highlighted.
- Accounts of near-catastrophic birth experiences supply riveting yet informative firsthand knowledge of how Black Women experience care in the U. S. maternal healthcare space.
- An OB/GYN expert discusses common morbidity and mortality outcomes that plague the black birthing experience.
- A midwife shares a perspective of the holistic birthing experience identifying inequities in quality of care for black mothers while highlighting the historical role they have played
- Reproductive rights activists and legal experts provide historical law, policy, and practices that perpetuate inequality and reproductive injustice in the United States.

Where Have All the Midwives Gone?

Phyllis L. Brodsky, RNC, MS

Birthing, Blackness, and the Body: Black Midwives and Experiential Continuities of Institutional Racism

Keisha La'Nesha Goode, Graduate Center, City University of New York

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OUTLINE

1. The two women are introduced. They each give a brief description of their initial pregnancy journey. The audience does not know their background (Harvard educated medical doctor vs. struggling actress).
2. A medical expert in the OB/GYN space speaks to the current overall maternal health crisis in the United States versus the rest of the international healthcare community which is experiencing better maternal outcomes yearly.
3. A midwife shares considerations of the social determinants of health for Black women and how this impacts the care they provide which focuses on communal health and implementation of unique care models such as Centering Pregnancy for better birth outcomes.
4. The two women give details of their maternal healthcare, i.e. perinatal assessments/doctor's visits, birthing resources, insurance/payment issues, and mental health. They relay their excitement about the new baby's arrival and being a mother.
5. A reproductive rights activist and attorney discusses the history of health inequality and reproductive injustice in the United States.
6. The two women tell the catastrophic details of their birthing experiences. At times, they say the exact same words.
7. A medical expert in the OB/GYN space explains what happened in each case and the prevalence (e.g. preeclampsia, hypertension, hemorrhage).
8. The medical expert and reproductive rights activist/attorney each give a synopsis of what can be done to affect change.
9. Each woman discusses the aftermath of their experience and their current physical and mental health. They show a picture of their children, who also survived.
10. Their occupation and education are revealed. The audience now sees education, income, insurance status, etc. had no effect on how the two were treated or their near-death birthing experiences.



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LENGTH, DISTRIBUTION & MEDIA

Target Length: 75 minutes

Distribution and Media: To maximize audience and exposure, the distribution plan will include broad-spectrum film festivals such as Sundance, Tribeca, and South by Southwest (SXSW). We will also submit the film to more targeted film festivals such as DOC LA. Los Angeles Documentary Film Festival, San Francisco Documentary Festival, The American Black Film Festival, Martha's Vineyard African American Film Festival, and Another Experiment by Women Film Festival. PBS, BET and streaming services will be approached. Mu Films and Black Public Media distributors are also viable options.

Audience: The target audience for Notice of Intent: The Peril of the Black Womb is widespread as the maternal health crisis has been brought to the forefront with new reporting by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the National Institutes of Health. While there have been singular reports from national news outlets exposing the horrific birthing experiences of black women, even some that proved fatal, none have presented the related historical law, policy, and practices that perpetuate inequality and reproductive injustice in the United States. This is a new take that offers solutions that a wide range of professionals and interested stakeholders can utilize to ignite change, including healthcare providers, women, families, education, and cultural change groups/institutions. We will also use social media, the internet, and academic platforms throughout post-production to broaden the audience for the finished film.

Video: Live interviews of participants in natural or home settings. Live interviews of experts in their prospective professional environments. Approved archival and historical footage. Additional visual storytelling using stills of participants and their families and personally posted online videos (Facebook, YouTube, Tik Tok, Instagram). FuFu + Grits, a professional production company, will shoot and edit the film.

Music: Cleared music by contracted artists.

Location: Multiple cities across the U. S.

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PRODUCTION ELEMENTS, STYLE & TONE



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Production Elements: This is an expository documentary that is meant to act as a “notice of intent” to inform those that deliver and use the U.S. healthcare delivery system of the hidden dangers and backward thinking associated with the birthing process in our country. Historical accounts and current practices are brought out of the dark unknown as the real story develops in full color, bringing awareness to racist laws, policies, and practices that are taking the lives of Black mothers--no matter their wealth or societal standing.

Style: There will be vibrant, exciting visuals, straightforward narration, and thought-provoking storytelling that come together to create fertile ground for viewers to understand what is at stake, allowing them to come to their own conclusion as to what is happening in our country and what might be done to affect change.

Tone: It is the darkest right before the light of day. While the storyline leans toward despair, the voice of activism and courage will truly shine throughout the film.

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CHARACTERS

Birthing Mothers

Birthing Mother #1: A Harvard School of Medicine graduate. She is married and has two children. She works at a large healthcare system and currently serves as the Chief Equity Diversity Inclusion (EDI) Officer. She is insured. She received excellent prenatal care and is well prepared for the birth. She knows the ins and outs of the healthcare system. She did not have trouble with her first birthing experience.

Birthing Mother #2: A high school graduate. She is a single mother of two. She is a struggling model and actress. She works in a local department store as a sales clerk. She has insurance but with high copays. She received prenatal care. "I never missed an appointment." She was on Medicaid at one point. She did not have trouble with her first birthing experience but felt she was treated "rough" and was not listened to.

Experts

There is a practicing OB/GYN physician and faculty member from a well known university healthcare system. A dean of a respected university law program who is also an award-winning author of several books that cover critical issues related to reproductive justice. Finally, a celebrated reproductive health activist completes the team.

Narrator/Interviewer

The narrator has a unique position and perspective in that she reviews and investigates these types of cases and/or notices of intent. She is also an RN, lawyer, author, and EDI consultant. She works for a respected, large university healthcare system. She also owns an organizational culture/transformation consulting firm.



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CREW



FuFu + Grits

We celebrate Black culture as a means to connect what makes us beautiful. We use our talent to share human experiences and welcome all that can get behind that. We create what we want to see in the world, collaborate with others who wish to do the same and enjoy ourselves while doing it.

While we celebrate what makes Black culture uniquely beautiful, we do so knowing the disparities we face. Finally, we're filling the void in the professional creative industry that needs more variety. Doing what you enjoy most is the spice of life, and we're here to spice things up.

See our award-winning work [HERE](#).



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DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I am number nine of ten children. To say we, numbers nine and ten, are close is an understatement. My sister and I share everything, including a love for helping others. She is a physical therapist, and I am a nurse. When she called, and said she was going to the emergency room for a severe headache and elevated blood pressure. I panicked. Why would a nurse have panicked? I had seen too many things go wrong—especially for black women in the postpartum period.

Her newborn was barely a month old, and we both knew what she was experiencing was abnormal. As we would later learn, the rate of hypertensive crisis in the postpartum period had been increasing in the United States for years. Left undiagnosed and treated, this condition can lead to heart attack, kidney disease, stroke, or death. Though we were scared, through continued advocacy, we found a doctor who specialized in the type of care she needed. Other Black mothers have not been so lucky.

Each year in the United States, hundreds of women die during childbirth or the year after. Thousands more have unexpected outcomes post-pregnancy with serious short- and long-term health consequences. Every maternal loss is tragic, especially because more than 80% of pregnancy-related deaths in the U.S. are preventable.



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DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I am a nurse dedicated to patient advocacy and safe healthcare delivery. After finishing law school, I have added skills related to investigating adverse events in healthcare, determining causation, and making recommendations for change. I used all my skills to assist my sister, and we received a positive outcome—a healthy mother and baby. After that experience and continued reports of the devastating consequences for black mothers, I knew I had to create a work and a subsequent movement that led to notable change.

I have read the accounts and watched the news events about the horrible birthing experiences of notable figures like Serena Williams, Beyonce, and Tori Bowie. The families and friends of lesser-known women have also worked to keep their lives at the forefront, i.e., Shalon Irving, Kira Johnson, April Valentine, and many more. Through my extensive research and work with experts, I have learned that the gaps in relating the critical aspects of this issue are most evident when it comes to explaining the history (Why are we here?) and the path to change (How do we save lives, NOW?).

Notice of Intent: The Peril of the Black Womb builds the necessary bridge across this narrative chasm. This is not a story of despair, it's a roadmap to salvation for Black mothers.

If you are asking yourself what a nurse or lawyer (or a combination of the two) knows about great storytelling, read on.



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DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Joann Wortham is an author, playwright, and director. She resides in Los Angeles, California. Though most of Joann's work has been in live theater, she is also well-known in the healthcare space for looking into dark corners and addressing themes of healthcare injustice, social reform, and human healing through short films and theater-based learning. Her bestselling book, *EDI is the New Black*, received rave reviews and was recommended by *Forbes*. It was touted as one of the best new books on organizational equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) transformation. This expertise adds to her ability to direct interviews and structure stories centered in EDI tenets.

Her work includes *How to Mary the Bank* (2013), *Cherry Picking with Mr. Bean* (2015), *Kinley: God as Man* (documentary, 2016), *Redo Love* (2019), *Baby Steps* (short film, 2023).



Actress & Comedienne Miss
Laura Hayes

The show opens with the musical talents of nationally known *Damon Berry* and *The Movement*, singing and performing hits from the 70's, 80's, 90's and now, leaving no generation out, bringing audiences to their feet!

About J.R. Wortham and "How To Marry The Bank"

J.R. Wortham, a playwright and novelist originally from New Orleans, Louisiana, joined the West Coast scene after Hurricane Katrina's devastating blow to her Gulf Coast life in 2005.

Wortham, an ardent lover of dramatic theatre, with roots that run deep as both an actress and writer, first wrote and produced *Kingdom* for a private client, but got rave reviews among the sold out crowd, who promised, "If you produce another play, let us know, and we're coming!" It was this outstanding praise that pressed J.R. Wortham onward and to the creation of *How to Marry the Bank*.

Looking for love and money, three beautiful, single ladies move in with their celebrity, rapper cousin, with hopes of fulfilling their dreams. Banking on marrying into wealth, by socializing with his rich friends, instead the ladies get murder and mayhem! It's a meet and greet that goes terribly awry.

Inspired by the 1932 film classic *Three Broadway Girls*, the show is filled with present-day romance, an eccentric, ghetto-fabulous, comedic fun.



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SPONSORSHIP

We "can't health-care-access our way out of this problem. There's something inherently wrong with the system that's not valuing the lives of black women equally to white women," said Dr. Reagan McDonald-Mosley, Chief Medical Officer of Planned Parenthood Federation of America. Dr. McDonald-Mosley was a longtime friend of Shalon Irving, a CDC epidemiologist who died after giving birth.

Experts agree this work must be completed and awareness kept at the forefront. We must acknowledge and address the effects of historically racist healthcare laws, policies, and practices to create a just, quality healthcare experience for all.

Los Angeles Times

SUBSCRIBE

CALIFORNIA

Cedars-Sinai faces federal civil rights investigation over treatment of Black mothers

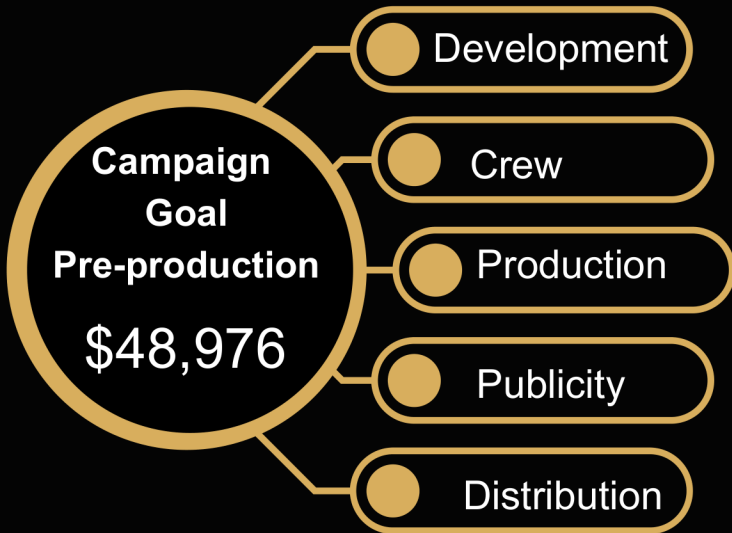


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