

## *SILENT CHOICES* STUDY GUIDE (4/10)

### *Silent Choices*

Director/Producer/Editor: Faith Pennick

Running time: 60 mins.

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[www.newday.com](http://www.newday.com)

[www.newdaydigital.com](http://www.newdaydigital.com) (for digitally streamed version)

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NOTE FROM FILMMAKER: The language in the study guide – “pro-choice” and “pro-life” – mirrors the terminology used in the film. I chose it in fairness to those who appeared in *Silent Choices*, in that those are the terms they use to describe their own positions on the issue of abortion.

### GENERAL

1. What are the social concerns that inform African American women’s reproductive choices like abortion that may differ from those of other women in the U.S.?
2. The woman in the bridging dramatic segments is wearing a wire hanger necklace. What does the wire hanger represent?
3. Pro-choice progressive Christians. Pro-life conservative Democrats. How do religion and politics inform the debate over abortion in the U.S., especially for people like those aforementioned? Do you think there is a middle ground between pro-choice and pro-life views on abortion? If so, how can we work towards it?
4. Many women of color advocate for reproductive justice. What does that term mean to you?
5. Is there a particular political perspective on abortion put forth by younger African Americans that may differ from older African Americans?

### THE WOMEN

1. Angela describes her experience having a dangerous illegal abortion. What are some of the ways pregnancies were terminated during the time of illegalization?
2. In reflecting on her abortion, Angela told us about her sorrow after having it, saying, “I grieve for that soul. I grieve for what could have been.” Qrescent, on the other hand, displayed no remorse or ambivalence in obtaining her abortion. Both reactions are sincere and valid. What are other feelings that women may have after having an abortion? Are varying reactions a result of generational differences? Religion? Race? Class?

3. Qrescent says it was in part feeling like a “dirty girl” that kept her from telling all but a handful of people about her abortion. She said she was “afraid of being judged.” What are ways in which women and men, religious and non-religious people, can dismantle the shame and stigma that comes with abortion?
4. When Lori had her abortions, her mother was aware of her decisions to terminate her pregnancies. An intense emotional dynamic remains between Lori and her mother regarding this period in Lori’s life. How can spouses, significant others and other family members impact a woman’s decision to have (or not have) an abortion?

### THE SILENCE

1. What is the percentage of Black women obtaining abortions in your state or city? How does that compare to the national percentage?<sup>12</sup>
2. Do you feel there is freedom to speak about abortion and reproductive rights on your campus or in your community? Why or why not? If there is a freedom of expression about this issue, does that extend to Black women? What about among your own families and friends?
3. Several of the interviewees discussed why they believe there is reluctance among African American women to openly engage about abortion and reproductive rights. What are the reasons given by people interviewed in the film? Are there other reasons?
4. Have you felt pressure from family members, friends or religious groups to take a certain stand on abortion or reproductive rights?

### THE HISTORY

1. Name some prominent African Americans activists who supported reproductive rights. Name some who opposed abortion and reproductive rights. What are/were the rationales for their positions? Are those rationales based in facts, rhetoric or both?

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<sup>1</sup> (06:28) “African American women obtain 31.7 percent of abortions in the U.S.” SOURCE: Rachel K. Jones, Jacqueline E. Darroch and Stanley K. Henshaw. “Patterns in the Socioeconomic Characteristics of Women Obtaining Abortions in 2000-2001.” *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, Vol. 34, No. 5, Sept./Oct. 2002: 228.

<sup>2</sup> (06:28) “Black women are more likely than white or Latina women to resolve unplanned pregnancies by having abortions.” SOURCE: Lawrence B. Finer and Stanley K. Henshaw. “Disparities in Rates of Unintended Pregnancy in the United States, 1994 and 2001.” *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*. Vol. 38, No. 2, June 2006: 93.

2. What are some of the reasons for some Harlem residents and activists to want a family planning clinic based in their neighborhood during the 1930s?
3. Key members of the Black Power movement had conflicting views about abortion and reproductive rights (some supported reproductive rights, some decried abortion as “murder” and “genocide”). How did the idea of “Black Nationalism” buttress or refute the need for reproductive freedom for African American women? How did Black women in the Black Nationalist movement incorporate reproductive rights into their activism, if at all?<sup>3</sup>
4. How do reproductive rights tie into larger issues of racism and civil rights for African Americans?

### THE STATEMENT

“Abortion is a white woman’s issue.” What are your responses to that statement? Has the predominance of white leaders in the pro-choice (and pro-life) movements lent credence to this opinion? How does someone challenge this statement effectively?

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### ADDITIONAL NOTE

**Citation** of second statistic in film (58:38)

“Number of abortions performed in U.S. in 1995 (per 100 live births):

White & Latina women: 20.3 - Black women: 53.1”

SOURCE: Health, United States, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2005

<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0764203.html>

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## **BOOKS AND MEDIA RESOURCES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

Here is a list of resources for those of you who would like to get more information about abortion, the reproductive rights movement, African American women, women of color or a combination of these subjects. Some of the books listed were research sources for *Silent Choices*, but inclusion in this list does not constitute a recommendation by the filmmaker or Organized Chaos Mediaworks, nor is it close to being a complete list.

### **BOOKS**

*Abortion Wars: A Half Century of Struggle, 1950-2000*. Edited by Rickie Solinger. University of California Press (1998)

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<sup>3</sup> Angela speaks candidly about her experience as a Black power student activist and her peers’ thoughts on abortion and pregnancy. (“The History” 19:04 to 20:20)

*Birth Control Politics In The United States, 1916-1945* by Carole McCann. Cornell University Press (1994).

*Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* by Barbara Ransby. University of North Carolina Press (2003)

*Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* by Dorothy Roberts. Vintage Books/Random House (1997)

*Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980* by Kimberly Springer. Duke University Press (2005)

*Still Lifting, Still Climbing: Contemporary African American Women's Activism.* Edited by Kimberly Springer. New York University Press (1999).

*A Taste of Power* by Elaine Brown. Doubleday (1992)

*Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organize for Reproductive Justice* by Jael Silliman, Marlene Gerber Fried, Loretta Ross and Elena R. Gutierrez. South End Press (2004)

*When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* by Paula J. Giddings. Amistad Press/HarperCollins (1996)

*Woman of Valor: Margaret Sanger and the Birth Control Movement in America* by Ellen Chesler. Simon & Schuster (1992)

*Women of Color and the Reproductive Rights Movement* by Jennifer Nelson. New York University Press (2003)

*Women, Race and Class* by Angela Y. Davis. Random House (1981)

*Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations* by Sharla M. Fett. University of North Carolina Press (2002)

### **ORGANIZATIONS**

African American Women Evolving [www.aaweonline.org](http://www.aaweonline.org)

California Black Women's Health Project [www.cabwhp.org](http://www.cabwhp.org)

Center for Reproductive Rights [www.crlp.org](http://www.crlp.org)

Choice USA [www.choiceusa.org](http://www.choiceusa.org)

Civil Liberties and Public Policy Program – Hampshire College  
<http://clpp.hampshire.edu>

Law Students for Choice [www.lawstudentsforchoice.org](http://www.lawstudentsforchoice.org)

Life Education and Resource Network (L.E.A.R.N.) – Northeast Region  
[www.blackgenocide.org](http://www.blackgenocide.org)

NARAL Pro-Choice America [www.naral.org](http://www.naral.org)

National Black Women’s Health Imperative [www.blackwomenshealth.org](http://www.blackwomenshealth.org)

National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health [www.latinainstitute.org](http://www.latinainstitute.org)

National Network of Abortion Funds [www.nnaf.org](http://www.nnaf.org)

National Organization for Women (NOW) [www.now.org](http://www.now.org)

Planned Parenthood Federation of America [www.plannedparenthood.org](http://www.plannedparenthood.org)

Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice [www.rcrc.org](http://www.rcrc.org)

SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Health Collective [www.sistersong.net](http://www.sistersong.net)

### **FILMS/VIDEOS**

*SpeakOut: I Had an Abortion* (dirs: Jennifer Baumgardner & Gillian Aldrich):  
[www.speakoutfilms.com](http://www.speakoutfilms.com)

*The Abortion Diaries* (dir: Penny Lane) <http://theabortiondiaries.com/>

*On Hostile Ground* (dirs: Liz Mermin and Jenny Raskin) [www.onhostileground.com](http://www.onhostileground.com)

### **OTHER**

Abortion Gang (blog): <http://abortiongang.org/>

*Our Truths/Nuestras Verdades* (a web site for women to read about and share abortion experiences. Disclaimer: an essay written by the filmmaker about *Silent Choices* was featured on this site) [www.ourtruths.org](http://www.ourtruths.org)

Reproductive Rights Prof Blog: [http://lawprofessors.typepad.com/reproductive\\_rights/](http://lawprofessors.typepad.com/reproductive_rights/)

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