

## INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

to accompany the discussion guide  
**Wicked Silence: The North Carolina Forced Sterilization Program and Bioethics**  
for use with the documentary *Wicked Silence*

The film is available at the Z Smith Reynolds Library, as well as on Youtube at:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hstkagJJdfg>

This instructor's guide is intended to aid discussion of the topics covered in the discussion guide. Ideas for prompting discussion for each section are provided as well as additional resources related to each section.

### Part I: National Influences

In this section, the discussion guide reviews some of the national movements and historical events that influenced the development of eugenics and the North Carolina forced sterilization program. The sterilization program in North Carolina was not unique through the 1930's; instead, eugenics was an idea propagated throughout the United States and Europe.

- What are some of the possible origins of these national attitudes toward forced sterilization and eugenics?. Students might look at the effects of industrialization, emigration and immigration patterns, and historical worldwide events.
- Parallels can be drawn between these national movements and those happening in Europe, in particular with Germany, where a similar eugenics movement was growing under Hitler's leadership.
- Consider the profound effects of these national ideas on the survivors of the sterilization program. These theories were likely foreign to them, but their lives were changed permanently.

### Additional Resources:

Allen, G.E. (n.d.) *Social origins of eugenics*. Retrieved from

<http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/html/eugenics/essay1text.html>

Dvorksy, G. (2013, September 13). *How the pseudoscience of social darwinism nearly destroyed humanity*. Retrieved from <http://io9.com/how-the-pseudoscience-of-social-darwinism-nearly-destro-1308329496>

Kevles, D.J. (1999). Eugenics and human rights. *British Medical Journal*. 319(7207), pp. 435-438. Retrieved from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1127045/>

Lombardo, P. (2008). *Three generations, no imbeciles: Eugenics, the Supreme Court, and Buck v. Bell*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

## **Part II: The Practice in North Carolina**

This section covers the laws, practices, social impacts, and current state of events surrounding the North Carolina sterilization program.

- As the laws evolved, they became more expansive – increasing the reasons for sterilization as well as the population to be examined for possible sterilization. At the same time, the program evolved to contain more balance with the inclusion of a right to appeal the decision for sterilization. Was that enough? What more could be done to ensure the fairness of this decision?
- North Carolina was the only state to use its social workers to help identify candidates for sterilization. Consider that social workers who have been interviewed truly believed they were helping individuals and families. How did their participation and influence affect the program? Are there ethical boundaries crossed by their participation?
- The inclusion of social workers also points to the potential benefits to the state in sterilization. From an economic standpoint, if eugenics worked, the state could benefit from forced sterilizations through reduction of the population on welfare. What ethical issues are presented here? Can the state be working for the benefit of individuals and society when it is an economic stakeholder?
- Students may discuss the implications of determining “feeble-mindedness.” Does IQ tell all we need to know about a person’s worth? How can access to education, nutrition, and other resources affect a person’s IQ and human development?
- Consider the changes in social mores over time. Do you think similar standards would be employed to determine candidacy for sterilization if the program existed today? Promiscuity? Life success? Others unique to today?
- Consider the targeted populations of females and Black people – what do you think influenced this targeting? Think about social attitudes, mythologies, and patterns over time.
- North Carolina was one of the few states, all in the South, that increased its program after WWII. Are there qualities of North Carolina that made it more vulnerable to this increase? Economic? Social?
- Think about the broad power exercised by the few wealthy benefactors of the Human Betterment League. This speaks to the power of marketing – with this level of marketing, could this program have been expanded anywhere in the country?
- Are there ideas today that have become movements due to the influence of a few individuals? What has changed? Stayed the same?

### **Additional Resources:**

Green, J. (2014, June 18). *Breaking the 'Wicked Silence.'* Retrieved from <http://triad-city-beat.com/breaking-the-wicked-silence/>

Krase, K. (2014, October 1). *History of forced sterilization and current US abuses.* Retrieved from <http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/health-info/forced-sterilization/>

North Carolina Digital Collections. (n.d.) A collection of historical eugenics documents. Retrieved from <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm/search/searchterm/Public%20Health%20Collection!eugenics%20eugenics/field/relatig!subjec/mode/exact!any/conn/and!and/order/nosort/cosuppress/1/page/1>

Rose, J. (2011). *A brutal chapter in North Carolina's eugenics past.* Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/2011/12/28/144375339/a-brutal-chapter-in-north-carolinas-eugenics-past>

### **Part III: Principles of Bioethics**

This section is intended to give students a bioethical framework with which to examine the North Carolina sterilization program. The principles of bioethics can be applied to discussion of forced sterilization programs, and, if desired, can facilitate comparisons of the North Carolina program with other types of eugenic decisions, for instance, those that may be made by individuals, families, or prospective parents.

- Beneficence. From the perspective of eugenicists, their actions were beneficent – they promoted forced sterilizations for the benefit of individuals and society. What defines a benefit to others? Intent or result?
- Non-maleficence. Although this was invasive surgery, many simply viewed sterilization as a means to a good end. Is this the same as intentionally harming someone?
- Respect for autonomy offers much for discussion. Were the victims and their families allowed to make autonomous decisions for themselves?
- Did victims or their families give informed consent? Recall that to give informed consent, they had to be competent to make a decision, to be given enough information to achieve understanding, to be free from coercion, and come to a decision independently.
- How did the power imbalance between the state and the victims affect victims' autonomy? Think about the history and levels of trust and respect between the state and Black populations.
- Imagine a visit to the doctor at a large medical center for an impoverished, uneducated person. Do they communicate the same way? What needs to happen to ensure that the patient has autonomy and can give informed consent?

- Consider virtue ethics, which emphasizes character and virtuous action. How does that apply to forced sterilizations? What are virtues health care professionals ought to have? Could it be said that the eugenicists were acting with virtue?
- How might a feminist ethics approach inform our interpretation and assessment of forced sterilizations?

### **Additional Resources**

DeBord, J. (2014). *Ethics in Medicine: Informed Consent*. Retrieved from <https://depts.washington.edu/bioethx/topics/consent.html>

McCormick, T.R. (2014). *Ethics in Medicine: Principles of Bioethics*. Retrieved from <https://depts.washington.edu/bioethx/tools/princpl.html>

World Health Organization. (2014). *Eliminating forced, coercive and otherwise involuntary sterilization*. Retrieved from [http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media\\_asset/201405\\_sterilization\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/201405_sterilization_en.pdf)

### **Part IV: Theories of Justice**

In this section, theories of justice are explored. Students may discuss how eugenicists justified their actions. From the perspective of victims, students might explore the injustice in forced sterilizations and the attempts at rectification.

- Under utilitarian justice, society should seek to achieve the greatest amount of overall happiness, even if some go without resources. Egalitarians want every individual to have an equal share of the resources necessary for basic wellbeing. Libertarians believe that everyone can acquire the resources they want and need for their own well-being through their own means using the market system. Which form of justice do you think eugenicists employed to justify their program of forced sterilization? Why?
- Which account of justice makes the most sense to you? Are there other accounts of justice we should consider?
- Is there ever a time that forcibly removing a resource from a person can be just?
- Many believe that the forced removal of fertility from people was an injustice – is the injustice exacerbated because it was a state-mandated program? Why?
- Who should be responsible for righting the wrong? What would it mean to right the wrong?
- Has North Carolina achieved justice? If not, what more should North Carolina do to work towards justice?

### **Additional Resources**

- Bakst, D. (2011). *North Carolina's forced sterilization program: A case for compensating the living victims*. Retrieved from <http://www.johnlocke.org/acrobat/policyReports/NCeugenics.pdf>
- Carmon, I. (2014, June 27). *For eugenic sterilization victims, belated justice*. Retrieved from <http://www.msnbc.com/all/eugenic-sterilization-victims-belated-justice>
- Risinger, C. (2014, October 30). *Forced sterilization compensation begins in NC*. Retrieved from <http://www.dailytarheel.com/article/2014/10/forced-sterilization-compensation-begins-in-nc>
- Severson, K. (2011, December 9). *Thousands sterilized, a state weighs restitution*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/10/us/redress-weighed-for-forced-sterilizations-in-north-carolina.html?pagewanted=all>
- Smith, S.E. (2013, October 17). *Is cash alone enough for forced sterilization victims?* Retrieved from <http://www.care2.com/causes/is-cash-alone-enough-for-forced-sterilization-victims.html>

## **Section V: Wicked Silence – the Movie**

In this section, the discussion guide reviews the stories of the subjects in the film “Wicked Silence.” The previous sections of the discussion guide have reviewed the history of the North Carolina forced sterilization program and have given a framework through which to evaluate the actions taken by the state. This film gives students an opportunity to encounter the direct impact of the state’s actions upon actual people.

In creating laws that limit people for the sake of greater society, it is easy to forget the emotional toll that these restrictions can have on individual lives. Elaine, Ann, and Willis had a basic human function taken away, and although it did not impede their physical health, they had lifelong grief over the loss of their fertility.

The inclusion of John Railey’s interview offers some current history of the movement to support sterilization victims as well as insight into the surprised reaction of many in the mainstream when they learned about the program. Students might consider if learning about this program changes their view of North Carolina or of government and politics generally.

Questions for discussion are included in the discussion guide.

## **Additional Resources**

- Boggs, B. (2013, August). *For the public good: The shameful history of forced sterilization in the U.S.* Retrieved from <http://blog.longreads.com/2014/11/19/for-the-public-good/>

## Section VI: Modern Examples

This section is intended to show students that the issues surrounding eugenics and forced sterilizations cannot be viewed as a historically isolated event. Reproductive rights remains a current issue. Societal controls and goals remain present for the populations affected by classism and ableism, as well as those living with substance abuse.

Students can be encouraged to think about the ethical implications of these controls, both objectively and subjectively.

Questions for discussion are included in the discussion guide.

### Additional Resources

#### *Women on Welfare*

Governor's welfare plan pushes free birth control. (1993, January 17). Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/01/17/us/governor-s-welfare-plan-pushes-free-birth-control.html>

Schoen, J. (2005). *Choice and coercion: Birth control, sterilization, and abortion in public health and welfare*. Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press.

Vobejda, B. & Havemann, J. (1997, March 30). Doing the math on the welfare 'family cap.' *The Washington Post*, p. A01. Retrieved from <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/welfare/stories/wf033097.htm>

#### *Project Prevention*

Adams, W.L. (2010, April 17). *Why drug addicts are getting sterilized for cash*. Retrieved from <http://content.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,1981916,00.html>

Bickman, J. (2012, May 2). *Should addicts be sterilized?* Retrieved from [http://www.salon.com/2012/05/02/should\\_addicts\\_be\\_sterilized\\_salpart/](http://www.salon.com/2012/05/02/should_addicts_be_sterilized_salpart/)

Clark, A. (2011, May 6). *IUDs to prevent HIV in Kenya?* Retrieved from <http://www.thenation.com/article/iuds-prevent-hiv-kenya/>

Newman, A. (2010, November 3). *Paying drug-addicted women to get sterilized: Choice or coercion?* Retrieved from <http://rhrealitycheck.org/article/2010/11/03/paying-drugaddicted-women-sterilized/>

#### *Genetics*

Entine, J. & Fecht, S. (2012, November 26). *Gattaca alert: Personal genomics meets neo-eugenics*. Retrieved from <http://www.geneticliteracyproject.org/2012/11/26/gattaca-alert-personal-genomics-meets-neo-eugenics/>

Maranto, G. (2013, March 4). *Meet the new eugenics, same as the old eugenics*. Retrieved from <http://www.geneticsandsociety.org/article.php?id=6724>

Mendelsohn, E. (2000, March 1). *The eugenic temptation*. Retrieved from <http://harvardmagazine.com/2000/03/the-eugenic-temptation.html>

## **Other Topics that May be of Interest**

### ***Modern Eugenicists***

Hutson, M. (2014, January 3). *Social Darwinism isn't dead*. Retrieved from [http://www.slate.com/articles/health\\_and\\_science/science/2014/01/social\\_darwinism\\_and\\_class\\_essentialism\\_the\\_rich\\_think\\_they\\_are\\_superior.single.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/science/2014/01/social_darwinism_and_class_essentialism_the_rich_think_they_are_superior.single.html)

Stoller, P. (2011, October 24). *The Return of Social Darwinism*. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paul-stoller/social-darwinism-election\\_b\\_1027743.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paul-stoller/social-darwinism-election_b_1027743.html)

VanCourt, M. (2004). *The case for eugenics in a nutshell*. Retrieved from <http://www.eugenics.net/papers/caseforeugenics.html>

### ***The importance of IQ***

Hambrick, D.Z. & Chabris, C. (2014, April 14). *Yes, IQ really matters*. Retrieved from [http://www.slate.com/articles/health\\_and\\_science/science/2014/04/what\\_do\\_sat\\_and\\_iq\\_tests\\_measure\\_general\\_intelligence\\_predicts\\_school\\_and.single.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/science/2014/04/what_do_sat_and_iq_tests_measure_general_intelligence_predicts_school_and.single.html)

Young, S.H. (2013, July). *Why your IQ matters less than you think* (Web log comment). Retrieved from <http://www.scottheyoung.com/blog/2013/07/23/ignore-iq/>

### ***Marginalized Women and Reproductive Justice***

Johnson, C.J. (2013, July 7). *Female inmates sterilized in California prisons without approval*. Retrieved from <http://cironline.org/reports/female-inmates-sterilized-california-prisons-without-approval-4917>

Mingus, M. (n.d.) *Disabled women and reproductive justice*. Retrieved from <http://protectchoice.org/article.php?id=140>