

PRESS NOTES – WOMEN IN BLUE

WOMEN IN BLUE



WOMEN IN BLUE

AT THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER, RACE & VIOLENCE

A FILM BY DEIRDRE FISHEL / AN ITVS INDEPENDENT LENS DOCUMENTARY

Executive Produced by Sally Jo Fifer Gini Reticker Lois Vossen

Original Score Chad Cannon Directors of Photography Tom Bergmann Eric Phillips-Horst

Cinematography Sean Mattison Mike Shum Editors Sunita Prasad Christopher White

Supervising Producer ITVS Shana Swanson Producers Deirdre Fishel Aideen Kane

Produced by Beth Levison Directed by Deirdre Fishel



NATIONAL TELEVISION DEBUT ON PBS INDEPENDENT LENS
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2021

LOGLINE

In the years leading up to the murder of George Floyd, four female Minneapolis Police Officers believe gender equity in the force can help change the culture of policing in a department that would soon become a worldwide emblem of state violence.

SYNOPSIS

Filmed from 2017-2020, *WOMEN IN BLUE* follows Minneapolis' first female police chief Janeé Harteau, as she works to reform the Minneapolis Police Department by fighting to get rid of bad cops, retraining the rest, diversifying the ranks and promoting women—who statistically use less force than their male counterparts—into every rank of leadership. The film focuses on four women in Harteau's department, each trying to redefine what it means to protect and serve. After a high-profile, officer-involved shooting forces Chief Harteau to resign, the new, male chief selects only men as his top brass. The women left behind continue the fight to police differently and to rebuild community trust.

WOMEN IN BLUE offers an unprecedented view into the inner workings of the MPD, chronicling a department—and a community—grappling with racism and a troubled history of police misconduct long before an MPD officer killed George Floyd in May of 2020. The film reveals the limitations of police reform through incremental change and asks questions that apply well beyond the city of Minneapolis. Could increased gender equity and more women—especially Black women—contribute to greater public safety?

FILM FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS

Official Selection – Tribeca Film Festival 2020

Official Selection – AFI Docs 2020

Official Selection – Minneapolis/St. Paul International Film Festival 2020

Official Selection – St. Louis International Film Festival 2020

Official Selection – Denver Film Festival 2020

Official Selection – DOC NYC 2020

CHARACTER BIOS

SGT. ALICE WHITE



Sgt. White joined the Minneapolis Police Department in 2003. She has served on patrol, as the East African Liaison and as part of a cutting-edge Procedural Justice training team. In 2017, she was promoted to Sergeant in the 4th Precinct. She is the only Black female sergeant in the MPD to work on the street.

CHIEF JANEÉ HARTEAU



Chief Harteau joined the Minneapolis Police Department in the 1990s and, despite winning a “hostile environment” suit, rose to become the MPD’s first female and first openly gay chief in 2012. She initiated a series of progressive initiatives: bringing in a cutting-edge training program and promoting diversity which included putting women into every rank of leadership. In 2017 she was asked to resign in the wake of the Justine Damond shooting.

COMMANDER MELISSA CHIDO



Melissa Chido served with the Minneapolis Police Department for over 20 years, rising to the rank of commander, first of Special Crimes under Chief Harteau and then, of Internal Affairs under Chief Arradondo. In 2019, she left the MPD to become the chief of the Inver Grove Hts., Minnesota police department.

NEKIMA LEVY-ARMSTRONG



Nekima Levy-Armstrong is a civil rights lawyer and police reform activist. In 2015, in the wake of the shooting death of Jamar Clark, an unarmed Black man, by a Minneapolis Police officer, she joined the occupation of Minneapolis' 4th precinct. She then launched a run for mayor with a police reform agenda. She is a former law school professor and former head of the Minneapolis NAACP. She continues to be a strong voice in the movement against police brutality in Minneapolis.

OFFICER ERIN GRABOSKY



Officer Grabosky joined the Minneapolis Police Department in 2015. She has served on night patrol in the first precinct, which covers the downtown, and is part of the MPD's mounted police.

INSPECTOR CATHERINE "CJ" JOHNSON



CJ Johnson was a member of the Minneapolis Police Department for over 22 years, rising through the ranks to become a Commander and then Inspector (Head) of the 3rd precinct. A progressive cop, she was increasingly interested in rehabilitation over law enforcement. In 2017, she left the MPD to become the Director of the Hennepin County Department of Community Corrections & Rehabilitation.

DIRECTOR'S BIO

Deirdre Fishel is a producer/director of documentaries and dramas that have premiered in competition at Sundance, SXSW and AFI DOCS, among many other festivals, and been broadcast in 35 countries worldwide. Her last documentary *CARE*, which looks at the poignant but hidden world of home elder care and exposes America's broken care system, was funded by the Ford and MacArthur Foundations and broadcast on *America Reframed*. Deirdre's groundbreaking documentary *STILL DOING IT: The Intimate Lives of Women Over 65* was expanded into a book co-written with producer Diana Holtzberg, published by Penguin Books. Other projects include a web documentary *SUICIDE ON CAMPUS* produced in conjunction with The New York Times Magazine. Deirdre was a directing fellow at the American Film Institute and has an MFA from Hunter College. She is an Associate Professor and the Director of the BFA in Film/Video at the City College of New York.

WOMEN IN BLUE TIMELINE

- 1990's Police officer Janeé Harteau files a suit with the EEOC for a hostile environment at the Minneapolis Police Department and wins.
- 2012 Janeé Harteau is appointed Minneapolis' first female and first openly gay police chief.
- 2015 November, Jamar Clark, an unarmed Black man is killed by a white MPD officer. Protesters occupy the 4th precinct for 18 - days. Chief Harteau fights the police union to allow protesters to stay and have their voice heard.
- 2016 Chief Harteau doubles down on her reform efforts:
- She brings in a cutting-edge Department of Justice Procedural justice training program and picks officer Alice White to be one of the key trainers.
- She appoints Melissa Chiodo to be Commander of Special Crimes, which oversees domestic assault, sexual assault and sex trafficking.
- She appoints CJ Johnson to run the 3rd precinct -- known to be the most aggressive in the city -- so that she can hold officers accountable.
- 2017 March, Chief Harteau is selected as one of Fortune 500's fifty greatest leaders.
- April, Chief Harteau starts a recruitment campaign to bring in more women
- July, Chief Harteau is forced to resign after the shooting of Justine Damond, a white Australian woman by a Black MPD officer, becomes an International incident.
- September, Chief Medarria Arradondo becomes Minneapolis' first Black Police Chief. He selects only men for his executive team, bringing two men of lower rank up and over higher-ranking women, including Inspector CJ Johnson
- December, Inspector Johnson leaves the department after 22 years.
- December, Alice White is promoted to Sergeant in the 4th precinct, the precinct with the highest crime, but where she has deep roots.
- 2018 March, Officer Mohamed Noor, who fatally shot Justine Damond, is charged with second degree murder.
- June, Thurman Blevins, a 33-year old Black man, is killed by an MPD officer. There is no prosecution because he was carrying a gun.
- 2019 June, Mohammed Noor is the first officer in 30 years to be convicted of murder for killing a citizen in Minneapolis.
- June, Cmdr. Melissa Chiodo leaves the MPD to become Chief in a neighboring department.
- 2020 May, George Floyd is murdered by a white, male MPD officer.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In 2014, I was filming in Staten Island when I heard that Eric Garner, an unarmed Black man selling loose cigarettes outside a store, had been killed by the police only blocks away. Outraged, I turned to the only police officer I knew, Sallie Norris, a lieutenant in the NYPD. I wanted to know if this could have happened if she'd been there. She immediately said, no, it couldn't have. She would have started by simply saying, "Hi, my name is Sallie Norris, what's yours?" The male rookie had gone the opposite way, starting aggressively, quickly escalating the situation out of control.

I started wondering whether women tend to approach policing differently than men. When I discovered statistics showing that women are better at de-escalating conflict and that they use substantially less excessive force, I couldn't believe the issue of gender in policing was all, but invisible. I felt compelled to make a film that explored the question: 'What could women bring to help change our troubled police departments?' I soon realized the film would need to be more expansive, examining policing at the intersection of gender, race and violence.

I went to Minneapolis in April 2017 because Chief Janeé Harteau, the city's first female and first openly gay chief, was interested in visibility for women officers and gave me full access to the department. Chief Harteau was hellbent on trying to reform a department with a long history of sexism, racism and misconduct, including the controversial police shooting of an unarmed Black man by a white, male officer during her tenure. She was battling the police union to try to get rid of bad cops, bringing in cutting-edge training, and diversifying the force, including putting women into every rank of leadership. I began to follow three women: Officer Alice White, who became a cop because of the abusive officers she'd met in her Black neighborhood growing up; Cmdr. Melissa Chiodo, who was working to change protocols around sexual assault and sex trafficking; and Inspector CJ Johnson who was working to hold officers accountable in the most aggressive precinct in the city. They were all fighting to redefine policing from the inside.

Then three months after we began filming, there was another high-profile police shooting—this time of a white woman by a Black male officer—and Chief Harteau was quickly forced to resign. With shocking speed, the MPD reverted to a traditionally male run department, with no women on the executive team. I filmed as the higher-ranking women were sidelined one by one, and started to understand that while there is clearly systemic racism throughout police departments, there is also systemic sexism. The gender progress achieved under Chief Harteau was erased in a flash. It was like a rubber band that snapped back.

For two years, I followed these women as they worked to regain community trust and fight for internal reforms. Officer White was promoted and became the only Black female street sergeant in the department. Assigned to a Black neighborhood, where she had deep roots with the community, she felt the painful tug of being both Black and blue. It was inspiring to watch an officer, who really understands the trauma that Black communities have experienced at the hands of the police, and who tries to heal that pain in every encounter. As we finished the film, I hoped her work would highlight the need not only for more women in policing, but especially for more Black women.

A week after the film premiered, George Floyd was brutally murdered by an MPD officer. As the world rose up in protest, I wondered if the film had any meaning in this new context. Why focus on the role of women in a system that continued to have such disregard for Black life? And then I realized I had a journalistic responsibility. Having filmed the Minneapolis Police Department for the three years leading up to that cataclysmic moment, I had unique and valuable footage that could contribute to the public dialogue about the policing crisis. I went back into production to have our central characters reckon with the brutal truth of George Floyd's murder.

The repeated killing of unarmed citizens by police officers in Minneapolis between 2017 and 2020 showcases the limitations of police reform through incremental change. I believe the problem goes beyond police violence. Across this country, poverty, racial inequity, racist laws and a proliferation of guns have created a toxic landscape. We clearly need major systemic change—in public safety and in larger public policies.

As we begin reimagining public safety, I hope we finally consider what increasing the participation of women, particularly Black women, could bring to the table. We've known for over 30 years that women rely less on physical force, possess more effective communication skills, and are better at defusing potentially violent confrontations before they turn deadly, yet their numbers have remained stagnant at 12% of police officers nationwide. The only way to increase the role of women – and to bring about other desperately needed changes - is to demand it. I hope WOMEN IN BLUE can help in that fight.

– Deirdre Fishel, Director

WOMEN IN BLUE CREDITS

HEAD CREDITS

The following film contains images of violence that may be disturbing to viewers.
A Mind's Eye Productions in association with InMaat Productions

Executive Produced by
Sally Jo Fifer, Gini Reticker, Lois Vossen

Original Score by
Chad Cannon

Director of Photography
Tom Bergmann

Edited by
Sunita Prasad, Christopher White

Produced by
Beth Levison

A Film by
Deirdre Fishel

END CREDITS

Directed by
Deirdre Fishel

Produced by
Beth Levison

Producers
Deirdre Fishel, Aideen Kane

Edited by
Sunita Prasad, Christopher White

Original Score by
Chad Cannon

Title Design and Animation
Nuncle

Directors of Photography

Tom Bergmann, Eric Phillips-Horst

Cinematography

Sean Mattison, Mike Shum

Featuring

Sergeant Alice White, Chief Melissa Chiodo, Officer Erin Grabosky, Chief Janeé Harteau, Catherine "CJ" Johnson

Featuring

Chief Medaria Arradondo, Nekima Levy-Armstrong

Field Producer

Stephanie Mosher

Location Sound

Johnny Hagen, Eric Pagel

END CREDIT ROLL

Supervising Producer

Shana Swanson

Production Accountant

Ameena Din

Additional Cinematography

Nick Clausen, Cy Dodson, Robert Durland, Matt Ehling, Jimmy Gildea, Jon Springer, Michael Sutz, Brennan Vance, Jim Zabilla

Additional sound

Bernie Beaudry, Tom Colvin, Jim Morgan, Jennilee Park, Alek Roslik, Elizabeth Turner

Additional Field Producer

Laurie Stern

Production Manager

Kirsten Norr

Production Coordinators

Sabrina Yates, Sara Kim

Post Production Associate

Jessica Bermingham

Archival Researcher

Jasmine Cannon

Photographer
Erica Ticknor

Assistant Editors
Rossana Gomes, David Bartner, Jonathan Leiner, Justin Rosen, Reid Zarker

Production Assistants
Erica Beebe, Emily Busch, Ashley Cook, Ariel Donahue, Emily Durben, Georgia Fort, Diego Luke, Katie G. Nelson, Bella Racklin, Erica Ticknor

DI Colorist / Post Finishing Editor
Evan Anthony

Post Production Picture Services Provided by
Goldcrest Post Productions New York

Sound Editorial & Mix Services
HARBOR

Supervising Sound Editor
Tony Volante

Co-Supervising Sound Editor/Re-recording Mixer
Daniel Timmons

Dialogue Editor
Giuseppe Cappello

Chief Sound Engineer
Avi Laniado

Sound Engineer
Joel Scheuneman

Senior Producer, Sound Post
Kelsea Wigmore

Producer, Sound Post
Joy Jacobson

Musicians
Score Engineered & Mixed by Matthew Snyder

Score Editor
William Chen

Studio Manager, Allegro Recordings
Thu Nga Dan

Orchestrations by Daniel A. Brown, Sun Young Park & Chad Cannon

Additional Orchestration by Kate Diaz

Music Preparation by DB Music: Daniel A. Brown, Jennifer Fagre-Golya, & Kevin Bodhipaksha

Score recorded February 2020 @ Allegro Recordings in Burbank, CA, under contract with the American Federation of Musicians, Local 47, Los Angeles

Violin

Mark Robertson, Stephanie Yu, Ashoka Thiagarajan, SunYoung Park

Viola

Andrew Duckles, Jonah Sirota

Cello

Garik Terzian, Niall Taro Ferguson

Bass

Stephen Pfeifer

Flute

Catherine Baker, Alexandra Miller

Clarinet

Chris Stoutenborough, Jonathan Sacdalan

Harp

Alison Bjorkedal, Cristina Montes Mateo

Piano

Chad Cannon

Orchestra Contractor

Noah Gladstone

Session Coordinator

Sean Gehricke

Attorney

Frankfurt Kurnit Klein & Selz Iddo I., Arad, Andrew J. Ungberg, Melissa Georges,
Brittany Levenbrown, Ariel Sodomsky

Additional Legal Services

Documentary Film Legal Clinic at UCLA Law Dale Cohen, Director Dan Mayeda, Associate Director

Insurance

Taylor & Taylor Associates
Tammy Soto

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Grant Writer

Tony Heriza

Advisory Board

Dr. Tracie Keese, Lt. Sallie Norris, Katherine Spillar

I Can Breathe Now Mural

Xena Goldman Cadex, Herrara Greta McClain

Icon of a Revolution Mural

Peyton Scott Russell

Say Their Names Cemetery

Anna Barber Connor Wright

Archival Materials

ABC5, KSTP, Al Jazeera, CBS Evening News, CBS 60 Minutes, City of Minneapolis City Pages, CNN, Global News, Huffington Post, KARE 11, FOX9, KMSP NBC, Minneapolis Police Department, Star Tribune, The UpTake, WCCO - CBS Minnesota

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AP Images

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