

Fact Sheet: citations and context for *Abortion and Women's Rights 1970*

0:19 “...when abortion was still illegal in many states...”

- In 1967 Colorado became the first state to allow abortions in cases where a woman's physical or mental health was in jeopardy, or in cases of rape or incest up until 16 weeks of a pregnancy. Many states soon followed suit, utilizing similar conditional restrictions.¹
- Hawaii was actually the first state to legalize abortion upon request, just before New York State in 1970.²
- The legal position prior to *Roe v. Wade* was that abortion was illegal in 30 states and legal, typically restricted to certain circumstances, in 20 states.³
- Today abortion access continues to be negotiated on a state by state basis. “More than 900 anti-choice measures have been passed in the states in the last two decades.”⁴

4:10 “I asked the doctor if he could give me an abortion and he said that he could, but it would be \$1000 dollars.”

- Although each of the two vignettes is presented as a single narrative, the first is a synthesis of the stories of several women who mailed in tapes. Although abortion was legal in some states by the making of the film, many women still needed to travel to receive the procedure, or their pregnancies didn't meet the legal conditions for abortions. Some doctors performed illegal abortions, but for a steep fee. Additionally, even in states where abortion was legal, cost and insurance coverage varied widely.⁵

9:18 “At least one million women seek abortions every year. Only one percent get legal abortions. 300,000 of those who have illegal abortions suffer complications. Three to eight thousand women die from illegal abortions every year. 80-90% of those who die are nonwhite, poor women.”

¹ Dukakis, Andrea. “50 Years Ago, Colorado Passed Nation's First State Law Liberalizing Abortion.” Colorado Public Radio,

www.cpr.org/show-segment/50-years-ago-colorado-passed-nations-first-state-law-liberalizing-abortion.

² “Medicine: Abortion on Request.” Time, Time Inc., 9 Mar. 1970, www.content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,878789,00.html.

³ Kliff, Sarah (January 22, 2013). “CHARTS: How *Roe v. Wade* changed abortion rights”. *The Washington Post*.

⁴ “State Governments.” *NARAL Pro-Choice America*, www.prochoiceamerica.org/laws-policy/state-government/.

⁵ OBOS ABORTION CONTRIBUTORS. “History of Abortion in the U.S.” *Our Bodies Ourselves*, 18 May 2016, www.ourbodiesourselves.org/book-excerpts/health-article/u-s-abortion-history/.

⁶ Thomson-DeVeaux, Amelia. “When Abortion Was Only Legal In 6 States.” *FiveThirtyEight*, *FiveThirtyEight*, 28 Aug. 2014, www.fivethirtyeight.com/features/when-abortion-was-only-legal-in-6-states.

- “In the U.S. before Roe v. Wade, American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) says an estimated 1.2 million U.S. women got illegal abortions every year, and says unsafe abortions killed as many as 5,000 of them per year.”⁷
- Race and class disparities have always shaped abortion access. According to the Guttmacher Institute, in the 1960s in New York city, one in four child-birth related deaths among white women was abortion related, compared to one in two child-birth related deaths among nonwhite women and Puerto Rican women. From 1972 to 1974, the Institute reports that “the [mortality rate due to illegal abortion](#) for non-white women was 12 times that for white women.”⁸
- “Maternal deaths declined sharply over the past 50 years, falling from 376 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1940 to 37 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1960, and 9 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1980.”⁹
- “At 2014 abortion rates, one in 20 women (5%) will have an abortion by age 20, about one in five (19%) by age 30 and about one in four (24%) by age 45.”¹⁰
- In 2019, lack of Medicaid coverage blocked 29 percent of abortion seekers from getting the procedure.¹¹

18:08 “Four out of five babies delivered in the public facility are unwanted”

- Degrees of wanted or unwanted-ness is a difficult metric to track and measure. However, the “number of adoptions rose from 91,000 in 1957 to 175,000 in 1970, then fell to 130,000 by 1975; the decline of the early 1970s coincided with the legalization of abortion.”^{12,13}

19:08 “Abortion for a poor woman would cost \$500.”

- “When abortion was illegal in the U.S., desperate women often paid high fees to obtain abortions, even from unlicensed, untrained practitioners working in frightening, non-sterile conditions.”¹⁴

⁷Fox, Maggie. “Abortion Is at the Top of the Political Agenda. Here Are a Few Facts.” *NBCNews.com*, NBCUniversal News Group, www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/abortion-u-s-five-key-facts-n889111.

⁸ “Lessons from Before Roe: Will Past Be Prologue?” *Guttmacher Institute*, 14 Sept. 2018, www.guttmacher.org/gpr/2003/03/lessons-roe-will-past-be-prologue.

⁹ AMA Council Report. Induced Termination of Pregnancy Before and After *Roe v. Wade*. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 1992, 268: 3231.

¹⁰ Jones RK and Jerman J, Population group abortion rates and lifetime incidence of abortion: United States, 2008–2014, *American Journal of Public Health*, 2017, doi:10.2105/AJPH.2017.304042.

¹¹ Anna North, *Vox*, June 20, 2019. See Hyde 1976 Amendment, which blocks federal funding for abortions except in the case of rape, incest, or a threat to the life of the pregnant person.

¹² Bitler, Marianne, and Madeline Zavodny. “Did Abortion Legalization Reduce the Number Of Unwanted Children? Evidence from Adoptions.” *Guttmacher Institute*, 6 Dec. 2016, www.guttmacher.org/journals/psrh/2003/01/did-abortion-legalization-reduce-number-unwanted-children-evidence-adoptions.

¹³ U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Children's Bureau, Welfare Administration, *Child Welfare Statistics*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1961; and Maza PL, Adoption trends: 1944-1975, *Child Welfare Research Notes*, 1984, No. 9.

¹⁴ “Abortion Facts.” National Abortion Federation, prochoice.org/education-and-advocacy/about-abortion/abortion-facts/.

- A 2001 study conducted by the Guttmacher Institute found that the average overall cost of an abortion in the United States was \$468.¹⁵

19:57 “Infant mortality rate in DC general hospital is much higher than any other hospital”

- DC ranked second only to the state of Mississippi in infant mortality in 1970.¹⁶
- In 2018, D.C. topped the national charts in hepatitis, gonorrhea, syphilis, TB, infant mortality, and the spread of HIV, according to the Center for Disease Control, and ranked well above the national averages for deaths by cancer, heart disease, and liver ailments.¹⁷

20:46 “At Lincoln Hospital, the first sister to die of an abortion after that law was passed was a sister named Carmen Rodriguez because the room they used to do abortions in was a supply room.”

- Carmen Rodriguez was the first person to die from the “the effects of an abortion” at Lincoln Hospital after a New York state law was passed in 1970 allowing a woman to undergo an abortion with the consent of her physician. The autopsy revealed that a prior heart condition caused a negative reaction to a salt solution used during the procedure. The Young Lords protested that the death was a result of neglect.¹⁸

21:09 “Black maternal mortality is 4 times that of whites”

- “The risk of maternal mortality remained 3 to 4 times higher among black women than white women during the past 6 decades (1935-2007)”¹⁹
- According to a report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, in 1970 there were 50 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births for black women and 10 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births for white women. In 2007, there were 25 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births for black women and under 10 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births for white women.²⁰

¹⁵ Head, Tom. “How Much Does It Cost to Get an Abortion?” Thought Co, www.thoughtco.com/how-much-does-an-abortion-cost-721089.

¹⁶ Kline, Wendy. *Coming Home: How Midwives Changed Birth*. Oxford University Press, 2019.

¹⁷ Gifford, Bill. “The Curse of D.C. General.” *Washington City Paper*, www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/article/13009811/the-curse-of-dc-general.

¹⁸ Gansberg, Martin. “Abortion Death Reported By City.” *The New York Times Archive*, *The New York Times*, 21 July 1970, www.nytimes.com/1970/07/21/archives/abortion-death-reported-by-city-victim-is-first-here-since-state.html.

¹⁹ Singh GK. *Maternal Mortality in the United States, 1935-2007: Substantial Racial/Ethnic, Socioeconomic, and Geographic Disparities Persist*. A 75th Anniversary Publication. Health Resources and Services Administration, Maternal and Child Health Bureau. Rockville, Maryland: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; 2010.


²⁰ <https://www.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/ourstories/mchb75th/mchb75maternalmortality.pdf>

- “Black women are more than three times more likely to die of pregnancy-related causes than white women, the Center for Disease Control said, based on data from 2011 to 2013.”^{21,22}

21:09 “Black life expectancy is 7 years less than whites”

Year	Black	Men	Women	White	Men	Women
1900	33.0	32.5	33.5	47.6	46.6	48.7
1950	60.8	59.1	62.9	69.1	66.5	72.2
1960	63.6	61.1	66.3	70.6	67.4	74.1
1970	64.1	60.0	68.3	71.7	68.0	75.6
1980	68.1	63.8	72.5	74.4	70.7	78.1
1990	69.1	64.5	73.6	76.1	72.7	79.4
2000	71.8	68.2	75.1	77.3	74.7	79.9
2010	75.1	71.8	78.0	78.9	76.5	81.3
2011	75.3	72.2	78.2	79.0	76.6	81.3
2012	75.5	72.3	78.4	79.1	76.7	81.4
2013	75.5	72.3	78.4	79.0	76.7	81.4
2014	75.6	72.5	78.5	79.1	76.7	81.4
2015	75.5	72.2	78.5	78.9	76.6	81.3
2016	74.8	71.5	77.9	78.5	76.1	81.0

SOURCE: NCHS, National Vital Statistics System, public-use Mortality Files | Chart prepared by



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21:34 “Over one third of women in Puerto Rico are sterilized, pushed as population control”

- A 1965 survey of Puerto Rican residents found that about one-third of all Puerto Rican mothers, ages 20-49, were sterilized. “Women of childbearing age in Puerto Rico in the 1960s were more than 10 times more likely to be sterilized than women from the United States.” The sterilization program was designed by the Eugenics Board and institutionalized by the passage of Law 116 in 1937.²⁴
- “In 1976, the U.S Department of Health, Education, and Welfare reported that over 37% of women of childbearing age in Puerto Rico had been sterilized. The vast majority were in their twenties.”²⁵

²¹ Jacob, Angela. “DC Has Highest Maternal Mortality Rate in US; Answers Sought.” NBC4 Washington, NBC4 Washington, 9 Feb. 2018, www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/DC-Maternal-Mortality-Review-Committee-Amid-Highest-Death-Rates-in-US-473449653.html.

²² “Pregnancy Mortality Surveillance System | Maternal and Infant Health | CDC.” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/maternalinfanthealth/pregnancy-mortality-surveillance-system.html.

²³ “The African American Population.” *BlackDemographics.com*, 25 Jan. 2013, blackdemographics.com/health-2/health/. Data taken from a table created by Black Demographics which drew numbers from the National Center for Health Statistics, the National Vital Statistics System, and public-use mortality files

²⁴ Krase, Kathryn. “History of Forced Sterilization and Current U.S. Abuses.” *Our Bodies Ourselves*, www.ourbodiesourselves.org/book-excerpts/health-article/forced-sterilization.

²⁵ Ordober, N. (2014, February 24). Puerto Rico. Retrieved July 14, 2019, from <http://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/connections/530ba18176f0db569b00001b>

21:57 “The IUD was first tested in Puerto Rico. It was then tested on black women in Harlem Hospital in New York, and on poor women in Sunflower County Mississippi, and Atlanta, Georgia.”

- In the late 1950s and early 1960s, IUD research trials were performed in Puerto Rico alongside oral contraceptive testing. The research was facilitated by Clarence Gamble and pharmaceutical companies. One of the primary IUD researchers was Dr. Penny Satterthwaite. Various “population control” methods were tested in Puerto Rico by U.S. doctors throughout much of the 20th century.²⁶
- A 1970s methodical survey found that 60% of the Black women in Sunflower County, Mississippi unknowingly suffered postpartum hysterectomies. A Eugenics Board targeted Sunflower County for “population control.”²⁷
- Before the passage and enforcement of more extensive guidelines for medical testing, black populations like those in Harlem Hospital, Sunflower County, and Atlanta were often used by researchers and drug companies as test subjects.²⁸

22:10 “That pill is being pushed on welfare mothers”

- Over the course of 1971 and 1972, Congress debated large-scale welfare reform. During the debates over H.R. 1, mandatory birth control for welfare recipients was seriously discussed and entertained. However, they decided rather to “encourage” its use and to, specifically, empower clinics to suggest and prescribe birth control to minors from families who received welfare without parental consent or knowledge. Poor women of color also sometimes experienced pressure to have abortions from welfare workers. For more recent examples of women on welfare being pressured to use birth control, see “Welfare Queens and Other Fairy Tales: Welfare Reform and Unconstitutional Reproductive Controls,” 38 Howard L.J. 473 (1994).²⁹

22:54 “The pill was first tested in Puerto Rico, then in clinics in Chicano neighborhoods of San Antonio, TX and Los Angeles, CA”

- In the 1950s Doctors Gregory Pincus and John Rock began testing progesterone on women in Puerto Rico, later known (in smaller doses) as “the pill.” Clarence Gamble expanded this distribution by selling off access to women in his clinics in Puerto Rico to pharmaceutical companies who were unable to conduct trials in the U.S.³⁰

²⁶ Briggs, Laura. *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, Science, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

²⁷ Washington, Harriet A. *Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present*. Knopf Doubleday, 2010.

²⁸ Washington, Harriet A. “Tuskegee Experiment Was But One Medical Study That Exploited African-Americans Infamous Research.” *Baltimoresun.com*, 23 Oct. 2018, www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-1995-03-19-1995078058-story.html .

²⁹ Moloney, Daniel Patrick. “The Racist Origins of U.S. Family-Planning Policy.” *Public Discourse*, 30 May 2019, www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2009/05/229/.

³⁰ Ordovery, N. (2014, February 24). Puerto Rico. Retrieved July 26, 2019, from <http://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/connections/530ba18176f0db569b00001b>

See also: Pendergrass, Drew C., and Michelle Y. Raji. “The Bitter Pill: Harvard and the Dark History of Birth Control | Magazine: The Harvard Crimson.” *The Bitter Pill: Harvard and the Dark History of Birth Control | Magazine | The Harvard Crimson*, The Crimson, www.thecrimson.com/article/2017/9/28/the-bitter-pill/ .

- “In the late 1950s, Dr. Joseph Goldzieher at the Southwest Foundation for Research and Education (now Texas Biomedical Research Institute) tested the drug on 200 women with the cooperation of the Planned Parenthood Center of San Antonio.”³¹

³¹ Parenthood, Planned. “Conceptive History.” Conceptive History | Planned Parenthood South Texas, www.plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-south-texas/80anniversary/conceptive-history .