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PLAN C

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Abstract

This is a film review of PLAN C (2023), directed by Tracy Droz Tragos.

Keywords

Abortion access, Roe v Wade, Dobbs v Jackson, COVID-19

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Author Notes

Dereck Daschke is a professor of Philosophy & Religion at Truman State University and holds a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago Divinity School. Particularly interested in the intersection among religion, psychology, and wellness, his academic work over more than two decades has analyzed the transformational breakdowns and creative buildups in the form of apocalypses, mysticism, new religious movements, psychedelics, the Bible, Bob Dylan, and, of course, film. He regularly teaches "Religion and Film" at Truman and has overseen a number of student research theses that have contributed to the conversation about just why it is that movies capture our meaning-making imaginations in the way they do.



PLAN C (2023), dir. Tracy Droz Tragos

Except for the fleeting invocation of God in anti-abortion protests, especially in connection with the quote from Jeremiah 1:5 (“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you”), the discomfoting documentary *Plan C* barely mentions religion at all. Yet the reason the film depicts the actions of the Plan C organization with such urgency is entirely because of the religious coordination (both American Catholics and Protestant Evangelicals) with conservative, “pro-life” politicians (and, as turned out to be the case, Supreme Court justices) to radically restrict abortion access across America and especially in so-called Republican “red states.” Since 2015, the Plan C organization and its founders, Francine Coeytaux and Elisa Wells, have aimed to get information about access to the chemical abortion medications mifepristone and misoprostol (and sometimes the drugs themselves) into the hands of women who find that their ability to terminate a pregnancy is impeded, whether due to geographical inaccessibility, cost, social stigma, or other barriers. Medical abortions offer a number of advantages over surgical ones, most especially the

ability to make this highly emotional and personal decision at one's own pace, in one's own home, with the people one chooses to have on hand for support.

Presented chronologically over three years, starting in 2019 and concluding in the wake of the US Supreme Court's *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision that overturned nearly fifty years of a woman's Constitutional right to an abortion, director Tracy Droz Tragos captures Francine and her team, largely made up of physician volunteers who can legally prescribe and distribute the medications, constantly needing to adapt to the ever-changing legal landscape, from one state to the next, from one day to the next. The audience has an almost Hitchcockian sense of dread and foreboding as the months and years tick down to the shocks to the American political system that give us the abortion landscape we know today: The COVID pandemic, the death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg and appointment of Justice Amy Coney Barrett, all in 2020; the passage of the bizarre Texas citizen bounty law in 2021; the leak of the draft opinion overturning *Roe vs. Wade* in May 2022 and then the actual decision in June. Relatedly, once the film enters the COVID era in 2020, many surgical abortions were suspended as "medically unnecessary," which increased the need for access to the chemical treatment, leading to the on-again, off-again, on-again ability to mail these drugs absent consultation with a physician, a restriction the FDA permanently (for now) suspended in 2021.

The film also follows volunteers for Plan C as they drive across rural areas of the US to find locations where women can discretely pick up the medications from their van. All of these volunteers face the potential for public exposure, doxing, violence, or even death, yet virtually everyone who was in the film showed up on stage at the premiere of the film in Park City. One of the film's recurrent themes is the need for people in positions of power, especially doctors, to push back against these state restrictions in order to find out where the justice system is actually willing

to draw the legal line. Doctors and patients alike have been cowed by the political forces set against them, yet the women of Plan C return again and again to the notion that until the laws are tested, no one really knows what is and is not permissible. This kind of strategy calls readily to mind the targeted civil disobedience of the civil rights movement, to be sure, but also, ironically, the exact efforts that abortion foes used over the last fifty years to achieve their goal of overturning Roe. Both movements certainly appealed to the moral force of the Christian God and the Bible to motivate citizens to fight for what they believe was the right thing for American society. It is therefore fitting that one woman tells Plan C, “Y’all are doing the Lord’s work.”

To contact Plan C and inquire about access to their information and services, please visit <https://www.plancpills.org/>