

LABOR + JUSTICE

SUMMARY

BRIEF SUMMARY

Set in a dystopian United States, Labor+Justice explores what our future could look like if pregnant persons were required by law to give birth in front of a panel of judges, and sentenced to death if they failed to bring their unborn child into this world alive. We open on an empty courtroom, loud voices approaching us from the hall when 3 judges enter, throwing vulgar remarks at one another. Not a second later, 2 more judges enter carrying greasy to-go bags. More insults are hurled, and before long a food fight of chicken wings and bbq sauce erupts. Suddenly, a female judge enters, seemingly angry, but soon breaks the facade to reveal she's one of the boys.

Beer and champagne are produced and it's not long before the sauce-soaked judges are seated, devouring their chicken wings like gluttonous pigs. A scream outside the courtroom is heard. The judges quickly wipe their faces and hands, settling in a most eerie manner as they stare with anticipation at the back of the room. The double doors abruptly SWING open and two guards lead a team of medical staff that wheeling a woman in active labor into the room. The proceeding commences as if the food fight never occurred and the woman is read the possible sentencing if she fails to birth a healthy child. "We have been gathered here today-".

We soon learn that the baby is breach, but the judges are quick to deny any medical intervention. As the doctor coaches the laboring woman, the judges continue to suck and slurp on their chicken, the mix of blood and bbq sauce repelling the audience. The baby is born and there is a moment of hope before the doctor begins to resuscitate the baby. The judges pressure him for a status of life or death. The baby is stillborn. The woman is immediately sentenced to execution and wheeled out without even being able to hold her child. At the same moment a second woman is wheeled in, fear igniting in her eyes. And so the cycle repeats. "We have been gathered here today..."

THEMES

Labor+Justice can best be described as a surrealist nightmare. A mixture of genres comparable to The Twilight Zone and Black Mirror, the film weaves thriller with horror, yet draws out empathy and heartbreak with its all to relatable themes. The most obvious being the injustice of a "woman's right to choose" what to do with her body and her unborn child.

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SUMMARY (Continued)

THEMES (cont.)

I wrote this film back in January of 2019. In the Fall of 2021, I decided to move forward with directing it. Who knew that in the middle of our pre-production, a leaked draft noting the possibility of Roe V. Wade being overturned would surface, and finally the decision to retract it all-together would occur. I will admit we questioned if we should move forward due to the gravity of SCOTUS' decision, not to mention the grief. But doors kept opening for us and we took it as a sign to move forward.

Another theme is subtly expressed through our lead actress Anissa, who is both Black and Mexican. According to the CDC, in 2020 the maternal mortality rate for non-Hispanic **Black** women was **55.3 deaths per 100,000 live births**, 2.9 times the rate for non-Hispanic *White* women. **Nearly 3x MORE**. Aside from the injustices of women's rights over their bodies as a whole, I felt is necessary to touch on this injustice in the delivery room.

The third theme is emphasized by the gluttonous charade of the Judge's eating during the birth. To me this portrays the carelessness and power-hungry nature of our government leaders when it comes to women's rights. They easily forget it is real-human beings that must suffer the consequences of their actions, and parade through their meetings and their town halls as such. Our fourth theme is the use of religion as an excuse for our government's decision making, rather than keeping the two separate. Our 7th Judge indulges in himself as he sings a hymn throughout the birth, which is completely inappropriate and insensitive.

Lastly, the crux of the film was the sentencing to death based on the life of the baby, not the mother. Though this is not where our country is, it doesn't seem too far fetched. As a woman and a mother myself, I sometimes feel that society treats my husband and children's lives as more valuable than mine. Don't get me wrong, I would lay down my life for them, and as for my career, I have in some instances. But I feel society was wired in this inequality, and it runs deep.

VISUAL STYLE

After much contemplation, I landed on shooting the film in Black & White. Since the film is set in a dystopian future, I knew I wanted the decade to be vague. I chose a location that has wooden paneling from the 1960's and chandeliers that date back to the 1800's. Even the costumes were meticulously thought out by our designer, Haydee Antunano, who implemented styles spanning from the 60's to present day.

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SUMMARY (Continued)

VISUAL STYLE (cont.)

Shooting in black & white removes the distraction of items in the room that feel out of place, and really makes the audience focus on the story at hand. It also provides a grotesque nature, similar to the style of *The Twilight Zone*, making the bbq sauce and the blood the same color. We chose wide angle, vintage Cooke Panchro lenses to enhance/exaggerate the judges as they demean and challenge their counterparts. I wanted it to feel as though the judges and the medical staff/woman were in two different worlds, paralleling how I feel to the world I live in compared to the world our government officials live in.

When we push into the judge's extreme closeups of their mouths, we added in higher contrasting key-lights. In doing so, the grease of the chicken glistens more, and the judges are more artificially lit as if they were politicians at an indoor rally. Most of the film is shot with natural light pulled from the beautifully tall windows in the room to further voice the natural reality we live in.

Thank you for taking the time to review our application!

Sarah Joy Byington