

# Unwanted (excerpted)

## ABORTION | Planned Parenthood abortion videos stir fresh controversy, but reproductive violence has a long history in America, with many dark chapters

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Issue: "Banned parenthood," Sept. 19, 2015

Posted Sept. 4, 2015

ATLANTA, Ga., and LITTLETON, N.C.—When Elaine Riddick saw the recently released videos of Planned Parenthood workers picking through the tiny remains of aborted babies, she was horrified. Riddick herself is no stranger to childhood—or reproductive—violence.

From her dining room in suburban Atlanta, Riddick, 61, points to a half-inch scar above her right eye as she remembers the afternoon in 1967 when her life irrevocably changed. At age 13, Riddick was walking home in rural eastern North Carolina when a grown man from her small town attacked her: Riddick says he raped her and threatened to kill her if she told anyone. She stayed quiet.

A few weeks later, while she was picking cotton, Riddick vomited. She thought she had a virus, but when she started gaining weight, her grandmother took her to the county health department. The young girl was pregnant.

Instead of launching an investigation, welfare officials recommended doctors sterilize Riddick after she delivered her baby. They deemed her promiscuous and “feeble-minded.” Without benefit of a review or accountability process, the government declared Riddick at age 13 unfit ever to reproduce again.

Her forced sterilization wasn’t an isolated incident. From the 1930s to 1970s, officials from government agencies and eugenics boards across 33 states ordered sterilization for at least 60,000 men, women, and children deemed undesirable or unfit.

Reasons ranged from family poverty to a sweeping, ill-defined category of “feeble-mindedness” that ensnared victims of both below-average and above-average intelligence. Eugenics literature decried the idea of these “morons” bearing children.

The plan behind eugenics—driven by Charles Darwin’s theory of natural selection (also known as survival of the fittest)—was simple and chilling: Eliminate certain future problems by eliminating certain future people.

Germany adopted similar sterilization laws in the 1930s, and the American movement in part inspired Adolf Hitler in his genocidal campaign to exterminate millions of victims based on his notions of racial superiority.

In North Carolina, five men on the state’s eugenics board regularly gathered in a Raleigh meeting room, reading short files on intended targets, and often condemning them to childlessness.

Officials convinced Riddick’s grandmother—the girl’s guardian—to authorize her sterilization procedure. Her grandmother was poor, illiterate, and afraid. She signed the papers with an X. Riddick had no idea.

A few months later, doctors put Riddick to sleep as the 14-year-old delivered a healthy baby boy. When she awoke, she didn’t know physicians had cut, burned, and tied her fallopian tubes as well.

Riddick suffered chronic health problems, but didn’t know about the sterilization until she married at age 19 and learned she couldn’t conceive children. After a medical exam, she says a doctor told her: “Someone butchered you.”

Now, when Riddick watches the undercover videos of Planned Parenthood workers picking apart aborted babies and joking about their remains, she feels indignation like many viewers. But she also feels particular sympathy for the unborn children.

“It’s as if those babies didn’t have the right to live, and I didn’t have the right to bear children,” Riddick says. “And there is a connection, whether you’re killing a baby or killing a woman’s womb ... I don’t think anyone is qualified to decide who should live and who should give birth.”

TRAGICALLY, government officials, scientists, politicians, philanthropists, and physicians—including many Planned Parenthood workers—have been making such decisions for nearly a century.

In the early 20th century, Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger—an ardent eugenicist—infamously referred to lower classes and those she deemed unfit as “human waste,” and she championed mass sterilization of so-called defective classes of people.



Margaret Sanger wasn’t a scientist, but she vehemently embraced eugenics and believed the best way to reduce what she and other eugenicists considered undesirable populations was to prevent their conception. The activist promoted birth control, but she also advocated sterilizations of lower classes as part of her American Birth Control League—the organization that later became Planned Parenthood.

MEANWHILE, thousands of children became easy targets. Nearly two decades before Elaine Riddick faced sterilization, Willis Lynch met the same abuse at the hands of state officials.

Lynch still lives seven miles from where he was born in rural Littleton, N.C., in 1933. Standing near his tiny trailer where he lives alone near lush tobacco fields, Lynch, 82, remembers the day in 1948 when workers from Caswell Training School took him to a local hospital. The teenager didn’t know what was happening, but a nurse suggested he sing a song while she administered anesthesia. When he woke up, Lynch couldn’t stand up straight. Later, he would realize doctors had performed a vasectomy.

Lynch was 14 years old.

The young boy had lived at Caswell Training School for two years, after getting into trouble at home. At home, Lynch, one of seven children, had lived with his single mother on a rural farm. The family was poor, and his mother gleaned corn and other produce from the fields of a kind farmer.

Lynch says he was a troublemaker, and welfare officials sent him to Caswell to set him straight: “It was a school for mean boys and mean girls.” But Lynch endured cruel treatment there, including beatings from authorities, and ultimately sterilization. His mother signed the order. Lynch thinks she feared they wouldn’t release him from the school if she refused. She died 10 years ago, but mother and son never discussed it.



Like other eugenics victims, Lynch learned the fuller history when the *Winston-Salem Journal* ran a series of articles in 2002 revealing harrowing records from North Carolina’s aggressive eugenics program.

Lynch’s records show his diagnosis: “feeble-mindedness.”

Behind his trailer, Lynch peers under the hood of a 1982 Ford Mustang he bought in 1996. He’s rebuilt the engine and does all his own repairs. He served in the military for two years (and remembers every place he was stationed), and he’s held jobs with plumbers, electricians, and mechanics. “No, I’m not feeble-minded,” he says. “I can do just about anything.”

Lynch is one of 220 victims of the North Carolina eugenics program who received compensation (\$20,000) from the state legislature last year. He and other victims, including Riddick, are waiting on the remaining \$30,000 promised.

Both Riddick and Lynch say it isn't about the money but the recognition of wrongdoing by the state. North Carolina officials have apologized for the ghoulish treatment revealed in eugenics board records.

In some cases, victims knew about their sterilization order and begged the eugenics board to relent. One woman pleaded in 1945: "I don't want it. I don't approve of it, sir. I don't want a sterilization operation. ... Let me go home, see if I get along alright. Have mercy on me and let me do that."

The *Winston-Salem Journal* reported the North Carolina eugenics board approved 90 percent of cases, and decided most of them in less than 15 minutes.

Riddick discovered her eugenics records diagnosed her as feeble-minded and promiscuous and recommended sterilization at age 13: "This will at least prevent additional children from being born to this child who cannot care for herself, and can never function in any way as a parent."

These days, Riddick uses her experience as a parent to promote pro-life causes and legislation across the country. She's close to her only son, Tony, and her 10-year-old grandson, and says she's glad eugenics officials couldn't order abortion in the 1960s. (The North Carolina eugenics program ended in 1977, four years after *Roe v. Wade* legalized abortion. Other eugenics programs lost some support after Hitler's eugenicist-driven holocaust in World War II, but they still managed to continue in some form for decades.)



Riddick recently testified before the South Carolina state legislature in favor of a 20-week abortion ban: "My son was conceived in rape, and he had the right to live."

PLANNED PARENTHOOD officials reject comparisons between eugenics and the 300,000 abortions their centers perform each year. But similarities abound: Abortions disproportionately occur among minorities and the poor, and babies with genetic defects like Down syndrome are singled out for extermination in significant numbers.

(On Aug. 27, a group of black pastors and pro-life activists gathered in front of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., to ask museum curators to remove a bust of Margaret Sanger from the National Portrait Gallery, calling her views "racist and genocidal.")

Mothers do consent to abortions, but much like eugenics programs of the past, leading scientists, doctors, and politicians still approve of a practice that eliminates the unwanted. John West of the Discovery Institute (who writes about eugenics in his book *Darwin Day in America*) says the recent videos released by CMP also show connections with eugenics campaigns of the past.

Steven Mosher of the pro-life Population Research Institute says he hopes the graphic videos will revolt viewers with the reality of what happens when abortionists eliminate unborn children. Mosher learned the reality when he witnessed late-term abortions in China while studying the country's one-child policy in 1981. The experience transformed him into a pro-life advocate and led to his Christian conversion. The sight of abortion produced an effect numbers can't convey, he said: "I saw hell open up."

Mosher hopes the grisly images in the CMP videos also lead many to embrace the reality of man as created in the image of God, instead of the theory of man as organic material evolved from animals. "There are only two views of man," said Mosher. "One is that we are a little lower than the angels. The other is that we are a little higher than the apes. I'm firmly on the side of the angels."



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