

FAQ for the Broadcast Premiere of *WOMEN IN BLUE* on PBS and *Independent Lens*

Overview

- ITVS is proud to present the broadcast premiere of *WOMEN IN BLUE*—a thoughtful look inside the Minneapolis Police Department that delves into the story of its first female police chief, Janeé Harteau—on *Independent Lens* on Monday, February 8, 2021 on PBS.

About *WOMEN IN BLUE*

- *WOMEN IN BLUE* is a documentary film by Deirdre Fishel. Filmed from 2017 to 2020, the documentary shines a spotlight on the police women within the Minneapolis Police Department working to reform it from the inside amid a troubled history of police misconduct and racism. It focuses on MPD's first female police chief, Janeé Harteau, and three of the women in her department in their efforts to reimagine their profession and usher in greater equity and diversity to their ranks. After a high-profile, fatal police shooting of an unarmed woman—the officer, Mohamed Noor, was eventually convicted of third-degree murder and second-degree manslaughter—Chief Harteau is forced into making a difficult decision that threatens the gains of women represented on the force under her leadership. Central to the film is the question, 'Could women help both change the culture of policing and create reform?'

Reactions in the press:

- "This is an unflinching study of a complex situation, showing gray areas where often only black and white are seen." —[Boston Globe](#)
- "*Women in Blue* reminds us that women officers are statistically way less likely to be involved in excessive force situations. This is a compelling look at a group of women who are dedicated to their job and transforming the department." —[Aisle Seat](#)
- "Consider it a spiritual prequel to everything we've seen in the past four weeks. [...] *Women in Blue* gives us some early clues that there was something dreadfully wrong going on in the Minneapolis Police Department." —[Splice Today](#)

Filmmaker Statement

“Outraged after Eric Garner was choked to death by a male NYPD officer in 2014, I had a discussion with a female lieutenant that made me start to wonder if women police differently. When I found statistics that women deescalate conflict better and use substantially less excessive force than their male counterparts, I felt compelled to make a film that would ask the question: Could women help transform our troubled police departments? I went to Minneapolis in 2017, because Chief Janeé Harteau, the city’s first female and first openly gay chief, wanted 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. I began to follow her and three women she had put into leadership, all fighting to change policing from the inside.

I never could have predicted that Chief Harteau would be forced to resign three months later, after a Black officer was spooked and shot into the dark, killing a white woman, nor that the film would end with the brutal murder of George Floyd by an MPD officer in May 2020. After Floyd’s death, as the world rose up in protest, I questioned whether the film could have 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 that the film could be a unique and valuable contribution to a national dialogue about our policing crisis. Filmed between 2017 and 2020, *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. The film clearly reveals the limitations of police reform through incremental change.

But *Women in Blue* highlights something else that I think is critical right now: the work of women who come to policing not just to enforce laws, but to serve communities with respect and care. Officer Alice White was promoted six months after I started filming 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 eye opening 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.

I understand the feeling that police departments are too corrupt to be reformed. Far too many Black lives have been taken and white officers have repeatedly not been held accountable. But short of dismantling the police—which is not a monolithic position—we need to reimagine what public safety should look like. Having more women is not a single solution. Nothing will happen if police unions have the power to protect rogue officers, but I hope that audiences will see the value of what women could bring.

As we look to reimagine public safety, we need to think about not only what we want public safety officers to do, and not do, but what kind of people we want in these positions and what skills we want them to have. I hope *Women in Blue* will help audiences finally consider what increasing the participation of women, particularly Black women, could bring to the table. We've known for 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 officers nationwide. The only way to increase the number of women to the point where they aren't a minority and can help transform a toxically, aggressive culture—as well bring about other desperately needed changes—is to demand it. I hope *Women in Blue* will help in that fight.”

Deirdre Fishel, Director
January 2021

Independent Lens Executive Producer Statement

“Over the course of the last 19 seasons, *Independent Lens* has explored the topics of policing, community safety, and gun violence in many documentaries, including *Charm City*, *The Armor of Light*, *TOWER*, *Peace Officer*, and *The Force* to name just a few. Later this season we'll explore some of these same issues in *Philly D.A.* and *Down a Dark Stairwell*. The intersection between gender, race, and violence in American policing impacts every community, and is an issue that we believe needs to be examined from a variety of perspectives and from within different communities. When the Minneapolis Police Department named Janeé Harteau as the first female police chief, we felt there was a unique story to capture, looking very specifically at gender and race in the larger context of policing. As is true with all of our documentaries, the filmmakers

couldn't have known when they began making the documentary in 2017 the historic events that would unfold in Minneapolis and its police department over the next three years.

No single documentary can tell the complete story, which is precisely why *Independent Lens* returns to this topic periodically. *Women in Blue* provides a bird's eye view into the lives of these female officers and what they have encountered working in law enforcement. It is not the definitive look at the Minneapolis Police Department—before or after the murder of George Floyd.

Finally, on a personal note as a native Minnesotan with a large circle of family and friends who live in Minneapolis, I'm invested in understanding how decisions around policing impact the people involved, as well as the police department and the city as a whole.”

Lois Vossen, *Independent Lens* Executive Producer
January 2021

Q&A

Why is *Independent Lens* and PBS airing a film about the Minneapolis Police Department and police violence at a time when the community is still reeling from the murder of George Floyd?

The purpose of *Independent Lens* documentaries is to spark conversations about some of the most pressing social issues of our time and to provide access to a broad range of perspectives in the lives of Americans. The issue of police violence has long impacted Minneapolis and other communities across the country, and the aim of *Women in Blue* is to spark a conversation about reform through the specific lens of the role that gender plays in policing. Filmed in the years before the murder of George Floyd, *Women in Blue* is a look into lives of female officers in the MPD and the challenges they face working in law enforcement, as well as their efforts to reform the system from within. Their experiences within MPD remain relevant today for how they shed light on and provoke discussions about the decisions made around policing not only in Minneapolis, but also around the nation.



Questions about Funders

Please refer any questions about the underwriters for *Women in Blue* to ITVS by contacting Lisa Tawil, VP, Marketing & Communications, lisa.tawil@itvs.org or Daniel Ross, Senior Director, Marketing & Publicity, daniel.ross@itvs.org.

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