

# The Maternal Health of Incarcerated Women

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UVa 2022



# Relevant Quotes from *Poster Child*

- “As it was, the prison had granted me special privileges. In the months before my due date, I started to get larger portions at mealtime, nighttime, snack bags, and just two weeks before , my cell door had been left open just in case I went into labor in the middle of the night. Even though these were considered “special privileges” because I had to make a written request, you would have thought it would’ve been common sense and automatic,” (Smith 1).
- ““Her hands and legs need to be shackled at all times,” he instructed. My mom looked devastated. She couldn’t believe that someone would even consider putting a woman who just gave birth in shackles. Women can’t even walk after delivery, let alone run anywhere,” (Smith 17).
- Somewhere along the way, the innocent little girl in me became a troubled, vulnerable woman. Standing there with my foot shackled to the side of the bed, unable to walk across the room to get a diaper, as my son wailed and kicked, I just stopped. I stood there in front of Armani, crying as he did, wondering if and when everything would be over,” (Smith 21).

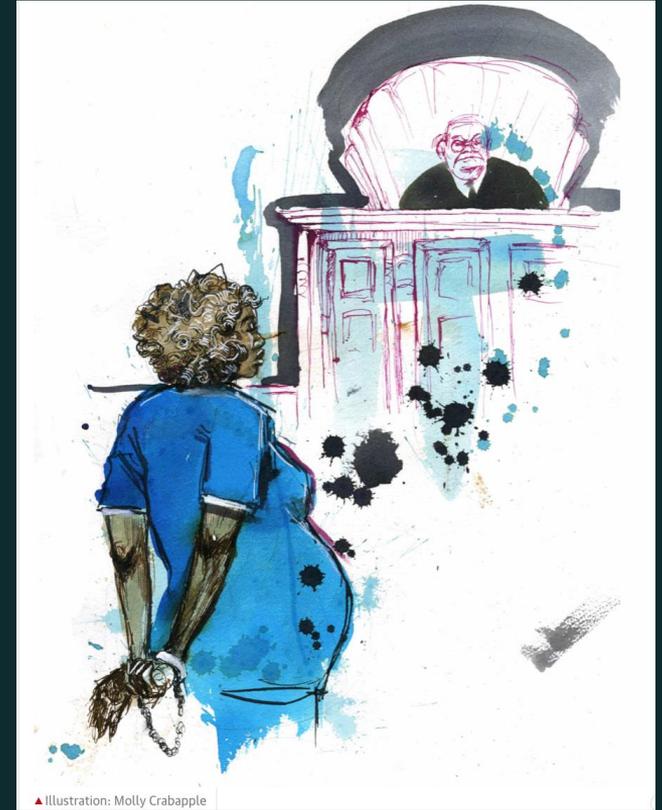
# Pregnant & Shackled

- Podcast: What We Do And Don't Know About Pregnancy And Incarceration
  - <https://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2019/03/21/705587775/pregnant-behind-bars-what-we-do-and-dont-know-about-pregnancy-and-incarceration>
  - Quotes:
    - “Shackled during childbirth”
    - “Complaints about pain or contractions ignored”
    - “Women who don’t count don’t get counted and women who don’t get counted don’t count.”
      - “Children who are separated from their mothers in custody are more likely to end up in foster care, even from birth.”
    - 1:00-2:06 & 3:12-
    - Sterilization and coercion as another hurdle



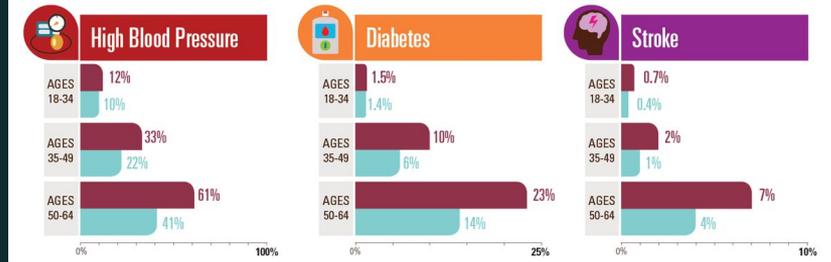
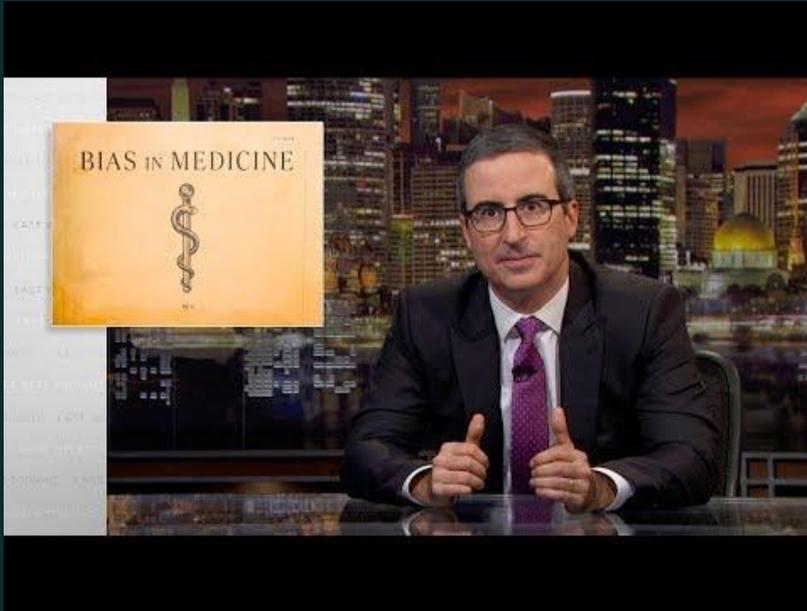
# Legislation

- “Despite a constitutional mandate that prisons and all institutions of incarceration provide health care to people inside, there is no set of mandatory standards, there is no mandatory oversight that these institutions must follow. And so you get a wide range ... of some places that are actually providing relatively good pregnancy care and others that are providing harmful, neglectful or absent pregnancy care.”
- Passage of “First Step Act” in 2018: federal legislation that prohibits shackling of pregnant women failed to protect pregnant inmates from mercy of guards



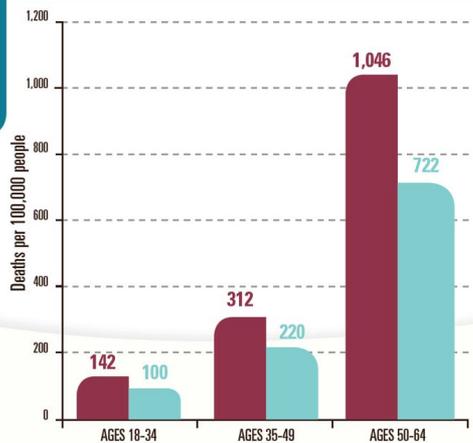
▲ Illustration: Molly Crabapple

# The Role of Race in Maternal Health



African Americans and whites include Hispanic and non-Hispanic origin. SOURCE: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 2015.

African Americans are more likely to die at early ages from all causes.



SOURCE: US Vital Statistics, 2015.

# Serena Williams & Childbirth

- Almost lost her life after giving birth due to blood clots
- Was told that the medication made her “befuddled” and refused to run the CT scan she asked for, performing an ultrasound instead
- “I know my body.”
- Discussion Question:
  - Serena Williams’ experience illustrates how systemic medical racism is, as even the most renowned Black women are neglected during childbirth.
  - What might this suggest about how Black pregnant inmates—arguably the most vulnerable population of people in society—might be treated behind bars?



**Questions, comments, or  
concerns?**