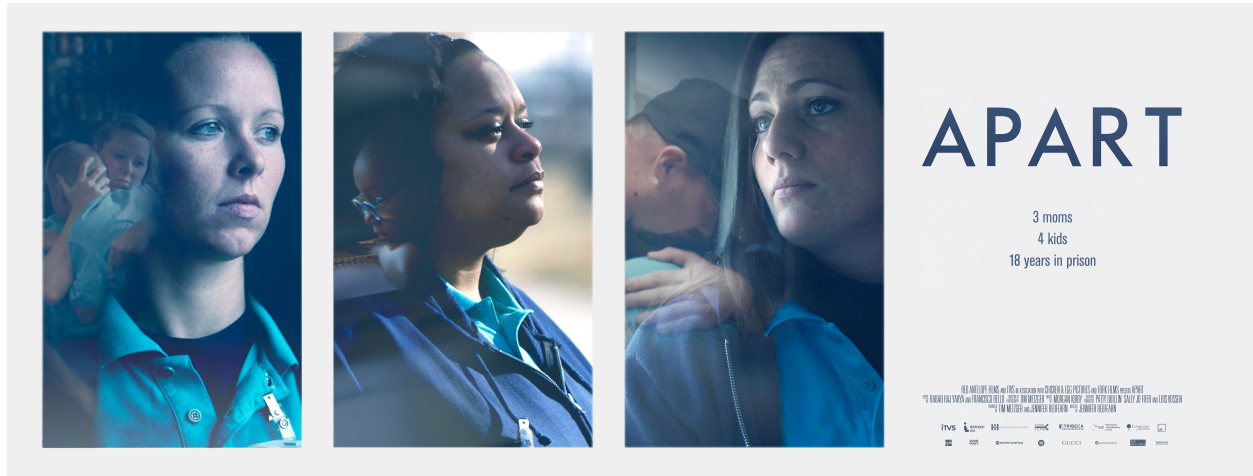


APART

3 moms. 4 kids. 18 years in prison.

Directed by Jennifer Redfearn
85 mins. | USA | 2020



LOGLINE

In a Midwestern state caught between the opioid epidemic and rising incarceration for women, three unforgettable mothers —Tomika, Lydia, and Amanda— return home from prison and rebuild their lives after being separated from their children for years.

LONG SYNOPSIS

On a cold morning at a prison in Northeast Ohio, women are counted and locked into a waiting van. After a short ride, they arrive at a new building and see a dramatic change: no prison guards, no rattling keys, no slamming doors. They aren't summoned by their last names or called "offender." They're welcomed by their given names. Among the group are three mothers, whose prison and post-prison odysseys are the focus of **APART**.

Lydia has a bachelor's degree in criminal justice and was a soccer mom to two young sons, but after an injury, her doctor prescribed Vicodin. The prescription led to opioid addiction, then to heroin, and finally to prison. With a felony on her record, she wrestles with how to put her middle-class life back together – but her biggest hurdle is rebuilding her relationship with her son. *"We were super close. And then I was just gone. I do hope I can put his world right-side-up again."*

Tomika grew up in low-income housing in Detroit and used her skills as an entrepreneur to escape the inequality that kept generations of her family in poverty. Facing a 32-year sentence for trafficking marijuana and ecstasy, she took a plea for 10 years when her daughter Bailee was an infant. Tomika dreams of opening a restaurant called "Bailee's," honoring her daughter and providing her with stability she never had as a kid. But her long sentence starts to wear her down, and with each passing year, her

daughter grows further away. *"I've always been driven, I've always wanted so much more out of life. And I want that back. I want to pave the way for Bailee. And then for her to give her kids a good life."*

Amanda grew up in rural poverty surrounded by addiction and slipped into the same pattern as her parents and siblings. Now, after years of sobriety, she's on a new path. In the seventh year of her nine-year sentence for robbing a pharmacy, Amanda has a chance at early release and a reunion with her ten-year-old son, Tyler. Amid all the stories of relapse, she struggles to break the cycle of addiction and incarceration, and build a new future for her son. *"There are so many things that I've missed that I can never get back. I have to look forward now, and that's scary because failure is so real."*

Ohio has one of the largest populations of women in prison. Yet, a culture of reform is emerging in Cleveland with strong leadership from women. A new reentry program is set up in the city—it's the first time incarcerated people are allowed to leave prison to attend a daily program off-site. The program prepares the women to find work after prison, and to rebuild relationships with their kids. Its program manager, **Malika**, is an advocate and mother who was formerly incarcerated in the same prison.

As they step into their post-prison lives, Lydia, Tomika, and Amanda navigate an unforgiving environment, looking for jobs and housing. But after all this time away, the real test is whether they can restore the bond with their children. Will they be able to persevere and reconstruct lives derailed by drugs, crime and imprisonment? Will they be able to restore the broken trust and faith with their families? Filmed over 3 ½ years, **APART** traces their steps and slow progress toward rebuilding their lives.

At its heart, **APART** is a family story. It's the story of economic alienation, addiction, and survival. But it's also a story of women helping each other return to their communities—a story of love, reunion, and redemption. Amanda, Tomika, and Lydia are three women among millions who are trying rebuild their lives after prison, as women are now the fastest-growing population in the U.S. criminal justice system. This year alone, long-term incarceration will separate 150,000 minor children from their mothers.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In December 2016, I traveled to Cleveland, OH, to learn more about a reentry program set up to address the unique needs of women returning home from prison. My partner and I talked to over two dozen women in the program; the stories they shared with us were at once profoundly engaging, moving, and at times, gut-wrenching. Most of the women we met were in prison due to drugs or drug-related charges. And though each story was unique, they all faced an early trauma—sexual abuse, physical abuse, or a family history of poverty, addiction, and incarceration—that led them to drugs and into the prison system. Their stories paint a vivid picture of the complex forces that drive women into the system and the challenges they face upon returning home. All of them were concerned about the practical needs of finding work and housing, and I was particularly struck by the conversations we had about restoring bonds with their kids.

During the trip, we filmed women reuniting with their children at a Christmas party organized by the reentry program. Tomika told us she was planning to tell her daughter Bailee that she was in prison, and she invited us to sit at the table and film this privileged moment with the family. It was a difficult

moment for everyone involved, and yet it powerfully shows how difficult the separation is for mothers and their children. On witnessing the women seeing their children for the first time in months and reaching across a vast divide, to give love, and to feel loved, I knew I had to make this film.

Viewers will experience intimacy in the film that was developed only over time. In the beginning, I was torn about filming while the women were sharing intimate details of their lives, and I questioned how our presence would influence their process in group discussions or when they were sharing such critical moments with their children and families. But the women we filmed with are eager to share their stories—they want us to witness this side of the story, the side most of us don't get to see. I wanted to audiences to grapple with that separation, and think about what that does to mothers, children, their families and entire communities.

Since the 1980s, the number of women prisoners has grown by a staggering 800%. Hopefully, the film will move audiences to learn more about women's incarceration and inspire conversations about what we can do in the short, and long term, to create a more equitable and just society. Incarcerated women and men are less likely to return to prison if they maintain a strong relationship with their children. How do we help people maintain those bonds while in prison and restore them when they return home? How do we continue to design programs that address the unique needs of women returning home from prison? In the long term, how do we design a society that serves people better, and centers of recovery that are restorative rather than punitive institutions.

I'm honored to have had the opportunity to work with these remarkable women, and I'm inspired by their candor and courage in sharing their most vulnerable moments with an audience.

TEAM

Jennifer Redfearn - Director, Producer, Sound

Jennifer Redfearn is an Academy Award nominated director. She directed and produced SUN COME UP, about a small island community losing their land to rising seas. SUN COME UP was nominated for an Academy Award in 2011, screened in theaters across the U.S. and aired on HBO. TOCANDO LA LUZ (TOUCH THE LIGHT) was co-produced with ITVS and aired on PBS in 2016. It premiered at the Full Frame Documentary Festival where it won the Charles E. Guggenheim Award. Jennifer worked on the 2016 SXSW audience award winner LANDFILL HARMONIC as a field director and consulting producer. She has produced television documentaries for PBS, the BBC, National Geographic, CNN, and Discovery. Jennifer currently serves as the Director of the Documentary Program at UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism.

Tim Metzger - Cinematographer, Producer

Tim Metzger is an Academy Award nominated producer and Emmy nominated cinematographer with over 15 years of experience filming documentaries. Tim filmed and produced the 2011 Oscar nominee SUN COME UP, as well as the award-winning feature documentary TOCANDO LA LUZ (TOUCH THE LIGHT). He has served as director of photography for several major Emmy-nominated series, including National Geographic's THE STORY OF GOD WITH MORGAN FREEMAN and RISING: REBUILDING GROUND ZERO for Discovery, executive produced by Steven Spielberg. Tim has filmed in more than 20 countries

and his work has also appeared on PBS, BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera, and HBO among others. He has also taught documentary filmmaking for New York University.

Rabab Haj Yahya - Editor

Rabab Haj Yahya is best known for the award-winning feature documentaries, THE FEELING OF BEING WATCHED (Tribeca 2018), for which she won best editing in a feature documentary (Woodstock, 2018) and the Critic's Choice-nominated SPEED SISTERS (Hot Docs 2015). She was also an editor on the Emmy-nominated web-series the SECRET LIFE OF MUSLIMS (Peabody Finalist, Vox and USA Today, 2016) and is a Sundance Edit and Story Lab Fellow. Rabab has also edited numerous documentaries for the critically acclaimed TV documentary series Witness as well as for the Al Jazeera Documentary Channel including Enemies of the South (Al Jazeera Doc Channel 2015).

Francisco Bello - Editor

Francisco Bello, ACE, is an Oscar and three-time Emmy nominee. He shot and produced SALIM BABA, a 2008 Best Short Documentary Oscar and 2009 Emmy Nominee. Francisco produced and edited WAR DON DON, the winner of the Special Jury Prize at the 2010 SXSW Film Festival, for which he was also awarded the inaugural Karen Schmeer Award for Excellence in Documentary Editing and two Emmy nominations. Additional highlights include editing the 2017 SXSW Narrative Grand Jury Prize winner MOST BEAUTIFUL ISLAND, the Peabody winning BEST KEPT SECRET, and the archival films OUR NIXON and THE REAGAN SHOW. Francisco co-directed DREAMING AGAINST THE WORLD seen at the 2015 Telluride Film Festival and the closing night of DocNYC. Most recently he wrote and edited Barbara Kopple's DESERT ONE.

CREDITS

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PRODUCED BY

Tim Metzger

Jennifer Redfearn

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Rabab Haj Yahya

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Michael Kinomoto

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