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***No Más Bebés* Premieres on *Independent Lens*  
Monday, February 1, 2016 on PBS**

**40 Years after Groundbreaking Lawsuit, Documentary Examines the  
Unwanted Sterilization of Mexican Immigrant Women at a  
Los Angeles County Hospital**



*Maria Figueroa returns to the maternity ward at Los Angeles County Hospital.  
Credit: Kevin Castro*

(San Francisco, CA) — ***No Más Bebés*** tells the story of a little-known, but landmark event of women’s history and reproductive rights, a struggle that unfolded four decades ago in Los Angeles. The film recounts how a small group of Mexican immigrant mothers and activists sued county doctors, the state, and the U.S. government after they were sterilized while giving birth at Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center during the late 1960s and 1970s. Many of the mothers spoke no English, and charged that they had been forced to consent to having their fallopian tubes tied by doctors and nurses during the late stages of labor — often based on little more than the question “More babies?”

The film tells an unforgettable tale of family, cultural conflict, and resistance. Aided by an intrepid, 26-year-old Chicana lawyer and armed with hospital records secretly gathered by a whistle-blowing young doctor, the mothers stood up to powerful institutions in the name of justice. In their landmark 1975 civil rights lawsuit, *Madrigal v. Quilligan*, they argued that a woman’s right to bear a child is guaranteed under the Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade*. Directed by Renee Tajima-Peña (*Who Killed Vincent Chin?*), *No Más Bebés* premieres on *Independent Lens*, Monday, February 1, 2016, 10:00-11:00PM ET ([check local listings](#)) on PBS.

One of the film’s key figures is Dr. Bernard Rosenfeld, then a young doctor who had noticed a troubling practice in the maternity ward at Los Angeles County-USC Medical Center — immigrant women, many of whom spoke no English, were being encouraged to sign authorizations for tubal ligations. A first year intern with everything to lose, Rosenfeld secretly gathered evidence and blasted letters to media and watchdog groups around the country, trying to get someone to take up the cause. He soon met a newly minted law school graduate, Antonia Hernández, whose own mother had given birth at the hospital. Hernández and a group of young Mexican American lawyers, working out of a legal aid storefront, set out to file a civil rights lawsuit to stop the practice.



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The filmmakers spend six years tracking down the mothers who sued and other witnesses, and the unfolding drama of the case, *Madrigal v. Quilligan*, is told through their own words. Many of the mothers were still living under the emotional shadow of the sterilization and were reluctant to discuss the case, but six agreed to be filmed. Four decades later, their memories are still raw. Many had no idea they were sterilized until lawyers and activists helping with the case came knocking on their doors. They frankly discuss the effect the procedure had on their marriages, families, and future lives.

The film asks: Was the maternity ward functioning as a “border checkpoint” for unborn babies? Were the mothers pushed into signing consents in a language they did not understand, were in no condition to sign, or agreed to under threat?

For the first time since the trial, the defendant doctors also agreed to be interviewed, including Dr. EJ Quilligan, the prominent head of OB-GYN. While the doctors deny any wrongdoing, they describe the maternity ward of the massive, public teaching hospital as a “war zone,” where so many women labored on gurneys in the hallways.

The events depicted in *No Más Bebés* unfolded against the backdrop of similar sterilizations of poor women at public facilities across the U.S. The *Madrigal v. Quilligan* lawsuit and related cases around the country led to reforms to protect women from coercive sterilizations and other significant changes in hospital policy. And yet, coercive sterilizations continue to happen. In 2010, it was discovered that incarcerated women in California prisons were unwillingly sterilized; in 2015, a Tennessee judge was found to have offered probation in exchange for sterilization. On the positive side, North Carolina and Virginia have recently agreed to compensate victims of sterilization abuse. Says *Independent Lens* executive producer Lois Vossen, “the struggle so vividly depicted in *No Más Bebés* also anticipated the reemergence of the reproductive justice movement today, as Chicana activists sought to redefine reproductive politics not only as the right to abortion, but also the right to bear a child.”

“Like most middle class women, to me *Roe v. Wade* meant the right to abortion,” says producer/director Renee Tajima-Peña. “I never considered I would ever be denied the choice to *have* a baby. Today there is a growing reproductive justice movement that argues for a woman’s control over the full range of her fertility — the right to terminate a pregnancy as well as the right to have a child and raise that child in dignity. Forty years ago, these women were talking about reproductive justice in a way that was ahead of their time. They understood that their race, poverty, and legal status affected whether or not they had any choice at all.”

Visit the *No Más Bebés* page on [Independent Lens](https://www.independentlens.org), which features more information about the film.



## About the Major Participants

### The Mothers

Consuelo Hermosillo  
Carolina “Maria” Hurtado  
Dolores Madrigal  
María Figueroa  
Melvina Hernandez  
Jovita Rivera

**Antonia Hernandez** migrated from Mexico as a child and grew up in East Los Angeles. She was a 26-year-old UCLA Law School graduate, working at the Los Angeles Center for Law & Justice, when she met Dr. Rosenfeld. She and lead attorney **Charles Nabarrette** filed the Madrigal v. Quilligan suit. She went on to become President of the Mexican American Legal Defense & Education Fund (MALDEF) and is now CEO of the California Community Foundation.

**Dr. Edward James Quilligan** was the esteemed head of the Women’s Hospital at LAC+USC.

**Dr. Bernard Rosenfeld** was the whistle-blowing young resident.

**Frank Cruz** was the first Latino anchor on Los Angeles TV news and the only reporter to cover the trial.

**Gloria Molina** is an activist and, as President of the nascent feminist organization, Comisión Femenil, signed on as class representatives for the Madrigal v. Quilligan suit.

## About the Filmmakers

**Renee Tajima-Peña** (Producer/Director) is an Academy Award-nominated filmmaker whose directing credits include *Calavera Highway* (PBS), “The Mexico Story” of *The New Americans* series (PBS), *My Journey Home* (PBS), *Labor Women* (PBS), *Skate Manzanar* (performance and installation), *My America...or Honk if You Love Buddha* (PBS), *The Last Beat Movie* (Sundance Channel), *The Best Hotel on Skid Row* (HBO), and *Who Killed Vincent Chin?* (PBS), which was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Documentary. Her films have premiered at Sundance, Cannes, San Francisco, New Directors/New Films, Toronto, the Whitney Biennial and festivals around the world. Among her honors are a USA Broad Fellowship, a Peabody Award, a DuPont-Columbia Award, an Alpert Award in the Arts, and IDA Achievement Award, and a Guggenheim Fellowship.





**Virginia Espino** (Producer) is a historian at the UCLA Center for Oral History Research, and has conducted oral histories with major figures in the Latina/o community. Her research on coercive sterilization at LACMC provided the basis for the documentary project. Her research was published in *Las Obreras: Chicana Politics of Work and Family*, edited by Vicki L. Ruiz, and *Latinas in the United States: A Historical Encyclopedia*, and was supported by the Woodrow Wilson Dissertation Grant in Women's Health, the Ford Dissertation Fellowship for Minorities, the Smithsonian Institution Minority Fellowship, the Smithsonian Institution Inter-University Program for Latino Research Fellowship, and Irvine Fellowship. She has served on the California Commission for Sex Equity, and the Los Angeles Chicano/Latino Education Committee.

### CREDITS

Director/Producer	Renee Tajima-Peña
Producer	Virginia Espino
Director of Photography	Claudio Rocha
Editor	Johanna Demetrakas
Associate Producer	Kate Trumbull-LaValle
Original Music	Bronwen Jones
Executive Producer for LPB	Sandie Pedlow
Executive Producer for ITVS	Sally Jo Fifer
Executive Producers for Chicken & Egg Pictures	Julie Benello Parker
	Wendy Ettinger
	Judith Helfand

*No Más Bebés* is a co-production of Renee Tajima-Peña and Virginia Espino of Moon Canyon Films, and the Independent Television Service (ITVS), in association with Latino Public Broadcasting (LPB) with funding provided by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), and Chicken & Egg Pictures.

### About *Independent Lens*

*Independent Lens* is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing on PBS Monday nights at 10:00 PM. The acclaimed series features documentaries united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement, and unflinching visions of independent filmmakers. Presented by Independent Television Service, the series is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding from PBS and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. For more visit [pbs.org/independentlens](https://pbs.org/independentlens). Join the conversation: [facebook.com/independentlens](https://facebook.com/independentlens) and on Twitter [@IndependentLens](https://twitter.com/IndependentLens).

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