

# Woodside World

NEWS of CONGREGATION and COMMUNITY

*Woodside Church is a progressive Christian community  
committed to nurturing freedom, honesty and diversity,  
where members and friends live Jesus' way of social justice.*

a Congregation of the United Church of Christ and American Baptist Churches

## **Flint Town — a new miniseries.**

*Flint Town is an 8-episode docudrama that hit Netflix last week. Created by the filmmakers who produced T-Rex, the award-winning documentary about Claressa Shields, Flint Town depicts the city through the eyes of law enforcement; it was shot in 2015-16, the height of the water crisis and the presidential election season. (Woodside footage is included, FYI.)*

*There is no doubt that the attention Flint has gotten these past couple of years feels different depending on proximity. Those far away may see the city as a metaphor or cautionary tale; those closest to Flint may experience grief in the reality, frustration that any depiction is incomplete, or, as below, anger that the city is being exploited again for someone's profit. This series is certainly sparking conversation.*

*Vogue calls Flint Town "a Mesmerizing and Troubling Portrait of Police and Race in Small-City America."*

*Charlie LeDuff, a Detroit-based writer for The New Yorker, calls it and Flint "a story of the struggle to survive....How does law enforcement work in a place in constant crisis? The answer is that it doesn't, not really."*

*The Detroit Free Press quotes one of the filmmakers: "We just saw firsthand the toll it takes on a person when living in a place like Flint, with poverty so high and crime just being a part of everyday life."*

*The Daily Nebraskan comments: "Everyone is stuck. Whether they are held here through a job promising a better future, or the fear of leaving what you have always known, each individual in this documentary is a prisoner of Flint."*

*The Chattanooga (TN) Pulse calls it "a hard look at a failed city," but comments that "Flint Town is a series that looks unflinchingly at a serious problem and offers no solutions. Political leanings aside, we can all agree that Flint is our collective responsibility."*

*Perhaps that is the hopefulness we can find in the production — collective responsibility. (disclaimer: I've seen only one episode. -ed)*

*Woodsider Desiree Duell, brought her own proximity to a review of the series, and consented to having her thoughts published here. If you would like to offer your thoughts, we'd be happy to print them also. Please note: This is intended to represent Desiree's opinion only, and we make no representation to the accurate assessment of Netflix' or the producers' protocols. (Warning: Spoiler Alerts)*

## **Flint Town: Representation, Audience, and Aesthetics**

I was away on a graduate residency when the documentary series, *Flint Town* was released. As I am an artist who uses art as tool to disrupt dominant narratives about poverty, and seeks collective agency in the community, a friend wanted to know my opinion.

*Flint Town* is a classic example of 'poverty porn.' Poverty porn objectifies those living in poverty and their suffering for the media/arts/entertainment to elicit an emotional response and generate a profit. Poverty Porn helps no one except those making money off of it.

The series tells a very singular story about the Flint Police Department. Flint police and community officers do need funding to keep community-policing going, to keep out state police. The film failed to mention that state police patrols were increased in the City of Flint in summer of 2015.

There are no trigger warnings indicating there are highly graphic images of violence in this series. I almost threw up watching the first episode. Trigger warnings should be at the beginning of every episode.

The stereotypical poverty tropes of liquor stores, black on black violence, abandoned buildings, churches, and cops is neither complex nor interesting. Flint has rich culture that makes it distinct (and I'm not talking about downtown). Erasure of our culture is dehumanizing and this representation furthers shame and negative images of our city.

One mother watched the series to — unknowingly — have to relive her son's murder. I have spoken to others who lost loved ones, who were not notified about being represented in this film. Victims of violent crimes and family members should have been asked, and consent to have their images represented in the film. No mother should have her son's death memorialized for public entertainment.

The over-representation of police shootings and very little representation of police brutality in the context of the national narrative only reinforces systematic racism. Due to Netflix's national audience, this film is more than a representation of Flint. It will be read as a representation of all predominantly black urban areas.

Aesthetically, the over-stylized glossy images almost make the movie seem fictionalized; this is very dangerous as we as a culture love to consume violence. The mothers, children, youth, and adults that were victims of violence and those who committed violence are real people. The aerial shots of Flint made it seem like a large urban city; this is a town, a small town with big city problems.

Our pain should NOT be for public consumption. Our pain should NOT be someone's Sunday Netflix binge. Our pain should NOT be for someone else's profit. All proceeds of this film should go back directly to the Flint community.

*to add your thoughts, email pastor deb (debc@woodsidechurch.net)*

