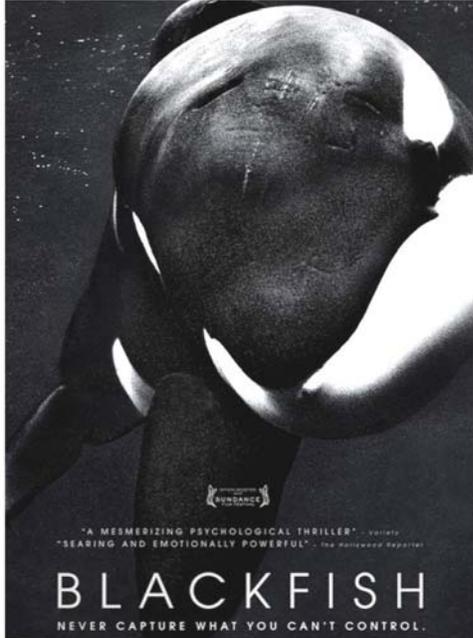


## BLACKFISH

HOLLYWOOD THEATER, 14232 Rt 9N, Main St, Au Sable Forks. \$6  
Mostly Mondays-Au Sable Forks Film Series: NEXT UP - July 11, 7pm



“Blackfish” is a 2013 American documentary film by Gabriela Cowperthwaite. It concerns an orca held by SeaWorld and the controversy over captive killer whales. **This emotionally wrenching, tautly structured story challenges us to consider our relationship to nature and reveals how little we humans have learned from these highly intelligent and enormously sentient fellow mammals.**

Cowperthwaite began work on the film after the February 2010 death of Tilikum’s trainer Dawn Brancheau, and in response to the claim that the orca had targeted the trainer because she had worn her hair in a ponytail.

The film premiered at the Sundance Film Festival on **January 19, 2013**. It was nominated for the BAFTA Award for Best Documentary. Blackfish tells the story of Tilikum, a performing killer whale that killed several people while in captivity. Director-producer Cowperthwaite compiles shocking footage and emotional interviews to explore the creature’s extraordinary nature, the species’ treatment in captivity, the lives of the trainers and the pressures within the multi-billion dollar sea-park industry.

The coverage of Tilikum includes his capture in 1983 off the coast of Iceland, and purported harassment by fellow captive orcas at Sealand of the Pacific, incidents that Cowperthwaite argues contributed to the orca’s aggression, and includes testimonial from Lori Marino, Director of Science with the Nonhuman Rights Project. Cowperthwaite also focuses on SeaWorld’s claims that lifespans of orcas in captivity are comparable to those in the wild, typically 30 years for males and 50 years for females, a claim the film argues is false. Interview subjects also include former SeaWorld trainers, such as John Hargrove, who describe their experiences with Tilikum and other captive whales.

### A DOCUMENTARY RAISES AWARENESS.

*Michael Scarpuzzi, the vice president for zoological operations and trainer for SeaWorld San Diego says the film used Brancheau’s death and gruesome details to “not inform the public, but, rather because of the desire to sensationalize.”* Nonetheless, this important documentary raised awareness and made a huge impact on Sea World. Scarpuzzi stated, “We have changed the facilities, equipment and procedures at our killer whale habitats. The care and educational presentation of these animals at SeaWorld has been made safer than ever.” But those changes came too late for Dawn Brancheau.

In its defense, SeaWorld Entertainment described the documentary Blackfish as inaccurate, misleading and withholding key facts about SeaWorld. These key facts include that **SeaWorld rescues, rehabilitates, and returns** to the wild hundreds of wild animals every year. SeaWorld also commits millions of dollars annually to conservation and scientific research.

### ACTIVISM

After the 2013 release of Blackfish, Southwest Airlines came under pressure to end its 26-year relationship with SeaWorld. Southwest responded that it was aware of concerns and was “engaged” with SeaWorld over them, but that the partnership would continue. But in July 2014, it was announced that the partnership would not be renewed. A press release stated that the break was mutual and based on “shifting priorities.” The petitioning by activists was cited as a possible factor for the split.

**Within a year of the film’s release, by 2014, New York State Senator Greg Ball proposed legislation in New York that bans keeping orcas in captivity.** In March 2014, California State

Assemblyman Richard Bloom introduced the Orca Welfare and Safety Act, a bill in California that would ban entertainment-driven orca captivity and retire all current whales. In June 2014, **U.S. Congressmen Adam Schiff** and Jared Huffman citing "Blackfish" as raising public concern, attached an amendment to the Agriculture Appropriations Act, requiring the USDA to update the Animal Welfare Act in regards to cetacean captivity. This passed with "unanimous bipartisan support." The bill allocated 1 million USD to *studying the impacts of captivity on marine mammals.*

## SEAWORLD CHANGES

SeaWorld said in August 2014 that the film had hurt revenues at its San Diego, California, park. By November 2014 SeaWorld announced that attendance at the parks had dropped 5.2% from the previous year, profits had fallen 28% over that quarter. And the company's stock was down 50% from the previous year. The company attributed the decline to the proposed government legislation related to the documentary. On December 11, 2014, SeaWorld announced that chief executive Jim Atchison would resign, with an interim successor replacing him on January 15, 2015. In August 2015, SeaWorld continued to announce falling revenue and drop in net income.

**In November 2015, SeaWorld announced plans to end killer-whale shows at its San Diego theme park. In March 2016, SeaWorld announced it would end its orca breeding program and begin to phase out all live performances using orcas.** (Wikipedia reference)



*A whale performs at SeaWorld in a scene from "Blackfish." (Magnolia Pictures)*

### FINDING DORY – FOUND A NEW ENDING!

Executives from the Walt Disney-owned Pixar Animation Studios, viewed the documentary "Blackfish" and considered the sharp questions about the health of whales in captivity. Pixar chief creative officer John Lasseter and "Dory" director Andrew Stanton sat down with

"Blackfish" director Gabriela Cowperthwaite in April 2014. After seeing her movie, the studio decided to make substantial changes to the "Dory" script. **The ending to Finding Dory was revised, and the depiction of a marine park in the film was altered.**

According to Louie Psihoyos, who directed the Oscar-winning dolphin slaughter documentary "The Cove," "at the end of the Finding Dory movie, some marine mammals are sent to an aquatic park/rehab facility -- a SeaWorld-type environment." "After seeing 'Blackfish,' the Pixar executives retooled the film so that the sea creatures now have the choice to leave that marine park. They told Gabriela Cowperthwaite they didn't want to look back on this film in 50 years and have it be their 'Song of the South,'" a reference to the 1946 Disney musical that was widely viewed to be racist.

While Pixar declined to comment. Cowperthwaite confirmed she screened the film on the studio's Northern California campus, but would only say that employees there were deeply "impacted" by her movie. "These are obviously people who are dedicated to researching every topic they cover," the filmmaker said. "Whether 'Blackfish' affects their creative decisions, I can't say."

**Pixar films are intended for family audiences, and it's not unusual for them to examine social or political issues** -- the Lasseter-directed "Cars 2" included a subplot about alternative fuel; Stanton's "WALL-E" takes place on a deserted, trash-strewn future Earth.