

SISTERSONG WOMEN OF COLOR REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE COLLECTIVE

CollectiveVoices

VOLUME 6 ISSUE 12

Summer 2011

Is Abortion “Black Genocide”

**Allies Defending
Black Women**

**Unshackling
Black Motherhood**

**Reproductive
Violence and
Black Women**

**Why I Provide
Abortions:
Alchemy of Race,
Gender, and
Human Rights**



Sister Song

COLLECTIVE VOICES

“The real power, as you and I well know, is collective. I can’t afford to be afraid of you, nor of me. If it takes head-on collisions, let’s do it. This polite timidity is killing us.”

-Cherrie Moraga

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From the Managing Editor, Serena Garcia:

Please note in this issue of Collective Voices we have allowed our writers to maintain their own editorial integrity in how they use the terms, “Black”, “minority,” and the capitalization of Reproductive Justice.

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1 in 3

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Ask. Listen. Share.

Visit www.1in3.org to get involved.



This special edition of *Collective Voices* is dedicated to women of color fighting race- and gender-specific anti-abortion legislation and billboards across the country. After our successful coalitional work defeating racialized anti-abortion legislation and billboards in Georgia in 2010, SisterSong decided to publish this special issue of *Collective Voices* to highlight the history of Black women and our support for abortion rights. We also wanted to detail the histories and tactics of abortion opponents who use race-based campaigns, and provide an overview of some of the current issues and debates African American women face in responding to these recent onslaughts, and provide suggestions for those who want to fight back on college campuses and in communities. With articles from activists, doctors, researchers, allies, and young women, among others, this special edition will provide information on nationally countering the emerging anti-abortion movement in the African American community.



Loretta Ross, SisterSong's National Coordinator

Rarely do we find ourselves fighting for just one aspect of reproductive justice such as abortion rights

This special issue of *Collective Voices* also celebrates that the United Nations declared 2011 as the International Year for People of African Descent. We are celebrating the activism of women of African descent in the United States fighting for our human rights, or in the words of Anna Julia Cooper in 1898, “to gain title to the bodies of their daughters.”

As our members know, SisterSong is a reproductive justice organization that fights for the right to have a child, not have a child, and parent the children we have. SisterSong has both pro-choice and pro-life members working together to defend the human rights of women to make decisions about their lives for themselves. Rarely do we find ourselves fighting for just one aspect of reproductive justice such as abortion rights. Reproductive justice is an intersectional analysis that demands that we embed abortion rights in the human rights framework and not isolate abortion from other social justice issues. Even more rarely do we focus on one specific ethnic or racial community, rather than represent all women of color and Indigenous women’s issues in our work, although we have previously published special editions of *Collective Voices* for Latinas and Asian Pacific Islander members.

However, stunning events last year compelled us to lead a struggle for abortion rights in our home community of Atlanta and facilitate organizing by African American women to defend abortion rights around the country. Since February 2010, billboards have been splashed across the country attacking Black women by claiming that we are responsible for the “extinction” of African American children because we choose to control our bodies by using birth control and abortion. The first of these billboards appeared in Atlanta in February, and after we got over our “WTF” moment, SisterSong sprang into action and quickly mobilized to fight the billboards and the subsequent anti-abortion legislation proposed in Georgia. We won in Georgia, but knew we could not rest after the Georgia fight and had to remain vigilant and organized. Our opponents are relentless and ruthless.

Similar race- and gender anti-abortion legislation passed in Arizona in early 2011, signaling that race- and sex-based attacks on the motives of women of color seeking abortions are a dangerous new front in the abortion wars. New billboards with similar sexist and racist messages quickly appeared in many other states like Missouri, Illinois, New York, California, Texas, Florida, Wisconsin, etc. New billboards suddenly appeared in Chicago in early 2011 with President Obama’s image claiming that “Every 21 minutes, our next possible leader is aborted.” It was one of 30 billboards that a Texas-based anti-abortion group called Life Always placed in the Chicago area.

To organize a long-term movement to be pro-active rather than reactive, SisterSong sponsored a meeting in July 2010 in Atlanta that launched the Trust Black Women Partnership (TBW). This is a coalition of national and local African American women’s



organizations committed to defending the dignity and rights of Black women, to lifting our voices as women with the power to make our own decisions about our lives, and challenging the negative attacks on Black women’s right to self-determination by the anti-abortion movement. More information on TBW is available in this issue.

On a personal note, I’ve been countering stereotypes about Black woman and abortion for the past 20 years, writing extensive histories about our activism from enslavement to the present. Perhaps one of the greatest miscalculations our opponents made was to launch their first racialized campaign only five blocks from SisterSong’s office when we had the determination and motivation to stop them in their tracks in our home community, and the extensive national networks to challenge them all over the country wherever they appear.

We invite all readers to join our efforts to defend the human rights of women of color. You can join the Trust Black Women campaign through SisterSong’s website at www.trustblackwomen.org. Just like the struggle against the Hyde Amendment 36 years ago that largely ended public funding for abortion for poor women, women of color again are drawing a line in the sand. Like our sisters in South Africa, our opponents will learn that they have struck a rock, and dislodged a boulder that will crush them.

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Defending Abortion Rights AS BLACK WOMEN

By Serena Garcia, Communications Coordinator, SisterSong

As this Collective Voices issue addresses how reproductive injustices continue to negatively impact Black women, we interviewed Byllye Avery, a 35-year human rights activist who has worked to improve the welfare of Black women.

She founded the National Black Women's Health Project in 1981 (now known as the Black Women's Health Imperative) and has received numerous human rights awards. In 1987, Avery produced a documentary film which features African American women and their daughters talking about menstruation, sex and love – On Becoming a Woman: Mothers and Daughters Talking to Each Other.



COLLECTIVE VOICES:

Why is Defending Abortion Rights Important for Black Women?

Byllye Avery offers six reasons:

1. Economic realities. These are the kinds of things people who live in rhetoric don't want to talk about – the realities of people's lives. Some say the reasons why Black women are having abortions are because of immorality and a lack of responsibility.

Avery also references the March 8, 2010 report that addresses the lack of wealth among Black women, "Lifting as We Climb: Women of Color, Wealth and America's Future." According to media reports, "Among the most startling revelations in the wealth data is that while single white women in the prime of their working years (ages 36 to 49) have a median wealth of \$42,600 (still only 61 percent of their single white male counterparts), the median wealth for single black women is only \$5."

I was shocked when a friend told me about this. Think of all the sisters who cannot afford to take off from work and not get paid and live from pay check to pay check. These are people holding jobs. A lot of Black women are living off credit. It's not enough to cite these statistics. You have to also look at why we have these economic realities. Black women often work in lower paying service jobs. Quite often (they) have no access to health care and benefits. Before the recession these facts were in place. The economic reality is even more dire. Other contributors to lower incomes for Black women are incarceration and unemployment of Black men. This reduces the pool of people to meet, marry, cohabitate with, put their money together and have a life. This reason is not addressed by anti-abortionists.

2. Lack of Sex Education. Most of us don't come from families where we transmit information about sex and sexuality in the family structure. Conservatives don't want people to get sex information. They don't want classes in schools and they certainly don't want them in churches.

Where are we supposed to learn about this important responsibility and as an important part of the nature of a sexual being? Parenting is the most important job that we will ever have in our lives. But to have no place to have structured or factual information given with love, feeling, honor – we don't have that kind of environment. Many of us rear our families around silence.

3. Lack of Access to Health Insurance. Having a lack of good health insurance puts us in jeopardy in a lot of ways. We rarely go to the doctor for prevention. We have a health care system that is a sick care system that gets rewarded when we are sick and not when we are healthy. We need to turn the whole health care delivery system turn around to work for prevention.

4. Sexually Abusive Relationships. A lot of people are in sexually abusive relationships. That is a big deal for many women and young girls. They've been in these relationships with the men in their families since they were little girls. And



The most recent Atlanta anti-abortion billboard, leased by CBS Outdoor Advertising, is located within walking distance of the Mother House at Beecher Street and Westmont Road.

then when they get their periods, they become pregnant. What does a 12-year old child do with a child?

5. Some Women Don't Want To Have Babies. When people want to enjoy sexual pleasure, it doesn't mean they want to be pregnant. If I want to be pleased sexually that's one thing; if I want to have a baby, that's another thing. Every woman doesn't want to have a child. We pretend every woman wants to have a baby, but every woman doesn't want to have a baby. We are not just talking about our lives, religions, and ways of thinking. Fifty percent of people in the US are women. We are bound to have different opinions. We need to say this more in the Reproductive Justice Movement.

6. We are Plagued With Chronic Health Conditions. Black women have high rates of diabetes, high blood pressure, obesity, cancer, and HIV/AIDS.

Many chronic illnesses get exasperated by pregnancies. Women have a number of reasons why they choose abortion. We should recognize and realize that this life is very difficult for Black women. This has a lot to do with having a high infant mortality rate. Conditions force us to lose babies at twice the rate of White women. Talk to women about the reasons for abortion. All of these must be taken into consideration. My word to those who want to remove the right (to have an abortion) – they need to guarantee every woman \$1 million for each child she is forced to bear so she can have economic security to help her get some of the things she needs in order to raise a healthy child. We need to call them on their hypocrisy.

COLLECTIVE VOICES:

How Did Founding of the NBWHP Pave the Way to Impact Black Women, Reproductive Rights, and Reproductive Justice?

Avery on the National Black Women's Health Project (NBWHP)

The contributions that I think we made to society and to the lives of Black women is that we helped to break the conspiracy of silence. When we started in the early 1980s – most of us as Black women really didn't know much about each other. We had no way of consistently finding out who we were. The perspective that most of us had, was that if it didn't happen to us it wasn't really quite a problem.

We didn't have the wealth of information that would help us form an analysis and look at where these issues came from and how they evolved. (Years ago) I was very perplexed by the health statistics I read in a Health in the United States report, (conducted in 1979).

The National Survey of Personal Health Practices and Consequences [United States], 1979-1980 was sponsored by the United States Department of Health and Human Services. National Center for Health Statistics. It was designed to provide data for examining the relationships between health practices and physical health status.

In 1979, they found out over half of Black women from ages 18-39 rated themselves as having had psychological distress. I wanted to find out what was that distress was. I didn't see many Black women walking around overtly distressed. When we started our self-help groups, Lillie Allen brought a way to help us open up and talk about our issues. We had to talk about our own lives. When we listened to women all over the country talk

about what was happening in their families such as being victims of domestic violence, incest, sexual abuse, and psychological abuse, we understood what the psychological distress was. That's when we started the self-help movement among Black women to help women feel comfortable talking about their own lives.

This went on for 14-15 years. We realized it wasn't just us. When you sit with 30 women and 25 have experienced some sort of abuse, you realize we have a serious community problem.

Women have been totally silent about all the issues. But the issue they were most silent about was abortion. I was amazed that women would talk about the worst kind of psychological abuse. But they would not talk about their abortions. We had to specifically raise it as an issue to talk in order to break that silence. Somehow if you had to have a hierarchy of what you could be stigmatized against in the Black community, they felt abortion was the highest. It's always been a very hard issue. The new polling data say Black women feel it is a personal issue.

Black women have to open up and start talking and being advocates for ourselves and know the decisions they made when they made them were the best decisions they could make. That's been the message we have tried to get to women around Reproductive Justice issues. We were the only group of people in this country who came in chains, who were chained, and who were shackled. We can't forget our past. Everybody says don't go back to slavery. No, you better go back to slavery. We are still chained. You have to redefine what the shackles are now. Women who have economic problems are still chained. Incarcerated men who were not given the opportunity to be educated and succeed are still chained. Are the new chains made out of steel, thoughts, or are they made out of laws or attitudes? At NBWHP, many say it changed their lives. I say, "It didn't change your life, you changed your life." Most of them have reared children who have a different way of looking at the world and dealing with the realities of our world. There is much work to do. We only started the process with a few hundred thousand and now there are millions who need it. So the work continues.

One of the things we did that was extraordinary was – we had several women of color organizations that started. We said, "Work down your color line. Look at what your priorities are around health care."

COLLECTIVE VOICES:

Where Do We Need to Go Next?

Avery:

1. Raise Your Voices. Be willing to deal with the realities of what is going on the world today, this is a global world. We need to embrace a progressive agenda that gives us choices. It doesn't take away from your personal power.

2. We Need To Call Out All of The People Who Want to Make Decisions For Us. We need to call them on their hypocrisy. They are not bringing money into the community to help feed hungry children. There is much we can do. We need to make people put their money where their mouth is. If they want to make changes in this society that can work for us, then it can be done. We have to make sure we get our act together and ... (so we are able) to work our political agenda. The work is there.



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Office on Women's Health
Congratulates SisterSong on Their Successful
Let's Talk About Sex Conference

Is Abortion “Black Genocide”?

By Kathryn Joyce, Political Research Associates

In February 2010, a highly provocative series of 65 billboards went up around Atlanta, which featured an African American infant and the proclamation, “Black Children Are an Endangered Species.” The signs directed viewers to a website, TooManyAborted.com, created by the Radiance Foundation—a vague antiabortion and “personal transformation” nonprofit founded by biracial advertising executive Ryan Bomberger—with funding from Georgia Right to Life.

At the unveiling of the billboards, Georgia Right to Life Minority Outreach Director Catherine Davis explained their justification: “Planned Parenthood’s Negro Project,” she said, “is succeeding.” She was referring to a 1939 project begun by Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger that has inspired decades of claims that family planning is a racist plan to wipe out populations of color. It’s an old argument, but in recent years it has become the province of anti-abortion groups who are selectively co-opting civil rights rhetoric to present abortion and even contraception as eugenicist plots disguised as voluntary reproductive choices, which are leading to a slow “Black genocide.” Recent studies by the Guttmacher Institute found that abortion rates are indeed higher among women of color.

African Americans, in particular, are thirteen percent of the population but account for 37 percent of all abortions. However, Guttmacher determined this is due to their greater incidence of unwanted pregnancies, resulting from economic inequality and poor access to contraception and education. Nonetheless, the anti-abortion movement holds that Black and brown populations are being targeted by abortion providers who deliberately place clinics in inner-city, low-income neighborhoods.

For the past several years Black History Month has brought an onslaught of antiabortion activities related to this “Black genocide” strategy. Anti-abortion legislation was introduced in Georgia in 2010 following the billboard campaign. For example, Georgia Right to Life launched a series of robocalls that featured 2008 presidential candidate and Fox talk show host Mike Huckabee, stumping for the bill on the grounds of its “powerful implications for the sanctity of human life nationwide.” The Network of Politically Active Christians has made a similar pitch, and Focus on the Family may soon join the fight.

Advocates of color have been appalled by these campaigns, with their implicit accusation that women of color are either dupes or agents of genocide against their own people, not to mention that the language of the billboards implies a tone-deaf comparison between Black children and animals. “We’re calling the bill the OB/GYN criminalization and racial discrimination act,” says the director of SPARK Reproductive Justice NOW, Paris Hatcher. She notes that the burden of proof the bill puts on doctors would greatly impede healthcare delivery. In an email campaign that has generated hundreds of complaints about the “endangered species” billboards to the owner of the signs, CBS Outdoors, SPARK tweaked a common refrain in the pro-choice community—“trust women”—calling on people to “trust Black women” over those demonizing their decisions. “I think what you have here is tokenized leaders within a White movement floating an agenda,” says Hatcher. “You see White organizations capitalizing off of Black bodies and the shaming and blaming of Black women.”

Civil Rights Rhetoric and “Black Genocide”

The token leaders to whom Hatcher is referring are a small but busy cadre of Black activists working in White-run anti-abortion organizations. For example, in late 2008, Pro-Life Unity hired a Black vice president, Samuel Mosteller, and in January 2009, after years of failed attempts to reach out to African Americans, Georgia Right to Life hired Davis to spread the word that reproductive healthcare providers such as Planned Parenthood have a “mission to



eliminate blacks from America.”

Most visible of these leaders is Alveda King, the niece of Martin Luther King Jr., whose full-time position with Priests for Life was the first funded role for a “Black genocide” activist. Her main strategy—and critics say her sole qualification—has been capitalizing on her uncle’s legacy, often asking, “How can the dream survive if we murder the children?” She takes frequent aim at a speech delivered on behalf of Martin Luther King Jr. by his wife, Coretta Scott King, in acceptance of the 1966 Margaret Sanger Award. The speech includes a lament about the number of unwanted children among poor Blacks. Alveda King suggests that Martin Luther King didn’t write the speech—to her ears, it sounds like it was written by a woman—and that his wife’s delivery of it was due to a marital disagreement. On Alveda King’s website, she annotates the speech with quotations from the Rev. King that she believes refute his apparent support for the birth-control movement.

Alveda King and other “Black genocide” spokespeople make ample use of imagery that aligns the anti-abortion cause with the Civil Rights Movement. There is no shortage of high-emotion analogies. The Rev. Johnny Hunter, the president of the Life Education and Resource Network (LEARN), talks often about “womb lynchings.” The president of LEARN’s Northeast chapter, the Rev. Clenard Childress, who founded the website BlackGenocide.org, frequently partners with the California-based group Genocide Awareness Project, which hosts “photo-mural” demonstrations on university campuses, comparing abortion to the Rwandan genocide. In 2007, 10,000 pamphlets published by the Waco, Texas-based anti-abortion group Life Dynamics Incorporated were mailed to inner-city neighborhoods to publicize an appearance by the Black right-wing radio personality, the Rev. Jesse Lee Peterson. The pamphlets denounced “Klan Parenthood” and juxtaposed images of lynchings with those of aborted fetuses, under the slogan “lynching is for amateurs.”

Anti-abortion activists have long compared Roe v. Wade to the 1857 Dred Scott decision, which opened the territories to slavery. They have also pointed to the Constitutional mandate to count Blacks as 3/5 of a person to further their “abortion as slavery” analogy. Their strategy now includes merging this rhetoric with the wave of fetal “personhood” amendment campaigns in place in eight states—and building in dozens more. In January, the American Life League and Father Frank Pavone, the national director of Priests for Life, hosted a meeting about overturning Roe v. Wade, which focused both on recruiting supporters in Black communities and passing fetal personhood bills. “There’s a lot of personhood legislation nationally,” agrees Childress, “and that’s going to remind most African Americans that there was a question about our personhood with Dred Scott.”

In an email interview, Pavone said that the language of the Civil Rights Movement lends itself seamlessly to the anti-abortion cause. After visits to Martin Luther King’s Ebenezer Baptist Church with the King family, Pavone said, “I have thought to myself, the message is exactly right. Nothing has to change except to include one more group of people—the unborn.” Pavone and Alveda King both sample civil rights language in their outreach to Black pastors, explaining that the “beloved community” must include the unborn, and “that nonviolence includes nonviolence to children in the womb”—messages they used last summer through a series of

“freedom ride” bus tours kicking off in Birmingham, led by Alveda King and a host of “Black genocide” leaders. The apparent success of such rhetoric has encouraged mainstream anti-abortion groups to ask their donors to support outreach to Blacks, arguing that these converts to the anti-abortion cause have the potential to revive the movement. Last December, Pavone told his donors, “With your help today we will help African Americans take their rightful place in the pro-life movement . . . men and women who know what it means to be persecuted and treated as ‘non-persons’ . . . men and women who will re-energize the movement.”

Promoting Conspiracism

In 1999, Childress helped lead 1,500 people, mostly Black activists, on the “Say-So” anti-abortion march from Newark, New Jersey, to Washington, D.C., where they laid 1,452 roses—the number of abortions Black women were then having daily—on the steps of the Supreme Court. Childress, a 2007 candidate for the state assembly who often says that “the most dangerous place for an African American to be is in the womb of their African American mother,” was recruited to the anti-abortion movement by a White Catholic activist who convinced him to attend a 1994 conference featuring the Rev. Johnny Hunter.

While other organizations contribute money or materials, Childress supplies bodies for protests from his 200-member, Montclair, New Jersey, congregation, New Calvary Baptist Church. His young “zealots” frequently volunteer for high-commitment activism, such as a bus trip to Birmingham in 2003, where they crashed a mainstream Civil Rights Movement celebration, and recent trips to NAACP conventions to protest the exclusion of “Black genocide” concerns.

Childress is featured in *Maafa 21: Black Genocide in 21st Century America*, a 2009 film produced by Mark Crutcher, a White Texan who runs Life Dynamics Incorporated—the producer of the “Klan Parenthood” brochures. *Maafa* is a Swahili word that refers to the African holocaust of abduction and slavery. The film argues that the *maafa* didn’t end with slavery but rather continues in a plot to exterminate the black population through ongoing eugenics programs created by “wealthy white elitists.” According to Crutcher, its chief villain is Planned Parenthood founder, Margaret Sanger.

“In the African American community, if you shout conspiracy, they’ll listen, because of the history they’ve had in this country,” Childress told me. “I come from the conspiracy tone whenever I’m speaking, especially to African Americans, so they understand you’ll have to do some digging, you’ll have to go beneath the veneer.” (Apparently operating under the same philosophy, Alveda King dismisses the studies citing higher rates of unwanted pregnancy among Black women as the cause for high abortion rates by suggesting that Planned Parenthood intentionally distributes faulty contraception to minority teens so they’ll need abortions.)

Childress’s loose attitude toward historical accuracy seems representative of the broader “Black genocide” movement. Thus, *Maafa 21* sidesteps historical hurdles to suggest that Sanger’s support for sterilization on mental illness grounds was a coded effort to target Blacks; that a eugenics movement mobilized to legalize abortion to market it to Black women; and that the government “hired Planned Parenthood” to continue eugenics programs.

“Black genocide” argument has remained a male-driven conversation that shuts out women of color and ignores the role they have played in the reproductive justice movement.

The film, which received support from Priests for Life, premiered at the United States Capitol Visitor Center in 2009 on Juneteenth (June 19), an African American holiday that marks the issuance of the emancipation proclamation. The host was the White Congressman Trent Franks (R-AZ)—a steadfast ally of the “Black genocide” cause. Later, Alveda King and others held a screening of the film for congressional aides. In early March, Maafa 21 was the feature presentation at the Jubilee Film Festival at the 45th anniversary of the “Bloody Sunday” attacks outside of Selma. The film has been shown at numerous Black churches and colleges. In April 2010, Childress, sponsored by the Christian student group Every Nation Campus Ministries, discussed the film at Florida A&M, the largest historically black college in the country—an event he predicts will exponentially spread his message into the Black community.

In a March 2010 fundraising appeal seeking support to fill requests for the film, Crutcher claimed that 13,000 copies had already been distributed. He triumphantly announced, “Life Dynamics has hit pay dirt” with Maafa 21, as the film rages “like a wildfire” through the Black community. The film, he said, is “the stone our pro-life movement would use to bring the abortion Goliath to his knees.” “Black Genocide” and Healthcare Reform

For close to fifteen years, the “Black genocide” movement has drummed up publicity by capitalizing on discussions of race or Black history in the media and promoted the posturing of White anti-abortion activists laying claim to Rosa Parks’ legacy. But from these awkward origins, the movement has grown enormously over the past year. In January, Lou Engle, the White founder of the anti-abortion group Bound4Life as well as of a group that campaigned to pass California’s Proposition 8 forbidding same-sex marriage, convened a Martin Luther King Day march on a large Planned Parenthood clinic under construction in Houston, calling it an “abortion supercenter that targets the minority community.” The march drew prominent White anti-abortion leaders, including the Family Research Council’s Tony Perkins and the president of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, Richard Land.

The stage had been set earlier in 2009, as the abortion debate overwhelmed healthcare reform. In mid-July, the White congressional representative Todd Tiahrt (R-KS) argued against President Obama’s healthcare bill on “Black genocide” grounds, suggesting that Obama’s mother might have aborted him if she’d had the option of “taxpayer-funded abortions.” Tiahrt was backed up by a series of five op-ed essays in the conservative Washington Times, written by prominent Black leaders of the “abortion as genocide” cause, which urged Republicans to adopt the issue in their fight against healthcare reform. At press conferences throughout the summer, Alveda King and her colleagues kept the rhetoric heated, telling the media that “genocide is not healthcare.” In an open letter to President Obama in August, a writer for the creationist Discovery Institute implied that John Holdren, Obama’s pick to head the Office of Science and Technology Policy, was a eugenicist targeting people of color in developing nations.

Sex- and Race-Selective Abortion

At the end of February 2009, Representative Franks upped the ante in the “Black genocide” debate, telling a blogger that with “half of all black children” being aborted, “Far more of the African American community is being devastated by the politics of today than were devastated by the policies of slavery.” After his statement, a lineup of leaders from the “Black genocide” movement came to his defense. Alveda King declared that any critics of Franks shared “the slave owner’s mindset.” Day Gardner of the National Black Pro-Life Union said Franks “should be revered as a great modern day abolitionist.”

Franks’ activism on the subject is longstanding. In 2008, he said a “Black genocide” protest in Washington, D.C., inspired him to sponsor a bipartisan House bill that would prohibit “discrimination against the unborn on the basis of sex or race, and for other purposes.” The bill, which benefited from the collaboration of “Black genocide” leaders like King and Childress, was reintroduced by Franks as the Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass Pre-natal Nondiscrimination Act of 2009. It had 42 sponsors.

Intellectuals in the anti-abortion movement have long counseled linking abortion with female infanticide and sex-selective abortion, as a method of converting moderates who would recoil at the thought of reproductive choice being used as a weapon of gender inequality. This argument is making the rounds in states as well. Oklahoma passed a law banning sex-selective abortion in 2009 (it was struck down in February 2010 on technical grounds). Expanding the strategy to race may be even more potent. In addition to Georgia, with its failed Pre-natal Nondiscrimination Act, Mississippi, and New Jersey have proposed bans on race- and sex-selective abortions. (Arizona passed the bill in 2011, becoming the first state to do so. Notably this is Trent Franks’ home state. — ed.)

When Franks first introduced his bill in 2008, the Catholic anti-abortion and anti-contraception group, Population Research Institute, mused that the bill’s premise—that there is discrimination through abortion—could be as powerful as the campaign against so-called partial-birth abortion. “Even those who believe in the absolute right to destroy a child under any and all circumstances, it is safe to predict, will be uncomfortable defending such an extreme position,” PRI President Steve Mosher suggested.

Anti-Abortion Movement Cynicism

While in recent years conservative Christian groups have made efforts, both calculated and sincere, to address racism, the Religious Right has an undeniable history of antipathy to civil rights and minority concerns. The quasi-progressive language of “Black genocide” rings hollow when politicians such as Representative Joe Wilson (R-SC), a Confederate flag defender, signs on to Franks’s bill; when Tony Perkins, who managed the Louisiana Senate campaign that famously bought White supremacist David Duke’s mailing list, protests Houston’s Planned Parenthood on antiracist grounds; or when Pro-Life Radio’s Stephen Peroutka calls for “the defunding of the racist agenda of Planned Parenthood,” while he and his brother and law partner Michael are the principal sponsors of the Institute on the Constitution: a thinktank closely tied to the far-right Constitution Party, which calls for repealing the Voting Rights Act.

Kevin Alexander Gray, an African American civil rights leader and the author of *Waiting for Lightning to Strike: The Fundamentals of Black Politics* (2008), sees White fundamentalist outreach to the Black church as destructive. It has shifted the Black church away from liberation theology, he says, and toward conservative social action, particularly through the prosperity gospel movement, which has flourished in Black churches by promising financial rewards to the faithful.

Likewise, the organizations screening Maafa 21 for black audiences, such as the Frederick Douglass Foundation, Global Outreach Campus Ministries, and the Network of Politically Active Christians (NPAC), which lobbied for Georgia’s “Black genocide” bill, “have close ties with religious right powerhouses Focus on the Family and Family Research Council,” says Sarah Posner, the author of *God’s Profits: Faith, Fraud, and the Republican Crusade for Values Voters* (2008). Some groups, like the NPAC, which shares offices with the Family Research Council, were created specifically “to bolster Religious Right and Republican outreach to Blacks,” Posner says.

“Dupes” and “Sell-Outs”

Co-opting this old fight, anti-abortion groups claim that Blacks who support choice are either genocidal elitists or dupes. Alveda King suggests that a White-led birth control movement “cultivate[d] Black leaders” to coerce them into targeting other people of color. Day Gardner likewise refers to the Black politicians, ministers, and community organizers who worked with Margaret Sanger in Harlem as Judases “who sold their souls for ‘thirty pieces of silver’” when they were hired to enact “ethnic cleansing.”

Childress and Maafa 21 focus on mainstream Black organizations, such as the NAACP, and leaders such as Jesse Jackson, who at one time opposed abortion rights, depicting them as formerly principled advocates who bought into Planned Parenthood lies in exchange for campaign support. In Maafa 21, the Dallas, Texas, pastor Stephen Broden, a leader in the “Black genocide” movement who has addressed Tea Party conventions, remarks of Jackson, “There’s never been a shortage of Black leaders willing to sell us down the river.” (Gray, who was Jackson’s South Carolina

presidential campaign manager in 1988, instead suggests that Jackson’s understanding of the issue evolved.)

The argument leaves Black women facing the accusation that they are either fools or murderers—and either way complicit in what Mark Crutcher says is Planned Parenthood’s sinister plan for “convincing the target group to commit mass suicide.” The accusation cuts to the heart of an intersection of sexism and racism for Black women, who have historically been pressed to choose allegiance between two aspects of their beings: their gender and the race.

It continues today. Maame Mensima-Horn, an African American activist based in Miami who consulted for SisterSong, says that the “Black genocide” argument has remained a male-driven conversation that shuts out women of color and ignores the role they have played in the reproductive justice movement. Mensima-Horn sees a new generation of male activists relegating women to “breeder” status and blaming them for a deficit in the Black population.

It seems a neat return to the 1920s debate in the Black community about how to best uplift the race. W.E.B. DuBois argued for “quality versus quantity,” saying that Black interests were best met by family planning that allowed parents to invest more in fewer children, not by simply birthing greater numbers. In 2010, Catherine Davis of Georgia Right to Life seems to take the latter position, saying that if Black women hadn’t had abortions, “we would be 59 million strong.”

The emphasis underscores a history of sexism in the Civil Rights Movement and its institutions, says Gray, in which Black women’s intellectual and physical labor was the backbone of the movement yet was rarely acknowledged. Today, “Black genocide” movement leaders, such as Childress and King, emphasize male leadership in both the movement and church—not surprising in conservative circles, but the destructive effect on women of color continues.

For Gray, this kind of sexism is a result of White fundamentalist outreach as well as a symptom of a larger problem: the breakdown of political education in Black politics.

He says, The result of it is that we have people claiming that the maafa is the abortion of black kids, instead of what it really is: the great catastrophe related to the slave trade. It means a bunch of frauds can rewrite your history and make it everything that it’s not. The freedom movement, which is what civil rights is about, is about the freedom of citizens to determine their lives for themselves and make their own opportunities.

And not, Grays says, to become a mother “because these people think you ought to be a mother.”

Women of Color at the Intersection

The question of how to counter the “Black genocide” argument is almost as complicated as its history. Ellen Chesler, historian and author of *Woman of Valor: Margaret Sanger and the Birth Control Movement in America* (1992) says that, after one hundred years of variations on the argument, she’s not sure what the response should be. Alex Sanger, Margaret Sanger’s grandson, says it’s the same dilemma that faces the larger pro-choice movement, of boiling down a complex argument to a catchphrase, to counter anti-abortion slogans that claim abortion is murder, or now, genocide.

Gloria Feldt, author of *The War on Choice* (2004) and a former president of Planned Parenthood, says that many reproductive-rights activists who came out of the Civil Rights Movement are so horrified by accusations of racism that they haven’t been able to look at the history. Part of the answer could be more discussion of the issue led by women of color. Feldt notes the need for more diversity in the reproductive-rights movement, and more women of color in visible leadership roles. Faith Pennick, a noted filmmaker who produced “*Silent Choices*”, agrees that inadequate outreach by pro-choice groups to women of color, and insufficiently direct attempts to address the complicated history of Sanger and eugenics, has “left a door open for prolife organizations to come in and say, ‘they don’t care about you, but we do.’” Another part of the solution, many activists agree, must be more discussion of sexuality and reproductive issues in communities of color which avoids discussions of abortion as it has shunned talk of AIDS and gay issues.

Excerpted article originally published in *The Public Eye*, Summer 2010

The Right To FIGHT!

By Dionne Turner, SisterSong Communications Assistant

The anti-choice national billboard campaign seeks to undermine the fundamental right of women of color to speak for ourselves and make the choices necessary for our own bodies. However, the tactic may have backfired. The billboard attacks helped to mobilize Reproductive Justice (RJ) activists in an entirely new way. Coalitions of resistance are springing up around the country – often led by women of color -- sparking new forms of organizing and protests, and building stronger alliances between the reproductive justice and pro-choice movements. Hence, the formation of Trust Black Women (TBW) in 2010, a partnership created to mobilize and counter such assaults in African American communities.

According to founding TBW member Pamela Merritt in St. Louis, “Showing women of color as collateral damage...They’re trying to gain traction in the RJ battle but they’re doing so knowing they’re maligning our reputations as women of color. They don’t care that they’re perpetuating a stereotype that we’re bad mothers, etc....” Her home state of Missouri is the latest battleground in this fight against the insidious billboard messages erected in Atlanta, Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, and Milwaukee, among other cities and states.

Following are some of the stories from frontline activists offering some of the lessons learned from our resistance to this attempt to racialize the struggle for abortion rights.

This national billboard campaign may be coming to your community and RJ activists need to be ready to fight back. The key is to not work in isolation. Some women of color may not have a local RJ group in their part of the country, but can always reach out and connect with national and local groups within TBW’s network.



Some Lessons Learned

Be Ready!

1) Form a coalition and consider partnering with other local RJ organizations and policy institutions, like Planned Parenthood, before the billboards arrive in your town. Have an idea of what resources you will need, and request in-kind donations such as office space and volunteers to convene meetings with your coalition and develop your impact goals.

In the New York City battle this year, a city where people move to escape the kind of ignorance displayed by groups like Life Always, Jasmine Burnett of SisterSong NYC was ready because she was one of the founders of TBW who had worked on the Atlanta campaign. She said the billboards, “really struck a chord. Black women were hungry for a place to go, because they simply couldn’t believe it happened here.” She suggests developing tasks and forming action groups, making sure to engage members of the coalition once they show up.

In Los Angeles, Nourbese Flint of Black Women for Wellness, another TBW co-founder, said they were able to pull together quickly because their response started before the billboard campaign arrived. At local coalition meetings, they discussed Atlanta’s successful activist response in 2010, and gathered their troops to keep their eyes and ears on the ground. They created strategies to fight the billboards’ arrival – which were boldly erected in a Black neighborhood one day before the Martin Luther King, Jr. parade.

2) Develop your communications strategy and create talking points that you can share with your allies and supporters. “We need consistent messages that put us on the offense rather than the defense,” Nourbese Flint stated. She recalled the L.A. Watts Times publishing a biased article, and her coalition realized the need to set up meetings with the Black press, and overall media, to give them tools for more balanced coverage. She worked with TBW’s Communications Working Group to develop Strategic Talking Points.

Consider writing an editorial, or op-ed piece like Sarah Noble of the Milwaukee RJ Coalition who wrote one for the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel. Don’t be distressed by negative responses, such as Ryan Scott Bomberger’s (Radiance Foundation and www.toomanyaborted.com website) personal attack on Sarah. He called her offensive names in an op-ed to counter her article. Sarah recognized the success of her strategy and the need to garner support before publishing her op-ed piece. “The way Ryan Bomberger responded signified we got to him,” she recounted. “It struck a nerve.”

You will also want to be upfront with your allies, to ensure they don’t feel entitled to speak for Black women; but rather on behalf of the women on the frontlines of the attacks. “We’re all educators on this,” Jasmine Burnett stated. Establish a point person that your allies can turn to for guidance on the issue and reinforce a structured approach that positions women of color as the primary spokespeople.

At the very least, call up radio stations and make comments, send out press releases, write on blogs, and use the power of social media. There are ample free tools developed by TBW that will assist you with useful information.



Organize!

3) Find out if any actions are going on in your state and connect with other women in the movement. Know ahead of time how your community typically responds to anti-abortion threats and figure out the best way to galvanize your community. Learn, for example, if they are not likely to attend traditional rallies.

For example, Black Women for Reproductive Justice in Chicago chose to organize a Black Women’s Speak Out, so that women in the communities where the billboards were placed could tell their stories. According to BWRJ Executive Director, Toni Bond-Leonard,

Our first Black Women’s Speak Out was a huge success. We had strong turnout from the community. The room was packed with at least 60 people, and at least 13 women and young women told their stories. Gaylon Alcaraz of the Chicago Abortion Fund was the moderator. It was a very moving evening, full of raw emotion, calls for action, and a special announcement by the Chicago Commission of Human Relations -- they passed a resolution against the billboards!! This was the result of a briefing BWRJ made to the Commission last month. Next, we will be working with them to get the City Council to pass a similar resolution and hold a press conference.

This event was about creating the space for Black women to tell stories about their lived experiences and barriers they face in being healthy, having healthy families, and living in healthy communities. We also had Black men in the audience; one was a BWRJ board member and the rest were Black men who came to support Black women.

We accomplished our goals. The event was recorded by WBEZ Chicago Amplified thanks to help from one of our billboard strategy partners, Affinity Community Services. We also videotaped the event to be posted to our website.

We have three more Speak Outs planned, and I believe they will get better and better. People who attended were ready to work to get the billboards down. We even talked about the Illinois comprehensive sex education bill as women demanded more preventive measures for unintended pregnancies throughout the evening.

4) Distribute a petition to garner community support for removing the billboards. Investigate what the billboard’s purpose is in your area, and find out if they are attached to legislation. Research your local pro-choice legislators in your state, and provide them with your talking points. This is where allies like Planned Parenthood or NARAL Pro-Choice America can be very helpful because they have the capacity and the experience to provide useful information about elected officials.

5) Know your opposition and reach out to other organizations for support and to share the work. Never assume that people are too busy or do not have the time to assist with specific organizing tasks. In California, Nourbese’s group formed a committee of people to research the opposition and learn more information.

Foster Sisterhood.

6) With the overwhelming lack of capacity through mostly volunteer coalitions, finding time to bond outside of the fight will help sisters move forward knowing they are supported in their commitment to this lifelong work.

Jasmine Burnett emphasized the importance of having dinner together after meetings, as another way to vent about the surreal nature of the work, but to also celebrate and decompress. She suggested planning something special with each other as a collective, and getting to know other sisters socially to form strong bonds.

She also stressed the need for self-care because it is easy to become burned out and “overstretched with the taxing work that can affect your psyche and grounding as a woman.”

The most important lesson Pamela Merritt has grasped in her recent fight against the billboards is to recognize that, “This is your wake up call and opportunity.” She reminds us that we must be inclusive, and if people are connecting, we need to keep those connections. “We could benefit from energized sisters in the community. This isn’t about what we can do, or I can do, but the coalition and what we all can do.”

Don’t wait! Connect now!

The Take Away Steps

- Create a local coalition
- Develop Strategic Talking Points
- Have a media outlet and legislator list compiled and ready for use
- Have your coalition email lists compiled and ready to send out e-blasts
- Distribute a solidarity statement and/or petition
- Reach out to other organizations and share the work, including national organizations like SisterSong, the Black Women’s Health Imperative, or the

TBW Partnership

- Have an established action plan so that everyone feels a part of the process
- Partner with mainstream organizations, like NARAL & Planned Parenthood
- Reach out to local branches of the national Civil Rights organizations like the NAACP or Urban League
- Position yourself as the spokesperson around the issue in your area
- Develop a rapid response plan
- Take the time to do self-care

Talking POINTS

TRUST
BLACK WOMEN
STAND WITH US FOR REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

Written by Belle Taylor McGhee, Chair, Trust Black Women Communications Working Group

About Trust Black Women

- Trust Black Women (TBW) is a national partnership founded in July 2010 of Black women's Reproductive Justice organizations supporting a local, regional and national front to maintain and defend reproductive justice for women and girls.
- TBW organized in response to the Black Genocide billboard campaign led by abortion opponents, including Priests for Life, Life Always, Issues4Life Foundation, and the Radiance Foundation.
- TBW denounces any campaign that insidiously portrays Black women as perpetrators of genocide against African American children. We will take a stance wherever these billboards appear.
- TBW was convened by SisterSong, a woman of color Reproductive Justice Collective based in Atlanta, GA. TBW is represented by eight partner groups across the U.S. from New York, DC, Illinois, Wisconsin, Georgia, and California, and individual African American women on our Advisory Board.

Opposition Media/Billboard Campaign

- The groups behind the racist and sexist billboards – LifeAlways, Heroic Media, the Radiance Foundation – are the same groups who oppose government safety net programs and healthcare reform that would directly benefit Black women, their families and communities.
- In fact, Heroic Media has been the group hosting fundraising events around the country for former Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin.
- The “Black Genocide” campaign attempts to undermine the fundamental human right of every Black woman to make her own personal and private decisions about childbearing.
- These billboards are not only offensive, they are also racist and sexist.
- TBW trusts Black women to make personal and private decisions about childbearing – not backers of a racist billboard campaign that denigrates and stigmatizes Black women.

Latest Billboard Depicting President Obama

- By using the President's face in this most disrespectful way, our opponents have shown once again that they care more about abortion politics than they do about supporting Black women and their babies. Exactly how much are they spending to insult the President as well as Black women?
- Our opponents are not only insulting the President, they are using Black women's bodily integrity to do it.
- Our research shows that most African Americans trust women to make personal decisions about childbearing. They will not be swayed by the racist and distorted messages these billboards represent.

Contraception and Abortion Access

- Reproductive Justice is built on an international human rights framework that recognizes the human right of every woman to have a child; to have access to information and family planning methods to help her control her fertility; and to receive the social, economic resources and support she needs to parent the child or the children she already has.
- All women of color are under attack by groups who claim to have a moral authority over women's personal reproductive decision-making. Let's be clear: our opponents are not just opposed to abortion. They are on record as not supporting women's access to basic contraceptive services, such as birth control.
- The fact is: the majority of African Americans consider contraception, such as birth control, IUDs, diaphragms and other contraceptive methods, as part of basic healthcare.
- Our research also shows that the majority of African Americans believe that making it harder for Black women to get birth control – as well as obtain an abortion – will only create greater problems for women in managing their reproductive health, such as preventing unintended pregnancies and other poor health outcomes.
- Opponents of reproductive justice are not interested in supporting public policies that improve women's access to basic healthcare, such as contraceptive services. Their opposition to these government safety nets, like Title X funding, clearly indicates that supporting Black women's reproductive autonomy is not part of their agenda.
- TBW supports women's access to the full range of reproductive health services, including access to affordable contraception; evidence-based sex education; prenatal care services; prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STIs); HIV/AIDS prevention; as well as access to abortion services, including public funding for poor women.
- Our research shows that the majority of African Americans trust Black women to make the best decisions for themselves and their families, which includes the decision to obtain an abortion.
- We know that Black women face barriers to obtain basic healthcare services, which contribute to poor health outcomes, such as HIV/AIDS and other STIs, as well as high rates of unintended pregnancy. These billboards – and the money spent to fund them – do nothing to address these health disparities. Instead, they are designed to divert our attention from addressing the structural, institutional, economic and political barriers that lead to poor health outcomes for Black women and their families.
- TBW is working to engage Black women and their partners in addressing these critical issues and finding solutions to combat the problem.

The Black Faith-based Community

- TBW finds it disturbing that some faith-based leaders are standing in solidarity with the backers of these billboard campaigns and posturing themselves as condemners of Black women. They should be extending support to any woman who finds herself in the position of having to make this decision.
- Our communities are overwrought with violence, lack of access to quality education, high rates of unemployment, and lack of access to healthy foods. Those are the real issues – not Black women making the decisions in the best interest of their families.
- Fortunately, many progressive Black faith-based leaders recognize the direct link between the sacredness of Black women's bodies and social justice issues, including access to vital family planning services, as well as access to safe abortions.
- Our research shows that most African Americans believe God gives a woman free will to decide for herself whether to obtain an abortion depending on her own life circumstances.

NOTE: If you get into a conversation about “abortion.” Here is a talking point that spotlights the opposition's extremism and highlights our own research:

- The groups behind these billboards are the same groups who oppose a health exception for women who have been raped or suffered incest who are in need of an abortion. They do not represent the views of most African Americans who feel strongly that abortion should be legal if the life or health of the woman is in danger.

And specifically on claims that Planned Parenthood places most of its clinics in or near Black neighborhoods, or that most abortion clinics are located in predominantly Black neighborhoods, the Guttmacher Institute offers excellent research that disputes this claim:

- Fewer than one in 10 abortion clinics are located in predominantly African American neighborhoods, or those in which the majority of residents are Black.

TBW Partnering Organizations (as of April 2011)

- SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective, Atlanta
- SPARK Reproductive Justice Now, Atlanta
- SisterLove, Inc., Atlanta
- Black Women for Reproductive Justice, Chicago
- Milwaukee Reproductive Justice Collective, Milwaukee
- Black Women's Health Imperative, Washington, DC
- SisterSong NY, New York City
- California Black Women's Health Project, California (statewide)
- Black Women for Wellness, Los Angeles



BILLBOARD

**Black Children Are An Endangered Species?
Every 21 Minutes The Next Possible Leader Is Aborted?
The Most Unsafe Place For An African American Child Is In My Womb?**
I Guess You Assumed You Could Say What You Wanted In Jesus' Name
And I Would Let It Slide
Let It Ride Like You Rode A Ship And Talked Some Shit
To Bring Me To A Land That Wasn't Mine
Told My King I'd Be Fine And That You'd Be Kind
But As The Story Goes 500 Years Later
And You Still Lying

You Wasn't Trying To 'Make Me Betta'
At Night Together We Conceived That Child
Forced Me To Breed That Child
More Stock To Tend More Crops For Your Hard Labor
Back Broke, Culture Choked
Vilifying Me 'Cause I'm Trying To Survive
Blaming Me Of Committing Genocide?

I Just Been Trying To Live Inside America And This Dream
Trying To Keep Hope Alive While You Keep The Pope Alive
And The Pedophiles Who Would Rape That Same Child And Sweep It Under Rugs
Hail Mary's And Hugs With Hues Of Red White And Blue
With Liberty And Justice For Only You

My Womb Produced All The Leaders You Constantly Kill
Every 21 Minutes A Black Child Is Faced With The Real Deal
On 58th & State
Swallowed The Blue Pill But The Matrix Is Hate, Racial Profiling, And Rape
Prayin' For A Clean Slate After Bargains And Pleas
Endangered In A Land Of Thieves, But A Species?

Insensitivity At Its Best
Culturally Incompetent
Civil Unrest
Misinformed
Unworthy To Lead A Charge Then Charge Me With Murder!

Where Are You After Our Babies Are Born?
You Scorn, Jack Welfare & Health Reform
Sons And Daughters Mourned Over Caskets And Graves
But Not By My Hand
Ain't Never Been My Plan To Kill The Next Black Man
Yet You Stand Blameless As If You Really Give A Damn
You Eating Filet Mignon, Baby Eating Spam
Food Deserts, Polluted Air
Shit Schools Setting Rules For Ritalin Ridden Babies
You Take A Time Out!
And Put Some Time In
Cause You Don't Comprehend My Beginning Or My End

Covering My Roots Like Thieves Cover Tracks
One Nation Under God
Indivisible 'Til We Visualized A Leader
Targeting Me Again As A Breeder
With His Picture To Mock Me
Billboards To Shock Me
This Ain't Shit But The Next Plan To Block Me
But I See You...Pharisee.

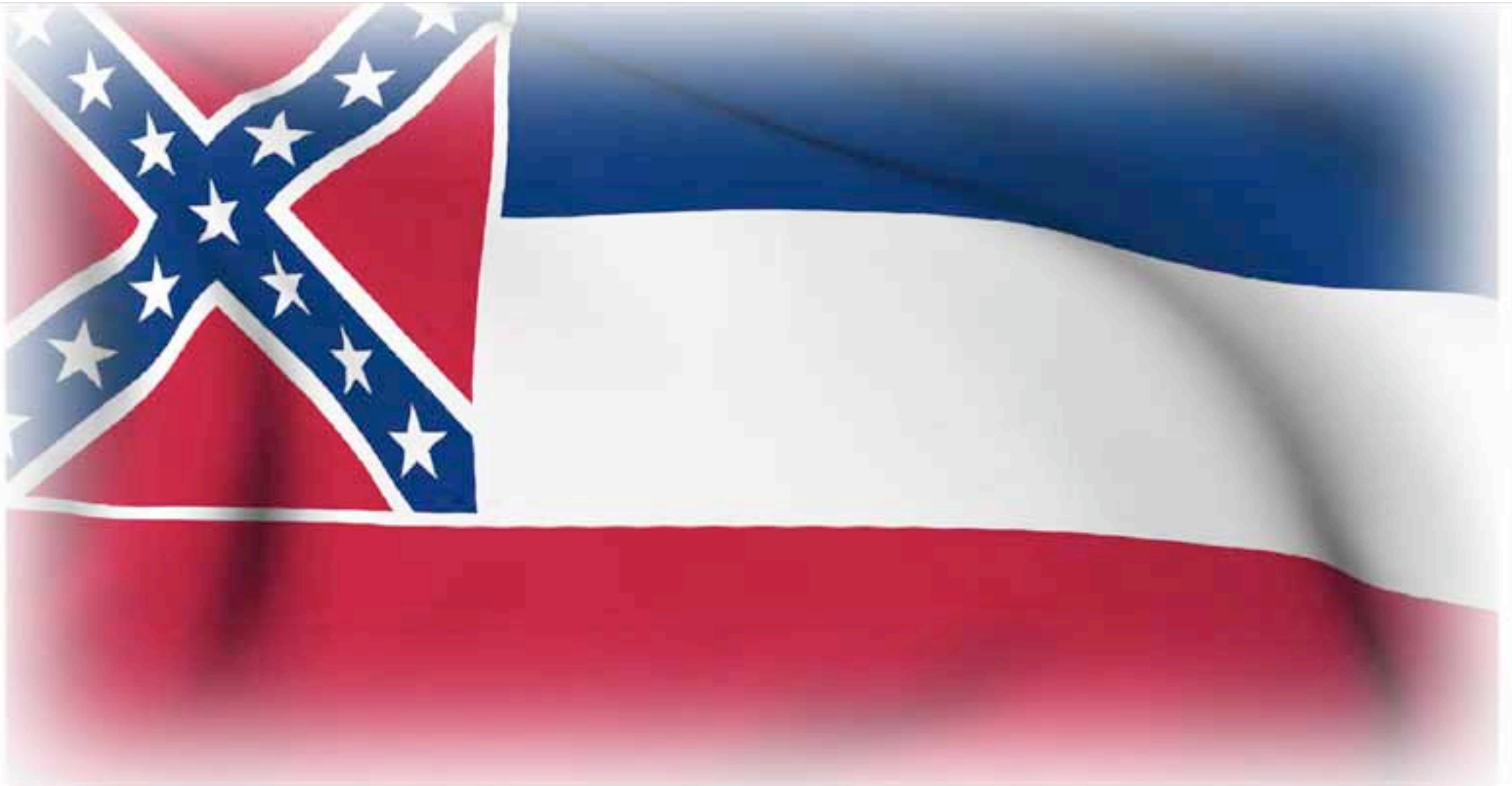
Black Preachers Gon' Wild
Crucifying Queens
Pimpin' King James For Fame
In Jesus' Name Pitting Blame
Like God Is Pleased
You The Disease In The Village That We Just...Can't...Shake
But My Back Is Something You Just...Can't...Break
Flexible Like The Willow
Bosom Soft Like A Pillow That Was Used To Nurse
Yo Foul Ass
If I Wasn't Spiritual I'd Curse
Yo Foul Ass
But You Already Done
Til You Do Right By Me The Race Ain't Run, The Spin Ain't Spun
You Think You've Won But It's Only Just Begun

Like A Sucka Punch When You Least Expect It
I'll Be There
Leading A Healthy Life In Spite Of Your Hypocrisy
I'll Be There
Raising A Healthy Family Rooted In Democracy
I'll Be There
Doing What Black Women Have Always Had To Do In Spite Of You
Rebuke That Shit...
And Continue.

BARBBILOM

CHERRISSE SCOTT

www.rstgj.com/cherissecott



Anti-Abortion PreNDA Legislation

By Loretta Ross, SisterSong National Coordinator

Race- and gender-specific anti-abortion legislation got its start in the devious brain of Republican Representative Trent Franks from Arizona in 2008. Although Congressman Franks is a conservative who consistently fights every civil and human rights bill in his state and in Congress, he decided to introduce the offensively-named Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass Pre-Natal Nondiscrimination Act of 2008 or PreNDA. He also re-introduced the same bill in 2009. This federal bill claimed to prevent discrimination against fetuses in the womb – in other words to save African American and Asian American fetuses from being aborted because of the race of the mother or gender of the fetus. Its assumptions were as offensive as its name – another example of a human rights opponent appropriating the names of iconic figures in order to promote something that betrays the legacies of the legends whose names they are colonizing.

The basic logic of PreNDA legislation is flawed: one cannot save babies of color by discriminating against women of color. PreNDA legislation sets women of color up for racial profiling by abortion providers who are compelled to question our motives for seeking abortions, something to which white women may not be subjected. This is legislatively-mandated discrimination. The legislation intrudes on patient-doctor confidentiality, increases barriers to abortion access, increases medical malpractice insurance costs, and is frankly unconstitutional because it subjects a federally protected legal right to state restrictions that prohibit abortion access for targeted groups of women. At the time of its introduction in 2008, Generations Ahead mobilized local and national organizations into a Race and Sex Selection Working Group to fight PreNDA legislation. SisterSong was part of the group, along with the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum, and dozens of women's organizations that find sex-selective abortions a problematic use of the choice framework. While Generations Ahead led the response against the gender-based attacks on abortion rights, SisterSong did not see how the race-based attacks would

succeed, or even make sense. After all, what African American woman – when pregnant – does not know that her child will be Black? In other words, what Black woman seeks an abortion because her fetus is Black? It seemed laughable at the time.

Generations Ahead pressed on with the fight against sex-selective abortion legislation, as reported in the last issue of *Collective Voices*. The proponents of gender-based anti-abortion bills stereotype Asian American women as docile, brainwashed victims of their own “bizarre” cultures who need to be rescued by white men from hyper-patriarchal situations, such as described by Gayatri Spivak's famous description of the syndrome of white men trying to save brown women from brown men. As Sujatha Jesudason reported, “the use of sex selection to have a child of the sex the parent or parents prefer seems inexorably linked to gendered expectations...and such practices may reinforce gender discrimination.” She asserts that the best strategy is to discourage the practice of sex selection while protecting access to abortion and reproductive autonomy, as has been done around the world in such countries where sex selection can actually be proven to have occurred.

Fast forward two years. While the Franks' legislation failed at the federal level, it provided a model in states for abortion opponents to attempt to pass bans on abortion access based on the race or gender of the fetus. When conservatives introduced House Bill 529 in Georgia as the first combined race- and sex-selection state bill following the billboard campaign, they failed because our strong coalition of women's and civil rights organizations successfully fought them and won. (A report of this campaign is available at www.sistersong.net – ed.)

However, anti-abortion opponents succeeded in another state – Arizona – because Arizona is apparently the new Mississippi of the 21st century with legislation targeting immigrants, women, civil rights, ethnic studies, workers' rights, etc. Some writers accuse conservatives of trying to repeal the entire 20th century! Arizona became the first state in the nation to

make alleged sex- or race-selection abortions a crime. Gov. Jan Brewer signed into law House Bill 2443 in April 2011 which makes it a felony for a doctor to perform an abortion based on the sex or race of the fetus. The Arizona law allows the father of an aborted fetus -- or, if the mother is a minor, the mother's parents -- to take legal action against the doctor or other healthcare provider who performed the abortion. If convicted of the felony, physicians would face up to seven years in jail and the loss of their medical license. This unprecedented and predictably unconstitutional law would allow third parties to sue a doctor for the legal actions of a woman who has signed ample consent forms for the abortion procedure, and leaves providers vulnerable to other parties who claim they were harmed by the abortion.



It is likely that other conservative states will copy Arizona's example just as they've replicated that state's anti-immigration legislation permitting racial profiling and arrests of immigrants. Calling themselves campaigning against "reproductive racism," conservatives use the bizarre "abortion is racist" narrative that disregards the rights, the wishes, or the needs of women of color. Conservatives, who apparently don't care to help children of color once they are born, are now claiming to be the champions of our children in the womb. At the same time, they are attempting to deny citizenship rights to the children born in the U.S. to undocumented women by trying to exclude them for inclusion in the 14th Amendment to the Constitution. They also oppose healthcare reform, controlling gun violence, environmental protections, immigration reform, marriage equality, public education, criminal justice reform, and other important human rights policy issues that determine the quality of life for children of color. They also falsely claim that abortion clinics are intentionally located in our communities to eliminate people of color. They used charges of "Black genocide" in the failed attempt to end Title X federal funding to attack Planned Parenthood earlier this year, and are continuing their efforts in state legislatures.

Legislation Mobilizes Conservative Voters

SisterSong believes that the astonishing wave of anti-abortion legislation around the country is part of the predictable cyclical response of conservatives when they find themselves defeated at the ballot box and seek to regain political power. In the 1970s when Ronald Reagan was seeking the presidency, Republicans seized upon several cultural "wedge" issues around which they could activate and mobilize their base, replicating a strategy crafted by Richard Nixon. Building on a core of dissatisfied white voters opposed to the Civil Rights gains of the 1960s, Republicans in the 1970s crafted a strategy that would meld together opponents of civil, women's, gay, workers' and immigrants' rights in a unified "anti-government" political force mobilized by the religious right that would help them regain the presidency. In the process, they shifted the majority of Southern white Democratic voters into aligning with the Republican Party. This strategy worked distressingly well in 1980 and was successfully repeated so often it has become known as the conservative "Southern Strategy."

A similar mobilization occurred after the election of Bill Clinton in 1992 (remember Newt Gingrich's Contract with America?), and of course, was repeated by conservatives re-inventing themselves as the Tea Party after the election of President Obama. Every Republican campaign for the presidency (and in other elections) uses some version of this Southern Strategy to heighten racial, gender, anti-gay, and anti-immigrant tensions in order to mobilize their angry white base at the voting booth.

The real question is whether progressives who support abortion rights can recognize this strategy for what it is -- a ruthless campaign to regain political power -- rather than just another attack on abortion rights disguised in racial justice language. If we fail to link this attack on abortion rights to other social justice wedge issues, we will inadequately respond to this all-out assault on human rights. It is not a coincidence that the sponsors of some of the billboards also fundraise for Sarah Palin. Our opponents are using an intersectional analysis in their legislative attacks? Can we afford to do less?

Responding to PreNDA Legislation

It is vital that we understand how to fight this legislation. First, we must work closely with Black elected officials in each state who will more often than not recognize the racial subtexts and attacks presented by this legislation. The Congressional Black Caucus in Washington, DC has stood firmly in support of women's rights, gay rights, workers' rights, and immigrants' rights. They have power and influence with Black elected officials around the country and can be depended upon to support our cause. Second, we must understand and foment the tensions among Republicans who are a divided party, no matter how well they attempt to disguise it. Moderate Republicans are either driven out of the party or are intimidated into silence by their extremist members. Yet, in 2010 SisterSong worked with moderate Republican men and women in Georgia who did not want millions of the state's dollars spent in defending patently unconstitutional legislation. We were supported by associations of doctors and lawyers -- both pro-choice and pro-life -- who recognized the threats to the medical and legal communities if such legislation was enacted. As usual, the abortion opponents over-reached, and their mistakes can benefit us as we drive wedges into their supporters.

Third, those of us who fought attempts by former Klansman David Duke to run for elected offices in Louisiana in the 1990s remember that his blatant racism was defeated not by the 55% of white voters who supported him, but the 45% of white voters who did not, joining their electoral strength with people of color. More white people are repelled by these racist and sexist tactics than not, and will join with people of color to rebuff these attempts to divide progressive voters if we consistently name these bills as the offense they really are.

Fourth, we can challenge their policy inconsistencies and expose their strategies for mobilizing their base against the human rights movement. If they oppose feeding, healing, or educating children, how credible are they when they claim to want to protect the unborn? They are vulnerable when their hypocrisy is revealed by examining their voting records and opposition to legislation that will actually help children.

Fifth, we must build coalitions with allies in other movements who understand the challenges such legislation makes to the human rights of all people. SisterSong was joined by allies from the civil rights, immigrants' rights, civil liberties, and LGBTQ movements to present a united front against this legislation in 2010. Even if PreNDA legislation has not yet reached other states, it is not too early to begin conversations with our allies about the billboards and legislation. Billboards have appeared in nearly a dozen states and it is possible that PreNDA legislation will follow in every state in which Republicans have a majority of votes in the legislature.

PreNDA legislation can backfire on conservatives. It precipitated a determined response by African American and Asian American women to defend our right to access abortion and not be racially profiled. It has alerted the entire African American about a new tactic to undermine our human rights and roll back the progressive gains of the 20th century. The Trust Black Women Partnership and the Race and Sex Selection Working Group were organized to fight race- and gender-based attacks on abortion around the country. We will partner with our pro-choice allies to ensure that they do not succeed in re-enslaving us through our wombs through forced breeding. We've seen that script before.



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AFFIRMING Sexual Rights

Passion & Punishment

By Heidi Williamson, SisterSong National Advocacy Coordinator

Historically Black women in the U.S. have struggled to affirm our sexual rights. By formal definition, the concept of “Sexual Rights” is the right to the highest attainable standard of sexual health, including access to sexual and reproductive health care services; the right to seek, receive, and impart information related to sexuality. It includes sexuality education; respect for bodily integrity; choice of partner and whether or not to be sexually active. Sexual rights require consensual sexual relations and consensual marriage, although no one has to do either. Everyone has the right to decide whether or not, and when, to have children and how to pursue a satisfying, safe and pleasurable sexual life as part of the universal human rights framework.



Black women’s historical activism revolved around actively resisting attempts to restrict our reproductive freedoms and bodily integrity – in other words fighting against violations of our sexual rights. As the human rights community embraced sexual rights as part of the spectrum for human dignity and life, Black women still struggle to incorporate this right because there is an inherent link between sex health, sexuality, sexual rights, and Reproductive Justice. For many generations of Black women, affirming sexual rights happened one of two ways: 1) protecting our wombs to maintain the option of bearing children, and 2) determining for ourselves when and if we would have children. For Reproductive Justice activists, there is a third aspect of sexual rights: the right to parent our children in safe and healthy environments.

Sexual rights too often are not seen as a priority for some activists and advocates, particularly in the policy arena, as organizations and lobbyists must invest huge amounts of hours into holding the proverbial line on abortion rights, which is just one aspect on the continuum of sexual rights. Many advocates steer clear because defining what sexual rights means politically is a hot topic. What are we affirming and to whom – an act, idea, identity, or lifestyle? How do we go about it?

But as billboards claiming “the most dangerous place for an African American child in the womb” continue to go up, Black women recognize that our opponents have become savvier in demonizing not only our reproductive health choices, but our very engagement in sexual activity. We now know we must break from the norm of simply resisting sexual and reproductive oppression and affirm the sexual rights and reproductive freedoms of Black women.

But there is another reality for us that is rarely discussed – the repercussions we experience because we attempt to affirm our sexuality in both the private and public spheres.

It’s no secret that our opponents seek to simultaneously shame our actions publicly, while attempting to restrict our rights and access through punitive public policies allegedly for the “public good.” In other words, our fertility and our children are blamed for nearly every social problem, including crime, the environment, poor schools, gun violence, etc. Our lived experiences tell a more dramatic story: one of sexual punishment.

Sexual punishment will always remain a type of reproductive oppression that has a particular and specific impact on the health and well-being of ourselves and our families. Black women’s lived experiences (and various historical records) teach us that since slavery, sexual violence has been and continues to be justified by individuals and institutions within and outside our communities. Whether its church leaders dictating behavior or discriminatory health services restricting our access, Black bodies are held up to a lens that deems us unworthy and unable to manage sexual rights. But what about those instances where we are victimized and subjugated expressly for attempting to affirm our sexual rights? For example, it was routine during the Civil Rights movement for segregationists to use the government to attempt to remove the children of women who were registering people to vote.

This reproductive punishment is not limited to African American women, by the way. Women who are Indigenous activists who fight for sovereignty or immigrants’ rights activists who challenge negative immigration policies are also at risk of child removal as a form of state-sponsored violence.

There are more and more stories than ever in the news media and on the web about the punitive and pre-meditated practices that define sexual violence and punishment against Black women. Too often the most egregious stories appear as unlinked random events of sexuality and circumstance rather than a pervasive sub-culture of violence projected on individuals seeking to affirm themselves – who to love, how they would love, and their desire for sexual pleasure. In these instances, overt oppression is often used by those who want to avoid questioning the more commonplace abuses in the lives of Black women. For example, coercive rape, or raping lesbians in an attempt to make women “straight” remains a frequent practice both internationally and domestically, intentionally terrorizing lesbians seeking to live their lives openly within their communities. Moreover, the blatant contempt of the perpetrators is shocking and frightening, particularly as RJ activists name and bring to light the fear of a broader reproductive and sexual rights model and analysis that includes but is not limited to heterosexual norms.

Women across this country, regardless of sexual orientation, are punished for realizing their sexual rights that go beyond the traditional scope of resisting reproductive oppression like sterilization abuse. Many women of color endure sexual punishment in silence and shame. This includes coercive sex (or rape), forced/coerced pregnancy, birth control sabotage, interference with birth options like midwifery, and domestic violence. Coercive sex remains a hotly contested policy issue as Republicans in Congress earlier this year sought to make a distinction between rape and forcible rape. Any advocate truly concerned about women’s lives knows there is no distinction – rape is rape – and too often takes place in circumstances thought to be controllable, like date rape or within relationships.

Ultimately, sex is used as a weapon to subjugate, silence and control women’s behaviors. Victims of domestic violence, and many could argue poor women, are often forced to carry pregnancies to term because that is what a spouse or the state considers punishment for immoral behavior, such as those who believe that victims of rape or incest should not have a right to abortion. Control and shame are the goals, and our bodies become the prison or place of punishment. Sex and sexuality then become a privilege that one must be able to afford and get social approval to engage in – preferably only within heterosexual marriage. In total, women bear the shame and the burden for their sexual desires and attempts to affirm our sexual rights.

As the right continues to drive the conversation around what is appropriate behavior, public policies take a beating. In the last two years, the public discourse is more anti-woman and anti-sex than ever. We must name our oppression and define the essence of our liberation to fundamentally transform the daily lives of women of color and shape a new future. Affirming our agency within intimate partnerships and communities leads to having the power to reform the health care system, criminal codes, and marriage laws that try to restrict our sexual behavior. As we seek to realize human rights for women of color with the Reproductive Justice framework, it is critical that we balance our movement’s successful resistance to reproductive oppression, as well as find ways to positively affirm the sexual rights of women of color.

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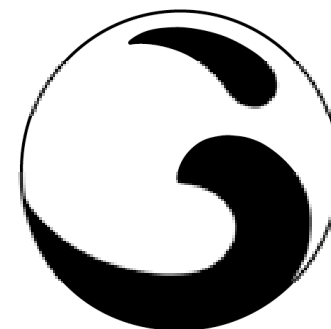
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Trust Black Women Partnership

By Loretta Ross, SisterSong National Coordinator

Who We Are

Trust Black Women (TBW) is a partnership of women from many different organizations, regions and religious backgrounds developed in 2010 in Atlanta to challenge anti-abortion campaigns across the country that targeted the African American community. TBW is a coalition of national and local Black women's organizations with an Advisory Board of individual women dedicated to working together to raise the voices of Black women, and use our community organizing expertise to establish a long-term response to racialized anti-abortion attacks in the African American community. The anti-abortion campaign is based on the racist and sexist stereotype that Black women, are "promiscuous, uncaring, and self-indulgent," in the words of Dorothy Roberts. Those who believe Black women do not have the right and the capacity to control our own bodies stand on the wrong side of justice and human rights.

We launched TBW by bringing together Black women's organizations and dozens of leading individual African American women to form – for the first time – a national coalition of Black women expressly dedicated to protecting abortion rights through the reproductive justice framework. We are young and older women working together. We are both pro-choice and pro-life, and we are not divided over the misleading debate on abortion. While African Americans have fought for reproductive control and autonomy for hundreds of years, explicitly forming a long-term coalition to fight race-based attacks on abortion rights is a new chapter in our ongoing struggle for human rights. In the words of one of our foremother, Fannie Lou Hamer, "A black woman's body is never hers alone." We understand the wry sentiment underlying her reality.

TBW believes that that Black women have the human right to make our own decisions about our reproductive lives, and that we should never regret difficult choices based on our complicated experiences. We don't judge women – we leave that to our opponents. We demand that everyone trust Black women to be make important moral decisions for ourselves, our families and our communities. It's a matter of Reproductive Justice.

We named ourselves Trust Black Women for several reasons. First, we wanted to honor Dr. George Tiller, who was assassinated several years ago, but who always said to "Trust Women" to make their own reproductive decisions. Second, the services of a first-class branding consultant were donated to help select the best name for our work that was aspirational, affirming, and complex. Third, we wanted to speak to the reality that Black women are not trusted by many in our society and, in fact, are unfairly blamed for many social problems. We keep throwing our lived experiences up against the disbelief of white America, sometimes even our allies. To demand that our society "Trust Black Women" boldly states that we shall let no one challenge our dignity, our human rights, and our self-determination without a strong response from empowered and organized African American women.

When we decided to fight the anti-abortion billboards and

legislation popping up in Georgia, we did our homework and found that the sponsors of these billboards have millions of dollars to quickly spread their messages of hate, blame and shame. They cynically exploit the historical trauma of the Black community to appear to speak seriously to black suffering by using "genocide" arguments to decry abortions. They are particularly adept at using Black surrogates as spokespeople for a racialized attack to make the whites for whom they work feel more comfortable in ignoring the structural racism that actually is central to their movement. Like other opponents of human rights and justice, they place highly visible people of color up front in defending ideas and programs that undermine racial justice. Our opponents have nimbly institutionalized tokenism to thwart the pro-choice movement.

As TBW, we have to ask ourselves, what does it mean when white conservatives with racist and sexist histories are able to recruit increasing numbers of African American leaders to support their campaigns against Black women? After 16 futile years of trying to gain traction for their "Black Genocide" arguments, why are nationally-known conservatives like Trent Franks (R-Az), Todd Tiahrt (R-Az), Joe Wilson (R-SC), and Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council suddenly using this false claim to torpedo President Obama's agenda, including health care reform and funding for Planned Parenthood? Is the pro-choice movement ready, and what can we as Black feminists do to counter this movement to bring African Americans into conservative social action?

What We Do

The TBW Partnership has taken up the battle in local communities in which the billboards appear. We fought them in Atlanta, New York, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, St. Louis, and Chicago, and we're hoping that all around the country, Black women have the information and the support to challenge these attacks. In states where we haven't yet organized, like Arizona, we're working to build our capacity so that we can provide quick response teams when billboards or legislation crop up.

These billboards nearly always receive national media attention in the New York Times, CNN, ABC News, MSNBC, and generate hundreds of stories based on the anti-abortion meme that Black women are either too stupid to make our own reproductive decisions or too selfish to be trusted. We have also been featured on Oprah Winfrey Radio Network and in many media stories about the billboards and campaigns. Only the progressive media fairly cover the story and enable the perspectives of Black feminists to be heard.

Our strategies include community organizing, direct action, protests, speak-outs, leadership development, media campaigns, and both opinion and opposition research. When the billboards go up in a city, we help organize local Black women to protest, write op-eds, organize coalitions that include allies, and expose the organizations and motivations behind the campaigns. Our

long-term goal is to build the capacity of Black women's organizations across the country to provide permanent sites of resistance and local organizing to challenge the billboards and defeat any accompanying race- and sex-selection legislation in the state. In short, we are building a firewall of resistance to white conservatives using our bodies to divided the African American community and the pro-choice movement.

For example, TBW, SisterSong and a coalition of allies protested when Priests for Life came to Atlanta in July 2010 with a so-called Pro-Life Freedom Bus that imitated the legendary Freedom Buses for voting rights in the 1960s. They staged a prayer service for the "unborn" at the tomb of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This is a perverse strategy by the largely white anti-abortion movement that attempts to appropriate the moral mantle of the civil rights movement. What they really do is distort Dr. King's history, because he and his wife Coretta Scott King were strong supporters of women's rights. Dr. King received an award from Planned Parenthood in 1966 while Mrs. King unfailingly supported all human rights causes, including very strong support for LGBTQ issues. When the mostly white bus riders showed up in Atlanta, they were met by determined Black and Brown activists challenging their hypocrisy in claiming to save us from ourselves.

We've also taken on the corporations that supported the billboards and the organizations that sponsor them like CBS, Lamar Advertising, and Dillard's department stores in Texas. We are demanding that these corporations stop their support of racist campaigns against Black women, and although we can't be sure they won't do it again, we are sure that we will fight them everywhere they try. For example, we helped expose the fact that the same organization, Heroic Media that paid for the New York and Chicago billboards, were also supporters of Sarah Palin and Mike Huckabee, making a mockery of their claim to care about African American children.

The attacks have also produced some wonderful support for our work. Lionsgate Films gifted us advance premiere screenings of For Colored Girls by Tyler Perry as fundraisers. Noted filmmaker Charles Stuart helped us produce a series of films on Laura Flanders' GritTV show to lift the voices of African American women so that we could speak for ourselves on national television as activists, providers, clinic escorts, and everyday women. The film is now being re-edited with a grant from the Mary Wohlford Foundation to allow us to distribute free copies to students and community organizations around the country.

The NAACP, Rev. Al Sharpton's National Action Network, Operation PUSH, and other Civil Rights organizations have begun some valuable and overdue conversations about how African American men can stand up for the human rights of Black women and not fall prey to this attempt to create a schism in our community between men and women around abortion rights.

We have also received support from some key foundations to conduct pioneering opinion research on what the African American community thinks about abortion rights and access. Although the pro-choice movement has more than 40 years of opinion research on American attitudes about abortion, TBW found that the available data on African Americans was scarce and disjointed. We worked with Beldon, Russonello and Stewart to organize focus groups and surveys to delve more deeply into attitudes and perceptions of the African American community. The results of this research will be released in the summer of 2011.

TBW is organized into five major Working Groups: 1) Communications; 2) Law and Policy; 3) Opposition Research and Faith-based Work; 4) Mobilization and Outreach; and 5) Fund Development. The eight organizations coordinated by SisterSong are: Black Women's Health Imperative in Washington, DC; SisterSong NYC; Black Women for Reproductive Justice in Chicago; the Milwaukee Reproductive Justice Collective; SPARK Reproductive Justice NOW! and SisterLove in Atlanta; the California Black Women's Health Project and Black Women for Wellness in Los Angeles. It is our plan to expand this founding core group of organizations and supportive individuals as we secure the resources to do so. Early support for SisterSong's organizing of TBW has been provided by the Catalyst Fund, the Irving Harris Foundation, and the Anderson Rogers Foundation. But there is much more to do to counter this alarming tactic by the anti-abortion movement.

Our Opponents

TBW knows we are up against formidable and well-funded opponents who believe they should control Black women's reproduction like during slavery. Our opponents are manipulative,

zealous, and immoral. They believe in population control, and use false compassion for children to disguise a racist and sexist agenda. They believe they can cynically use the African American community to attack abortion rights for all women. They lie using deceptive religious language to create an atmosphere of guilt and coercion. They manipulate Black history, our concerns about medical mistreatment, and our real collective pain about genocide and slavery to spin stories about Black women being the stupid pawns of doctors or selfish women who do not care about our communities to claim that we cannot be trusted. While all of them may not be openly racist, they are at least racially-challenged.

Brian Follett, founder of Heroic Media mentioned above, is a Texas-based millionaire who has also placed anti-abortion ads on BET, MSNBC, and FOX. The Follett family has very deep pockets. The Follett family earned its wealth from Anchor Foods, a manufacturer and supplier of frozen food appetizers headquartered in Wisconsin. In 2000, it was sold to McCain Foods and H.J. Heinz Company with a reported \$503 million in sales. The Folletts have created their own charity called Mercy Works Foundation. Funded through family tithing, Mercy Works reported \$29 million in assets in 2008 and, in that same year, gave \$3.4 million to Catholic anti-abortion groups. Follett says that Heroic Media's budget for 2011 is \$5 million, and he projects growing the organization to have an annual budget of \$30-\$50 million over the next five years.

Joining the racialized campaign is Priests for Life with a \$20 million war chest. They've hired Alveda King, Dr. King's niece, as Director of African American Outreach, trying to exploit the King name and legacy. They lavishly spend money on venues, publicity campaigns, buses, and salaries of their Black surrogates, at a scale our side can hardly match. But it doesn't take much money to start a media uproar. The Radiance Foundation that

launched the billboard campaign in Atlanta is reported to have spent a mere \$20,000 on the billboards that catapulted this movement into national prominence. It is estimated that this organization, incorporated in Georgia in 2009, has already raised more than \$1 million for its campaigns across the country.

Another well-funded opponent is Life Dynamics, Inc. (LDI), founded in 1992 in Denton, Texas by Mark Crutcher. Planned Parenthood Federation of America has been the targets of various "stings" by Crutcher who claims to be gathering "intelligence" on abortion clinics and pro-choice organizations. LDI is accused of harassment and intimidation tactics by PPFA and the National Abortion Federation. LDI produced the Maafa 21 film, a pseudo-documentary that misuses selected facts about African American history to claim that the legalization of abortion was a plot to eliminate Black people. The film has been distributed to all of Congress, as well as many colleges, universities, and civil rights organizations to promote the "black genocide" theme.

Another article in this issue of Collective Voices by Kathryn Joyce will more detail the operations of the anti-abortion movement in the African American community.

Next Steps

The SisterSong staff member who coordinates TBW is Candace Cabbil and she can be reached at Candace@sistersong.net. SisterSong will serve as the fiscal sponsor and facilitator of TBW for two years until it is able to secure funding to become independent. If you are interested in working with TBW, please send her an email and, after vetting (for security purposes) we will gladly include you in this movement of Black women standing up and speaking up for ourselves. We also welcome allies who are not Black women to work with us, because we believe that only a united movement can challenge this new front in the abortion wars.

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MEDIA FAILURE is a Women's Issue

By Serena Garcia, SisterSong Communications Coordinator

SisterSong has experienced media failure, especially during our work to protect Black women and Reproductive Justice during the sudden surge of anti-abortion legislation and publicity early last year in Georgia. What started out as calculated anti-abortion legislation and dehumanizing billboards (1) depicting Black women as the agents of genocide, stirred into a sparring match not only against the usual conservative opponents but also a male-dominated media industry.

Our National Coordinator Loretta Ross has been quoted in feminist and progressive media about not backing down in the face of what she calls a “firestorm” of legislation, publicity and media failure. She warns: “The problem with mainstream media is that they almost never reflect the point of view of progressives and they demonstrate their lack of balance in how they structure the stories in their reporting...the sexism and racism should not surprise us anymore.”

This media analysis will focus on examples of how women of color Reproductive Justice activists are not receiving fair treatment in or from the mainstream media, how the media relies on male “experts” and not women who can best comment on complex women’s issues, and why there is a myth amongst the media that women cannot effectively speak on race.

1. Women of color Reproductive Justice activists are not receiving fair treatment in or from the media.

RH Reality Check wrote about this issue in “New York Times Article on Myth of ‘Racial Bias and Abortion’ Omits Critical Analyses,” by Jodi Jacobson, Editor-in-Chief, published March 1, 2010.

Jacobson reported (2):

“...the Times story failed on several fronts. First, it failed to explore in any real depth the factors underlying reproductive and sexual health problems among African-American women. Nowhere does the article cite the actual public health data that would immediately discredit the claims of anti-choice groups using racial wedge issues to raise money and gain power.

Second, it failed to provide context for the widespread support among African-American leaders in Congress and in the public health community for expanding access to services.

And third, the Times (3) gave inordinate amounts of space to truly questionable characters in the anti-choice movement without exploring how these groups themselves are at fault for the problem about which they profess to be so worried. In fact, it failed to ask any questions at all about what the so-called right-to-life groups cited were doing to address the causal factors behind high rates of abortion. Nor did it really question the validity or credibility of these groups in any real way, or ask what they’ve done to address poverty, social isolation, or broader health concerns among African-American women. The answer? Nothing.”

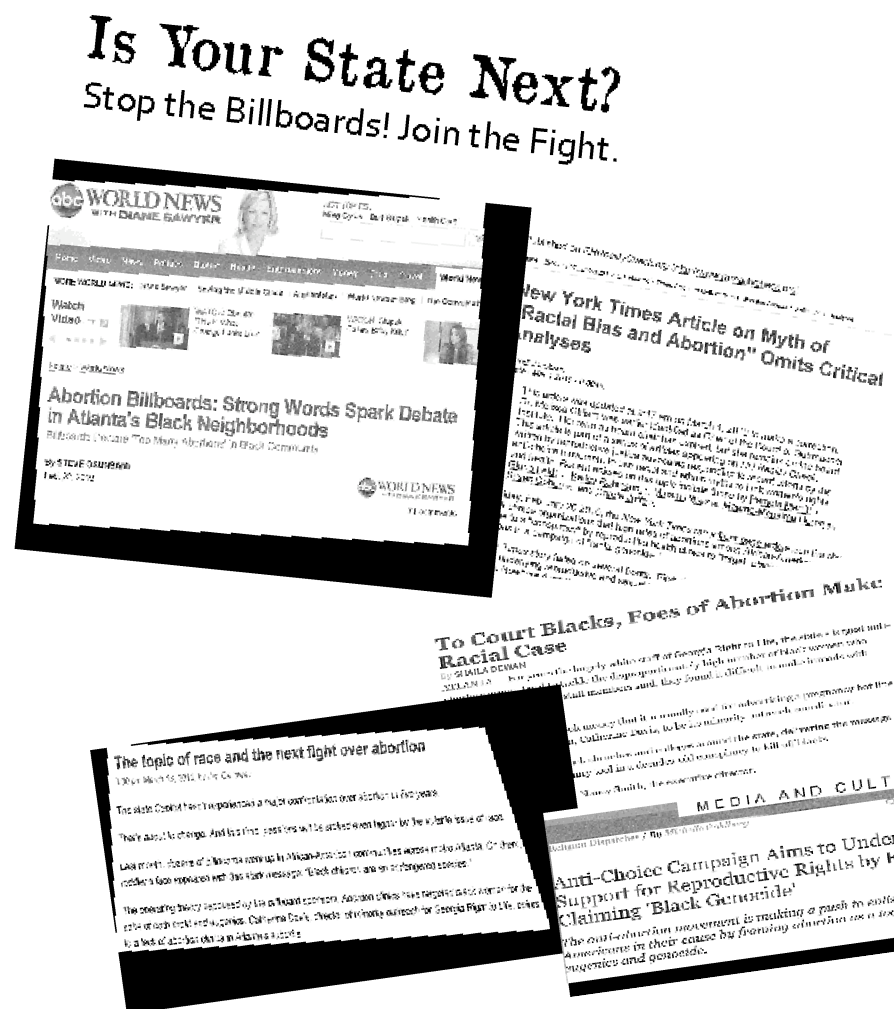
On The Issues Magazine wrote about this issue in “Loretta Ross Unmasks Black Anti-Abortion Message, Media Spin,” by Cindy Cooper, published March 2, 2010. Cooper reported (4):

“So how is it that the mainstream media, including The New York Times, ABC and CNN, managed to sideline Ross on a topic on which she is the leading national expert – that is, the misogyny and duplicity behind Black anti-abortion campaigns? What’s worse, the story was set in her backyard, where Georgia Right-to-Life mounted exploitive billboards targeting African Americans with messages about the so-called “Black genocide” of abortion.

But in news reports on an insidious effort of anti-abortion activists to terrorize African-American communities with billboards that claim ‘Black children are an endangered species’ and direct people to a right-wing anti-abortion website, Ross’ searing analysis was skipped over.

A front page article in The New York Times on February 27, 2010 manages to quote four anti-abortion activists, refer to two others, mention the billboards and the anti-abortion website before giving Ross 25 words buried in the 19th paragraph. Of course, it was little different in an earlier Times article on the same subject. There, Ross’ thinking is represented only if readers get to the bottom quarter of the story (online version).

Other leading figures in the Black community were also excluded ... SPARK Reproductive Justice NOW!, Planned Parenthood of Georgia, Feminist Women’s Health Center, Raksha (an Atlanta Asian American domestic violence organization), along with Generations Ahead in California. They also are being ignored by the mainstream media, although we recommend they be interviewed every time.



Television stories gave the same lack of attention to reproductive justice advocates. A feature on ABC World News (5) lasted 2.41 minutes and repeated the anti-abortion arguments fully, but gave Ross, the only reproductive rights expert, 15 seconds to counter them. Without evidence, the story claims that Black women have historically shunned abortion. (Fortunately, all of the 'women on the street' interviewed by ABC supported Ross' perspective.)"

On the Issues also referenced CNN not contacting SisterSong or any other reproductive justice, health or rights organization to participate in the important nationally public debate.

Cooper also noted that these failures are more serious than a discussion about billboards. Not even mentioned by The New York Times or other media is that the billboards are propaganda for an anti-abortion legislative assault, a bill in Georgia titled the "Prenatal Nondiscrimination Act," and called "PreNDA" by its anti-choice sponsors. The bill would create a new felony of "criminal solicitation of abortion." Under it, a person commits a crime punishable by five years in prison if the individual "solicits or coerces" another person to have an abortion "based in any way on account of the race, color, or sex of the unborn child or the race or color of either parent of that child."

2. The media relies on male "experts" and not women who can best comment on complicated women's issues.

NewsBusters wrote about this issue in "CNN Joins ABC in Highlighting Blacks' High Abortion Rate," by Matthew Balan, published March 1, 2010. Balan reported (6):

"(During the week of February 24, 2010)...CNN anchor, John Roberts acknowledged the high abortion rate of Blacks as he moderated a debate on a pro-life billboard campaign in Georgia which accuses the abortion industry of targeting the

Black community...Invited were Catherine Davis, the director of minority outreach for Georgia Right to Life, and Dr. Artis Cash of Shreveport, Louisiana's chapter of Al Sharpton's National Action Network just after the bottom of the 6 am Eastern hour."

Balan's article provided excerpts of the debate and pinpointed the blatant disregard for accuracy and obvious pivoting to non-Reproductive Justice issues. He wrote, "Instead of addressing Davis's numbers, Dr. Cash repeatedly accused her of condemning Black women, while extolling the efforts of Sharpton in the Black community."

The failure to provide an abortion rights expert clearly demonstrates the media's lack of understanding of how to effectively and fairly balance representation, since the anti-abortion position was represented by an expert. Asking a man to discuss women's issues is not an issue itself, because there are male pro-women activists who can provide insight to why men should support women. There are also men who are experts on abortion rights. But to intentionally choose not to select a Reproductive Justice organization that is woman-led, is more than an oversight, especially in a debate format.

3. There is a myth amongst the media that women cannot effectively speak on race.

In the examples that we cited earlier and that continue daily, the mainstream media often blindly determines who the most effective interviewee is and which position to portray.

They like to pretend that along gender lines women are all equal in a sisterhood and have the same opportunities to succeed by denying both racial and gender oppression.

According to a July 2002 article (7), "Women's experience of racism: How race and gender interact," published by the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIA), writer (<http://criaw-icref.ca/printmail/96>) Kalwant Bhopal says that the idea of sisterhood implies that all women

experience the same oppression, but solidarity implies an understanding that the struggles of all women are different, but interconnected ... to build a strong women's movement and a strong society, we must face head-on the challenges of racism and how it interacts with many other factors to produce our different life experiences."

I referenced the CNN unbalanced interview earlier. When challenged, CNN claimed that they wanted a male because they thought of him as an expert on racism, as if Black women were not also experts on racism. A fairer debate would have been between two Black women experts representing both sides of the issue. So sexism in the media is prevalent and has to be consistently challenged.

In terms of moving forward, we need to work with the Women's Media Center in New York City to get more women placed in mainstream media (MSM) as experts on a range of topics, but especially women of color on reproductive justice/health/rights issues. We need to ensure that adequate training is provided to a wide range of media spokespeople to ably handle hostile debates. We also need to appreciate the support and fairer reporting available in alternative media such as on americanindependent.com. Of course, we must use social media extensively to get our viewpoints widely known. It is rarely the agenda of corporate media to tell fair stories about Black women and we have to take charge of our own stories and work.

But we cannot let the mainstream media off the hook. The same media that endlessly repeated Don Imus' "nappy headed ho's" comment or mindlessly repeats every negative stereotype about Black women has to be challenged on its racism and sexism that does incalculable harm. We need to campaign against those media outlets that treat us unfairly or use sexist arguments for their policies. We have to hold media accountable.

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Trust Black Women or Lose Ground

By Bani Hines Hudson – Trust Black Women Partnership, Louisville, Kentucky

The War on Women has numerous campaigns and weapons. The long-running campaign against Planned Parenthood has intensified to converge with the revived ‘Black Genocide’ campaign demonizing African American women. The toolkit to divide by race (White women, Black women and other women of color) and by sex (Black women and men) has been hauled out again with misrepresentations of history and facts. The case of the “Black genocide” campaign that dredges up memories of slavery’s mercenary reproductive control and brutal sexual exploitation of Black women is quite a gamble by the anti-abortion movement. The rage it inspires in African American women feeds our fierce determination to ‘never go back’ to forced breeding like during slavery.

Centuries of injury and insults fuel the efforts of Black women who fight against reproductive dictatorship. Rage was our not-so-silent partner in the successful battle against proposed anti-choice Georgia legislation in 2010. That accomplishment will go down in herstory as a victory led by Black women and allies -- SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective, SPARK Reproductive Justice NOW!, Feminist Women’s Health Center, SisterLove, Planned Parenthood of the Southeast Region and Raksha. Loretta Ross, National Coordinator of SisterSong, outlined the comprehensive approach that shut down the attempt to criminalize abortions with a race- and sex-selection narrative targeting women of color. The power of Black women who were indignant, informed, organized, and strategic was an effective combination that made the bullies back up and off in Georgia -- at least for now. (The following year – 2011 – not one anti-abortion bill made it out of the Georgia legislature; instead they focused on copying Arizona’s anti-immigrant law racially profiling immigrants, HB 87. – ed.)

Black women toiling in organizations that work for women’s rights often observe blind spots that make the pro-choice movement generally vulnerable to accusations of racism. For example, Black women are often used for the pro-choice agenda, more so than looked to as leaders for the pro-choice agenda. Clearly, Black women can lead as SisterSong and other women of color reproductive justice organizations demonstrate daily. Yet within the movement, Black women and other women of color sometimes serve largely as statistics for getting funding; as bridges to low-income communities (who attract more funding); and as low-cost employee ‘help’ (to stretch funding) -- crucial roles that further the missions of ‘progressive’ non-profits.

This facilitates the tradition of White leadership, the custom of White women being ‘served’, and a self-absorption that



inhibits the sharing of resources or power. This is not a state of affairs peculiar to any specific pro-choice organization, and is not meant to diminish the many victories made by White women-led organizations. Planned Parenthood is an easy anti-choice target for anti-abortionists, not only for the obvious reasons (predominance, longevity, spread), but because of its Title X funding and valuable services it provides to women around the country to vulnerable populations conservatives would rather ignore. But Planned Parenthood and other pro-choice organizations have difficulty acknowledging their problematic histories that are distorted and exploited by the anti-abortion movement. But as SisterSong points out in its 2010 policy report on the Georgia legislative battle, “the failure to recognize this legacy jeopardizes our collective ability to defeat our mutual opponents” and weakens the entire movement.”

There are pro-choice leaders who serve and share with Black women, and they tend to be those who make deconstructing racism and sharing power priorities in their work for women’s rights. These allies are role models for other women if defending women’s human rights is the shared goal. They are a source of support for battle-weary Black women fighting both inside and outside our movements.

Black and White women share a unique and unresolved history around slavery and sexuality. There is much to learn and do together as equals in this tough work to defend abortion rights and access. The “Black Genocide/Margaret Sanger as Racist” campaigns stumble when confronted by Black women with the authenticity and capacity to challenge the racism and misogyny. In the face of the current onslaught, there is no telling what could be accomplished if all women worked together effectively as equals sharing resources and power to defeat this race- and sex-based attack on abortion. But old habits die hard.

Scripts will need to be flipped in order to beat back the ‘all-sides assault’ on women. That will require different actors in different roles. Our opponents know this, and have cynically used Black women and men as visible spokespeople, demonstrating a degree of cultural competence even as they seek to thwart our progress towards human rights. Their earnestness, steeped in judgmental religious dogma, is the tie that binds while they receive extensive funding from White conservative donors and organizations, much more than is available to women of color fighting these attacks. To counter this, progressives will have to become more tightly bound together. It will take more unity and strategic collaboration among us to effectively move beyond our scathing critiques of conservatives. The pro-choice movement must overcome “...its historical reluctance to confront accusations of racism...[a need to] understand the power of the reproductive justice framework...and that we all live in a system of white supremacy that affects everyone...” according to a movement assessment made by Loretta Ross.

It is not too late to bring in off-the-radar allies or the fence-sitters in the Black community, regardless of anti-choice billboards and bluster. The analyses and victories by SisterSong and sisterfriends attest to this. Prominent Black civil rights organizations and religious leaders have publicly aligned with Black women in support of reproductive justice and abortion rights. With characteristic foresight, SisterSong rallied activists in Atlanta as well as from across the country through the Trust Black Women Partnership. It fills a gap in leadership to connect Black women when challenged about our reproductive autonomy. A record of winning in spite of having ‘less than the rest’ makes for formidable fighters. In these threatening times, it behooves the mainstream pro-choice movement to shift its course and fully “Trust Black Women” to lead the walk, not just share the talk.

Social Black Women as Sex Offenders? Injustice

By Gina Brown, New Orleans AIDS Alliance

When you see a sex offender flyer, what is the first thing that comes to mind? Do you think the person committed a crime against a child or a woman? If so, you are mistaken, like the rest of us.

In Louisiana, the average registered sex offender is female, black, a drug addict (past/current), poor, between the ages of 25-40, and has never committed a crime involving a child. Louisiana's Crime Against Nature statute is 206 years old. It requires anyone who is convicted of soliciting oral or anal sex to register as a sex offender. In more than 90 percent of current sex offender cases, the target of the solicitation is a male well over the age of 18 and often, the man is not charged with a crime. If he is charged, although he may have requested oral or anal sex, he is not required to register as a sex offender.

The woman, however, must mail out notification cards in her neighborhood, and her state identification card must bear a "sex offender" label. Most women have been arrested when authorities apply the law in a sexist and racist way.

An often-overlooked group that is adversely affected by this ancient law is women who desire to become mothers. Having this label placed on them makes it almost impossible for these women, most of who are of child-bearing age, to raise children. They are not allowed to live near schools. They cannot visit their children's school or a neighborhood playground or participate in functions designed for children. Why would a woman have children if she is barred from properly raising them? It is an impossible situation.

Another place where this law hurts women is in securing safe, affordable housing and jobs. If a woman is homeless she is more likely to engage in survival sex and/or use drugs, which puts her at greater risk for re-arrest. Becoming a productive member of society is out of the question if a woman cannot get a decent paying job.

There is a definite pattern in place; a 206-year-old wall is placed in front of women that blocks them from being good mothers. National and local studies have consistently shown that parents who are actively involved in their children's educational and social lives produce positive and productive leaders for our future. With a sex offenders' status, a woman is barred from doing just that as there is a huge stigma associated with being a sex offender. Forty-three percent of the households in Louisiana are headed by women with children. This State cannot afford to sacrifice even a small portion of its children to a lack of parental involvement.

Two hundred and six years is a long time to be at the bottom. It is time that we allow women, all women, to be good mothers. Soliciting sex in order to pay for your children's uniforms may not be the most politically acceptable way of raising funds, but women should not be barred from properly raising their children because of it.

This is a social injustice that cannot continue.

Gina is a recent graduate of the in Building Global Leadership, Advocacy, and Partnerships among Women Living with HIV: An Advocacy Training to Advance the AIDS Response for Women and Girls Globally, hosted by the Center for Health and Gender Equity (CHANGE), the International Community of Women Living with HIV and AIDS (ICW), and the U.S. Positive Women's Network (PWN).

Update: On June 6, 2011, Louisiana's Crime Against Nature statue was removed.



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Allies Defending BLACK WOMEN

By Loretta Ross, SisterSong National Coordinator

Since the anti-abortion billboards appeared in February 2010 in Atlanta, SisterSong and the Trust Black Women Partnership have been frequently asked what role White allies can play in fighting these attacks apparently directed only towards women of color. We have had many conversations with our allies and offer some of the following guidance based on our experiences.

We were dismayed to find that some of our allies were often flinching when race and abortion were twinned to attack all women by hypocritically using the bodies and questioning the motives of African American and Asian American women who obtain abortions. While the pro-choice movement is grappling with concepts of cultural competency, the reproductive justice framework, and building, developing and partnering with women of color organizations and leaders, we don't have the luxury of resolving all of these issues before taking on racialized attacks on abortion rights. We must work quickly and we must work intelligently, as the recent attempts to defund Planned Parenthood demonstrated when accused of racially targeting Black women for abortion services. Whether at the federal, state or local level, our entire movement is weakened when we don't work together against our mutual opponents.

Stand up against racism and injustice all the time, no matter who you are. It is important for White allies to name the billboards and legislation as racist and sexist (and sometimes xenophobic), and to defend the rights of women of color to make the decisions for ourselves in controlling our bodies. It is not helpful for White women to assume that because they are not women of color that they cannot or should not speak out against racialized attacks. What women of color don't need are bystanders while our human rights are violated. In fact, it may be even more important for White allies to speak out because often they are more credible in naming racism than are people of color.

Standing up is not the same as standing in front. If there are women of color in your community fighting these billboards and race- and sex-based legislation, do not presume to organize without them or speak for them. It may be tempting for the pro-choice community to continue "business as usual" without ensuring that diverse voices of women of color are also in the leadership. Don't presume to develop messages or strategies without women of color. For example, in one city a group of white women vandalized a billboard, creating a backlash against Black women who had not been consulted before such a tactic was chosen.



Seek out experienced women of color and help build their capacity to work with you. While every community may not have an organized group of women of color formally working in the reproductive justice movement, this can be addressed by reaching out to national women of color organizations like SisterSong to help locate women of color in each community with whom to work. It may also be tempting to choose to work with individual women of color who will not challenge the customary white privilege practices of the pro-choice community, and use our sisters to ignore the more challenging voices of other women of color who insist on integrating resistance to racism and white supremacy in the campaign. May we say that tokenism as a strategy by our allies might be less than helpful and may backfire? It is impossible to fight racism using racist tactics, and failing to contact the many experienced women of color on this issue is extremely problematic.

Use messages offered by women of color and increase the number of leaders of color in your work. SisterSong and the Trust Black Women Partnership are developing effective messages based on original and in-depth opinion research in the African American community. We have leaders around

the country willing to work with our allied organizations that respect the expertise they bring. Some of the messages will be expressly crafted for our allies who understandably cannot speak in Black women's "voices" but have a valuable perspective as allies that should be heard frequently and loudly.

Use the reproductive justice framework to bring together the intersection of race and gender in these latest abortion attacks. This is an opportunity to bring together many RJ issues, including sexual rights, violence against women, LGBTQ issues, immigrants' rights, etc. Using the RJ framework provides a space for conversations to be held with many communities and allies, often enlisting their explicit support for abortion rights for the first time. SisterSong and TBW offer trainings for allies in fighting race- and gender-based assaults on abortion rights. For more information, contact Loretta@sistersong.net for more information.

As Black women, we believe these race- and gender-based attacks threaten the human rights of all women regardless of race. Only a united movement of women of color and allies working together can effectively rebuff this latest tactic.



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Faith, the Black Church, and Reproductive Justice

“It is important for the faith community to have a conversation about Black women and Reproductive Health, particularly because Black women keep the Black church thriving.”



Toni Bond-Leonard,
Black Women for Reproductive Justice
interviewed by Candace Cabbil

Collective Voices: Why should people of faith and Black ministers be active in the struggle for Reproductive Justice for Black women?

Bond-Leonard: I think there is a general understanding and acknowledgement on the part of Black Reproductive Justice activists of the role the Black Christian church has played in the community over the years as being a source for spiritual grounding – to get spiritual guidance. The progressive Black church has a history of activism around civil rights and social justice issues. That role has long needed to expand to provide spiritual grounding around Reproductive Health/Justice issues facing Black women and girls and to be

open to working with those in the Reproductive Justice Movement.

Collective Voices: Does the church address the history of Christianity as it pertains to Black women?

Bond-Leonard: The Black church must address the history behind how Christianity conspired with White Supremacy to enslave Black people. In her book, “Sexuality and the Black Church,” Black womanist theologian Kelly Brown Douglas talks about the need to look critically at how Christianity both fueled white racism and supports Black faith. Those of us in the RJ movement feel that the church has not

critically addressed the issues of abortion and reproductive and sexual health. We have a number of conservative Black pastors in Chicago. One pastor on the Southside in particular, is very anti-abortion and anti-comprehensive sex education or teaching sex-ed in public schools, as are many pastors in the conservative wing of the Black Church. However, he will do HIV testing in his church. He is in a community that needs everything (HIV/AIDS awareness, feeding the homeless, addressing high unintended pregnancy rates, etc.). I think we in the RJ Movement have to structure our approach in a way that is sensitive to the other issues that Black pastors and clergy are working on in their respective communities.

It is important for the faith community to have a conversation about Black women and Reproductive Health, particularly because Black women, on any given Sunday, make up the majority of the members of the congregation. In addition, Black women played a critical role in helping to start Black churches across the country. In a sense, the Black church has a responsibility to address and meet the needs of the majority of members of its congregations, particularly those who, in effect, keep the Black church thriving. The church needs to have the conversation to save the lives of Black women and girls. Our optimal health needs should be of concern in more areas than diabetes, breast cancer, hypertension, and heart disease. Additionally, the Black church can no longer turn a blind-eye toward the fact that many of its Black female members:

- Have had abortions.
- Have had risky sexual encounters or have partners having risky sexual encounters who are coming back home to them.
- The church is to serve as a safe place to fill the spiritual needs of the congregation, but it cannot neglect the natural needs that are pressing in the community. The two are not mutually exclusive.

If we talk about our bodies according to Scripture, it acknowledges that we are sexual beings. In her book, Kelly Brown Douglas also talks about the need to create what she calls a “sexual discourse of resistance, to disrupt the power White culture has held over Black bodies for far too long.” This discourse on sexuality must take place within the Black church from a “womanist” perspective to promote and nurture healthier attitudes and behaviors about reproductive and sexual health issues.

There is a need for the Black church to have conversations about Black women, Black bodies, and the Puritanical perspectives the Black church picked up during slavery. In having the conversation, we can talk about how Black bodies were treated in the name of Christianity and how Christianity used Biblical text to support slavery. A lot of how Black women are viewed comes from those Puritanical ways. People of faith need to have a serious conversation about the lies that were told during slavery, i.e. Black women are oversexed. We also need to acknowledge how slavery emasculated Black men, as many of these myths continue to persist in today’s vernacular with terms like Ho’s, Jezebels, Sapphires, Welfare Queen, etc. for Black women, and Stud, Mandingo, and the depiction as “dangerous”, etc. for Black men. Additionally, these stereotypes were created to support slave economies that needed to believe that 1) Black women are good as breeders; 2) Black men are good as sperm donors to impregnate Black women; and 3) Black men, women, and children are only good for manual labor. We need to look at how these stereotypes play out in today’s legislative laws, the media, etc.

Despite these racist myths, Black women particularly in the South were instrumental in the creation and growth of the Black church. Their missionary duties consisted of traveling from place to place to set up Black churches. During this missionary work, many Black women were raped and brutalized by white men. The Black church’s response to this was for the women to dress in long skirts and be as asexual as possible to guard against these attacks. This placed the blame upon Black women because of our gender.

The Black Church must look critically at Biblical text to see what it really says about sexuality, homosexuality, and pre-marital sex. An example is the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. That has been a story used to demonize our Black Sisters and Brothers who are homosexual. But is that really the meaning of the text? There is a difference between

regular Bible study and critical Biblical interpretation.

People of faith and the church must be able to go beneath the text and look seriously at:

- The context of the text.
- What was going on at the time.
- Who were the people talked about in the text.
- What was going on during that period in history.
- The geography of the scriptural setting.

The church has a responsibility for saving souls, but it must also recognize that part of saving souls is saving the lives of its community. As a staple institution in the Black community, the church has to promote healing in the lives of its congregants by talking about social justice issues of the day and the impact on their lives, such as high rates of unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted disease/infections, and HIV/AIDS.

The Reproductive Justice (RJ) Movement has been hesitant to interact with the Black church because of some of our own personal histories with the church. The onus is not just on the Black church; it is also on us as Black women Reproductive Justice Activists. We know there is a gap in the discussion on sexuality awareness between the church and its members. Certainly, it’s much easier to walk away because many of us have been hurt by the church. While it is difficult to stay and try to advocate, as a Black woman of faith working in the reproductive justice movement, I would offer that we have so much to gain. We can become vessels of change with the Black church and help empower our Sisters within the church with live-saving information and supporting them to become their own agents of change.

Collective Voices: Yes and I wonder if that is one of the dichotomies of being an RJ activist and a member of the church. Honestly, sometimes I feel awkward talking to people in my church (United Methodist) or my dad (a Baptist minister) about my work because I know the church’s stance on sexuality, pre-marital sex, homosexuality, etc. It’s a very thin, delicate, and uncomfortable line to walk.

Bond-Leonard: From the perspective of many Black pastors and clergy, a big question is how do they have the conversation and not be in conflict with what they believe Biblical text is telling us. Some believe they are not qualified to speak about reproductive and sexual health issues. If you will, envision a continuum with RJ on the left and the Church on the right. Black women of faith in the RJ Movement must reach out to the faith-based community, respectfully, while not being disrespected by the church. We must bridge that gap between the RJ Movement and the Black church because we understand that women of faith cannot be left out of the vital education and access that our movement for reproductive and sexual health offers. There is also a lack of ministry leaders who have a social justice platform from which they engage their ministries.

Collective Voices: What is the role of Black Womanist Theologians in the Reproductive Justice Movement?

Bond-Leonard: Working with Black Womanist Theologians is a good place for Black RJ activists to start to build relationships, because the female ministers are looking to start/do work to empower Black women. Many activists don’t know who the Black Womanist Theologians are. They’re looking for us and we’re looking for them. These Black Womanist Theologians have already written about and researched how Biblical scriptures sometimes oppressed and sometimes supported our sexuality.

The role of Black Womanist Theologians is that they serve

as this wonderfully ordained body of progressive thinking Black women who have sat with, struggled with being a woman and a woman of God, which compels them to both speak and teach the word of God from a womanist perspective. Most of them fully embrace the “womanist” term created by Alice Walker.

Black women ministers and Black Womanist Theologians have their own struggles within the Black church and with the Black Liberation Theology framework. Many have been in the struggle to be recognized and respected as having the ability to be vessels of God’s word despite their gender. It is interesting to watch how the Black church engages Black Liberation Theology, but work is still needed on being gender inclusive. Black Womanist Theologians serve as a good place to start in terms of having a conversation within the Black church on RJ issues, because they understand that Black Liberation Theology lacks gender inclusivity.

We as Black RJ activists have to be willing to stand in the gap and support Black Womanist Theologians. These female ministers have written amazing pieces that don’t coincide with what the church traditionally says about sexuality and the Black woman. They have made a significant contribution via their writings and we need to support their work by inviting them to our conferences in order to get to know them and build relationships. We can also promote their work and participate in their workshops to gain a deeper understanding of the faith-based perspective. To those activists who may say that “they need to seek us out and get to know us,” the problem with this sentiment is that many are in academic institutions and dealing with all the issues that come with being Black woman in academia.

However, the benefits of working with Black Womanist Theologians are many:

- They are hungry for connecting with women in justice movements so they can share their work and help empower Black Women around justice issues.
- They can take information coming out of the RJ Movement back to the churches.
- They can write pieces about RJ work within a faith-based context.
- They can help us to understand the challenges that women of faith must deal when it comes to what the Bible says and how we move through our day-to-day lives.
- Help to address the oftentimes shame many Black women feel from the Black church around some of the reproductive and sexual health decisions we oftentimes make.

Collective Voices: What does the Bible say about abortion and choice?

Bond-Leonard: This is where Black Womanist Theologians can help us. At the end of the day, it is really the individual woman who has to make her own choices and decisions based on her life circumstances who has to stand before God and answer for her choices. We make decisions and we take responsibility for those decisions and give an accounting to God. God is the only one to whom we have to give an accounting.

Throughout the Bible in instances where God asked ancient people to do something, they have had the free will to say yes or no. When people say the Bible bans abortion, remember that is their own interpretation of Scripture, and others interpret the Bible differently because everyone has the obligation to exercise free will to live according to their own beliefs. I recognize that freedom of religion is a human right but freedom from religion is also a human right – the freedom not to have someone else’s religious views imposed on my faith.

BIRTH JUSTICE

Unshackling Black Motherhood

By Dorothy E. Roberts, Professor of Law,
Northwestern University, Chicago

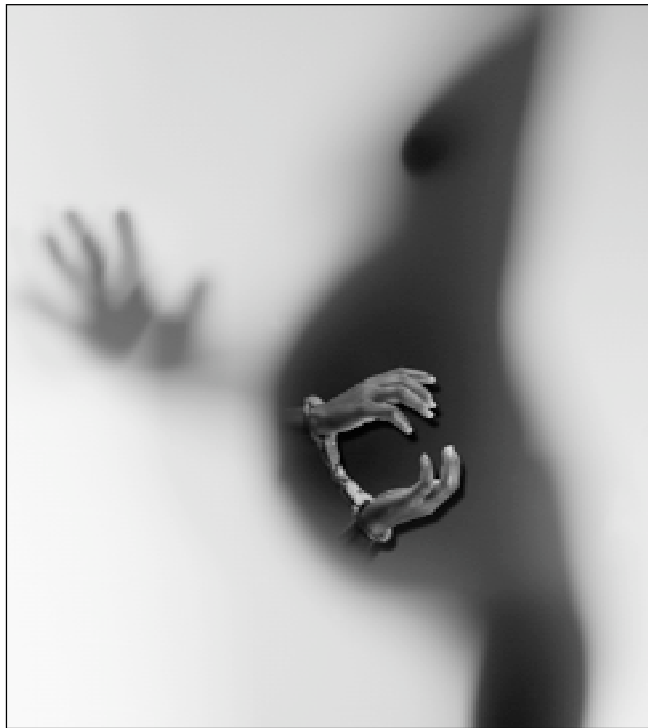
When stories about the prosecutions for women for using drugs during pregnancy first appeared in newspapers in 1989, I immediately suspected that most of the defendants were Black women. Charging someone with a crime for giving birth to a baby seemed to fit into the legacy of devaluing Black mothers. I was so sure of this intuition that I embarked on my first major law review article based on the premise that the prosecutions perpetuated Black women's subordination. My hunch turned out to be right: a memorandum prepared by the ACLU Reproductive Freedom Project documented cases brought against pregnant women as of October 1990 and revealed that thirty-two of fifty-two defendants were Black. By the middle of 1992, the number of prosecutions had increased to more than 160 in 24 states. About 75% were brought against women of color.

In *Punishing Drug Addicts Who Have Babies: Women of Color, Equality and the Right of Privacy*, I argued that the prosecutions could be understood and challenged only by looking at them from the standpoint of Black women. Although the prosecutions were part of an alarming trend toward greater state intervention into the lives of pregnant women in general, they also reflected a growing hostility toward poor Black mothers in particular. The debate on fetal rights, which had been waged extensively in law review articles and other scholarship, focused on balancing the state's interest in protecting the fetus from harm against the mother's interest in autonomy. My objective in that article was not to repeat these theoretical arguments, but to inject into the debate a perspective that had largely been overlooked. It seemed to me impossible to grasp the constitutional injury that the prosecutions inflicted without taking into consideration the perspective of the women most affected. Nor could we assess the state's justification for the prosecutions without uncovering their racial motivation. Taking race into account transformed the constitutional violation at issue. I argued that the problem with charging these women with fetal abuse was not that it constituted unwarranted governmental intervention into pregnant women's lifestyles. Instead I reframed the issue: the prosecutions punished poor Black women for having babies. Critical to my argument was an examination of the historical devaluations of Black motherhood. Given this conceptualization of the issue and the historical backdrop, the real constitutional harm became clear: charging poor Black women with prenatal crimes violated rights both to equal protection of the laws and to privacy by imposing an invidious governmental standard for childbearing. Adding the perspective of poor Black women yielded another advantage. It confirmed the importance of expanding the meaning of reproductive liberty beyond opposing state restrictions on abortion to include broader social justice concerns.

Attorneys successfully challenged the prosecutions of prenatal crimes in appellate courts without relying on arguments about the race of the defendants. But failing to contest society's devaluation of poor Black mothers still has negative consequences. Prosecutors in a few states continue to press charges against poor Black women for exposing their babies to crack. Many mothers have lost custody of their babies following a single positive drug test. The continuing popular support for the notion of punishing crack-addicted mothers leaves open the possibility of a resurgence of prosecutions and the passage of punitive legislation. I argue that we should develop strategies to contest the negative images that undergird policies that personalize Black women's childbearing.

The South Carolina Experiment

South Carolina bears the dubious distinction of having prosecuted



the largest number of women for maternal drug use. Many of these cases arose from the collaboration of Charleston law enforcement officials and the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC), a state hospital serving an indigent, minority population. In August 1989, Nurse Shirley Brown approached the local solicitor, Charles Condon, about the increase in crack use that she perceived among her pregnant patients. Solicitor Condon immediately held a series of meetings, inviting additional members of the MUSC staff, the police department, child protective services and the Charleston County Substance Abuse Commission, to develop a strategy for addressing the problem. The MUSC clinicians may have intended to help their patients, but larger law enforcement objectives soon overwhelmed the input of the staff. The approach turned toward pressuring pregnant patients who used drugs to get treatment by threatening them with criminal charges. As Condon expressed it: "We all agreed on one principle: We needed a program that used not only a carrot, but a real and very firm stick." Condon also pressed the position that neither the physician-patient privilege nor the Fourth Amendment prevented hospital staff members from reporting positive drug tests to the police.

The Interagency Policy resulted in the arrests of forty-two patients, all but one of whom were Black. Disregarding the sanctity of the maternity ward, the arrests more closely resembled the conduct of the state in some totalitarian regime. Police arrested some patients within days or even hours of giving birth and hauled them to jail in handcuffs and leg shackles. The handcuffs were attached to a three-inch wide leather belt that was wrapped around their stomachs. Some women were still bleeding from the delivery. One new mother complained, and was told to sit on a towel when she arrived at the jail. Another reported that she was grabbed in a chokehold and shoved into detention.

At least one woman who was pregnant at the time of her arrest sat in a jail cell waiting to give birth. Lori Griffin was transported weekly from the jail to the hospital in handcuffs and leg irons for prenatal care. Three weeks after her arrest, she went into labor and was taken, still in handcuffs and shackles, to MUSC. Once at the hospital, Ms. Griffin was kept handcuffed to her bed during the entire delivery.

I opened *Punishing Drug Addicts Who Have Babies* with the recollection of an ex-slave about the method slave masters used to discipline their pregnant slaves while protecting the fetus from harm:

A former slave Lizzie Williams recounted the beating of pregnant slave women on a Mississippi cotton plantation: "[']s seen nigger women dat was fixin' to be confined do somethin' de white folks didn't like. Dey [the white folks] would dig a hole in de ground just big 'nuff to her stomach, make her lie face down an whip her on de back to keep from hurtin' de child."

Thinking about an expectant Black mother chained to a belt around her swollen belly to protect her unborn child, I cannot help but recall this scene from Black women's bondage. The sight of a pregnant Black woman bound in shackles is modern-day reincarnation of the horrors of slavemasters' degrading treatment of their female chattel.

Shackling Black Motherhood

Not only did South Carolina law enforcement agents brutally degrade Black mothers and pregnant women at the Charleston hospital with little public outcry, but the state's highest court essentially sanctioned the indignity. How would judges ignore this blatant devaluation of Black motherhood? State officials repeatedly disclaim any racial motivation in the prosecutions; and courts routinely accept their disclaimer. Everyone continues to pretend that race has nothing to do with the punishment of these mothers.

The blatant racial impact of the prosecutions can be overlooked only because it results from an institutionalized system that selects Black women for prosecution and from a deeply embedded mythology about Black mothers. These two factors make the disproportionate prosecution of Black mothers seem fair and natural, and not the result of any invidious motivation. These factors also make it more difficult to challenge the prosecutions on the basis of race. As the Black poet Nikki Giovanni recently observed: "In some ways, the struggle is more difficult now. I'd rather take what we did – if we were killed or beaten, you knew you were fighting the system." Giovanni explained that the battle for racial justice is more complicated today than in the 1960s, because "racism is more sophisticated and insidious than segregated drinking fountains."

Prosecutors like Condon do not announce that they plan to single out poor Black women for prosecution. Rather, they rely on a process already in place that is practically guaranteed to bring these women to their attention. The methods the state uses to identify women who use drugs during pregnancy result in disproportionate reporting of poor Black women. The government's main source of information about prenatal drug use comes from hospital reports of positive infant toxicologies to child welfare authorities. This testing is implemented with greater frequency in hospital serving poor minority communities. Private physicians who serve more affluent women are more likely to refrain from screening their patients, both because they have a financial stake in retaining their patients' business and securing referrals from them, and because they are socially more similar to their patients.

Hospitals administer drug tests in a manner that further discriminates against poor Black women. One common criterion triggering an infant toxicology screen is the mother's failure to obtain prenatal care, a factor that correlates strongly with race and income. Worse still, many hospitals have no formal screening procedures, and rely solely on the suspicions of health care professionals. This discretion allows doctors and hospital staff to perform tests based on their stereotyped assumptions about the identity of drug addicts. Women who smoke crack report being abused and degraded by hospital staff during the delivery. Their experiences suggest that staff often harbor a deep contempt for these women born at least partly of racial prejudice. A 24-year-old woman from Brooklyn, "K," recounted a similar experience: "Bad...they treat you bad....That was like I had my daughter, when the nurse came, and I was having the stomach pain and my stomach was killing me. I kept callin' and callin' and callin'. She just said you smoking that crack, you smoke that crack, you suffer." Accordingly to court papers, Nurse Brown, the chief enforcer of the Charleston Interagency Policy, frequently expressed racist views about her Black patients to drug counselors and social workers, including her belief that most Black women should have their tubes tied, and that birth control should be put in the drinking water in Black communities. It is not surprising that such nurses would turn their Black patients over to the police.

A study published in the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine* discussed possible racial biases of health care professionals who interact with pregnant women. Researchers studied the results of toxicological tests of pregnant women who received prenatal care in public health clinics and in private obstetrical offices in Pinellas County, Florida. The study found that little difference existed in the prevalence of substance abuse by pregnant women along either racial or economic lines, and that there was little significant difference between patients at public clinics and private offices. Despite similar rates of substance abuse, however, Black women were ten times more likely than whites to be reported to government authorities. Both public health facilities and private doctors were more inclined to turn in Black women than white women for using drugs while pregnant.

Just as important as this structural bias against Black women is the ideological bias against them. Prosecutors and judges are predisposed to punish Black crack addicts because of a popular image promoted by the media during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The pregnant crack addict was portrayed as an irresponsible and selfish woman who put her love for crack above her love for her children. In news stories she was often represented by a prostitute, who sometimes traded sex for crack, violating every conceivable quality of a good mother. The chemical properties of crack were said to destroy the natural impulse to mother. "The most remarkable and hideous aspect of crack cocaine use seems to be the undermining of the maternal instinct," a nurse was quoted as observing about her patients. The pregnant crack addict, then, was the exact opposite of a mother; she was promiscuous, uncaring, and self-indulgent.

By focusing on maternal crack use, which is more prevalent in inner-city neighborhoods and stereotypically associated with Blacks, the media left the impression that pregnant addicts is typically a Black woman. Even more than a "metaphor for women's alienation from instinctual motherhood," the pregnant

crack addict was the latest embodiment of the bad Black mother. The frightening portrait of diabolical pregnant crack addicts and irreparably damaged crack babies was based on data that have drawn criticism within the scientific community. The data on the extent and severity of crack's impact on babies are highly controversial. At the inception of the crisis, numerous medical journals reported that babies born to crack-addicted mothers suffered a variety of medical, development, and behavioral problems. More recent analyses, however, have isolated the methodological flaws of these earlier studies. (See National Advocates for Pregnant Women, <http://www.advocatesforpregnantwomen.org>)

The point is not that crack use during pregnancy is safe, but that the media exaggerated the extent and nature of the harm it causes. News reports erroneously suggested, moreover, that the problem of maternal drug use was confined to the Black community. A public health crisis that cuts across racial and economic lines was transformed into an example of Black mother's depravity that warranted harsh punishment. Why hasn't the media focused as much attention on the harmful consequences of alcohol abuse or cigarette smoking during pregnancy, or the widespread devastation that Black infants suffer as a result of poverty? In *Punishing Drug Addicts Who Have Babies*, I suggested an answer:

[T]he prosecution of crack-addicted mothers diverts public attention from social ills such as poverty, racism, and a misguided national health policy and implies instead that shamefully high Black infant death rates are caused by the bad acts of individual mothers. Poor Blacks thus become the scapegoats for the causes of the Black community's ill health. Punishing them assuages any guilt the nation might feel at the plight of an underclass with infant mortality at rates higher than those in some less developed countries. Making criminals of Black mothers apparently helps to relieve the nation of the burden of creating a health care system that ensures healthy babies for all its citizens.

The best approach for improving the health of crack-exposed infants, then, is to improve the health of their mothers by ensuring their access to health care and drug treatment services. Yet prosecuting crack-addicted mothers does just the opposite: it drives these women away from these services out of fear of being reported to law enforcement authorities. This result reinforces the conclusion that punitive policies are based on resentment toward Black mothers, rather than on a real concern for the health of their children.

Although the image of the monstrous crack-addicted mother is difficult to eradicate, it will be hard to abolish the policies that regulate Black women's fertility without exposing the image's fallacies. Describing the details of these women's lives may help. Crystal Ferguson, for example, was arrested for failing to comply with Nurse Brown's order to enter a two-week residential drug-rehabilitation program. Her arrest might appear to be justified without knowing the circumstances that led to her refusal. Ferguson requested an outpatient referral because she had no one to care for her two sons at home and the two-week program provided no childcare. Ferguson explained in an interview that she made every effort to enroll in the program, but was thwarted by circumstances beyond her control:

"I saw the situation my kids were in. There was no one to take care of them. Someone had stolen our food stamps and my unemployment check while I was at the hospital. There was no way I was going to leave my children for two weeks, knowing the environment they were in."

I believe that leaving these images unchallenged will only help to perpetuate Black mothers' degradation. A better approach is to uproot and contest the mythology that propels policies that penalize Black women's childbearing. The medical risks of punitive policies and their potential threat to all women only enhance an argument that these policies perpetuate Black women's subordination.

Excerpted from Volume 95, *Michigan Law Review*, 1999

FATAL INVENTION
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REPRODUCTIVE VIOLENCE

- African American women of reproductive age – particularly women 16-24 – are at greatest risk of intimate partner violence.
- Approximately 40% of Black women report coercive contact of a sexual nature by age 18.
- Black females experience intimate partner violence at a rate 35% higher than that of white females, and about 2.5 times the rate of women of other races.

AND BLACK WOMEN

By Charity Woods, SisterSong Membership Program Associate

Reproductive violence among Black women needs to be lifted to the same level of recognition as domestic violence, child abuse, and rape because too few people understand the intersections between reproductive justice and violence committed against African American women and girls. Reproductive violence is coercive behavior that interferes with a woman's ability to control her reproductive life. Examples include: attempting to impregnate a woman against her will; intentionally interfering with birth control; intentionally exposing a partner to a sexually transmitted infection (STI); or threatening or acting violent if a partner does not comply with the abuser's wishes regarding contraception or the decision whether to terminate or continue a pregnancy. Early work on defining reproductive violence and coercion has been pioneered by the Family Violence Prevention Fund.

Often sexual violence and reproductive violence are viewed as being two separate subjects. However reproductive violence is a major indicator of abuse and indicators suggest that there is a strong association between intimate partner violence (IPV) and unintended pregnancy, abortion and sexually transmitted disease. For example, recent statistics from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) suggest that 49% of African American teenagers may have an STI. Without intersecting this statistic with the sexual violence experienced by at least ? of young Black girls, this data out of context creates the perception that Black girls are irresponsibly promiscuous, rather than being survivors of childhood sexual abuse, often committed by much older men.

The basis of reproductive justice is the human right of a woman to bear children, not to bear children and to mother as she wishes. However, at the heart of reproductive justice are the intersections of race, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, immigration status, age, economics, and sexuality. Through the more comprehensive lens of reproductive justice, many social and health issues can more effectively be addressed.

It is clear when examining IPV and reproductive violence, the statistics for Black women are alarming.

- African American women of reproductive age – particularly women 16-24 – are at greatest risk of intimate partner violence. (Family Violence Prevention Fund)
- Approximately 40% of Black women report coercive contact of a sexual nature by age 18. (Black Women's Health Imperative)
- Black females experience intimate partner violence at a rate 35% higher than that of white females, and about 2.5 times the

rate of women of other races. (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2001). However, they are less likely than white women to use social services, battered women's programs, or go to the hospital because of domestic violence.

- Approximately one in three Black women is abused by a husband or partner in the course of a lifetime. (US Department of Justice, Findings from the NVAWS, The National Violence Against Women Survey, July 2000)
- Most sexual assaults against Black women are unreported. For every Black woman that reports her rape, at least 15 Black women do not report theirs. (Bureau of Justice Statistics, US Department of Justice)
- African American women who are abused have more physical ailments and mental health issues. They are less likely to practice safe sex, and are more likely to abuse substances than comparable women without a history of abuse. (American Journal of Public Health)

Many researchers have examined these statistics further to find natural links between reproductive violence and IPV. According to the CDC, women who had mistimed or unwanted pregnancies reported significantly higher levels of abuse at any time during the 12 months before conception or during pregnancy (12.6% and 15.3%, respectively) compared with those with intended pregnancies (5.3%). Higher rates of abuse were reported by women who were younger, Black, unmarried, less educated, on Medicaid, living in crowded conditions, entering prenatal care late, or smoking during the third trimester.

What does this all mean? These statistics clearly demonstrate that Black women experience sexual assault and violence as well as poor reproductive health outcomes to a disturbing degree, and often are victimized at a very young age. Yet, due to a variety of factors, it is often difficult for them to get the services they need. Black women encounter many barriers when seeking to use social services, sexual assault crisis centers, or going to the hospital, particularly if the people who work at these agencies are not trained in cultural competence. In order to not only effectively treat and assist Black female survivors of abuse, but to change the systemic perpetuity and culture of abuse, a reproductive justice framework is imperative. The efficacy of outreach to Black women survivors and potential victims is negatively affected by using a linear, exclusive, and often outdated model.

The reproductive justice framework changes the conversation and approach. It compels us to look at the intersectionality and multi-layered conditions in the Black community. It teaches us that there are other intrinsic factors at play, and inclusive and comprehensive responses are crucial. For African American

women some of those factors include but are not limited to:

- Cultural and/or religious beliefs that restrain the survivor from leaving the abusive relationship or involving outsiders. For example, traditionally Black women have been raised to believe they shouldn't "take their business to the streets" or "air dirty laundry."
- Distrust of law enforcement, the criminal justice system, and social services due to classism and racism (often called "state violence" towards women).
- Lack of service providers that look like the survivor or share common experiences.
- Assumptions by providers based on race and ethnicity.
- Lack of economic independence that we call "economic violence," forcing the survivor to stay with the abuser.
- Attitudes and stereotypes about the prevalence of domestic violence and sexual assault in the Black community. (Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance)

For advocates, service delivery agencies, activists and survivors, it is critical to understand these issues to provide culturally appropriate services and sensitive strategies to combat reproductive violence.

The history of Black women in this country reveals that our bodies and our reproductive choices have always been subjugated in some form. Understanding reproductive justice can help us to have a context and effectively process the diverse aspects of our experiences socially, economically, sexually, culturally, environmentally, etc., thereby forming the groundwork for successful violence prevention. Incorporating a reproductive justice framework into health care, advocacy and education offers the potential to enhance the quality of life of Black women by alleviating disparities and mitigating our marginalization as it relates to not just violence but other harms. We can empower where there is disempowerment.

SisterSong has a strong track record of building partnerships and coalitions, and providing trainings to organizations who work with survivors of IPV. We are starting a new training program in 2011 called Intersecting Atlanta. Intersecting Atlanta will educate at least 25 service providers in engaging women in prevention education regarding reproductive violence. It will address not only the individual behavior factors at the intersection of violence against women and reproductive violence, but the structural and social issues that increase the risks for violence for Black women in Fulton County, Georgia. Intersecting Atlanta is funded by a grant from the Healthcare Georgia Foundation. For more information on Intersecting Atlanta, please contact Charity Woods at charity@sistersong.net or 404-756-2680.

Why I Provide Abortions:

Alchemy of Race, Gender, and Human Rights

By Willie J. Parker, MD, MPH, MSc

Medical Director, Planned Parenthood Metropolitan Washington, DC
Physicians for Reproductive Choice and Health, Board Member



Given the climate around abortion in this country and the recent assassination of Dr. George Tiller, invariably, the question is asked: “Why do you do abortions, given the risk involved?” As an African American physician, the question is valid to which I have only one response: it is a matter of conscience. Someone once said, “When you wrestle with your conscience and you lose, you win.” Losing that battle for me meant retraining to work in family planning and abortion care after 12 years in practice as an obstetrician-gynecologist. The career re-direct was prompted in part by a sermon by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., called “Re-discovering Lost Values.” Dr. King said that what made the Good Samaritan good was his ability to reverse the question of human concern: rather than thinking about what would happen to him if he stopped to help the fallen traveler, he asked what would happen to the traveler if he didn’t stop to help? Analogously, being moved to action on behalf of women with unwanted pregnancies, I was concerned about what happens to those women with limited access to abortion or contraception if I as a women’s health expert do not provide it. Hence, I began performing abortions about six years ago.

I came from a religious background with a fundamentalist, narrow understanding about abortion, but I have also always believed strongly in social justice, leading me to conclude that when you become aware of injustice you have to act against it. Understanding the dilemma of an unintended, unwanted pregnancy for a woman, and possibly her partner, challenged me deeply as a women’s health provider. Ironically, my path to empowerment to provide abortions came via a call to deeper compassion and action through the same religious background that initially left me conflicted about doing so. That call allowed me to weigh the inevitability of women needing abortions, the consequence of those services not being available, and to quell the fear about what would happen to me if I chose to provide services, or concerns about what others would think about me for doing so. I became convinced that I could not merely sympathize with women in this position, but rather, that I had to act on their behalf.

Following my initial commitment to provide abortions for women, I became aware of the fact that women of color, Black women in particular, often are the women most likely to be in circumstances that lead to abortion: high unintended pregnancy rates, lower use of modern contraception, deep poverty, lack of support by their churches and schools, and less economic and educational access. This awareness led me to two conclusions. First, African American women, followed by women of Latino ethnic descent, have the highest rate of abortion in this country. This speaks of the great need for abortion availability for those groups. Hence, to provide the greatest good to the greatest number, I double my effort to serve women this way with a clearer aim, the additional clarity being that providing abortions is critical, knowing that safe abortion access is even more important for Black and Brown women.

Secondly, at the risk of sounding tribal, given that women of color have the greatest need for abortion services, in large part due to limited access to the things that would allow them to avoid abortion (medically accurate sex education, unrestricted access to modern contraception, economic empowerment), it is important to me as a man of color, a Black man, to provide these services. This does not mean that my resolve to help all women is any less, as I am firmly committed to gender equality on a racially transcendent level. Rather, it is on a “if we don’t care about and help ourselves, who will?” level. It seems to me that a lot of the mischief around framing abortion as “Black genocide” is possible because abortion remains an “open secret” in our community, and as we fail to engage it meaningfully, others have done so for their own gains, often at the expense of the health and wellbeing of women.

The false concern by reproductive rights opponents about Black babies or the women who bear them, is insulting and odious. It exploits the interests of vulnerable people for the ideological goal of extremist thought on the issue of abortion, and uses inflammatory rhetoric (“Black genocide”) to massage perceived vulnerabilities by the community in subtle manipulation, thereby insulting the intelligence of both women and African Americans. This is more offensive in many ways to me than outright racial animus. As the epitome of hypocrisy and insincerity, they oppose contraception and abortion simultaneously while failing to support sensible socio-economic policies, victimizing the very people about whom they feign concern. These realities make the fact that I am a man, a Black man in particular, important and relevant as I do this work.

In closing, the backbone of every community has been women. Nowhere is that more true than in the Black community. By meeting the need for family planning services for women, including abortion, I feel that I strengthen the “backbone”, our backbone, my backbone, of our community: the woman. Individual self-determination is essential to human dignity at both the personal and group level, and I believe it begins with responsible reproductive behavior. To oppose medically accurate sex education, contraception, and abortion while chiding people for being “irresponsible” is illogical. It is well recognized that high birth rates are linked adversely to poverty. Decreases in unintended, unwanted pregnancy significantly decrease poverty, and vice versa. In other words, people who can control their reproductive lives can better control their economic destinies. This relationship has to inform reproductive health and economic policies if they are to be well crafted and just. We have to demand these changes systemically for the long run while we meet individual needs right now. That is why I, as a man of color, provide abortions for all women and agitate and advocate for human rights at the same time.

No Conspiracy Theories Needed

Black Women Have More Abortions Because Black Women Have More Unintended Pregnancies

By Susan A. Cohen, Alan Guttmacher Institute

A billboard campaign targeting African-American women may be coming to your city soon. It began in Atlanta and most recently made an appearance in New York City, though fierce opposition caused that one to be very short-lived. The campaign does not deny the fact that black women for the past five decades have consistently suffered an almost four-times greater risk of death from pregnancy complications than have white women. Or the fact that black women are 30% more likely to die from breast cancer than white women are. No, the campaign is not aimed at promoting black women's health or protecting them from disease—it is aimed at protecting them from themselves.

It is an anti-abortion campaign carrying an insidious message not merely that abortion is wrong, but that since it is wrong, black women could not possibly be making choices about their own reproductive lives for themselves. It is premised on the false notion that providers of abortion care are aggressively marketing their services to minority communities and that women—especially African-American women—are overly susceptible to their power of persuasion. The campaign uses some facts and fabricates others to concoct a narrative that bears no resemblance to the reality of women's lives, especially women of color. The inconvenient truth in this debate is that this line of attack against reproductive rights is not only insulting to black women's autonomy; it ignores the fundamental reason women have abortions and the underlying problem of racial and ethnic disparities across an array of health indicators.

Facts Matter

The truth is that behind virtually every abortion is an unintended pregnancy. This applies to all women—black, white, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American alike. Not surprisingly, the variation in abortion rates across racial and ethnic groups relates directly to the variation in the unintended pregnancy rates across those same groups.

It is true that the abortion rate for black women is almost four times that for white women. It is completely misleading, however, to ignore the inescapable accompanying fact that black women are three times as likely to experience an unintended pregnancy as white women. Because black women experience so many more unintended pregnancies than any other group—sharply disproportionate to their numbers in the general population—they are more likely to seek out and obtain abortion services than any other group. In addition, because black women as a group want the same number of children as white women, but have so many more unintended pregnancies, they are more likely than white women to terminate an unintended pregnancy by abortion to avoid an unwanted birth.

The disparities in unintended pregnancy rates result mainly from similar disparities in access to and effective use of contraceptives. As of 2002, 15% of black women at risk of unintended pregnancy (sexually active, fertile, and not wanting to be pregnant) were not practicing contraception, compared with 9% of their white counterparts. This gap is significant given that, nationally, half of all unintended pregnancies result from the small proportion of women who are at risk but not using contraceptives.



As for the allegation that most abortion clinics are located in African American neighborhoods, that is patently false. Indeed, the Guttmacher Institute has found that fewer than one in 10 abortion clinics are located in predominantly African-American neighborhoods, or those in which the majority of residents are black.

Bigger Picture

Fundamentally, the question at hand is less why women of color have higher abortion rates than white women than it is what can be done to help them have fewer unintended pregnancies. Obviously, facilitating better financial and geographic access to contraceptive services is key. Beyond access, however, dissatisfaction with the quality of services and the methods themselves may be as much or sometimes more of an impediment to effective use of contraceptives. Life events such as relationship changes, moving or personal crises can have a direct impact on method continuation. Such events are more common for low-income and minority women than for others, and may contribute to unstable life situations where consistent use of contraceptives is lower priority than simply getting by. In addition, a woman's frustration with a birth control method can result in her skipping pills or not using condoms every time. Minority women, women who are poor and women with little education are more likely than women overall to report dissatisfaction with either their contraceptive method or provider. Cultural and linguistic barriers also can contribute to difficulties in method continuation.

Moreover, there is increasing recognition of the critical importance of quality of care as it affects health-seeking behavior and outcomes. In 2002, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) noted a level of mistrust for the health system in general that exists in minority communities. Mistrust can

cause a patient to refuse treatment or comply poorly with medical advice, which in turn can cause providers to become less engaged—leading to a vicious cycle. These obstacles are difficult enough to surmount in cases where a patient is ill and presumably motivated to receive some kind of treatment. In the case of a prevention intervention such as birth control, however, where the need for "treatment" may seem less pressing, the cumulative effect of these obstacles could be daunting.

Ironically, treating all patients the same, regardless of race or ethnicity, may not be the answer to the problem of health disparities. Harvard Medical School professor Thomas Sequist published the results of his research in a June 2008 issue of the *Archives of Internal Medicine* in which he and his colleagues found that a physician's failure to match a treatment regimen with a patient's cultural norms could contribute significantly to the poor compliance and worse health outcomes manifest in minority communities. "It isn't that providers are doing different things for different patients," he explained to the *New York Times*. "It's that we're doing the same thing for every patient and not accounting for individual needs. Our one-size-fits-all approach may leave minority patients with needs that aren't being met."

Speaking for Themselves

SisterSong and other leading organizations representing the interests of African-American women have long asserted that the mainstream reproductive rights movement has been too narrowly focused on protecting and promoting family planning and abortion rights. They argue that these rights, although critical, must be lodged in the broader health, social, and economic context of women's lives—especially the lives of poor and low-income women who are disproportionately minority—and interconnected with other critical life needs and aspirations.

What is clear is that black women—as with all women—armed with accurate information and the ability to access necessary services, are eminently qualified and indeed entitled to make decisions about their own health and welfare including whether or not have an abortion to end an unwanted pregnancy as well as the means to prevent that unintended pregnancy in the first place. No one has said it more eloquently recently than Rep. Gwen Moore (D-WI), who earlier this year lambasted those on the floor of the House of Representatives during debate over a provision in the government-wide spending bill that would have defunded Planned Parenthood that somehow devolved into the debate over marketing abortion to black women. "I am really touched by the passion of the [opposition] to want to save black babies," she began. "I can tell you, I know a lot about having black babies. I've had three of them. And I had my first one when I was 18 years old...an unplanned pregnancy." Thrust onto welfare, Moore eventually beat the odds, having now represented Milwaukee in Congress since 2005. So she spoke from whence she came when she argued that black women—all women—need to be trusted as well as supported. "It is important for women to have a choice," she said, "to have an opportunity to plan their families."

*Cohen is Director of Government Affairs at the Guttmacher Institute. This article was adapted from "Abortion and Women of Color: The Bigger Picture," published in the *Guttmacher Policy Review*, Summer, 2008. See <http://www.guttmacher.org/pubs/gpr/11/3/gpr110302.pdf>



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**PLANNED
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Campus Anti-Abortion Tactics

10 Steps for Effectively Fighting Back

By Loretta Ross, SisterSong National Coordinator

Progressive students on high school, college, and university campuses are often blindsided when pictures, advertisements, and films suddenly appear that claim “abortion is Black genocide.” Often, a predominantly white campus anti-abortion or conservative religious group creates this uproar. Previously they used posters of bloody fetuses but found out those grotesque images turned more people off than convinced folks to join them. Now they have found a more sensationalist tactic, inviting African American speakers to the school who falsely claim that abortion providers like Planned Parenthood are deliberately seeking to eliminate the Black race. When these lies are challenged, these purveyors of hate and misogyny claim it’s a matter of free speech, like Holocaust Deniers who trumpet their lies on college campuses under the guise of free speech.

Students of color and feminists on campus want to respond. They often contact SisterSong, Choice USA, the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, Hampshire College’s Civil Liberties and Public Policy Program, the Feminist Majority Foundation, or PPFA’s VOX chapters for assistance. Following are some strategies progressive students may want to consider to be prepared to fight against this attempt to persuade young people – women in particular – not to exercise their human right to make their own decisions for themselves.

1) **Fight back, organize, and contact SisterSong and the Trust Black Women Partnership for help (info@sistersong.net).** We can provide background information, talking points, speakers, local community activists, Civil Rights organizations, and allies who can help with resources. We can offer particular assistance in countering charges of racism and genocide, and provide research, messages, and diverse, multi-cultural community activists who can help.

2) **Get together for consciousness-raising about students’ real experiences regarding their sexual and reproductive health.** Sometimes students have difficulty accessing birth control or abortions. Some school officials will not let condoms and other contraceptive devices or information be distributed. Let people know what services are available in the community or through the school’s health services.

3) **Organize a speak-out for students to share their experiences.** Often, these disruptive protests make women feel less safe, and especially make women feel under attack who have had or considered having an abortion. Make sure to provide a supportive and healing atmosphere so that women feel love and solidarity from other students.

4) **Frame abortion rights as a human rights issue and learn about the Reproductive Justice framework that embeds abortion in eight categories of human rights to which everyone is entitled.** Sexual rights, as part of the human rights movement, affirm that everyone has the right to bodily integrity and to determine the number and spacing of their children, if any. Don’t let opponents misuse the framework to claim that fetuses have human rights, because in fact, one has to be born to claim human rights, according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

5) **Document who is sponsoring the anti-abortion activities on the campus.** Opposition research is very important and can alert other students to the organizations trying to manipulate the student body.



6) **Write letters to the student newspaper to let other students know what’s going on.** Like most hate groups, while they seek shallow publicity, they actually shy away from a thorough investigation into their backgrounds, funding, political positions on other progressive issues, and how they are connected to other hate groups.

7) **Lift your voices as loudly as possible.** Use blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and all social media to let people around the country and in the community know what is going on.

8) **Reach out to other student groups like the LGBTQ groups or the Black Student Union, students of color, and medical and law students.** Law Students for Reproductive Justice and Medical Students for Choice have chapters on many campuses in nearly every state, and will gladly help other student groups.

9) **Contact women’s studies departments, women’s organizations, rape crisis centers, domestic violence shelters, LGBTQ groups, progressive political organizations, and HIV/AIDS organizations in the area, both on your campus, other area campuses, and in the community.**

10) **Demand financial transparency.** If speakers are brought to campus using student fees to pay honoraria, students have a right to know how their money is being spent. The school is obligated to provide equal funding to students to counter these haters, and progressive faculty members and administrators can help hold schools accountable.

While there are many strategies progressive activists may select, it is important that they do not try certain tactics:

- Do not try to ban such groups from your campus. This will divert the argument into one about free speech, which is what the haters want, so that they can claim victim status and recruit supporters who may not support their point of view, but will defend their right to be on campus.

- Do not judge potential allies merely because they are personally opposed to abortion. Even if they would not choose to have an abortion, most women support the right to bodily self-determination and autonomy. In other words, they would defend the right of every woman to make her own decisions and not judge them for it.

- Do not ignore these anti-abortionists or any other hate group. Silence from progressive students may be their strongest ally. We have the right and the obligation to speak out to defend our human rights

Those of us in the Reproductive Justice movement recognize that young people are on the frontlines in this struggle. It is a fight for the bodies of fertile young people, after all, in determining who gets to decide whether or not to have a child, receive factual sexual health information, and uphold the human right of young people to sex and sexuality. This is a war for bodily self-determination, and it may be the most important political fight of all because it affects if young people have the freedom to make some of the most important decisions of their lives.

Helpful websites:

SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective
Choice USA
Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
Hampshire College’s Civil Liberties and Public Policy Program
Feminist Majority Foundation
PPFA’s VOX

www.sistersong.net
<http://www.choiceusa.org>
<http://rcrc.org>
<http://clpp.hampshire.edu>
<http://feminist.org>
<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/about-us/boards-initiatives/youth/college-campus-groups-4638.htm>

Fighting the Legacies of American Eugenics

By Laura L. Lovett, Associate Professor of History,
University of Massachusetts, Amherst

Opponents of reproductive justice often characterize abortion as a form of eugenics – one that especially targeted communities of color. Historically, American eugenics was a much broader effort that cannot be reduced to the single issue of abortion. A wider view of the history of eugenics that includes public health and housing supports SisterSong’s claims that reproductive rights must be addressed in terms of human rights. If the pro-choice movement is to successfully address the legacies of eugenics, it must recognize all of them and make the fight for reproductive rights into a fight for human rights.

Eugenics is often associated with efforts to limit reproductive choice, usually through sterilization and marriage restriction legislation that prohibited mixed race marriage. American eugenics, however, was much more diverse. Beginning in the 1920s, the American Eugenics Society explored a number of different ways to promote reproduction among those they saw as eugenically superior, including family insurance to cover maternity and healthcare costs, nursery schools for the eugenically select, improved living conditions for farmers where families were larger, family housing for students on college campuses, and national programs for housing and redevelopment.

Leaders of the American Eugenics Society joined housing reformers, such as Edith Elmer Wood, to eliminate slums and build suburbs in the 1930s (which destroyed thousands of homes of Black people in the cities – ed.). Partly motivated by anti-immigrant bias, the eugenic attack on tenement life sought to eliminate living conditions that caused supposedly “fit” city dwellers (namely, white, educated, and affluent city dwellers) to think of cities as places not friendly to kids. At the same time, eugenicists promoted the suburb as a new alternative that was close to the city, but had the supposed pro-family virtues of the countryside. In 1937, eugenicists sponsored a Housing Conference in New York that drew together leading suburban planners and housing reformers.

Eugenicists did not succeed in getting eugenic tests for suburban homebuyers, but they supported the racially restrictive covenants on suburbs and practices of racial discrimination in the awarding of home loans by the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation who famously drew their redlines around poor and racially-mixed neighborhoods. HOLC standards for awarding loans described grade A properties as the “best” because of their “homogeneous” population of “American business and professional men,” while grade C housing was “definitely declining” and marked by “infiltration

of lower grade populations.” Grade D neighborhoods were those redlined areas often inhabited by African Americans. The systems of ranking location and property used in these efforts have significant implications for our understanding of how and why people of color were excluded from home ownership in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. These practices set the stage for “reverse redlining” that awarded subprime mortgages implicated in the recent collapse of the housing market in the United States.

American eugenicists tried to regulate reproduction by controlling both who reproduced and how they lived. Eugenicists recognized that a child’s environment could not be ignored, and they worked to insure that those they deemed to be “best” had healthy living conditions.

If we want to effectively fight the racist and biologically deterministic assumptions of eugenics, we must recognize the extent of their reach. Assumptions of biological and racial superiority and inferiority were built into housing, health care, and actual reproductive regulation. Answering the legacies of American eugenics requires us to fight for human rights that extend beyond reproductive rights alone.

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“Because there is an overwhelming need for social change there is always an overwhelming need for funds to do the work for social change”.

Power of Grassroots Fundraising

By Monica Simpson, SisterSong Development Coordinator

As a kid growing up in rural North Carolina, I heard a lot of funny nicknames. I had a cousin named Munt, a play uncle named Tom Dooley and even a friend named Toot. With names like that in the community, I guess Monica seemed pretty boring, so my family started to call me Monie (pronounced Money).

It was an incredibly fitting name because I was always asking for Money. My mother raised four of us on one income, so I realized really early that if I wanted to be a part of all of the many extra-curricular activities that I felt were necessary for my development, I needed to ask money. So I would ask with no problems.

I was always prepared to answer any questions my “funder” would ask, and of course I would let them know the outcome of my endeavor and thank them in a special way. Whether it was a picture of me in my new cheerleading uniform that they helped to purchase with a nice note on the back or a copy of the award I won in some competition that they helped me get to, they always got something in return.

How ironic is it that as an adult, my job is asking for money? Because there is an overwhelming need for social change there is always an overwhelming need for funds to do the work for social change. Therefore, a lot of concentration goes into going after the folks that can give you the “big bucks.” Although I believe in the importance in acquiring high dollar grants and contracts for our work, I am firm believer in the power of grassroots fundraising. In the Reproductive Justice movement, we are dealing with anti-abortionist groups, like the Radiance Foundation, who raise the funds to splatter their racist messages on billboards across this nation. They are funding individuals to campaign on their behalf and fight for legislation that moves their agenda forward – and they are not going to stop.

We can’t afford to stop either. We must harness the power of all of the individuals that we know to support our work. We must see everyone as a potential supporter. The women and men who donated funds for my needs as a child would probably never call themselves a philanthropist, but they were. They were giving of their money to a cause that they felt was important. I didn’t look for the folks in my community with the most money. Instead I asked myself, “Who believes in me?” Some folks could give me \$10, while others could give me \$50. Even though I had to ask more people because of the smaller donations, I still raised

all of the funds I needed. What was even more exciting was that more people knew about the work I was doing and felt connected to me and my success.

Reproductive Justice Issues are becoming more visible in the media now more than ever before, and people need to become aware of how they can help us move the movement forward. I feel that Grassroots Fundraising is a way to achieve this goal.

Within our organizations, we have to see every staff member and every board member as a fundraiser and hold them accountable. We can also organize our current donors and help them become organizers and fundraisers for our work. My friend, Theo Copley, who is also a young donor of color, recently wrote on the power of donor organizing within communities of color for the Resource Generation and GIFT’s Blog Sites:

“The structures that impede asset accumulation in communities of color contribute to a stereotype in philanthropy that donors are white wealthy people, and people of color are recipients of philanthropy, not practitioners of philanthropy. I think when we operate based on this stereotype, there are negative consequences. For example, we participate in a dynamic where people of color with wealth, and all philanthropy in communities of color, become invisible.

I believe that promoting donor organizing in wealthy, middle-class and low-income communities of color is a way to break that pattern. Providing philanthropic, fundraising and leadership training in communities of color literally transforms the dynamic that perpetuates the system in which people of color are targets of racism and class oppression. It flips the script, empowering people of color to become change agents on behalf of their own communities.”

It is time that all people become change agents on behalf of their own communities and for the causes they care about. As leaders in the movement, it’s important that we empower folks just like the folks from my hometown to become agents of change in whatever ways that they can. The possibilities are limitless. All we have to do is ask.

To view Theo Copley’s full blog post please visit: www.resourcegeneration.org or www.grassrootsfundraisingjournal.org.



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BLACK ABORTION

A Systemic Perspective

By Candace Cabbil, SisterSong Program Associate

I have been pregnant five times, gave birth to four boys, and raised a daughter that I did not birth. As a mother of five, I had one pregnancy end in a spontaneous miscarriage. I gave passing consideration to having an abortion on a couple other occasions, but never really thought in-depth about abortion beyond a personal decision or the fact that I have legal access to safe abortions.

I vividly remember the day I was driving along Interstate 285 in Atlanta last February seeing the anti-abortion billboard with the sad little brown face and the line proclaiming that “Black Children are an Endangered Species.” My gut reaction was shock as a Black woman. Species?!?! It even made me a little queasy to see Black babies characterized as a species. I thought to myself, “Here we go again; Black people are being compared to animals!” What I did not foresee was my eventual involvement in the issue of abortion and Black women. I intend to provide my perspective on the anti-abortion/anti-choice attack on Black women’s autonomy, the systemic impact, and the importance of trusting and supporting Black women.

What do I mean when I say systemic? Systems Theory is a look at systems or groups in both part-to-whole and whole-to-part thinking about making connections between various elements so they fit together in the whole. For example, the human body is a whole system. It is made up of several sub-systems, like the circulatory system or the skeletal system. Comparatively, think of America as a whole system and within the larger system exists several smaller systems, such as demographic, socioeconomic, etc. Using the systemic lens, the anti-abortion/anti-choice campaign and attack on Black women would not only affect Black women, but other women of color and lead to the eventual erosion of the rights of all women to safe access to abortions. Additionally, women of color and poor communities tend to bear the brunt of any economic shifts in America, which is to say that a change in the larger system affects the smaller system. Furthermore, the systems are often based on power and privilege and maintaining structural exclusivity.

After years of raising my children as a stay-at-home mom and finally summing up the courage to leave a mentally,



emotionally, and spiritually abusive relationship, I found myself starting over in every way imaginable...a new home, a new state, and a new life! With that new life, I found myself having to support four boys, so I went back to school. While completing my Master’s degree I learned about Quadrant Behavior Theory (QBT), which is a result of conversations between Black and White people about power, assumptions, and dominant group behavior within the

quadrants of White men, White Women, Men of Color, and Women of Color. This theory encompassed so much of my lived experience.

In coming to work with SisterSong, I am able to see QBT in action, especially as it relates to a disenfranchised person’s access to basic resources. “The Women of Color quadrant is the most volatile and least stable, yet it is the quadrant that supports the other three quadrants,” asserts Dr. Cathy Royal, Quadrant Behavior Theorist. Furthermore, QBT states that within the Women of Color quadrant there is an unspoken hierarchy that further categorizes according to skin color that places -- you guessed it -- Black women on the bottom! So, please tell me, why on earth would anyone proceed to attack Black women’s autonomy when, according to QBT, we provide the support that keeps this entire system together?

Looking at the issue of Black women and abortion systemically and pulling on the tenets of QBT, there is absolutely no way you can attack Black women and our decision-making without adversely impacting other systems and/or groups. For example, looking specifically at Women of Color as a group, if the anti-abortion factions can successfully attack Black women, the campaign will begin to attack other Women of Color, such as Asian American women alleging gender selection or Latina women using immigration issues. The opponents use scare tactics and seek to ultimately control all women’s reproductive decisions. Additionally, recent developments in critical thought about the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age -- known as the “Social Determinants of Health” -- recognize the influence institutional factors, economic systems, and racism have on individual and community health.

The impact of denying Black women the basic human right to choose what is best for us or our families keeps us in a perpetual cycle of poverty because of inadequate access to healthcare, education, and economic resources. The persistent refusal to acknowledge the existence of these economic disparities among women of color communities, and Black women in particular, maintains this impoverished level in the American economic, education, and health systems. The impact on the American community system as a whole is the continual denial of a group of the population (in this case, Black women) to ever have the opportunity to sit at the table and influence the process where decisions are being made that have the greatest impact on our lives. If it can be done in this demographic of the population, then everyone must know it can happen in any demographic in America as well.

Americans of any demographic cannot continue to separate themselves from issues that affect any group within a system and act as if it does not or will not touch their communities. To do so, colludes with the system as it is and continues its inequities. Supporting the change efforts of any one group within a system influences the entire system. Consider this analogy; imagine yourself looking out at a still lake. Now imagine you just threw a pebble into that lake. What happened? You caused a ripple effect, creating movement/change in the entire lake. My job as a change agent is not to make people within the system comfortable, but to create enough discomfort in people to cause a shift in the system.

My personal reproductive story is one of the many melodies represented in SisterSong. As SisterSong’s Program Associate, I manage the Trust Black Women Partnership, coordinating and assisting the efforts to eventually emancipate the group into a separate nonprofit organization. In my new role, I will continue to provide my systemic perspective to this program and stand proudly with my sisters as we fight for the human rights of all Black women.

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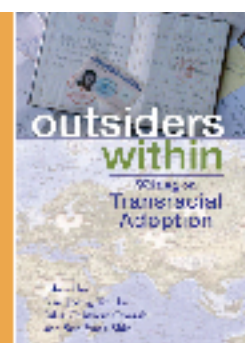
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