

Stand With Us for Reproductive Justice

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Campus Anti-Abortion Tactics – 10 Steps for Effectively Fighting Back

In College? Here are ways to fight back

©Loretta Ross, SisterSong National Coordinator – May 2011

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.

Below are a few ways to organize on campus grounds

1. Fight back, organize, and contact Trust Black Women Partnership for help. 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 www.sistersong.net

Choice USA <http://www.choiceusa.org>

Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice <http://rcrc.org>

Hampshire College's Civil Liberties and Public Policy Program <http://clpp.hampshire.edu>

Feminist Majority Foundation <http://feminist.org>

PPFA's VOX <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/about-us/boards-initiatives/youth/college-campus-groups-4638.htm>