

HOT TOPICS Celebrate Love Drug War Graduates How We Eat Jobs Crisis Sci-Fi Wal-Mart Youth and Race

Past and Present Collide as the Black Anti-**Abortion Movement Grows**



by Miriam Zoila Pérez

Thursday, March 3 2011, 9:35 AM EST

ShareThis I Print I Comment (23)

THATSABORTION.COM

LAMAR

Tags: abortion, Planned Parenthood, reproductive rights

96 tweets

retweet



Just over a year ago, in February 2010, Ryan Bomberger's impassioned campaign to convince black people that abortion is genocide burst into mainstream view. Bomberger's Radiance Foundation, a Georgia-based anti-abortion group, placed dozens of billboards around Atlanta in coordination with black history month, touching off a media firestorm. "Black children are an endangered species," said the billboards, of which there are now at least 170 in at least five

"I'm an adoptee and adoptive father who has worked in the urban community most of my adult life," says Bomberger, who is black. "I mourn the loss of beautiful possibility, not only in the unborn children who are unjustly killed, but the would-be mothers and fathers who are propagandized to believe that abortion solves any of the issues we face as a society."

In the year since the Radiance Foundation campaign began, the abortion-as-black-genocide meme has spread widely. As the House voted to defund Planned Parenthood last month, Georgia Republican Paul Broun lectured on the floor about eugenics. Last week, the group Life Always sparked outrage with a billboard in lower Manhattan that declared, "The most dangerous place for an African-American is the womb." FOX News shows have been abuzz with talk about high abortion rates in urban centers and among black women. Suddenly, the right is terribly concerned with the well-being of black babies.

The black-focused billboards direct viewers to websites-Bomberger's toomanyaborted.com and Life Always' thatsabortion.com. The two sites have a similar message: abortion is tantamount to genocide in the black community. Both campaigns identify Planned Parenthood as the villain at the center of this genocide-they claim the organization targets African Americans through outreach and strategic clinic locations, and point to founder Margaret Sanger's early 20th century involvement in eugenics.

All of these campaigns also take as their staring point a fact that everybody agrees upon: black women have the

highest rates of abortion in the United States. According to Melissa Gilliam, University of Chicago researcher and Guttmacher Institute board member, an African-American woman is four times more likely than a white woman to have an abortion in her lifetime. According to the Guttmacher Institute, 37 percent of all abortions in 2004 were obtained by black women, 34 percent by white women and 22 percent by hispanic women.

So why are African-American women having so many more abortions than other groups? Most reproductive

THIS ARTICLE IS PART OF:

Topic in Focus: Gender & Sexuality, Health

Build the Movement

Tell 5 friends to join you in Dropping the I-Word. Nobody is "illegal."

PASS IT ON!

GET THE LATEST







ON FACEBOOK REACTIONS COMMENTS



Jose Antonio Vargas Came Out as Undocumented, NOT "Illegal" COLORLINES

974 people recommend this.



Puerto Rican Politicians Remain Silent on Homophobic Violence COLORLINES

230 people recommend this



Midwest Rappers Show Love for Their Indigenous Ojibwe Language - COLORLINES

673 people recommend this.



Survey Says: Capitol Hill's Staff Is Lily White - COLORLINES 272 people recommend this



Eddie Long and the 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell' Pall Over the Black Church -COLORI INES

214 people recommend this.

MORE FROM THIS CONTRIBUTOR

Teen Moms Look for Support, But Find Only Shame

by Miriam Zoila Pérez on May 06 10:34 AM 22 Comments

Home Birth Is Safer, Cheaper and Can **End Disparities in Moms Dying**

by Miriam Zoila Pérez on April 12 10:12 AM 49 Comments

Past and Present Collide as the Black Anti-Abortion Movement Grows

by Miriam Zoila Pérez on March 03 09:35 AM 23 Comments



rights and health advocates say it's because of a much higher rate of unintended pregnancy among black women, a fact that is supported by data: black women have an unintended pregnancy rate three times that of white women, according to Guttmacher. This imbalance derives from larger health disparities: lack of access to health care, lower rates of contraceptive use, and higher rates of untreated STDs and of preventive disease overall.

Groups like the Radiance Foundation, in their language about abortion as "genocide" and "holocaust," imply instead a larger conspiracy, perhaps promoted by government, to threaten the black community. And like other public health conspiracy theories that have circulated in black neighborhoods over the years, the assertion is rooted in a very real and troubling history.

An Ugly Past Remains Present

Women's reproduction has long been at the mercy of state control, particularly for women of color. For black women, this history dates back to slavery. As Dorothy Roberts outlined in her seminal 1998 book, "Killing the Black Body," women held in bondage had no control over their fertility whatsoever, and they were relied upon and manipulated in order to produce the next generation of labor. Even after emancipation, eugenics and paternalistic ideas about who was fit to reproduce influenced government policy in the U.S. These policies overwhelmingly impacted the lives and health of women of color, as well as low-income women, women with disabilities and others deemed "unfit." There is a deep history of forced sterilization across communities of color—some of which actually did result in the near elimination of certain Native American tribes.

These practices are not ancient history, and many incarnations still exist today: primarily through economic and social welfare programs that limit women's access to certain forms of contraception or place caps on how many children they can have when receiving welfare. For example, undocumented women I worked with in Pennsylvania were able to get coverage for sterilization as part of their emergency medical coverage during pregnancy, but could not receive coverage for other forms of birth control since their Medicaid ran out shortly after giving birth. Women's reproduction—but more specifically, the reproduction of women of color and low-income women—remains a practice in which the government is invested and deeply entwined.

Roberts outlines in her book how this reasoning was used within the black community to decry birth control and family planning, including abortion, from the early 20tht century through the civil rights era. Critics claimed that for the black community to succeed, black women needed to produce children, and that any attempt to limit fertility represented an effort to eliminate or weaken the race. In 1934, Marcus Garvey's nationalist organization, the Universal Negro Improvement Association, came out against birth control. Garvey's group and others called it "race suicide" and argued that controlling reproduction through birth control was harmful to the black community overall, and likely being promoted by whites in service of racism. This rhetoric popped up again and again in black nationalist movements, most often coming from the male leaders and figureheads. Bomberger echoes it today.

"After years of extensive research into the immense disparity of abortion's impact on the black community, it was readily apparent that the history of the birth control movement (and America's racist and eugenics-driven history of dehumanizing efforts to control black populations) provided much of the explanation," Bomberger told me in a recent interview.

He is a compelling leader for the black anti-abortion movement. A young African-American man, Bomberger leads with his own personal story about abortion—a common thread among movement spokespeople. A video on the Radiance Foundation website tells his story. Bomberger was adopted as an infant by a white Christian family. His biological mother, Bomberger claims, conceived him during a rape. In his own words, he "was once considered 'black and unwanted' but instead was adopted and loved."

His group is behind the largest billboard campaign we've seen to date: 172 so far in Atlanta, Arkansas, Milwaukee, Texas and most recently Los Angeles, with plans for expansion. But the Radiance Foundation and Bomberger are no means alone in the black anti-abortion movement. At least four other groups—Life Always, National Black Pro-life Coalition, National Black Pro-life Union and Issues4Life—also work specifically on abortion in the black community. The leadership behind these groups is primarily African-American, male and religious. Of the nine speakers advertised on the National Black Pro-Life Coalition's website, three are women and six are religious—ministers, pastors or other Christian religious figures. While Bomberger partners with Issues4Life, a California-based anti-abortion group, he says he has no relationship to Life Always, the group behind the NYC billboard that was taken down last week.



New Voices, Same Messages

If these groups are not working in concert, they nonetheless share common messaging, particularly Christian-based rhetoric about sexual purity, abstinence and heterosexual marriage. Most of their websites also provide the typical anti-choice information about abortion, but with a racialized spin.

A 170-billboard campaign cannot be a cheap endeavor—Bomberger's campaign site invites corporate sponsorships of "between \$5,000 and \$10,000" to cover new billboards—but it's not clear how these campaigns are being financed thus far. Bomberger responded to my inquiry by stating that "there is no conspiratorial right-wing anything funding us. It's individuals, mostly, who are simply passionate about defending life, in all of its stages." Others, however, allege that there are connections between this work and the Republican Party.

In fact, the black anti-abortion movement doesn't look all that different from the mainstream, and mostly white, version—similar language about abortion, morality and reproduction; similar strong Christian influence. But the specifically racialized take, which often borrows from the language of civil rights and genocide, has a unique weight coming from within the black community. One of the often mentioned spokespeople of this movement is the is Alveda King, the neice of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. She's affiliated with the NBPC as well as the National Black Pro-life Union.

Of course, they overlook another part of black



RELATED READING

Latinos Fall Prey to the Danger-Womb Epidemic!

by Akiba Solomon on June 10 2011 5 Comments

\$327 Million for Women's Health Will Shut Down Government, Say Dems

by Shani O. Hilton on April 8 2011 0 Comments

Black Anti-Choice Group Compares Abortions to Japan Death Toll

by Jorge Rivas on March 29 2011 0 Comments



America's history with reproductive rights. According to Roberts, black women were actually overwhelmingly in support of birth control and fought to gain access to it throughout the 20th century. In 1941, the National Council of Negro Women became the first national women's group to endorse birth control. Prominent female political figures in the black community came out against the rhetoric of their male counterparts when it came to reproduction. "Black women have the right and the responsibility to determine when it is in the interest of the struggle to have children or not to have them



and this right must not be relinquished," declared Frances Beal, head of the Black Women's Liberation Committee of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) during the civil right movement.

Roberts explains that these women had good reason to be in support of birth control: They were already using rudimentary methods of family planning, and suffered greatly from illegal and unsafe abortions. Prominent male leaders also stood beside them in support of family planning, including Martin Luther King, Jr., Jesse Jackson and the Black Panther Party, among others.

"They have discovered a very volatile and provocative way of getting their anti-abortion message across," Roberts argues. "They are misusing and distorting history in order to support their view on abortion."

They are also misusing the much-cited data on black abortions. Abortion rates alone may appear to support the black anti-choice movement's genocide claims. But those numbers can't be taken in isolation. The fertility rate, for instance, directly counters the provocative genocide language. According to Gilliam, the fertility rate (meaning the average number of children a women will have in her lifetime) is the same for white and black women: 2.0. The black community in the U.S. is not in a state of population decline due to abortion, and continues to reproduce at rates equivalent to whites.

More broadly, there is the crucial point that criminalizing abortion actually poses a greater threat to the African-American lives. Before the procedure was legalized, "Illegal abortion was the cause of 25 percent of the white women's deaths due to pregnancy, 49 percent of the black women's, and 65 percent of the Puerto Ricans'," as Shirley Chisholm, the first African American woman in Congress and a strong supporter of reproductive rights, wrote in her memoir. In addition, the legalization of abortion resulted in significant improvements in maternal and fetal mortality rates. "Maternal mortality in New York City dropped by more than half during the first year [abortion was legal], to an all-time recorded low. Infant mortality also dropped to a new low," reports New York Times columnist Linda Greenhouse. Bomberger responded to Greenhouse's column that shared this data, refuting it with his own version of these numbers.

Reproductive rights advocates, including women of color, have come out strong against the billboard campaigns led by Bomberger and his movement cohorts. Sistersong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective has been organizing against the billboards since their launch in Atlanta last year. They've formed a group, called the Trust Black Women Coalition, that responds specifically to the racialized messaging. These advocates say that the campaigns unfairly target African-American women themselves.

"Black women's wombs are not the main enemy of black children," says Roberts, who says they promote "toxic stereotypes" about black mothers' irresponsibility. "Racism and sexism and poverty are the main enemy of black children. [The billboard] doesn't highlight the issues behind why women are having so many abortions, it just blames them for doing it."

Indeed, it all leaves out the state policies that have had significant impacts on black women's reproductive choices—welfare family caps, for example, that limit the number of children a for which a mother can receive support.

Planned Parenthood, instead, has been at the center of this movement's attacks. They have come under fire for the government funding they receive under Title X—money specifically earmarked for family planning services like contraception as well as cancer screenings and overall reproductive health. Planned Parenthood has become a central health care provider nationwide, known for the affordability of their services and being a resource for low-income women and women of color. The abortion care they provide (which is not funded by federal money and, in fact, is legally mandated to remain separate from their other operations) has placed them at the center of this debate.

As Loretta Ross and the Trust Black Women Coalition have pointed out, it was African American women who asked Margaret Sanger to bring family planning clinics to black neighborhoods, and it's African American women now who seek out and support Planned Parenthood for the wide range of health services they provide, only a portion of which is abortion.

"They are essentially blaming black women for their reproductive decisions and then the solution is to restrict and regulate black women's decisions about their bodies," Roberts says of the burgeoning black antiabortion movement. "Ironically, they have that in common with eugenicists."

Miriam Zoila Pérez is an editor at Feministing and the founder of Radical Doula, a blog that lives at the intersection of birth activism and social justice.





What this article doesn't address is the break down of the black family. Nearly 70% of all black babies are born out of wedlock. We are raising our children on our own! Black women have the lowest marriage rate than any other group of women. There are many factors that play into this statistic, went to Mr. Bomberger's website. Its "interesting" that he has billboards that state the black woman's womb is the deadliest place for a black child. I guess that is why he gave his children a white woman's womb

1 person liked this. Like Reply



TclurFancy 3 months ago

Until I read this article I did not know Ryan Bomberger was black. Now, I'm truly shocked and appalled. I think that may be the reason I have not heard of this campaign until now. If it were a white person or a right-wing Christian organization, the sham of an organization known as NAACP (no disrespect to anyone who holds them in high regards) would've been all over it like white on rice. Shame my damn head.

1 person liked this. Like Reply



Mark Belgrave 3 months ago

Why all this talk about fertility. If we were all aborted we would not be able to have any discussion. Is it not taking a life. We as a society are too sophiticated and can quibble about anything, even when we know its wrong.

1 person liked this. Like Reply



laure mcelroy 3 months ago

Thanks for this article. It always amazes me how eagerly people of any race tend to give up their hard fought for rights. It's also funny how people who are against abortion don't ever seem to adopt foster kids, or if they do, they seek babies. The overwhelming majority of fosterchildren are older african-descended kids who were taken from parents who were deemed unfit because of poverty related causes, and who will spend their whole youth in indifferent state care until they age out. Does the responsibility for kids end afte they're out of the womb?

Nenya and 9 more liked this Like Reply



wu fru de lu 3 months ago

This really just seems to be religious convictions versus scientific rationalization. You cant throw personal beliefs in deities into a public dispute. It is automatically prejudice against those who believe in a different deity than you or no deity at all.

2 people liked this. Like Reply



SimmerG 3 months ago in reply to wu fru de lu

There are also secularist, social justice arguments for a pro-life position. Here is a link to a well-facilitated on-line discussion of both sides (though i think there are at least three sides to every issue):

As the woman arguing against abortion notes, it really depends on how we define "personhood." This is a philosophical issue that secular and religious alike weigh in on and disagree about. What makes a post-natal baby a person? More of a person than 7-month old fetus? More than a person than a geriatric person unable to feed or clothe herself?

And, for those who are secular animal rights activists, there is the question of whether the life of a fetus is less valuable than the life of cat or horse or cow. If someone argues that we have no right to take the life of animals to feed ourselves, then we may also ask that person whether they think it right to kill a fetus if the mother is capable of giving birth without serious risk to her life.

Like Reply



Samantha Wilatowska 3 months ago

I don't think anti-choice is ever going to learn that abortion is not something you make generalizations about. There are millions of women who terminate pregnancies for a million different reasons (and 61% of them are already mothers). It's a personal, often difficult (and legal!) medical decision.

Also, enough with the anti-Planned Parenthood tirades. PP provides low-income women with a place to go for yearly pap and pelvic exams, cancer screenings, prenatal care, STI testing/treatment, and contraception. 98% of people who visited PP in 2010 went there to obtain these services. They provide general health care for those who can't afford insurance. If you're opposed to PP, you're opposed to health care for the poor.

I notice none of the revenue raised is going to programs to help impoverished families. I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm beginning to think they don't actually care about "teh baybeez!!1!". Imagine that!

wu fru de lu and 17 more liked this Like Reply



Erich Hicks 3 months ago

Abortion should only be initiated only in a emergency...Keep telling that history:

Read the novel, Rescue at Pine Ridge, where Buffalo Bill Cody meets a Buffalo Soldier, the greatest fictionalized 'historical novel' ever written. A great story of Black Military History, the first generation of Buffalo Soldiers...5 stars Amazon, and Barnes & Noble. The website is; http://www.rescueatpineridge.c... Youtube commercials are:

Rescue at Pine Ridge is the story of the rescue of the famed 7th Cavalry by the 9th Cavalry Buffalo Soldiers. The 7th Cavalry was entrapped again after the Little Big Horn Massacre, fourteen years later, the day after the Wounded Knee Massacre. If it wasn't for the 9th Cavalry Buffalo Soldiers, there would of occurred, a second massacre of the 7th Cavalry. This story is about, brutality, compassion, reprisal, bravery, heroism and gallantry.

I know you'll enjoy the novel. I wrote the story that embodied the Native Americans, Outlaws and African-American/Black Soldiers, from the south to the north, in the days of the Native American Wars with the approaching United States of America.

The novel was taken from my mini-series movie of the same title, "RaPR" to keep my story alive. The movie so far has attached, Bill Duke directing, Hill Harper, Glynn Turman, James Whitmore Jr. and a host of other major actors in which

we are in talks with.

When you get a chance, also please visit our Alpha Wolf Production website at; http://www.alphawolfprods.com and see our other productions, like Stagecoach Mary, the first Black Woman to deliver mail for the United States Postal System in Montana, in the 1890's, "spread the word".

Peace

ATTACHED FILES





Like Reply



SHEILA 3 months ago

I think it is really ashame of what people tends to think is important. African-American young girls and women should be able to decide what they can do with their bodies. It may seem like all the abortion clinics are in urban communities, but they are not just there for these women to have abortions, there also there to prevent STDS, provide information about alot of personal things that may interest them. For them to gain knowledge about prevention is welcome so that way people wont be arguing about why there are so many clinics in the urban communities and start focusing on real problems.

Crystal Evans and 11 more liked this Like Reply



Dank_Angel 3 months ago

Very, Very well explained. Great job at bringing out the horrible history women of color had to endure. Everyone wants to bring race into a problem that is done right a woman's problem. This campaign against abortion is red herring plays right inot religious justifications. How about we hear from the women themselves? How about we empower women with the right tools and education? and then see how things go. What an idea. Things are changing people- for the better unless the narrow minded control freaks keep getting their ways. These men have no business in women's issues.

wu fru de lu and 12 more liked this Like Reply



Saynsumthn Blog 3 months ago

It would appear by your statements that BLACKS can only "think for themselves" if they subscribe to a pro-abortion view! You degrade the entire Black Anti-Abortion movement! You are adding to the stereotype that BLACKS must submit to the theories of the Majority Elites which are in fact pro-abortion and pro-Planned Parenthood. You also cleverly left out the fact that MANY BLACK WOMEN are in leadership within the BLACK anti-eugenics/Planned Parenthood/Abortion movement! You are twisting FACTS! However, let's look at he leadership of the abortion movement. Planned Parenthood was founded BY RACIST WHITES, like KLAN SPEAKER Margaret Sanger. They are now headed by ELITE WHITE Cecile Richards and they are supported by ELITE WHITE organizations like the Rockefellers, Bill Gates, Ted Turner and others. Blacks DID oppose Planned Parenthood early on and continue to do so today. In fact YOU the author are WHITE, why did you not reveal that fact since you have made such an issue of mentioning color? And, in case you forgot to disclose this fact from your bio allow me to expose the fact that you are "in bed" with the Planed Parenthood/Abortion Lobby as stated, "Pérez also enjoys speaking to local organizations such as Planned Parenthood NYC, and national groups like NARAL Pro-Choice America and the Asian American Justice Center". So, your VERY BIASED report is easy to see through. I would encourage everyone to get a copy of the documentary film about this topic called-Maafa21 here http://www.maafa21.com and stop letting this WHITE GIRL and her ilk tell you how to think!!!!

marcus and 4 more liked this Like Reply



babrathw 2 months ago in reply to Saynsumthn Blog

I see what you are seeing here, it is very good to acknowledge the history behind Planned Parenthood as a young woman of color, who is really active in the reproductive justice movement who works youth from low-income areas, but trough my work I have found that Planned Parenthood has made contraception and other sexual health services very available to communities of color. Yes, it is important that people who work at the top acknowledge their privilege and social locations, but in any movement we must have allies that belong to different social locations than we do. This is how we build bridges and help get our agenda's across to other people. I have read "Killing the Black Body" from cover to cover, and if you haven't already I recommend you do also. I personally believe this billboards are outrageous, and further marginalizing Black women. I also recommend that you look into the work being done by SisterSong and their Trust Black Women Campaign. It may give you some insight on where Miriam is coming from. Also FYI, to add to Miriam's extensive list of work, she started off working for the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health. She is very involved reproductive justice and how women of color are being affected. Ms. Perez is "no WHITE privileged" women, she is indeed a beautiful Latina women who is ingenious and brilliant when it comes to RJ!

1 person liked this. Like Reply



Crystal Evans 3 months ago in reply to Saynsumthn Blog

I saw Maafa21 and all it did was show the history of eugenics wanting to destroy the Black community. It did not address the problems in the Black community which is racism, sexism and poverty. You have many white politicians that want to end abortion, cut funding for planned parenthood and also want to cut funding for programs that keep many low income families afloat such as TANF, food stamps, Section 8 and medicaid. Women do not abort their babies because they do not want them, they abort their children because they cannot afford to feed them.

parkwood1920 and 17 more liked this Like Reply



wu fru de lu 3 months ago

also the unintended pregnancy rate is explainable through allot of mexicans being catholic, allot of white women are born into a life with much more resources due to the last 500 years of white hell, which leaves black women in a lower economic bracket making it much more difficult to "intend" to have the child. Usually, someone just gets pregnant and the "intend" to would be resolved after the fact. I think its important to note the "intend" b.s. seems to be intending to imply black women get knocked up more. Also the most dangerous place for a black baby to be is in its potential mother is a horrible and racist thing to say. It's dehumanizing the female while displaying her to the white male owned world. Its saying look, this little girl is gonna grow up to get knocked up and abort babies too. I dont know, im ranting.

Excellent article, thanks. There are political/economic reasons behind the cries that black women having abortions is "genocide." I've heard this "genocide!" cry from people on Facebook and have done some research into their backgrounds and connections, especially around what was then going on in Georgia. I found that there were some sweetheart real estate/federal tax break deals lurking in the shadows here, but since I'm not an investigative reporter, I didn't take it on. As in everything: FOLLOW THE MONEY. Who is making bucks off of this campaign? Who is gaining power or money or lucrative contacts/contracts as a result of jumping on the "genocide" train? We need a real "follow the money trail" investigation.

8 people liked this. Like Reply

Women's eNews 3 months ago

1 person liked this. Like Reply

Add New Comment Required: Please login below to comment.

Post as ...

Reactions



mal2091 2 months ago

From Twitter

Why do discriminatory movements want to point fingers at the symptons and not solve the problem? http://bit.ly/dKaNfA#LeadByExample



Alliance4Chnge 2 months ago

From Twitter

2 more retweets from Proberson07 KatrinaNation

RT @kai_wright: Past and Present Collide as the Black Anti-Abortion Movement Grows @miriamzperez @colorlines http://bit.ly/hgv4H9



losangelette 3 months ago

From Twitter

Remind self: MUST read later http://colorlines.com/archives/2011/03/past_and_present_collide_as_the_black_antiabortion_movement_grows.html



KelMunger 3 months ago

From Twitter

Great piece from Colorlines: "Past and Present Collide as the Black Anti-#Abortion Movement Grows" http://t.co/lflSwL2 #race #feminism



EndingViolence 3 months ago

From Twitter

 $RT\ @ Audrey Huntley: Past\ and\ Present\ Collide\ as\ the\ Black\ Anti-Abortion\ Movement\ Grows\ http://bit.ly/gO3puH$



EndingViolence 3 months ago

From Twitter

They're blaming black women for their reproductive decisions & trying to restrict/regulate decisions abt their bodies http://bit.lv/hivS0v



grollman 3 months ago

From Twitter

http://ow.ly/4d8Bx Past and Present Collide as the Black Anti-Abortion Movement Grows // @grollman



mark1107 3 months ago

From Twitter

Past and Present Collide as the Black Anti-Abortion Movement Grows - COLORLINES http://bit.ly/hgv4H9

Show more reactions

Trackback URL http://disqus.com/forums

blog comments powered by **DISQUS**