

Abortion and the Black Church

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Lisa Olivia Fitch | OW Contributor

Doctrines vary, view on life does not

As we move deeper into Women's History Month, the status of Black women's health is a subject ripe for

discussion, and there is no topic more connected to health than abortion.

According to the Guttmacher Institute, 30 percent of abortions occur to non-Hispanic Black women; 8 percent of women who have abortions have never used a method of birth control, and non-use is greatest among those who are young, poor, Black, Hispanic or less educated.

The Guttmacher Institute advances sexual and reproductive health worldwide through an interrelated program of social science research, public education and policy analysis.

Historically, the Black community has been considered one of the most religious in the nation, and a key tenet of Christianity is "thou shalt not kill." Yet, the numbers speak for themselves.

And recently, anti-abortion supporters have launched an aggressive nationwide effort to eradicate abortion, and they have targeted African American women.

You probably saw the billboards last month—a picture of a beautiful Black baby stares straight at you as you drive by—"Endangered Species" written near it's forehead. It's a striking, controversial public service campaign that, if organizers have their way, you may never see again.

"I'm hoping to end abortion this year," Issues4Life Foundation President Walter B. Hoye II said.

"This campaign finished on March 6th. It had been up since January 15th, King's birthday, and through all of Black History Month. I hope we don't have to do this again next year."

The campaign was run not only in Los Angeles, but in a number of other United States cities including Atlanta. Here in L.A., 70 billboards were posted, created and directed by the Radiance Foundation, with the support of Issues4Life and other local pro-life organizations.

The stark billboards also included a website address printed in bold letters: toomanyaborted.com/CA.

"This awareness campaign has been extremely successful, and we have benefited greatly by the website associated with the campaign," said Hoye. "We've gotten a lot of hits on the site. That's where you need to go to look at all types of acts and figures.

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Across Black America

Here's a look at African American people and issues making headlines throughout the country.

Alabama

Thousands of marchers, including several prominent civil rights leaders, recently marked the 46th anniversary of "Bloody Sunday" (a day during which law enforcement officers attacked civil rights demonstrators marching toward Montgomery across the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 7, 1965) by re-enacting the walk over the Alabama River. Participants included U.S. Rep. John Lewis of Georgia, a Bloody Sunday survivor, as well as Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and the Rev. Jesse Jackson.

California

After a four-month pilot in more than 60 markets across the country, Tavis Smiley and Cornell West recently announced that "Smiley & West" is now officially a weekly program. Alisa Miller, president and CEO of Public Radio International (PRI) says, "Tavis Smiley and Cornel West bring a rare dynamism and authenticity to conversation, and a heartfelt dedication to inviting listeners to take part in the exchange of ideas and discussion of thought-provoking topics. The addition of Smiley and West underscores PRI's commitment to offer new places to discover a diverse, interconnected world, and to stimulate important conversations in American society." For a list of stations and times the show will air, visit <http://google/4pavz>.

District of Columbia

The Washington, D.C., Martin Luther King Jr. National Memorial Project Foundation recently received a \$1 million gift from the memorial's design-build joint venture team, Mckissack & Mckissack, Turner Construction Co., Tompkins Builders Inc., the Gilford Corp. (MTTG). The gift will support the memorial on the National Mall honoring Dr. King. To promote Dr.

“When the general population looks at that, it sparks debate and initiates discussion,” he added.

“At that point, people are in a position to make up their own mind.”

The pro-choice camp views the campaign from quite a different point of view.

“When we saw those billboards, we understood that it was part and parcel of a rightwing conservative campaign using Black people to do its bidding,” Black Women for Wellness Communications Director, Thandi Chimurenga said. “We are still uncovering all the layers of people involved.

“We are concerned about the Black Christian, pro-life movement’s ties to a conservative Republican movement in this country that does not care one whit about the Black babies who are already here,” she said.

Chimurenga believes that the “Endangered” campaign is backed by some of the same forces that were behind a recently passed house amendment that aims to strip Planned Parenthood of any federal funding.

“It’s not just about abortion with them,” she said. “That’s just one peg in their plan to destroy grassroots organizations, the poor and folks of color.

“We are concerned about the alignment of Black pro-life groups with these Republicans,” Chimurenga added. “It’s disingenuous and insulting that Black women are being accused of genocide, when in reality, these people could be the purveyors of genocide against black people.

“No, the enemy of my enemy is still my enemy,” she said. “That is, until they develop a relationship with me, he is not my friend.”

Pro-choice groups have been supportive of organizations which give access to comprehensive health services that teach all forms of women’s health—including abstinence, birth control, adoption and abortion. In actuality, some of those pro-choice groups are Christian in nature.

“Yes, we are an endangered species, when we are warehoused in orphanages, or taken from abusive parents,” Grace Untied Methodist Church Pastor, Rev. Paul A. Hill said. “Who is going to make sure that children get quality education, health insurance, or that they are loved? There has to be more accountability, not just on the front end, but on the back end.”

The United Methodist Church Book of Resolution states that the church respects every life as sacred and also acknowledges a woman’s right to make decisions about her own body.

“We need to teach responsibility to expectant parents,” Hill said. “We need parenting classes in schools when a child becomes of age, so they can know what real parents are supposed to be like.”

Ryan Bomberter, CEO of the Radiance Foundation, creator of the billboard campaign, has gotten a lot of feedback on the foundation’s 800 number, as well as it’s website. Bomberter was adopted, along with nine other children in his multi-ethnic family, and feels it’s in his DNA to be life-affirming. His goal is to end abortion entirely. He’s been quoted as saying, “Abolitionists didn’t settle for slavery reduction.”

Bomberter said the campaign has received a variety of feedback—from venomous, racist groups to grateful, Black mid-lifers.

The Radiance Foundation has as its purpose “to inspire people to a life of meaning.” They work to educate and motivate with campaigns like “Endangered,” partnering with local organizations in the cities they target.

“These groups are on the ground,” Bomberter said. “These are people who are out there and who do this and take care of their community everyday.”

“In the end, abortion has not solved any of our urban community problems,” he added. “I have worked in

King’s messages of hope, democracy, justice, and love, MTTG Joint Venture has created the MTTG Dream Design Build Scholarship program for high school seniors. In its inaugural year, MTTG will award up to ten \$5,000 scholarships to minority high school seniors from the Washington metropolitan area who are pursuing a post-secondary education in architecture, engineering, or construction management fields, or attending a trade school following graduation. For more information about the scholarship or to submit an application, please visit www.mttgmlk.com. Scholarship applications will be accepted until March 15.

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the urban community all my adult life, and I'm painfully aware that none of it is solved by killing our future."

As Bomberter notes, abortion is an emotional issue in the Black community, part of its strong religious bent. There are those like Bishop Henry W. Hearn, senior pastor of Livingstone Cathedral of Worship in Littlerock, Calif., who unequivocally declared that abortion is murder.

"It's against the principles which God has set up to replenish the earth. We know that. I believe that women and families who do abortion have not been properly taught from the Word. That much of what is done, when people abort a baby is out of ignorance."

To stem this tide, Hearn believes churches must teach their doctrine much more strongly.

At the Antelope Valley Christian Center, Assistant Pastor Joey Brown Jr., works with young people, and believes that abortion is a matter of a individual person's relationship with God. "No matter what church you go to, and if you're not in church, it all boils down to your relationship with God . . . you have to answer to God." Brown reminds that God is a forgiving God and a graceful God.

Pastor Hill says every four years, the United Methodist Church reviews its positions on current issues and the United Methodist Church Book of Resolutions—the adopted official stance of the church in dealing with life matters from a biblical and theological perspective—says that although the church respects every life as sacred, it acknowledges a women's right to make decisions about her own body.

It stresses that the church shall offer ministries to reduce the number of unintended pregnancies and the bottom line is the church does not advocate an abortion unless the mother's life is in jeopardy or the baby is determined to have an abnormality that may impair its life.

"The United Methodist Church opposes late-term and partial-birth abortions," Hill said, adding that it encourages the option of adoption. "And we call all Christians to conduct a searching and prayerful inquiry into the sorts of conditions that may cause them to consider an abortion."

There is no monolithic "Black Church" reminds Lewis Logan II, senior pastor of Ruach Church There are some churches that preach against abortion at any cost, and there are others that say it can be allowed under certain circumstances such as rape, incest or in order to preserve the mother's life.

"Different denominations have different position statement on abortion . . . but there is one thing that is consistent—the sanctity of life itself. Life should be preserved," said Logan, who also questions why the same churches that condemn abortion will support a war on foreign soil, where our (sometimes teenage soldiers) end up killing women (who may be pregnant), sometimes children or who may be killed themselves.

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Black Women for Wellness (BWW)—a nonprofit organization committed to the well being of women and girls by building healthy communities through health education, empowerment and advocacy—joined with others nationally and locally last week to celebrate the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

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African Americans are a colorful people, who claim some of the most phenomenal talents, elaborate philosophies, and eccentric belief systems. One thing about Black religion and spirituality is that we know how to have us some church.

