

Behind “Enemy” Lines: Attending the Issues4Life Press Conference



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[From Asian Communities Reproductive Justice Blog](#)

I'm new to ACRJ, and even newer to the reproductive justice movement. The little knowledge I do have about reproductive justice was garnered from books and lectures in Gender and Women's Studies classes. However, prior to any entry into discussions on feminist politics and reproductive matters, I had decided that I was pro-choice.

Last weekend, I attended a press conference for Issues4Life and the Radiance Foundation. For those who don't already

<http://www.trustblackwomencalifornia.org/2011/06/26/behind-enemy-lines-attending-the-issues4life-press-conference/>

know, these are some of the organizations that are responsible for the anti-abortion billboards that have been popping up all over Oakland. Before attending the press conference I debated about outfits asking my roommate, "What do anti-choice people look like?" I was going incognito. I entered the press conference with some apprehension. Could they tell? Did I look like the enemy? Did they know I was morally opposed to everything they were promoting?

My bout with paranoia was interrupted by the beginning of the press conference which was opened with a prayer. I was reminded of my pastor father who spends every night with his hands clasped talking to God. The anti-choice people look like my dad.

After closing his prayer, the moderator Walter B. Hoye (founder of Issues4Life) promised to make the press conference entertaining. He introduced the first speaker Katherine Davis who identified herself as an angry Black woman. She spoke about Barbara Lee, calling Lee's reaction to the billboards a betrayal of the Black community. I thought, I agree with Barbara Lee. Am I betraying the Black community? Ryan Bomberger from the Radiance Foundation spoke next. He presented a PowerPoint full of shocking numbers detailing how abortion was killing the Black community and the racism that is "inherent" to abortion practices. I looked at his presentation thinking, "that makes sense." The next speaker was a young womyn named Christina Martin who looked about my age. She shared the story of her journey to being anti-abortion. Her own mother had sat in a doctor's office contemplating abortion. Christina Martin was almost dead. Dispersed between speakers were clips with photos of children that resembled my own fifteen month old niece. I felt a knot in my stomach. With each speaker and video clip I began to feel...guilty.

I left the press conference confused and wanting to crawl into bed. It took me days to be able to process everything. My conclusion: their campaign is brilliant. They found a way to appeal to my every sense. Their skewed data spoke to my logic obsessed brain, and their photos of infants tugged at my heart strings. Then I had an epiphany. The real strength of this campaign, the reason it has picked up so much momentum, is because it reinforces ideas I have been fed since birth. Ideas that abortion was immoral, sinful, and that as a womyn, I needed to be protected from myself. My initial reaction was a symptom of the patriarchy and Sunday School lessons I have internalized and had arrogantly thought I conquered. I mistook the knot in my stomach as guilt. That knot was something much better. What I felt growing in the pit of my stomach was dissension from an oppressive system, maladjustment to injustice. These billboards are an attempt to remind me of the unjust lessons I am trying to unlearn. I absolutely agree that Black is beautiful. I will never be opposed to promoting the beauty of a group that has historically been marginalized and disenfranchised. What I stand against is the framing that to be pro-choice is to be racist. Such language is divisive and an oversimplification of a complex issue. Although smart, this campaign is nothing new. It is part of a national, even global, tradition of attacking the bodies of womyn. When I say I am pro-choice, it is not to say that I am anti-life. It is to say that I am demanding the power to make decisions about my body and that others regardless of race, gender, sexuality, ability, religion, or class have that same right.

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