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## Issues4Life Foundation

### Is This About Male Responsibility or Female Submission?

Submitted by Marysia on Thu, 09/15/2011 - 18:02

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Already known for their controversial billboards on race and abortion, the Issues4Life Foundation and the Radiance Foundation are announcing a new campaign, apparently directed most at African American men, that declares "[Fatherhood Begins in the Womb.](#)"

All Our Lives is all for greater male responsibility—in sex, birth control, and childraising—and we agree, fatherhood, like motherhood, does begin with conception. We recognize the many ways that systematic racism and intersecting injustices have undercut the ability of Black men, as well as Black women, to parent their children in nonviolence and safety, beginning in pregnancy—and \*not\* at all ending there..

But do these organizations mean the same thing that we do by "Fatherhood Begins in the Womb"? We have to wonder.

Because the Radiance Foundation's Ryan Bomberger says in the press release announcing this campaign: "Men have been empowered by Roe v. Wade to have sex and run. They've been forced out of their crucial role by perpetual welfare and today's brand of liberal feminism."

Whatever effects Roe v. Wade may have had on destructive male behavior—men were certainly "empowered" (a curious choice of words!) long before Roe v. Wade "to have sex and run." Although we obviously disagree with prochoice

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feminism that abortion is a constructive solution to these very real and serious problems, we can understand that prochoice feminism arose in part as an effort at female self-defense against longstanding, socially sanctioned male sexual and reproductive coercion, violence, irresponsibility, and abandonment.

Bomberger's analysis does not sound like male responsibility taking. It sounds like he is blaming destructive male behavior on the alleged wrongs of the (gender-coded female) "nanny state" and those ever-drafted "liberal feminists." After all, if these Bad Women and their social assistance programs have "forced [men] out of their crucial role"—then it's the Bad Women's fault if men maltreat them, isn't it?

And just what is this "crucial role" of men? Is it ownership of/dominance over women and children, based on a misinterpretation of the Christian scriptures that mandates "Biblical submission"? Whatever it is, it does not have the sound of equal, reciprocal, nonviolent \*partnership\* with women in the nonproprietary care of children. And if it's not about that—then it may actually increase rather than decrease the number of women who feel they have no other or better choice than abortion, precisely because of the violent, abusive, controlling behavior of their babies' fathers.

The reference to "perpetual welfare"—among other things!—in the context of a campaign directed principally at African Americans smacks of stereotyping. After all, most Americans who receive public assistance are White. Even before the debacle of welfare "reform," most Americans of all race on public assistance have been on it for relatively short portions of their lifespans. There have been plenty of heterosexual married couples and single fathers on public aid. Where, pray tell, is this emasculating "perpetual welfare" that drives men to bad behavior? Especially since child support enforcement in the US is actually more effective in some respects for children who receive public aid than for many other children?

We also have to ask the Radiance and Issues4Life Foundations: If fatherhood begins in the womb—what active, concrete, practical, real-world, effective steps at the systemic/institutional level are you taking to support African American men as responsible, egalitarian fathers before, during and ever after birth? To promote healthy decisions about sex and access to comprehensive sex education, family planning, and prenatal care? To abolish the complicity of religious and other community institutions in sexual assault, domestic violence, and other forms of reproductive coercion? To create substantive educational and job opportunities? To prevent and heal community violence? To ensure that everyone has enough decent food, clothing, shelter and medical care? Among other things...

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