

# The Public Eye

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## “If You Love Children, Say So”

### The African American Anti-Abortion Movement

#### Editorial Preface:

Ten years ago, when the *Public Eye* featured a two-part article on Black conservatives, Deborah Toler noted that “for most African Americans [and for most Americans] the notion of a Black conservative is an oxymoron.” In 2003, we would certainly not presume that to be the case. Black conservatives (and other conservative people of color) occupy important offices in George W. Bush’s cabinet, such as Secretary of State (Colin Powell) and National Security Advisor (Condoleezza Rice). They are part of the judicial branch, including the U.S. Supreme Court (Clarence Thomas). They are leaders in legislative politics (former Congressman J.C. Watts, R-OK, and Congresswoman Denise Majette, R-GA). They have been prominent spokespersons on significant issues like affirmative action (Ward Connerly and Dinesh DeSouza), bilingual education and immigration (Linda Chavez), and school vouchers and welfare (Star Parker) that are vital to Blacks and other people of color. And they have been presidential (Alan Keyes) or vice-presidential (Ezola Foster) candidates in national primaries. Conservatism in communities of color, however, reaches beyond high-profile individuals. As Angela Dillard, the author of *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner Now? Multicultural Conservatism in America* has written in *Dissent*, “Poll after poll has revealed that some 30 percent of African-Americans, particularly younger ones, identify as conservative.”

Predominantly White (and White-led) conservative movements, particularly the Christian Right, have made outreach to Blacks, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans a visible part of their agenda.

The Christian Coalition has sought to bring in African American and Latino pastors as “church partners.” Focus on the Family has a whole program on the African American family. The Promise Keepers proactively reaches out to Black and Latino fathers/men. All of these predominantly White movements have sought to build alliances with, and recruit from people of color communities using wedge issues such as abortion, gay rights, “traditional values,” and “school-choice.”

The Right is able to use some of these wedges successfully because there is the basis for their acceptance within communities of color. School vouchers, for instance, can appear very attractive to communities of color and low income communities who are saddled with the worst public schools that have been systematically deprived of state funding, even if in reality vouchers don’t serve their children, as the Rev. Timothy McDonald, chair of the African American Ministers Leadership Council, observes. Similarly, Elsa Holguin, who serves on the board of Hispanics in Philanthropy, has pointed out that in the Latino (particularly immigrant) experience, elite, private Catholic schools are viewed as the ultimate in educational institutions, access to which has historically been difficult for the poor.

Toler’s article provided our readers with an analysis of Black conservative thought, and its roots in “longstanding white conservative and Neoconservative arguments.” In this issue of the *Public Eye* Louis Prisock’s article focuses on the antichoice movement among African Americans, highlighting differences between it and the predominantly White, Christian Right-led anti-abortion movement. These differences converge primarily on

the issue of race and racism, which are central frames for the Black antichoice movement’s message. Secondly, while much of the focus on Black conservatives has been on ideologues and political leaders, Prisock’s article also addresses grassroots movements. Progressives—people of color and White—need to understand the logic of grassroots conservative people of color movements, not dismiss it. And to recognize the difference between them and the White-dominated or led conservative movements as well as the more familiar ideologues that are the public face of conservatism of color.

By Louis Prisock

#### Introduction

For those on either side of the abortion debate there are great stakes involved with the outcomes of the upcoming 2004 elections. There could be the possibility of three open vacancies on the Supreme Court within the next few years, with speculation around Chief Justice William Rehnquist, 78, stepping down due to continued health problems. Justices Sandra Day O’Connor, 73 and Justice John Paul Stevens, 83 have also been mentioned as possible candidates

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# Guest Commentary

## African American Women and Reproductive Rights

How deeply vexed is the reproductive capacity of African American women! Vexed and subject still to manipulation, be that ideological, political, or medical.

One need not be a conspiracy theorist or an historian of long past medical abuses to believe that current government policies are intended to constrain the sexual and reproductive behavior of poor Black women. In fact, one need look no further than the welfare reform legislation passed in 1996 and currently up for congressional reauthorization.

The ground was prepared for TANF's (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) passage by a decades-long assault on the morals, sexual choices and childrearing practices of poor women. The baseline message: It was high time for the U.S. government to stop providing support to "babies having babies," i.e., to teen mothers on welfare; to "generations of dependency," i.e., women passing on the "habit" of welfare receipt to their children; to unrestrained childbearing, i.e., women having babies for the express purpose of garnering a larger welfare check; or to sex and reproduction outside the context of marriage. The message was laden with multiple layers of mythology, untruth, misogyny, and class bias. And, since the assiduously cultivated prototypical image of a welfare recipient was that of an urban, lazy, sexually irresponsible Black female, it was laden with a heavy dose of racism as well.

With this narrative as a backdrop, TANF legislation includes a provision allowing states to deny aid to women who have additional children while on welfare—the "child exclusion" or "family cap" policy. It provides for "illegitimacy bonuses" for the states in which the proportions of "illegitimate" births show the most substantial decrease (meanwhile reviving and affording governmental imprimatur to the archaic and heinous concept of human illegitimacy). It pours money into abstinence only education and marriage promotion programs.

Though the Right loudly decries big government's intrusions into our lives, evidently the lives of poor women—disproportionately Black, Native American, Asian American and Latina—are an exception. Their reproductive choices are to be aggressively shaped and coerced, their childbearing limited by withdrawal of social resources, their autonomy constrained by retrograde family policies.

Small wonder, then, that the abortion rights movement's mantra of individual choice has gained limited traction in African American communities. And small wonder that conspiracy theories about concerted attempts to limit the growth of the African American population gain a ready hearing.

When a multi-racial, cross-class reproductive rights movement becomes consistently attuned to the ways in which race and class biases suffuse government policy and frame women's reproductive choices, it will be able to craft and carry an abortion rights message capable of effectively challenging the influence of the African American antiabortion movement.

Linda Burnham  
*Executive Director, Women of Color Resource Center*

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to leave the bench soon.<sup>1</sup> Abortion advocates and opponents alike recognize that who the next president nominates as possible replacements to the bench and who the next Senate confirms can have a major impact on how the court rules on reproductive rights issues such as abortion.

As the upcoming elections draw nearer the media will be calling on advocates from both sides of the abortion debate to provide their opinions about the impact of electoral outcomes on the abortion issue. Most likely the individuals and organizations the media will most often call upon to get their insights will be White, thus giving the appearance that abortion is a “White” issue. Black conservative Alan Keyes’s failed attempt to capture the Republican Party’s presidential nomination in 2000 garnered attention from a variety of media outlets, and much of that attention was on his staunch opposition to abortion. That and his staunchly conservative positions on a lot of socioeconomic issues have made him a favorite of the Right in the United States. Because of the strong association this nation has of African Americans with the liberal and progressive civil rights movement, the overwhelming support African Americans give to the Democratic Party, and the historical racial antagonism between African Americans and conservatives, the common assumption is that African Americans naturally gravitate towards the Left on political and social issues. Yet, Alan Keyes’ public denunciation of legalized abortion only represents the tip of the iceberg of anti-abortion sentiments among African Americans. The prolife or anti-abortion movement among African Americans has been in operation for more than a quarter of a century, but because this movement’s history has fallen under the radar of the mainstream media, liberals, and scholars, the anti-abortion activism of African Americans has gone largely unnoticed.

This article attempts to unearth the African American anti-abortion movement, focusing on the activism of noted movement leaders such as Dr. Mildred Jefferson and the Rev. Jonathan Hunter and movement organizations such as L.E.A.R.N. Inc. (Life Education and Resource Network). The media and academics have largely focused on the intel-

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lectual and elite articulations of Black conservatism (by individuals such as Ward Connerly, Shelby Steele, and Alan Keyes), and thus very little attention has been paid to how Black conservatism is expressed at the community level through social movements. An examination of African American conservative social movements will provide a clearer picture of the diversity within Black conservatism.<sup>2</sup> As progressive economist Julianne Malveaux pointed out in an article over a decade ago, the most

vocal and prominent representatives of Black conservatism tend to be all men.<sup>3</sup> The Black conservative intellectual and political realms have generally been male domains with most of the visible Black conservative thinkers and politicians being men. This is not always, however, the case at the grassroots level. For example, Milwaukee activist Annette “Polly” Williams has been recognized as a pivotal figure in the African American school choice (vouchers/charter schools) movement. Los Angeles resident Ezola Foster has gained prominence through her community activism with her organization Americans for Family Values. Foster was selected by Pat Buchanan to be his running mate in the 2000 presidential elections. It appears that the social movements arena is the area where Black conservative women thrive and occupy leadership roles.

At times some of the practices of the African American prolife movement come into conflict with Black conservative ideals. For example, the manner in which Black prolife activists address issues of race is at times in stark contrast to the manner conservative African American intellectuals and politicians speak to racial issues. Black conservative intellectuals and politicians have often put forth the claim that racism in American society has abated and have often chastised other African Americans for continuing to focus on race.<sup>4</sup> For African American anti-abortion activists, in contrast, highlighting the racism of American society is central in how they justify their position and mobilize their supporters. This example only underscores the multiple ways Black conservatism is articulated. This article looks at how African American anti-abortion activists justify their position and mobilize their supporters, to demonstrate how divergent Black conservatism expressed at the grass roots levels can be from Black conservatism articulated in intellectual or political forums.

At times some of the practices of the African American prolife movement come into conflict with Black conservative ideals. For example, the manner in which Black prolife activists address issues of race is at times in stark contrast to the manner conservative African American intellectuals and politicians speak to racial issues. Black conservative intellectuals and politicians have often put forth the claim that racism in American society has abated and have often chastised other African Americans for continuing to focus on race. For African American anti-abortion activists, in contrast, highlighting the racism of American society is central in how they justify their position and mobilize their supporters.

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### Movement Leaders

Although Alan Keyes has garnered a significant amount of media coverage for his opposition to abortion, there are other African Americans that are more central to the African American anti-abortion movement. As noted previously, an interesting characteristic of the African American prolife movement is the active and dominant roles African American women occupy within it. Women make up the majority of the most influential leaders of the African American prolife movement.

### Mildred Jefferson

Mildred Jefferson can rightly be called the matriarch of the African American prolife movement. Jefferson is significant for both her contributions to the anti-abortion activism of African Americans and her actions within the larger predominantly White anti-abortion movement. At one time Jefferson was the vice president of the Massachusetts Citizens for Life organization and the president of the National Right to Life Committee (NRLC), an organization she helped to found. Jefferson is one of the few African American anti-abortion activists to be nationally rec-

ognized as a leader of the right to life movement.<sup>5</sup> Jefferson gained attention inside and outside of the movement, not only for her accomplishments, but also for the fact that she is an African American Protestant, in a movement where Whites and Catholics have a strong presence. Among her accomplishments, she was the first African American woman to graduate from the Harvard Medical School, was an assistant professor of surgery at Boston University's School of Medicine, and has been acknowledged as playing a leading role in establishing the NRLC. As an African American woman, Jefferson was able to deflect charges of racism and anti-woman bias from critics of the organization. Jefferson was also clear in pointing out to the media the organization's tradition of having non-Catholics in leadership positions. "The Catholic Church is not leading the Right To Life Committee, I am."<sup>6</sup>

Jefferson has also been credited with helping the NRLC make connections with other individuals and organizations within the larger conservative movement, including such leaders as New Right founding father Paul Weyrich. In 1994 Jefferson was unsuccessful in her bid to win Senator Ted Kennedy's seat in the U.S. Senate.

Jefferson stated that she ran against Kennedy because, "it is unconscionable that the destiny of minorities and women in this country should be perceived as dependent on the morally bankrupt leadership of this senior Senator of this Commonwealth."<sup>7</sup> Speaking in November 1994, at a Patriot meeting in Burlington, Massachusetts, she took aim at the "elite" medical profession, the National Organization for Women, and Planned Parenthood for their contributions to the rise of secular humanism.<sup>8</sup> While Jefferson dedicates most of her energy towards abolishing abortion, she has also spoken out against welfare and affirmative action, and supports allowing law enforcement to use tougher measures to curtail crime like other Black conservative leaders.

### Kay Cole James

Kay Cole James is another conservative African American woman who is an influential figure within the movement. Fighting against abortion is one of the many causes James has taken up for the traditional values movement. James served under President Reagan as a member of the White House Task Force for the Black Family and commissioner of the National Commission on Children. Under President

George H. W. Bush, James was the Assistant Secretary for Health and Human Services. In addition to serving Presidents Reagan and Bush, Sr., James has also served under George Allen (former Republican governor of Virginia), as Secretary of Health and Human Resources. James has also been the dean of the school of Government at Regent University begun by Christian Coalition founder, the Rev. Pat Robertson, and a senior fellow at the conservative Heritage Foundation. James has deep ties with the traditional values movement as she was, at one time, a senior vice president of the Family Research Council and has also served on the board of Focus on the Family, an organization founded and headed by influential Christian Right leader Dr. James Dobson.<sup>9</sup>

According to James, her introduction to abortion issues came when she volunteered at a crisis pregnancy center in Roanoke, Virginia. As James stated,

“that was my first exposure to the issue. I was horrified at what I learned and saw. I knew instinctively that killing an unborn baby was wrong, but I had never studied it as an issue. When I began to read the literature and see the pictures and as I became more educated about the issue, I felt very deeply about it. Something akin to righteous indignation stirred within.”<sup>10</sup>

In addition to all her other commitments, James also oversees operations at one of the major African American anti-abortion organizations, Black Americans for Life. James is currently working in Presi-

dent George W. Bush’s administration as the director of the U.S. Office of Personnel Management.

### Star Parker

Star Parker is a veteran conservative activist who is best known for her anti-welfare activism. Besides speaking out against welfare, Parker has also focused on the issue of abortion. Parker strongly favors abolishing the welfare system and is against a woman having an abortion even in cases of rape or incest.<sup>11</sup> Parker also runs an organization she founded called the Coalition on Urban Affairs, an African American grassroots organization that advocates for popular conservative causes such as, school vouchers, enterprise zones, stressing the use of self-help measures, and



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bringing moral restoration to society. Parker has worked extensively with other grassroots conservative organizations such as the Traditional Values Coalition headed by Louis Shelton. In fact, Parker's involvement in politics began around 1991 with her involvement in the movement, headed by the Traditional Values Coalition, to protest the Los Angeles School Board's decision to allow the distribution of condoms in Los Angeles' public schools.<sup>12</sup> Parker has also worked closely with the Christian Coalition in trying to recruit more African Americans into the organization and promoting the organization's mission within the African American community. Parker has a strong following with White conservatives; radio commentator Rush Limbaugh featured her on his radio show after seeing Parker on television speaking at a press conference held for African American conservatives. In addition to the guest appearance on Limbaugh's show Parker also garnered an invitation to speak at a forum hosted by Pat Buchanan when his sister Bay read a profile of Parker in the *Washington Times*.<sup>13</sup>

In her autobiography titled, *Pimps, Whores, and Welfare Brats*, Parker presents herself as the quintessential female version of Horatio Alger, pulling herself up from the culture of poverty to the road of righteousness. Parker documents her transformation from an out of control young woman on welfare, experimenting with drugs, and having sex which led to her having four abortions, to a woman who, through finding the religious and entrepreneurial spirit, was able to get herself off of welfare.<sup>14</sup> In her book Parker readily embraces one of the worst stereotypes of African American women—the welfare queen icon. One could argue that Parker's open embracing of the welfare queen icon has garnered her significant attention from various White conservative sectors. For example, when a reporter asked Parker what she thought was the reason for her popularity among White conservatives Parker responded, "One of the reasons I am so popular with those Republican people is that I validate some of the things they

have been thinking for a long time now: Welfare is a waste."<sup>15</sup> Parker dedicates most of her energy to operating her community based organization Coalition on Urban Renewal and Education (CURE).

### Rev. Johnny Hunter

Reverend Johnny Hunter is the only African American male that commands prominence and status inside and outside of the Black antichoice movement. Hunter is the President of Global Life and Family Mission, a ministry that promotes the ideas of traditional values, racial rapport, and speaking in the interest of children worldwide. Hunter is also the founder of the largest African American anti-abortion organization, Life Education and Resource Network Inc. (L.E.A.R.N.). A self-proclaimed activist of the civil rights movement Hunter attributed his wife's arrest outside of an abortion clinic in Buffalo, NY, two days before Christmas as the catalyst that got him focused on fighting against abortion.

I received a call that day from the Holy Spirit and He just asked one question: 'With whom is God most pleased?' Is God most pleased with ministers like me who could preach a sermon on how the wise men warned Jesus?...Or is He more pleased with those few women from our church who said, 'No child should die two days before Christmas?'<sup>16</sup>

In addition to his links with Republican Party insiders Hunter also has connections with predominantly White anti-abortion organizations like Operation Rescue, and other social conservative activist groups like the Rev. Donald Wildmon's American Family Association.

### Movement Organizations

There are a number of organizations in operation within the African American anti-abortion movement. They vary by size and scope, with names like African Americans for Life, Association of Black Catholics against Abortion, African American Association for the Preservation of Life and Family, and International Black

Women's Network. The exact number of African American antichoice organizations is hard to determine, but there are indications that the numbers are growing as more African Americans are being mobilized to fight against the availability of abortion. The media coverage given to the larger, predominantly White, mainstream anti-abortion organizations, such as Operation Rescue, often overshadows the African American antichoice organizations. Consequently, the U.S. public is not as familiar with African American anti-abortion organizations and the contributions they have made to the "prolife" movement. The more prominent and influential organizations within the African American antichoice movement are featured below.

### African American Life Alliance

The African American Life Alliance (AALA) is a non-profit organization that was founded in 1991 by Washington D.C. native Paulette Roseboro, a single mother of two daughters who quit her job in the federal government to pursue anti-abortion activism full time. The operational base for the organization is Glendale, MD, with a specific focus on the Baltimore and Washington D.C. areas. The organization's mission statement claims to "educate the black community about how sexual promiscuity and illicit moral activities have invaded our communities and are eroding our families, organizations, schools, and churches."<sup>17</sup> In addition to focusing on abortion, the organization also focuses on preaching abstinence to youth, promoting creationism in schools, and defending traditional gender roles for men and women. The information disseminated by the organization is heavily couched within the context of fundamentalist readings of the Bible. The organization's main publication *Life Drum* covers a wide range of topics. In the 1998 winter issue, for example, the range of topics included articles on former president Bill Clinton's veto of a bill that would have banned late term abortion, the problematic racial history of Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger, and an article speculating the potential profits

abortion providers expected to receive from fetal tissue research.

Besides disseminating information the AALA also works in the African American community, offering counseling to pregnant women, holding seminars, and providing speakers to churches, community centers, and historically Black colleges and universities through its speaker's bureau.<sup>18</sup> The hallmark of this organization was its collaboration with the Rev. Johnny Hunter's L.E.A.R.N to mobilize supporters to participate in the "Say So March" of October 1999, one of the first major public actions by the African American anti-abortion movement. The name of the march was taken from the motto, "If you love Children, say so." The three day march originated in Newark, NJ, wound its way through Black neighborhoods in such cities as Philadelphia and Baltimore, and ended at the Supreme Court in Washington D.C., where marchers placed 1452 roses on the steps of the Supreme Court. According to spokespersons, the roses represented the alleged average number of African American children aborted everyday. Similar style marches in other cities have not matched the levels of the 1999 Say So March. An October 2002 Black anti-abortion march in Birmingham, AL, only drew 50 participants.<sup>19</sup> The AALA also works closely with another African American organization, Black Americans for Life.

### Black Americans for Life

The Black Americans for Life (BAL) organization was founded in 1986 with Kay Cole James as its initial president. BAL claims to have a membership of over 3000 members and 40 state and local chapters. BAL functions as an outreach organization for the NRLC. According to James, the recognition by African American anti-abortion activists of the lack of a viable organization for African Americans to attract media attention led to its creation.<sup>20</sup> In addition to giving speeches to

audiences at African American churches and community organizations, BAL also aims its message at African American college students by hosting informational sessions and film screenings on the campuses of predominantly African American colleges and universities.<sup>21</sup> For James, the organization's strong emphasis on placing abortion in a racialized context is vital to mobilizing African Americans to support the organization's antichoice agenda.

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Black Americans for Life produces printed materials that address abortion as it relates to the black community...We feel that Black Americans for Life can reach the black community in ways the traditional pro-life movement cannot.<sup>22</sup>

Although the organization admits Whites, it is clear that its leadership positions must be filled by African Americans. As James stated, "we felt we needed a specifically black organization in order to make our point with the news media and politicians that the prolife movement is

strong in the black community."<sup>23</sup>

The mission statement of BAL states the organization "supports education, legislation and political candidates that seek to protect those victimized by abortion, infanticide and euthanasia."<sup>24</sup> The cover story of one of the organization's newsletters featured the voting patterns of members of the Congressional Black Caucus on abortion related issues during the summer and fall of 1999. All thirty two members of the caucus were given failing grades with the newsletter stating, "...the 32 African American U.S. Representatives who are members of the Congressional Black Caucus have, with rare exception, demonstrated anti-life and pro-abortion commitments."<sup>25</sup> The only African American representative who escaped the organization's wrath was former Republican Oklahoma Congressman J.C. Watts, an African American conservative who holds anti-abortion views.

### L.E.A.R.N. Inc

The largest and most prominent organization within the movement is the Life Education and Resources Network (L.E.A.R.N. INC.) founded by the Rev. Johnny Hunter who also serves as the organization's national director. It was while attending the African American "pro-life" planning conference in Houston, TX, that Hunter got the idea to create L.E.A.R.N. INC. For Hunter it was important that the organization set out as its main goal establishing meaningful connections with African Americans at the grassroots level.

In reaching the African American community and the traditional black church...the primary goal of LEARN is to facilitate a strong, viable grassroots network of African American and minority prolife and profamily advocates who are motivated by their love for Jesus Christ and their neighbors, and by the devastating impact abortion has on mothers and their children.<sup>26</sup>

In addition to educating African Americans about the “racist origins of Planned Parenthood, its founder Margaret Sanger, and the American Eugenics Movements,”<sup>27</sup> the organization also trains activists, produces a library of written and visual material for dissemination, provides speakers to other organizations through its Speakers Bureau, and strongly supports a Right to Life Constitutional amendment. The organization has two main offices, one in Fayetteville, NC, and the other in Houston. It also claims to have connections with over 40 Christian prolife organizations run by groups of color.<sup>28</sup> L.E.A.R.N. functions in a unique fashion: the organization has an identity as a separate entity but also acts as an umbrella organization. Some aspects of L.E.A.R.N. bear a slight resemblance to the heralded civil rights organization, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). L.E.A.R.N. welcomes organizations to become affiliates in the same fashion as the SCLC.<sup>29</sup> One exception is that, where the SCLC only welcomed organizations, L.E.A.R.N. also allows individuals to become members.

There are other structural similarities between L.E.A.R.N. and the SCLC. According to sociologist Aldon Morris, the SCLC leadership believed it was in their best interest not to centralize the activities of their affiliates.

The SCLC’s leaders did not attempt to centralize the activities of its affiliates, because it was felt that centralization would stifle local protest. Rather, the role of SCLC’s affiliates was to organize local movements and address grievances salient in local communities.<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, L.E.A.R.N. is very careful about not infringing on the autonomy of its affiliates.

Each organization or individual that joins the Network remains independent. L.E.A.R.N. INC. will help with organizational efforts to facilitate incorporation in communities if

no similar organization exists. Each organization is a voluntary adjunct to the network...<sup>31</sup>

The SCLC also saw itself playing a role in bringing together leaders of different movements so they could share experiences and resources with each other;<sup>32</sup>

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**For many Black antichoice activists racism as a point of analysis is central in how they articulate and justify their opposition towards abortion. In addition to racism, the themes of victimization and conspiracy are also mainstays in the discourse of the Black “prolife” movement. When the language of this movement is compared with the language of Black conservative intellectuals, it becomes clear that these rhetorical strategies utilized by participants in the Black anti-abortion movement are in opposition to what some Black conservative thinkers feel is the appropriate approach for African Americans to articulate grievances.**

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L.E.A.R.N. too views itself in the same light. At the annual L.E.A.R.N. Leadership Conference fellow anti-abortion activists gather to share information, participate in workshops, and “enjoy fellowship with other like-minded Christians who are also fighting the good fight of faith on the

front lines of the war against the family.”<sup>33</sup> As other conservative organizations have done, L.E.A.R.N.’s conference also functions as a venue where different organizational leaders can gather to evaluate strategies and coordinate new ones. As L.E.A.R.N.’s founder and president, the Rev Johnny Hunter stated, “the conference is a time to share what is working in our different organizations and to learn what pitfalls to avoid.”<sup>34</sup>

### **Framing Abortion: Racial Extinction and Racial Propagation**

Since much of the focus on Black conservatism has been placed on various Black conservative thinkers, their ideas influence how Black conservatism is perceived by those outside of this movement. However, the language of the Black anti-abortion movement shows some distinctive differences between these African American conservative grassroots activists and their intellectual counterparts. These differences illustrate the complexities and fluidity of Black conservatism.

For many Black antichoice activists racism as a point of analysis is central in how they articulate and justify their opposition towards abortion. In addition to racism, the themes of victimization and conspiracy are also mainstays in the discourse of the Black “prolife” movement. When the language of this movement is compared with the language of Black conservative intellectuals, it becomes clear that these rhetorical strategies utilized by participants in the Black anti-abortion movement are in opposition to what some Black conservative thinkers feel is the appropriate approach for African Americans to articulate grievances. For example, Black conservative intellectual Shelby Steele strongly disapproves of the rhetorical approach that has as its foundation what he labels the “memory of oppression.”

I believe that one of the greatest

problems black Americans currently face is one of our greatest barriers to our development in society—is that our memory of oppression has such power, magnitude, depth, and nuance that it constantly drains our best resources into more defenses than is strictly necessary.<sup>35</sup>

Not only does the enemy-memory pull us backward, it also indirectly encourages us to remain victims so as to confirm the power of the enemy we remember and believe in.<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, John McWhorter believes the overemphasis on racism by African Americans leads to a situation where Blacks fall into the state of victimhood and as he sees it, “Victimology, in a word, is a

disease.”<sup>37</sup>

Emphasis on the United States’ historical mistreatment of African Americans and the ways racism has victimized Black Americans is not only the crux of the various arguments used by Black anti-abortionists; one could say that it is the *raison d’être* of the African American anti-abortion movement. As movement participants see it, they are not only speaking out against a medical procedure they view as immoral but as African Americans they are in the forefront of the battle to protect against the “continued violation” of Black bodies. In a paternalistic manner Black anti-abortionists see their mission as protecting Black women’s wombs and the unborn Black children within them. The language within

the African American anti-abortion movement ignores the history of Black women’s agency and activism around their reproductive rights. In fact, the Black antichoice movement’s legitimacy is predicated on portraying Black people and Black women, in particular, as helpless victims not having the consciousness to act in their own reproductive interests.

One of the main arguments used by African American anti-abortion activists is that “abortion is racial genocide.” The argument diverges from the conservatism articulated by their Black conservative intellectual and political counterparts; and it is also not as easy to dismiss it because of the fragments of truth embedded within the rhetoric.



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### Abortion is Racial Genocide

Labeling abortion as racial or cultural genocide plays a prominent role in the rhetorical battle waged by those in the African American anti-abortion movement. Of all of the arguments espoused by antichoice African Americans, no one argument produces as much ambivalence amongst Blacks towards abortion than the linking of abortion with genocide.<sup>38</sup> This has not been lost on this generation of Black anti-abortion activists. In fact, as activist Reginald Jones noted, inserting the word genocide into their discourse is a vital strategy to the success of the movement.

...we must become as adept as our opponents in their use of evocative words and catch phrases...Two words that really cause a stir in the Black community are 'conspiracy' and 'genocide.' The community will be more eager to listen when the issue of the abortion movement and its true agenda for us are explained in these terms.<sup>39</sup>

There are several reasons why this argument produces uncertainty towards abortion rights from select sectors of the African American community. First, the racial mistreatment of Blacks in America has not only led to a lack of trust between some Blacks and the American government but also has influenced some African Americans to view the various social problems impacting them through a conspiratorial lens. When the *San Jose Mercury News* published an expose in August 1996 detailing the possible links between the CIA and the sale of crack cocaine in southern California Black neighborhoods, the report regenerated fears among some Blacks of yet another government conspiracy to oppress African Americans. As Bob Law, a Black radio talk show host stated, "I'm not sure all these things could be happening by chance...The latest situation with the CIA is just confirmation for what a lot of my audience believes is going on."<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, while the conspiratorial angle of the argument is one that many antichoice Blacks highlight frequently, it is disdained by other conservative Blacks. In the Black

conservative publication *Headway*, one journalist spoke disapprovingly of Black America's attraction to conspiracy theories.

Conspiracy theories, coupled with the constant rhetoric of victimization, reinforce the view that black Americans, particularly those living in poverty, are little more than impotent bystanders in their own lives. This is simply not true.<sup>41</sup>

Although very critical of the use of conspiracy theories by Blacks, he aptly pointed out that these theories have a continued attraction among some Blacks because "conspiracies against black Americans do have some historical roots."<sup>42</sup>

Second, the invoking of genocide by Black anti-abortionists brings forth underlying fears among some African Americans of the vulnerability of the race as a whole becoming extinct, or depopulating, as a result of the ravages of racial oppression. For example, when racial violence was committed against African Americans during the early part of the 20th century, segments of the African American community, particularly Black nationalists, were calling for women to reproduce as a response to racial oppression.<sup>43</sup> The abortion is genocide argument was also prominently advocated by Black nationalists of the sixties and early seventies. Ironically, anti-abortion African Americans of today who espouse this view make no acknowledgment of the argument's nationalist history, which parallel nationalism worldwide. In fact, some antichoice African Americans view Black Nationalism as a form of Black racism.<sup>44</sup> Even though the nationalist history of this argument is not openly acknowledged by today's Black antichoice activists, it is clear that they did not conceive the argument themselves. Instead, they have inherited the argument as it has been passed down through generations of African Americans.

While to some the claim that abortion is akin to genocide is hyperbole, this argument still continues to garner attention within the African American community. This argument's ability to, over time, transcend political boundaries within the Black

community is an indication of how deep the fear of racial violence runs within the Black community. The argument's wide appeal not only gives it the appearance of capturing the reality of African Americans in the United States but it also lends the argument the veneer of being commonsensical.

The abortion is genocide argument of Black anti-abortionists comprises three components: the problematic racial history of the birth control movement, the historical abuse of African Americans by the medical establishment, and the social disarray of contemporary Black communities. Integrated throughout each of these components are the three themes of racism, victimization, and conspiracy. Because the abortion is racial genocide argument taps into each of the aforementioned themes and has truths integrated throughout, the argument can be very persuasive and forceful; irrespective of the consequences it may have on Black women.

### Racialized Birthing: The History of the Birth Control Movement

Black anti-abortionists often point to the history of Planned Parenthood as one example of larger social forces "conspiring" to eliminate African Americans. Akua Furlow, Executive Director of L.E.A.R.N., refers to the connection Planned Parenthood founder Margaret Sanger had with the eugenicist movement and her views about population control and Blacks, to support their claim.

Planned Parenthood started back in 1916 to limit the births of minority people...If people would just study the documentation they would find that Planned Parenthood was rooted in racism and founded by a white supremacist...Most of the Planned Parenthood's clinics are in minority communities. The language has changed, but the original intent is still the same-to limit the births of minority people...<sup>45</sup>

But others like scholar Dorothy Roberts state that a more nuanced analysis of Margaret Sanger and the birth control

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movement is needed to understand the complexity surrounding Sanger's views around race and birth control. Roberts points out that Sanger had reasons similar to those of prominent Black leaders such as W.E.B. DuBois for providing education about conception options to poor Blacks. Both Sanger and DuBois felt that better education concerning birth control would help poor Blacks to have an opportunity to live healthier and more successful lives.<sup>46</sup> Sanger's sincere desire to improve the health of poor mothers by making birth control accessible to them and her belief that uncontrolled fertility, not genetics or race, was the main cause of the problems these women faced, separated Sanger from her eugenicist colleagues.<sup>47</sup> Even with these important observations, as Roberts notes, Sanger still had views that were problematic from a racial standpoint.

Sanger nevertheless promoted two of the most perverse tenets of eugenic thinking: that social problems are caused by reproduction of the socially disadvantaged and that their childbearing should therefore be deterred. In a society marked by racial hierarchy, these principles inevitably produced policies designed to reduce Black women's fertility.<sup>48</sup>

Roberts and other scholars argue that the birth control movement of the early 20th century was not in total opposition to the interests of African Americans, and that African Americans did mobilize to voice their own health interests.<sup>49</sup> It is important that this history of African Americans' activism gets told because as Roberts states,

"It would be misleading to paint a picture" of the birth control movement as being "simply thrust upon an unwilling black population."<sup>50</sup> But this is exactly what the Black anti-abortion movement is doing. It is imperative to reveal how Black anti-choice activists omit Black people's agency in this matter for at least two reasons. First, the acknowledgment that African Americans debated among themselves the best approach the community should take regarding family planning, and acted to secure family planning clinics in their local communities, challenges such claims as the one put forth by this Black anti-abortion activist who stated, "When you look at African Americans from a historical standpoint, you do not find abortion as an integral part of our culture."<sup>51</sup> Second, the omission of Black women's activism in the Black anti-abortion narrative of Black women's fertility history leaves intact the false dichotomy of Black women as helpless victims and family planning institutions as the victimizing and conspiring agent.

### **African Americans and the White medical establishment**

The second component of the abortion is racial genocide argument is the historical abuse of African Americans by the predominantly White U.S. medical establishment. African American anti-abortionists frequently make references in their literature to the Tuskegee syphilis experiments or the 1939 "Negro Project" carried out by the Birth Control Federation of America.<sup>52</sup> To African American antichoice activists these troubling historical events are

evidence that African Americans should look warily towards groups, particularly White or White-led health organizations, who claim to be looking after the health interests of African Americans. For example, a pamphlet put out by the Family Assistance Center, a pregnancy crisis center founded by African American anti-choice activist Juliette Bartlett Pack, warned young African American women of Planned Parenthood's intentions "to seduce our community into their ideas of 'family planning' by buying influence with our ministers, doctors, other medical professionals and media outlets."<sup>53</sup>

In another article, activist Michele Jackson invoked the themes of racism and victimization by referencing the historical mistreatment of African Americans by the medical establishment. In this case Jackson was using the medical abuses committed on African Americans as justification for the support of informed consent and waiting period legislation.

As black people we ought to be cautious of any group that wants to deny people's access to informed consent and waiting periods before life-altering surgical and chemical procedure. We should recall noteworthy times when American health professionals betrayed the trust and privilege society has given them by irreparably harming innocent citizens...Our history teaches us that informed consent and waiting periods help protect us from abuse from the medical community and preserve our rights to make informed choices.<sup>54</sup>

### Social Disarray within the community

The third component of the abortion is racial genocide argument, uses the social disarray within poor Black communities as a rationale for prohibiting abortion. This aspect of the argument is voiced as vigorously by today's anti-abortion African Americans as it was by Black nationalists during the twenties and again in the sixties and seventies. The combination of cutbacks in governmental aid, deindustrialization, and continued flight of middle class families from cities, has had deleterious consequences on a number of metropolitan areas in the United States. With diminished tax bases and reduced federal and state financial support, city governments are forced to address an array of social problems with increasingly fewer resources. Because of the racial inequality produced by institutional racism, African American communities have been disproportionately hurt by these structural shocks. African Americans living in inner city communities on the margins of the urban economy are impacted the hardest. Antichoice Blacks use the conditions of this population of African Americans as the basis for their arguments of abortion is racial genocide and then extrapolate from that to cover all African Americans.<sup>55</sup> In one article African American antichoice activist Akua Furlow drove home this point to her readers, linking violence in the larger society to violence against bodies and fetuses.

Recently an anti violence summit meeting was held in Washington, D.C. in which leading African American elected officials, ministers, community activists and leaders in the entertainment industry participated. The summit was an attempt to find ways to bring order and a sense of value for human life, in hope to stem the rising tide of violence...Pictures of young boys and girls gunned down by other youth are commonplace on the evening news...Although noble in its efforts, the summit did not address an important aspect of violence-violence in the womb. Abor-

tion has decimated African Americans in genocidal proportions...The future of African Americans is surely endangered as never before in history. Violence and other social ills facing our community will continue as long as we do not also seek to protect the lives of our unborn.<sup>56</sup>

According to one activist, the battle to mobilize other African Americans against abortion had greater meaning "because the policies of abortion on demand threaten our very survival as a people."<sup>57</sup>

### Racial Depopulation

Why does Black women's access to legal abortion get viewed as a threat to the very survival of the race? At the core of these articulations of urgency among today's Black antiabortionists is their fear of depopulation. Just like their predecessors, today's contemporaries feel that larger White forces are conspiring to reduce the Black population. For example, Black antichoice activists see the disproportionate placement of Planned Parenthood clinics in African American neighborhoods as a clear illustration of the "plot" to control the population of African Americans. "The conspiracy is the fact that 78% of abortion mills are located in our neighborhoods. As a result the Black population is 35% smaller than it otherwise should be."<sup>58</sup> Combining this observation with the fact that various studies illustrate that a disproportionate number of abortions performed in the United States are done on African American women, movement leaders such as Rev. Hunter warn, "Just give us a generation or two and we'll be on the endangered species list."<sup>59</sup>

The expressions of this fear by today's cadre of antichoice African Americans revisits a long held debate in the Black community surrounding the role Black women's reproductive choices play in fighting racial oppression. On one side of the debate advocates such as Black nationalist Marcus Garvey and mainly male members of Black nationalist organizations like the Nation of Islam and the Black Panthers felt it was in the best interest of the Black race

for Black women to continue to reproduce.<sup>60</sup> This follows general nationalist attitudes towards women as the mothers of the nation, whose duty it is to produce offspring (read sons) who would carry on the race/nation. On the other side of the debate was noted scholar and civil rights activist W.E.B DuBois who strongly favored birth control use by African Americans, especially poor Black women. DuBois felt the strength in numbers argument put forth by the Black nationalists was deeply problematic. For DuBois it was imperative that Blacks understood that "among human races and groups, as among vegetables, quality and not mere quantity really counts."<sup>61</sup> In fact, African American women have consistently provided the best insight to the importance of having control over when they decide to have families. Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm eloquently articulated the importance of family planning to women and the problematic nature of the genocide argument.

To label family planning and legal abortion programs "genocide" is male rhetoric, for male ears. It falls flat to female listeners and to thoughtful male ones. Women know, and so do many men, that two or three children who are wanted, prepared for, reared amid love and stability, and educated to the limit of their ability will mean more for the future of the black and brown races from which they come than any number of neglected, hungry, ill-housed and ill-clothed youngsters.<sup>62</sup>

The abortion is racial genocide argument has been effective for the African American antichoice movement in garnering attention among a segment of the Black community. Through various intellectual sleight of hand maneuvers the argument's proponents can weave in bits of informational facts with ideological rhetoric to craft an apocalyptic vision of Blacks in the United States. Because the goal for Black antiabortionists is to move as many African Americans away from supporting legal and safe abortions, the complexities of African American women's reproductive

decisions are often obfuscated; along with any analysis of how labeling abortion as genocide was also a way for Black men to assert control over Black women's reproductive choices. For instance, it is true that many African American women were sterilized without their consent. But what Black anti-abortionists neglect to mention is that many poor Black women, due to a lack of available alternative family planning options (e.g. contraceptives, abortions), also **chose**, out of desperation, to be sterilized in order to prevent unplanned pregnancies.<sup>63</sup>

By connecting the racism of these historical moments with various examples of the racial oppression that many African Americans living on the margins face daily (unemployment, drug addiction, violence, imprisonment, etc.), Black antichoice activists are able to make aborting unborn Black babies appear to be the underhanded plan of sinister forces aiming to rid the United States of African Americans. The combining of historical truth with emotional rhetoric produces an argument that is effective in raising feelings of outrage, anger, and fear. In the end the abortion is racial genocide argument places African American women in a tough position. Under this rationale, Black women who speak out strongly in support of abortion get cast at best as unwilling dupes furthering the "enemy's plan" or worse as "traitors" to the cause of racial liberation. African American women who exercise their right to an abortion are constructed in this narrative as unknowing collaborators in the demise of the race.<sup>64</sup>

### **The impact of the abortion is racial genocide argument on the prochoice movement**

For reproductive rights activists, especially White activists, it is important to remember that the abortion is racial genocide rationale, as problematic as it is, needs

to be taken seriously. The counter arguments must be sensitive to the distrust some African Americans have with U.S. legal, medical, and governmental institutions, due to racist experiences encountered within these establishments. In addition, these counter arguments must also be nuanced in pointing out the ways the logic

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of the abortion is racial genocide argument distorts the racial history of the birth control movement and the struggles by African Americans for reproductive rights. Most importantly, the attention this argument continues to garner among some African Americans should inform the, predominantly White and middle-class, prochoice movement that their reliance on strategies that construct abortion solely in the context of women's individual choices will continue to fall short in two important areas.

First, they will fail in attracting significant numbers of African American women to the movement. Although African Amer-

ican women have abortions at a disproportionately higher rate than White women, according to one estimate, less than five percent of Black women work with White women in the prochoice movement.<sup>65</sup> As activist and scholar Marlene Fried aptly points out, the prochoice movement by constricting its agenda, "has narrowed the movement's base of support and alienated the very constituencies necessary to defend abortion rights."<sup>66</sup> Second, disconnecting abortion from the material circumstances that influence how women arrive at their decisions to have an abortion obfuscates the vital relationship between race, class, and reproductive rights. This, the prochoice movement can not afford to continue doing, especially since, as Fried observes, the anti-abortion movement has forged bonds with other conservative organizations by connecting its agenda to other issues such as sexuality, school prayer, and crime.<sup>67</sup> To advocate for abortion rights through the lens of individual choice is as Rickie Sollinger states, "an invitation...to ignore the relationship between some women's resource-full choice making and other women's resource choicelessness."<sup>68</sup> In the specific case of African American women, especially those who are

impoverished, Dorothy Roberts reminds us they deal with a wide array of forces that limit their reproductive options. Because of this fact, reproductive freedom for Black women is more than having access to safe abortions but also includes the provision of necessary resources that help facilitate healthy pregnancies and families.<sup>69</sup> As long as the prochoice movement opts to stay the course and fight for abortion rights separate from other related issues, it will continue to have the perception among African American and other women of color, that it is a movement that speaks mainly for middle-class White women.

Conclusion

A careful examination of the African American antichoice movement illustrates that a one size fits all approach to understanding and challenging Black conservatism is inadequate. As has been illustrated, Black anti-abortionist language demonstrates that they are not blind to the impact racism has had and continues to have on the lives of African Americans. It would also be inaccurate to generally assert that Black anti-abortionists minimize the racism in U.S. society or are not aware of the material circumstances that poorer African American women face when making their choices whether or not to have an abortion. By examining how Black conservatism is expressed from the grassroots, we can better explain why everyday African Americans can oppose a Black conservative such as Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas and yet hold positions similar to his concerning welfare and self-help strategies. Activists and scholars must begin to direct their focus on the grassroots level because it is there that we can begin to get a better understanding of the fluidity and complexity of Black conservatism in the United States.

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Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Woellert, Lorraine. 2003. "High Noon At The High Court?" *Business Week*, May 26, p.51.

<sup>2</sup> As Deborah Toler has noted, this segment of conservative African Americans has some significant differences from both their conservative intellectual and political counterparts. First, this sector of Black conservatives is overwhelmingly comprised of African American Christian fundamentalist groups. Second, constituency building is seen as a major priority within this movement. Lastly, followers of these movements are more receptive to Afrocentric perspectives. It is important to note that the African American antiabortion movement is one of many grassroots movements mobilized by a segment of conservative African Americans that advocate for traditional values. See Toler, Deborah. 1995. "Black Conservatives." In *Eyes Right!: Challenging the Right Wing Backlash*, edited by Chip Berlet. Boston: South End Press.

<sup>3</sup> Malveaux, Julianne. 1991. "Why are the Black Conservatives all Men?" *Ms. Magazine*, March/April, P. 60.

<sup>4</sup> One example of this perspective is given by John McWhorter, professor of Linguistics at the University of California at Berkley, in his book *Losing The Race*. "Black America today is analogous to a wonderful person prevented by insecurity from seeing the good in themselves. Insecurity has sad, masochistic effects...the race driven by self-hate and fear to spend more time inventing reasons to cry 'racism' than working to be the best that it can be." See McWhorter, John. 2001. *Losing The Race: Self-Sabotage in Black America*. New York: Perennial. P. 29.

<sup>5</sup> Paige, Connie. 1983. *The Right To Lifers: Who They Are, How they Operate, Where Do They Get Their Money*. New York: Summit Books. Pp. 16-17.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p.85.

<sup>7</sup> "AAPS Members run for Congress." *Association of American Physicians and Surgeons Newsletter*. Vol. 50, no.5, May 1994. P.4.

<sup>8</sup> Berlet, Chip, and Matthew N. Lyons. 2002. *Right Wing Populism In America: Too Close For Comfort*. New York: Guilford. Pp. 293-294. According to Berlet and Lyons, the Patriot movement emerged during the early 1990s and its core belief was a conspiratorial view that the government was run by a cadre of secret elites whose objective was to impose on Americans various forms of tyranny. The movement's ideological roots can be traced to conspiracist ideas of the John Birch Society, the insurgency of the Liberty Lobby, and other groups who have historically promoted ideas of White Supremacy and antisemitism. For a more detailed analysis see chapter 14, "Battling The New World Order: Patriots and Armed Militias." Pp. 287-304.

<sup>9</sup> This information was obtained at the web site of the Heritage Foundation. See <http://www.heritage.org/staff/james.html>.

<sup>10</sup> James, Kay Cole. 1992. *Never Forget: The Riveting Story of One's Woman's Journey from Public Housing to the Corridors of Power*. Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan Publishing House. Pp. 125-126.

<sup>11</sup> Murakami, Keri. 1995. "Christian Coalition Trying to Reach Out—African Americans, Rabbi Are Speakers." *Seattle Times*. June 25. P. B1.

<sup>12</sup> Parker, Star. 1997. *Pimps, Whores and Welfare Brats: The Stunning Conservative Transformation Of A Former Welfare Queen*. New York: Pocket Books. P. 7.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>14</sup> In one chapter Parker tells of her first abortion in a fashion that validates the dubious claim of the anti-abortionists that abortion allows women to see the procedure as an escape from their obligation to bear the child resulting from an unplanned pregnancy. According to Parker, her first abortion was, as she put it, "pretty easy." The impact of the procedure had a minimal effect on her, as Parker stated, "I was in an up-beat mood. I was scot-free and ready to resume having a good old time. If I was supposed to come away from that experience feeling remorseful and depressed, it was completely lost on me. I didn't learn a thing. I picked up right where I left off and continued to have promiscuous sex with numerous partners." *Ibid.*, p.18.

<sup>15</sup> Herrmann, Andrew. 1994. "Anti-Welfare Stance Makes her Star of Right." *Chicago Sun-Times*. December 17. P. 23.

<sup>16</sup> Benson, Rusty. 2001. "Black Community Waking To Most Basic Civil Right: African American Pastors are New Abolitionists." *American Family Association Journal*. January. P. 3.

<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.aala.org>

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Reeves, Jay. 2002. "Bama Church Activists Protest Abortion as Genocide." *Sacramento Observer*. October 23. P. C2.

<sup>20</sup> Religious News Services, 1994. "Enlisting Blacks in the Battle Against Abortion." *Christianity Today*. October. P. 63.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p.66.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> See Media Release. 1999. *Black Americans For Life Newsletter*, Spring. P. 4.

<sup>25</sup> "1999 Congressional Black Caucus Continues to Deliver Pro-Abortion Votes." 1999. *Black Americans for Life Newsletter*, Fall. P. 1.

<sup>26</sup> As quoted at <http://www.gateway.org/content/learn.htm>

<sup>27</sup> As quoted at <http://www.learninc.org>

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Morris, Aldon. 1984. *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*. New York: The Free Press. P. 90.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.learninc.org/page/members.php>

<sup>32</sup> Morris, op. cit., p. 91.

<sup>33</sup> As quoted at <http://www.learninc.org/page/members.php>

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Steele, Shelby. 1991. *The Content Of Our Character: A New Vision of Race in America*. New York: Harper-Collins. P. 151.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>37</sup> McWhorter, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>38</sup> In addition to the abortion is racial genocide argument, another popular argument used by antichoice African Americans makes abortion analogous to slavery. Antichoice African Americans attempt to justify their position by attempting to show the similarities between two Supreme Court rulings, the 1857 Dred Scott and the 1973 Roe v. Wade decisions. In the Dred Scott case, a Missouri slave, Dred Scott, sued for his right to be free by arguing that he and his former slave master lived in various states where slavery was not legal. The court ruled against Scott by stating that slaves were considered "private property" of their slave masters and thus they did not have rights recognizable by the court. As Chief Justice Roger B. Taney proclaimed in relation to slaves, "they have no rights which the white man was bound to respect." Antichoice African Americans liken the 1973 Roe decision to the Dred Scott ruling because from their perspective, the Court's legalization of abortion, in essence, said that the rights of the mother trumped the rights of the unborn child. According to antichoice African Americans, both the unborn Black child and slaves were denied their humanity by the Supreme Court. As antichoice African Americans see it, the unborn child is considered as private property of the mother in the same fashion as slaves were deemed to be property of their slave masters in the Scott case. Interestingly, this argument has found favor with both African American and White antichoice activists. The work of J.C. Willke, M.D., who is White, has been a valuable resource for proponents of the argument. See Willke, J.C. 1984. *Abortion and Slavery: History Repeats*. Cincinnati, OH: Hayes Publishing. Many of Willke's arguments have been articulated by various antichoice African Americans. Some antichoice African Americans have gone so far as to claim that primarily White mainstream women's

organizations are conspiring against African Americans by convincing African American women to have more abortions so as to keep Whites as the majority group in society. As one activist stated, "...Some upper middle class white females are not reproducing and they are trying to keep other groups from reproducing so they can remain in the majority... The National Organization of Women (NOW) and the National Association for Reproductive Rights Action League (NARAL) want only the preferred (white), the privileged (wealthy)... They are just trying to play God." Cited in Pack, Juliette Bartlett. 1995. "Abortion: The Black Woman's Voice." Texas Black Americans for Life. Other African American antichoice activists have claimed that organizations like Planned Parenthood encourage African American women to have abortions because of the financial windfall these abortions bring to the organization.

<sup>39</sup> Jones, Reginald. 1999. "We Can Overcome." *Black Americans for Life Newsletter*. Spring. P. 3.

<sup>40</sup> "CIA—drug accusations revive fears of conspiracy." 1996. *Philadelphia Tribune*. October 8. P. 8A.

<sup>41</sup> Brown, Joseph. 1996. "Conspiracy Theories Blind Us To Real Problems, Solutions." *Headway*. June 30. P. 27.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> See Ross, Loretta J. 1998. "African American Women and Abortion." In *Abortion Wars: A Half-Century of Struggle, 1950-2000*, edited by Rickie Solinger. Berkeley, CA: University of California. Pp. 161-208, 169.

<sup>44</sup> In an article that profiles Reverend Johnny Hunter of Life Education and Resource Network (L.E.A.R.N.), Hunter reflected back on his college days at the Hampton Institute and his attachment to the views of Malcolm X by stating, "I became a racist. I didn't hate all whites, just most." Cited in Benson, op. cit., p. 3.

<sup>45</sup> As quoted in Pack, op. cit.

<sup>46</sup> Roberts, Dorothy. 1997. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. New York: Pantheon. P. 80.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., pp. 82-86. Also see Ross, Loretta J. 1993. "African American Women and Abortion: 1800-1970." In *Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women*, edited by Stanlie M. James and Abena P. A. Busia. New York: Routledge. Pp. 141-160, 146-47, 150-57.

<sup>50</sup> Roberts, op. cit., p. 82.

<sup>51</sup> As quoted in Pack, op. cit. It is common to see within the discourse of the Black prolife movement claims like the one made by this activist. Such statements are based more on wishful narration than historical fact. As scholars such as Loretta Ross and Angela Davis have illustrated, the use of abortion has had a long history among Black women in Africa and the United States. See Ross. 1993., op. cit., pp. 144-146. See Davis, Angela. 1990. "Racism, Birth Control, and Reproduction Rights." In *From Abortion to Reproductive Rights: Transforming a Movement*, edited by Marlene Gerber Fried. Boston: South End Press. P. 17.

<sup>52</sup> According to historian Linda Gordon, the "Negro Project" of 1939 was the cooperative attempt of the Birth Control Federation of America and concerned southern state public health officials to curb the problem of southern poverty through birth control measures. More directly, the core of the problem as seen by officials was in the growth of the Black poor in the South. This sentiment was stated as much in the project's proposal: "The mass of Negroes...particularly in the South, still breed

carelessly and disastrously, with the result that the increase among Negroes, even more than among whites, is from that portion of the population least intelligent and fit, and least able to rear children properly." The project hired several Black ministers to travel throughout the South lobbying Southern Blacks to use birth control. A private letter from Margaret Sanger made clear why Black ministers were used in the project: "We do not want word to go out that we want to exterminate the Negro population and the minister is the man who can straighten out that idea if it ever occurs to any of their more rebellious members." Cited in Gordon, Linda. 1990. *Woman's Body, Woman's Right: Birth Control In America*. New York: Penguin. P. 328.

<sup>53</sup> As quoted in Hodge, Sharon Brooks. 1997. "Pregnant Women Seek Help From prolife Groups." *Headway*. August 31. P. 26.

<sup>54</sup> Jackson, Michele. 1999. "Should we Allow Denial of Our Right to Informed Consent About Abortion?" *Black Americans For Life Newsletter*. Spring. P. 1.

<sup>55</sup> The late veteran activist Erma Clardy Craven forcefully made this argument back in the early seventies with her essay, "Abortion, poverty and Black Genocide, Gifts to the poor?" This essay has been identified as a classic among movement activists. No wonder: witness Craven's passion and clarity as she puts forth her argument that the conditions of inner city Blacks in the seventies was tantamount to organized genocide. "The standard housing of the poor in this country where heat, water, and plumbing facilities are lacking, and adequate public services such as garbage removal are withheld, is genocide. The poor food found in the ghetto supermarkets, the absence of health services, and the fires which consume the run-down houses and the little kids who live in them is genocide. The fact that Blacks die six years earlier than whites and the infant mortality rate is twice as high for Blacks is genocide. The condition of the ghetto schools and the quality of public education in Black communities is genocide..." See Craven, Erma Clardy. 1972. "Abortion, poverty and Black Genocide, Gifts to the Poor?" In *Abortion and Social Justice*, edited by T.W. Hilgers and D.J. Horan. New York: Sheed & Ward. Pp. 231-242, 237. Unfortunately what Craven's observations demonstrate is that little has been done to eradicate the various structural problems plaguing inner city blacks, as Craven's description sadly captures the realities of urban poverty today as it did three decades ago.

<sup>56</sup> Furlow, Akua. 1993. "African-Americans and Induced Abortion." *Newsletter for Association for Interdisciplinary Research in Values and Social Change*. Vol. 6, no.1, November/December. P. 1.

<sup>57</sup> Jones, op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> "African Americans for life: Black Baptist pastor speaks at Catholic Interparish Council." *Gulf Coast Christian Newspaper*. P. 3.

<sup>60</sup> Even though there was serious dissension within the Black Panthers around the issue of birth control, the organization was the only Black nationalist organization to support free access to abortions and contraceptives. See Ross. 1998, op. cit., p.181.

<sup>61</sup> See Weisbord, Robert G. 1975. *Genocide? Birth Control and the Black American*. Westport, CT: Greenwood. Pp. 43, 51. It should be pointed out that DuBois and other advocates of the "quality is more important than quantity" argument faced criticism that implicit in this argument was a class bias against the poor having large families. This criticism is still being put forth today by prolife Blacks as illustrated by African American Life Alliance's founder Paulette Roseboro's commentary in the 1998 winter issue of the publication, *Life Drum*. "We

must realize that *elitist bigotry* was not (and is not) reserved for the white Sangers of her day. There were blacks even then who agreed that unfit segments resided in the Negro/Colored population. To some elite Negroes, it was only reasonable to believe elimination of the unfit within the community would clean up the race as a whole. Negroes would then eventually evolve into the *black Aryan* race. Birth control was promoted within the 'Negro' population...as a means to eliminate unwanted pregnancies when, in fact, it was a systematic means to discourage the continued procreation within our poorer, less educated ranks." See Roseboro, Paulette. 1998. "Elite Bigotry: A Black and White Issue?" *Life Drum*. Vol. 2, no. 1. P. 12.

<sup>62</sup> Cited in Ross. 1993, op. cit, p.155.

<sup>63</sup> Ross. 1998, op. cit., p. 177.

<sup>64</sup> African American women who have little knowledge of Black women's history of reproductive rights activism, lack a strong feminist consciousness, or are not as certain in their conviction of supporting abortion can be vulnerable to such an argument. For example, I am reminded of a story a former student told me about the impact the Five percenters, a splinter group of Nation of Islam followers, had on her peer group in New York City. According to the student, during the 1980s the Five percenters gained popularity among many young inner city Black youths, like herself, with the abortion is genocide argument. From the perspective of the Five percenters, these youth were aiding in the combat against White supremacy by reproducing the "next generation" that would continue the struggle. As my student noted, a number of her friends were taken by the argument. One friend ended up having more than 5 children before the age of 33. As my student notes, the friend's conviction in her decision to bear so many children came with her belief that she was making a contribution to the "cause."

<sup>65</sup> Ross, Loretta J. 1990. "Raising Our Voices." In *From Abortion to Reproductive Freedom*, op. cit., Pp. 138-143, 142-43.

<sup>66</sup> Fried, Marlene Gerber. 1990. "Transforming the Reproductive Rights Movement: The Post-Webster Agenda." In *From Abortion to Reproductive Freedom*, op. cit., pp. 1-15, 9.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Sollinger, Rickie. 2001. *Beggars and Choosers: How Politics of Choice Shapes Adoption, Abortion, and Welfare in the United States*. New York: Hill and Wang. P. 33.

<sup>69</sup> Roberts, op. cit., p. 300.

# Books Received

Eric Alterman

*What Liberal Media?: The Truth About BIAS and the News*

(New York, NY: Basic Books, 2003), hb, 322pp, index.

William Ayers, Bernardine Dohrn, and Rick Ayers, Eds.

*Zero Tolerance: Resisting the Drive for Punishment*

(New York, NY: The New Press, 2001).

Michael Barkun

*A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*

(Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), hb, 243pp, index.

Gregory Baum

*Nationalism, Religion, and Ethics*

(Montreal, QE: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), pb, 165pp, index.

William J. Bennett, John J. Dilulio, Jr., and John P. Walters

*Body Count: Moral Poverty*

(New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

John Benton

*Every Lady Deserves A Chance: The Story of the Walter Hoving Home*

(Garrison, NY: Walter Hoving Home, 2001), pb, 166pp.

Robert James Bidinotto, Ed.

*Criminal Justice?: The Legal System vs. Individual Responsibility*

(Irvington-on-Hudson, NY: Foundation for Econ. Education, 1996).

Taylor Branch

*Pillar of Fire: America in the King Years 1963-65*

(New York, NY: Touchstone / Simon & Schuster, 1998), pb, 746pp, index.

Elaine Brown

*The Condemnation of Little B*

(Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002).

Daniel Burton-Rose, Ed.

*The Ceiling of America: An Inside Look At The U.S. Prison Industry*

(Monroe, ME: Common Courage, 1998).

Frank G. Carrington

*The Victims*

(New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House Publishers, 1975).

Steven M. Chermak

*Searching for a Demon: The Media Construction of the Militia Movement*

(Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 2002).

David Chilton

*The Great Tribulation*

(Tyler, TX: Dominion Press, 1997), pb, 195pp.

Nils Christie

*Crime Control as Industry: Towards GULAGS, Western Style*

(New York, NY: Routledge, 1996).

Lane Crothers

*Rage on the Right: The American Patriot Movement*

(Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), pb, 205pp, index.

Alexander J. De Grand

*Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany: The 'Fascist' Style of Rule*

(New York, NY: Routledge, 1995), pb, 102pp, index.

Myra Marx Ferree, Judith Lorber, and Beth B. Hess

*Revisioning Gender*

(Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999), pb, 500pp, index.

Joshua D. Freilich

*American Militias: State-Level Variations in Militia Activities*

(New York, NY: LFB Scholarly Publishing, 2003), hb, 183pp, index.

Lawrence M. Friedman

*Crime and Punishment in American History*

(New York, NY: Basic Books, 1993).

Carolyn Gallaher

*On the Fault Line: Race, Class, and the American Patriot Movement*

(Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), pb, 273pp, index.

Mark Gerson

*The Neoconservative Vision: From the Cold War to the Culture Wars*

(Lanham, MD: Madison Books, 1997), pb, 368pp, index.

Chester Hartman, Ed.

*Challenges to Equality: Poverty and Race in America*

(Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2001), pb, 396pp, index.

James and Marti Hefley

*The Secret File on John Birch*

(Hannibal, MO: Hannibal Books, 1995), pb, 203pp, with index, list of publisher's other titles.

Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, Sr., Rep. Jesse L. Jackson, Jr. and Bruce Shapiro

*Legal Lynching: The Death Penalty and America's Future*

(New York, NY: New Press, 2001).

Gary S. Katzmann, Ed.

*Securing Our Children's Future: New Approaches to Juvenile Justice and Youth Violence*

(Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2002).

Maria Kefalas

*Working-Class Heroes: Protecting Home, Community, and Nation*

(Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003), pb, 203pp, index.

**Douglas Kellner**

*From 9/11 to Terror War: The Dangers of the Bush Legacy*

(Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), pb, 317pp, index.

**Mark Kozlowski**

*The Myth of the Imperial Judiciary: Why the Right is Wrong about the Courts*

(New York, NY: New York University Press, 2003).

**Jane Kramer**

*Lone Patriot: The Short Career of an American Militiaman*

(New York, NY: Vintage, 2002), pb, 259pp.

**Elinor Langer**

*A Hundred Little Hitlers: The Death of a Black Man, the Trial of a White Racist*

(New York, NY: Metropolitan/Henry Holt, 2003), hb, 398pp, index.

**Jerry Lembcke**

*CNN's Tailwind Tale: Inside Vietnam's Last Great Myth*

(Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), hb, 215pp, index.

**Julia Lesage, Abby L. Ferber, Debbie Storrs, and Donna Wong**

*Making a Difference: University Students of Color Speak Out*

(Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), pb, 242pp, index.

**Manning Marable**

*Black Liberation in Conservative America*

(Boston, MA: South End Press, 1997).

**Jonathan Marcus**

*The National Front and French Politics: The Resistible Rise of Jean-Marie Le Pen*

(New York, NY: New York University Press, 1995), pb, 212pp, index.

**Gary T. Marx and Douglas McAdam**

*Collective Behavior and Social Movements: Process and Structure*

(Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994), pb, 144pp, index.

**Reed Massengill**

*Portrait of a Racist: The Real Life of Byron De La Beckwith*

(New York, NY: St. Martin's Griffin, 1996), pb, 403pp, index.

**Marc Mauer and Meda Chesney-Lind, Eds.**

*Invisible Punishment: The Collateral Consequences of Mass Imprisonment*

(New York, NY: The New Press, 2002).

**Marc Mauer and The Sentencing Project**

*Race to Incarcerate*

(New York, NY: The New Press, 1999).

**Doug McAdam and David A. Snow**

*Social Movements: Readings on Their Emergence, Mobilization, and Dynamics*

(Los Angeles, CA: Roxbury Publishing Company, 1997), pb, 557pp, index.

**M. Lester Oshea**

*A Cure Worse Than the Disease: Fighting Discrimination Through Government Control*

(Tampa, FL: Hallberg Publishing Corp., 1999).

**Greg Palast**

*The Best Democracy Money Can Buy*

(New York, NY: Plume, 2002), pb, 367pp, index.

[Donated by Mary Ceil McManus, Chicago, IL]

**Christian Parenti**

*Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis*

(New York, NY: Verso, 1999).

**Francesca Polletta**

*Freedom is an Endless Meeting: Democracy in American Social Movements*

(Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002), hb, 283pp, index.

**Elihu Rosenblatt, Ed.**

*Criminal Injustice: Confronting the Prison Crisis*

(Boston, MA: South End Press, 1996).

**Luana Ross**

*Inventing the Savage: The Social Construction of Native American Criminality*

(Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1998).

**Paula Rothenberg, Ed.**

*Racism and Sexism: An Integrated Study*

(New York, NY: St. Martins Press, 1988), pb, 404pp.

**Jael Silliman and Anannya**

**Bhattacharjee, Eds.**

*Policing The National Body: Race, Gender, and Criminalization*

(Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002).

**Charles Tilly**

*Stories, Identities, and Political Change*

(Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), pb, 255pp, index.

**France Winddance Twine and**

**Kathleen M. Blee**

*Feminism and Antiracism: International Struggles for Justice*

(New York, NY: New York University Press, 2001), pb, 389pp, index.

**Bruce Wright**

*Black Robes, White Justice: Why Our Legal System Doesn't Work For Blacks*

(New York, NY: Kensington Publishing Corp., 1993).

## Videos Received

**Richard Ray Perez and Joan Sekler**

*Unprecedented: The 2000 Presidential Election*

(Los Angeles: Shout! Factory, 2002)

[Donated by Paula VanDusen, Denver, CO.]

Compiled by PRA Staff

# Eyes RIGHT

## CHILLING OUT ACADEMIA

Campus Watch, created by Daniel Pipes' Middle East Forum, is one of the "Websites that monitor university faculty for evidence of alleged bias against the US and Israel." Sites such as Campus Watch and Luann Wright's NoIndoctrination.org have been instrumental "in a congressional panel seeking increased oversight of federally funded international studies programmes... 'to ensure the appropriate use of taxpayer funds,' [according to] congressman Peter Hoekstra [R-MI]."

"Middle East Forum set up Campus Watch a year ago to compile online 'dossiers' on academics, especially Middle Eastern specialists, it considers anti-Israel and pro-Arab...."

Campus Watch is one of several groups that began to monitor university faculty after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Another, NoIndoctrination.org, invites students to report on professors they consider biased. To date, it lists 85 US academics."

"Campus Watch has stopped posting its dossiers online in a gesture of goodwill, it said, because of the public outcry likening the posting to a blacklist, not to mention an incentive to students to spy on their professors... [but not before] the site has forced the closure of a University of Michigan website, which it said contained radical Islamic teachings."

"Luann Wright, the founder and president of NoIndoctrination.org, said the organisations 'only want to promote open inquiry and are not out to 'chill' the academic community.'"

*Source: "Online 'blacklists' of anti-US faculty win in Washington."*

*Jon Marcus, The Times Higher Education Supplement, 3 October 2003*

## DEFENDING GOD AND COUNTRY

Juggling marriage protection and a 10 Commandments defense can be quite a circus, but the Concerned Women for America urges its supporters not to give up.

According to CWA, "Since the removal of the Ten Commandments monument from the rotunda of the Alabama State Supreme Court, there has been a sense of urgency to protect our Constitutional right to post the Ten Commandments in public areas. Rep. Robert Aderholt's (R-Alabama) Ten Commandments Defense Act (HR 2045) is designed to protect the authority of individual states to display the Ten Commandments in public places and ensures the freedom of religious expression under the First Amendment to the Constitution.

The passage of this bill is essential in protecting our freedom and putting an end to discrimination against religion under the smokescreen of separation of church and state."

And surely, since the Senate can't be seen as having nothing in its bag of tricks, "Sen. Wayne Allard (R-Colorado) has introduced S.1558, the Religious Liberties Restoration Act in the Senate. This bill would ensure our religious freedoms including displaying the Ten Commandments, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance with 'one nation under God,' and preserving the national motto, 'In God we trust.'"

*Source: CWfA Email Alert, 9/11/03*

## IT'S MARRIAGE, STUPID!

The War in Iraq? Healthcare? Education? Jobs? No! Of course not. Saving marriage is the burning issue for the 2004 elections according to the Family Research Council (FRC).

Speaking at the Marriage Protection Week press conference in Washington on 2 October 2003, FRC president Tony Perkins stated:

"We're here this morning because we believe marriage; the very foundation of our nation is in danger." And to think we naively believed all along that it was liberty or equality that were the very foundation of this nation.

Mr. Perkins says that, "The Supreme Court of Vermont has imposed a counterfeit form of marriage on that state against the will of its people. The Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts is poised to force the recognition of same-sex marriage on the people of

Eye  
LASHES

"The heart of Greenpeace's mission is the violation of the law."

U.S. Department of Justice

*—in its indictment of Greenpeace in Federal Court in Miami. The law in question is an obscure and archaic 1872 law against sailor-mongering that John Ashcroft's DOJ is using to charge Greenpeace USA. For details see <http://www.greenpeaceusa.org/>*

that state as well. Such a ruling will no doubt open the floodgates of litigation demanding all fifty states recognize homosexual marriages.”

“This is NOT happening because the American people want it. It is NOT happening because state legislators are voting for it. It is happening because of the black plague — From the Pledge of Allegiance to the Ten Commandments to the Do Not Call campaign”—and NOW to the very institution of marriage—unelected judges in black robes are not only ruling against the wishes of the American people, they are overturning laws passed by the elected representatives of the people.”

“There is only one way to stop this black plague. Our leaders in Congress and the executive branch must take a stand for marriage. To encourage elected officials to do that, Family Research Council today is announcing a ‘Marriage Protection Pledge’ which we will be asking every lawmaker at the state and federal level to sign. The pledge defines marriage as the legal union of one man

and one woman. We believe this is THE issue of our time and Family Research Council will use every resource at its disposal to ensure pro-family voters know where the candidates stand as they enter the voting booth in 2004.”

*Source: FRC Announces Plans To Make Protecting Marriage THE Issue Of 2004, FRC Online Press Release, 10/2/03.*

**EXPORTING ROBOCOP**

“In October 2001, just a month after the terrorist attacks on Washington and New York, when questions of security were on the minds of public officials everywhere, the leftist mayor of Mexico City, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, surprised everyone by ceremoniously inviting the controversial soon-to-be ex-mayor of New York, Rudolph Guiliani, to advise the authorities of the Mexican megalopolis on the implementation of the no-less-controversial plan called ‘zero tolerance,’ the idea that no crime is too small to be prosecuted.

**HAIKU**

race, gender, and  
class  
invisible yet so  
strong  
the threads that  
bind us

*by Chip Berlet*

For the modest sum of \$4.3 million, Mayor Guiliani and his team of consultants would commit themselves to developing a plan to implement zero tolerance in Mexico City....The city’s wealthiest entrepreneurs, led by the billionaire Carlos Slim, agreed to pay the entire bill.”

*Source: NACLA: Report on the Americas, Vol. 37, no. 2, Sept/Oct 2003, p. 22.*

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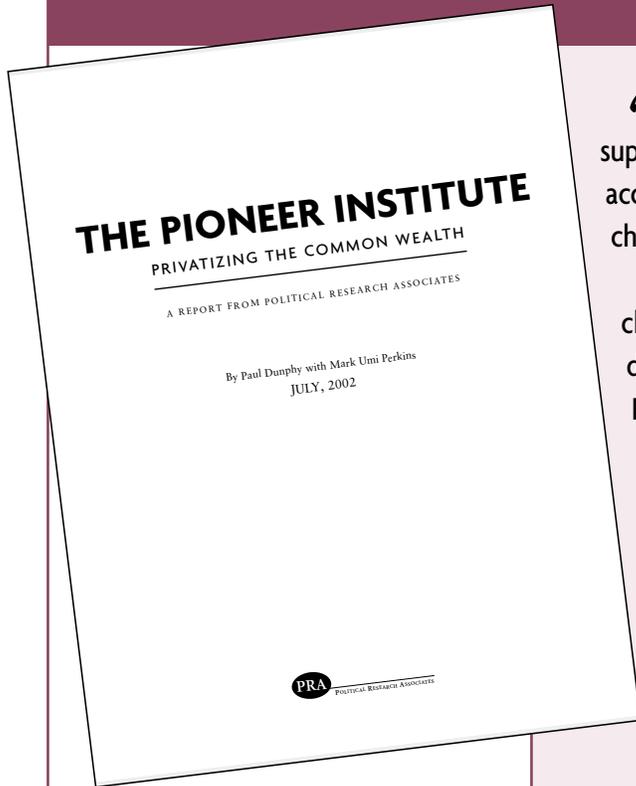
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