Population Control & Reproductive Justice

Loretta J. Ross, SisterSong
Fatima Cortez-Todd, Co-Founder, Mariposa Center for Spiritual Healing & Education
August 29, 2012
RJ and Population Control Consequences

- Threatens communities of color
- Invokes racist stereotypes
- Limits women’s reproductive freedoms
- Resurrects eugenics thinking
- Divides the pro-choice and RJ movements and the environmental justice and environmental movements
- Links apparently disparate public policies to manipulate targeted populations
- Undermines human rights obligations
Population Control in the Past

- Native American children removed to boarding schools
- Christian Movement encouraging Native women to marry White men – globally in New Zealand (“Rabbit Proof Fences”)
- Sterilization Abuse – Native American, Mexican, Puerto Rican and African American communities
- Experimentation on Puerto Rican women for birth control pill development – “precocious puberty”
Population Control = Community Control

Human population control is the practice of artificially altering the rate of growth of a human population by limiting the population's birth rate, usually by government mandate or private philanthropy, and has been undertaken as a response to factors including high or increasing levels of poverty, social unrest, political fears, terrorism, environmental concerns, religious reasons, and overpopulation. While population control can involve family planning measures that improve people's lives by giving them greater control of their reproduction, most programs are racially targeted and have exposed vulnerable people to exploitation, in that depopulated lands cannot protect their own natural resources. Whether pro-natalist (wanting more births) or anti-natalist (limiting births), controlling populations is ultimately about controlling communities and the people therein. It is the opposite of freedom and self-determination.

Article 2

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.
Universal Declaration of Human Rights – December 10, 1948

Article 25

(1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

(2) Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.
Population Control is achieved through…

- Denial of Social Services
- Denial of Human Rights
- Drug Testing
- Child Exclusions
- Immigration Restrictions
- Closing health services
- Immigration Restrictions
- Closing health services
- Drug testing
- Child Exclusions
Child Exclusions

TANF (Temporary Aid to Needy Families) was created by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act by President Bill Clinton in 1996, also known as welfare reform. Before TANF, each family member was entitled to an allotment of welfare benefits; if a family had a child while receiving welfare assistance, the grant amount would increase moderately. However, this changed in 1992 with New Jersey being the first state to implement a “family cap” policy. Currently, about 23 states have implemented some type of a “family cap” or “child exclusion” policy. Prior to TANF, under the federal Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) states had to obtain waivers before imposing family cap policies.
Population Control achieved through Racial Controversy

Gentrification
- Kerner Commission 1968 Report – Creation of Section 8 vouchers
- "Our nation is moving toward two societies, one black, one white—separate and unequal."
- Spatial De-concentration to de-populate inner cities
- Increase police state

Push & Pull Factors
- Shut down public services in inner cities
- Eliminate schools, fire departments, hospitals, health centers, stores
- Eliminate public housing
- Reduce affordable housing stock
- Provide means for people to move
Racialized myths of “undeserving” unfairly living off of “hard-working”

- “Welfare queen” rhetoric such as Santorum at 2012 RNC Convention
- Myths about Obama removing work requirements from TANF
- Tea Party “Take our Country Back” demands
Prison Industrial Complex

• Massive incarceration – more than 2.3 million people
• Privatizing prisons to become profit centers (Corrections Corporation of America)
• Voting disenfranchisement
• Expansion of definitions of crimes (pan-handling, urban camping, child abuse—National Advocates for Pregnant Women)
• Reproductive oppression of incarcerated women
Financial Deregulation

- Credit Scores discrimination
- Auto Insurance and Jobs linked to Credit Scores
- Health Insurance Discrimination
- Mortgage Fraud
- Blaming Community Reinvestment Act of 1977
- Blaming People of Color for Mortgage Crisis
Zoning & Land Use Ordinances

• Occupancy Limits used to discriminate
• Denial of property rights
• Denial of Right to Return (Katrina)
• Denial of municipal benefits (Right to City Movement)
• Limits affordable housing
• Abuse of Eminent Domain laws
• Toxic dumps in communities of color
• Targeted regulation of clinics (TRAP laws)
RJ Responses to Population Control

1. Reframe and broaden the definition of population control
2. Reaffirm our RJ core values – to right to have a child, not have a child, and parent our child in safe and healthy environments (affirms UN CEDAW and CRC treaties)
3. Counter anti-immigrant movement and links to environmentalism (Center for New Community)
4. Shared learning to help people make the connections
5. End isolation of women’s rights from other human rights issues by linking to other movements
6. Expose disguised eugenics and white supremacist thinking
7. Challenge “feminist” and “conservationist” co-optation of our values to achieve population control (sometimes called “population justice”)
8. End the silence on Population Control!
Additional Resources

Southern California Review of Law and Women's Studies Law Center
University Park
Los Angeles, CA 90089-0071
Additional Resources

~ Population and Development Program – “Different Takes” Publication: http://popdev.hampshire.edu/


~ Population Control: Real Costs, Illusory Benefits – by Steven Mosher

~ Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population – by Matthew Connelly

Fighting Overpopulation Myths Books by Betsy Hartmann:

~ Making Threats: Biofears and Environmental Anxieties

~ Reproductive Rights and Wrongs (Revised Edition): The Global Politics of Population Control
Support SisterSong Financially!

JOIN OUR
above & beyond
challenge
2012
FIVE FOR $25 ONLINE NOW!

SisterSong ♦ 1237 Ralph David Abernathy SW
♦ Atlanta, GA 30310
www.SisterSong.net
How to Support SisterSong

- Become an individual or organizational member (rhiannon@sistersong.net)
- Join our Listserv (dionne@sistersong.net)
- Schedule a training (monica@sistersong.net)
- Spread the word! Everyone is welcome!