

The Fight for Reproductive



FREEDOM

A NEWSLETTER FOR STUDENT and COMMUNITY ACTIVISTS

In this election year it is more important than ever that we do not allow mainstream politics and political agendas to dominate our visions for social justice.

We must not waver in our struggle for reproductive freedom and social justice for all.

In this special Election Year Issue of “The Fight for Reproductive Freedom” we bring to you some of the concerns that are NOT being raised in the Presidential Debates. These are the social justice issues that push us to think broadly and act locally. These are some of the debates left off of the Senate floor.

Yes we want the right to an abortion! But we also want the right to have a healthy baby, and the economic support to help our families survive.

Yes we want our choices! But we need true and unfettered access to the resources that will help us make the best decisions for OUR lives.

Yes we want programs in our communities that make these choices a reality! But we also want to ensure that each of us lives a life in which our human rights are respected and human security is guaranteed!

This issue of “The Fight for Reproductive Freedom” discusses marriage equality, the effect of war on our reproductive rights and information about the global HIV/AIDS crisis. Such analyses seek to inform our politics and activism to ensure that the fight for reproductive freedom crosses traditional boundaries and brings us together to ensure our success!



Activists marching for reproductive freedom.



Hampshire College students at the March for Women's Lives in Washington D.C., April 25, 2004.

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Unseen Collateral3
- Reproductive Wrongs.....6
- Untying the Knots.....8

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2004 Conference



Activists/students gather at CLPP's annual conference in Amherst, Massachusetts.



Activists/students attend workshops at CLPP's annual conference.

UNSEEN COLLATERAL

Military culture and violence against women

RYN GLUCKMAN

After 9/11 the Bush Administration called on the suffering and oppressed women of Afghanistan as one of the reasons to bomb one of the poorest countries in the world. Bush revived this argument as another justification for war in Iraq – to free the women of Iraq from Saddam’s stifling and retrograde regime. Not only was military action advertised as gender liberation, but women soldiers serving in the Gulf were touted as having a “liberating influence on Arab women.”ⁱ Images of women like Condoleezza Rice, Jessica Lynch, Shoshanna Johnson, and even Lyndi England, Maj. General Barbara Fast, and the other women implicated in the Abu Ghraib tortures are used as illustrations that the military isn’t a bad place for a girl to make her career.

But to take the claims of gender liberation and job equity at face value is to ignore the truth that the military, war, and the culture of militarism depends on the suppression of women’s voices and perpetuation of violence against women. The claims of liberation and gender equality that political leaders and the media spin out during military campaigns masks a more insidious campaign against sexual and reproductive health that is central to the military, and stands in stark contrast to the actual reality of their commitment to end violence against women. Let me offer some examples. One month after promising “educational and medical assistance to Afghani women and children” President Bush withheld \$45 million in funding to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) which provides basic health assistance in Afghanistan.ⁱⁱ While U.S. women soldiers were supposed to be modeling “liberation” for the Middle East, reports from Iraqi women indicate the situation has deteriorated since the first Gulf War and is far worse since

the U.S. invasion and occupation. The UN Fund for Women has reported “increased mortality rates...a significant increase in malnutrition among women and children; and an added burden of responsibility as women had to care for children traumatized by war, disease and malnutrition.”ⁱⁱⁱ In addition to threats from organized gangs and insurgents, women are also subject to the same prison conditions

**Reports of sexual harassment
and domestic violence are part of
the daily life of military service**

uncovered in Abu Ghraib. Reports from Amnesty International on the treatment of Iraqi women in U.S. military prisons include rape (sometimes resulting in pregnancy), humiliation, and forced exposure at gunpoint.

The women who serve in the military are not exempt from this violence. Reports of sexual harassment and domestic violence are part of the daily life of military service and not, as the figureheads might have you believe a few unfortunate incidents. In 1993 the Denver Post interviewed more than sixty women who had been raped or sexually assaulted in

the U.S. military and never reported attacks, fearing retaliation.^{iv} The wives and partners of those in the military live with violence as well. The Bureau of Justice estimates that 2,000 women are killed yearly by their partners in domestic violence incidences. The rates of abuse are two to five times higher in military homes.^v Clarissa Rojas accurately observes that this statistic is no coincidence, “The language of ‘hunting down’ the ‘enemy’ also leads to extensions of military violence, where the practices of war become the practices of relationships.”

Upon closer examination it becomes clear that rather than liberation, violence against women is a deep part of a military culture. In fact, the acceptability of a military campaign or presence, or a war, relies upon a version of femininity that validates sexual subordination and violence, even as it claims to be a liberatory force. In her book, *Maneuvers*, Cynthia Enloe outlines the necessity of maintaining a military culture of violence against women:

Militaries rely on women, but not all women experience militarization identically. Militaries have needed, and continue to need, some women to provide commercialized sexual services to male soldiers, other women to commit themselves to marital fidelity in military families; simultaneously, they need still other women to find economic security and maybe even pride in working for defense contractors. At times governments even need some civilian women to act as feminist lobbyists promoting women’s right to serve in the states’ military.^{vi}

It is not just that some parts of the military are bad, or that military reform will core the few rotten apples and leave an essentially equitable and just machine. It’s that the apples aren’t falling far from the tree.

Most insidious is how this culture of militarism permeates the media and domestic policy, in times of war and peace. The reality of women’s lives is all but invisible in the mainstream

media and women’s voices are shut down. This kind of violence, as well as the abuse of sex workers, decreased funding for social services, and restriction of movement, rarely go reported in the mainstream media. When they are, it is portrayed as an unfortunate but isolated incident, much like the rape and abuse in Iraqi prisons. During war, the first voices to be eliminated from the public sphere are those

Upon closer examination it becomes clear that rather than liberation, violence against women is a deep part of a military culture.

belonging to women. According to a study conducted by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, in the month following September 11, women were outnumbered by 10 to 1 on op-ed pages of the New York Times, the Washington Post, and USA Today. Similarly, while Bush’s 90% approval rate was consistently hailed, a poll finding that 48% of women supported limited or no military action was severely under-reported.^{vii} Not only are women’s lives put in danger but their public opinions and accounts of their experiences are silenced by the culture of militarism.

Challenging the military culture means actively working to make connections between seemingly unrelated issues: sex work, poverty, domestic violence, war, and the prison-industrial complex. In her essay “World War Culture” Meredith Craft describes the commitment of feminist activists in the former Yugoslavia to making these connections: During the wars that ensued, when most other contacts

between the former republics were broken, some feminist groups stayed in clandestine communication and developed into pacifists, helping men who were hiding from the draft and moving into the leadership vacuum left by the men's absence. Many of these activists had done advocacy for battered women before the war; they moved in to work with women war victims in the belief that rape in wartime and domestic violence are part of the same continuum, enraging nationalists by refusing to focus on the ethnic motives for rape.^{viii}

By building alliances with activists and human rights advocates all over the world, working on a variety of issues, we will be able to create a network of support and response, and be more equipped to critique calls to arms and military abuses carried out in our name. Building these bridges flouts the military myth that violence against women occurs in isolation and is an excusable mistake.

Resources

Madre

www.madre.org

Women of Color Resource Center

www.coloredgirls.org

American Friends Service Committee

www.afsc.org

The Committee on Women, Population, and the Environment

www.cwpe.org

For more information on the effect of militarism on reproductive justice visit:

Ten Reasons Why Militarism is Bad for Reproductive Freedom

Available from the Population and Development Program

http://clpp.hampshire.edu/different_takes.htm

Militarized Zones

Available from the Committee on Women, Population, and the Environment

www.cwpe.org

<http://www.cwpe.org/militarized%20zones/militarized%20zones.pdf>

i Points, Kari. "Reporting Conventions Mask Sexual Politics." Center for Media Literacy. www.medialit.org/reading_room/article71.html

ii Sere, Adriene. "The Best and the Brightest." *Said It*. Vol. 3 No. 4 2002. www.saidit.org

iii Buffa, Andrea. "Iraqi Women Under Siege: unemployment, violence rising." *WarTimes*. www.wartimes.org

iv Herdy, Amy. "Betrayal in the Ranks: Congress plans hearings on sex assaults in military." *Denver Post*. 2/12/2004.

<http://www.denverpost.com/Stories/0,1413,36~30137~1950523,00.html>

v Rojas, Clarissa. "War Hits Home for U.S. Women." *WarTimes*. www.wartimes.org

vi Enloe, Cynthia. *Maneuvers*. U. of California Press: Berkeley. 2000 p. xii

vii Jennifer Pozner. "Casualty of War: The U.S. Press Corps wimps out." *Ms*. December 2001/January 2002: 33-34.

viii Tax, Meredith. "World Culture War." *The Nation*. May 17, 1999. www.thenation.com

REPRODUCTIVE WRONGS: Important battles in the fight

THE HIV/AIDS CRISIS

This past July, Bangkok, Thailand hosted the International AIDS Conference. AIDS is perhaps one of the most urgent and devastating reproductive rights crises facing the US and the world today. It is extremely important for all activists who fight for reproductive freedom to know that HIV/AIDS is a serious reproductive rights concern.

Here are some important statistics and web resources for those who want to learn more:

How many people are affected by HIV/AIDS?

- At the end of 2003 there were 38 million people living with AIDS
- There were 5 million new HIV infections in 2003
- There were 3 million deaths due to HIV/AIDS in 2003
- At the end of 2001, a staggering 21.8 million people had died from HIV/AIDS.

According to the UN AIDS 2004 there are several major challenges to overcome

- Women are increasingly at risk of infection. As of December 2003, women accounted for nearly 50% of all people living with HIV worldwide.
- Young people (15-24 year olds) account for nearly half of all new HIV infections.
- Only 7% of the people who need antiretroviral treatment in developing countries are receiving it.
- In low and middle income countries in 2003, only one in ten pregnant women was offered services for preventing mother to child HIV transmission.
- Stigma and discrimination directly hamper the effectiveness of AIDS responses, stop people from being tested for HIV, prevent the use of condoms, and prevent marginalized groups, like injecting drug users, from receiving the care and support they need.
- AIDS has killed one or both parents of an estimated 12 million children in sub-Saharan Africa and too many of the orphans are not properly cared for.

HIV and AIDS: A reproductive rights issue

As these statistics have shown, women and their families are very strongly affected by this global AIDS crisis. A woman's right to have children or to choose not to have them is severely restricted in many parts of the world if she is HIV positive. In much of the attention paid to pregnant women, the focus is on preventing mother to child transmission (MCMT). Less attention is given to these women as women and they are often restricted in their right to become pregnant, carry a pregnancy to term, and even marry.

for reproductive freedom

Women are sometimes criminalized by policies meant to curb MCMT and are in danger of coerced abortions and the stigmas promoted by mandatory testing, which often discourages women from seeking prenatal care. In our efforts to broaden the scope of reproductive justice it is essential that we understand HIV/AIDS as a reproductive justice concern.

Resources

Center for Reproductive Rights, HIV/AIDS: Reproductive Rights on the Line, December 2002, http://www.reproductiverights.org/pub_bp_hiv.html (9 August 2004).

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for HIV, STD and TB Prevention Divisions of HIV/AIDS Prevention Basic Statistics, 6 July 2004, <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/stats.htm>.

UNAIDS, 2004 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic Executive Summary, June 2004, <http://www.unaids.org/bangkok2004/report.html>.

United Nations Statistics Division, World and regional trends: data for years around 1990 and 2000, 2004, http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mi/mi_worldreg.asp.

To learn more about HIV/AIDS check out these websites:

ACT UP NY www.actupny.org

Africa Action www.africaaction.org

AIDS.org www.aids.org

AIDS Action www.aidsaction.org

Aniz, Inc. www.aniz.org

Artists Against Aids Worldwide www.aaaw.org

The Body www.thebody.com

Community HIV/AIDS Mobilization Project

www.champnetwork.org

Global Action for Children

www.globalactionforchildren.org

Global AIDS Alliance, www.globalaidsalliance.org

Health Action AIDS

www.phrusa.org/campaigns/aids/index.html

HIV Law Project www.hivlawproject.org

National AIDS Fund www.aidsfund.org

SisterLove, Inc. www.sisterlove.org

Stop Global Aids/Global Justice

www.stopglobalaids.org

Student Global AIDS Campaign

www.fightglobalaids.org

UNTYING THE KNOTS:

Marriage Equality and the Struggle for Civil Rights

BY JILL SHENKER

While conservatives are coordinated in their assault on queers, people of color, women, low-income people, and immigrants, many of us under attack are divided, in part because we have learned and internalized the prejudice, mistrust, and hatred that the rightwing preaches. Though it is tempting to rally for access to certain rights and privileges in the fight for marriage equality, we will fail to build a successful civil rights movement if we do not include an analysis of the ways the institution of marriage is used to further marginalize already oppressed communities. We need to wage our struggle with a long-term vision that ensures healthcare, economic stability, and social recognition are available for everyone, regardless of national identity, economic status, sexual identity, or marital status.

IMMIGRATION, FAMILIES, AND MARRIAGE

Throughout U.S. history, immigration policy has reflected racism, sexism, and homophobia in our society. With restrictive immigration legislation passed in 1996 and the upsurge in anti-immigrant sentiment after 9/11, it has become increasingly difficult for undocumented immigrants to gain legal status in the U.S. If someone who has failed to always maintain lawful status in the U.S. wants to marry or be with a family member who is a citizen, they must leave the country for three to ten years before being eligible for a green card visa that recognizes their marriage.

For queer immigrants, the situation is even worse. Current immigration policy only recognizes heterosexual spouses while other committed partnerships go unrecognized – and delegitimized. Transsexual immigrants often face challenges

in obtaining documents from their home country that reflect their gender identity, resulting in enormous, sometimes insurmountable, difficulties with U.S. immigration. These policies have devastating effects: families are separated and forced to break up, people endure emotional distress, and queers who are forced to return to homophobic countries may face harassment, torture, or even death. Both the refusal to recognize marriages with undocumented immigrants and the discrimination against queers and same-sex couples stem from a fear of difference and a desire to keep certain privileges for some while denying them to others.

WOMEN, WELFARE, AND MARRIAGE

While conservative government officials fight against marriage rights for same-sex couples, they are campaigning for welfare reform programs that coerce low-income women on welfare into marriage. The Bush Administration's latest round of welfare reform proposals recommend spending \$300 million per year on "marriage promotion programs" such as marriage education classes for adults and in schools; financial incentives for single mothers on welfare to get married; abstinence-until-marriage education; and covenant marriage programs developed by the Christian fundamentalist movement, which make it more difficult for those in troubled marriages to divorce. Many states have already implemented some of these measures. Queer women on welfare who live in states with cash incentives for those who marry are placed in a difficult situation: either deny their sexuality and marry a man, or be open about their sexuality and forfeit needed welfare bonuses that are only given to women who participate in marriage programs.

Both the ban on marriage of LGBT couples and the promotion of marriage as a way out of poverty, for poor women, reinforce the myth that the only valid family is one with a powerful man and a dependent wife and children. To emphasize this ideology, the radical right has changed the language in welfare policy from “single-parent families” to “father-absent households” and “never-formed families,” phrases also used to denigrate LGBT families. We should not reinforce the widespread but problematic belief that state-sanctioned marriage makes a relationship more worthy of recognition and rights than other intimate or familial relationships.

QUEERS, FAMILY, AND MARRIAGE

According to the General Accounting office of Congress, there are 1,138 benefits, rights, and privileges contingent on or related to marital status. Some of the most widely known include access to healthcare through a partner’s or parent’s insurance, ability to see a loved one in intensive care, inheritance rights, and second-parent adoption rights. These benefits ought to be available to people in intimate relationships regardless of their marital status, not conditional upon it. Others are about familial commitments and responsibilities. For children of queer parents these protections are critically important. For example, if a child of

LGBT parents gets in an accident, it’s impossible to ensure that their non-biological/non-adoptive parent will be allowed to visit them in intensive care or make decisions about their care. These children may not be able to get health coverage on the insurance policy of their non-biological/non-adoptive parents’ policy. Many children of LGBT parents express that marriage would offer social recognition of their families, without which they face marginalization and, frequently, harassment. Ordinary activities like making a family tree in school or filling out a form can make a child feel like their family is invisible and invalid. Often, when their family is visible, it is shunned and ridiculed, not only by peers, but also by adults in their lives.

Conservatives have made anti-gay initiatives central to their national organizing over the last decade, and it has taken its toll. In addition to the proposed Federal Marriage Amendment, there are 19 states with state constitutional amendments proposed to define marriage as between one man and one woman. These efforts come on the heels of a right wing campaign that has won Defense of Marriage Amendments** in 38 states since 1996, making a federal constitutional amendment more possible since it would have to be ratified by 38 states. Conservatives claim that marriage of same-sex couples is a violation of the sacred institution of marriage, and they use children to justify it. In fact, their campaign to deny marriage equality is harming millions of children, putting caring relationships at risk, and invalidating families.

The strength of the LGBT community lies in our diversity: we are everywhere, in every community. We include families who want to get married (and those who do not), immigrants struggling to be united, and people dealing with poverty and oppressive state policies everyday. Our struggle for civil rights is about more than the right to marry. All families that are about love, respect, and caring are valid no matter what the configuration. Fighting poverty isn’t about “getting a man,” but instead about living wages, access to education, and affordable childcare and healthcare. Our country is built on

**There are 1,138 benefits, rights,
and privileges contingent on or
related to marital status.**

the hard work of immigrants and the strength of diverse communities. The most successful defense against the attacks on our civil rights is to recognize the connections between our struggles and our different communities. As the LGBT movement works for marriage equality, we need to also fight for the rights of immigrant families, and at the same time, need to challenge the use of marriage as a weapon against low-income women and their children. Don't let the right wing succeed in dividing us with a coordinated attack. Don't let marriage equality become a wedge issue in an election year. We can build a more equitable, diverse, and caring society if we make connections and work together across dividing lines.

** Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) (a) defines marriage under federal law as exclusively heterosexual (between one man and one woman); and (b) declares that states are not required to recognize same sex marriages performed in other states. In July 2004 DOMA came before the US Senate and was defeated.

This article was written for Just For Us, a publication of COLAGE (Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere), in connection with the "Bringing the Message Home" campaign to lobby against the Federal Marriage Amendment between Mother's Day and Father's Day, www.colage.org, (415) 861-5437, jill@colage.org.

Jill Shenker is an organizer, arts activist, and political educator with COLAGE as well as the San Francisco Day Labor Program and Women's Collective of La Raza Centro Legal.

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Resources

National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights:

www.nnirr.org

Legal Momentum:

<http://legalmomentum.org/issues/wel/marriagepromotion.shtml>

(Formerly the NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund)

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force:

www.nglftf.org

Find out more about

CLPP's programs

at our website!

<http://clpp.hampshire.edu>

THIS YEAR'S NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION IS COMING UP!!!

Who participates in the National Day of Action?

Anyone who cares about reproductive freedom and social justice! Young people, college students, first-time and long-time activists, and anyone who wants to ensure that our voices unite for reproductive freedom!

What have others done in the past?

"We set up a mock graveyard and on the gravestones we put stats on violence against women. We had several people from NOW and the women's center dress in black and lay behind the gravestones. We also handed out lots of info on this stuff and it went really really well. Almost everyone who walked by looked at us which rocked. Also, we had several people (men and women) come up and tell us that they really appreciate us taking a visible stand against violence like we did. So the "die in" was a success!"

"The Women's Center had a very successful NYWDA this year. We tabled from October 20th through 23rd. On each of those four days we held a pay-equity bake that made over \$100. Our table just happened to be next to the College Republicans who were also having a bake sale. I think it is safe to say that our profit was much higher than theirs was at the end of the week."

"We held a pro-choice rally at noon on our campus. It was co-sponsored by the College Democrats and Students for Choice, a new group on campus organized by MT NARAL. The rally drew a crowd of around 50 people and was covered by both the campus and city papers."

When is National Day of Action?

OCTOBER 21, 2004!!!!!!!

Where will National Day of Action be held?

On your campus! At your women's center! Out on the streets of your community!

Why should you participate in National Day of Action?

Now, perhaps more than ever, we must all hold hands, connect the issues that are important to us, raise our voices and scream and shout for our freedom! It is our obligation to ourselves, our communities and to justice that we step up and make this year's National Day of Action the most memorable one ever!

This year we ask all day of action participants to take the movement one step further by working with people across traditional boundaries of age, ethnicity, sex, and class. Create youth/adult partnerships, join forces with the peace activists, work across race and gender boundaries. Find your common ground and take action to build a stronger and more unified movement. Take action to secure your rights!



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TO SOCIAL JUSTICE:**

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Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender/Queer rights
Environmental Justice · Access to Education
Freedom from Violence · Peace and Militarism
Healthcare and Childcare · Globalization · Immigrant Rights

The conference is free, open to the public and wheelchair accessible. Housing, childcare and sign language interpretation are available with advance registration.

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