



Dangerous Intersections

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Gender Violence & Race

Women of color live in the dangerous intersections of sexism, racism and other oppressions.

Within the mainstream anti-violence movement in the U.S., women of color who survive sexual or domestic abuse are often told that they must pit themselves against their communities, often portrayed stereotypically as violent, to begin the healing process. Communities of color, meanwhile, often advocate that women keep silent about the sexual and domestic violence in order to maintain a united front against racism. **Therefore we must adopt anti-violence strategies that are mindful of the larger structures of violence that shape the world we live in.** That is, strategies designed to combat violence within communities (sexual/domestic violence) must be linked to strategies that combat violence directed against communities (i.e. police brutality, prisons, racism, economic exploitation, etc). In addition, as will be discussed later in this report, the remedies for addressing sexual and domestic violence have proven to be inadequate for addressing the problems of gender violence in general, but particularly for addressing violence against women of color. The problem is not simply an issue of providing multicultural services to survivors of violence. **Rather, the analysis and strategies around addressing gender violence have failed to address the manner in which gender violence is not simply a tool of patriarchal control, but also serves as a tool of racism and colonialism.** That is, colonial relationships are themselves gendered and sexualized.

Within the context of colonization and racism, sexual violence does not affect men and women of color in the same way. **However, when a woman of color suffers abuse, this abuse is not just attack on her identity as a woman, but on her identity as a person of color.** The issues of colonial, race, and gender oppression cannot be separated. Women of color do not just face quantitatively more issues when they suffer violence (i.e. less media attention, language barriers, lack of support in the judicial system, etc.) but their experience is qualitatively different from that of white women. Hence, the strategies employed to address violence against women of color must take into account their particular histories of violence.

Historical context

Colonizers have long tried to crush the spirit of the peoples they colonize and blunt their will to resist colonization. One of the most devastating weapons of conquest has been sexual violence. In the eyes of colonizers, the bodies of people of color are considered inherently “dirty.” For instance, as European settlers of California described in the 1860s, Native people were “the dirtiest lot of human beings on earth (Rawls 1984, 195).” They wear “filthy rags, with their persons unwashed, hair uncombed and swarming with vermin (Rawls 1984, 195).” The following 1885 Proctor & Gamble ad for Ivory Soap also illustrates this equation between Indian bodies and dirt.

*We were once factious, fierce and wild,
In peaceful arts unreconciled
Our blankets smeared with grease and stains
From buffalo meat and settlers' veins.
Through summer's dust and heat content
From moon to moon unwashed we went,
But IVORY SOAP came like a ray
Of light across our darkened way
And now we're civil, kind and good
And keep the laws as people should,
We wear our linen, lawn and lace
As well as folks with paler face
And now I take, where'er we go
This cake of IVORY SOAP to show
What civilized my squaw and me
And made us clean and fair to see (Lopez n.d., 119).*

In the colonial worldview, only “clean” and “pure” bodies deserve to be protected from violence and these concepts are always already racialized. Violence done to “dirty” or “impure” bodies simply does not count as violence. Because the bodies of women of color are also seen as “dirty,” they too are considered “rapable.” The practice of mutilating Indian bodies, for instance—both living and dead—makes it clear that colonizers do not think Indian people deserve bodily integrity. This attitude dates back to the earliest periods of westward conquest, as these examples from history illustrate:

I saw the body of White Antelope with the privates cut off, and I heard a soldier say he was going to make a tobacco-pouch out of them (Wrone and Nelson 1982, 113).

One more dexterous than the rest, proceeded to flay the chief's [Tecumseh's] body; then, cutting the skin in narrow strips...at once, a supply of razor-straps for the more “ferocious” of his brethren (Wrone and Nelson 1982, 82).

Andrew Jackson...supervised the mutilation of 800 or so Creek Indian corpses—the bodies of men, women and children that he and his men massacred—cutting off their noses to count and preserve a record of the dead, slicing long strips of flesh from their bodies to tan and turn into bridle reins (Stannard 1992, 121).

Although Native men have also been scarred by abuse, Native women have often been the primary focus of sexual violence because of their ability to give birth. Control over

reproduction is essential in destroying a people; if the women of a nation are not disproportionately killed, the nation's population can always rebound. This is why colonizers such as Andrew Jackson recommended that, after massacres, troops complete the extermination by systematically killing Indian women and children. Similarly, Methodist minister Colonel John Chivington's policy was to "kill and scalp all little and big" because "nits make lice (Stannard 1992, 131)." Symbolic and literal control over their bodies is important in the war against Native people, as these testimonies of colonization attest:

Two of the best looking of the squaws were lying in such a position, and from the appearance of the genital organs and of their wounds, there can be no doubt that they were first ravished and then shot dead. Nearly all of the dead were mutilated (Wrone and Nelson 1982, 123).

One woman, big with child, rushed into the church, clasping the alter and crying for mercy for herself and unborn babe. She was followed, and fell pierced with a dozen lances. . .the child was torn alive from the yet palpitating body of its mother, first plunged into the holy water to be baptized, and immediately its brains were dashed out against a wall, (Wrone and Nelson 1982, 97)

I heard one man say that he had cut a woman's private parts out, and had them for exhibition on a stick. I heard another man say that he had cut the fingers off of an Indian, to get the rings off his hand. I also heard of numerous instances in which men had cut out the private parts of females, and stretched them over their saddle-bows and some of them over their hats (Sand Creek Massacre: A Documentary History 1973).

The history of sexual violence and genocide for Native women is illustrative of how gender violence functions as a tool for racism and colonialism for women of color in general. As with Native women, African American women have also been viewed as inherently rapable. Whereas colonizers used sexual violence to kill of Native populations, however, white slave owners used rape to reproduce an exploitable labor force. Because the children of Black slave women inherited their slave status, it was economically profitable to systematically rape Black women in order to reproduce their slave labor. Because Black women were seen as the property of their slaveowners, their rape at the hands of these men did not count. As one southern politician declared in the early 1900s, there was no such thing as "virtuous colored girl" over the age of fourteen (Davis 1981, 182). The testimonies from slave narratives and other sources reveals the systematic abuse of slave women by white slaveowners.

For a period of fourth months, including the latter stages of pregnancy, delivery, and recent recovery there from...he beat her with clubs, iron chains and other deadly

weapons time after time; burnt her; inflicted stripes over and often with scourges, which literally excoriated her whole body; forced her to work in inclement seasons, without being duly clad; provided for her insufficient food, exacted labor beyond her strength, and wantonly beat because she could not comply with his requisitions. These enormities, besides others, too disgusting, particularly designated, the prisoner, without his heart once relenting, practiced...even up to the last hours of victim's existence. (A report of a North Carolina slaveowner's abuse and eventual murder of a slave woman) (Genovese 1976, 72).

He was a good man {my master} but he was pretty bad among the women. Married or not married, made no difference to him. Whoever he wanted among the slaves, he went and got her or had her meet him somewhere out in the bushes. I have known him to go to the shack and make the woman's husbands sit outside while he went into his wife. ...He wasn't no worse than none of the rest. They all used their women like they wanted to, and there wasn't nobody to say anything about it. Neither the woman nor the men could help themselves. They submitted to it but kept praying to God (a slave testimony from South Carolina) (Johnson 1969, 90).

Immigrant women as well have endured a long history of sexual exploitation in the U.S.

For instance, women were often lured into the U.S. with the promise of a stable marriage or job, only to find themselves trapped in the sex trade. Financially impoverished Chinese families were often forced to sell their daughters into prostitution and in other cases, racially discriminatory employment laws forced thousands of Chinese immigrant women into prostitution. By 1860, over 23.4 percent of the Chinese in San Francisco (all female) were employed in prostitution (Almaguer 1994, 174).

In these histories, while women of color suffered from routine sexual exploitation in the process of racist and colonial expansion, men of color become stereotyped as sexual predators. Prior to colonization, Indian societies tended not to be male-dominated. In fact, many societies were matrilineal and matrilocal and Indian women often served as spiritual, political, and military leaders. When work was divided by gender, both men's and women's labors were accorded similar status. Violence against women and children was rare — in many tribes, unheard of (Jaimes and Halsey 1992). Consequently, through the proliferation of "captivity narratives" in the 1800s, the message was spread that sexual predators were not white men, but were Indian men bent on capturing and raping white women.

Similarly, black men were targeted for lynching for their supposed mass rapes of white women. White women needed to be protected from predatory black men, when in fact it was black women who needed protection from white men. Anti-lynching crusader Ida B. Wells calculated in her investigations of lynchings that between 1865 and 1895 over ten thousand

Blacks had been lynched, whereas no white person was ever lynched for killing a Black (Davis 1981, 184). In addition, while the ostensible reason for these lynchings was to protect white women from black rapists, Wells discovered that only a third of those lynched were even accused of rape. And of those accused of rape, most were obvious consensual sexual relationships with white women (Giddings 1984, 28-29).

Present Day Context

The historical context of rape, racism and colonialism continues to impact women of color today. This legacy is most evident in the rates of violence in American Indian communities – **American Indian women are twice as likely to be victimized by violent crime than women or men of any other ethnic group. In addition, sixty percent of the perpetrators of violence against American Indian women are white and Asian American women are most likely to be victimized by whites as well (Greenfield and Smith 1999). Rates of violence against African American women as well are higher than the national average (Rennison 2001).** In general, forty-three percent of women will be raped (including marital rape) and one-half of women in the U.S. will be battered in their lifetime (MacKinnon 1987, 23-24).

Not only has sexual and domestic violence has become internalized within communities of color as a result of this sexual colonization, but women of color continue to be targeted by racialized gender violence in a number of ways. Within U.S. popular culture, Stuart Kasten marketed a new video in 1989 called, “Custer’s Revenge,” in which players get points each time they, in the form of Custer, rape an Indian woman. The slogan of the game is “When you score, you score.” He describes the game as “a fun sequence where the woman is enjoying a sexual act willingly.”

During times of heightened tensions between Native and white communities, sexual violence remains prevalent as is evident in some of these events I was involved in. During the Chippewa spearfishing controversies in the 1980s when Chippewa spearfishers were being harassed by white racist mobs for exercising their treaty-protected rights to spear fish, one white harasser carried a sign saying “Save a fish; spear a pregnant squaw.” During the 1990 Mohawk crisis in Oka, a white mob surrounded the ambulance of a Native woman who was attempting to leave the Mohawk reservation because she was hemorrhaging after having given birth. She was forced to “spread her legs” to prove she had given birth. The police at the scene refused to intervene. Two women from Chicago WARN went to Oka in Mohawk Territory, Canada to videotape the crisis. They were arrested and held in custody for eleven hours without being charged, and were told that they could not go to the bathroom unless the male police officers could watch. The place they were held was covered with pornographic magazines.

Trafficking in women from Asian and other Third world countries continues unabated in the US. According to the Central Intelligence Agency, 45,000 to 50,000 women are trafficked in the US each year (Brinkley 2000). In addition, there are over 50,000 Filipina

mail-order brides in the US alone (Tadiar 2000). White men, desiring women they presume to be submissive, procure mail-order brides, who then, because of their precarious legal status, are vulnerable to domestic and sexual violence in their homes. Neferti Tadiar, scholar of Philippines history, reports the promotional material for procuring mail order brides: Filipinas have “exceptionally smooth skin and tight vaginas. . .[they are] low maintenance wives. [They] can always be returned and replaced by a younger model (Tadiar 2000).”

Women of color are also targeted for sexual violence crossing the U.S. border. Blacks and Latinos comprise 43% of those searched through customs even though they comprise 24% of the population (Bhattacharjee 2001). The American Friends Service Committee documented over 346 reports of gender violence on the US Mexico border from 1993-1995 and this is just the report of one agency, which does not account for the women who either do not report or report to another agency. The following case illustrates the kinds of abuse women face at the border:

A Border Patrol agent, Larry Selders, raped several women over a period of time. Finally one of the rape victims in Nogales, Arizona had to sue the United States government for not taking action to investigate her rape. Selders demanded sex from the woman in return for her release. When she refused, Selders drove her out of town to an isolated area, raped her and threatened her not to say anything to anyone. Her defense describes in great detail the horrible trauma that she continued to suffer after the incident. Although the rape took place in 1993, it was only in October 1999, that the court finally arrived a decision in favor of the victims. ‘The government guarded information about Selders’ prior acts. It took more than three years of legal battles to uncover that at least three other victims were known to the government,’ declared the victim’s attorney, Jesus Romo (Bhattacharjee 2001).

Undocumented survivors of violence face many barriers to accessing services as a result of their legal status. They are often reluctant to report crimes because their partners threaten to report them to the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) for deportation. Many programs for domestic and sexual violence survivors in the U.S. do not provide services in languages other than English. In one case reported by a Chicago rape crisis center, a Latina was raped by a prominent businessman. During the trial, the basic line of defense taken by the defense attorney was to ask her repeatedly, “You’ve been in this country for a long time. Why don’t you speak English yet?” Her attacker (who was a friend of the judge) was acquitted.

Meanwhile, the media generally ignores this pervasive violence and focuses on the individual acts of violence by men of color. Examples include the media hype of their murder trial of O.J. Simpson (an African American celebrity charged with killing his ex-wife), Clarence Thomas (U.S. Supreme Court Justice accused of sexual harassment) and Mike Tyson (an African American boxer tried and convicted for rape). In the public discussions over these cases, women of color continued to be marginalized. That is, communities of color often focused on the racism directed against the men in these cases, neglecting to see how

their female victims (in the Tyson and Thomas cases) are also victimized by racism. The response by many communities of color to these cases was to blame the victims for breaking silence around violence. Meanwhile, the white women's anti-violence movement made these figures the symbols of male violence against women rather than white perpetrators. For instance, William Kennedy Smith (a white prominent figure who was tried for rape) was acquitted, no public outcry resulted even among activists in the anti-violence movement as it did when O.J. Simpson was acquitted. In fact, the outcry was so tremendous among white people after OJ Simpson's acquittal that many publicly called for an end to affirmative action programs because of his acquittal. The thousands of white men who batter and rape women have failed to attain the same public scrutiny as have men of color. This demonization of men of color as the real rapists, from whom white women need protection, ironically hinders white women as well from securing real safety from violence. That is, white women fear violence from men of color and consequently are less likely to protect themselves from those most likely to perpetuate violence against them – white men whom they know.

Remedies

Because violence against women of color cannot be separated from racism and colonialism, it is necessary to develop remedies for violence that also counter racism and colonialism, particularly as they are manifested in state violence. Unfortunately, the remedies that have been pursued by the mainstream anti-violence movement have often had the effect of strengthening rather than opposing state violence. The anti-sexual/domestic violence movements have been critical in breaking the silence around violence against women and providing critically needed services to survivors of sexual/domestic violence. However, these movements have also become increasingly professionalized around providing services, and consequently are often reluctant to address sexual and domestic violence within the larger context of institutionalized violence. **As a case in point, many state coalitions on domestic/sexual violence have refused to take stands against the anti-immigration backlash and its violent impact on immigrant women, arguing that this issue is not a sexual/domestic violence issue.** However, as the immigration backlash intensifies, many immigrant women do not report abuse for fear of deportation. However, it is impossible to seriously address sexual/domestic violence within communities of color without addressing these larger structures of violence, such as militarism, attacks on immigrants' rights and Indian treaty rights, the proliferation of prisons, militarism, economic neo-colonialism, and institutional racism. Consequently, it is critical that those interested in combating sexual/domestic violence adopt anti-violence strategies that are mindful of the larger structures of violence that govern our world. In other words, strategies designed to combat violence within communities must be linked to strategies that combat the violence directed against communities of color.

As a case in point, increasingly, **mainstream anti-violence advocates are demanding longer prison sentences for batterers and sex offenders as a front line approach to stopping violence against women. However, the criminal justice system has always been brutally oppressive toward communities of color.** In 1994, for instance, one out of

every three African American men between the ages of 20-29 was under some form of criminal justice supervision. Two-thirds of men of color in California between the ages of 18 and 30 have been arrested (Donziger 1996, 102-104). It is problematic for women of color to go to the state for the solution to the problems it has had a large part in creating. Consider these examples from reports from rape crisis centers from around the United States:

An undocumented woman calls the police because of domestic violence. Under current mandatory arrest laws, the police must arrest someone on domestic violence calls. Because the police cannot find the batterer, they arrest her and have her deported (Tucson).

An African American homeless woman calls the police because she has been the victim of group rape. The police arrest her for prostitution (Chicago).

An African-America woman calls the police when her husband who is battering her accidentally sets fire to their apartment. She is arrested for the fire (New York).

In fact the New York Times recently reported that the effects of the strengthened anti-domestic violence legislation is that battered women kill their abusive partners less frequently, BUT batterers do NOT kill their partners less frequently (Butterfield 2000). Thus, ironically, laws passed to protect battered women are actually protecting their batterers!

In addition, as Beth Richie notes in her study of Black women in prison and Luana Ross describes in her study of American Indian women in prison, women of color are generally in prison as a direct or indirect result of gender violence. That is, for instance, women of color, often become involved in abusive relationship in which they are forced to participate in men's criminal activities (Richie 1996; Ross 1998). In addition, over 40 percent of women in prison are there because they murdered an abusive partner (Jurik and Winn 1990). Thus, the criminal justice system, rather than solving the problems of violence, often re-victimize women of color who are survivors of violence. And in fact, Luana Ross notes the criminal justice system actually criminalizes the attempts of women of color to resist and survive violence (Ross 1998).

The basic problem is that the premise of the justice system is that most people are law-abiding except for "deviants" who do not follow the law. However, given the epidemic rates of sexual and domestic violence in which 50 percent of women will be battered and 43

percent will be raped in their lifetime, it is clear that most men are implicated in our rape culture (MacKinnon 1987, 23-24). It is not likely that we can send all of these men to jail. Addressing rape through the justice system simply furthers the myth that rape/domestic violence is caused by a few bad men rather than acts which most men find themselves implicated in. Thus, relying upon the criminal justice system to end violence against women strengthens a criminal justice apparatus that has been historically racist, while providing little more than the illusion of safety to survivors of sexual and domestic violence.

At the same time, however, many of the alternatives to incarceration that are promoted under the “restorative justice model” have not developed sufficient safety mechanisms for survivors of domestic/sexual violence.

In addition, anti-prison activists often uncritically support restorative justice programs as alternatives to incarceration without considering how to ensure these models provide safety for survivors. “Restorative justice” is an umbrella term that describes a wide range of programs which attempt to address crime from a restorative and reconciliatory rather than a punitive framework. That is, as opposed to the US criminal justice system that focuses solely on punishing the perpetrator and removing him from society through incarceration, restorative justice attempts to involve all parties (perpetrators, victims and community members) in determining the appropriate response to a crime in an effort to restore the community back to wholeness. These models have been particularly well-developed by many Native communities, especially in Canada, where the sovereign status of Native nations allows them more an opportunity to develop community based justice programs. In one program, for instance when a crime is reported, the working team that deals with sexual violence talks to the perpetrator and gives him the option of participating in the program. The perpetrator must first confess his guilt and then follow a healing contract, or go to jail. The perpetrator can decline to participate completely in the program and go through normal routes in the justice system. Everyone (victim, perpetrator, family, friends, and the working team) are involved in developing the healing contract. Everyone is also assigned an advocate through the process. Everyone also holds the perpetrator accountable to his contract. One Tlingit man noted that this approach was often more difficult than going to jail:

First one must deal with the shock and then the dismay on your neighbors faces. One must live with the daily humiliation, and at the same time seek forgiveness not just from victims, but from the community as a whole. . . [A prison sentence] removes the offender from the daily accountability, and may not do anything towards rehabilitation, and for many may actually be an easier disposition than staying in the community (Ross 1997, 18).

These models seem to have much greater potential for dealing with “crime” effectively because if we want perpetrators of violence to live in society peaceably, it makes sense to develop justice models in which the community is involved in holding him/her accountable.

Under the current incarceration model, perpetrators are taken away from their community and are further disabled from developing ethical relationships within a community context. As Rupert Ross, an advocate for these models notes: “In reality, rather than making the community a safer place, the threat of jail places the community more at risk (Ross 1997).”

The problem, however, with these models in addressing sexual/domestic is that they work only when the community unites in holding perpetrators accountable. However, in cases of sexual and domestic violence, the community often sides with the perpetrator rather than the victim. So for instance, in many Native communities, these models are often pushed on domestic violence survivors in order to pressure them to “reconcile” with their families and “restore” the community without sufficient concern for their personal safety. Thus, we face a dilemma: on the one hand, the incarceration approach for addressing sexual/domestic violence promotes the repression of communities of color without really providing safety for survivors. On the other hand, restorative justice models often promote community silence and denial around issues of sexual/violence without concern for the safety of survivors of gender violence under the rhetoric of community restoration.

Thus, our challenge is, how do we develop community-based models of accountability in which the community will actually hold the perpetrator accountable? While there are no simple solutions to violence against women of color, it is clear that we will not develop effective strategies unless we stop marginalizing women of color in our analysis and strategies around both racial violence and gender violence.

To answer this set of challenges, INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, was organized to combat violence against women of color in all its forms. This organization arose from the Color of Violence: Violence Against Women of Color conference held in Santa Cruz, California in April, 2000. The primary goals of this conference were to

1. Develop analyses and strategies around ending violence that place women of color at the center;
2. Address violence against women of color in all its forms, including: attacks on immigrants’ rights and Indian treaty rights; the proliferation of prisons; militarism; attacks on the reproductive rights of women of color; medical experimentation on communities of color; homophobia/heterosexism and hate crimes against lesbians of color; economic neo-colonialism; and institutional racism, and
3. Encourage the anti-violence movement to reinsert political organizing into its response to violence.

Originally designed to host 100-200 participants, over 2000 attended the conference while 2000 had to be turned away because of space limitations. Due to the overwhelming response at this conference, INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence was formed. INCITE! is a national activist organization of radical feminists of color advancing a movement to end violence against women of color and their communities through direct action, critical dialogue and grassroots organizing. This organization complements the work done by domestic and sexual violence agencies which focus on social services by emphasizing a grassroots, political mobilization approach toward ending violence. **By supporting grassroots**

organizing, we intend to advance a national movement to nurture the health and well-being of communities of color. Through the efforts of INCITE!, women of color and our communities will move closer towards global peace, justice and liberation.

Dangerous Contraceptives

Quinacrine, Depo-Provera, Norplant & Women of Color Reproductive Justice

Dangerous contraceptions have been disproportionately promoted to women of color, indigenous women, women with disabilities, and women on federal assistance. Population control (largely through sterilization abuse), directed against people of color and indigenous people has an extensive history in the US and internationally. As many Third World countries began to resist the neo-colonial economic policies imposed by the World Bank and IMF, US government and business interests blamed the unrest on the Third World's "overpopulation problem."

Quinacrine: a dangerous form of chemical sterilization that can be administered during a pelvic examination...without your knowledge.

Q: What is Quinacrine?

A: Quinacrine is a form of chemical sterilization. It is inserted in the form of a pellet into the uterus, where it dissolves, scarring the fallopian tubes and possibly resulting in irreversible sterilization.

Q: Who distributes Quinacrine?

A: Quinacrine is manufactured and distributed by the North Carolina-based Center for Research on Population and Security, headed by Stephen Mumford and Elton Kessel. Mumford and Kessel peddle Quinacrine because they believe that immigrants, potential and actual, are a national security risk and that Quinacrine is the cheapest way to reduce their number. They express this view in the BBC film *The Human Laboratory*, now banned from global distribution by the Population Council.

Mumford and Kessel have distributed Quinacrine in countries around the world, including Bangladesh, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Croatia, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Venezuela, Vietnam, the United States, and possibly in Brazil, Guatemala, Thailand, Malaysia, and Romania. Worldwide, over 70,000 women have been sterilized with Quinacrine. Because Quinacrine can be administered during a simple pelvic examination, it is an ideal tool for sterilization

abuse. In Vietnam, a hundred female rubber plant workers were given Quinacrine during routine pelvic examinations without their knowledge or consent.

Q. What are the side effects of Quinacrine?

A. The safety testing of Quinacrine has been extremely shoddy. In one Vietnam trial, participants who demonstrated serious side effects were simply dismissed from the study. Side effects that have been linked with Quinacrine include ectopic pregnancy, puncturing of the uterus during insertion, pelvic inflammatory disease, birth defects, cancer, and severe abdominal pains. Other possible effects include heart and liver damage and the escalation of pre-existing viral conditions. After conducting four in vitro trials, Family Health International determined that Quinacrine was too dangerous to continue testing. The World Health Organization has also recommended against further trials. No regulatory body currently supports Quinacrine.

For all its risks, Quinacrine may not even be effective. In many trials, women who received Quinacrine were also injected with Depo-Provera, a long-acting hormonal contraceptive. Given that Depo-Provera is also known to cause long-term sterility, it is difficult to ascertain how effective Quinacrine really is.

Q. If Quinacrine is not approved by the FDA for use as a form of sterilization, how can it still be given to women in the U.S.?

A: Quinacrine is an approved anti-malarial treatment. Since the FDA permits approved drugs to be used “off label” — that is, for uses other than the ones for which they were originally licensed — doctors can prescribe Quinacrine for whatever purposes they wish. Depo Provera, for example, was administered to women as a contraceptive long before it was approved for this purpose because it was already an approved form of cancer treatment. With private funding from such organizations as the Turner Foundation and Leland Fykes, Mumford and Kessel have been distributing Quinacrine for free to researchers, clinicians, and government health agencies worldwide.

The Children’s Hospital of Buffalo, New York has just approved the first quinacrine trial in the U.S. At least one doctor in Florida has publicly stated that he has begun distributing quinacrine off-label.

Q: What is to be done?

A: Women from your community may already be receiving Quinacrine without their knowledge. If you suspect that you or someone you know has received Quinacrine without consent, please contact the Quinacrine Alert Network, [Committee on Women, Population, and the Environment](#).

What You Need to Know About Long-Acting Hormonal Contraceptives

Q. What is Norplant?

A. Norplant is a hormonal contraceptive for women. Norplant consists of six match stick-sized silicone capsules that are inserted into the upper arm, where they solely release small amounts of progestin. These capsules last for five years and must be inserted and removed by a medical professional.

Q. What are the pros and cons of Norplant?

A. PROS: Norplant is effective 24 hours after insertion and lasts for five years. The procedure is reversible if personnel trained in removal are available.

CONS: There are several adverse effects to using Norplant. The most common adverse effect of Norplant is the disruption of a woman's menstrual cycle, resulting in prolonged bleeding, amenorrhea, or inconsistent spotting. However, Norplant is also associated with heart attacks, strokes, tumors, blindness, paralysis, coma, and depression. Norplant can also cause painful scarring where it is inserted. In addition, although Norplant is reversible if removed, addition, many women on Medicaid in the U.S. and women in the Third World have been refused removal or have been unable to find doctors who can remove it. If not removed after five years, Norplant increases a woman's chance of ectopic pregnancy. Because of these side effects, over 50,000 women have filed suit against Wyeth-Ayerst, Norplant's manufacturer.

Norplant does not protect against HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases.

Q. What is Depo-Provera?

A. Depo-Provera is a hormonal contraceptive for women. It consists of the synthetic hormone progestin, which is injected into a woman's bloodstream in large doses, causing suppressed ovulation, making the cervical mucus unable to support sperm survival, and making the uterus unsuitable for egg implantation. Each administration prevents pregnancy for three to six months.

Q. What are the pros and cons of Depo-Provera?

A. PROS: A single shot of Depo-Provera is an effective contraceptive for three to six months, freeing a woman from continued responsibility for birth control methods.

CONS: Depo-Provera is associated with adverse effects such as menstrual disorders (irregular bleeding, amenorrhea, and heavy bleeding), skin disorders, tiredness, headaches, nausea, depression (often suicidal depression), hair loss, loss of libido, weight gain, and delayed return to fertility. In addition, to these short term

effects, Depo-Provera is associated with long term effects such as breast cancer, osteoporosis, abdominal pain, infertility, and birth defects. It may also increase a woman's risk of cervical cancer. Once injected, Depo-Provera cannot be removed or reversed, no matter how extreme the adverse side effects.

Depo-Provera does not protect against HIV or other sexually transmitted diseases. In fact, Depo-Provera may increase the risk of HIV transmission by altering the vaginal epithelium.

Q. Why are Norplant and Depo-Provera promoted, given their serious, adverse side effects?

A. Depo-Provera and Norplant have been disproportionately promoted to women of color, indigenous women, women with disabilities, and women on federal assistance. Population control, (largely through sterilization), directed against people of color and indigenous people has an extensive history in the US and internationally. As many Third World countries began to resist the neo-colonial economic policies imposed by the World Bank and IMF, US government and business interests blamed the unrest on the Third World's "overpopulation problem." In 1977, R. T. Ravenholt from the US Agency for International Development (AID), announced the plan to sterilize a quarter of the world's women because, as he put it,

Population control is necessary to maintain "the normal operation of US Commercial interests around the world." Without our trying to help these countries with their economic and social development, the world would rebel against the strong US commercial presence.

The state's increased interest in limiting the growth of people of color in the US coincided with the expansion of post-World War II welfare provisions that have allowed many people of color to leave exploitative jobs. As a result, the growing unemployment rate among people of color means that non-white America is no longer simply a reservoir of cheap labor; it is considered "surplus" populations. Also, as land rights struggles increase between Native communities and the US government, it becomes in the interest of the US to have as few Native peoples as possible. One recently declassified federal document, National Security Study Memorandum 200, revealed that even in 1976 the U.S. government regarded the growth of non-white population as a threat national security.

With attitudes such as the one expressed above in place, coercive sterilization was regarded as acceptable, even respectable, until quite recently. In the 1970s, estimates run as high as 25 percent of Native women and one third of women in Puerto Rico receiving sterilizations without their informed consent. In 1979, it was

discovered that seven out of ten US hospitals that performed voluntary sterilizations for Medicaid recipients violated the 1974 Department of Health, Education and Welfare guidelines by disregarded consent procedures and sterilizing women through “elective hysterectomies.”

Now that coercive sterilization is less acceptable, long-acting hormonal contraceptives like Norplant and Depo-Provera have become the primary tools against “overpopulation.” Several women’s organizations, such as the Black Women’s Health Project, the Native American Women’s Health Education Resource Center, the National Latina Health Organization, and the National Women’s Health Network, have opposed these methods as appropriate forms of contraception. Several state legislatures have considered bills which would give bonuses to women on public assistance for using Norplant. The Philadelphia Inquirer ran an editorial suggesting that Norplant might be a useful tool for “reducing the underclass.” Judges have even required women convicted of child abuse or of drug use during a pregnancy to use Norplant. The Native American Women’s Health Education Resource Center has found that Indian Health Services (IHS), which routinely supposed Native women with Depo-Provera before it was even approved by the FDA for use as a contraception in 1992, still lacks adequate and uniform informed consent procedures for Norplant and Depo-Provera.

While sterilization abuse in the U.S. has ebbed somewhat since the 1970’s, population control efforts abroad have increased. **Women in the Third World, moreover, are regarded as an expendable testing pool for contraceptive drugs.** Before Norplant was introduced to the U.S., the device was tested on nearly half a million Indonesian women, most of whom received no counseling regarding the drug’s possible adverse effects. Many were not even told that the device had to be removed after five years to avoid the risk of ectopic pregnancy. In India, 3,5000 were given Norplant without screening to determine whether they were suitable candidates for the study. They received no warning of the drug’s possible adverse effects. The study was finally stopped due to concerns about “teratogenicity and carcinogenicity.” In both cases, women who wanted the implants removed had trouble finding doctors who were both willing and able to perform the procedure (Even in the U.S. many doctors know how to insert Norplant, but far fewer know how to remove it.).

- Much of this information comes from Committee on Women, Population, and the Environment.
- [Download 8 1/2 x 11 PDF flyer on Depo Provera:](#)

Gender & Disaster

Resources

- [“New Orleans and Women of Color: Connecting the Personal and Political”](#)
Janelle White, 2005
- [“An Unfragmented Movement: An Interview with Shana griffin”](#)
Joanne Dubinsky, 2006
- [“The Women of New Orleans After Katrina”](#)
Elena Everett, 2006
- “To Render Ourselves Visible: Women of Color Organizing and Hurricane Katrina” by Alisa Bierria, Shana griffin, Mayaba Liebenthal, and INCITE! published in South End Press book, [What Lies Beneath: Katrina, Race, and the State of the Nation](#), 2007
- [Disaster & Law Enforcement Violence Against Women of Color & Trans People of Color](#)
- New Orleans Solidarity Work via INCITE!
- [As Tsunami Recedes, Women’s Risks Appear](#)
Women’s eNews, 2005
- [The Women of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast: Multiple Disadvantages and Key Assets for Recovery. Part I. Poverty, Race, Gender and Class](#)
Institute for Women’s Policy Research, 2005
- [Exodus from Mexico’s flood zone](#)
BBC News, 2007
- [The Pakistan earthquake and the health needs of women](#)
Humanitarian Practice Network, 2005

ICE Violence Against Immigrant Women

Anti-Immigrant Fever Ignites Violence Against Women

Written by Julianne Hing. From [RaeWire](#), 2008.

I felt a sour taste in my throat, the one that immediately precedes my gag reflex, when I read the NY Times piece about an immigration official who forced a woman to perform oral sex on him in exchange for her green card.

After the 22-year-old Colombian woman, whose name has not been released, went in for an interview for her green card with immigration agent Isaac Baichu in December of 2007, she started receiving phone calls from Baichu demanding sex. When he called her to meet in a restaurant's parking lot in Queens, she was prescient enough to stash her cell phone, which was recording their conversation, in her purse. Her cell phone captured Baichu asking for sex "one or two times. That's all. You get your green card. You won't have to see me anymore." Later in the tape there's a minute-long pause when, the reporter writes, the young woman "yielded to his demand out of fear that he would use his authority against her." The Times posted an audio clip of the woman's recording in the web edition of the article (yay, multimedia?).

The sexual exploitation of immigrant women is nothing new, but there's a very specific pattern of abuse tied to this case. News of a Miami ICE agent who made a pit stop at his home so he could rape the Haitian woman he was responsible for transporting to detention and reports of sexual assault on a woman held at the Don T. Hutto Family Residential Facility, a de facto prison in Texas for families awaiting immigrations processing, come to mind. Similar scandals have been reported in Maryland (Deputy Lloyd W. Miner this year), California (Agent Eddie Miranda in 2007) and Georgia (Agent Kelvin R. Owens in 2005).

So what is it about the structural design of our society and the U.S. immigration system that enables this abuse of power and the sexual exploitation of immigrant women?

Part of it has to do with the vast discretionary power immigration agents actually have. It's a job with little oversight and nearly limitless opportunity to exploit immigrants – the power differential is too great for abuse not to be a near inevitability. But the recent jump in reports of sexual assault is not just about bureaucratic corruption. It's a symptom of the post-9/11, anti-immigrant fever that continues to burn across the country. Mainstream media's dominant characterizations of immigrants the last 7 years have been that of the criminal alien, the dark-skinned terrorist, the unwelcome foreigner. We've seen it more widely manifested in workplace raids, restrictive local ordinances, and the vitriolic daily debate taking place on talk radio. **This cultural climate emboldens folks like Baichu to act with impunity against people who've been systematically demonized in the nation's political debates.**

According to Pramila Jayapal, executive director of the Hate Free Zone Campaign of Washington, eighty-five to ninety percent of immigrants navigate the system without any legal representation, most immigrants have few resources and no recourse when they've been wronged. The truth is it's almost impossible to know how many similar cases go unreported.

The implicated immigration agents were not guilty of just everyday white-collar corruption. Let's call it what it was: sexual violence, rape plain and simple. **Underlying these incidents is the systematic debasement of undocumented immigrants and people of color justified by the assumption that if a person is in the country without papers, they cease to be human, and subsequently relinquish their rights to be treated as such.**

INCITE!-Critical Resistance Statement

- [Download a printable version of this statement.](#)
- [Download the 2008 version with discussion questions.](#)
- [Download the popular education workshop](#) by Escuela Popular Norteña and INCITE!
Binghamton

Statement on Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex (2001)

We call social justice movements to develop strategies and analysis that address both state AND interpersonal violence, particularly violence against women. Currently, activists/movements that address state violence (such as anti-prison, anti-police brutality groups) often work in isolation from activists/movements that address domestic and sexual violence. The result is that women of color, who suffer disproportionately from both state and interpersonal violence, have become marginalized within these movements. It is critical that we develop responses to gender violence that do not depend on a sexist, racist, classist, and homophobic criminal justice system. It is also important that we develop strategies that challenge the criminal justice system and that also provide safety for survivors of sexual and domestic violence. To live violence free-lives, we must develop holistic strategies for addressing violence that speak to the intersection of all forms of oppression. *The anti-violence movement has been critically important in breaking the silence around violence against women and providing much-needed services to survivors. However, the mainstream anti-violence movement has increasingly relied on the criminal justice system as the front-line approach toward ending violence against women of color. It is important to assess the impact of this strategy.*

1. Law enforcement approaches to violence against women MAY deter some acts of violence in the short term. **However, as an overall strategy for ending violence, criminalization has not worked.** In fact, the overall impact of mandatory arrests laws for domestic violence have led to decreases in the number of battered women who kill their partners in self-defense, but they have not led to a decrease in the number of batterers who kill their partners. Thus, the law protects batterers more than it protects survivors.

2. **The criminalization approach has also brought many women into conflict with the law**, particularly women of color, poor women, lesbians, sex workers, immigrant women, women with disabilities, and other marginalized women. For instance, under mandatory arrest laws, there have been numerous incidents where police officers called to domestic incidents have arrested the woman who is being battered. Many undocumented women have reported cases of sexual and domestic violence, only to find themselves deported. A tough law and order agenda also leads to long punitive sentences for women convicted of killing

their batterers. Finally, when public funding is channeled into policing and prisons, budget cuts for social programs, including women's shelters, welfare and public housing are the inevitable side effect. These cutbacks leave women less able to escape violent relationships.

3. **Prisons don't work.** Despite an exponential increase in the number of men in prisons, women are not any safer, and the rates of sexual assault and domestic violence have not decreased. In calling for greater police responses to and harsher sentences for perpetrators of gender violence, the anti-violence movement has fueled the proliferation of prisons which now lock up more people per capita in the U.S. than any other country. During the past fifteen years, the numbers of women, especially women of color in prison has skyrocketed. Prisons also inflict violence on the growing numbers of women behind bars. Slashing, suicide, the proliferation of HIV, strip searches, medical neglect and rape of prisoners has largely been ignored by anti-violence activists. The criminal justice system, an institution of violence, domination, and control, has increased the level of violence in society.

4. The reliance on state funding to support anti-violence programs has increased the professionalization of the anti-violence movement and alienated it from its community-organizing, social justice roots. **Such reliance has isolated the anti-violence movement from other social justice movements** that seek to eradicate state violence, such that it acts in conflict rather than in collaboration with these movements.

5. The reliance on the criminal justice system has **taken power away from women's ability to organize collectively** to stop violence and has invested this power within the state. The result is that women who seek redress in the criminal justice system feel disempowered and alienated. It has also promoted an individualistic approach toward ending violence such that the only way people think they can intervene in stopping violence is to call the police. This reliance has shifted our focus from developing ways communities can collectively respond to violence.

In recent years, the mainstream anti-prison movement has called important attention to the negative impact of criminalization and the build-up of the prison industrial complex. Because activists who seek to reverse the tide of mass incarceration and criminalization of poor communities and communities of color have not always centered gender and sexuality in their analysis or organizing, we have not always responded adequately to the needs of survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

1. Prison and police accountability activists have generally organized around and conceptualized men of color as the primary victims of state violence. **Women prisoners and victims of police brutality have been made invisible by a focus on the war on our brothers and sons.** It has failed to consider how women are affected as severely by state violence as men. The plight of women who are raped by INS officers or prison guards, for instance, has not received sufficient attention. In addition, women carry the burden of caring for extended family when family and community members are criminalized and warehoused.

Several organizations have been established to advocate for women prisoners; however, these groups have been frequently marginalized within the mainstream anti-prison movement.

2. The anti-prison movement has not addressed strategies for addressing the rampant forms of violence women face in their everyday lives, including street harassment, sexual harassment at work, rape, and intimate partner abuse. Until these strategies are developed, many women will feel shortchanged by the movement. In addition, by not seeking alliances with the anti-violence movement, the anti-prison movement has sent the message that it is possible to liberate communities without seeking the well-being and safety of women.

3. The anti-prison movement has failed to sufficiently organize around the forms of state violence faced by LGBTI communities. LGBTI street youth and trans people in general are particularly vulnerable to police brutality and criminalization. LGBTI prisoners are denied basic human rights such as family visits from same sex partners, and same sex consensual relationships in prison are policed and punished.

4. While prison abolitionists have correctly pointed out that rapists and serial murderers comprise a small number of the prison population, **we have not answered the question of how these cases should be addressed.** The inability to answer the question is interpreted by many anti-violence activists as a lack of concern for the safety of women.

5. The various alternatives to incarceration that have been developed by anti-prison activists have generally failed to provide sufficient mechanism for safety and accountability for survivors of sexual and domestic violence. **These alternatives often rely on a romanticized notion of communities, which have yet to demonstrate their commitment and ability to keep women and children safe** or seriously address the sexism and homophobia that is deeply embedded within them.

We call on social justice movements concerned with ending violence in all its forms to:

1. Develop community-based responses to violence that do not rely on the criminal justice system AND which have mechanisms that ensure safety and accountability for survivors of sexual and domestic violence. Transformative practices emerging from local communities should be documented and disseminated to promote collective responses to violence.

2. Critically assess the impact of state funding on social justice organizations and develop alternative fundraising strategies to support these organizations. Develop collective fundraising and organizing strategies for anti-prison and anti-violence organizations. Develop strategies and analysis that specifically target state forms of sexual violence.

3. Make connections between interpersonal violence, the violence inflicted by domestic state institutions (such as prisons, detention centers, mental hospitals, and child protective services), and international violence (such as war, military base prostitution, and nuclear testing).

4. Develop an analysis and strategies to end violence that do not isolate individual acts of violence (either committed by the state or individuals) from their larger contexts. These strategies must address how entire communities of all genders are affected in multiple ways by both state violence and interpersonal gender violence. **Battered women prisoners represent an intersection of state and interpersonal violence and as such provide and opportunity for both movements to build coalitions and joint struggles.**

5. Put poor/working class women of color in the center of their analysis, organizing practices, and leadership development. Recognize the role of economic oppression, welfare “reform,” and attacks on women workers’ rights in increasing women’s vulnerability to all forms of violence and locate anti-violence and anti-prison activism alongside efforts to **transform the capitalist economic system.**

6. Center stories of state violence committed against women of color in our organizing efforts.

7. Oppose legislative change that promotes prison expansion, criminalization of poor communities and communities of color and thus state violence against women of color, even if these changes also incorporate measure to support victims of interpersonal gender violence.

8. Promote holistic political education at the everyday level within our communities, specifically how sexual violence helps reproduce the colonial, racist, capitalist, heterosexist, and patriarchal society we live in as well as how state violence produces interpersonal violence within communities.

9. Develop strategies for mobilizing against sexism and homophobia WITHIN our communities in order to keep women safe.

10. Challenge men of color and all men in social justice movements to take particular responsibility to address and organize around gender violence in their communities as a primary strategy for addressing violence and colonialism. We challenge men to address how their own histories of victimization have hindered their ability to establish gender justice in their communities.

11. Link struggles for personal transformation and healing with struggles for social justice.

We seek to build movements that not only end violence, but that create a society based on radical freedom, mutual accountability, and passionate reciprocity. In this society, safety and

security will not be premised on violence or the threat of violence; it will be based on a collective commitment to guaranteeing the survival and care of all peoples.

Supporters:

Organizations American Friends Service Committee Arab Women's Solidarity Association, North America Arab Women's Solidarity Association, San Francisco Chapter Arizona Prison Moratorium Coalition Asian Women's Shelter Audre Lorde Project Black Radical Congress Break the Chains California Coalition for Women Prisoners CARA / Communities Against Rape and Abuse (Seattle) Center for Human Rights Education Center for Immigrant Families Center for Law and Justice Coalition of Women from Asia and the Middle East Colorado Progressive Alliance Committee Against Anti-Asian Violence (New York) Direct Action Against Refugee Exploitation (Vancouver) East Asia-US-Puerto Rico Women's Network Against Militarism Institute of Lesbian Studies Justice Now Korean American Coalition to End Domestic Abuse Lavender Youth Recreation & Information Center (San Francisco) Legal Services for Prisoners with Children Minnesota Black Political Action Committee National Coalition Against Domestic Violence National Coalition of Anti-Violence Projects National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights Northwest Immigrant Rights Project (Seattle) Pennsylvania Lesbian and Gay Task Force Prison Activist Resource Center Project South San Francisco Women Against Rape Shimtuh Korean Domestic Violence Program Sista II Sista Southwest Youth Collaborative (Chicago) Spear and Shield Publications, Chicago Women of All Red Nations Women of Color Resource Center Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice (Bronx) **Individuals** Debra M. 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Know Your Rights In Case of ICE/Police Raid

It's important the immigrant population be prepared and informed regarding their rights before, during, and after any immigration/police raid takes place. The following information provides important recommendations as to what you should or should not do if you are detained by immigration or your local police, or other authorities.

Before a Raid

- Be prepared and plan ahead.
- Contact an immigrant advocate, attorney, or qualified community agency and be well-informed about your rights.
- Know what documents you should carry with you at all times. It is advisable to carry a state ID or a driver's license. These documents contain information about you and contain no information at all about your immigration status or your country of origin.
- Do not carry any documentation brought from your country of origin.
- Do not carry false documents with you.
- If possible, carry a card that states you wish to exercise your right to remain silent for use in case you are interrogated by immigration/police officers. These cards are usually available from immigrant-rights organizations in your area.
- Always carry the name and the phone number of any immigration advocate, a lawyer, and/or an agency who will provide you with advice and other help in case the immigration/police detains you.
- Inform your neighbors and co-workers, regardless of their immigration status, of their right to remain silent if immigration/police comes to your neighborhood or workplace.

During a Raid

- Do not let any immigration official or public officer into your home/house/apartment without a court warrant. If they do not have one, they need your authorization in order to go inside. Ask them to put the warrant under the door. The warrant has specific names of people that the agents are looking for and should be signed by a judge. You should not open the door if the agents do not have a warrant or if it does not meet these requirements.
- If immigration officials or police officers enter without proper authorization, ask for their names and/or write down their badge numbers.
- Obtain the names and phone numbers of any witnesses.
- Remain calm and do not try to run away. If you do so, immigration/police may use that against you.
- Refuse to answer any questions regarding your birthplace and your legal status, unless your lawyer is present.

- If you lie about your name, your relatives will have difficulty trying to find you.
- If you have children in school who will not have someone to watch them while you are detained, say so, and ask to make arrangements.
- Share information about the raid with your co-workers. If there is a union in your workplace, contact a union official.

After a Raid

Remember that both documented and undocumented persons have the following rights.

Keep them in mind at all times:

- The right to make a phone call
- The right to speak to a lawyer
- The right to say nothing unless your lawyer is present
- The right to a hearing before an immigration judge.

Important Notes:

- Do NOT sign any document. If immigration/police tries to convince you to sign any document, you should refuse to do so. That document might allow them to deport you without giving you the opportunity to see an immigration advocate or your lawyer. Keep a receipt of any personal property that is confiscated.
- Report any incidents of raids or abuses/mistreatment by border patrol, INS, US Customs or police.
- Contact your local immigrant rights organization, or
- Immigration Law Enforcement Project: 956-425-9552, or the National Network of Immigrant and Refugee Rights, 510-465-1984.

Information compiled from the [National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights](http://www.nnirr.org), 310 – 8th St, Suite 307, Oakland CA 94607, nnirr@nnirr.org. Website: www.nnirr.org. Phone: 510-465-1984. They have this information available in a number of languages.

Law Enforcement Violence

Law enforcement violence against women of color and trans people of color is largely invisible in discussions about police brutality. Similarly, discussions about “violence against women” rarely, if ever, meaningfully address violence perpetrated by law enforcement officers. As a result, police brutality against women of color and trans people of color is often unacknowledged, leaving our voices largely unheard and our experiences unaddressed.

Yet since the arrival of European colonists on this continent and the creation of slave patrols — the first state-sponsored law enforcement agencies in the U.S. — Native, Black, Latina, Asian, and Arab women and girls have been and continue to be harassed, profiled, strip searched, body cavity searched, raped, beaten, and murdered by agents of the state on a systematic basis. Such abuses

remain widespread and entrenched across the country, in the context of the “war on drugs,” policing of sex and sex work, the “war of terror,” “quality of life,” “zero tolerance” and “broken windows” policing. In addition to breaking the silence around law enforcement violence against women of color and trans people of color, we focus on violence by police and other law enforcement agents for two main reasons:

- First, to foreground the central role of law enforcement in the prison-industrial complex – they represent the front lines of the criminal injustice system, and are often primarily responsible for determining who will be targeted for heightened surveillance and policing, enforcing systemic oppressions based on race, gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, immigration status, class and ability, and feeding people into the prison-industrial complex.
- Second, because mainstream responses to violence against women have relied almost exclusively on the police to protect us from violence, when in fact, police not only often fail to protect women of color and trans folks of color from interpersonal and community violence, they often perpetrate further violence against us, including when responding to calls for help.

[Download: INCITE! Law Enforcement Violence Toolkit](#)

Popular Education Workshop

Building Violence-Free Communities

A popular education workshop by Escuela Popular Norteña & INCITE! Binghamton, based on the [Critical Resistance – INCITE! Statement on Gender Violence and the Prison Industrial Complex](#).

[Download Workshop](#)

Race, Class, Gender, & Prisons

Excerpts from “Race, Class, Gender and Prisons,” a talk given by INCITE! co-Founder, Beth Richie, on a panel discussion that occurred as a part of the art installation, [Voices in Time, Lives in Limbo](#)

I want to talk tonight about the perfection of the movement to remove women of color, especially women that have experienced violence, from our communities and put them into the criminal justice system. **I think there are very few places where we can see such a perfect exhibition of racism and gender oppression than when we look over the walls of a women’s correctional facility.** There we will get a perfect glimpse of how racism feeds people into the system, how gender oppression, especially violence against women, keeps women in the system.

There really is no better place to look for a perfect example of what poverty does to destroy people's lives than women's prisons and jails. **If we're interested in knowing how perfectly violence against women works to coerce women into behavior, activities, situations that they would rather not be in, we could look in jails and prisons and see how perfectly violence against women works.** Jails and prisons and probation departments and even secure halfway houses show us how perfectly conservative ideology in this country about safety and risk has dominated public policy.

As some of my colleagues on the panel will discuss, **if we're interested in understanding how perfectly civil and human rights are being eroded in this country, how blatant violations of rights are accepted in the service of maintaining gender, racial, national, cultural subordination, we could see that perfectly if we look in women's jails and prisons.** We could see perfect sexual repression, xenophobia in perfect terms, the perfect oppression of young people, and we could go on and on.

There is no better place to understand that the increasingly concentrated disadvantage in this country is based on race, class, and, I would argue, gender than in the women that are incarcerated. We might start that perfect story at the Cook County Jail where there are 1,000 women tonight. 70% of them are Black women. Like most of the women in jails and prisons in this country,

- Most of them – 80% — are detained there because of their involvement in non-violent crimes, mostly crimes of survival to take care of themselves and their children;
- Most of them are mothers, and most of these Black mothers that are detained for non-violent crimes have no idea where their children are;
- Most of them are poor and they've lived lives that have been characterized by conditions of poverty. They've had long periods of unemployment. They've probably been homeless for most of their adult, if not also their juvenile, lives;
- They've had very little access to the incredible health resources that this country offers. They probably have HIV, TB, asthma, diabetes, depression, some anxiety disorder, substance abuse problems;
- They've probably been involved in prostitution. Conservative estimates would say about 30% of them, but anybody that has gone to a jail or prison or spent time with women that have been there knows that it's probably much more than that.

In addition, even conservative data would suggest that they have a rate of violence against women three times higher than the national average. Some studies suggest that 60% of the women in jails or prisons in this country have experienced physical violence at the hands of an intimate partner, but in 20 years of going to jails and prisons and working with women I have rarely encountered somebody who has not

experienced some form of violence or coerced sexual activity. **They are at high risk of physical and sexual abuse from their intimate partners, co-dependents, parents before that, authority figures in the system, and others that have a lot of power to make decisions that will impact the lives of these women, such as drug treatment counselors and prison guards who have coerced women into sexual encounters.**

So that's the picture from the jail. It's a picture of perfect racial disadvantage, perfect use of violence against women so that women get incarcerated instead of getting support services...

It's a picture of perfect racial stigma attached to being poor and in trouble with law in this country. It's a perfect picture of abandonment from their communities, including communities of color, and their prison activist allies and by society. These are people held in almost perfect and complete isolation from us.

And what makes the picture even more perfect is that if we took a map of Chicago or New York or Houston or Atlanta or any major city in the country and increasingly in less urban areas and we put a circle around the neighborhoods that most of the women come from we would find the worst public transportation, the worst schools, the fewest parks, the most abandoned buildings, the most liquor stores, the highest rates of children that have been removed from their homes.

And instead of women being free to organize around these things, we'd find disproportionate and increasing levels of surveillance of women and their families. Surveillance by court orders, ankle bracelets, probation and parole departments, high tech cameras perched on top of high buildings and unmarked police cars. We'd see a disproportionate number of child welfare workers, mandatory treatment counselors and, of course, the highest rates of incarceration of women of color. **It's like a perfect picture, and, of course, you recognize that when I'm using the 'perfect metaphor' here it is not to say how good it is, but to say how perfectly orchestrated this movement to incarcerate women of color really is.**

Although we know people that live in low-income communities are not more violent or less respectful or more reckless, this country has found a perfect way to warehouse women and girls of color and men of color and boys of color who live in disadvantaged communities by not responding to violence and being reckless with their lives when they incarcerate them. In fact, it's a perfect plan. **So violence against women becomes a much more serious problem when Black women and other women of color have to worry about police brutality at the same time we are worrying about our own safety and health.**

...If we've used drugs to numb pain or if we are abused by someone who's on parole or on probation, if we allow someone who is on parole or probation to live with us in

Chicago public housing, if we have contraband in our bathrooms, those are the things that make us vulnerable to greater violence and cause that violence to be ignored by both our community and the system. In these cases, we are much more likely to end up in jail or prison.

So we have mass incarceration on the one hand, that's the set of criminal justice and social policy that target women of color and result in huge overrepresentations of women of color in the criminal justice system. On the other hand we have a national agenda that advocates criminalization, the tendency to respond to any social problem by developing a law that makes illegal many behaviors that are about survival. We have a national agenda that is increasingly advocating the erosion of civil and human rights in this country as a strategy to allegedly increase someone's safety – it's not clear whose safety they are concerned with. **Then we have gender oppression not only in the larger community, but also in communities of color where violence against women is not a priority, so much so that in some communities men who have used violence against women receive honors like Image Awards from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.**

So it makes a very complete picture for us. Since we have been witness to this picture, I believe we now have some responsibility to take action to change the picture. **Just imagine if we worked to change the processes of racism and sexism that lead to the mass incarceration of women of color in this country, that's the background to the picture.**

Sweatshops & Women of Color

A sweatshop is a workplace where workers are subject to:

- extreme exploitation, including the absence of a living wage or benefits,
- poor working conditions, such as health and safety hazards, and
- arbitrary discipline.

The U.S. General Accounting Office has developed a working definition of a sweatshop as “an employer that violates more than one federal or state labor, industrial homework, occupational safety and health, workers' compensation, or industry registration law.”

Today, the overwhelming majority of garment workers in the U.S. are immigrant women. They typically toil 60 – 80 hours a week in front of their machines, often without minimum wage or overtime pay. In fact, the Department of Labor estimates that more than half of the country's 22,000 sewing shops violate minimum wage and overtime laws. Many of these workers labor in dangerous

conditions including blocked fire exits, unsanitary bathrooms, and poor ventilation. Government surveys reveal that 75% of U.S. garment shops violate safety and health laws. In addition, workers commonly face verbal and physical abuse and are intimidated from speaking out, fearing job loss or deportation.

Overseas, garment workers routinely make less than a living wage, working under extremely oppressive conditions. Fierce competition for cheaper labor costs — as well as the liberalization of trade barriers — has brought apparel production to countries where workers have little bargaining power and where authoritarian governments squash worker organizing. U.S. retailers and manufacturers are reaping enormous profit in the garment industry, setting wages with little relation to productivity. “In Mexico, for example, apparel workers are 70% as productive as their U.S. counterparts, yet they earn just 10% as much per hour,” according to surveys by Kurt Salmon Associates Inc. (see chart below).

Sweatshops can be viewed as a product of the global economy. Fueled by an abundant supply of labor in the global market, capital mobility, and free trade, garment industry giants move from country to country seeking the lowest labor costs and the highest profit, exploiting workers the world over. The examples below illustrate the wide gap between what garment workers bring home and what their families need to live dignified lives. Workers should be earning a living wage that allows their families to meet their basic needs.

- Fundacion Nacional para el Desarrollo, an NGO research organization in El Salvador, establishes the basic basket of necessities for the average sized Salvadoran family (4.3 people) to survive in “relative poverty” as \$287.21 per month. In El Salvador, workers at Doall Enterprises make \$0.60/hour. This meets only 51% of a basic basket of goods necessary to survive in relative poverty. SOURCE: “Liz Claiborne/Sweatshop Production in El Salvador,” September 17, 1998, National Labor Committee
- According to a U.S. Commerce Department report (February 17, 1998), “The minimum wage [in Honduras] is considered insufficient to provide for a decent standard of living for a worker and family.” \$0.43 per hour, or \$3.47 per day, is the base wage for garment workers in the Evergreen factory in Honduras, meeting only 54% of the cost of survival, meanwhile inflation is expected to reach 13.7% next year, eating away the purchasing power of workers’ wages. When transportation to and from work, breakfast and lunch costs \$2.59, that leaves only \$0.80 a day for families’ other basic needs.

- Garment workers in Los Angeles, California who are mostly paid a piece-rate average \$7,200 a year, less than 3/4 of the poverty level income for a three-person family.

The very structure of the garment industry encourages the creation of sweatshops. Retailers sit at the top of the apparel pyramid, placing orders with brand-name manufacturers, who in turn use sewing contractors to assemble the garments. Contractors recruit, hire and pay the workers, who occupy the bottom level of the pyramid. In many countries, competitive bidding by these contractors for work drives contract prices down so low that they cannot pay minimum wages or overtime to their workers. In fact, in today's garment industry, very little competitive bidding takes place. Most contractors are put in a "take it or leave it" position and must accept whatever low price is given to them or see the work placed elsewhere. The contractors must "sweat" profits out of their workers, cut corners, and operate unsafe workplaces.

Retailers have acquired enormous power to determine the price of clothing. During the past decade retailing has experienced a series of major mergers, which has led to a considerable consolidation of their buying power, especially among discounters. Today, for example, Wal-Mart's annual sales are nearly \$118 billion, and Kmart's are \$32 billion. These two retail giants alone outsell all department stores combined; their purchasing decisions shape much of the apparel industry. The ten largest retailers account for nearly two-thirds of all apparel sales in the U.S. This consolidated buying power vastly increases retailers' ability to put more pressure on the manufacturers in terms of price and speed. Some retailers, such as May Department Stores, insist that manufacturers making their private labels guarantee a profit margin, sometimes as high as 48%. This impossible goal forces down wholesale prices, and it is ultimately the worker at the sewing machine that feels the pinch. The \$100 sale price of a garment is typically divided up as follows: \$50 to the retailer, \$35 to the manufacturer, \$10 to the contractor, and \$5 to the garment worker.

Retailers also control the apparel industry by producing their own private labels instead of buying from brand-name manufacturers. Retailers contract for the production of, oversee, and price garments created exclusively for their stores. Approximately 32% of women's apparel sold in the U.S. is manufactured under private labels. While retailers typically keep 50% of the price of brand-name goods, they are able to keep 80% of the price of their own private label products.

- J.C. Penny's Arizona Jeans Co., one of the industry's most successful private labels, brings in over \$1 billion in annual sales. Private labels represent 50% of the store's annual sales, which were \$16 billion in 1997.

- Federated Department Stores' seven "power brands" (INC/International Concepts, Charter Club, Alfani, Tools of the Trade, Arnold Palmer, Style & Co., and Badge) represent \$1 billion in annual sales, or 15% of the company's business.

Retailers' domination of the garment industry means they can affect whether sweatshop conditions improve or worsen. With their power to control production, retailers, along with manufacturers, should be held accountable for the conditions of the workers who sew their clothes.

Information from Sweatshop Watch, 310 Eighth Street, Suite 309, Oakland, CA 94607, sweatwatch@igc.org. Contact them to report sweatshop conditions. Also, see Garment Workers Center for more information.

Women of Color & Prisons

We are told that prisons will keep us safe from domestic and sexual violence, but prisons are a source of extreme violence for women of color. Consider:

- Since 1980 the number of women in prison has increased at nearly double the rate for men. The number of people in women's prisons rose almost twice as fast (4.8%) as the growth of the number of men imprisoned (2.7%).
- The number of women in state and federal prisons has increased eight-fold from 12,300 in 1980 to 107,500 in 2005.
- 30% of women prisoners are African American and 16% are Latinas. Black women are incarcerated at 4 times the rate of white women.
- Women in state prisons in 2003 were more likely than men to be incarcerated for a drug offense (29% vs. 19%) or property offense (30% vs. 20%) and less likely than men to be incarcerated for a violent offense (35% vs. 53%).
- In 1997, Latinas (44%) and African American women (39%) were more likely to be incarcerated for a drug offense than white women (23%).
- Three-quarters of women in state and federal prisons report that they had used drugs regularly prior to their arrest; over 60% had used drugs in the month prior to their offense.
- In 1997, 65% of women in state prisons were parents of minor children, compared to 55% of men. Two-thirds of mothers incarcerated in state prison lived with their children prior to their arrest.
- Approximately 37% of women and 28% of men in prison had monthly incomes of less than \$600 prior to their arrest.
- Nearly a quarter of women in state prisons have a history of mental illness.

- Nationally 3.6% of women in state and federal prisons were HIV positive in 2000, compared to 2% of men. The women's figures range as high as 18.2% in New York State and 41% in the District of Columbia.
- More than half of the women in state prisons have been abused, 47% physically abused and 39% sexually abused (with many being survivors of both types of abuse).

Statistics from [The Sentencing Project](#) & [Critical Resistance](#)

For more information about prisons and violence against women of color, please see the following resources:

- [Definition of Prison Industrial Complex, from Critical Resistance](#)
- [Kinder, Gentler, Gender Responsive Cages: Prison Expansion is Not Prison Reform](#) by Rose Braz. In: Women, Girls & Criminal Justice.
- [Women of Color & The Drug War](#)
- [Race, Class, Gender, & The PIC](#) by Beth Richie
- [Making Connections: The Anti-Violence Movement Actively Resisting The Prison Industrial Complex, CARA](#)

Women of Color and Welfare

From: [Working Hard, Staying Poor](#), published by the Women of Color Resource Center

Welfare reform reduced welfare rolls by more than half, dropping the number of welfare recipients from 4.6 million to 2.4 million by 1999. However, while many have left the system, few are thriving.

Work is at the core of the new welfare system, which now encourages, pressures and finally coerces women into the labor market. Most former recipients have moved into low-wage and contingent work. Few families who have moved from welfare to work are experiencing better economic conditions. Of even greater concern are those former recipients who have left the system but have not found employment. Many more people left the welfare system than have entered the labor force. These families suffer the harshest effects of poverty and are at greatest risk of homelessness and hunger.

Worsening Conditions

Housing and Homelessness — Evidence is quickly piling up that welfare reform is contributing to rising levels of housing insecurity and homelessness, adding more pressure on the already stressed shelter system. Families are increasingly faced with the impossible choice of feeding or sheltering their family.

Food Security and Hunger — Welfare reform has made women's struggles to obtain food for themselves and their families more difficult. Studies show former recipients can't pay for

sufficient food, skip meals, go hungry, or turn to food pantries and other emergency food assistance.

Child Care — Welfare reform eliminated the federal guarantee of childcare assistance to families working to get off welfare. With thousands of women entering the work force or attending school to meet welfare-to-work requirements, the demand for childcare has increased while the availability of high-quality affordable childcare has not.

Women of Color and Immigrant Women

Women from these communities, which are already characterized by significantly higher levels of poverty, have been particularly hard hit. In weakening the social safety net for the poor, welfare reform necessarily and discriminatorily has had its greatest effects on women from communities that are disproportionately represented among the poor.

White women are leaving welfare rolls at much higher rates than Black or Latina women, indicating white women are making a more successful transition into the labor force.

Some of the most punitive provisions of the new welfare laws are directed at immigrant women, who are not surprisingly reporting high levels of hardship.

For an extended analysis, see a full report [Working Hard, Staying Poor](#) by Linda Burnham and Kaaren Gustafson, published through the [Women of Color Resource Center](#). Call 510-848-9272, email chisme@igc.org or visit their web page: www.coloredgirls.org for ordering information.

Facts About Welfare and Poverty

- Two out of three adult recipients of public assistance are women. One out of five children in America lives in poverty. Children are poor because their mothers are poor.
- In 1995, the median hourly wage that a woman earned in the United States was \$10.82. For a family of four, that is only 135% of the poverty level.
- For every \$1.00 the average man earned in 1997, white women earned 75 cents; black women 67 cents; Latina women 53.9 cents; and Asian Pacific American women earned 80 cents. The average annual income for American Indian families is \$6,500 with unemployment rates as high as 90 percent on some reservations.
- In 1994, a full-time, minimum wage (\$4.25) job paid only 75% of the federal poverty level for family of 3.
- The percentage of all workers with health insurance coverage has decreased, but more so for low-wage workers. In 1996, only 26% of low wage workers had health insurance coverage.
- Nationwide, the median wage for those with only a high school diploma fell by 6%, from 1980 to 1996, while the earnings of college graduates increased by 12%. Thus, the impact of anti-affirmative action legislation will contribute to the further

impoverishment of women of color. Further, since the passage of welfare reform in 1996 practices huge numbers of welfare recipients enrolled in college programs are dropping out. Welfare reform has decreased the numbers of welfare recipients who will be able to become economically self-sufficient by earning a college degree.

- The low wages earned by welfare recipients undercuts unionized labor, resulting in the further impoverishment of working class communities.
- Most former welfare recipients who find work earn between \$5.50 and \$7.00 per hour. Median monthly earnings amount to \$1,2149, not enough to lift a family out of poverty.
- 20-30% of those who leave welfare have no formal employment or employer-reported earnings.
- Many families lose income after leaving the welfare rolls, even if they find work. Cash earnings may go up, but not enough to make up for lost benefits.
- One-third of those who left TANF had to cut the size of or skip meals. 57% worried that food would run out before more money came in.
- Over half a million legal immigrants remain ineligible for Food Stamps due to the 1996 welfare law.
- 38% of welfare recipients have been unable at times to pay rent, mortgage or utility bills
- Meanwhile, the rich receive over \$111 billion a year in government welfare.

For more information, contact the [Welfare Warriors](#), 2711 W Michigan, Milwaukee, WI 53208, 414-342-6662.