

ABORTION IS A REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE ISSUE FOR BLACK FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

There have always been those who have stood in the way of our exercising our rights, who tried to restrict our choices. There probably always will be. But we who have been oppressed should not be swayed in our opposition to tyranny, of any kind, especially attempts to take away our reproductive freedom. You may believe abortion is wrong. We respect your belief and we will do all in our power to protect that choice for you. You may decide that abortion is not an option you would choose. Reproductive freedom guarantees your right not to. All that we ask is that no one deny another human being the right to make her own choice. That no one condemn her to exercise her choices in ways that endanger her health, her life.

-We Remember: African American Women for Reproductive Freedom, 1989

Donna Brazile · National Birth Equity Collaborative

Black Mamas Matter Alliance · SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective

Black Women's Health Imperative · In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda

Over thirty years ago, 16 Black women courageously led a movement for reproductive freedom with the seminal brochure *We Remember: African American Women for Reproductive Freedom* in 1989. In response to the U.S. Supreme Court decision to uphold restrictions to abortion in the *Webster v. Reproductive Health Services* case, the brochure was a reminder that when abortions are made illegal or restricted, Black women disproportionately suffer life-threatening complications and even death. Furthermore, it placed Black women's struggle for reproductive freedom in historical context - our struggle against intersecting oppressions during enslavement, Jim Crow, and the War on Drugs - and defined what reproductive freedom meant to them. We reflect on their legacy in this moment when the Supreme Court will rule on another case, *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, seeking to restrict abortion in Mississippi and overturn *Roe v. Wade* during the COVID-19 pandemic, an ongoing maternal health crisis, and sanctioned actions that disproportionately take the lives of Black people.

I. ABORTION IS A REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE ISSUE FOR BLACK COMMUNITIES

Coined by U.S. Black women in 1994, reproductive justice, or the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities, is rooted in our experiences with and resistance to reproductive oppression. We have experienced forced pregnancy and childbearing, involuntary sterilization, restrictions to abortion and contraception, and policies and environments that endanger and take away our children. Equitable access to safe and legal abortion is a reproductive justice issue. All people regardless of their backgrounds

and circumstances have the right to decide when and how they want to have a child and we trust their ability to make the best decisions for themselves and their families.

II. UPLIFTING THE ACTIVISM AND LEADERSHIP OF THE BLACK REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE MOVEMENT

Black-led reproductive justice organizations have resisted attempts to control the reproductive decision-making of communities and limit their access to healthcare. This was true in 2010 when billboards were placed in our communities declaring Black children an endangered species in hopes of garnering support for anti-abortion legislation. Under the leadership of Loretta Ross and then Monica Simpson, SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective led a coalition of Black-led reproductive justice organizations that collectively created the "Trust Black Women" campaign that successfully defeated the racist billboard campaign as well as local and state legislation that sought to limit abortion access. Similar efforts have been conducted throughout the U.S. while In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda works with its state partners to change policies at the regional and national levels. For Black reproductive justice organizations, the priority is making sure our families are safe and have the resources and decision-making power to do what is best for them.

As we are one year away from the 50th Anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, we ask our allies to lead from the front. We, the signers of this document, stand firmly on the shoulders of the warriors who came before us and demand that women and pregnant people be spared the indignity of having others take away their bodily autonomy.

Avery, B., Barrow, W., Chisholm, S., Collins, C., Edelin, R., Gates, J., Gillespie, M., Height, D., McCabe, J.J., Malveaux, J., Norton, E.H., Tucker, C.D., Tyson, P., Waters, M., & Wattleton, F. (1989). *We Remember African American Women for Reproductive Freedom*. The National Council of Negro Women, Inc. <https://ncnw.org/files/WeRememberBrochure.pdf>

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