



Thinking South: Locating a Reproductive Justice Movement
Paris Hatcher, SPARK Reproductive Justice NOW!

The summer of 2007, Operation Save America, a violent anti-choice organization linked to terrorists like Eric Rudolph (Atlanta Olympic Games bombing and the bombing of a gay club and two abortion clinics including the clinic stated) descended upon the All Woman New Woman Clinic in Birmingham, AL for their annual siege. As I stood across from an all white mob, using the big pictures of Black children as their cause to end abortion, it became clear the importance of the thinking and locating South in our reproductive justice movement.

The idea of thinking South is more than pointing out this geographical area on a map. It asks that we examine the role of the South as a player in constructing race and gender in our society and giving context to our current reproductive justice movement. The actions and racialized examples made by Operation Save America of “good” White folks as protective and well meaning parents of Black bodies was a common place for the Confederate past as well as their neo conservative contemporary. The anti choice group strategically made the connection in their racist messaging between abortion and the history of the South (in particular relating abortion to genocide and Klu Klux Klan references are just two of the many examples).

Although this argument is used by the antis to attract people of color to their overwhelmingly White base, the South as a politic and location offers an opportunity for the reproductive justice movement to continue to build and link the resilience and resistance of our foremothers and the history and events of the South as a site and fertile ground for the birth of the reproductive justice movement and framework.

The South as a location and as a politic reminds us that culture, legacy, and resistance live hand in hand with building a movement of collective visions and shared experiences, and that this can not happen if we are not challenging White supremacy and the control of our bodies and communities. This challenge comes directly from the Southern experience of genocide and slavery that sets the context of race, gender, class, and sexuality in this country. Especially for people of color, especially for women. This country’s orientation to us-and its attempts to control our bodies, reproduction and thus “usefulness”—is founded solely on the legacies of slavery and genocide.

Reproductive justice and multi-issue social justice organizations based in the South know that our work is the continuation, summation, and articulation of freedom fighters of our not so distant past. Examples are the nameless many Black and Native women who knew

herbs, used gynecological resistance, caught each others' babies, and built radical families and communities before colonialism and slavery, and continued while being under attack, sold, bought, and killed. Thinking and locating our reproductive justice movement South honors the legacy of our foremothers as well as gives a foundation to our current struggle.

As we move forward, the fight for reproductive justice, a movement that centers the lives of women of color, must locate and think South. Beyond geography, the South offers an opportunity to channel movements and frameworks that have always been indivisibly linked to freedom, liberation, and reproductive justice. Although steeped in a rich and graphic past, the South as a politic reminds us of our radical roots and the on going fight for our bodies, our communities, and our future.

If you would like more information about grassroots reproductive justice activism in the South, visit SPARK Reproductive Justice at www.sparkrj.org.