

IS BIRTH CONTROL GENOCIDE?

ONE OF THE MOST controversial issues in the Black community at this point is that of birth control-genocide. In attempting to make some functional statements in this area a number of things have to come to fore. I think one of the crucial things at this point is the present condition of the black community. Can we afford the unlimited reproduction that Dick Gregory recently talked about? The other question or factor is, should we advocate a kind of family control, what shall we mean?

To some men it seems that the most revolutionary thing that can be done is to flood the community with black babies. To these same men, talk of any kind of restraint is equated with genocide. I have some rather pointed objections to the first kind of mentality. When one looks closely at the situation in our community, one has to ask can we really deal with many more children? My answer has to be a qualified, no. Consider the number of black children that die before they reach two years old because of the conditions of the society into which they are born. Black children must be provided for if they are to survive. They must receive medical attention, food, clothing, shelter, and compassion. The fact of the matter is that too many black children are hungry, sick, poorly clothed, and deserted. When one looks at the number of black children on AFDC rolls it is evident that without welfare, a substantial number of black children that are alive would be dead. It is my feeling that to add to that number would be to increase a misery which we cannot afford.

When we hear black men talk of genocide, and look at the number of unwed mothers, and no-dad children in our community, we must ask what it is that is called genocide. I agree that if white people start massive sterilization in our community that would have to be genocide against us. A kind of genocide that we would have to fight with every ounce of our being. On the other hand to abandon a mother and a child is no less cruel than outright genocide. Now, when we talk about desertion, I do not want to include what I think of as the committed black father who is smart enough to be absent when the caseworker comes 'cause that's another way of feeding his family, but is otherwise right there on the scene when the mother of his child needs him. This is one beautiful adaptation to survive in this hostile country. Pride must also be measured as commitment to those that you profess to love.

On the other hand we have to talk about and begin to deal with the slimy stud who gets children and hats up as soon as they are born, if not before, in order to find somebody else's legs to get between. There are too many sorry individuals who think their only role is to make women pregnant, a sort of carry-over from the stud the white men created during slavery. It is sad to think that our freedom is tied up in dealing with this kind of mentality in our community. My own feeling is that this kind of man is on the same level with drug pushers, and ought to be "offed" as soon as possible. With the drug pushers, if too many of them wind up dead, they 'gon

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stop pushing drugs. I think if we begin to make it clear that black men who can do no more than sleep with women are a drawback to our freedom then some of this problem will be eliminated. For it is well known any boy past 15 can get a child but it takes a man to father one.

WHEN WE talk about the future of our community, I think our first concern has to be with the survival and well-being of black children who are already here. We must encourage and require black men to stay with their children and the women that have trusted them, or that they have fooled; either way it is the responsibility of black men to shape the generation that will follow ours. Secondly, we must encourage, if not require, blacks who are able to do so to take in other children to raise, and to assist families in our community who are having problems providing for the needs of their children. We must begin to consider the children in our community as the responsibility of that community, and if a child goes to bed hungry, or stays sick, or is poorly clothed, or does not receive compassion it is an indictment against that community and not just his immediate family. If our oppression is as one, then we must unite as one to eliminate it and to protect our own from it.

The common reason given for encouraging baby-making is often that we must insure our future, our survival, etc. What we fail to realize is that our future has already been born, and all we need to do is to protect it.

The little child who runs around Pettigrew Street in Durham with a runny nose begging for a dime is our future. The little girl in Bedford Stuy who smiles up at you even though her clothes do not protect her from the cold; she there shivering, is our future. The black youth who go to old shack-schools and try to learn despite the fact that the places are ready to fall down, they are our future. And if we fail to love them, to protect them and to shape the future we already have then we shall have no future, even if we have babies every five seconds. Mao has said freedom comes out of the barrel of a gun, I have yet to hear someone say freedom comes out of a womb.

Just more children will not by any means make us free. If we continue to be slaves as we are, they too shall be slaves. If we are to have a beautiful future, we must destroy the present. We must destroy our present, for it is only as we are free that our children can be free. Free children are not born to slaves, your mother was a slave, you are a slave, and yes, your children are slaves. And they will remain slaves until this generation, this day, and this commitment destroys that which oppresses.

When we equate a kind of birth control with genocide we begin to talk about preserving our race, our seed, our existence as human beings. We seem to think that no matter what the price black people ought to remain on the face of the earth. Have we not forgotten the mother who in slavery killed her own child because she did not want it to be a

slave? I can think of nothing more painful than what that mother must have felt as she slit the throat of her child lying there in all of the beauty that black babies are born with. We are past the stage where this must happen, for freedom is at our fingertips if we only grasp it with the will to kill, and yes the will to die before we let it escape.

Many black men often say, "if I die in the revolution I want my wife and my kid to live to carry on my seed." My own feeling is otherwise with regard to wives and children. If we decide that we shall be free, then it shall be all or nothing. If we ever rise against the United States government then we must win or die in the process, for the rest of us will be exterminated immediately afterward. Hitler did not fail to kill Jew mothers and Jew babies. Lt. Calley did not fail to kill Vietnamese women and children. And if we doubt this happening to us, read of some of the past lynchings of black women. It is one thing to castrate a man before killing him. It is quite another to tear a baby from a pregnant black woman, and to stomp it to death before her very eyes as the rope tightens around her own throat. White people in these United States invented both savage acts. If I should die in open conflict with the powers that be in this place then, should I have a wife and children, they too will die alongside this husband and father. For if I lose in an attempt to free them, that is all.

A NATION OF BLACK PEOPLE which cannot free itself deserves to be banished from the face of the earth as it surely will. There is nothing greater than the reality of being free. If Japanese pilots could fly suicide missions in hopes to be free we must consider the same kind of risk. For it is clear to me that if we lose we will not be given even the chance they had to rebuild. Slaves who rebelled were for the most part killed when they were captured. I also hasten to remind you that black people are the one thing that this country no longer needs. After Nat Turner they still needed cotton pickers, now they don't. Make no mistake about it, either we win, or we die.

PAGE 36

When we talk about genocide in this country, we seldom talk about the institutional genocide that this country is already using on us, the Indians, and Chicanos. It is no accident that black people for the most part do not live to get as old as white people. It is no accident that in some areas 50-75% of the black children born die before they reach 3 years old. The thousands of black people who are starving, the millions more who are malnourished or undernourished, are by no means accidental. The high proportion of black soldiers who die in combat does not represent an accident. And finally, the many black people who are murdered by white policemen, and other black people, are not accidents of history.

We admit that next to mass execution, forced birth control is the most overt kind of genocide. But if we are going to defend ourselves we must begin to control births in our community, ourselves. If we limit the number of births so that we increase the survival rate in our community, then as a group of people we will have a stronger army. We are talking about the kind of birth control that we should provide to our people such that people who don't want any more children, or cannot afford any more children, will not have to deal with unwanted pregnancies.

Black women must become mobile and able to defend our homes. A black woman with two babies in her arms, or eight months pregnant will not be able to take up a piece and defend herself against a white policeman who invades her home. While I would be no better than white people if I suggested that black people stop having babies, I do think that we ought to begin encouraging our people not to have any more kids than they can provide for, and not to add to the number until the baby is old enough to protect itself. The fact is armies fight for freedom, and if we are going to be free then we are going to have to act like an army in some respects.

THIS LEADS us to the final reality that we have to deal with in terms of this discussion. Are we talking about a realistic thing?

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Do we honestly think that we will have to go to a kind of bloody war to be free? Do we in truth feel that we are that serious about what we call freedom? If we do not see our situation in this country in the plain terms of act against act then questions of what we shall do do not approach the issue of survival. If survival is not an issue but is taken for granted, then there is no need to talk about genocide. I think there are about two logical reasons for this kind of attitude. (1) If we do not conceive this country as being an enemy of black people, that is an enemy like Hitler was to the Jews, or Calley to the Vietnamese, then we should have no fear of being wiped out. If white people love us, and we are like them, then they will not kill us slowly or otherwise. (2) If we do not see ourselves as mounting a serious defense against being wiped out, there is no point in talking about birth control or genocide. If we remain as we are, then it makes no difference for we are powerless to resist birth control, sterilization, or mass murder. I can only make the point that whether we continue to encourage baby-making (not family making) or anything else, the choice is not ours unless ours is a community capable of defending and protect-

ing itself.

I contend that we must become serious in our every act, such that we consider the possible consequences as they affect all of us. From the simple things like having families and love-making, to where we live and what we do. We either begin to actively work toward liberation, or we accept our lot as the powers that be see fit to dish it out. We have to decide whether there is something better that is worth the risking of life itself to achieve. To have a family is one thing, to make that family *free* is quite another. To have a large family of slaves is no big thing, anybody with time and a bed can do it. To have even one son and to make him free takes something else, might be your life and his. If you decide that he will be free, then be prepared to go all the way. If you change your mind you both will be dead, you killed, him murdered. If we are concerned about genocide or any other kind of oppression we must decide if we really mean it when we sing the words our foreparents sang:

*Freedom, Freedom, Freedom over me,
And before I'll be a slave,
I'll be buried in my grave,
And go home to my lord and be free.*

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