

“An instrument of genocide”

The Black Nationalist Campaign against Birth Control

These [sterilization] clinics claim to be “aiding the indigent,” (the poor and black) but the obvious aim is surgical genocide, as effective in a long term sense as Nazi Germany’s gas chambers and with the same objective.

—*Muhammad Speaks*

Birth control is nothing more than part and parcel of the anti-human practices of the fascist racist and U.S. government and their genocidal war effort.

—*The Black Panther*

There is growing evidence that there is an organized plot on the part of the Montgomery Community Action Committee (MCAC) and the Montgomery Family Planning Center (MFPC) to employ mass sterilizations of Black people in Alabama. The Planning Center has arranged sterilization for 11 persons during the past year.

—*The Black Panther*

As we have seen, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Nation of Islam and the Black Panther Party claimed that any contraceptive use among blacks would inevitably lead to the genocide of the population. This was the anti-fertility control rhetoric criticized by black and white feminists in the previous chapters. The Nation of Islam, founded in the early 1930s in Detroit and united under Elijah Muhammad in Chicago, and the Black Panther Party, a Black Power group organized in Oakland in 1966, both protested against what they saw as the pernicious aims of government funded family planners and those who supported them, including white feminist abortion rights activists. For the most part, Black Nationalist men were opposed to any promotion of personal

fertility control until black feminists pressured them into changing their position. At the same time, the Black Muslims and the Black Panthers contributed to the development of a new public discourse on *involuntary* reproductive control that foregrounded problems of sterilization abuse and population control among people of color.

Background

Black Nationalist and Black Power opposition to fertility control came to prominent public attention after the sterilization of Minnie Lee Relf in 1973. But the Panthers and the Black Muslims had already vocalized opposition to federally funded birth control in poor black neighborhoods for over half a decade. The Black Panther Party for Self-Defense responded to Relf's sterilization with the scathing accusation that "the actions of the Montgomery Family Planning Clinic are genocidal."¹ According to the Black Panthers the Montgomery Family Planning Clinic had contributed to the genocide of the black race by sterilizing a total of 11 women who received federal health subsidies in 1973. The Nation of Islam similarly alleged, "This is but one known case of sterilization: many Blacks are aware of the genocidal program of the federal government against Blacks. This case here in Montgomery which has gained publicity is simply one 'manifestation.'"²

The responses to the Relf sterilization by the Black Panthers and the Nation of Islam represented some of the most negative and severe black attitudes toward family planning in the United States. Research done in the 1970s suggested that the majority of blacks supported government involvement in fertility control, although in lower numbers than white respondents. Young black men had the least positive response to fertility control and were the most likely to link fertility control with black genocide.³

The Black Panthers and the Black Muslims saw Minnie Lee Relf's plight as one instance of a national, and possibly international, conspiracy by whites to eradicate people of color. All federally supported fertility control programs in poor communities came under fire as methods meant to gradually destroy black populations. As one writer for the Black Panther paper wrote, "no pill, loop, or treatment short of mass sterilization will restrict our growth . . . each child born will be one more revolutionary that the power structure will have to try to deal with."⁴

Black Panthers and members of the Nation of Islam placed sterilization abuse and other birth control methods, viewed as coerced population control, within a larger context of concern about the overall welfare of blacks. A broad view of their concern for black racial survival allows for a better understanding of some of their vehement rejection of birth control and abortion. Black feminist and pro-fertility control advocate, Frances Ruffin, expressed her understanding of the black militant's legitimate paranoia about genocide:

In a country which has a history of being a hostile environment for Black people, militants felt that it was necessary to reject this society's attempt to use birth control as the answer in dealing with the outstanding problems of poverty, unemployment, unequal education, and inadequate housing conditions. . . . [O]n the minds of many, was the realization that the thrust of governmental funds to public and private birth control programs followed on the heels of urban upheavals of the mid 60's—such programs were previously out of reach for many Black women.⁵

Ruffin emphasized that blacks only gained access to birth control and abortion after the political and social rebellions of the civil rights movement, Black Power, and riots in Detroit, Newark, and Watts. She suggested that that sort of “benevolence” on the part of a white government reticent about granting blacks any kind of real political or economic power spawned theories of genocidal intentions among blacks. For Ruffin, blacks reasonably suspected that white paranoia about black political organizing and violence motivated federal government sponsorship of fertility control programs.

According to former Black Panther Kathleen Cleaver, fears about a dangerously shrinking black population had been expressed throughout the 1960s, particularly as the civil rights movement shifted to Black Power and became more violent.⁶ When the Black Panthers found themselves the target of the FBI's counterintelligence (COINTELPRO) efforts, their suspicions of a genocidal plot grew. Revelations in 1972 about the U.S. Public Health Service's research experiments on syphilitic black men in Tuskegee, Alabama whose condition was left untreated further fed suspicions that the U.S. government intended to destroy the black population.⁷ The Panthers also published articles in *The Black Panther* accusing the federal government of spreading heroin in poor black neighborhoods

and imprisoning black men in order to wipe out the black population. Likewise, the Nation of Islam believed that whites had tried to eradicate blacks by keeping them poor, by supplying drugs to black neighborhoods, by jailing black men, and by promoting the use of fertility control.

Like black feminists, both the Panthers and the Muslims also argued that white population controllers threatened the survival of people of color by offering them birth control without other health care measures, such as public clinics specializing in preventive medicine and hospitals providing pre- and postnatal care, nutrition advice, and dentistry. According to Black Nationalists, African Americans needed other resources too, such as decent housing, opportunities for work and education, and day care, all aimed at the wellness of the entire population. They believed that a total health care program that took into account the extensive needs of poor blacks was central to the promotion of stable and thriving black communities. Without an end to the health care problems linked to poverty, Nationalists argued, birth control services remained harmful.

Too often Black Nationalists are represented as a uniform group without contradictory or conflicting beliefs about the best way to fight racist oppression. Yet, a more precise representation of Nationalist beliefs recognizes that they articulated varied opinions as to the best strategy for ending racist oppression. This is particularly true when looking at Black Nationalist positions concerning health care and fertility control. Compared with the Black Panthers, the Black Muslims articulated a relatively weak plan for total health care. Their warnings of a genocidal conspiracy, published in their paper *Muhammad Speaks*, often sounded more like science fiction than rational political editorializing. Still, concrete evidence of sterilization abuse in black communities in America convinced many non-Muslim blacks that the Black Muslims were not entirely wrong when they cried “genocide.” Even the National Medical Association, a society of black physicians, voiced their suspicions that federally funded family planning programs were not in the black community’s best interest, particularly when blacks lacked basic health care facilities.⁸

By contrast, the Black Panthers offered advice for total health care in their publications and set up their own community-controlled clinics to stem the tide of ill health in poor African-American neighborhoods. The Panther warnings of genocide accompanied a political agenda that advocated black community-controlled health care. Ideally, this program would include prenatal care, preventive health care such as vaccinations against childhood diseases and screenings for sickle cell anemia, commu-

nity-based child-care, and prekindergarten education for children. The Panthers believed that blacks could best provide medical services in their own communities. These programs helped maintain a popular following for the Black Panthers, particularly among black women.

The Black Panther emphasis on total health care led them to reverse their anti-birth control and abortion position without disrupting their most popular programs set up to strengthen black communities. In the early years of the debate, the Black Panthers argued that all fertility control—sterilization, abortion and contraception—equaled genocide for people of color. As the feminist message of a woman's fundamental right to abortion became more widespread, and as black women began to forge a feminism of their own, the Panthers refined their criticism to accept birth control and abortion when voluntarily chosen. This gradual transformation came at the behest of black women, both in the Party and outside of it, who rejected the total condemnation of reproductive control for people of color as genocidal. By the mid-1970s, black criticism of population control focused almost exclusively on the federally supported sterilization of black, Latina, and Native American women. Most of the conspiratorial rhetoric about black genocide had disappeared from Black Panther literature.

Other factors also contributed to the shift in the Black Panther's attitudes toward birth control and abortion. By the mid-1970s, the federal government had reduced funding for fertility control. Public support for family planning was less acceptable after *Roe v. Wade*, due to a concerted campaign on the part of the Catholic Church and other New Right anti-abortion organizations. Also, the Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) department adopted a set of guidelines regulating sterilization in federally funded clinics. Finally, accusations of genocide by Black Nationalists (both in the U.S. and internationally) convinced the population establishment to refashion their rhetoric. They began to promote the idea that every individual should exercise full control over his or her fertility; this included the right to bear children as well as the right to prevent or terminate pregnancy. All these forces combined, contributed to a context in which the Black Panthers felt free to promote abortion and birth control as beneficial to the black community, a reversal of their earlier position.⁹

In the 1960s and early 1970s, however, other prominent blacks joined the Nation of Islam and the Black Panthers in their criticism of black birth control programs. Black scholars, in particular, argued that "family planning" institutions failed to ameliorate the causes of hunger, poverty,

and ill health in black communities. Ronald Walters, chairman of the department of political science at Howard University, became one of the most outspoken critics of population control aimed at African Americans. Walters decided to explain his position when he rejected a request to become a member of the Advisory Board of the World Population Society. In his essay, originally appearing in the *Black Scholar*, he detailed some of the reasons blacks felt that birth control programs were not in their interests. First, Walters asserted that population control rhetoric emanated from “the richest nation in the world, a nation which might be able to feed its population and wipe out its poverty except for the fact that this would require basic changes in its system of the distribution of resources.” Furthermore, the richest nation in the world aimed their population control rhetoric at poor nations and poor residents of the United States, all of whom consumed fewer resources than well-to-do Americans. Walters offered an alternative strategy for improving the lives of the poor. He advised, “It should be clear that the need is not for population limiting programs but for the expansion of political and economic opportunity” in the Third World and among low-income Americans. By refusing to exercise this option, Walters believed the U.S. government “admits its inability or its unwillingness to accomplish the humane task.”¹⁰ Finally, Walters argued that, “since black and Third World communities appear to be the target communities for family planning, and it is their survival which is at stake . . . such programs should be determined by them and their peoples and no one else.” Walters asserted that communities of color and poor people should take responsibility for defining their own fertility programs to fit their needs as they perceived them. This notion of community control was a key element in Black Power discussions of fertility control without coercion.¹¹

Other prominent black leaders, including members of the Urban League, officials of the NAACP, members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) led by Martin Luther King, and the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), criticized birth control programs in the 1960s. In particular, Whitney Young, head of the Urban League in 1962, worried that Planned Parenthood consciously obscured their population control aims with rhetoric about aiding the black community. He believed that an absence of minority representation in Planned Parenthood’s local programs betrayed their hostile attitude toward the black population. Roy Innis, National Director of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), criticized both domestic and international

population control programs and, like Walters, noted the high density of populations in European countries in comparison to the rest of the world. Based on this evidence, he questioned the motivations of population control programs aimed at African and other Third World countries inhabited by people of color. Furthermore, Innis argued, the percentage of blacks in America had dropped since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—from 20 percent of the population to 10 percent. He maintained that “this catastrophe . . . was caused, in part, by the genocidal action of Europe and her offspring in America against ‘Africans at home and abroad.’” Innis concluded, “Overpopulation is a white man’s problem. In his limited space, he squanders an extremely disproportionate share of the world’s resources.”¹²

Evidence that others in the black community were suspicious of family planning programs came in 1966 when SCLC held a workshop on family planning in South Carolina. Participants voiced their negative attitudes about federal birth control programs in black neighborhoods. Comments ranged from the belief that God intended women to bear children to fears that the state conspired to keep black people powerless by controlling their numbers. For example, one woman testified, “I am a mother of 12—8 living and I don’t believe in birth control because if God meant me to have 12 children I should and God will provide.” Another argued that “birth control is a plot just as segregation was a plot to keep the Negro down.” A third activist at the workshop concurred that “it [birth control] is a plot rather than a solution. Instead of working for us and giving us our rights—reduce us in numbers and not have to give us anything.” At the same time, other civil rights activists in SCLC stated that blacks wanted to control their fertility, but distrusted agencies such as Planned Parenthood that presumably promoted fertility control without taking into consideration the wide range of more pressing needs in poor black communities.¹³

There were also strident black voices affirming the importance of birth control to the black community in the 1960s and early 1970s. Julius Lester of SNCC believed that forced childbearing was akin to slavery. He wrote, “Those black militants who stand up and tell women, ‘Produce black babies!’ are telling black women to be slaves.” Stressing the positive benefits of birth control for blacks, Lester continued, “If blacks within the movement are seriously concerned about revolution, then they should be urging women to postpone having children, because women need to be free for the fullest participation in the struggle.”¹⁴ In concert

with Lester, Dr. Martin Luther King denounced anti-birth control rhetoric as similar to the forced breeding of slave women by antebellum slaveholders.¹⁵

When the Black Panthers and members of the Nation of Islam raised the specter of genocide, they responded to what they viewed as a long history of state and corporate-sponsored eugenic population control in the United States.¹⁶ Granted, from the 1930s onward, even the most avid advocates of eugenic population control avoided any rhetoric that might associate them with Nazi eugenic policies.¹⁷ Some population control advocates believed, however, that contraceptives, often including sterilization, could help eradicate the poverty found in black and Latino communities.¹⁸ Furthermore, some population controllers championed birth control as a palliative against rebellions and riots among urban blacks as the civil rights movement shifted toward Black Power in the mid-1960s. As society appeared to be crumbling around them, and people of color threatened to overturn racial hierarchies by bringing armed-revolution to the streets, some white Americans climbed onto the population control bandwagon, supporting greater government funding for birth control in communities of color.¹⁹

Contemporary forms of population policy date to the end of World War II and to the formation of John D. Rockefeller III's influential Population Council in 1952, although the U.S. federal government did not back population programs financially until the 1960s because of opposition from the Roman Catholic Church. In the 1960s, the United States reversed their family planning policy as concerns about ecology, a "population bomb," and political upheaval grew both abroad and at home. In 1963, Secretary of State Dean Rusk gave authorization to the Agency for International Development (AID) for the creation of family planning programs. Also in 1963, Senator Ernest Gruening of Alaska introduced legislation that would amend the foreign aid bill, allowing AID to research the problem of population increase. By 1964, Planned Parenthood affiliates had acquired Organization for Economic Opportunity (OEO) funding from President Johnson for welfare programs. In 1965, the Johnson administration provided OEO with additional funds for family planning—excluding abortion—and maternal health programs. In the same year, Senator Gruening convened hearings on S. 1676, which addressed expenditures to deal with the "population explosion" both abroad and in the United States. Witnesses who testified at the hearings connected what they believed was a dire problem with overpopulation in poor and black

neighborhoods to the riot in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles. Finally, the year 1967 included congressional passage of the Child Health Act, which mandated that at least 6 percent of maternal-child health grants to public health agencies be reserved for family planning. Through initiatives such as these, birth control became state policy. Birth controllers justified the provision of contraceptives to the poor with the logic that not only the rich should be able to regulate their fertility.²⁰

The Nixon administration expanded state involvement in population politics even further. With Daniel Patrick Moynihan as his social policy director, President Nixon established a five-year goal to provide contraception to all people unable to afford it. He proposed increased spending on family planning from \$48 million to \$150 million over the course of those five years. In 1970, responding to the administration's policy on family planning, Congress passed the Family Planning Services and Population Research Act that would help achieve Nixon's goal of providing contraceptive services to every poor woman on a voluntary basis.

Federal population policy went through another sea change, however, just as achievement of the goal of providing contraception to a broad representation of the American poor was in sight. The introduction of abortion into the population control equation was central to this transformation. When the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future, established by Congress in 1970, endorsed the use of legal abortion to control population, Nixon distanced himself from the birth control issue in response to criticism from the Catholic Church. Although abortion was legal in New York State, Washington State, and Hawaii, it was still too controversial to be introduced as federal policy.²¹ It was also during the Nixon administration that a federal clinic had involuntarily sterilized Minnie Lee Relf. As the press popularized this case and others similar to it, the Nixon administration received a barrage of criticism for its failure to regulate the OEO-HEW federal sterilization programs. As a result of these two public controversies over federal contraceptive programs, the Nixon administration back-pedaled on its earlier commitment to provide contraceptives to poor women.²²

In and of itself, there would appear to be no complaint against an administration that made it a goal to provide birth control equally to rich and poor. Both black and white and rich and poor women had need for voluntary fertility control measures. For many Black Nationalists, however, the idea that the federal government would use birth control to prevent social unrest further fed theories about genocide. Suspicions among

black leaders of racial prejudice and demographic manipulation were spawned when government funds for fertility control increased in 1965, the same year that saw the Voting Rights Act passed.²³ Both the Black Panthers and Black Muslims believed that attempts to quell urban riots or to end poverty through family planning were palliatives used by the federal government to avoid more sincere efforts to change the circumstances that caused poverty in communities of color. They argued, rather than curb the poor black population through fertility services, government planners should end poverty by helping strengthen the economy in neighborhoods of color and incorporating blacks and Hispanics into the national political process. After these goals had been achieved, people of color would consider limiting their fertility for their own reasons. Neither the Black Muslims nor the Black Panthers trusted a white government to help them meet these ends, however; both agreed that if blacks wanted more power, they would have to take it for themselves.²⁴

*A “Sin” against Allah:
The Nation of Islam and Genocide Rhetoric*

The Nation of Islam espoused a conservative theology that at its foundation opposed any form of population limitation within the black community. The Black Muslims inherited their animosity for any form of fertility control from an earlier twentieth century Black Nationalist movement founded by Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association. In 1934, the Garveyites passed a resolution condemning all use of birth control. Likewise, in 1976, Elijah Muhammad, the foremost “Prophet” and spiritual leader of the Nation of Islam wrote of birth control: “Using the birth control scheme against the production of human beings is a sin that Allah (God) is against and for which he will punish the guilty on the Day of Judgment. Both the Bible and Holy Qur-an’s teachings are against birth control.”²⁵

Elijah Muhammad traced the “sin” of birth control to the creation of the white race. He used this mythology to illustrate his opposition to fertility control among blacks: “The white race is a race that was produced by using the birth control law, says God to me. Do not accept this death plan of the devils to destroy and keep from being a people.”²⁶ The Black Muslims believed that Yakub, a black scientist who tampered with biological reproduction by taking grafts from black people to create a new

race, created whites. According to the myth, blacks consisted of two parts, one brown and one black. “The brown germ can be grafted into its last stage, and the last stage is white.” Elijah Muhammad preached that God gave the white race six thousand years to rule over blacks as punishment for Yakub’s manipulation of God’s creation. That rule ended in 1914. From that year on, it fell to black people to overthrow whites and take their divine place as leaders.²⁷

Despite their extreme racial views, and a marginal place in American politics, the Black Muslims articulated an argument about black genocide that drew upon fears already present in American black communities. The Black Muslims incorporated these fears into their brand of racial politics and religious doctrine. In a study published in the *American Journal of Public Health* in 1973, Castellano Turner and William Darity found that young black men with less than average educations most often believed that family planning was a form of black genocide. Expressing sympathy for this sentiment, they wrote, “The young, lower status, northern black male (the most expressive of genocide fears) has every reason to wonder why white America is pushing family planning in the black community at the same time that it fails to push for equity in education and in occupational opportunity.” Additionally, Turner and Darity found that most blacks supported family planning when under their personal control, and black women expressed desire for birth control more often than black men. Turner and Darity theorized that because fears of genocide created ambivalence about family planning, it had an overall negative effect on the use of birth control among blacks.²⁸

Black Muslims also created an elaborate history that narrated white attempts to exterminate blacks, which resonated for many people of color who did not join the Nation of Islam. They traced the genocidal plot against black people to the international slave trade of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In a condemnation of the historical colonial exploitation of Africa, one Nation of Islam reporter for *Muhammad Speaks* proposed that if it had not been “for the incredibly ruthless and genocidal slave trade which raped and wrecked Africa for centuries—Africa today would be the world’s most populous continent and perhaps the most prosperous and thriving.”²⁹ As this passage suggested, the Nation of Islam twinned black population growth with economic growth. They believed that because they were greater in numbers, people of color united could overwhelm whites of European descent, appropriating both economic and political power. Greater numbers would also confirm the

prophecy that blacks and other nonwhites were destined to rule over whites. “The slavemasters envy their once-slaves’ future and want to destroy it,” Elijah Muhammad preached. Black Muslims conjectured that if white people had no reason to fear blacks and other people of color, they would leave them to prosper. The Black Muslims believed that whites knew that when the tables would be turned, people of color would rise up against them, so they fashioned methods to keep blacks and other people of color weak.³⁰

Anti-birth control rhetoric figured centrally in Muhammad’s political diatribe against the white man. In one 1967 address to his followers, he gave evidence that he believed proved that whites used birth control to reduce the number of Third World people. He wrote, “Birth control has become a major phase of America’s foreign ‘aid’ program—in some cases, the ‘hook’ on which all other aid to underdeveloped countries hangs.”³¹ He used India as an example: “The cynically overt way in which famine-plagued India was forced to accept birth control, in the form of devices and sterilization, shocked civilized people everywhere, even among some white nations.”³² In fact, after droughts and an economic crisis in 1966, the Indian government transformed what had been a voluntary program for population reduction into one that operated on the basis of incentives to both individuals and communities to reduce their fertility. Compulsory sterilization was part of the state population control package, particularly in the 1970s. Muhammad argued, however, that India was “forced” to accept these measures. While the whole story of Indian state-sponsored birth control is much more complex, it is true that after 1966 USAID and the World Bank pressured India to step up their population reduction efforts.³³

Muhammad gave special warning about the dangers of birth control to the women in the Nation of Islam. Because Black Muslims believed that women held the ultimate responsibility for bearing and rearing a strong and large black population, they needed to be extra vigilant when it came to temptations to use birth control. Perhaps Muhammad also understood that black women had relatively positive notions about birth control and would want to limit their reproduction if given the opportunity. He wrote, “To the Lost-Found members of the tribe of Shabazz (the so-called Negroes), I warn you my people—and especially the women. Be aware of the tricks the devils are using to instill the idea of a false birth control in their clinics and hospitals.” Muhammad avowed that women lost their value if they could not reproduce. He asked, “Who wants a ster-

ile woman? . . . No man wants a non-productive woman. Though he may not want children for a time, he does want a woman who can produce a child if he changes his mind. Using birth control for promiscuous behavior is a sin.” Muhammad described most black women as incapable of making their own personal decisions about fertility control. He stated that they were “ignorant of the real motive behind the so-called birth control schemes proposed and demanded by white officials.” According to Muhammad, Black Muslim women should count themselves lucky to receive his warnings about fertility control; with this knowledge they could fulfill their god-given childbearing role (at the behest of their husbands) and contribute to the fight against black genocide.³⁴

According to Black Muslims, whites used sterilization as their primary weapon in the genocidal war against Third World peoples in America and internationally. In 1967, Lonnie 2X, writing for *Muhammad Speaks*, reported that “Black leaders across the country have pointed to this state’s [Virginia] sterilization clinics as proof that there is a deliberate effort to destroy the Negro population of America by surgically stripping young black women of their ability to bear children.” He believed that the “United States has sponsored sterilization clinics and other ‘birth control’ programs in nonwhite countries throughout the world. Already some three million young men and boys in and around New Delhi, India, have been sterilized” by the United States Peace Corps.³⁵ Although the author overestimated the number of sterilizations at this point in Indian population control history and I have found no evidence that the United States Peace Corps carried out sterilizations, the significance of his statement lay in the author’s attempt to connect the oppression experienced by African Americans—experiences of reproductive abuses that included coerced sterilization—within the borders of the United States to that of Third World peoples subjected to what the Nation of Islam viewed as neocolonialism.³⁶

The Nation of Islam made explicit the parallels between what they saw as genocidal population control in the United States and in developing nations. According to Black Muslims, John D. Rockefeller III sponsored this program with the aid of his Population Council. Black Muslims believed that because Rockefeller was “[a]ware that the skyrocketing growth of political knowledge among the world’s poor is directly threatening his profits,” he plotted to institute a worldwide program of population control.³⁷ An uncredited article in *Muhammad Speaks* declared, “the most hated and bitterly opposed scheme the U.S. Government has plotted since

the enslavement of Africans and the near-extinction of North and South American Indians and Eskimos is the world wide birth control program.” The article continued, “This ‘contribution’ according to a study financed by the Ford Foundation, involves wiping out 2 billion potential liberation army soldiers in the systematically de-developed nations of Asia, Africa, Central and South America.” President Nixon, too, the article intoned, had jumped on the population control bandwagon despite his public opposition to abortion by “cutting aid to living poor people” and maintaining “LBJ’s level of birth control budgeting” siphoned into the OEO/HEW clinics.³⁸

Although the Nation of Islam produced some of the most heated critiques of state population planning in the United States and in the Third World, other people of color and feminists agreed with the essence of the Black Muslim protest against population control efforts. The reproductive rights critique of population control put forth by feminists and other people of color that would gain influence in the mid-1970s was partially articulated by members of the Nation of Islam in the late 1960s. The general argument was that population policy-makers within the United States government believed that world population growth needed to be limited in order to stem the tide of poverty and violence among people of color both in U.S. borders and in developing countries. The United States, and developing nations influenced by the United States, sponsored population planning that focused on limiting fertility by any means, sometimes coercively through incentives and sometimes by force. They argued further that health care measures that could have been influential in reducing infant and maternal mortality rates among the poor, both domestically and internationally, were bypassed in favor of fertility limitation.

Despite their critique of Third World population control programs, the Black Muslims’ primary concern remained with low-income black Americans. Lonnie 2X reported that “now so-called ‘Maternity Clinics’—specifically outfitted to purge women or men of their reproductive possibilities—are cropping up in hospitals across this state (Virginia).” According to Lonnie 2X, a Virginia clinic sterilized one woman whose husband had recently died. He described her experience of being pressured into the procedure:

First they go easy . . . by explaining the surgery and trying to persuade you that it’s all very harmless. If you don’t go for this, they say your re-

lief checks might be cut off. Soon the attitude of the doctors and welfare people changes. Where they asked you to be sterilized at first, they start telling you to be sterilized later.

The sterilized woman told Lonnie 2X that she immediately regretted her “choice.” She expressed the fear that no man would want to marry her now that she had lost her ability to reproduce. When she returned to the clinic that had sterilized her to ask if her reproductive organs could be restored, “[t]hey actually laughed at me,” she went on, tears swelling in her eyes. “To make a long story short,” she continued, “there is no way to restore my womanhood. The operation was the greatest mistake of my life.”³⁹

Black Muslim rhetoric about genocide and coercive population control measures failed to balance the dangers of reproductive abuses with the benefits of individual control over reproduction. Their opposition to any form of reproductive control had a conspiratorial tone that tended to alienate those who did not ascribe to the general teachings of Elijah Muhammad—specifically white women’s liberationists—who were otherwise sympathetic to a critique of domestic and international population policy. For example, writing for *Muhammad Speaks*, Dr. Charles Greenlee, proclaimed that the “genocide tool that the white man is counting on most heavily now is a procedure he labels, ‘Population Control.’” He argued, “Population Control is broken down into two categories.” One that attempted to control nonwhite people by limiting their numbers, and a second, which attempted to control “the kind of people who populate this earth.” Greenlee described “Quality Population Control” as “the ultimate weapon of Black genocide . . . it is a few years off and for that reason, the U.S. along with other white governments is pushing Numerical Control to the nonwhite races.” Greenlee continued, weaving a conspiracy he believed whites and “Uncle Tom” blacks waged against nonwhites:

Today, the liberal, money oriented whites, backstopped by the black “butler” group (“anything you say white folks”—Blacks), have seized upon the noble sounding cause of the individual right of every mother to have her family with whatever spacing she desires, and have converted this noble cause to an instrument of Black genocide in the same manner that the church converted the brotherhood of men and the fatherhood of God into an instrument of mass murder during the crusades.⁴⁰

By couching anti–population control rhetoric in such conspiratorial and generalized terms, Black Muslims discouraged multiracial protests against the forced sterilization of women of color. Rather than jump to defend black women against forced sterilization, many white women’s liberation activists understandably opposed genocide arguments that equated all reproductive control with population control. The vehemence of the Black Muslim genocide argument may have delayed feminist participation in the anti-sterilization abuse campaign by forcing them to defend all fertility control programs regardless of their sympathy for women of color and the problem of sterilization abuse.

Despite their sometimes-fantastic warnings against genocide, however, the Nation of Islam contributed an important perspective to discussions of reproductive health care. Like the Black Panthers and black feminists, they believed that blacks had the right to have as many children as they wanted, they needed to have comprehensive health care, and there needed to be an end to poverty and its effects in black communities before many African Americans could look on reproductive control positively.

Contributors to *Muhammad Speaks* were some of the first to outline the dual demands for an end to reproductive abuses and improvement of total health care in poor communities—and to push it as an alternative to federally sponsored birth control clinics. For example, writers for *Muhammad Speaks* reported on the inordinately high rate of infant deaths among blacks. One author maintained that “despite the fact that the death of babies in the United States has reached ‘an all-time low for the nation,’ black infants continue to die at an alarmingly faster rate than white babies.”⁴¹ Another article provided statistics on high infant mortality rates, linking them to poverty in black neighborhoods. This author connected birth control and poverty and argued that both contributed to the genocide of blacks: “the ‘pill’ is but a latter-day adjunct to a long-time weapon of genocide against Black people in the ghettos—poverty and all its ramifications.”⁴² A similar article entitled “Nutrition Expert Surveys Pre-Natal U.S.A.: Pigs Get Better Care Than Pregnant Women” summed up the problems faced by poor women offered birth control over prenatal care: inadequate nutrition, low birth weight babies, and a high infant mortality rate.⁴³ A final article discussed the effects of poverty that had become an intrinsic part of life for many black urban dwellers. The author quoted the director of the Health Services of the National Urban League to assert that “‘there is sufficient evidence . . . that ill health and poverty reinforce each other.’” The doctor continued, “‘The poor, partic-

ularly the Negro poor . . . live in conditions which assault both physical and mental health in terms of malnutrition, crowded and unclean housing, substandard heating and sanitary facilities as well as poor personal hygiene and family disorganization.”⁴⁴ Rosalind Petchesky, feminist activist and historian of the reproductive rights movement, reported that in 1979 black American rates of infant mortality still stood at nearly twice the rate of the white majority. For Black Muslims, who felt that black people were already struggling for survival in a country that valued African Americans for little more than their cheap labor, federally funded family planning services seemed to only exacerbate their already dire health problems.⁴⁵

Ogun Kokanfo, writing for *Muhammad Speaks* in 1969, tempered the hostility often directed at birth control programs in this publication but still drew a connection between the lack of government efforts to combat poverty and black suspicions of genocide. Kokanfo discussed “the fact that while welfare for the living is held in suspension, the money spent on birth control had already been increased and is slated to be increased even further.” Kokanfo maintained that HEW officials justified funding family planning by claiming to provide for those who needed birth control but did not have the resources to pay for it. Their motives, however, might not be all that benevolent, he argued: “They say that they simply want ‘poor families to have the same choice that families in middle- or upper-income levels have: to plan the size and spacing of their families.’” Agreeing with this goal, Kokanfo expressed a position reiterated by Black Nationalists and black and white feminists in the 1970s:

Certainly poor families should have this right. But shouldn't they also have the same right not to be poor: Shouldn't they have a right to the same education, the same adequate diet, the same medical treatment and the same sanitary and roomy housing conditions as middle- and upper-income levels have: to plan the size and spacing of their families.⁴⁶

Although Kokanfo still invoked a language of genocide—the article is entitled “Why Blacks Must Resist Govt.’s Genocidal Birth Control Programs”—he opened the door to an acceptance of fertility control in conjunction with an end to poverty among blacks. This perspective, that a program for total health care must accompany personal reproductive control, would become popular with both black and white feminists in the 1970s.

*The Black Panther Party and Fertility Control—
The “weapon of the pigs” or a Woman’s Right?*

In the first few years of the organization’s existence, the Black Panthers rejected all forms of reproductive control as genocidal for blacks. Thomas “Blood” McCreary, a member of the New York City Black Panther Party from its inception in 1968 and the Black Liberation Army, the military wing of the party, recalled, “abortion was considered genocidal.” He said that the Panthers worried about population controllers imposing birth control and abortion on black women. He added that he now thinks “women should be able to have children if they want them. People don’t have babies to get more welfare money and laws that restrict the number of children a woman can have when on welfare are” more likely to be “genocidal than legal abortion or contraception used voluntarily.” He continued, “We wanted numbers for political power although we now realize that numbers don’t make all the difference. I believe women should have the choice, but should never be coerced into abortion or sterilization.”⁴⁷

Like the Black Muslims, some Black Panthers believed that an armed revolution by blacks against the white power structure was possible, if not inevitable. Large numbers of soldiers would be required to win the struggle. The Panthers also agreed with the Black Muslims that the U.S. government plotted to reduce the number of nonwhites in America in order to prevent an armed revolt. McCreary and others also believed that, if blacks were to exercise their civil rights, they would require large numbers of political participants to have any positive effect.⁴⁸

This attitude was to change for several reasons. First, in 1971, the party began to reconsider their anti-birth control position as women in the party articulated some of the barriers to large families. For example, they noted that large families were costly in terms of both time and money. If both men and women were going to be involved in the movement, they argued, less energy could be devoted to raising large families. Second, in 1974, Elaine Brown took over the leadership of the party after Huey Newton went into exile. With Brown in a leadership position, women gained more influence in the organization. Women also became more important as men in the party were killed or serving long-term prison sentences, as a result of the FBI’s crackdown on the Black Power movement.⁴⁹ Additionally, feminism began to have a more positive impact on Black Panther politics, as black women articulated their own

black feminist agenda and expressed their demand for voluntary methods of contraception.⁵⁰ At this stage, the Panthers continued to report and condemn reproductive abuses, involving forced sterilization or incompetent abortions performed on black, Latina, and Native American women; at the same time, however, they supported the voluntary practice of fertility control by women of color. In the late 1970s, they took a firm stand against congressional measures making it more difficult for poor women to obtain legal abortions, particularly the Hyde Amendment, first passed in 1976 as a rider to an HEW appropriations bill that banned federal Medicaid support for abortion.

Huey Newton and Bobby Seales had founded the Black Panther Party in 1966 in Oakland, California, as northern urban blacks became the focus for Black Power organizing in the late 1960s. At this point, and for the first year, the party was entirely male. Newton argued that he wanted to organize the “brothers off the block.” They drafted a 10-point party platform that articulated their political ideology. The last point of the platform called for economic security for blacks and a nationalist program that united blacks around the world as colonized subjects. They also called for black exemption from military service, an end to police brutality, freedom for black men held in jail, and juries of black peers for black people brought to court.⁵¹

Newton had a charismatic style that captured wide media attention and the fascination of a trendy Hollywood coterie of film and other entertainment personalities able to give the Black Panthers substantial financial backing. White (male and female) new leftists were also drawn to the urban Black Power movement’s display of weapons and revolutionary rhetoric, as the anti-war movement became more militant, violent, and many argue, masculine. Black Panthers and new leftists often worked together to oppose the Vietnam War, exchanging political ideas in the process of building an anti-war coalition. These alliances allowed Newton to establish a diverse following that popularized the Panthers in both black and white grassroots political circles (including radical feminist ones).⁵²

When Huey Newton left the country for exile in Cuba in 1973 (he had been accused of murder), making Elaine Brown the head of the party, the Panthers began to develop in a less violent direction, focusing on community-controlled institutions to build local black political power. Brown expanded upon Newton’s “Survival Programs,” which included a free health clinic, responsible for testing hundreds of blacks for sickle-cell

anemia, a free ambulance service, a free shoe program, prisoner support facilities, free breakfast programs for children, and a Black Panther elementary school. The party also developed programs for senior citizens (SAFE—Seniors Against a Fearful Environment), programs for teens (GED classes and peer counseling), and early childhood education (a day-care center and a child development center). Newton believed that black-run social services could be used to build a revolutionary following by educating the community. Blacks would begin to wonder “why the party can do so much with so little, and the capitalists so little with so much. That’ll motivate them to start making some demands—not begging—for more concessions . . . the programs are another tactic for revolution.”⁵³

When Elaine Brown took over the party, she placed women in key positions in the organization and expanded Newton’s Survival Programs. She found new methods for raising funds, particularly for the elementary school, which became the Panthers’ showcase program. At this point in the development of the party, Brown also decided the Panthers needed to become more involved in electoral politics; Bobby Seale had already run for mayor and Brown for city council. After a second bid for a city council seat in 1974, Brown served as a delegate for Jerry Brown in the 1976 presidential election.⁵⁴

By changing the direction of party organizing and placing women in powerful positions, Brown risked the enmity of some Black Panther men who believed women should support their men, not lead them. Brown noted that “a woman in the Black Power movement was considered at best, irrelevant. A woman asserting herself was a pariah. A woman attempting the role of leadership was, to my proud black Brothers, making an alliance with the ‘counter-revolutionary, man-hating, lesbian, feminist white bitches.’”⁵⁵ Despite open hostility, Brown persisted in making Beth Meador, a law student, her campaign manager; Phyllis Jackson, a coordinator of Panther campaign workers; Ericka Huggins, administrator of the school; Joan Kelley, administrator of the nonmilitary apparatus, in particular, the Survival Programs; and Norma Armour, the minister of finance for the party.⁵⁶

Newton’s return to the United States in 1976 quashed female leadership in the party. Elaine Brown explains in her memoir that she fled the Bay Area in fear of reprisal for transforming the party into an organization focused on gradual social change rather than armed revolution. According to Brown, Newton felt pressure from the “brothers” in the organization to reassert masculine leadership by physically “disciplining”

women who ran the social programs. This ugly display of masculine aggression drove important female members of the party to cut all ties with the Panthers.⁵⁷

Despite the reassertion of masculine dominance in the party in the late 1970s, black women had helped to transform Black Power attitudes toward birth control and abortion. Elaine Brown's tenure as head of the Black Panther Party from 1974 to 1976 accompanied a new attitude toward reproductive control for black women that included both anti-sterilization abuse and pro-birth control and abortion positions.

In the early 1970s, articles appeared in the Black Panther Party paper condemning all forms of birth control for blacks. A 1970 article entitled "Birth Control" discussed the need for economic changes that addressed poverty before blacks concerned themselves with fertility limitation. This article echoed those published by the Black Muslims in *Muhammad Speaks*, in that the Black Panthers questioned "family planning" policy that recommended ending poverty through fertility control. The author wrote, "The relevant question is not, 'If you have all those babies, how will you care for them?' But 'Why can't we all get enough to care for our children?'" The author described the pill as "the weapon of the pigs" because it stifled the growth of the black community and added that government rhetoric about the "'population explosion' is only another attempt at deceiving the masses." He asserted that it was wrong to prevent births because it "dealt with overpopulation rather than capitalism and imperialism. Capitalism is the problem, not too many people." He continued, challenging any attempt to reduce the black population: "no pill, loop, or treatment short of mass sterilization will restrict our growth . . . each child born will be one more revolutionary that the power structure will have to try to deal with."⁵⁸

Other articles published in the early 1970s Black Panther Party paper speculated as to the genocidal intentions of white medical practitioners in publicly funded hospitals. One article described a pregnant black woman's experience at San Francisco General Hospital. After finding out about her pregnancy, she wrote, "The doctor thinks you wouldn't possibly want another kid for the state to support so he tells you how to go about getting a therapeutic abortion. You explode and tell him a few things about genocide." The author criticized a physician who tacitly assumed that low-income black women with children should be granted abortions, whereas a white woman might have difficulty obtaining one.⁵⁹

At this point in their history, the Black Panthers opposed any relaxation of the anti-abortion laws as genocidal. The Panthers ran an article on the 1970 New York State abortion reform law that described the theoretical dangers that legal abortion posed for black women. The New York law allowed a woman to terminate her pregnancy up to 24 weeks gestation as long as a doctor performed the procedure. The Black Panthers considered the new abortion law the most recent chapter in a genocidal history of European domination over people of color:

A victory for the oppressive ruling class who will use this law to kill off Black and other oppressed people before they are born. To the black woman, the Welfare mothers, it is an announcement of death before birth. Black women love children, and in order to see to it that they do not starve, that they do not have to be ashamed of having to wear improper clothing, they will kill them before they are born.

At the same time, the Black Panthers argued for increased entitlements for the poor, explaining that black poverty stemmed from a racist and capitalist system that exploited poor blacks as laborers. If black people were going hungry, it had little to do with overpopulation. Instead, according to the Black Panthers' Marxist analysis of capitalism and poverty, fewer laborers were needed in an economy that had shifted to service from production. The Panthers believed that the government used legal abortion to reduce the worker population, resulting in genocide for blacks.

Like the Nation of Islam, the Panthers suggested that abortion should be illegal because black women could not be trusted to make their own reproductive decisions. The Panthers maintained that some black women might be fooled into believing the feminist "dogma" that legal abortion could save them from illegal and unsafe abortions. They amended the argument that black women suffered most often at the hands of dangerous illegal abortionists with evidence that black women did not receive quality health care in hospitals either. With abortion legal, the Panthers predicted, black women might be subject to abuses by medical doctors. One Panther wrote that the "abortion law hides behind the guise of helping women when in reality it will attempt to destroy our people. How long do you think it will take for voluntary abortion to turn involuntary."⁶⁰

The Black Panthers also educated their readers about the dangers of forced sterilization among indigent women of color as incidents of abuse became public. In a 1971 article, the Black Panther Party reported on a

punitive sterilization bill proposed in the state of Tennessee. As we already saw, bills of this sort were proposed in many states nationwide during the 1960s and early 1970s. The Panthers noted that the Tennessee bill would address “‘the problem’ of families with ‘dependent children’ by reducing or eliminating the very possibility of children for black and poor people. The number of ‘illegitimate’ children would be controlled by involuntary sterilization of women.” The Tennessee bill stipulated that all unmarried welfare mothers of two or more children be sterilized or forfeit their benefits and give up their children to the state. The writer for the Black Panther paper described the sterilization law as “the state’s insurance against a large young generation of blacks and other poor people swelling the welfare rolls.”⁶¹ A coalition of organizations including black doctors, black legislators, and welfare rights groups successfully fought the Tennessee sterilization bill. Some of the most committed protesters against this bill were a group of about 200 mostly black welfare women associated with the local branch of the National Welfare Rights Organization. All of these activists held that the state had a responsibility to provide a living wage for the poor, not reduce their numbers.⁶²

The Panthers addressed further the coerced sterilization of black women who received Medicaid benefits in their report on Dr. Pierce of Aiken, South Carolina, the doctor who had required that indigent women with two or more children be sterilized if they wanted to use his obstetrical services. The Panthers argued that “what continues to go on with state and local financing, as well as private, is clearly a racist, genocidal extermination directed at poor, Black girls and women. Every evidence of such a policy, in every corner of this country must be exposed, condemned and destroyed.”⁶³

The Black Panthers recognized that Puerto Rican, other Latina, and Native American women suffered from the highest rates of abuse. Like the Nation of Islam, the Black Panthers linked sterilization abuse in the United States among women of color with the violation of women’s reproductive rights in parts of the Third World. For example, in an article supporting the Committee to End Sterilization Abuse (CESA), a New York City anti-sterilization abuse group that included black, Latina, and white activists, the Black Panthers asserted that over one-third of Puerto Rican women had been sterilized as well as 20 percent of black women in the United States. They compared these figures to the high numbers (40,000) of women sterilized in Colombia in the late 1960s with support of the Population Council. In another example, the Black Panther paper

reported the story of a Puerto Rican woman who consulted her doctor about fibroid tumors. The doctor ordered sterilization even though this condition never required it. The Panthers also criticized international and domestic family planning programs, supported by the United States, that discouraged abortion and barrier methods of birth control in favor of sterilization and more permanent methods of contraception such as the IUD or the pill, both of which have contributed to dangerous side-effects in women.⁶⁴

By 1974, after Newton's exodus and Brown's accession, the Black Panther Party had shifted their rhetoric away from the genocide argument to focus on the importance of health care and safe, legal abortion provision in the black community. In a radical reversal, the Panthers emphasized the complementary nature of health care and abortion, arguing that black women needed quality health care in addition to legal abortion. Elaine Brown described her advocacy of abortion rights in her autobiography, testifying that "I would support every assertion of human rights by women—from the right to abortion to the right of equality with men as laborers and leaders."⁶⁵ Both Brown and the Black Panthers owed their new support for birth control and abortion, in part, to black feminists like Toni Cade, Linda La Rue, Frances Beal, and the women organized in the Black Women's Liberation Group of Mount Vernon who began to speak out in favor of reproductive rights in the 1970s. Beginning with just a few voices in the early 1970s, black women were a fundamental part of the feminist movement that combined the fight for abortion rights with an anti-sterilization abuse movement. The Black Panther support of abortion rights coupled with demands for access to general health care reflected the persuasive powers of this group of black women.

In 1974, an article appeared in the Panther paper that explicitly reflected the new feminist influence on the party. The article instructed women on how to do their own breast exams so that they would have greater control over their personal health. The same information had been distributed by feminists both to facilitate early breast cancer detection and to illustrate that women need not depend on a male medical profession for all their health care. Both the Panthers and feminists involved in the women's health movement understood that knowledge about the body gave individuals and communities power.⁶⁶ Finally, the Panthers developed a program to bolster AFDC support by offering welfare recipients medical care, free food, nutrition information, and help in applying for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) supplements.⁶⁷

Two years after the Supreme Court found abortion to be a constitutional right, the Black Panthers placed themselves firmly in the feminist pro-abortion camp by protesting the persecution of a black abortion doctor accused by Right-to-Life activists of aborting a viable fetus. Dr. Kenneth Edelin, coordinator of Boston City Hospital's (BCH) ob/gyn department, was one of two doctors willing to perform legal abortions at this hospital. BCH physicians treated a largely poor and minority clientele unable to pay for abortions at private clinics. Edelin argued that low-income and black women died from illegal abortion in large numbers before 1973 and continued to have difficulty affording safe, legal abortion after *Roe*. The Black Panther paper quoted Edelin as saying, "During illegal abortions, not only did the fetuses die, but many women died. . . . The problem is, the women who die are poor women, mainly Black women."⁶⁸

As black feminists became increasingly outspoken in their support for abortion rights, the Black Panthers followed their lead. Like black feminists, the Panthers addressed the particular needs of poor and black women. For example, in 1977, after the Hyde Amendment cut federal Medicaid funding for abortion, the Black Panthers ran a series of articles on how these restrictions would damage black women. One author wrote, "Black and poor women on welfare will suffer the most from this ruling, as Medicaid funds that were previously used for abortions may be denied."⁶⁹ When President Carter stated that he opposed federal abortion funding, the Panthers publicly criticized his position.⁷⁰

The Black Panther health care agenda diverged from the mainstream feminist one, however, in that the Panthers did not make abortion and birth control their first priority. By 1975, abortion was just one aspect of a total health care plan. Like black feminists, Panthers emphasized the need for jobs, comprehensive health care, child-care, housing, welfare entitlements, an end to imperialism, and prevention of police violence against blacks. Furthermore, the Panthers focused on the importance of maintaining welfare entitlements for poor women, a disproportionate number of whom were black.⁷¹

By 1975, the Black Panthers began promoting women's liberation as a racially inclusive movement with the potential to benefit both black and white women. Like their stance on abortion, the Panther attitude toward feminism transformed under the leadership of Elaine Brown and as black feminists gained influence and power in both mainstream and radical feminist organizations and began to form their own feminist groups, such

as the National Black Women's Health Project, an umbrella organization of women's health groups, which grew out of the National Women's Health Network founded in 1975. To showcase their new feminist stance, one Panther author quoted Margaret Sloan, president of the National Black Feminist Organization, stating that "we Black feminists say very clearly that we are part of the women's liberation movement. Many of us feel very insulted that the women's lib movement is called White because we were there from the beginning."⁷²

In the early part of 1977, the Panthers articulated a working-class feminist agenda by running an article protesting a Supreme Court ruling that allowed employers to refuse disability payments for pregnancy-related disorders or childbirth. Similar to their defense of Medicaid abortions for poor women, the Panthers supported pregnancy disability coverage because the issue addressed economic disparities among women. The 1976 case involved women workers at General Electric who argued that the "failure to include pregnancy in the company's disability coverage programs constituted discrimination on the basis of sex." General Electric countered that payment for childbirth and pregnancy complications added significantly to their health care costs. The Supreme Court, siding with GE, disagreed with Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) findings that equated discrimination on the basis of pregnancy with sex discrimination. The Court called pregnancy a "unique" and "voluntary" status, making GE's refusal to cover medical costs legitimate. In opposition to this ruling, the Black Panther paper editorialized, "In the worst possible sense employers can now treat pregnant women as badly as they like—can fire them, refuse to hire them, or force long leaves of absence." By taking this position, the Panthers staked out a feminist reproductive politics that prioritized working-class women's economic access to reproductive control, including the right to bear children. Black women had pioneered this notion when they argued that women had a right to bear children regardless of economic status. Some white feminists would adopt this political stance as they attempted to build an inclusive reproductive rights movement.⁷³

Despite their earlier anti-fertility control rhetoric, the Black Panthers aided in the transformation of an abortion rights campaign into one for reproductive rights. Due to the combined efforts of the Black Panthers, Black Muslims, and black feminists involved in the movement against population control abuses both in the United States and abroad, organizations concerned with population policy and abortion rights found it in-

creasingly difficult to advocate fertility control for the indigent without including demands for improved health care and resources for the poor. American Black Nationalist links to Pan-Africanist and other nationalist movements in the developing world helped create an international coalition against reproductive coercion. The Panthers and Black Muslims were not the only American nationalist organizations to demand that fertility control accompany improved health care, however. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Young Lords, a Puerto Rican nationalist group, fought for an end to sterilization abuse among women of color, access to safe abortion for poor and minority women, community-controlled health care, and an end to machismo and equal treatment for women as we will see in the next chapter.

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