



WOMEN WITH A VISION

AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO ABORTION JUSTICE

Sometimes people try to destroy you, precisely because they recognize your power — not because they don't see it, but because they see it and they don't want it to exist. —bell hooks

Nobody in the world, nobody in history, has ever gotten their freedom by appealing to the moral sense of the people who were oppressing them. —Assata Shakur

You have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time. —Angela Davis

THE MOMENT WE ARE IN

At Women With A Vision (WWAV), we have been working to realize the Black feminist vision for Reproductive Justice for more than 30 years. And still it knocked the wind out of us when news broke of the leaked draft opinion in *Dobbs v. Jackson*, indicating that the U.S. Supreme Court could overturn the constitutional right to abortion. Abortion is still legal!! But if this decision stands, it will mean the end of abortion care in Louisiana, one of the poorest states in the nation with some of the worst outcomes for birthing people. We also know that in Louisiana and nationwide we are not ready for the massive escalations in criminalization that are coming.

RECKONING WITH THE HORRORS OF CRIMINALIZATION

As Black women working in the South, we know that we are criminalized in more ways than the media will ever show us. Already in the state of Louisiana, legislators are fast-tracking a bill that would classify abortion as homicide. *We know this place.* For 30 years, WWAV has fought back against the carceral system and what it does to people. We have seen how policies designed for one purpose were used to expand the terror that our communities survive daily. 10 years ago, our offices were firebombed and destroyed in retaliation for our work. *We have to talk about what this system already is for people living at the intersections of multiple oppressions.* That is why we insist, as Kimberlé Crenshaw has taught us, that intersectionality as an essential framework for building analysis and strategy in these times. In the words of the late Audre Lorde, “There is no thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.”

CRIMINALIZATION POLICIES ALWAYS DO MORE THAN LAWMAKERS SAY

Our historic win in the NO Justice Project removed more than 800 people from the Louisiana sex offender registry. All of them had been charged with a felony-level crime against nature by solicitation (CANS), a law that was passed in 1982 amid AIDS hysteria to intensify the criminalization of white gay male sex workers in the French Quarter beyond our state's existing prostitution statute. At the time of our 2012 NO Justice victory, 97% of women registered as sex offenders were mandated to do so because of a CANS conviction, and 79% of those registered were Black. How was CANS so quickly extended beyond the “male problem” it was designed to address? Simple: the police had sole discretion over whether to charge someone with CANS or prostitution. Through their patrolling and booking practices, they mapped CANS onto the gendered and racialized bodies of hundreds of Black cisgender and transgender women. This is *how* Black women are criminalized and invisibilized. And this was hardly the first time.

THE INTENDED CONSEQUENCE IS THE DESTRUCTION OF ENTIRE COMMUNITIES

When the WWAV foremothers were getting to work in 1989, the country was rounding the corner on nearly two decades of the so-called “war on drugs.” From their own front porches, our foremothers bore witness to how these policies of drug criminalization were *actually* unfolding. Decades of divestment had gutted the social safety net and isolated their people from necessary supports and services. Meanwhile, racist stereotypes of “welfare queens” were being used to blame Black women for this violence, just as sensationalized stories about “crack babies” were being used to criminalize them and disassemble their families. Rates of HIV infection were exploding, and the numbers of new infections among Black people were fast exceeding those among white people and have ever since. By the early 1990s, HIV was the second leading cause of death for Black women between the ages of 25 and 44. That lethal fact underlined for our foremothers why mass criminalization is an afterlife of slavery. Mass criminalization has and always will depend on regulating which bodies can take space, indeed, can *exist*, just like all systems of white supremacy that precede it. That is why we have continued to fight to decriminalize sex work and drug use in the state of Louisiana, centering Black women's experiences in all we do.

WE CAN FIGHT BACK USING AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

In this moment, we must move with an understanding of these histories, and we must do so strategically. That is what it means for WWAV to take an intersectional approach to abortion justice. And it is this generations-honed Black feminist strategy that we will be bringing to allies across our many social movements, as well as to health care providers and other frontline workers, through teach-ins and webinars and political education materials. We will do so armed with texts from our Black Feminist Library — books by our sister-comrades, like Dorothy Roberts' *Killing the Black Body*, Cathy Cohen's *Boundaries of Blackness*, Loretta Ross's *Reproductive Justice*, Beth Richie's *Arrested Justice*, and Andrea Ritchie's *Invisible No More*. We encourage you to study and struggle with us. And still we rise.

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