

Contraception Mandates, Population Control

✖ I often am asked questions by the media on choices the government makes about our society. It is an anomaly to me to see the drift in government to control in micro-detail certain aspects of our society, and yet determine to be hands-off on other key issues. Recently the American public was given an edict that affects many religious nonprofit organizations.

The debate over the new Health and Human Services regulations, which require all employers to pay 100 percent of the cost of contraception including abortion-inducing chemicals, has been rightly cast as an intrusion on religious liberty. Opponents of such regulations are no more advocating a ban on contraceptives than vegetarian restaurants are advocating a ban on meat. They are simply saying that companies shouldn't have to pay for services to which they object for moral reasons.

But black Americans in particular would be wise to pay close attention, since the age old contraception battle has special historical significance to them. For more than a century, "reproductive services" have been special code words for the constant, silent effort of the powerful to control black breeding. And this control has often come in the form of a "helping hand."

From the earliest days of our nation, people in power have wanted

to control black reproduction. Before the Civil War, slave owners had a financial interest in increasing the birthrate among their slaves.

This was a matter of simple economics; even before the transatlantic slave trade was outlawed, it had become cheaper to “breed” your slaves than to import new ones. Female slaves were pressured to become pregnant (often they were raped).

After emancipation, black birthrates (and marriage rates) were higher than whites, causing great concern in the growing movement known as Eugenics. An elite group of whites began to see the growth of the black population as a direct threat to their community. Blacks at this time actually had a higher employment rate than whites, because black men were willing to work for lower wages. In a time when many intellectuals were becoming paranoid about overpopulation, some began to fear that blacks would compete with whites for the resources needed to survive.

Powerful whites no longer wanted blacks to make more babies that they could enslave; now they wanted blacks to stop having babies that would compete for their jobs or overcrowd their cities. Their goals changed from forcing them to breed to preventing them from breeding.

Thus in modern times, no people group has been plied with more contraceptives than African-Americans. People willing to turn a blind eye to the obvious still aren't convinced about whether abortion is aggressively marketed to blacks. But there can be no confusion about contraception being pushed on black women from the time they are middle school students to even the most highly educated married women. And in a way it is working: Despite a terrifyingly high 70 percent illegitimacy rate, the black American population continues to decline as a percentage of the American population.

But all of this was marketed as freedom, not control. Universal access to birth control, we were told, was to give women the freedom that men had supposedly enjoyed all along: consequence-free sex. Methods became increasingly convenient: first the pill, then the shot, then the implant. When Depo Provera (the contraceptive injection) was being developed between 1972 and 1978, poor black women in Atlanta were used as laboratory rats in the clinical trial. More than 9,000 women were injected with Depo Provera at Grady Hospital in Atlanta, in what became known later as the Grady Trials. Years later it was revealed that the women were not given sufficient information about the risks of the drug, nor were they informed that

they were part of a trial to test the drug's fitness for human usage.

According to a 2004 report from the Centers for Disease Control, black women are still twice as likely to be prescribed Depo Provera as white women. And while no one has studied the effects of Depo Provera on black women, one of its riskiest side effects is blood clots, and recent studies suggest that African-Americans are at least 30 percent more likely to suffer from blood clots than members of other races.

We now face a terrible irony about childbearing in the black community: Fatherless teenagers often intentionally have a baby so that someone will love them, while college-educated black women fear that a baby will ruin their lives. In addition to teens failing to properly use the free birth control thrown at them daily in our schools, married black women abort their babies five times as often as married white women.

The black community does not need more birth control. We need men and women who respect their bodies and raise their children to do the same. We should put more energy and effort into educating people to make wise choices in relationships and being a family instead of

mandating how they make those choices. Let's let our representatives know how we feel!

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