

## **On Women's Reproductive Rights by Julia Feliz**

On her 1982 chapter on "Racism, Birth Control, and Reproductive Rights," Angela Davis, an African American civil rights activist and scholar, wrote the following:

"When nineteenth-century feminists raised the demand for 'voluntary motherhood', the campaign for birth control was born. Its proponents were called radicals and they were subjected to the same mockery that had befallen the initial advocates of woman suffrage."

"Voluntary motherhood" was considered audacious, outrageous, and outlandish by those that insisted that wives had no right to refuse their husbands...Eventually, of course, the right to birth control would be more or less taken for granted by US opinion."

"A full century later, the call for legal and easily accessible abortions are no less controversial than the issue of "voluntary motherhood," which had originally launched the birth control movement in the United States."

"Birth control – individual choice, safe contraceptive methods, as well as abortions when necessary – is a fundamental prerequisite for the emancipation of women. Since the right of birth control is obviously advantageous to women of all classes and races, it would appear that even vastly dissimilar women's

groups would have attempted to unite around this issue. In reality, however, the birth control movement has seldom succeeded in uniting women of different racial backgrounds, and rarely have the movement's leaders popularized the genuine concerns of working class women....arguments sometimes based on blatantly racist premises.”

In her essay, Ms. Davis goes on to state that, “It was not a coincidence that women's consciousness of their reproductive rights was born within the organized movement for women's political equality. Indeed if women remained forever burdened by incessant child births and frequent miscarriages, they would hardly be able to exercise the political rights they might win...”

Unfortunately, due to time constraints I am only able to give you a glimpse of this important work, but as it relates to today, almost 35 years since Ms. Davis wrote her essay, it's a strange feeling to recognize that I was one of those people that took the right to birth control for granted. When the threat surfaced, I felt confident that my rights would be safe. Today, it's incredulous to stand here speaking about rights to my own body and openly acknowledging that my right to prevent any kind of pregnancy might completely be taken away in 2017.

It's also an odd thing to still not have the right to do with my own body as I please with regards to abortion or any reproductive choices in general.

I refuse to be told what to do with my own body, and I refuse to tell other women what to do with theirs regardless on the limits that I would place on my own choices. I have no more right to anyone else's body than anyone has to mine. This has always been my way of thinking, and I struggle to understand at almost 35 years old, why men, whom I've never even met, consider themselves a higher authority to my own self.

I am pleased to see that the current political climate and the continual disregard for women's bodies and rights have brought women of all races together as progress to what Ms. Davis explained was a problem within the movement. Could we finally have been moved enough by such vile forces into solidarity with ALL women of races and class that will last?

As we revisit our fight for our rights to contraceptives, reproduction, and the right to our bodies, we must remember that we all come from different backgrounds, economic circumstances, as well as different life circumstances.

Reproductive equality must be equal for all. All races, some which have faced horrific struggles in the fight for reproductive rights, must be represented. We must stand in solidarity with one another. We must do so open to each other's struggles.