

On the basis of a historical survey, newspaper articles, opinions of black people and other data the authors conclude that there is a relationship between fears of genocide and the use of family planning methods. The need to consider this behavior as a symptom of a more profound problem of our society is stressed.

Family Planning, Race Consciousness and the Fear of Race Genocide

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Introduction

One of the current and abiding issues facing family planning educators is the perception of the objectives of family planning among black Americans (as well as other minority groups). There have recently been expressions from many sources suggesting strong feelings that family planning programs (in some or all of their methods) are forms of black genocide. Our purpose in this paper is to provide some preliminary answers to several of the broad and important questions that are generated by the reported expressions: First, to what extent are fears of race genocide held in the black community? Second, to what extent can one attribute the use (or nonuse) of family planning methods to such fears of race genocide? We will attempt to answer these questions, as well as several more specific questions, in two ways: First, by means of a review of historical and anecdotal material; second, by discussing some preliminary findings in a research project attempting to answer these and similar questions.

An Historical and General Survey

Contemporary proponents of the black genocide notion are able to cite historical as well as contemporary factors which provide evidence of a black genocide conspiracy. These include both general factors and factors which are more specific to the question of family planning (or birth control). They include such historical factors as slavery and the long-lived residual slave economy; they include direct physical violence perpetrated against blacks such as lynchings, bombings, and demasculation of many black males; they include social-economic pressures which make life difficult to maintain such as poor housing, job discrimination, and lack of access to educational opportunities leading to marketable skills; they include social-psychological pressures which make life less bearable such as social discrimination, segregation, and intimidation of every kind; they include the very direct evidence of excessive hysterectomies among black women in the past and many proposals to increase hysterectomies for black women in the future.

In 1933 the late E. Franklin Frazier discussed concerns about birth control and whether it would have a eugenic or dysgenic effect on black people.¹ According to Frazier:

As the knowledge of contraception spreads, so runs the argument, the process will become eugenic; the economically incompetent and mentally deficient will have fewer or no children and the race will be improved.²

Frazier studied census data and analyzed his personal observations; he remained unconvinced that birth control practice among blacks would have an eugenic effect. On the contrary, he observed decreasing numbers of better educated blacks. Also, on the other hand, he reasoned that natural forces such as disease would cause a similar decrease in the number of low-income blacks.³

W.E.B. Dubois in an article published in 1938, "Black Folk and Birth Control", stated:

There comes, therefore, the difficult and insistent problem of spreading among Negroes an intelligent and clearly recognized concept of birth control, so that the young can marry, have companionship and natural health, and yet not have children until they are able to take care of them.⁴

Dubois also pointed out that black people, like most people of that time who followed middle-class standards of morality, considered birth control inherently immoral. However, his own position is made quite clear in his criticism of those who opposed the use of birth control methods among blacks:

... they are quite led away by the fallacy of numbers. They want the black race to survive. They are cheered by a census return of increasing numbers and a higher rate of increase.⁵

The brief review above simply suggests that the issue of family planning in the black community is by no means a new one. Obviously, it was not meant to be exhaustive, but it indicates that important black scholars have regarded the use of birth control as an important issue for black people in America.

Contemporary Thought

Contemporary proponents of the black genocide notion maintain that the black man's security in the United States lies in "strength of numbers." It is noteworthy that even black physicians are among those who support such a

position. For instance, a black physician in Pittsburgh a few years ago was quoted as saying, in essence, that all the strength black people have is in their numbers. Moreover, he went on to enumerate four aspects of what he referred to as the "genocide plot." These were: (a) the idea, perpetuated by a majority of the white community, that the black man is "no good" and inferior because he is black. This is a psychological factor which develops a real *sense* of inferiority and consequent inability to compete; (b) the destruction of the moral code within the black community. This process is so long-standing and powerful that the black man is himself convinced that the white man's moral code, whatever that may be, is superior to his own; (c) the systematic method by which whites keep the black man broke and hungry, keep black children in disadvantaged circumstances, and keep black women on relief or "on the block." This situation leaves blacks essentially at the mercy of whites and with no control over their own destiny; and (d) the procedure of herding black people into ghettos and into limited areas and subsequent by withdrawing ordinary municipal services, ceasing to enforce building codes, and removing preventive policing.⁶ This same physician has also noted that, in addition to the above, "population control" is a euphemism for limiting the American black population. He maintains that any effort in the direction of birth control is basically an effort to eliminate all black people or all nonwhite people.⁷

The late Malcolm X, in an interview in 1962, simply objected to the term "birth control." He felt that blacks did not need to be controlled. He preferred the term "family planning," which used in the broader sense suggests the importance of self-determination for black people. Planning, he felt, was something that black people had to be concerned about.⁸

On the other hand, in contrast to Malcolm X's moderate approach, there has recently been increasing evidence developing of strong opposition to family planning as well as birth control programs. Several moderate black civil rights organizations as well as more militant black organizations have provided the context for strong criticism of family planning programs and organizations. For instance, during a meeting of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference having to do with *Family Planning in South Carolina*, opposition to family planning programs was voiced in such spontaneous statements from participants as:

Birth control is a plot just as segregation was a plot to keep the Negro down . . .

Let's just have more and more Negroes and we'll overcome them in sheer numbers alone; we'll take what's ours.

It (birth control) is a plot rather than a solution; instead of working to give us our rights, reduce us in numbers, therefore not have to give us anything.⁹

Such statements, though expressed only by individuals, seem to crystallize the general meaning of race consciousness and race genocide as bases of opposition to family planning. In another instance in Cleveland at the *Conference on Human Values in Family Planning*, similar statements were made which suggest how wide-spread such feelings are. The following comments also suggest the depth of feelings that is involved in this issue:

Birth control is compared to "stopping the germ

(black people) before it starts" and "weeding out impurities."

It's a genocidal program set up by whites who are playing with murder.

Population is our strength in this country . . . the black man must realize this (birth control) is a form of genocide . . . history tells us that the white man is capable of genocide.

The idea is expressed that "birth control pills" could make the second generation sterile. This might be the whole thing a process of extermination.¹⁰

At this conference there were other reasons (aside from notions of genocide) presented to explain the rejection of family planning programs by the black community. These included: general rejection of white American values; fears regarding health; lives of poverty; and rejection of "tampering" with the normal body functions.¹¹ However, the connection between the notion of race genocide and rejection of family planning programs seems to have been substantial.

An example of the position of more militant black organizations has been presented by Walter Thompson, head of EROS (Endeavor to Raise Our Size). In a 1966 conference with two staff members of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, Mr. Thompson indicated that his organization was vehemently opposed to the Planned Parenthood Federation and considered it to be an immoral organization. He stated that his organization had two major purposes, namely (a) to increase the voting power of black people, and (b) to improve the life and conditions of black families.¹²

Newspaper and Magazine Articles

To some extent reports in newspapers and magazines, as well as other types of mass communication media, reflect the importance of ideas; they also function to stimulate and spread ideas. In the case of the former, we wish here merely to point out that newspaper and magazine articles, which raise the question of a relationship between race genocide and family planning programs, appear to be increasing. We would assume that this might mean that more black people have begun to be concerned about this issue and are acting on their concerns—i.e., not using family planning methods. Approaching this issue from a different direction, we would assume that the increasing expressions of concern will themselves increase awareness and concern in the larger black community.

The late Langston Hughes¹³ in his syndicated column in the *New York Post* in 1965 indicated that concepts "birth control" and "population explosion" were unacceptable to black people. He pointed out the considerable support given to the practices of sterilization and abortion by some well-known conservative organizations, particularly the American Medical Association. The general conservative stance of such organizations might well cause blacks to be suspicious both of the motives underlying such practices and of the motives of the organizations supporting them. Hughes, whose articles were read by a large proportion of the black population, pursued this point through his

mythical character *Simple*, who expresses the fear all too clearly:

They got all kinds of Health Wagons going up and down the streets of Harlem now, free x-rays, free vaccine shots, and things. But nobody has to take them. Suppose, though, they passed a birth control law and the Supreme Court upheld the right of the city to cut down by law on the uptown population explosion and then sent a Sterilization Wagon to Harlem. Naturally . . . they would try it out on the colored folks first, calling themselves being helpful to poor underprivileged Harlem, curbing the population explosion.¹⁴

Other newspapers have carried articles (editorial, serials, or statements from leading black spokesmen) concerning birth control and black genocide.¹⁵ These include articles and serials in *Muhammad Speaks* (the major publication of the Muslim religion), which are vehemently opposed to the use of birth control methods by black Americans.

Summary

If one will accept the idea that general written expressions of concerns and reported oral expressions of concerns reflect something real in the population, several things follow. On the basis of the above review, one must conclude that concerns exist among black Americans concerning the meaning of family planning programs. One must conclude that this concern has been a long-abiding one, which has recently become intensified. Finally, one must conclude that the concern has not existed within any narrowly defined part of the black community, but can be found among very different groups.

The Research Project

The preliminary report here is based on pilot work done as part of a larger project. One major purpose of this study (as well as the larger research project) was to determine the relationship between family planning practices and belief in a race genocide conspiracy against black Americans. A second major purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between family planning practices and race consciousness. In addition to these general purposes we also simply wished to determine the extent to which fears of genocide were present in the black community, the extent of rejection by blacks of various family planning methods (especially sterilization and abortion), and the extent to which blacks feel that black community control of family planning programs would make a difference in the degree of receptiveness to them.

In addition to answers for the above general questions concerning prevalence of certain ideas, we are attempting to test two hypotheses:

1. Race consciousness will be significantly related to rejection of family planning methods.
2. Fears of race (black) genocide will be significantly related to rejection of family planning methods.

Definitions

Race (black) consciousness is generally defined as positive identification with physical features of and cultural

aspects related to the black race. In the present study we are using an indirect putative measure of race consciousness, in which the respondent simply designates the preferred racial identifying term from among these: Colored, Negro, Afro-American, and Black. A survey of contemporary thought and popular literature suggests to us that the degree of racial consciousness increases as one moves from "Colored" to "Black."

Race (black) genocide fear is the fear that there is a general plan or conspiracy aimed at the elimination of the black race.

Family planning (birth control) is defined as any method or technique used to limit live births.

Sample

A medium-sized New England city was chosen for this pilot project. Several black communities within this urban area were identified with the help of local black citizens. By means of census data and street lists it was possible to classify several black neighborhoods in terms of income level. The classification system was very simple: low-income neighborhoods and middle-to-upper income neighborhoods. In those neighborhoods which had been classified as middle-to-upper income a 40% sample of households was initially designated; in those neighborhoods classified as lower income a 60% sample of households was initially designated. From this total designated group of households a 2.5% random sample was drawn. This procedure provided an approximately stratified sample of the black community in that city. The total sample was 160 households.

Procedure

After sampling procedures were complete, the interviewing began. When the interviewers found households empty or potential interviewees were inaccessible, a new household was randomly selected. Ten interviewers were employed to interview the head of the household or a female member of the household in the reproductive age range. Every attempt was made to balance the group in terms of age.

An interview schedule was used which contained items seeking information concerning: general demographic characteristics, attitudes toward family planning methods, attitudes toward family planning agencies, racial consciousness, racial genocide, and general attitude items.

Results

Some general characteristics of the population sample should be noted. Females made up 66% of the sample. The median age for the females was 27; the median age for the males was 30. The median educational attainment was high school graduation.

The first hypothesis was tested by means of cross-tabulations and Chi-square analyses. As an indirect index of attitudes toward family planning we used the number of additional children the respondent wished to have. The index of race consciousness was the preferred racial identifying term (as discussed above). Table 1 shows the cross tabulation for those two variables. As is clear, the number of

children desired was collapsed into two categories. Although there appears to be some tendency for the higher race consciousness group to report wanting more children, the Chi-square value was not statistically significant. Moreover, if one relates race consciousness to a more general item concerning family planning ("Black Americans should not limit their family size.") no significant Chi-square value is found (Table 2).

A much more indirect measure of attitude toward family planning was this item: "Birth control clinics operated by blacks will be more acceptable to blacks than if operated by whites." This may be considered an item aimed at attitude toward family planning in the sense that the respondent who endorses it is saying that he or she sees a connection between race and the acceptability of family planning organizations. The respondent is also saying that family planning programs are not acceptable without this condition. Table 3 is a presentation of frequencies and percentages agreeing and disagreeing with the statement by race consciousness level. As can be noted in that table, there is considerable indication that the more race conscious respondents tended to agree (Chi-square = 9.38, df = 1, p < .01).

In testing the second hypothesis a different statistical method was used. Here the relationship between reported actual use of any birth control method was correlated with endorsement of the various items directly asking about genocide. A tetrachoric correlation coefficient was computed. This statistical technique is conceptually

Table 1—Frequencies and Percentages of Respondents by Race Consciousness Level and Desired Number of Children

Desired number of children	Ethnic or color designation preference		Total
	Negro, colored or no preference	Black or Afro-American	
0-2	21 (60%)	40 (49%)	61 (52%)
3 or more	14 (40%)	42 (51%)	56 (48%)
Total	35	82	117

Table 2—Frequencies and Percentages of Respondents by Race Consciousness Level and Attitude Toward Family Size Limitation

	No preference Negro or colored	Black or Afro-American	Total
Agree	8 (26%)	29 (29%)	37
Disagree	23 (74%)	72 (71%)	95
Total	31	101	142

Table 3—Comparison by Race Consciousness Level on Statement: Birth Control Clinics in Black Neighborhoods Should be Controlled and Operated by Blacks*

	No preference Negro or colored	Black or Afro-American	Total
Agree	15 (47%)	80 (75%)	95 (68%)
Disagree	17 (53%)	26 (27%)	43 (32%)
Total	32	106	138

*Chi-square = 9.38, df = 1, p < .01

Table 4—Tetrachoric Correlation Coefficients Relating Reported Use of Family Planning Methods and Belief in the Notion of Racial Genocide (N = 159)

Item (Agree/Disagree)	r
1. As the need for cheap labor goes down there will be an effort to reduce the number of black Americans.	.67*
2. As black Americans increase their demands for civil rights there will be an effort to rid the country of American blacks.	.04
3. The assassination of black leaders is an indication of the white effort to eliminate blacks.	.34*
4. Encouraging American blacks to use birth control is comparable to trying to eliminate this group from society.	.38*
5. Abortions are a part of a white plot to eliminate blacks.	.52*
6. Sterilization is a white plot to eliminate blacks.	.36*
7. All forms of birth control methods are designed to eliminate black Americans.	.41*

*p < .01

related to non-parametric tests such as the Chi-square technique. It is particularly appropriate in situations in which test items are being correlated and the responses have been dichotomized. It assumes, as is the case here, that there is underlying continuity in each of the variables in spite of the dichotomous scoring. Table 4 presents each item and its correlation with the reported use of birth control methods. As can be seen in that table all of the correlation coefficients are statistically significant except for one. One possible explanation for lack of significance with that item may be that the item is made complex by the inclusion of the very salient (but unrelated) notion of "civil rights." In summary, it can be said that support has been found for the second hypothesis.

Some additional findings are worthy of note. It should be recalled that, in addition to the two hypotheses, several general questions were raised at the beginning of our

discussion of the research project. One question had to do with the simple extent to which fears of genocide were present in such a sample; another was the extent of rejection by blacks of various family planning methods; and the extent to which blacks feel that black community control over family planning programs would make a difference in the degree of acceptability of such programs. Several items which bear on the question concerning extent of fear of genocide are listed in Table 5 with the percentage endorsing responses keyed for fear of genocide. In an attempt to assess the statistical significance of these percentages, K values were computed. This statistical test, which was developed by McCall and Simon¹⁶ simply determines the degree to which unpopular views are held in a particular population. The K value ranges from 0 (no strength in a minority view) to 1 (the highest degree of group division). The minus signs indicate that the unpopular response was the agreement response in each case. Neither the percentages nor the K values are large. This suggests, especially when one considers the findings discussed above, that it is a small but consistent group of the respondents who are making the difference. This does not, of course, detract from the importance of the findings already reported. Indeed, it is remarkable that the relationships between the variables are as consistent as they are.

Next, the question of the extent of rejection of various family planning methods. Note that this is not necessarily a direct function of fear of genocide; other reasons may exist for rejecting various methods. Table 6 lists four questions concerning the acceptability of birth control methods.

The fact that all methods are rejected by only 37%

Table 5—Percentage Endorsement on Items Dealing with Race Genocide

Item	Per cent	
	Agree	K
1. Birth control methods are designed to eliminate the black population.	13	-.079
2. Abortion is a plot to eliminate black Americans.	29	-.243
3. Sterilization is a plot to eliminate black Americans.		

Table 6—Percentage Respondents Rejecting Certain Birth Control Methods

Item	Per cent rejecting
1. If you had the desired number of children, would you have an abortion (female) or encourage your partner to have an abortion (male).	71%
2. If you had all the children you wanted, would you allow yourself to be sterilized.	79%
3. Sterilization is an acceptable method of family planning.	90%
4. There are acceptable methods of birth control.	37%

Table 7—Comparison by Sex: Birth Control Clinics in Black Neighborhoods Should be Controlled and Operated by Blacks

	Male	Female	Total
Agree	32 (67%)	50 (58%)	82 (61%)
Disagree	16 (33%)	36 (42%)	52 (39%)
Total	48	86	134

Table 8—Comparison by Sex: Birth Control Clinics Operated by Blacks Will be More Acceptable to Blacks than if Operated by Whites

	Male	Female	Total
Agree	36 (75%)	59 (66%)	95 (69%)
Disagree	12 (25%)	31 (34%)	43 (31%)
Total	48	90	138

and the percentage rejecting abortion and sterilization ranges from 71% to 90%, clearly suggests that these two latter methods are considered especially objectionable. Sterilization, because it is a method which has finality, is reasonably less acceptable to most individuals. There may be both religious and moral restrictions which cause individuals to reject abortion as a method of birth control.

Finally, we should attempt to determine from these data the extent of feeling in the sample that black control of the family planning programs in black communities would be more acceptable. The respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "Birth control clinics operated by blacks will be more acceptable to blacks than if operated by whites." The per cent agreeing was 62%; 28% disagreed; 10% did not answer. On another item—"Birth control clinics in black neighborhoods should be controlled and operated by blacks."—received the following responses: 59% agreed; 37% disagreed; 4% did not answer. Although these percentages speak for themselves, it is worth pointing out that the 62% agreement is considerably higher than the 37% who considered no family planning method acceptable. That is, this large percentage cannot be attributed only to the responses of those who hold extremely negative feelings about family planning.

Conclusions and Implications

If one considers both the general survey which was presented early in this paper as well as these preliminary findings, one must conclude that there is a significant group of black Americans who are wary of family planning programs, especially if those programs involve certain types of family planning methods, and especially if the programs are run by non-blacks.

One rather striking conclusion which we must come to on the basis of these data is that there is a relationship be-

tween fears of racial genocide and the use of family planning methods. One immediate implication of this finding is that those individuals who have interpreted various historical and current events as a conspiracy to eliminate black people are responding in a direct way to counter the effects of the assumed conspiracy. One might think that a person might well allow that whites have done many things contrary to the well-being of black people (including systematic attempts to reduce their numbers), and yet not find that the response is the one which would potentially counter the effects of such a situation.

The limitations of these conclusions are obvious. As we implied early in this paper, one might well take issue with a brief historical survey, a few references to conference statements, and newspaper articles as the basis for inferring that there is widespread belief in something among the black people of America. However, when we have added some evidence based on a randomly selected group of black people, then one must consider the trend as more than trivial.

It is our general feeling about the data as analyzed so far that there are groups who feel estranged from the larger society in more ways than in birth control. Their feelings are based on a great deal more than the notion of family planning as a method for eliminating black people. Their response is to a great deal more than information about family planning agencies. They are responding to a long history of every possible type of oppression which has been perpetrated against blacks. The resistance to family planning and to family planning agencies run by whites is merely a symptom of the deep sense of historical and life-long estrangement.

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