



Reproductive Justice Confronts Fascism

A report on Collective Power's April 9, 2022 convening



Above: Graphic notes from the April 9 convening, by Sita Magnuson, dpict

On April 9, 2022, 31 activists and scholars participated in Collective Power’s Reproductive Justice Confronts Fascism convening at Hampshire College, in Amherst, Massachusetts. The goal was to deepen our understanding of white supremacy in order to disrupt and defeat it. In many ways, we anticipated the extensive attacks on abortion and civil rights contained in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*.

This report **summarizes our discussions (p 4-7)** on the simultaneous rise of the Far Right, a resurgence of “overpopulation” politics, and increased criminalization and policing of Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) communities. It confirms that we must fight the multiple manifestations of white supremacy—fascism, increased policing, patriarchal oppression, population control, and eugenics—head-on.

It concludes with preliminary **strategies for resistance (p 8-12)**: lift up our history, center the knowledge of those most impacted, confront white supremacy in our movements, provide visions of liberation and fight apocalyptic gloom, take inspiration from movements in other countries, and ask: what are we willing to do?

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Introduction

On April 9, 2022, 31 activists and scholars participated in Collective Power's *Reproductive Justice Confronts Fascism* convening at Hampshire College, in Amherst, Massachusetts. Attendees collectively analyzed white supremacy in the US, particularly in relation to efforts to narrow abortion access. The goal was to deepen our understanding of white supremacy in order to disrupt and defeat it. Our discussion was a powerful consideration of today's grim politics. In many ways, we anticipated the extensive attacks on abortion and civil rights contained in [Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization](#). By overturning *Roe v. Wade*, the decision that legalized abortion in the US, *Dobbs* adds new urgency to the ideas we addressed at the meeting and summarize in this report.

The group came from 12 US states and a variety of movements, some of which extend internationally. Attendees work to defend and expand abortion and birth justice, ensure access to doula support, provide legal defense for those engaging in direct action, register voters, end state violence against communities of color, fight for climate and environmental justice, uproot population control and eugenics, abolish prisons, and expose the Far Right's tactics. Over half of the participants identified as BIPOC and represented multiple generations of activists; a third were under age 30.

Our analysis is also based on three roundtable discussions hosted by Collective Power, in January and March 2022, to build the agenda for the April 9 convening. Participants were asked to raise the pressing and interrelated issues which inspire their activism in this challenging political time. Rising to the top were: abortion law, access, and justice; building broad based social justice movements; confronting population control and eugenics; and addressing climate change.

We acknowledge and appreciate each participants' individual perspectives and insights within this collective analysis, even though we do not attribute ideas to individual participants. Instead, we synthesized the main themes that emerged from our conversations. When

appropriate, we include references to research and analysis that can deepen our understanding of these issues.

The convening marked several milestones in Collective Power's history. It celebrated Marlene Gerber Fried's many contributions to our organization and to our movements in anticipation of her June 2022 retirement as a professor at Hampshire College and as Collective Power's Faculty Director. It also marked our organization's 40th anniversary. It was our first in-person gathering since March 2020 and our first in-person event with our new name: Collective Power for Reproductive Justice.

Today's Restrictive Abortion Politics

While we are just beginning to see all the impacts of *Dobbs*, the decision has essentially [obliterated abortion access](#) in certain parts of the country and has generated widespread confusion and fear. The direct and indirect medical impacts [will be severe](#). The Supreme Court decision has made the legal status of abortion dependent on state law and possible new federal laws. This means clinics, abortion funds, and providers who were already operating under stigma, surveillance, and violence, are now increasingly strained and at increased risk of criminalization. The current attacks on legalized abortion are the culmination of the long-term strategy of the political Right and anti-abortion movement.

We recognize the far-reaching implications of *Dobbs*, and also support a critical understanding of the 1973 Supreme Court decision it overturned, *Roe v. Wade*. *Roe* never ensured that everyone could access abortion care. Restrictive legislation including the 1976 [Hyde Amendment](#), which banned Medicaid funding for abortion, and Targeted Regulation of Abortion Providers ([TRAP laws](#)), which impose burdensome standards on abortion providers, have consistently limited abortion access for those who need it most. These laws, along with state bans on procedures, gestational age limits, and more, [have especially harmed BIPOC \(Black, Indigenous, people of color\) communities](#), and others who are marginalized by ongoing systems of oppression.

We caution against idealized versions of *Roe*, which see it as cementing women's rights to bodily autonomy. Ignoring how racism shapes abortion access is a major challenge to realizing reproductive justice. It also undercuts the ability to have a full understanding of how racism is at the core of anti-abortion politics. In this way, a narrow focus on *Roe* in abortion politics upholds white supremacy.

The constitutional attacks on *Roe* are part of an extensive Far Right strategy to criminalize, control and restrict people and further erode individual rights. *Dobbs* confirms our fears of that strategy, which is already well underway. We see this in the criminalization of people who self-manage their abortion, and in related attacks on LGBTQ+ rights, especially trans health services, particularly for children. The radical anti-abortion movement, working in tandem with other Far Right and anti-democratic movements, has reframed the debate, intensified its boldness, and created new models for restrictive legislation in the form of state-based ordinances and policies. Implicit in this is the importance of knowing those who seek to restrict our rights. By dropping the *Roe*-centric focus, we can see clearly that they are coming for so much more.

Intensified white supremacist extremism, violence and apocalyptic thinking

Over the past decades, there has been a consolidation of the US Far Right. It is evident in the variety of groups who joined the January 6, 2021 attack on the US capital. The violent wing of the anti-abortion movement has been working with militias and what is sometimes called the [Patriot Movement](#) since the 1990s. Today's militia activity is in many ways similar to their earlier organizing, when they were [actively coordinating and advocating for violence at abortion clinics](#). During the Obama Presidency, the Oath Keepers (a Far Right, anti-government militia) joined with the John Birch Society (an old school white supremacist, anti-Semitic, anti-communist group), the Tea Party (the conservative political party) and others in a [move to increase their power](#).

While anti-abortion groups claim they are not going after people who have abortions, the reality is different. Today, there are those within the anti-abortion movement that call themselves abolitionists. This includes groups who want to classify abortion as homicide and criminally punish those who get them. Groups like Free the States (Oklahoma based anti-abortion group) and End Abortion Now (global network of anti-abortion Christian churches) are working together to build a legislative strategy, even as they maintain their anti-government stance.

For example, these groups have been successful in getting [“sanctuaries” for the unborn](#) passed at the local level, a strategy to outlaw abortion city-by-city. They had their first national conference with Operation Save America (an extremist anti-abortion group that is also Islamophobic and homophobic) and people who are involved in various militias. They also proposed “abortion abolition” bills which call for the death penalty for anyone involved in abortion.

Beyond abolishing abortion, these groups are pushing for a total theocracy. Their activities dovetail with another key political strategy of the Far Right, which focuses on organizing youth on college campuses and elsewhere. Turning Point USA, for example, is a white supremacist organization that targets college students. The pictures on [its website](#) feature BIPOC. It is highly organized and has extensive social media offerings which radicalize viewers. They are expert at running anti-abortion rallies on campuses and using YouTube and TikTok algorithms to lead viewers to Far Right propaganda, including QAnon conspiracies.

The April 9 convening highlighted the need for our movement to get smarter and more sophisticated about these youth recruitment tactics, especially through technology. Our movement must recognize the ways that social media is being used by the Far Right to organize and radicalize young people. Further, by paying attention to these online and algorithmic tactics, we can better understand how these movements garner political and financial support across racial lines. At the December 1, 2021 (when *Dobbs* was argued) abortion rally outside of the Supreme Court, one of the most painful realities was how many young people overall, and young people of color were participating with the anti-abortion movement. We must be aware of anti-abortion groups like [Pro-Life, Pro-Black](#), which argues for

“tough conversations surrounding racial equality including the womb.” Or the anti-abortion [Black Pre-Born Lives Matter](#), whose web presence is supported by the abortion abolitionist group, Students for Life. It is important to expose how anti-abortion groups use and distort the language of racial justice and civil rights to further their aims.

Another dangerous trend is the rise of “overpopulation” rhetoric, hate and violence on the Far Right. As the climate crisis intensifies, some on the Far Right are rejecting climate denialism and instead embracing eco-fascist rhetoric that blames “overpopulation” and immigration for environmental degradation and climate change. Eugenics is threaded throughout. Their ideas also build on anti-immigrant advocacy in the name of environmental protection, also known as the “[greening of hate](#).” The so-called “Great Replacement” conspiracy theory is key to the [apocalyptic thinking](#) of several of the shooters who targeted Black, Latinx and Muslim people. It holds that elites (including Jews, Democrats) are orchestrating the replacement of white, “native-born” Americans with Black and Brown immigrants. This ideology has been mainstreamed by Far Right news pundits like Tucker Carlson, and on [fringe social media sites](#) like *Gab* and *Parler*. According to a poll from the Associated Press, [one in three people in the US believe it](#). This conspiracy theory is used to justify anti-abortion, “pro-family” policies in the US and is shared globally. Today’s “overpopulation” rhetoric is echoed across the political spectrum, among some feminist scholars, in climate change pessimism among progressives, anti-immigrant sentiment from centrist politicians, and mainstream family planning campaigns which call for population reduction to save the planet.

Increased criminalization, policing, and erosion of civil rights

The mainstreaming of white supremacist groups and ideology in the US corresponds with a troubling rise in criminalization, policing, and loss of civil rights. This builds on existing mass incarceration, which has a genocidal intent and impact on low income, BIPOC communities. Mass incarceration rests on eugenic ideology which paints racialized, targeted groups (for instance, low income, BIPOC) as inherently criminal and in need of “reform.” President Biden’s “fund the police” strategy sustains increased criminalization, surveillance, and incarceration,

and supports overtly racist and authoritarian policies. For example, [45 US states have considered over 200 bills criminalizing protest](#), allegedly to address the so-called “threat” of leftist and Black activists. [Nineteen states passed laws restricting access to voting in their state’s elections](#).

At the same time there is increased criminalization related to the so-called “rights” of children. [According to the Guttmacher Institute](#), “24 states and the District of Columbia consider substance use during pregnancy to be child abuse under civil child-welfare statutes, and 3 consider it grounds for civil commitment.” Similarly, from the year 2000 to today, at least 60 people in the US have faced [criminal penalties for self-managed abortions](#). With the narrowing of abortion access, we can expect rising rates of criminalization for pregnancy outcomes particularly for BIPOC who are already [disproportionately surveilled by the child protective services apparatus and criminalized](#). Similarly, in the name of protecting children, anti-trans health care bills deny gender affirming care to youth 13-18 years old on the grounds that it is a form of sterilization enacted on children. Already, [trans youth across 15 states risk losing access to life saving care](#).

Strategies for Resistance

Together, we must fight the multiple manifestations of white supremacy—fascism, increased policing, patriarchal oppression, population control, and eugenics—head-on. The following are some preliminary strategies that emerged from our collective discussion.

Lift up our history

Our movement's history offers decades of insight, inspiration, and tactical lessons that we can draw from in this challenging political moment. This is not the first time that feminist activists have taken on Far Right extremists, white supremacy, “overpopulation” politics, population control, eugenics, xenophobia, patriarchy, homophobia, transphobia, and anti-abortion militancy. We have a powerful legacy of intersectional thinking and action to draw from. This includes the [reproductive justice framework](#) created by Black feminists, now fundamental to our strategies. Remembering and respecting that history is an act of resistance which will strengthen us today.

Our history also provides cautionary tales: paths to avoid so we don't repeat mistakes that undermine our advocacy. Failing to face racism and a lack of intersectional movement strategy are key examples. Challenging the racism, eugenics, and anti-immigrant politics that have motivated the criminalization of abortion since the 1800s is fundamental to forging a liberatory approach to abortion access. Today, larger mainstream groups in the abortion rights movement have still not brought together resistance to racism and the fight for abortion rights.

Center the knowledge and experience of those most impacted

Our movements must center the knowledge and experience of those most impacted by the overlapping challenges of abortion restrictions, the tactics of anti-abortion protesters, and the violence from state governments, militants, and police. Clinic workers, abortion fund providers, and people seeking abortion, as well as Black, Indigenous, people of color, poor and rural people are taking the lead, especially those in states controlled by radical anti-choice

legislators. We need to build solidarity in the movement across geographic, political, racial, gender, religious and class lines—in other words uphold intersectionality in practice—while championing the priorities of those in regions that are most impacted. Attention to class is built into the reproductive justice framework, which tells us to center the people who are experiencing oppression in every area.

Upholding an intersectional approach means challenging the ways that national mainstream leaders have talked about “red” states, saying, for example, that we should just “leave” Texas. This disrespects people from the US South and rural people in general and misses the fact that so many people in these areas are allies. The mainstream reproductive rights movement has failed to pay significant attention not just to social class and race. It has also ignored the specific needs of people who live in rural areas, not recognizing how people in those communities are leading resistance efforts. Unfortunately, the Right and indeed the Far Right has built its base in part by speaking directly to this constituency. The movement for reproductive rights has failed to adequately challenge white supremacy, or to successfully build coalitions and bring new people into the movement. Failure to do so has deepened racial and class divisions within the reproductive rights and justice movement.

Historically the main groups in the abortion rights movement have also neglected the intersection of religion, faith, and reproductive justice. Upholding these connections is necessary to counter white Christian exceptionalism and religious voices on the Right, such as Project Blitz (a coalition of Far-Right Christian groups). Women of color-led organizations such as [SisterReach](#) and [Interfaith Voices for Reproductive Justice](#) are playing a leadership role in this area.

Confront white supremacy in our movement

Upholding intersectionality and forging solidarity require us to tackle white supremacy inside and outside the movement. Our dreams of the future must be untethered from past and current white supremacy. We must continue to directly address eugenics and population control in the US, including within the reproductive rights movement. For example, in California, [coerced](#)

[sterilization in prisons](#) was justified under the framework of liberal “choice” and paternalism. Doctors and prison officials defended their eugenic sterilization policies based on the idea that “these people don’t really want to have more children.” In order to undo these policies and to recognize the harm they have caused, we must look closely at the deep connection between neoliberalism and fascism in their common tactics, such as privatizing public space and inserting profitability into every aspect of human existence.

Within the movement, we need to tackle our own operationalized white supremacy in the non-profit industry. This includes challenging the orientation to [white saviorism](#) in our organizations’ “mission” statements, strategies, power structures, hierarchies, funding, and scarcity narratives. How can we model and sustain liberatory practices within movement spaces and organizations? How do we perpetuate white supremacist cultures within our organizations and movements? We have the tools to challenge white supremacy and saviorism as an ongoing, collective process. We need to use them!

Another way that white supremacy is showing up is in political strategies and communications that fall back on regressive messaging, such as [promoting vasectomy](#) to counteract today’s patriarchal reproductive oppression or urging women to go on a sex strike to protest *Dobbs*. In this moment of extremely challenging politics, we must support visions for change that champion social justice, show respect for those most impacted, and invite solidarity across movements.

Provide visions of liberation and fight apocalyptic gloom

Visions for the future can come from us. We need to make spaces for intersectional, collective thinking and action to support our politics, strategy, and imaginations. The April 9 convening reminded us of how actualizing intersectionality means sharing our political insights and strategies across movements, identities, and geographies. Collectively, we were able to make connections and to reveal the complex and connected politics of oppression that we face and

begin to explore pathways to justice. Extending our conversations internationally, with anti-population control, anti-eugenics, social justice advocates from a variety of movements will further stretch our visions and strengthen our politics.

Visions for the future don't need to be new to be powerful. Our history of resistance provides strategies and inspiration. As an example, in addition to intensive organizing aimed at [overturning the Hyde Amendment](#), activists created community-based abortion funds in an effort to fill the gap left by the denial of public funding. How can this vision of community support, stressed as it is, be sustained and/or expanded?

Visions for the future must resist "end days" stances, whether joking or deeply felt, which support apocalyptic thinking. Apocalyptic rhetoric shuts down connection, resistance, and liberatory potential, and carries dangerous bias. For instance, "overpopulation" thinking is rooted in the idea that population growth will bring environmental ruin, scarcity, and war. Apocalypticism has been a central part of Far Right, white nationalist and neo-fascist ideology for decades. Our visions of liberation must challenge that ideology by centering hope, solidarity and critical thinking to messages of inevitable doom, particularly in the face of climate change.

Build cross-movement solidarities and take inspiration from movements in other countries

Our conversations highlight the possibilities raised by cross-movement solidarity among social justice-oriented movements. We can learn from the international anti-eugenics efforts and peoples' health movements, as well as the emergence of new workers' unions.

We can look to international social movements for inspiration and strategic direction. Countries in Latin America including Uruguay, Argentina, Colombia, Chile, and Mexico have all increased abortion access by building strong, intersectional movements. Activists in those countries have successfully changed their laws, policies, and societal attitude. Most importantly, they have managed to work across class, religion, and rural/urban lines by

speaking to broad material issues like intimate partner violence, state sanctioned violence and more.

We can also draw from movements facing harsh abortion restrictions and forms of oppression that mirror those in the US. For example, activists in Poland are organizing a [campaign for Justyna](#), a woman facing three years in prison for helping someone with a self-managed medical abortion with pills.

What are we willing to do?

This important question and strong call to action was raised, but not fully answered. Are we ready or willing to do what is required to directly confront racism and oppression? Historically, BIPOC communities have done so, seeing no other choice.

What forms of resistance will we participate in and support? What serves our long-term goals of liberation? Can we use guerrilla tactics without undermining efforts to draw more people into the movement? Can we be critical of the strategy on the progressive side of divesting from the power of people and grassroots organizing and instead focusing on litigation to protect *Roe*, while at the same time affirming the need for multiple strategies on many fronts? Most important, how are we going to build solidarity and support each other, and build intersectional coalitions?