

Religious Coalition *for* Reproductive Choice

THE HISTORY OF REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

*From SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collaborative
Available at sistersong.net*

The reproductive justice framework – the right to have children, not have children, and to parent the children we have in safe and healthy environments -- is based on the human right to make personal decisions about one's life, and the obligation of government and society to ensure that the conditions are suitable for implementing one's decisions is important for women of color.

It represents a shift for women advocating for control of their bodies, from a narrower focus on legal access and individual choice (the focus of mainstream organizations) to a broader analysis of racial, economic, cultural, and structural constraints on our power.

Reproductive Justice addresses the social reality of inequality, specifically, the inequality of opportunities that we have to control our reproductive destiny. Our options for making choices have to be safe, affordable and accessible, three minimal cornerstones of government support for all individual life decisions.

The SisterSong concept of Reproductive Justice emerged at a Black women's caucus in 1994 that merged the concepts of reproductive rights + social justice = reproductive justice. We did so in order to bring home human rights concepts that we discovered international activists used at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo, Egypt. Human rights provide more possibilities for our struggles than the privacy concepts the pro-choice movement claims only using the U.S. Constitution. Reproductive justice emerged as an intersectional theory highlighting the lived experience of reproductive oppression in communities of color. It represents a shift for women advocating for control of their bodies, from a narrower focus on legal access and individual choice (the focus of mainstream organizations) to a broader analysis of racial, economic, cultural, and structural constraints on our power.

In 2005, Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice (ACRJ) offered an expanded perspective on reproductive issues advocacy by defining reproductive justice as "the complete physical, mental, spiritual, political, social, and economic well-being of women and girls, based on the full achievement and protection of women's human rights."

OUR WORKING DEFINITION OF REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

For the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, reproductive justice means that all people and communities should have the social, spiritual, economic, and political means to experience the sacred gift of sexuality with health and wholeness.

Three Frameworks for addressing reproductive oppression

(excerpt from *A New Vision for Advancing our Movement for Reproductive Health, Reproductive Rights and Reproductive Justice*, ACRJ 2005)

Framework:	Reproductive Health	Reproductive Rights	Reproductive Justice
Model	Service delivery to address women's reproductive health needs	Legal and policy advocacy to protect an individual woman's legal right to reproductive health services with a focus on keeping abortion legal	Organizing individuals and communities to create structural change and challenge power inequalities
Central Theme(s)	The need to increase access to the full range of reproductive health services to address women's health disparities in underserved communities	Choice and privacy in making reproductive health decisions	The control and exploitation of women's gender, bodies and sexuality has historically been a means of controlling entire communities — particularly low-income communities of color
Strategies	Improving and expanding services, research, information and access, particularly prevention of STIs and unintended pregnancies	Legal and policy advocacy	Organizing, leadership development, cross-sector alliance building, movement building
Key Players	Professional medical community, health care providers, researchers, health educators	Advocates, legal experts, lawyers, policymakers	Organizers, community members
Limitations	Focus on individual, resource intensive, differing levels of access	Emphasis on individual choice overlooks social context and discounts the state's regulation of "behavior" and options in certain populations; assumes access to education, information and access to the policy process	Asks organizations and individuals to take risks to challenge power relations, values, and assumptions; Long-term movement building is resource-intensive and requires balancing the immediate, short-term needs of communities and constituencies