
In Memoriam: Erma Clardy Craven

More than 20 years ago, she exposed abortion as Black genocide

The death in June of Erma Clardy Craven at the age of 76, deprived the United States of one of its bravest fighters against population-control schemes aimed at killing off the poor.

This August, Clardy Craven was to have received the first Sanctity of Life Award from Life, Education, and Research Network, a group holding the first conference of Black leaders who oppose "abortion rights." She helped start and was a board member of several groups, including African-Americans Against Abortion, Americans United For Life, the National Right to Life Committee, Black Americans for Life, and National Democrats for Life.

She was a pioneer in helping to establish Minnesota Citizens Concerned for Life. In trying, in the 1950s and 1960s, to build a movement against Planned Parenthood's eugenicist storm-troopers—the likes of Margaret Sanger—Craven often stood alone, while the Planned Parenthood crowd wooed civil rights leaders with the siren song that birth control and abortion would "liberate" poor women. She was a founding endorser of the Club of Life in 1982, as well as a staunch defender of the efforts of the Schiller Institute, both organizations founded by Helga Zepp-LaRouche.

Mrs. Clardy Craven was born in Minneapolis and graduated from South High School. She earned a bachelor's degree in social work from the College of St. Scholastica in Duluth, and worked in an ammunition plant during World War II. She worked with the Urban League in Milwaukee and as a parole officer in New York City before returning to Minneapolis in 1958. She was a social worker in the Hennepin County Welfare Department until she retired in 1983, involved in child protection and dealing with the problems facing young mothers. She was well known as a public speaker, and was honored to be the second African-American woman to address a Democratic National Convention.

In 1972, Mrs. Craven published her book, *Abortion and Social Justice*, which included a chapter "Abortion, Poverty and Black Genocide: Gifts to the Poor?" This was before the landmark Supreme Court decision of 1973 in *Roe v. Wade* which made the right to abortion the law of the land. Mrs. Craven asserted: "It takes little imagination to see that the unborn Black baby is the real object of many abortionists.

Except for the privilege of aborting herself, the Black woman and her family must fight for every other social and economic privilege. This move toward the free application of a non-right (abortion) for those whose real need is equal human rights and opportunities is benumbing the social conscience of America into unquestioningly accepting the 'smoke screen' of abortion. The quality of life for the poor, the Black and the oppressed will not be served by destroying their children."

The African-American's humanness was "ruled out of existence" for centuries under slavery, Craven wrote. "Every effort was made to destroy the Black family; knowing that with its destruction, the Black man remained powerless. . . . Now, the womb of the poor Black woman is seen as the latest battleground for oppression. In times past, the Blacks couldn't grow kids fast enough for their 'masters' to harvest; now that power is near, the 'masters' want us to call a moratorium on having babies. When looked at in context, the whole mess adds up to blatant genocide."

There are more subtle forms of genocide than Hitler's slaughter of the Jews or the Turkish massacre of Armenians, Craven wrote: "The substandard housing of the poor in this country where heat, water and plumbing facilities are lacking, and adequate public services such as garbage removal are withheld, is genocide. The poor food found in the ghetto supermarkets, the absence of health services, and the fires which consume the run-down houses and the little kids who live in them is genocide. . . . The conditions of ghetto schools and the quality of public education in Black communities is genocide. Government family planning programs designed for poor Blacks which emphasize birth control and abortion with the intent of limiting the Black population is genocide. The deliberate killing of Black babies in abortion is genocide—perhaps the most overt form of all."

She stated, "As a Black, Protestant social worker of thirty-four years experience in the rat-infested ghettos of the United States, I am calling for an immediate halt to this genocide."

Mrs. Craven observed that "while many southern states have relaxed their abortion statutes, I have not found one piece of truly progressive social legislation which the South as a whole has been willing to give to Blacks. On the other

hand, the same year that North Carolina relaxed its abortion law, it refused to legislate equal employment opportunities for Blacks.”

Writing in 1972, when George McGovern was challenging Richard Nixon for the presidency on a “peace in Vietnam” platform, Craven revealed that McGovern had set 1976 as target date for achieving zero population growth in the United States as a “firm national goal.” “Since white Americans have already achieved this,” she wrote, “it can only be interpreted as having its most significant impact on the Black poor. To kill an unborn child because it may be unwanted, or deformed, or simply does not measure up to someone’s standard of excellence is the same as destroying a Vietnamese village in order to save it.”

As for McGovern’s opponent, she was equally blunt: “While President Nixon has strongly defended the unborn’s right to exist, his administration policies toward the delivery of family planning programs to the Black poor are highly suspicious and, I think, can be strongly indicted. In a terribly illogical move, he proposed, in his opening remarks to the White House Conference on Hunger, held in 1969, that the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future be established. What this had to do with hunger is still to be determined.” Gigantic efforts ensued to provide “family planning services” to the poor in the following years, while similar efforts to feed and house the power got “hardly off the ground.”

Craven identified the Planned Parenthood Federation’s policies as made by “upper-middle-class white people who have a fetish about controlling the reproductive capacities of others, especially those who are poor and Black. They are joined by many others of even greater wealth: John D. Rockefeller III; Nelson A. Rockefeller; the Rockefeller Foundation; the Ford Foundation; the Carnegie Foundation; the Commonwealth and Community Funds; the Mott Trust; the Population Council (a Rockefeller baby); the World Bank; the Hugh Moore Fund; General Draper; Robert McNamara; J. Patrick Moynihan; the Kellogg Foundation; Clifford Hardin; Stuart Udall; Robert Packwood; Paul Ehrlich; and the Agency for International Development.”

Evidence of coercion

“If family limitation programs were truly grounded in free choice, in voluntary acceptance or rejection,” wrote Craven 22 years ago, “one could have little quarrel with their availability. However, there is mounting evidence to suggest that coercion is being used.”

For instance, “Chicago’s Planned Parenthood Association has been known to sponsor birth control ‘coffee parties’ all over the poorer sections of the city, a policy unheard-of in the suburbs.” She also cited testimony from a respected Black physician in Pittsburgh that federally financed birth control programs were carrying propaganda into Black homes via public assistance workers and women are encour-

aged to visit clinics with “implicit and explicit threats that welfare payments will be cut off if the recipient has more children.” Among many examples Craven cited, she reported on the linkage that was made between federal welfare and social security appropriations and birth control programs for the poor. In New York City, the fear of losing federal appropriations “has led one health center to play a recording in waiting rooms every five to ten minutes urging women to visit the local family planning agency. This is not only coercive, it is genuinely dehumanizing.”

Moreover, “at Cook County Hospital in Chicago, some physicians attempt to ‘make sterilization appeal’ to women who are in the pains of labor. How coercive can you get?” Craven asked.

The reality of Black genocide

“Although Blacks are strongly opposed to various family planning programs and especially to abortion,” Craven wrote in 1972, “there is incontrovertible evidence that they are being eliminated against their wishes. While birth rates have dropped for nearly every sector of the United States population over the last decade, births to poor women dropped by 32 per thousand, compared with a drop of 17 fewer per thousand among the rest. For Black poor women, the fall was even greater; they produced 49 fewer babies per thousand. Government-sponsored birth control clinics, supported strongly by men and organizations with money and power, are slowly achieving their aims.”

Craven reported, “During the first 15 months’ experience with abortion in New York City, 43.4% of all abortions performed on New York City residents were performed on ‘non-whites’ (90% of whom are Black). This is put into even more tragic perspective when one realizes that only 18.1% of New York City residents are ‘non-white’ (90% of whom are Black.)”

Hence, “Black women are being aborted at a rate 2.5 times greater than any other ethnic group in New York City. *Why?* They are not being given the freedom to say no! They are being coerced into destroying their children! *This must come to an immediate halt!* Then, an investigation should be carried out, and those responsible should be brought to trial for one of the most ghastly crimes of this century.”

The chapter ends as follows: “If we are truly a nation who speaks of civil human rights, then we must prove that we carry no prejudices. The abortion issue, with its gnawing ability to make one honest, may very well be the ultimate test. If we can openly admit our prejudice, then perhaps we can begin to move forward. If we cannot, then we will move one step further down into the valley of death.

“The blood-and-guts problem is our lack of compassion and our lack of concern. More and more, women are being seen as wombs to be deactivated rather than human beings with lives to be fulfilled. Only when this impoverishment is eliminated can we fully expect to enter the new frontier.”