

Organizing To Stop The War Against Women of Color

INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence

"We need an analysis that furthers neither the conservative project of sequestering millions of men of color in accordance with the contemporary dictates of globalized capital and its prison industrial complex, nor the equally conservative project of abandoning poor women of color to a continuum of violence that extends from the sweatshops through the prisons, to shelters, and into bedrooms at home. How do we develop organizing strategies against violence against women that acknowledge the race of gender and the gender of race?"

—Angela Y. Davis, keynote address, Color of Violence Conference, April 2000, University of Santa Cruz, CA.

born out of the first groundbreaking Color of Violence conference held in 2000, INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence — a national activist organization of radical feminists of color advancing a movement to end violence against women of color and their communities through direct action, critical dialogic and grassroots organizing — will be celebrating its fifth year this March in New Orleans.

Shortly after its creation, the organization developed and issued a joint statement on gender violence and the prison industrial complex with Critical Resistance, a national organization working for prison abolition. The statement, signed by over a hundred individuals and organizations, outlines the ways in which women of color suffer disproportionately from all forms of violence, and calls on social justice movements to develop strategies and analysis that address both state and interpersonal violence, and particularly violence against women. Since then, INCITE! has organized a dozen activist institutes across the country aimed at doing just that.

Thirteen INCITE! chapters have sprung up between Hawai'i and Boston to put INCITE!'s analysis into action on the ground. In the past two years, the organi-

zation held a second Color of Violence conference in Chicago, and launched campaigns aimed at mobilizing women of color against the war in Iraq and sterilization abuse of women of color in the US. INCITE! also collaborated in the founding of the Boarding School Healing Project, a coalition formed to address the community-wide and intergenerational impacts of physical, sexual, psychological and cultural abuse of Native American children abducted from their families and forced to attend government sponsored, church-run boarding schools throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

SisterFire

Last summer, INCITE! launched SisterFire, a nationwide multi-media tour centering culture and art as tools to mobilize local resistance to violence against women of color.

Based on an understanding that progressive organizations too often rely solely on the intellect when developing public education campaigns, and an appreciation of the importance of developing multi-media forms of political expression more accessible to a wide range of audiences, SisterFire featured music, films, art, performances, dance, and other forms of political artistic expression, as well as workshops demonstrating how women of color can use culture and artistic expression as a means to organize against violence against women of color.

*Eh Roo Wa Eh Roo Uhl Sa
Help pull from the front
Eh Roo Wa Eh Roo Uhl Sa
Help push from the back
Eh Roo Wa Eh Roo Uhl Sa
OO-RI SO-RI (Our Voice),*

A Korean women's percussion group founded in 1998 that not only performs, but creates *No-Ri* — a gathering for all people to dance, sing, play and gather power — opened up the Incite SisterFire National Arts Tour Chicago stop. The group played four of the traditional Korean percussion instruments involved in *Poong-Mool No-Ri*. Each of the four instruments represents different aspects of the universe and sounds of nature: the *Kweng-gwa-ri* (smaller gong) represents stars and thunder; *Jing* (gong) represents sun and wind; *Book* (drum) represents moon and cloud; and *Jang-go* (hour

glass shaped drum) represents rain and man and woman. Historically, *Poong-Mool No-Ri*, was played for harvesting rituals and for gathering people for collective tasks. Today, it continues to be played all over the world in celebration of Korean heritage and resistance to oppression.

*Let's gather all our power
Eh Roo Wa Eh Roo Uhl Sa
Together, we can enlighten this darkness
Eh Roo Wa Eh Roo Uhl Sa*

Inhe Choi, co-founder, describes *No-Ri*, as "a tradition that has been dominated by men," but multi-generational members of *OO-RI SO-RI* come from various backgrounds as mothers, community workers, and church-goers tied together by a common thread of supporting KAN-WIN (Korean American Women In Need), a hotline program founded in 1990 for Korean American women experiencing sexual and domestic violence. KAN-WIN works to transform legislation and

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public policies on violence against women, immigration, welfare, housing, and social services. "Their performance on the SisterFire tour exemplified the way in which historical struggles, resistance, and the power of women come together in artistic expression, reaching many whom flyers and speeches may leave out," Choi said.

The 2004 SisterFire Tour traveled to cities such as Pierre, SD; San Francisco, CA; Seattle, WA; Portland, OR; Los Angeles, CA; Albuquerque, NM; Washington, DC; New Orleans, LA; and New York, NY. Twenty touring artists and over a hundred local artists staged events in community organizing centers, stadiums, and public parks. SisterFire provided a strategic way to reach not only people who are college students, activists for social change or members of community-based organizations or other organizing groups, but those among us who often are the most affected by state-sponsored violence such as war and poverty, but do not have access to each other to inform ourselves on the issues, reflect on them and take action with others to create changes.

Political imagination

"There aren't a lot of spaces like this that are art-based, community-organizing based, and really exemplify women of color artists' responses to social justice," says Selly thiam, one

of the Chicago stop co-coordinators. "So many people after the event came forward and said that they hadn't participated in an event like that before. Folks are really looking forward to continuing the work of SisterFire as a way for them as political artists to express their art and work on the violence against women of color.

There's so much telling you that art isn't supposed to be political. We're not having that argument here. We have a political imagination." The lessons of SisterFire will be evident at the upcoming Color of Violence III in New Orleans. Whether the subject is reproductive rights; domestic violence; sexual assault; police violence; the "War on Terror;" poverty; violence against bisexual, lesbian, intersex, transgender, and Two Spirit women of color; attacks on immigrants' rights and Indian treaty rights; gentrification; denial of affordable housing; or education, the Color of Violence III will place the experiences of women of color at the center of the debate, and provide a forum in which to share organizing strategies and build a movement of resistance.

Not only will cultural work and performance be integrated throughout the program, but the conference will wrap up with a traditional New Orleans "secondline" — a community based jazz street procession and celebration rooted, like the Color of Violence III, in the culture of resistance of people of color living in the South. We hope you'll join us weaving through the neighborhoods of New Orleans in celebration of the resistance of women of color to all of the wars waged against us, as we keep building a movement to STOP THE WAR ON WOMEN OF COLOR!

—Andrea Ritchie & Tammy Ko Robinson

Andrea Ritchie and Tammy Ko Robinson are National Collective members of INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence. Join us at Color of Violence III, March 11-13, 2005 in New Orleans, LA. For more information about INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence or The Color of Violence III, check out our website at <http://www.incite-national.org>, or call (734) 231-1845.

