

# From OJ to Proposition 187

## Or, how to talk about racism and domestic violence

by Hope Mohr

Statistics on domestic violence numb the mind. A woman is physically abused every nine seconds in this country. Women are more often victims of domestic violence than victims of burglary, muggings or violent crimes combined. Forty-two percent of murdered women are killed by their intimate male partners.

Yet despite the overwhelming evidence that something needs to be done to end violence against women in the home, the problem remains far from being solved. And, like many activists in the Bay Area, domestic violence activists are taking another look at their work following the November elections.

If anything good came out of the passage of Proposition 187, it was this— 187 has given activists outside the immigrant and Latino communities a (new) reason to address racism. When African-American women struggled to advance a space for a gender analysis within the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, they were attempting to deepen their movement's analysis of the nature of power. In the same way, domestic violence activists are pushing the domestic violence movement to evolve so that it more effectively addresses the intersections between racism and violence against women.

Sue Kuyper, director of crisis services at WOMAN, Inc. in San Francisco, says that, "The Battered Women's Movement was started by women of color, formerly battered women, and lesbians. Like the women's movement in general, it was taken over by white women. As (the movement) became institutionalized, we lost touch with the communities that were supposed to be leading us." Kuyper says that, "It is important that there be a voice challenging white racism in the Domestic Violence Movement."

One of the main liabilities of the left is its inability to present a unified front. Proposition 184 and Proposition 187 capitalized

on this phenomenon, and their double presence on the November ballot was an obvious attempt to divide communities of color. Now that both initiatives have passed, it is important that activists do not perpetuate the divisive potential of the two propositions. As Kuyper says, "187 and 184 come out of a fear of having a state that will be majority people of color. ... To expect battered women of color to come to (domestic violence) agencies and turn in their batterer into a racist (penal) system is outrageous. We can't expect a Latina to comply with the INS in order for her to be safe. We can't approach the problem that way." In other words, it is not enough to hold batterers accountable and expect the racist penal system to participate in ending the cycle of violence.

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Women and children often suffer the brunt of misguided social policy and economic crisis, and battered immigrant women and children are no exception. Battered immigrant women and children are generally unaware of their legal and civil rights and are a

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highly vulnerable group. It is common for abusive citizen or legal permanent resident spouses to use the threat of;deportation to deter their victims (even those that have legal status) from reporting the violence and seeking assistance. The passage of Proposition 187 by California voters has resulted in much fear and confusion among immigrants and refugees living in California. Proposition 187 is therefore not only a racist policy which scapegoats immigrants, but is also an anti-woman policy which perpetuates violence against women and children.

To fight this kind of layered injustice, "It is crucial that communities of color come together," says Kuyper. "We can look at 187 like we look at the O.J. ok. To ignore sexism is not ok. Why does it have to be either or?" Indeed, agency and clinic policies on 187 may prove to be the litmus test for future alliances within the domestic violence movement. Sor Juana Inés, a Latina-focused

Domestic Violence agency in San Mateo, has said that they will refuse to refer any clients to agencies that comply with 187. Jennifer Rakowski, director of administration and training at Sor Juana Inés, says that the agency made this decision so that, "Families are safe, including the person who may be violent. It is important that the violence in the home is not echoed in the larger community."

For the women leading the fight against violence against women, this is not a time to make concessions to the conservative backlash. Although there have been informal reports that calls from battered immigrant women have been down since the elections, domestic violence agencies are more committed than ever to making services available to battered women, regardless of their documentation status. Sandra Camacho, Associate Director with La Casa de las Madres says, "Our message to the community is that as an

agency, we are here for the women. Since the elections, we have come up with two sayings. One is 'Battering crosses borders.' The other is 'Si apoyamos no repotamos.' The message to the community is that we are here for you. We are here to help."

On Dedcember 8, in response to the passage of Proposition 187, the San Francisco Domestic Violence Consortium issued a "Statement of Policy" which states that the Consortium member organizations; "shall continue to provide all of its services to our clients without regard to their immigration status... shall not ask our clients for immigration documents as a condition for receiving our services...shall not report or disclose a client's immigration status to the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) or any other government agency without the express consent of the client."

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The Consortium represents the major agencies and clinics serving battered women in San Francisco.

Although 187 is not in effect, forces in opposition to the law are wasting no time in refining the logic of non-compliance in case the court system fails to obstruct 187 from going into effect. Social service providers and advocates for battered women raise the same grounds for non-compliance as do teachers and health workers; in addition to 187 making no sense from a public health and civil rights perspective, it violates ethical and professional standards to preserve the confidentiality and privacy of information relating to clients.

Proposition 187 gives activists within the domestic violence movement a new chance to inject a race analysis into their work. Just as activists are calling for a "de-Latinoization" of 187, we can educate ourselves and each other as to how racism and anti-immigrant sentiment affect not only people of color and immigrants, but everyone. Activist rhetoric must go beyond single-issue analysis and must resonate across community lines.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO  
\*\*\*WHERE TO FIND HELP\*\*\*  
LO QUE UD. PUEDE HACER  
\*\*\*DONDE HAY APOYO\*\*\***

Bay Area Domestic Violence agencies need your volunteer help! Call to find out when the next volunteer trainings will be. If you are suffering abuse at the hands of a partner, you are not alone. Usted tiene el derecho a vivir libre de violencia en su hogar. ¡No está sola! There are women who understand and who are waiting to help you at the following places. Call now for support and help. Llame hoy mismo para apoyo y asistencia.

● A Safe Place, Oakland  
(510) 536-7233

● Battered Women's Alternative, Contra Costa County  
(510) 930-8300 (Crisis Line)  
(510) 676-2845 (Office)

● Immigrant Assistance Line (415) 554-2444

● La Casa de las Madres,, San Francisco  
(415) 333-1515 (Crisis) (415)-777-1808 (Office)

● Rosalie House, San Francisco (415) 255-0165

● Sor Juana Inés, San Mateo  
1-800-300-1080.

● WOMAN, Inc. San Francisco (415) 864-4777 (Office)  
(415) 864-4722 (Crisis Line).

As it is helpful to post and give clients an actual copy of official policies of non-compliance to assuage fears, you may obtain a copy of the San Francisco Domestic Violence Consortium's 187 policy by writing them at 354 18th Street Box 19 San Francisco 94110.