



NEWSLETTER

of the

FEMINIST CAUCUS

of the American Humanist Association

DECEMBER 2005

FROM THE CHAIR

Hello Feminist Caucus members!

I hope you are all well and warm as we begin another winter of skyrocketing fuel prices that are yielding windfall profits for the oil companies, which as we all know hold the closest of associations with many of the U.S. regime's elected and appointed officials. Some postulate that this closeness of capital to government, which is evident with so many other corporate sectors as well, marks a foreboding approach toward fascism. We certainly do have a corporate government that looks after the needs of capital against the people with the North American Free Trade Agreement, the Central American Free Trade Agreement, the World Trade Organization, and on and on. Yet it is likely we are not yet fascist, although we come closer as the general citizenry continues to yield its civic responsibilities to capitalist government. U.S. Americans are far too seduced by the saccharine amenities we are fed daily by the likes of Hollywood, McDonald's, Coca-Cola, et al. which mollify the people into a languid, almost drugged, acceptance of everything the patriarchal capitalists dish out; by having to work two or more jobs at wages that are too low to support anyone so that we are too tired to think about complex issues of governance. And, it is dished out to us in order to make us compliant so that we accept as normal the insatiable capitalist machine's greed motive for unconscionable profits that further enrich the rich and impoverish the poor in their efforts to see who can accumulate the greatest wealth and power over others.

This destructivist, masculinist model is premised in large part on archaic Hebrew ideology which determined that men were full human beings and women were of a lesser sort, that women and all the Earth were to be subjugated to their will, and that the domination of "others" was to be absolute and unquestioned. This dominion/ownership mentality is a failed doctrine that is destroying the earth. Greed and male privilege make masculinists blind to the pleas and needs of the poor, the war ravaged, all but elite women, and the suffering and dying animals who can't possibly save themselves in the face of guns, pollutions, habitat destructions, and bulldozers intent on scraping the land to make way for bigger, better houses and corporate buildings, all in service to unbridled consumerism and profit.

I heard a supposedly progressive man, who in April 2005 was in the same van as I when on a trip to the Guatemalan highlands, say that what we (U.S. Americans) needed was a "nasty little war" to decimate parts of the Earth's population (the Chinese) in order to alleviate the population/environmental crisis. This man was on a Christian mission to "help" the poor Guatemalans, the indigenous Mayan populations. His wife, a teacher attending a conference on pedagogy, said, "Oh you don't really mean that, honey" as she tried to cover for him because she knew my companions and I were progressive activists, as she too was supposed to be. I practically choked in disbelief as I said to him, "That is abominable! You represent Christian compassion? I suggest you situate yourself right in the middle of that nasty little war of yours."

One Christian modus operandi, and that of most other patriarchal religions, is to use violent means to further its causes. We need to examine not just Christianity but its inherent relationship to patriarchal social systems because patriarchal social systems advocate violent means if other oppressive measures fail to convince.

HUMANIST HEROINES

2005 Amy Goodman 2004 Aileen Hernandez 2003 Kate Michelman 2002 Samantha Smoot 2001 Diana Russell 2000 Molly MacGregor 1999 Lorrie Williams
1998 Loretta F. Ross 1997 Dottie Lamm 1996 Annette Van Howe 1995 Rosemary Matson 1994 Kristin Lems 1993 Barbara G. Walker
1992 Sally Roesch Wagner 1991 Sherry Matulis 1990 Carolyn McDade 1989 Ann Simonton 1988 Cleo Kocol 1987 Fran Hosken
1986 Patricia Maginnis 1986 Ben Munson, MD 1985 Anne Nicol Gaylor 1984 Tish Sommers 1983 Christine Craft 1982 Sonia Johnson

Patricia K. Willis, CHAIR

The Personal is Political



FC Notes

The following is an excerpted article by Laura McPhee dated 10-04-05 at chilidoll@aol.com.

The subject is an attempt to further control women, to make our bodies the property of patriarchal privilege. It is yet another example of archaic religious practice that spills over into the social and legal realms of our lives. I see *The Handmaid's Tale* in it and I shiver. It also demonstrates to us again that we cannot just "add women and stir" to the political equation because women can be, and often are, just as indoctrinated into the "patriarchal soup" as the men who have traditionally made the rules for, and against, us. This proposal seems particularly aimed at lesbians who want to have a child without a man, and therefore an attempt to legislate women's sexuality.

The Crime of "Unauthorized Reproduction"

Republican lawmakers are drafting new legislation that will make marriage a requirement for motherhood in the state of Indiana, including specific criminal penalties for unmarried women who become pregnant "by means other than sexual intercourse." According to a draft of the recommended change in state law, every woman in Indiana seeking to become a mother through assisted reproduction therapy, such as in vitro fertilization, sperm donation, and egg donation, must first file for a "petition for parentage" in their local county probate court.

Only women who are married will be considered for the "gestational certificate" that must be presented to any doctor who facilitates the pregnancy. Further, the "gestational certificate" will only be given to married couples that successfully complete the same screening process currently required by law of adoptive parents.

The draft of the new law states that an intended parent "who knowingly or willingly participates in an artificial reproduction procedure" without court approval, "commits unauthorized reproduction, a Class B misdemeanor." The criminal charges will be the same for physicians who commit "unauthorized practice of artificial reproduction." Republican Senator Patricia Miller is both the Health Finance Commission Chair and the sponsor of the bill. "We did want to address the issue of whether or not the law should allow single people to be parents. Studies have shown that a child raised by both parents—a mother and a father—does better. So, we do want to have laws that protect the children," she explained. When asked specifically if she believes marriage should be a requirement for motherhood, and if that is part of the bill's intention, Sen. Miller responded, "Yes. I do."

I have just heard from Meg Bowman who sends her hellos to all FC members. Meg has just finished her 11th(!) book. It is entitled *Four Women: Dramatic Readings* and will be available in January 2006. These women are Agnes Smedley, May Arkwright Hutton, Miria Matembe, and Sally Hemings. Meg says she won't be coming to the conference in 2006 but we hope to see her at a conference again soon.

At our 2006 conference in Tampa the Feminist Caucus will be sponsoring a workshop/panel presented by a Florida chapter of the National Organization for Women. This is in addition to our own scheduled business meeting as well as our strategy meeting that we asked the AHA to schedule. I am still arranging the topic with FL NOW and will let you know more about it in the April newsletter. I am hoping they can do something on the make up of the Supreme Court and how this new Court will have already affected our status as women in the U.S. It should be a very helpful discussion.

The Feminist Caucus, along with some other progressive organizations, has signed onto several letters on issues that concern us. One is a letter dated Sept 13 to Condoleezza Rice encouraging U.S. ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which has been ratified by 180 countries but not the United States. The letter also asks the administration to reaffirm its commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action, the Millennium Development Goals, to support the United Nations Peace Building Commission, increase support for global AIDS funding, and support UN efforts to work against genocide. This was after John Bolton introduced his 750 amendments to the UN World Summit draft resolution. How do thugs like this reach such lofty posts?

The AHA FC, in my person, will be presenting a paper at the 6th World Social Forum in Caracas, Venezuela, in January 2006 on current fundamentalist trends in which patriarchal governments and patriarchal religions ally themselves with each other in order to further oppress women (who just seem to be getting out of hand with too much strident feminism and progress on some issues here and there). See www.forumsocialmundial.org for info on the WSF.

The FC is a very proud member of the World March of Women (Look them up. WMW is a fantastic initiative addressing patriarchal oppression against women: www.marchemondiale.org.) The WMW's "Global Charter for Humanity" is a radically feminist document that envisions an oppression-free world for women and all living creatures. It was started by Latin American and Canadian femi-

nists and has spread all over the world, except for the U.S., which has me a bit perplexed. My explanation is that U.S. feminists just have not yet caught on to the global feminist push that is beginning to sweep the world in a renewed effort to put forth feminist visions. It is the condition of U.S. myopia about the world. It's almost as if the rest of the world does not exist for us. (I don't mean "us" because AHA FC members are very aware, but people in the United States are generally seduced into dumbness about the rest of the world).

On September 6 and 7 I attended as the FC chair a UN consultation on Violence Against Women in New York City, sponsored by the [UN] Division for the Advancement of Women. About 100 other representatives from NGOs and other feminist organizations were also present. The DAW requested that interested parties submit a short paper on remedies to VAW, which I did. I addressed a fundamental cause of VAW—patriarchy. I feel that feminists must name and shame the cultural perpetrator rather than the usual method of focusing the lens on "women as victims." I can e-mail anyone a copy.

I have to thank again the AHA staff for all the help they are offering to the FC. Two of the letter sign-ons came about because Anne Lyster notified me of them. Farhad Shakerin is continuing to help us with our needs at the conference. And many thanks to Sonia Nikolic who, along with Anne and Farhad, has helped tremendously with the FC newsletter. And then, of course, Roy Speckhardt has done wonders for our Humanist feminism. His message in the Executive Director's Corner in the last issue of *Free Mind* demonstrates a broad Humanist view which is inclusive of women as full Humanist beings.

I had hoped to announce our Humanist Heroine Award-ee for 2006 but it is not confirmed yet. If I have your e-mail addresses I can send that info out to you as soon as it is finalized. But the AHA does have another great feminist to whom an award will be presented and that is Kim Gandy, president of the National Organization for Women who will be receiving the Distinguished Service Award. I have to tell you, I had a small part to play in this. Thanks to the AHA and to Roy for this special award to Kim!

I want to start an FC listserv and, in order to do this, I need FC members' e-mail addresses. I promise not to overload you with e-mails but I would like to have the Feminist Caucus be able to engage in some concerted actions such as letter writing. And then there is very occasional info I would like to put out in between newsletters. So please send me your e-mail addresses if you have not already done so. The AHA has suggested that the FC have an official e-mail address. Here it is, along with my personal e-mail address. You are welcome to use either one to contact me: FemCaucus@AmericanHumanist.org, pwill06@coastalnet.com.

Feminist Humanist Bio

Marilyn Fitterman

My activism began in 1964 when, already the mother of five children under eight (including two sets of twins), I nearly died of an illegal backstreet abortion. Only twenty-six years old at the time, I came to the realization that the right to control one's own reproductive life was the very essence of freedom. That experience was the beginning of the rest of my life as a human rights activist. I have been, both literally and figuratively, chaining myself to the state and national capitals ever since. I am currently busy on the very urgent issue of saving the U.S. Supreme Court and its historic privacy rights decisions: 1965's *Griswold v. Connecticut* recognizing the right to contraception for married persons, 1972's *Baird v. Eisenstadt* recognizing the right to contraception for single persons, and 1973's *Roe v. Wade* recognizing the right to safe legal abortion.

My fervent desire in this lifetime is to work for the rights for all women and men worldwide to control their own destinies. The U.S. Supreme Court justices hold the power to determine whether we are free and have equal rights. That's why I have been spending my recent days working very hard to counter the right-wing nominations to the Court.



Feminist Funnies

God and the Pope

Well, the pope died and went up to heaven. He knocked at the pearly gates to be admitted. An angel answered the door and said, "What do you want?" "Uh, well I want to get into heaven," said the pope. The angel, along with many other angles standing at her side, looked at the pope for a moment and then said, "Well, pope, you were not too friendly to women in the church and you denied them equal rights to men, you wouldn't let them become priests, you refused to allow Catholic women the right to reproductive choice, and you seemed to have been pretty intent on keeping women subservient to men." "Yes! I did!" said the pope proudly. Then, starting to look a bit perplexed, he said "Uh, I thought God would be pleased." The other angles stood there, some with their arms akimbo, others with their hands on their hips. Finally, the spokesangel said, "Well, she wasn't!"

Feminist Humanist Bio

Scotty Michaelsen

In Guatemala and El Salvador where I lived from the time I was three to eighteen years old, Catholicism was the primary religion. My family was not Catholic and, in order to worship in the Protestant faith, my mother took me to a house which had been converted to a church. My mother and I didn't go to the services very often and my father never went. He went to play golf. Until just before he died I thought he was an atheist. But my mother told me a couple of years ago that he was very religious and talked to God often (probably to ask for help with his golf game, not anything more substantial than that). As a young boy I had many questions about some very ambiguous stories in the Bible which were never answered to my satisfaction. The military high school that I went to required attendance at a church service every Sunday and, out of boredom, I switched to a different church every few months so I was introduced to quite a few different Christian sects. My agnosticism continued to evolve and not until after I had started my conversion to feminism did I become interested in religion again, although from an entirely different perspective.

More difficult for me has been my conversion to feminism for, as a male growing up in Central America, I was exposed to extra strong doses of what it meant to be male in a patriarchal society. This was further reinforced by military school and a career in the military. I thought I had an egalitarian philosophy in spite of my internalized misogyny, and I think this is how many men think of themselves. How wrong I was. I think the day I discovered this most acutely was when I made the extremely sexist

and ignorant statement that women could not multitask. That statement and was immediately annihilated on the spot by my partner and the love of my life, to whom I am eternally grateful for teaching me how absurd and narrowminded I was to think such a thing. I really started to learn what it is to be a feminist after that and, so importantly, I believed that I could become one—which was a very important state of recognition. Being a feminist has provided me with a better understanding of the inequalities and injustices that many people in this world face and made me realize the responsibility we have to try to correct these conditions.

As I started to become a feminist, some of my readings addressed the subjugation of women in the Bible, among them Annie Laurie Gaylor's wonderful book on the subject, *Woe to the Women: The Bible Tells Me So* and *A New Look At Biblical Crime* by Ralph Scott. And when I viewed these stories from my feminist perspective I was horrified. One of the purposes of religion is to control people and this is more true for women than for men. Stories about incest, rape, murder, and enslavement abound in the Bible and we are asked to believe that these atrocities committed by "the patriarchs" are divinely inspired and therefore acceptable. Well, of course, in a patriarchal society men have patriarchal privilege and are dominant. Today I see many organizations embracing the literal interpretation of their religious writings when it suits their cause and overlooking the ethical applications that are in contradiction to their lifestyles. I think this is so wrong and that is why I am a feminist and a Humanist.

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Send to: The American Humanist Association - Feminist Caucus - 1777 T Street NW - Washington, DC 20009-7125
T.: 800.837.3792 - F.: 202.238.9003 e-mail: FemCaucus@AmericanHumanist.org