

## ISSUE 83 FALL 2011

## News Update

After a long hiatus, the ALF News is back. The ALF website has been redesigned and updated. Another design change is coming by the end of the year as we update our logo. Temporarily the logo on the newsletter will not match the website.

National Coordinator Sharon Presley has been giving talks on behalf of ALF this year. In Feb., she spoke at a Students for Liberty Conference (SFL) in Washington, DC on the topic "Government Is Women's Enemy." In Sept., she gave a talk on this topic to the local SFL chapter at UC Berkeley, her old alma mater, and in October, will give a similar talk to the Libertopia conference in San Diego. The Berkeley version of the talk is now on YouTube under Sharon's name.



Sharon Presley

Sharon and Jan Stover are editing a libertarian feminist anthology, tentatively titled *The Free Woman: Individualist/Libertarian Perspectives on Women and the Family*. The purpose of this volume is to examine current social issues that affect women. The topics include affirmative action, pay equity, social security, abortion, daycare, health care, welfare and poverty, education, homeschooling, marriage laws, parents, children and youth rights, as well as nonauthoritarian childrearing, egalitarian marriage, family sharing of domestic responsibilities, and more.



Jan Stover

When all the essays are completed, Sharon and Jan will seek a publisher. This volume will fill an important void in libertarian social policy analysis since no book of its kind from a libertarian feminist perspective now exists. ALF will be conducting a fundraiser to raise funds for the promotion of this book. Watch for announcements.

Another book that ALF will be sponsoring is the reprinting of the libertarian feminist classic *Concerning Women* by early 20th c. libertarian feminist Suzanne LaFollette., a colleague of Albert Jay Nock.

Continued on p. 3

## Government is Women's Enemy Revisited, Part I

BY SHARON PRESLEY

Back in the 1970s, in our ALF Discussion Paper, "Government Is Women's Enemy," Lynn Kinsky and I wrote: "Libertarian feminists believe that we can't achieve a non-authoritarian society by authoritarian methods. If our goals are personal autonomy and individual freedom, we can't achieve these goals by taking away individuals' rights to choose for themselves. If we pass laws that force *our* values on others, we are no better than men who have forced *their* values on us through legislation. We merely substitute our tyranny for the tyranny of men. Feminist Catherine MacKinnon advocating anti-pornography laws is no better than Republican Henry Hyde advocating anti-abortion laws."<sup>1</sup> Not much has happened to make us change our minds, in fact, quite the contrary. Let's see why.

Libertarian and anarchist feminists believe that Government is women's enemy. Government has harmed women far more than it has helped them. Government has, in many cases, *created* the problems in the first place and still continues to perpetuate them through unnecessary and harmful legislation. Historical examples include restrictions on abortion and contraception, protective labor legislation that kept women out of certain job markets, and marriage, divorce and property laws that discriminated



against women and made them nonentities subject to the whim of their husbands.

Current examples include rigid and unnecessary zoning restrictions on child care centers that make affordable child care even more inaccessible to women, public schools that teach children docility and obedience, not how to think; abortion and contraception laws that still restrict access and are still vulnerable to fundamentalist predations and encroachments, as well as tax laws that hurt married women. In this issue of the ALF newsletter, I'll take on one of these areas—reproductive freedom. Subsequent issues of *ALF News* will explore others.

One of the most obvious areas where government has harmed women in the past and has the very real potential to harm again is reproductive freedom, particularly in regard to abortion and contraception. The State has long controlled these areas to women's detriment, with a long history of government interference with women's reproductive freedom. Because of the pressure of the churches, anti-immigration fears, and professional medical associations composed entirely of men, abortion became

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## History

ALF was founded by Tonie Nathan in 1973. The national group was created in 1975 in New York City. Nathan was the first woman in history to receive an electoral vote as the Libertarian Party VP candidate in 1972.

## Statement of Purpose

### The purpose of ALF is to

- encourage women to become economically self-sufficient and psychologically independent
- publicize and promote realistic attitudes toward female competence, achievement, and potential
- oppose the abridgement of individual rights by any government on account of sex
- work toward changing sexist attitudes and behavior exhibited by individuals
- provide a libertarian alternative to those aspects of the women's movement that tend to discourage independence and individuality.

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illegal in the late 1800s. With the Comstock Law, even information about contraception became illegal to send through the U.S. mails. These were all achieved though the power of the State. By 1965, all fifty states had banned abortion, with some exceptions which varied by state: to save the life of the mother, in cases of rape or incest, or if the fetus was deformed. Contraceptives were restricted as well.

Not that criminalization of abortion reduced the numbers of women who sought abortions; not at all. In the years before *Roe v. Wade*, the estimates of illegal abortions ranged as high as 1.2 million per year.<sup>2</sup> But what the anti-abortion laws *did* result in was serious harm to women. Many women died or suffered serious medical problems after attempting to self-induce their abortions or going to untrained practitioners who performed abortions with primitive methods or in unsanitary conditions. During this time, hospital emergency room staff treated thousands of women who either died or who suffered great physical harm from abortions provided without adequate skill and care.

But you might say, that's all a thing of the past. The Supreme Court in 1973, in the case of *Roe v. Wade*, declared most existing state abortion laws unconstitutional. Most women can get abortions if they want—or so you might think. Actually if you live in a nonurban area even now, you might have to travel a long way to get an abortion under safe conditions. Fully 87 % of counties in the US do not even have a single abortion provider.<sup>3</sup> Some *states* only have a handful. As of 2000, for example, Nebraska only had five and Kentucky three. The *number* of providers has also gone down markedly since 1992, partly due no doubt to the chilling effect of the rabid right anti-choice movement and the unpleasant tendency of some of its members to *kill* people who provide abortions.

And that's just the beginning. Anti-woman forces with an extreme social agenda are once again trying to use the power of the State to erode our hard-won reproductive freedom. Let's see what they've been up to in the last few years. Our very own Supreme Court has been helping them.<sup>4</sup> In 1991, *Rust v. Sullivan* upheld the constitutionality of the 1988 "gag rule" which prohibits doctors and counselors at clinics that receive federal funding from even providing their patients with *information about and referrals* for abortion. In 2000, the Food and

Drug Administration (FDA) approved mifepristone (RU-486, the so-called "morn-ing after" pill), as an option in abortion care for very early pregnancy but that is busy being eroded by Bush appointees in the FDA. Bush appointed a completely unqualified man named David Hager to the FDA Reproductive Health Drugs Committee that deals with such issues. Other panelists thought he was idiotic. But he managed to have his way. The FDA in 2004 *went against* its own advisers and scientists, based on Hager's irrelevant and unsubstantiated claims, and declined to make emergency contraception available over the counter.<sup>5</sup>

In *Gonzalez v. Carhart*, 2007, the Supreme Court upheld a ban on "intact dilation and extraction" (intact D&C), a procedure that opponents sensationalized as "partial birth abortion."<sup>6</sup> The ban called for a two-year jail term and \$250,000 fine for performing it. In actuality this procedure is used infrequently, but now when it *is* medically necessary, physicians have to use more risky procedures instead. Thus the Supreme Court put its own judgment about appropriate medical practice above relevant associations of *physicians*, including the College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and Planned Parenthood Federation. This decision also legitimized the highly contested notion of "post-abortion syndrome" (alleged long-term grieving over having had an abortion) for which no reliable data exist. In fact, the American Psychological Association found quite the opposite in its literature reviews of considerably more reliable studies in 1992 and again in 2008.<sup>7</sup> Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg, who wrote the dissent for *Gonzalez v. Carhart*, says Carole Joffe, "decried the paternalism inherent in the majority's willingness to protect "fragile" women from possible "regret" over the details of the particular procedure used in their abortion."<sup>8</sup> "This way of thinking," writes Ginsberg, "reflects ancient notions about women's place in the family and under the Constitution—ideas that have long since been discredited,"<sup>9</sup>

But it is not just abortion that is being ravaged by the fundamentalist Right. Contraception too may be in danger. Until the *Griswold v. Connecticut* Supreme Court decision in 1965, contraceptives, as well as abortions, were restricted or illegal. The Constitutional basis for striking down the restrictive laws was the right to privacy. Some researchers in this area fear that there is a chance that the Supreme Court (through

Scalia and Thomas) may reverse *Roe v. Wade* by determining that the right to privacy is not guaranteed by Constitution. This is the bet of most legal scholars, according to Page.<sup>10</sup> They are also worrying about what happens to the right to contraception, which is also based on the right to privacy in sexual matters. It could threaten landmark decisions like *Griswold v. Connecticut*. An adverse ruling on the right to privacy could even open the door to states passing anti-contraception laws as well as anti-abortion laws.

And now the rabid Right wants the State to do even more to set back women's reproductive freedom. Hence the recent Stupak Bill and more recently, the Chris Smith Bill. Here's what a columnist in the *Washington Post* said about the Smith Bill: "Federal law already prohibits federal dollars from being used to finance abortions, except for pregnancies that are the result of rape or incest or situations in which the life of the mother is endangered. But the vague legislation brought to you by Rep. Chris Smith (R-N.J.) and 173 co-sponsors, would bar folks from using their health savings accounts to pay for an abortion. And they could forget about availing themselves of tax credits or deductions for medical expenses for an abortion."<sup>11</sup> In other words, they are trying to legislate *private insurance*.

But wait, there's more: The *Washington Post* goes on to say: "The scary part is when federal funding of an abortion would be allowed." It has to be "forcible" rape. Excuse me—what other kind of rape is there? This is clearly a code word for making it even more difficult for poor women to get abortions. Even if the courts decide it is rape, women would have to prove to the *bureaucrats* that it was "forcible." Thus the bureaucrats would have the power to reinterpret the law. And what would suffice? Only bruises and broken bones? All rapes are by definition coercive but not all involve force sufficient to cause physical damage. If a poor woman is raped by a man with a gun, well, tough luck.

The libertarian tradition is one of non-intervention in others' affairs and of protection of the sovereignty of the individual. Whatever one's personal preference, qualms, or morality concerning abortion may be (as with drug use), the *libertarian* position on abortion is clearly one of *no state or legal intervention*.

Some people imagine that the State protects reproductive freedom. Only if the right people are in Congress, the Presidency, and even the Supreme Court, and then only maybe. Sounds a bit shaky to me. Women cannot count on the State to protect them when all laws are subject to the whims of those currently in power. Power doesn't stand still; next year who knows? If Obama loses and a fundamentalist candidate wins, you can start kissing your reproductive freedom good-bye. Even if Obama wins, the Supreme Court could still strike down the right to privacy in sexual matters. Either way, women lose.

*In our next issue, we explore how the State hurts working women, especially poor women, by hamstringing inexpensive daycare and bureaucratizing the rest.*

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ALF's position on abortion was adopted by the membership on October 20, 1977: *The basic human right to limit one's own reproduction includes the right to all forms of birth control (contraception, including sterilization, and abortion), recognizing the dual responsibility of both sexes. ALF therefore opposes all practices and all governmental actions that restrict access to any of these means of birth control, and advocates the elimination of all laws and practices that would compel any woman to bear a child against her will.*



New photos of LaFollette as a young woman can now be found on her page at the ALF website [[www.alf.org/lafollette.php](http://www.alf.org/lafollette.php)].

Also see the Suzanne LaFollette page on Facebook. Sharon, who wrote the essay on LaFollette for ALF, based it on interviews with her friends and her brother. She will be writing the introduction for the book. If you would like to help make sure this classic gets reprinted, watch for our fundraising announcement on Facebook and on the ALF website. Our current plan is to reprint it ourselves under the imprint of Atalanta Press, a publishing company that Sharon is planning. If you want to contribute to this project by contributing or promoting it, please get in touch with Sharon at [presley@alf.org](mailto:presley@alf.org).

We will be reorganizing ALF soon and recreating it as a 501[c][3] nonprofit organization in order to facilitate obtaining (private) funds for this project and others.

The Links page of the ALF website has links to other libertarian feminist organizations, including Ladies of Liberty Alliance (LOLA) and Ladies of Voluntarist Evolution (LOVE). We also have short descriptions of several classic libertarian feminist books, as well as many new essays on the other pages. A Speakers Bureau has also been added.

Sharon Presley will be debating fellow libertarian Jakob Wisniewski on the issue of abortion at PublicSquare.net some time in November. After the y go two rounds each, the audience can participate. Watch for the announcement on the ALF Facebook page and the ALF website.

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# Libertarians Against Empathy: Is the Nonaggression Principle Enough?

BY ROSS KENYON

If I had to choose a word that sums up the typical libertarian I meet, I'd pick 'logical.' One of the forms libertarianism takes is to be very concerned with tightly ordered logical systems, such as ironclad deductive rights. Subscribers opt for clarity over comprehensiveness when it comes to political philosophy; they have a value and they generally run with it as far as they can take it.

This precision is one of libertarianism's strengths but also the area which gives the philosophy its deepest blind spots. If one speaks with people normally constituted on the political left who are concerned with gender and/or race, they can usually quote statistics and other concrete indicators of how our culture works and what it values, e.g., women and men's relative speaking time in film and television, whether or not women are primarily secondary characters or not, and a host of other reasons why men are the default in media reflections of ourselves, etc.

Libertarians sometimes react against critiques like these on the grounds that this disparity isn't actually a bad trend, that if it is a bad trend the government is the sole cause of it, or that this trend and all other bad values of cultural consumers have been chosen by "the market," and this alone makes these values acceptable, and possibly even desirable. Sadly, they do this without acknowledging that *the market is us* and we're the market forces regulating its presence in our lives. If we seek to be free of state regulation, then we need to challenge the culture we participate in that limits the flourishing of our peers.

These conversations are often far more perceptual than strictly logical and statistical. When a member of a marginalized group says something akin to "the way our culture and our interpersonal relationships work don't make me feel like an equal peer worthy of one's respect," if your response is "well, **prove it!**" *you're approaching this incorrectly.* In fact, you're exacerbating the problem. Consider the following faux interaction:

Member of othered group: *Myself and others like me are systematically marginalized in a way which makes us feel like lesser members of our society. Please join with us in confronting these humiliating and degrading barriers to better and more welcoming culture and law.*

Reactionary: *Change the way we treat one another so that you feel less marginalized?! What kind of pc liberal left bullshit is this?! You're not marginalized! You have more privileges than white men do!*

Member of othered group: *Really? You won't even listen and try to understand how our humanity suffers under our current culture, and try to pursue some reasonable adjustments in order to make our lives more dignified and livable? Fuck you. I guess we'll need the force of law to make our lives more tolerable.*

Reactionary: *These feminazis/ [pick your term] are trying to change the way we treat one another through the state! Statists!*

What's missing here is **empathy**. Life isn't only about deducing everything from first principles.

If libertarians took concerns regarding how people feel marginalized seriously at step one, they'd be able to see just how little interpersonal effort it actually takes to make people feel included, and justified cultural critics probably wouldn't have to up the stakes all the time. Instead, both groups react off of one another and further deepen our feelings of alienation from each other in our shared social space.

Perhaps most disappointing in this tragic scene is the fact that our interpersonal relationships are the relationships which are the most accessible for transformation. These aren't distant state actors we're talking about; it's us. It's you and I, everyone in this room and everyone strolling around your community right now unaware that you care about their well-being outside of whether or not they're being taxed or caged at a given moment.

So what if you think using a different gendered pronoun, or even an ungendered pronoun, is silly? So what if you think spelling women as womyn is unnecessary? So what if you don't think the lessons the media teaches us about women being secondary matter? I don't think these are ridiculous things to challenge and change, and if it has the potential power to make people feel more respected and dignified members of our human community, then

I'll do it. The costs to one are a few small adjustments, and the potential benefits are huge. We can create a world worth living in culturally for the least among us without much trouble at all.

But yet, we resist these attempts to make a kinder and more inclusive culture. In fact many libertarians tend to dismiss all cultural concerns regarding sex, gender and race as not actually a problem, or something the government is solely responsible for, as if this magical free market will swoop in and make everyone more sincere and welcoming and caring once completely liberated from the state's grasp!

No. A million times no. If we seek to be free from the government regulating us from afar, and we seek to have the market free to supply whatever we demand, it is up to us to demand a world of virtue and kindness. No one is going to do it but us, and you can start changing these aspects of your being right now without permission. *Stop abstracting your responsibility as a market actor out of existence and let's evolve already!*

Much of living falls within the realm of the heart, dare I say it! The Non-Aggression Principle (NAP) offers us almost no positive content on how we should treat one another in the absence of physical force or the threat thereof. Maybe libertarians are so used to defending their principles against all comers that they get tunnel vision and forget that there are other ills that we must concern ourselves with, or they think that if they concede that something is bad it means that the state ought to fix it. Whatever it is, this myopia isn't exactly an endearing and liberating trend.

I feel safer knowing that libertarians believe in the NAP, but without empathy, I wouldn't want to have them as members of my community. I'm interested in creating beautiful and humane spaces for flourishing individuals to be themselves and feel that they matter as my equal peers, but I'm not looking to live inside of a math equation.

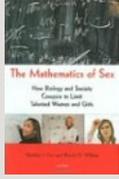


ALF member Ross Kenyon is an essayist with the ALLiance of the Libertarian Left and serves on the Executive Board of Alumni For Liberty.



## Book Reviews: Books worth reading

### CAN GIRLS DO MATH? SMASHING SILLY GENDER STEREOTYPES WITH SCIENCE



***The Mathematics of Sex: How Biology and Society Conspire to Limit Talented Women and Girls***  
by Stephen J. Ceci and Wendy M. Williams

*Reviewed by Sharon Presley*

As a psychology professor who has taught Psychology of Women for many years, I am familiar with much of the research literature on gender comparisons of cognitive abilities. But even I learned a lot from this book. It is far and away the fairest, most balanced and thorough overview of the research on this topic that I have ever seen or read (and I've read quite a few!). Its main purpose is to understand why there are so few women who have careers in areas of science that require math abilities. Many writers come to the glib conclusion that it is because women aren't as good at math and spatial abilities because of innate differences. This book dispels that common myth.

It looks at both the case for biological influences and environmental influences--dispassionately and carefully. The authors are well-known and well-regarded research psychologists so they know how to do their homework. This is in contrast to some books that just present their side of the argument or are superficial and present only a few studies. The authors even tell us that one of their minds was changed by what they found. A rare confession for an academic! In the spirit of true scholars, they also admit where there are gaps that are yet to be researched.

In my (educated) opinion, the authors come to a reasonable conclusion. There may be biological influences but they are minor in comparison to social factors. First of all, they show that cultural factors have also played a role in math and spatial scores (they report studies from all over the world—a big plus since many books on this topic somehow assume that if it's true in the US, it can be generalized to everyone—an arrogant assumption—and don't look into statistics in other countries). Females have HIGHER spatial scores in Iceland than males, folks. Since the author's specific purpose was to explain why math-talented

women are underrepresented in math- and science-oriented careers, they also explore the particular reasons why this is so—the social as well as biological. They conclude that it is not lack of math or spatial ability but rather preferences and limitations of academia. If you want to have a tenure track job in a science-oriented university, you have to really produce and publish early in your career. But this is right at the time when women are in their peak child-bearing years. If you don't publish enough, you don't get tenure. Many women really do have to choose between family and careers—which of course men do not have to do. There's more to the picture than that but this is the headline.

I cannot recommend this book too highly. It's not a pop psych book so having a background in research will help you understand some of it. But it's not ponderous. Any educated layperson will be able to read this well-written book and benefit from it. If you want the whole picture and not just part of it, read this book.



***Think: Straight Talk for Women to Stay Smart in a Dumbed-Down World***  
by Lisa Bloom

*Reviewed by Sharon Presley*

This gem of a book lived up to its name. Sensible advice, engagingly written. You are smart; now act like it, she says. Forget about the silly celebrities, care about the world around you. Read the papers, volunteer, do something you'll be proud of.

Readers of the ALF News may say—But I already do that. Well, then, give it to a young woman or girl you care about.

But honestly, I learned a lot from this book jam-packed with information. Bloom, the daughter of famed lawyer Gloria Allred, tells us lots of things that maybe we didn't know already. Did you know that Jimmy Carter's organization has helped wipe out a dread African disease called the guinea worm? I didn't. Nice to know that a few (ex)politicians do something worthwhile. Just one example of the tidbits in this fascinating book.

***Never in My Wildest Dreams: A Black Woman's Life in Journalism***  
by Belva Davis with Vicki Haddock; Forward by Bill Cosby



*Reviewed by Natalia Shebeko*

Ms. Davis' biography would be interesting if it only reported the events of her life, as a Black girl born in grinding poverty in Black Louisiana who eventually becomes an award-winning TV news reporter in the SF Bay Area. Davis, the first female African-American television reporter on the West Coast, also chronicles the amazing and tumultuous social changes that were unfolding around her in the Bay Area and in the nation in general in the 1960s. Davis was reporting from the vortex of where the changes were occurring that were to transform women and American society. From campus demonstrations and anti-Vietnam war protests, to the rise of the Black Panthers and much more, Davis was in the thick of social turmoil of the 60s, and the 70s and 80s as well.

The book begins with a gripping recount of Davis and another Black journalist being run out of the Cow Palace where they were covering the 1964 Republican Convention of the Republican Party. Some delegates was riling people up, insisting that Blacks should not let into the GOP. When they were spotted up in the high tiers of the balcony, a mob of infuriated convention goers, egged on by convention officials, came after them. Davis reports that she was in fear for her life, with the mob throwing everything from garbage to soda bottles at them. This is, no doubt, a shameful tale the GOP would rather forget.

She is quoted as saying “Don't be afraid of the space between your dreams and reality. If you can dream it, you can make it.” She is herself the proof of that statement. Entertaining and packed with information, I give this biography 5 stars.

Natalia Shebeko, a long-time resident of the Bay Area who frequently watched Davis on TV, is on the ALF Coordinating Committee.



## ALF Blog featuring all sorts of things...

*Facebook Pages ALF members and other libertarian feminists might enjoy:*

- Association of Libertarian Feminists
  - Women Resisters to Authority
  - Suzanne LaFollette
  - Susan Brownell Anthony
  - Voltairine de Cleyre
  - The Psychology of Freedom
- [the above are administered or co-administered by Sharon]*

*Also of interest:*

- Ladies Liberty Alliance [LOLA]
- Women's National History Museum
- Emma Goldman Papers
- The Mothers Institute [Jan Stover]
- Rose Wilder Lane
- Mary Wollstonecraft

Dr. Paula Caplan is a psychologist who has long been a critic of the Diagnostic and Staistical Manual of Mental Disorders [DSM] and of excesses in psychology, especially as they pertain to women. She has an insightful blog at *Psychology Today* online that often focuses on issues that are of

concern to women. One of her most recent posts is "Government Mistreatment of Women Exposed ." Do an Internet search on her name and *Psychology Today*.

Two Liberian and one Yemeni woman have just won the Nobel Peace Prize for their work for women's rights and nonviolent activists: Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Leymah Gbowee and Tawakkol Karman.

A study by psychologists Janet Hyde and Janet Mertz showing that culture trumps biology when it comes to math: Search on "Sorry, Larry Summers: Math Gender Gap Caused By Culture, Not Biology" at Jezebel.com.

### COMMENTS FROM AN ALF MEMBER:

"Even though Joan Kennedy Taylor is no longer with us physically, her words and excellent advice remains. I feel like I must've linked people to her article from

the ALF newsletter, "Why Aren't More Women Part of the Libertarian Movement?" dozens of times. Many of our number are (sometimes socially awkward) men who ask that question repeatedly.

It seems that the libertarian movement that has existed to this point has been one designed to attract just the people that make it up, and I find this unfortunate as the message of liberty (consistent liberty) should resonate with every human being. ALF is one of the more visible symbols of that attempt to create another libertarian movement. Well, at least I feel that way."  
-Tennyson McCalla

*"No system of government can hope long to survive the cynical disregard of both law and principle which government in America regularly exhibits. Under these circumstances, no legal guarantee of rights is worth the paper it is written on, and the women who rely upon such guarantees to protect them against prejudice and discrimination are leaning on a broken reed."*

Suzanne LaFollette, *Concerning Women*, 1926

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