

WINTER 2015

**POLITICAL  
RESEARCH  
ASSOCIATES**

# The Public Eye

# A GLOBAL SCAM:

# SELLING THE

# "NATURAL FAMILY"

**Also in this issue:**

**Meet the Patriarch of  
the Anti-Abortion  
Movement**

**Polly Williams and the  
School Privatization  
Juggernaut**

# Shining a Light on the Right

**A**t this writing, the U.S. Congress had just begun its 2015 legislative session. On conservatives' wish list is expanding access to privately run charter schools, plus other means of privatizing public education. The 114<sup>th</sup> Congress will consider other ways to roll back people's rights. Of the bills introduced in the first days, five would restrict access to abortion; two would countermand President Obama's 2014 executive actions to ease deportations; and one, CISPA (which Obama supports), would let the federal government order corporations to hand over private user data.

We have perhaps become too accustomed to such curtailing of civil liberties and surveillance by our government. But despite all of the government's surveillance of #BlackLivesMatter protestors, American Muslims, unionists, and other nonviolent activists, it falls to us to monitor the Right.

Researching the Right remains a difficult job. PRA's research staff and the journalists who write for *The Public Eye* must listen to the words of anti-LGBTQ or anti-abortion speakers, attend conservative-voter conferences where right-wing propaganda circulates, and sift through documents to find evidence that proves someone is connected to a faction on the Right. We publish blog posts, op-eds and investigative articles in the hope that readers will heed our call to action.

Our muckraking work continues to meet the need for activists and organizers to see and understand how the Right is undermining progress. We will continue to bring you the intelligence we have gathered about the Right and hope that you will share it widely and use it to build strategies for justice.

It has been my privilege and pleasure to edit these two issues of *The Public Eye*. Inside this issue, you will find the type of unique storytelling, investigation, and analysis of the Right that is *The Public Eye's* specialty.

First, a dispatch from the school reform wars by PRA research fellow Rachel Tabachnick: the story of Polly Williams, an African American state lawmaker from Milwaukee who helped birth the nation's first school voucher program, and who later became disillusioned by the profit-driven agenda of her wealthy conservative backers. Williams' story illustrates how school privatization promoters are eager to partner with leaders who reflect the communities historically underserved by public schools—such as Black and Latino communities—so long as those leaders' policies do not diverge from the privatizers' agenda.

Next is PRA researcher L. Cole Parke's debut investigative article, digging into the World Congress of Families (WCF), a global Religious Right network. While many Christian Right groups have claimed that being anti-LGBTQ and anti-abortion rights simply matches their "values," WCF has a strategy to codify such exclusionary "values" into the laws of nations. With a cadre of supporters inside the United Nations, and a message that the "natural family" as defined by WCF is the only one that should be legally recognized, WCF has helped get laws passed in Russia, Nigeria, Poland, and Australia that could lead to persecution of LGBTQ people and women.

Finally, journalist Robin Marty profiles Joe Scheidler, the octogenarian founder of the Pro-Life Action League. Scheidler is credited with inventing many of the tactics used by the current anti-abortion movement to harass and intimidate women and providers at clinics. Marty connects Scheidler's 1980s blueprint with the tactics that characterize today's anti-abortion activism.

Please read and share these articles widely. As always, we welcome reader feedback, both in our pages and on social media. We hope you will use these long winter nights for gathering, strategizing, and recharging; we will see you in the spring.

Thank you for all that you do,

Mariya Strauss  
Guest Editor

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## Where Conservative and Neoliberal “Feminists” Agree

I was pleased to see Sarah Jaffe’s article (“Neoliberal Feminists Don’t Want Women to Organize,” Fall 2014) opening up a conversation on neoliberal feminism. PRA should take it further in considering the direct parallels with right-wing ideology.

Right-wing anti-feminists, like Phyllis Schlafly, traditionally overtly oppose equality and insist that women belong in the home. Conservative Christian teachings of wifely submission and male leadership underlie organizations such as the Promise Keepers, a Christian men’s fellowship, and the Quiverfull movement.

But another brand of conservative women’s activism increasingly insists that individual women can make it whenever they choose—and is even bent on reclaiming the term “feminism.” Even if these conservatives ostensibly take issue with Democrat Sheryl Sandberg’s emphasis on careerism in *Lean In*, their rhetoric and policy mirrors that of neoliberal feminism. Consider the remarks made at a 2014 conservative women’s conference reported on by the *National Review*, in an article entitled “The Next Generation of Conservative Women.”

“We will reach parity when we want it, when we choose it,” said Penny Nance, CEO and President of Concerned Women for America, one of the largest Christian Right advocacy organizations. “Women succeed through opportunity, free markets and hard work, not through dependence on the government or through socialist policies,” asserted Katie Pavlich, a right-wing writer.

Abby Scher [Ed. note: Scher is a former editor of *The Public Eye*] writes in “Post-Palin Feminism” that until the catalyst of Sarah Palin’s vice-presidential candidacy, the neoconservative Independent Women’s Forum (IWF) was “the lonely home of the ‘free market’ feminists who say the key issue is choice and women now have choice so why complain?” IWF touts the idea of a “limited government feminist” and decries feminists who argue women face discrimination. “Like other conservatives, they see it as up to the individual to compete in the market, no matter what background or resources they bring to bear,” writes Scher.

In January 2013, IWF spotlighted one of my former classmates, Emily Esfahani Smith, for its “Modern Feminist” feature. Former editor-in-chief of the right-leaning *Dartmouth Review*, Smith cites *Who Stole Feminism* as a favorite book. In it, author Christina Hoff Sommers declares, “American feminism is currently dominated by a group of women who seek to persuade the public that American women are not the free creatures we think we are.”

While IWF refused to take a stance on “family values” issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage, the Christian Right organizations now taking up the “free-market feminist” theme dangerously merge these issues. Scher concludes, “This is in keeping with the efforts of both the Heritage Foundation and the Christian Right’s Family Research Council (FRC) in explicitly promoting a free market and ‘small government’ ideology among evangelicals and the Christian Right.”

Keying off of Sandberg’s book, Carrie Lukas, IWF managing director, said that what women really need is for government to “lean out.” Lukas condemns all workplace regulations, including sick day and family leave requirements, as interfering with female employees’ ability to negotiate a flexible contract. For Lukas, it would be ideal if women’s success in the workplace relied purely on their assertiveness and choice.

Yet without the support of collective action, many women lack leverage and power over their individual employment situations. So whose legislative agendas are served by *Lean In*’s arguments? Jaffe accuses neoliberal feminism of “ignor[ing] class as a determining issue in women’s lives.” Such statements could as accurately apply to right-wing feminism.

As Katie McDonough criticizes in *Salon*, Sandberg’s *Lean In* Foundation even celebrated as a trailblazer a Republican congresswoman who consistently opposes equal pay laws and reproductive rights. While McDonough claims this is “antithetical to the organization’s mission,” Jaffe’s explanation of neoliberal feminism makes intelligible the support for a female politician that slashes at women’s ability to succeed and thrive.

On the topic of reproductive rights, an entire article could be written on how prochoice ideology fits into neoliberal feminism, but I’ll leave that to another time.

-Alex DiBranco  
New Haven, CT

[Ed. note: Alex DiBranco is a current member of *The Public Eye*’s editorial board and is the former communications director at PRA.]

1. Alexa Moutevelis Coombs, “The Next Generation of Conservative Women,” *National Review*, June 26, 2014, <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/381324/next-generation-conservative-women-alexa-moutevelis-coombs>.
2. Abby Scher, “Post-Palin Feminism,” *The Public Eye* (Winter 2008), <http://www.politicalresearch.org/2008/12/06/post-palin-feminism/>.

# Opening Pandora's Box

## Polly Williams' Doomed Partnership with the Education Privatization Movement

Polly Williams, the Wisconsin African American lawmaker behind the nation's first school voucher program, believed vouchers could help students of color in urban Milwaukee. Conservative donors and right-wing think tanks saw her program as opening the door to the privatization of public education. Education reform has come to mean different things to different people: from improving public education to privatizing it out of existence.



Young students in Philadelphia in 2011 demonstrate support for privatization programs. Image via Pennlive.com. Photo used with the permission of PA Media Group ©2011. All rights reserved.

**P**olly Williams, the “mother of school choice,” passed away on November 9, 2014. The moniker dates back to the late 1980s, when Williams broke ranks with her fellow African American and Democratic state legislators to partner with conservatives on Milwaukee’s school voucher program, the first of its kind in the nation.<sup>1</sup> The Milwaukee voucher program was signed into law in 1990 by Republican Governor Tommy Thompson.<sup>2</sup> A quarter-century later, conservative pro-privatization funders and advocates continue to advance their free-market agenda as if it is the salvation of the nation’s most underserved

students. Vouchers, once stigmatized by their use in fighting integration of schools, are being marketed as the vehicle of a “New Civil Rights Movement.”

Polly Williams became an instant celebrity within the conservative-dominated world of school vouchers, although she did not share their privatization agenda. Williams supported a limited program targeting the city’s poorest families, sometimes referred to as “charity vouchers” or compensatory vouchers<sup>3</sup> by her conservative allies. Those allies saw an opportunity to use urban students of color as a wedge to break down the alliances defending public education. They also viewed it as an opening that could be

expanded over time to employ “universal vouchers”, or vouchers for students of families in all income brackets, and ultimately the privatization of public education.

But by the late 1990s, Williams had been pushed aside, just as she feared that students of color from low-income families would be pushed aside by the diverging agenda of her White conservative partners. Within a few years, Williams was ridiculed by her former allies, described as “irrelevant” and no longer useful.

Nevertheless, upon her death, the school privatization leaders and organizations reclaimed her—memorializing

her for her role as a pioneer while omitting her later disillusionment with the movement.

Williams' alienation from the movement she helped birth offers a cautionary tale for those who believe that vouchers, tuition tax credits for private schools—or even quasi-public charter schools—may offer a magic bullet to equitable education for underserved urban children.

### WHOSE INTERESTS ARE SERVED?

In 1995, Milton Friedman, an economist and the intellectual dean of the school privatization movement, stated, “Vouchers are not an end in themselves; they are a means to make a transition from a government to a market system.” School privatization’s “New Civil Rights” theme appears to be little more than a public relations campaign that camouflages this shift. Privatization advocates and their funders have appropriated the language of civil rights and use the dissatisfaction of underserved communities to promote the marketization of public education, an agenda that promises to leave many students of color behind.

Our nation has “consistently and purposefully underserved students of color,” notes Julian Vasquez Heilig, Professor of Educational Policy and Planning at University of Texas-Austin, in a 2013 *Texas Education Review* article on the current reframing of school choice as a civil rights issue.<sup>4</sup> Heilig adds that the school choice movement depends heavily on African American and Latino leaders such as Williams. Janelle Scott, a professor in the graduate school of education and the African American Studies Department at the University of California-Berkeley, writes in *Critical Studies in Education* about the tension between exposing the drivers of privatization while simultaneously understanding the limited options of underserved urban families:

In raising questions about the lack of commitment to eradicating structural inequalities by the managers of choice, I do not denigrate the individual choices parents of color are making for their children within the policy framework largely dictated by an elite invested in privatizing public education ... What is important is to

illuminate the elite networks that are funding and paving the way for educational policy to be radically altered along business models.<sup>5</sup>

The neoliberal privatization movement has presented “choice” as a civil rights effort—and as the only option for changing the status quo for these historically underserved students of color. It does so despite the preponderance of evidence that, as the authors of one educational study from 2002 wrote, “school choice, on average, does not produce the equity and social justice that proponents spin.”<sup>6</sup>

From the time of desegregation forward, disillusionment with integration and the failure to improve education in many urban communities led to the development of “independent black schools.” These were neighborhood private schools owned and operated by African Americans, often run on shoestring budgets, and often featuring Afrocentric or multicultural curricula. In 1984, Dr. Joan Davis Ratteray founded the Institute for Independent Education to organize these schools, which numbered almost 300 by 1990 and were attended primarily by the children of Black middle-class parents.

Polly Williams sent her children to one of Milwaukee’s independent, nonsectarian, Black private schools. Hoping to expand access for poor students whose parents could not afford the tuition, Williams advocated for a voucher program that would be limited to the lowest income families and to nonsectarian schools. She was, from the outset, concerned that raising income caps and including religious schools within voucher programs would again leave behind the poorest students.

Yet once Williams opened the door, the juggernaut of privatization began to roll through—a movement that blames teachers and teachers’ unions for low educational outcomes of students in underserved schools and fails to address (or even rejects) the role of structural inequalities in these same communities.

Ratteray was also a school choice supporter, and wrote a rousing op-ed in the *New York Times* supporting it. However, as the experiment in Milwaukee came to fruition, Ratteray grew wary of vouchers

as an economic incentive. She described the existing independent Black schools as being the result of a social need, not a business venture. “If you put on it this idea that each kid will bring a certain amount of money, it will change that,” Ratteray warned.<sup>7</sup> Her words proved prophetic.

### “SCHOOL CHOICES” OR OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROFIT

The term “school choice” encompasses a broad range of programs, from charter schools to vouchers. The more accurate term, “private school choice,” refers to programs that use public funding to pay or subsidize tuition for private school students. “Public school choice,” meanwhile, includes a variety of programs that allow students to attend schools outside their assigned district, magnet schools, and charter schools, the single most rapidly expanding sector of choice. (Charters are technically public but are independently operated, sometimes by for-profit corporations, and are exempt from many state and local regulations. See related sidebar, “Monetizing Charter Schools.”)

In the category of “private school choice,” there are now approximately 40 programs in 19 states, plus Washington, DC, and state legislatures are continuing to introduce bills for new or expanded programs. Advocates claim there is great public demand, despite the fact that a 2013 Gallup poll indicated that opposition to the use of public funds for private schools is at 70%, its highest level ever recorded in that survey.<sup>8</sup>

What’s more, as documentation accumulates showing that vouchers have failed to improve education outcomes, privatization advocates increasingly point to the budget savings that these programs supposedly provide.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to vouchers, the category of private school choice now includes tuition tax credit programs, a legislative maneuver that lets business redirect taxes owed to the state toward “scholarships” for student tuition at private and religious schools. These tax credit programs, sometimes referred to as “neovouchers” or back-door vouchers, have received less public scrutiny than vouchers, even as they currently com-

prise the largest private school choice programs in numbers of students. (See related sidebar on tax credit programs.)

## SCHOOL CHOICE'S SEGREGATIONIST ROOTS

Before African American and Latino children became the focus of a multi-million dollar, pro-privatization public relations campaign, vouchers had a distinctly racist heritage. As author Kevin Kruse explains in *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*, vouchers were part of a deliberate strategy in the 1950s and 1960s to circumvent school desegregation: "In the event of court-ordered desegregation, school buildings would be closed, and students would instead receive grants to attend private, segregated schools."<sup>10</sup>

"Massive Resistance" was the name adopted by the united effort of White leaders and politicians to prevent desegregation. "Freedom-of-choice" plans were used in several states to perpetuate segregation, as they allowed students to "choose" their school while, in effect, retaining segregated Black and White schools.<sup>11</sup>

Some locations followed through with their threats to close public schools. Prince Edward County, in Virginia, closed down its entire public school system from 1959 to 1964. Prince Edward only reopened integrated schools following the Supreme Court's 1964 ruling in *Griffin v. County School Board of Prince Edward County* that Virginia's tuition grants for sending white students to private schools were unconstitutional.<sup>12</sup>

The privatization agenda was birthed by segregationists in the 1950s, but it was kept alive in subsequent decades by Milton Friedman and sustained by wealthy conservative donors (and the infrastructure built with their dollars). School privatization became a key part of the "devolution" of government, advocated by conservative think tanks like the Heritage Foundation, Manhattan Institute, Cato Institute, Heartland Institute, and the 50-state network of self-described "free market" think tanks coordinated through the State Policy Network.<sup>13</sup> The names of the major funders of school choice, including the Bradley Foundation and the DeVos and Walton families,

should automatically raise red flags for progressives.

"In retrospect, it seems strange that so many liberals bought an idea that emanated from conservative think tanks and conservative thinkers," education scholar and anti-privatization activist Diane Ravitch wrote.<sup>14</sup>

## WILLIAMS' "UNHOLY ALLIANCE"

Annette "Polly" Williams was elected to the Wisconsin State Assembly in 1980 and served until 2010. She also ran the 1984 and 1988 Wisconsin statewide campaigns for Rev. Jesse Jackson's presidential bid. In the late 1980s, despite intense objections from her fellow Democratic legislators and organizations such as the NAACP, Williams joined forces with conservatives to push through the nation's first voucher program.

From the 1960s through the 1980s, activists and legislators proposed a variety of programs to provide public funding to Milwaukee's independent Black private schools, some of which were in serious financial jeopardy. Activists in the effort were largely liberal until the 1980s and 1990s, when conservatives and religious leaders began to capitalize on the idea as a model that could open the door to a larger voucher program.

In addition to her Republican allies in the state legislature, Williams' partnerships with conservatives included the Bradley Foundation and its former president Michael Joyce; former GOP Wisconsin Governor Tommy Thompson, a champion of conservative welfare reform; and George and Susan Mitchell, Wisconsin's leading pro-voucher advocates. (Williams described these partnerships as an "unholy alliance" in an interview with the Heartland Institute, an interview in which she was also described as the "Rosa Parks of vouchers."<sup>15</sup>)

In 1988, Gov. Thompson vetoed legislation to increase funding for the Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS) and provide additional teachers to reduce class size—but he included a voucher program proposal in his state budget. The Bradley Foundation provided research, polls, publications, and a legal defense of the voucher program.

In an effort to make the plan more palatable to Wisconsin legislators, Thomp-

son reduced the scope of his statewide voucher plan for 1989 to include only non-sectarian schools in Milwaukee County. Thompson assured voucher advocates that once the bill passed, the program could be expanded.

Polly Williams rejected Thompson's plan, but she introduced a bill that would pass and be signed into law in April 1990: the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program (MPCP). (Thompson even held a symbolic re-enactment of the signing in one of Milwaukee's independent Black community schools.)

Virtually overnight, Williams became the public face of the pro-voucher movement, speaking at conservative bastions like the Heritage Foundation, Hoover Institute, and the California State Republican Convention. Williams also gave high-profile interviews, including one on *60 Minutes* and one with Rep. Newt Gingrich's GOPAC, which aired on the Christian Broadcast Network.<sup>16</sup>

In his book *Freedom of Choice: Vouchers in American Education*, author Jim Carl noted that there was a moment when it seemed that conservatives and liberals might converge in agreement on the concept of compensatory vouchers. Carl described it as a program "with attributes originally championed by left-liberal policy makers, free-school advocates, and community activists from the 1960s."<sup>17</sup> But, as Carl points out, "social conservatives of various stripes did not wish to stop at nonsectarian, compensatory vouchers."<sup>18</sup>

Likewise, it would not be long before the agenda of Polly Williams and that of her conservative allies would diverge.

## THE ALIENATION OF POLLY WILLIAMS

Of all the partners in the "unholy alliance," Michael Joyce and the Bradley Foundation were among the most unlikely allies for the African American community. The Bradley Foundation had been a longtime funder of author Charles Murray, including his book *The Bell Curve* and its discredited theory of Black intellectual inferiority. For decades, the Bradley Foundation has been at the epicenter of reactionary policies, including welfare reform, opposition to affirmative action, and claims that "moral poverty," rather than structural

inequity, is the source of social ills in poor urban communities. The Bradley Foundation has also provided millions to the Heritage Foundation, Heartland Institute, Free Congress Foundation, and other conservative think tanks.<sup>19</sup>

In 1992, the Bradley Foundation collaborated with Partners Advancing Values in Education (PAVE), a nondenominational organization founded from the dissolution of the Milwaukee Archdiocesan Educational Foundation.<sup>20</sup> Funded by Bradley and several Wisconsin businesses, the program provided vouchers for students, including those attending religious schools, and was designed to “ratchet support for expanding the publicly funded choice program.”<sup>21</sup> To garner Protestant and Jewish support, the new program was not limited to Catholics. In 1995, Gov. Thompson followed through with his plans to gradually extend the program, and by the 1998-99 school year, 70% of the students in the MPCP attended religious schools.<sup>22</sup>

Williams was also concerned about the raising of income caps for the voucher program, as this gradually shifted funding toward families who were already sending their children to private schools. She objected to universal vouchers, stating, “Eventually, low-income families would be weeded out due to the large volume of families wanting to participate.”<sup>23</sup>

In a 2002 interview, Williams explained the parameters under which she supported vouchers and which, by that time, had led to rifts with her former allies. Ironically, the interview was with George Clowes, senior fellow at Heart-

land Institute addressing education policy. Clowes later wrote a report for Heartland responding to the lack of improvement in educational outcomes in the Milwaukee voucher program and disillusionment of some school reformers. Referencing Milton Friedman, Clowes called for a shift from “charity vouchers” for needy students to universal vouchers.

Journalist Bruce Murphy, who pub-

and build the myth of school privatization as a cheaper education alternative.<sup>24</sup>

As Williams went public with her complaints, the conservative backlash mounted. From 1990 to 1997, Williams received speaking honorariums and expenses totaling \$163,000, more than any other Wisconsin legislator. By 2000, this figure had dropped to just \$400.<sup>25</sup>

In 1998, Williams gave a frank interview for a chapter in *The Politics of School Choice*, co-written by a professor at Regent University. Williams expressed her concern that school choice was becoming a program for middle-class Whites who did not need public assistance:

The whites that promote Reverend Floyd Flake (school choice advocate in Jamaica, Queens, New York) are out to replace public education for their own children, not for blacks. I have a black agenda for black parents.<sup>26</sup>

Michael Joyce, of the Bradley Foundation, had formerly claimed that “the Lord God” had led him to support Williams.<sup>27</sup> By 2001, however, Joyce claimed that Williams had told him she didn’t much like White folks, and that

she kept referring to school choice as “a Catholic movement.”<sup>28</sup> Joyce added, “She was poised to be and could have been the leader of school choice. But she stepped aside and Fuller became the leader.”

Fuller is Dr. Howard Fuller, who replaced Polly Williams as the African American standard-bearer for the movement. Fuller and Williams attended the same high school, and later shared concern about the future of underserved

**Williams became the public face of the pro-voucher movement, speaking at such conservative bastions as the Heritage Foundation, Hoover Institute, and the California State Republican Convention. Yet as Williams went public with her concerns about the raising of income caps and universal vouchers, the conservative backlash mounted.**



*Polly Williams speaks about school choice programs in Wisconsin in 1998.  
Photo by Meg Jones and courtesy of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel.*

lished a 2001 article about Williams and her growing disillusionment with Milwaukee’s program, wrote that Williams understood school choice as an experiment. “Our intent was never to destroy the public schools,” Williams told Murphy. Murphy, himself a former teacher and principal at one of Milwaukee’s independent Black private schools, describes the conservative strategy as a “two-fer”—an agenda to eliminate teachers’ unions

## What Are Tuition Tax Credit Programs?

Tuition tax credit programs, sometimes called neovouchers, are “private school choice” programs.<sup>1</sup> Individuals or corporations receive credit against their state taxes for funding “scholarships” used to pay private school tuition (or to attend a public school outside the student’s district). The largest corporate tax credit program in dollars and in numbers of students is in Florida, where companies can receive a 100% credit against their state taxes for the amount given to the nonprofits, which distribute the tuition funds.

Businesses are often lauded in local papers for their “donations,” but these contributions cost the company nothing in states with a 100% credit, and very little or nothing in states like Pennsylvania, where a company is credited 75% for a one-year and 90% for a two-year contribution (plus federal deduction). Claims of tax savings for states have largely been based on one 2008 Florida report in which key figures affecting the calculation were admitted to be guesses by the authoring agency.<sup>2</sup>

Most of the 14 states with tax credit programs do not require the participating schools to administer standardized tests or adhere to requirements on curriculum and teacher qualifications. The majority of these students attend religious schools (currently 81.5% in Florida). While many of these schools are excellent, a significant percentage use Christian fundamentalist curricula, (such as A Beka, Bob Jones University Press and other textbooks) that promote Young Earth creationism, hostility toward other religions, and revisionist history.

## Monetizing Charter Schools

Charter schools are technically a “public school choice,” but operated by an outside group that is not bound by some of the same local and state regulations as traditional public schools.<sup>1</sup> Today charter schools are the fastest growing sector of school choice, with more than two million students attending over 6,000 charter schools.

Charters were originally intended to foster innovative approaches to teaching in small, autonomous schools. Excellent charter schools exist; overall, however, charters have failed to outperform traditional public schools. According to a recent study, Pennsylvania charter schools covered less material in both math and reading than did traditional public schools (the equivalent of 29 days of reading and 50 days of math).<sup>2</sup>

Charter schools have become a primary vehicle for the monetization of education. Although most states require charters to be run by nonprofit organizations, many contract out the management of charters to for-profit companies, sometimes with little separation between the charter board and the for-profit management.<sup>3</sup> In some cases, the buildings and facilities are purchased by the for-profit arm and leased back to the nonprofit, or even resold by the for-profit to an investment company.<sup>4</sup> Entertainment Properties, Inc., a publicly traded real estate investment trust (REIT), now owns the buildings and/or facilities of 60 charter schools.<sup>5</sup> According to an Ohio investigation, 40 percent of that state’s charter schools pay lease to a for-profit entity or out-of-state landlord. Rising lease costs are taking increasingly large percentages of the schools’ budgets, with one school paying more than 80 percent of its total budget in lease to a for-profit entity.<sup>6</sup>

children in Milwaukee as well as their opposition to universal vouchers.

Fuller is a former superintendent of the Milwaukee Public Schools with a previous history as a Black nationalist. In 1969, using the name Owusu Sadukai, Fuller initiated Malcolm X Liberation University “as a way of providing Black students with a revolutionary alternative to mainstream Black colleges.”<sup>29</sup>

In 1995, Fuller became the director of the Bradley Foundation-funded Institute for the Transformation of Learning at Marquette University and founded the Black Alliance for Educational Options, also heavily funded by Bradley and by Walmart heir John Walton.<sup>30</sup> Fuller continues today to serve as a major spokesperson for school choice and is currently on several boards, including the Milwaukee Region Teach for America.

Meanwhile, by 2006, Williams had shifted her efforts to supporting her city’s public school system. She formed the African American Education Council and worked with Milwaukee’s teachers’ union, the Milwaukee Teachers Education Association (MTEA), and the Milwaukee Board of School Directors to develop a strategic plan for improving MPS.<sup>31</sup>

Following the election of Republican Gov. Scott Walker in 2010 and his efforts to dramatically expand the voucher program, Williams again vocally objected. “They have hijacked the program,” Williams said in 2013.<sup>32</sup> George Mitchell, a major pro-voucher donor, immediately responded, describing Williams as “irrelevant” and saying he had had no dealings with Williams after about 1994 or 1995.<sup>33</sup> “Polly was useful to the school choice movement because of her race and her party affiliation,” Mitchell told a reporter.<sup>34 35</sup>

Although Williams was discarded by her allies, her name and face were still used throughout conservative media as an African American Democratic supporter of school vouchers. Sean Hannity lauded her in his 2002 book *Let Freedom Ring: Winning the War of Liberty over Liberalism*. In 2013, Jeanne Allen of the Center for Education Reform included Williams on a list of “venerable Davids against the Goliaths of education.”<sup>36</sup>

Following her death in November 2014, Polly Williams was memorial-



ized as the “mother of school choice.” In a post on the American Federation for Children (AFC) website, Chairman Betsy DeVos described Williams’ legacy as living on in the lives of “hundreds of thousands of children across the country who benefit from school choice.”<sup>37</sup> That post, along with most media coverage of Williams’ death, omitted any mention of her later disillusionment with voucher programs.<sup>38</sup>

### THE BAD NEWS ABOUT “CHOICE”

The school privatization movement has brought together an odd array of political bedfellows. Some are drawn by the prospects of profiting from the conversion of education into a multi-billion dollar industry. Others are ideologues, opposed to public education on either libertarian or religious grounds. Yet another group is comprised of religious leaders, perhaps not ideologically opposed to public education but anxious to use vouchers or neovouchers to fill the desks of their own schools. Ironically, in some districts, charter schools (see related sidebar) have even drawn students away from private religious schools.

Recently, more religious leaders have promoted privatization programs as a way to save religious schools with dwindling enrollment. The 2011 conference of the National Leadership Roundtable of Church Management, a Catholic organization, called for an aggressive strategy to implement tuition tax credit programs or neovouchers in all 50 states. Speaker B. J. Cassin, founder of Cassin Educational Initiative Foundation, told the audience, “Think of the effect if all Catholic schools, not just the ones that we mentioned here, had the ability to have this kind of revenue come in [from tax-credits]; it changes the environment completely.”<sup>39</sup> Like many other promoters of privatization, Cassin frames his agenda as altruism: “We have a social justice issue that we are presenting, and part of that is to eliminate the discrimination of the inner city kids.”<sup>40</sup>

In Florida and Pennsylvania, the two states with the largest private school choice programs (both are corporate tax credit programs or neovouchers), many of the students who receive neovoucher money attend fundamentalist Christian, conservative evangelical, or nondenomina-

national schools. Both Florida and Pennsylvania tout their tax credit programs as providing an opportunity for minority students to access a better education.

But instead of the Afrocentric curricula supported by Williams and Fuller, the A Beka and Bob Jones University curricula used in many of these schools are written with little regard for the heritage of children of color. Their textbooks promote nonfactual and revisionist history as well as Young Earth creationism and climate change denial.<sup>41</sup>

Most vouchers and neovouchers fund students attending schools with no curricula requirements or public accountability. Georgia’s tax credit program, which allows for donations from both individuals and corporations, makes it a criminal offense to track how that money is spent. Georgia’s program also promised to designate scholarships for students in “failing public schools” from low socioeconomic levels, but as a 2012 *New York Times* article exposed, the program has “[benefited] private schools at the expense of the neediest children.”<sup>42</sup> In Georgia and elsewhere, these programs are showing signs of re-segregating students by both race and income. Many of the students subsidized by these programs were already enrolled in private schools.

Michael W. Apple, a professor at University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Education, says that universal vouchers, or voucher programs for which all income levels are eligible, expose the privatization movement’s hidden agenda. “They want to minimize public schools and eventually eliminate as many government services, public employees and public institutions as possible,” writes Apple.<sup>43</sup> In *Educating the ‘Right’ Way: Markets, Standards, God, and Inequality*, Apple argues that “placing schools in a market does not interrupt the stratification of education, except for a very limited group of students. Instead, as study after study has shown, existing hierarchies are simply recreated.”

International examples include Chile, where vouchers were part of the reforms initiated during the rule of Augusto Pinochet and with the assistance of the “Chicago Boys,” economists trained under Milton Friedman at the University of Chicago. Research on Chile’s program

indicates that vouchers failed to produce improved average educational outcomes, but exacerbated stratification and inequality.<sup>44</sup>

Although excellent private schools exist, multiple studies have dispelled the myth that private schools academically outperform public schools on average.<sup>45</sup> A 2006 study not only “[challenged] assumptions of private school superiority overall” but also found substantial differences among various kinds of private schools. The poorest performers were conservative Christian schools.

### THE “NEW CIVIL RIGHTS” BRAND

In his 2003 book *Voucher Wars*, attorney Clint Bolick recounts how he anticipated legal challenges to the Milwaukee voucher program and contacted Polly Williams to offer legal representation. Bolick describes Bradley Foundation president Michael Joyce as having been wary of Williams but understanding the “necessity of their temporary alliance”; he describes Joyce as pursuing school choice as “a ‘silver bullet’ issue: the type of program that could destroy a key pillar of the welfare state.”<sup>46</sup>

Bolick was known for his work against race-based affirmative action. However, as the need grew for legal defense of emerging school choice programs, Bolick turned his attention to it and co-founded the libertarian, public interest law firm Institute for Justice in 1991 with seed money from David and Charles Koch.<sup>47</sup>

Branding education privatization as a civil rights effort has been a deliberate strategy. In his book, Bolick describes how he helped orchestrate the mainstream media’s first use of civil rights language in defense of school choice while discrediting a voucher opponent as “blocking the schoolhouse doors to minority schoolchildren.”<sup>48</sup> In 2002, Dick DeVos addressed the Heritage Foundation, emphasizing the need for his audience (wealthy, white conservative donors and activists) to remain behind the scenes and have other faces as the public advocates of school choice.<sup>49</sup>

As a 2001 *Economist* article spelled out, the strategy of linking the privatization movement to the wishes and activism of “poor blacks, not rich whites” has helped disguise the people actually behind these

campaigns.<sup>50</sup>

Another primary goal of the privatization movement is to drive a wedge between two pillars of the Democratic Party: African American voters and teachers' unions. The same *Economist* article, "Blacks v. Teachers," touted this growing wedge. While the article may have been premature in celebrating the success of both vouchers and charter schools, efforts to drive a wedge between Black voters and the teachers' unions have been remarkably successful.

At the 2008 Democratic National Convention, for example, a pre-convention event for the Democrats for Education Reform (DFER) essentially became an hour-long attack on teachers' unions. At the DNC in 2012, Convention Chairman Antonio Villaraigosa, Newark Mayor Cory Booker (now a U.S. Senator), and Sacramento Mayor Kevin Johnson (and husband of Michelle Rhee), headlined a screening of the fictional movie *Won't Back Down*, which promotes parent trigger bills, a mechanism for replacing unionized public schools with non-union charters. A model bill for the "Parent Trigger Act" and much of school choice and privatization legislation is designed and promoted by the American Legislative Exchange Council, or ALEC, which coordinates with the State Policy Network and has become notorious for promoting "stand your ground" legislation and propagating climate change denial.

### CURRENT TRENDS

Despite its failure to improve educational outcomes, Wisconsin's voucher program is now 25 years old and continues to grow. Today, the program includes about 30,000 students and represents the second largest de facto school district in the state.

Characterized by instability and lack of accountability, Milwaukee's voucher program has resulted in numerous stories

like one in 2013 in a local paper<sup>51</sup> about a minister and his wife who accepted \$2.3 million in taxpayer funding only to close their Lifeskills Academy abruptly during the school year. Although their house in Wisconsin was foreclosed, the couple moved to a gated community in Florida, where they opened another school.

**Private school choice and public charters continue to masquerade as the best option for underserved children. As Julian Vasquez Heilig warns, "If you are a 'choice' proponent interested in civil rights—understand that in markets there are winners and losers. In the case of choice, the long-term losers in a large-scale market-oriented education continue to be historically underserved students of color and special populations."**

Available test results showed that in the 2011-2012 school year, only one student in their Lifeskills Academy tested proficient for grade level in reading, and none in math.

Polly Williams bemoaned the co-opting of her voucher vision by national conservative figures, including Grover Norquist, William Bennett, and Lamar Alexander (who was Secretary of Education from 1991-1993). Now a U.S. Senator, Lamar Alexander is poised to take the helm of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP). In early 2014, Alexander introduced a bill in the Senate that would redirect \$24 billion of federal education funding and incentivize states to use the money to fund 11 million school vouchers for students in poverty. These could be used for private schools or even homeschooling.<sup>52</sup> On her website, Ravitch wrote simply: "Bottom line: the Alexander plan will destroy public education in the U.S."<sup>53</sup>

In the same post, Ravitch quotes a Pennsylvania Republican who warns that Alexander's package only includes \$2,100 dollars per voucher, meaning that the "School District of Record" must provide the rest of the tuition. Ravitch continues, "Do not be fooled: this is not a conservative plan. This is a radical plan.

It will send public dollars to backwoods churches and ambitious entrepreneurs."

The marketing of both private school choice and public charters promises to escalate over the next two years, masquerading as the best option for underserved children. This continues even as traditional public schools are stripped of funding, teachers, art and music programs, libraries, and more. In *Reframing the Refrain: Choice as a Civil Rights Issue*, Julian Vasquez Heilig closes with a warning about where we may be headed:

So if you are a "choice" proponent interested in civil rights—understand that in markets there are winners

and losers. In the case of choice, the long-term losers in a large-scale market-oriented education continue to be historically underserved students of color and special populations.<sup>54</sup>

Heilig continues, "Moving our schools from the public sector to the private sector is a false choice."

The story of Polly Williams serves as a cautionary tale about the dangers of partnering with school choice donors, politicians, and think tanks. Those concerned about the future of public education should not be fooled: the agenda of these players is about privatization and market-based reform. Williams continues to be used as the face of a movement that never intended to fulfill her personal vision. But once she opened the door for her right-wing allies, it could not be closed. ☹

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# Natural Deception

## Conned by the World Congress of Families

From Russia to Nigeria to Australia, a seemingly innocuous definition of the “natural family” is quietly being used as the basis of new laws to justify the criminalization of abortion and LGBTQ people. Pushing this definition is the World Congress of Families, a network of conservative religious leaders from a variety of faiths—and their high-level government friends.

**I**n November 2014, the Christian Right group World Congress of Families (WCF) found itself in the unusual position of having to publicly defend itself. Unlike prominent advocacy groups such as the Family Research Council or Alliance Defending Freedom, the Illinois-based WCF has seldom sought the spotlight, preferring a behind-the-scenes role in its campaign to impose a narrow, Christian Right definition of family as the international norm.

Responding to criticism following the announcement that WCF will host its ninth international summit in Salt Lake City in October 2015, Stanford Swim (a WCF board member and major donor) asserted that WCF’s political agenda and ideology were being unfairly scrutinized by local activists and media.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, WCF’s activities and global influence have received relatively scant public scrutiny. This is of concern because, contrary to Swim’s claim that WCF “does not spread fear,” the organization is leading

a global legislative and public relations campaign against LGBTQ and reproductive rights. WCF has become a power player on the Religious Right by building bridges between U.S. groups and their international counterparts and fostering a global interfaith coalition of conservative religious orthodoxies. While Political Research Associates<sup>2</sup> and other researchers have monitored WCF’s attempts to rewrite international law using a narrow, Religious Right definition of the family,<sup>3</sup> until recently, only a handful of gender justice



*A children's choir performs at WCF's 2012 conference in Madrid, Spain. Photo via Flickr and courtesy of Hazte Oir.*

groups understood WCF's project.

That changed abruptly in June 2013, when global events forced WCF into the U.S. activist spotlight.<sup>4</sup> That month, Russia passed its now notorious anti-propaganda law, which banned “propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations to minors” and prompted a surge in violent attacks on LGBTQ people throughout the country. (The law especially emboldened a right-wing vigilante group, “Occupy Pedophilia,” which uses social media to “ambush” gay people by luring them into meetings and then assaulting them on camera.<sup>5</sup> Online footage of these horrific attacks quickly went viral.<sup>6</sup>)

News of the law, along with graphic evidence of its impact, spurred American and European LGBTQ activists to action. Outraged Westerners launched a hastily conceived media counteroffensive, in which gay bar owners and their patrons emptied bottles of Russian vodka in the streets; LGBTQ sports enthusiasts threatened to boycott the 2014 Sochi Olympics;

**WCF maintains a regionally-based network of allies, who tailor WCF's messages to resonate with local communities and package the “natural family” agenda in whatever way will most effectively hook their audience. All around the world, the “natural family” is a solution in search of a problem.**

and the Human Rights Campaign, one of the largest LGBTQ advocacy groups in the U.S., mass-produced t-shirts proclaiming “Love Conquers Hate” in Russian.

While the initial wave of outrage largely took aim at Russia and its political leaders—LGBTQ magazine *The Advocate* named Putin its 2014 Person of the Year and described him as “the single greatest threat to LGBTs in the world”—it obscured the culpability of U.S. groups. Rather than being the brainchild of a few homophobic Kremlin insiders, Russia's anti-propaganda law emerged from a years-long, carefully crafted campaign to influence governments to adopt a Christian-Right legal framework, coordinated by an international network of right-wing leaders under the aegis of WCF.

Through large international convenings (its 2007 gathering in Warsaw attracted nearly 4,000 participants<sup>7</sup>), smaller regional events, and closed-door meetings with government officials and religious leaders, WCF has woven a tight, powerful web of right-wing ideologues and activists and has provided them with the tools to grow their numbers and expand their influence. WCF's success is especially evident in Russia,<sup>8</sup> but its influence also reaches other countries including Nigeria, Australia, and Poland—and international institutions such as the United Nations.

With its doctrine of preserving what it regards as the “natural family,” WCF is waging a campaign at local, national, and international levels to ensure that male dominance, heteronormativity (the belief that heterosexuality is the only acceptable sexual orientation), and religious hegemony are core tenets of civil society. “The WCF has created a cultural framework, under the banner of the family,

that is inclusive enough to appeal to a broad base,” said Gillian Kane, senior policy advisor at Ipas, an international reproductive rights advocacy group. “But it is also so narrowly writ that most of their initiatives and arguments don't hold up under international law.”

WCF, however, is gradually chipping away at international laws designed to protect human rights, posing a direct threat to LGBTQ people, women's reproductive freedom, single parents, mixed families, and other family structures that do not fit into the parameters of WCF's “natural family.” At best, those who are deemed “unnatural” by WCF standards could be excluded from the rights and privileges granted to “natural families.” At worst, they could be fined or otherwise punished by the state.

#### **ORIGINS AND AGENDA**

WCF is a project of the Howard Center for Family, Religion & Society, based in Rockford, Illinois, about a two-hour drive

from Chicago. It was founded in 1997 by conservative scholar Allan Carlson, who currently serves as president of both organizations. Carlson has authored nearly a dozen books, including *The Natural Family Where It Belongs: New Agrarian Essays*, published in 2014 and dedicated to Pitirim Sorokin. (Sorokin is one of many WCF links to Russia: the Russian-born conservative sociologist inspired much of Carlson's understanding of the family<sup>9</sup>).

The Howard Center was birthed from the Rockford Institute, a conservative think tank devoted to “analyzing the damage done to America's social institutions by the cultural upheaval of the 1960's.”<sup>10</sup> Carlson joined the Institute's staff in 1981, serving as its president from 1986-1997. For many years, according to the Howard Center's own website, the organization exclusively conducted research. But in 1995, that began to change.

That year, Carlson was invited to Moscow by Anatoly Antonov and Victor Medkov, sociologists at Lomonosov Moscow State University.<sup>11</sup> His hosts were concerned about the demographic shifts they were witnessing in Russia's post-Soviet era—popularly referred to as the “demographic winter.”<sup>12</sup> As the country struggled to weather political turmoil and economic hardship, the national birthrate was plummeting, alcoholism was on the rise, and—correspondingly—so was the national mortality rate.

While significant demographic shifts are underway in Russia and many other Western nations, ample research<sup>13</sup> has repudiated nativists' arguments that these changes will result in “global catastrophe” (as WCF communications director Don Feder has warned).<sup>14</sup> What drives right-wing concerns over Russia's demographics are xenophobia and Islamophobia; as Russia's overall population has plummeted, its indigenous Muslim population has grown—now comprising 21-23 million, or about 15% of Russia's total population.<sup>15</sup> Russia has also become an increasingly popular destination for immigrants and refugees. As of 2013, according to the U.N. Population Division, Russia was second only to the United States in its immigrant population—the two nations have 46 million and 11 million immigrants, respectively.<sup>16</sup>

What Antonov and Medkov meant by a “demographic winter” was that the

qualities and characteristics of what it means to be Russian were in danger of being redefined as something other than White and Orthodox.<sup>17</sup> Anxious to reassert whiteness and Russian Orthodox religious practice as fundamental qualities of Russianness, Antonov, Medkov, and Carlson's team at the Howard Center determined that they needed to "use [their] talents and resources to create new coalitions to promote the natural family worldwide."<sup>18</sup>

They convened the first World Congress of Families in Prague in March 1997. More than 700 delegates from 200 organizations across 43 nations gathered to forge a new interfaith alliance of conservative religious orthodoxies, including Russian Orthodox, LDS (Mormon), conservative Catholic, and conservative evangelical participants, as well as a few Orthodox Jews and Muslims.<sup>19</sup>

The WCF I convening produced more fear. A declaration published at its conclusion warned, "[C]ultural revolutions, materialism and sexual permissiveness have resulted in a destruction and denigration of moral values ... extra-marital relationships, adultery and divorce proliferate leading to widespread abortion, illegitimacy and single-parent children."<sup>20</sup>

The declaration specifically named "the United Nations, its N.G.O.s and agents" as key adversaries, claiming that the U.N. and its allies had "pursued dangerous philosophies and policies that require population control, limitation of family size, abortion on demand, sterilization of men and women and have sought to persuade Third World countries to adopt such policies." It condemned policies that subvert "the legal and religious status of traditional marriage," as well as those that promote contraception and abortion, "state welfare systems," comprehensive sexual education, non-marital cohabitation, "homosexual unions," and single parenting.<sup>21</sup>

This declaration constituted WCF's opening salvo in what has become an extended campaign to interrupt trends toward more expansive human rights at the U.N. by recruiting, influencing, and emboldening conservative delegates. WCF's project at the U.N. is to form a consolidated and increasingly powerful voting bloc prepared to take direction from U.S.-based right-wing leadership.

In May 1998, at a planning session for WCF II (its second international convening), a group of 25 religious leaders including evangelicals, mainline Protestants, Roman Catholics, Russian Orthodox, Mormons, Muslims, and Jews came together to define their common cause: protection and promotion of the "natural family." From WCF's planning documents:

The natural family is the fundamental social unit, inscribed in human nature, and centered around the voluntary union of a man and a woman in a lifelong covenant of marriage, for the purposes of:

- satisfying the longings of the human heart to give and receive love;
- welcoming and ensuring the full physical and emotional development of children;
- sharing a home that serves as the center for social, educational, economic, and spiritual life;
- building strong bonds among the generations to pass on a way of life that has transcendent meaning;
- extending a hand of compassion to individuals and households whose circumstances fall short of these ideals.<sup>22</sup>

With this collection of principles, designed to appeal to the broadest possible "traditional values" audience, WCF positioned itself as an umbrella organization for groups and individuals around the world (whether Christian or not) committed to codifying highly restrictive criteria for who counts as "family," and who does not. The policy statement identifies underpopulation as "the demographic problem facing the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," promotes "the large family as a special social gift," and regards "religious orthodoxy as the source of humane values and cultural progress."

Well-known and well-funded American organizations such as Focus on the Family, Family Research Council, Alliance Defense Fund (now called Alliance Defending Freedom), Americans United for Life, and the National Organization for Marriage signed on as dues-paying partners, expanding WCF's reach. (For all its influence, WCF remains small, with only five full-time employees and a modest budget—the Howard Center's 2012

IRS filings reported total revenue of just \$523,870.<sup>23</sup>)

WCF also has a regionally-based network of allies to spread its agenda: Theresa Okafor, director of the Foundation for African Cultural Heritage; in Mexico, Latino leaders such as Enrique Gomez Serrano, board president of *Red Familia* (Spanish for "Family Network"); and in Russia, Russian leaders such as Alexey Komov, director of external affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church. These allies tailor WCF's messages to resonate with local communities, packaging the "natural family" agenda in whatever way will most effectively hook their audience.

In Russia, for example, WCF manipulates deep-seated racial prejudices to mobilize demographic winter anxieties. In Africa, WCF exploits neocolonial concerns, arguing that racist Westerners are trying to abort Africa's Black babies. All around the world, the "natural family" is a solution in search of a problem.

#### USING THE U.N.

WCF considers the United Nations an adversary and has chosen to fight for its "natural family" agenda inside that institution. In a 1999 address to the World Family Policy Forum—an event organized by the now-closed World Family Policy Center and hosted at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah—Allan Carlson outlined his plans:

It is time to bring to the United Nations and to other international settings the shared truth of history ... It is time to move this view of the family as the fundamental social unit to the very heart of international deliberations, so that it might guide the creation of laws and public policies in our respective nations.

This focus on the U.N. was evident at the WCF II, convened in Geneva, Switzerland, in November 1999. During the opening plenary, Carlson noted that 51 years earlier, delegates to the newly formed U.N., meeting in the same hall, had approved the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). He emphasized the language in Article 16, which declares, "The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State."<sup>24</sup>

Carlson and WCF sought to co-opt the UDHR's language into a public relations push for a restrictive U.N. definition of family that could then be used to assail women and LGBTQ people through the U.N. and other international organizations.<sup>25</sup>

U.S. conservatives have long held suspicious, if not openly hostile, attitudes toward the United Nations. The "signature campaign" of the Far Right, anti-communist John Birch Society—launched in 1958—seeks to get the U.S. out of the United Nations. The JBS describes the institution as a "socialistic global government" controlled by "global power elites."<sup>26</sup>

Historically, hostility toward the U.N. often went hand-in-hand with Cold War-era opposition to Russia. Since the mid-90s, though, WCF and other elements of the U.S. Right have taken a different approach. Following advances made in the fight for abortion rights and other reproductive justice issues at the U.N.'s International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo (1994) and Beijing (1995), right-wing strategists began to see the U.N. as a key battleground. Writing in 2006, researcher Pam Chamberlain described a "flocking to the U.N." in which "12 NGOs opposed to abortion or comprehensive sexuality education ... gained consultative status since the Cairo and Beijing U.N. conferences in 1994. All of them are associated with the U.S. Christian Right."

At the same time, WCF developed an affinity for post-Soviet Russia, a country its leaders increasingly depict as a model of moral purity. Larry Jacobs, a strident opponent of abortion and LGBTQ rights, had joined WCF in 2003 as managing director.<sup>27</sup> At a WCF gathering in Melbourne in September 2014, Jacobs said, "The Russians might be the Christian saviors to the world; at the U.N. they really are the ones standing up for these traditional values of family and faith."<sup>28</sup>

Jacobs was referring to the U.N. Human Rights Council (UNHRC)'s June 2014 convening in Geneva. The council adopted

the "Protection of the Family" resolution, a resolution requiring the Council to host a panel and produce a report on protecting families.<sup>29</sup> While the resolution itself (co-sponsored by WCF's "natural family" friends from Russia) has no immediate policy implications, its potential precedent-setting language fails to acknowledge that, in the words of many progressive NGOs and delegates, "various forms

**Carlson's work on the "demographic winter" has proven to be particularly effective in garnering favor with Russia's conservative leadership. In Russia and other parts of Europe, a combination of population anxiety and growing anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant sentiment has offered WCF a favorable political context in which to advance its anti-abortion, "natural family" agenda.**

of the family exist." The UNHRC's Russian-led conservative voting bloc saw to it that the more inclusive phrasing never made it into the resolution.<sup>30</sup>

Ultimately, that same conservative voting bloc—including every African delegate on the Council (representing 12 of the 26 affirming voices)—passed the resolution.

Human rights advocates have expressed fear that the resulting panel and report will be used to further marginalize diverse family structures, such as those led by single parents, grandparents, or LGBTQ people. Commenting on the resolution, Geneva Advocacy Director at Human Rights Watch Julie de Rivero said, "[I]t is a travesty for the U.N. to ignore [the] reality" that "families come in all shapes and forms. Insinuating that different types of families don't exist can do nothing but harm the children and adults around the world who live in those families."<sup>31</sup>

One of the primary leaders behind the "Protection of the Family" resolution was Sharon Slater, president of Family Watch International (FWI), chair of the U.N. Family Rights Caucus, and longtime member of WCF. Slater traces the beginning of her political activism to WCF II,

held in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1999. Slater writes that WCF "changed the direction of my life, as I learned about the assaults in almost every area of family life and was instilled with the hope that if we all worked together, we could effectively stop many of these attacks."<sup>32</sup>

The so-called "attacks" Slater refers to include comprehensive sex education curricula and policies to support condom distribution, access to abortion, and LGBTQ families.

Later that year, Slater co-founded FWI. Officially registered at the U.N. as Global Helping to Advance Women and Children (Global HAWC), FWI enjoys Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) consultative status and is thus able to participate in meetings on economic and social issues. Over the last 15 years, Slater has taken on increasingly prominent roles as a cam-

paigner and foil to human rights advocates—in the U.S. and internationally, including at the U.N., where she often collaborates with Carlson and other WCF affiliates.

#### **FEAR OF A DARKER PLANET: FROM NATIVISM TO NATALISM**

WCF's influence at the U.N. relies heavily on its longstanding ties with Russia, one of the five permanent members on the U.N. Security Council. Carlson's work on the "demographic winter"—the idea that abortion, birth control, homosexuality, feminism, and other "unnatural" deviations have led to dangerous population decline and a crisis for the "natural family"—has proven to be particularly effective in garnering favor with Russia's conservative leadership.

Carlson argues that declining birth rates threaten the decline of civilization—Western civilization. As researcher and journalist Kathryn Joyce puts it, "The concern is not a general lack of babies, but the cultural shifts that come when some populations, particularly immigrant communities, are feared to be outprocreating others."<sup>33</sup> Put another way, the demographic winter thesis cultivates

racism and xenophobia in support of exclusionary “natural family” policies. A main objective of the WCF’s demographic scare tactics is to convert nationalism into natalism, and thereby mobilize a larger anti-abortion, “natural family” base. (Natalism prioritizes human procreation, including public policies that reward birthing children.)

This perspective is commonplace among WCF and its affiliates. Following WCF’s 1997 congress in Prague, Cathy Ramey, associate director of the U.S. anti-abortion organization Advocates for Life Ministries, explained what she’d learned: “As native citizens reject marriage and child-bearing, other non-native groups will simply move in and replace the historic population.”<sup>34</sup> Speaking at WCF V, John Mueller, a researcher at the Ethics and Public Policy Center—a neoconservative think tank in Washington, DC—argued that “fertility would rise and remain above the replacement rate, not only in the United States but also most other countries, by ending legal abortion.”<sup>35</sup>

In Russia and other parts of Europe, a combination of population anxiety and growing anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant sentiment has offered WCF a favorable political context in which to advance its anti-abortion, “natural family” agenda. Carlson and his network have fanned the flames of “demographic winter” anxieties throughout the region.

In June 2011, WCF hosted the Moscow Demographic Summit, describing it as the “world’s first summit to address the international crisis of rapidly declining birthrates.”<sup>36</sup> More than 500 people attended, including Patriarch Kirill, head of the Russian Orthodox Church; Russian First Lady Svetlana Medvedeva; members of the Russian Duma; and a host of right-wing American scholars and activists.

Within two weeks of the event, President Medvedev—whose wife, Medvedeva, had recently teamed up with the Russian Orthodox Church on a new anti-abortion campaign—signed a law requiring abortion providers to devote 10 percent of any advertising to describing the dangers of abortion to a woman’s health, and making it illegal to describe abortion as a safe medical procedure.<sup>37</sup> This was the first new legislative restriction placed on abortions in the country since the fall of Communism.<sup>38</sup>

Four months later, in October 2011, the Russian Duma passed a law further restricting abortions to within the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, with exceptions for cases up to 22 weeks in instances of rape or medical necessity. The new law also tacked on a mandatory waiting period of two to seven days before an abortion can be performed, a common tactic used by anti-abortion activists in the United States.

Russian leaders are by no means mere pawns in the Right’s “natural family” campaign. Referencing a book on family genealogy authored by Aleksandr Putin (a distant cousin of President Vladimir Putin), Russian journalist Vladimir Shvedov notes that extended families “are gradually returning to the consciousness of our much-suffering people,” because in Russia as in any country, “the greatness of the nation ... is built upon the ancient foundation of the old families.”<sup>39</sup> The country’s post-Soviet identity crisis has thus provided fertile ground for the vigorous promotion of the “Russian family.”

Nonetheless, the U.S. Right’s influence on these Russian debates is unmistakable. In 2011, the *New York Times* noted that “contention over abortion [in Russia] has begun to sound like the debate in the United States.”<sup>40</sup> And when President Putin signed a law in December 2013 completely banning abortion advertising, Steven Mosher, president of the Population Research Institute and a regularly featured speaker at WCF events, was not the least bit shy about claiming credit: “PRI has played a role in helping to turn Russia back to life,” he stated. “I participated in the first [WCF] Demographic Summit at the Russian State Social University in Moscow in May, 2011. We talked with senior Russian leaders about the need to protect life. Not long thereafter, a law was passed banning abortion of unborn babies older than 12 weeks.”<sup>41</sup>

Alexey Komov, WCF’s representative in Russia, agreed, calling the WCF’s Demographic Summit a “catalyst” for Russia’s anti-abortion movement. Komov, who organized the 2011 Moscow Demographic Summit, was subsequently appointed to a position with the Department for External Relations of the Russian Orthodox Church, further strengthening WCF’s ties to Russian Orthodox leadership.<sup>42</sup>

## THE AFRICAN CAMPAIGN

In recent years, WCF has expanded its influence not only in Russia but also in Africa, where it works closely with public intellectuals and conservative leaders who act as spokespeople for WCF’s “natural family” campaign. Perhaps most prominent is Theresa Okafor, a leading anti-choice advocate in Nigeria and the recipient of WCF’s 2014 Natural Family Woman of the Year award.

In Africa, debates over sexual health and rights are frequently tied to issues related to population. Development economists generally agree that for economic growth in Africa to continue in such a way that poverty rates decrease, birthrates must drop significantly.<sup>43</sup> U.N. reports indicate that population growth in Africa is so high that the continent’s population is expected to more than triple by 2100, rising from 1.2 billion to 4.2 billion<sup>44</sup>—a daunting forecast for a continent that also has the highest poverty rate in the world. (In Okafor’s native Nigeria, more than 60 percent of the population lives in absolute poverty—up from 54.7 percent in 2004.<sup>45</sup>) Okafor, however, denies the need for comprehensive sex education, contraception, and access to safe abortions. She instead argues that Africa needs to rid itself of the “negative cultures” being imposed on it from the West.

Speaking at the World Public Forum Dialogue of Civilizations in 2012 (described by a local news outlet as “the first pro-family conference in Africa”), Okafor explained her view—that poverty in Africa is the result of corrupt governments, poor resource management and distribution, and “the sinister agenda to downsize and control Africa.” According to Okafor, as Europeans face falling birthrates, they feel “threatened” by Africa’s growing population and economy and thus seek to promote contraception and abortion among Africans.<sup>46</sup>

Okafor’s statements contrast sharply with demographic winter ideas that Carlson and WCF promote in Europe, Australia, the U.S., and elsewhere. This highlights WCF’s cynical manipulation of racial resentments within different political contexts. In Russia, WCF points to declining White birthrates and growing numbers of immigrants, Muslims, and people of color to stoke White fears

of decreasing dominance over non-White and non-Christian minorities. In Nigeria, WCF plays to neocolonial resentments, suggesting that Western nations are seeking to restrict the growth and prosperity of African nations by “downsizing” Black African populations through increased access to abortion and contraception and the “promotion” of homosexuality. Whether rhetorically aligned with European racism or African nationalism, WCF’s solution remains constant: it of-

criminalizing same-sex marriage.)

According to Okafor, the Global Family Policy Forum for U.N. delegates hosted by WCF-affiliate FWI in Gilbert, Arizona, in 2011 was of particular importance, noting that it was there that the African voting bloc—which unanimously voted against adding more inclusive language to the definition of “family” used in the U.N.’s newly adopted “Protection of the Family” resolution—successfully “consolidated their positions.”

Where WCF has been successful in persuading national governments to adopt its “natural family” model, there has followed increased persecution of LGBTQ people and decreased access to abortion and reproductive healthcare. In African countries that accept Okafor’s

WCF-endorsed narrative and political agenda, we may see growing levels of poverty and—thanks to further restrictions on comprehensive sex education and healthcare options—increased risk for transmission of HIV/AIDS and other STIs.

### BRINGING THE FIGHT BACK HOME

Although it is based in the U.S. and has an entirely White, American board of directors, WCF has held its previous global convenings outside the U.S. But WCF IX is scheduled for October 27-30, 2015 in Salt Lake City, Utah. The Sutherland Institute, a right-wing think tank based in Salt Lake City (whose acting CEO and prominent right-wing philanthropist, Stanford Swim, sits on WCF’s board of directors) will host the event, which is expected to draw about 3,000 people.

The theme of WCF IX is expected to be “religious liberty,” which the U.S. Religious Right has been endeavoring to redefine as a sanction to discriminate in the public sphere (particularly against women and LGBTQ people).<sup>49</sup> U.S. Christian Right groups have been testing similar “religious freedom” strategies overseas. WCF, as an umbrella organization for right-wing groups, is seeking to orchestrate the coordinated, international

proliferation of this strategy. Many of its member organizations, including Alliance Defending Freedom and FWI, will be in attendance. ADF announced in October 2014 that it is “in the process of transitioning into an international religious liberties organization.” The announcement added that ADF will soon be establishing advocacy offices in Strasbourg, France, focusing on the European Commission on Human Rights; Geneva, focusing on the United Nations Human Rights Commission; and Brussels, focusing on the European Union.<sup>50</sup>

Depending on the audience, WCF’s strategy for promoting the “natural family” varies, but the impact of its campaign is the same across the globe: increased persecution of LGBTQ people, further restrictions on access to abortion, and an increasingly exclusionary definition of what kind of families deserve recognition and rights. With its far-reaching influence, streamlined structure, and ability to alter its message quickly, WCF is establishing itself as a vanguard for the Right’s global anti-choice and anti-LGBTQ agendas.

WCF IX provides a venue for WCF and other Christian Right leaders to continue expanding their international influence. If WCF IX goes forward as planned in Salt Lake City, those who support LGBTQ rights and reproductive justice may see a surge of new legislative assaults, at home and around the world.

However, the event also provides a unique opportunity for activists to challenge the expanding influence of WCF’s “natural family” campaign right where it started, here in the U.S. “Keep in mind that the work of WCF is in response to positive legal gains made by the sexual and reproductive rights and LGBTQ communities,” said Kane. “There is ample room for human rights defenders to challenge the WCF’s regressive agenda.” Activists who support reproductive justice and LGBTQ rights should use this opportunity to draw the public’s attention to the real policy agenda that this supposedly “pro-family” network is pushing. ☞

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**If WCF IX goes forward as planned, those who support LGBTQ rights and reproductive justice may see a surge of new legislative assaults, at home and around the world. Yet the event also provides a unique opportunity to challenge WCF’s “natural family” campaign right where it started, in the United States.**

fers its “natural family” campaign, knowing well that what follows may include restricted reproductive rights and the criminalization or persecution of LGBTQ people.

As Political Research Associates’ Rev. Dr. Kopya Kaoma has documented, the U.S. Religious Right has a long history of promoting anti-choice, anti-LGBTQ “pro-family” ideologies in Africa (at the expense of African women and LGBTQ people).<sup>47</sup> But WCF was one of the first to package its agenda in a U.N.-ready, policy-friendly format. The expansion of this campaign from local and regional levels to the international realm represents a grave threat to LGBTQ and reproductive justice globally.

Speaking at WCF IV in Madrid in 2012, Okafor noted that many of the recent anti-abortion, anti-LGBTQ gains made in Nigeria are thanks to networking coordinated by WCF. She specifically named Sharon Slater’s FWI as being “instrumental to many of the victories we celebrate.”<sup>48</sup> (Such “victories” include the repeal of a 2012 reproductive rights law in Nigeria’s Imo State, the enactment of a requirement that all condom packages include warnings indicating that they are not “100% safe,” and the passage of a bill



# Meet Joe Scheidler, Patriarch of the Anti-Abortion Movement

Joe Scheidler and his Pro-Life Action League pioneered many of the tactics that anti-abortion activists still use today. Robin Marty examines why these tactics have had such staying power—and what abortion rights advocates can do to stop them.

**A**bortion has been legal—with restrictions—in all 50 states for nearly 42 years, and anti-abortion activist Joe Scheidler has been fighting to make it illegal again for just as many of them. Still comfortably ensconced in his Chicago home, Scheidler, at 87 years old, is father, “Godfather,” and leader to generations of zealots. They continue using tactics Scheidler designed as they protest in the legislature, outside clinic doors, and even across the ocean, all with the goal of criminalizing—and removing access to—safe, legal abortion.

Now that the anti-abortion movement has grown more powerful in the last few years than it has been at any point in the history of legal abortion, it is worth examining where Joe Scheidler’s architecture is still being used—and where it might be decaying or vulnerable.<sup>1</sup> Although the days of having a clinic door physically blocked by human bodies or of having abortion providers picketed at their own homes are mostly a thing of the past, today’s assault on legal abortion differs only slightly from these methods.

## AN ANTI-ABORTION PLAYBOOK

Pro-Life Action League (PLAL), the anti-abortion advocacy group Scheidler founded in 1980, may not have the name recognition of Operation Rescue (the militant anti-abortion group best known in the 1990s for blocking abortion clinics



Joe Scheidler at the Pro-Life Action League’s offices in 2014. Photo by Wendi Kent.

and terrorizing patients and providers), or National Right to Life Committee (an umbrella group for the state and local affiliates of the national pro-life movement). Still, PLAL has had a profound impact on the movement. Scheidler’s 1985 book, *Closed: 99 Ways to Stop Abortion*,<sup>2</sup> became the handbook of those hoping to put abortion providers out of business with tactics ranging from creating mild nuisances to outright harassment and borderline stalking.

Those tactics haven’t changed much in the 29 years since the book was pub-

lished. Some of the book’s tips, like “conduct a blitz”—coordinating a group of anti-abortion activists to enter a clinic and refuse to leave until the police arrive, all the while attempting to talk patients in the waiting room out of undergoing abortion—no longer can be legally attempted. But other tactics detailed in *Closed*, such as protests at hospitals, medical offices, or other businesses affiliated with abortion providers, still happen with great frequency. Meanwhile, so-called “sidewalk counseling” has become the signature activity of choice for abortion opponents,

using scripts that are often based on the “Chicago-style” training method established by Scheidler and his colleagues.

Groups such as 40 Days for Life promote a constant clinic presence, in some cases even at buildings that only refer for, rather than actually offer, abortions on site. Other organizations, either national or local in scope, trade the allegedly silent (but often actually quite audible) prayers for graphic signs, amplified street preaching, and chasing of potential clinic patients and staff all the way to the building’s entrance.

These groups are also gaining the advantage in the courts. For years, local buffer zones were able to provide an element of protection for clinic patients in some cities across the country. But the Supreme Court’s decision in June of 2014 to eliminate Massachusetts’ buffer zone has led to new efforts to tear down remaining patient safety areas, and to even bolder anti-abortion activity outside abortion clinics.

Anti-abortion activists still document license plates at clinics,<sup>3</sup> as Scheidler encourages in Chapter 60 of *Closed*. They still gather in large groups, and while they may not physically block the clinic doors, they instead line the sidewalks on each side as near to the door as possible,<sup>4</sup> using their numbers and presence to bar the entrance. They still write complaints about providers and clinics to file with local departments of health, and they still wait on the streets to document a medical emergency on the rare occasion that an ambulance may be called to the building.

### **INSPIRING ACTIVISTS AND CRIMINALS**

The inspiration for much of this activity belongs to Scheidler. Trained first as a Benedictine monk and next as a journalist, Scheidler began his anti-abortion activism career first with Illinois Right to Life Committee and next with another anti-abortion group called Friends for Life. Scheidler claims he was forced out of both positions due to his unwillingness to work with boards or wait for permission from others to engage in his activist stunts. Scheidler used his severance pay to establish Pro-Life Action League, where he could act on his own impulses without being curbed by anyone out of fear of potential lawsuits.

And lawsuits there were. Most famously, Scheidler became the accused in *NOW v. Scheidler*,<sup>5</sup> a class-action lawsuit filed

in 1986 by the National Organization for Women and a large number of abortion providers, declaring that a multi-state activist network called the Pro-Life Action Network (PLAN), also founded by Scheidler, was conspiring with other anti-abortion activists and groups in a plot to close clinics through “racketeering.”

The racketeering charges never stuck, but Scheidler’s “Godfather” moniker did, and although it evokes the Mafia’s history of shady activities, he continues to claim it.

PLAN, according to Scheidler, was a coordinated effort to organize other anti-abortion groups from across the country who were willing to take direct, physical action against clinics. Scheidler writes in Chapter 68 of *Closed*, “Go National: Join the Activist Network,” that activists are encouraged to work in national networks to move from “random picketing and sidewalk counseling” to “blitzes of abortion clinics, picketing of doctors’ and clinic operators’ homes, vigils ... a national day of rescue ... and a national day of amnesty for the unborn, during which efforts would be made to close down as many abortion clinics across the country as possible.” PLAN’s national conventions occurred annually from 1984 to at least 1997,<sup>6</sup> and Scheidler credits the Atlanta conference in 1987 as being the birthplace of Randall Terry’s Operation Rescue.

Terry was just one of many anti-abortion activists who attended yearly PLAN conventions who would eventually go on to block clinics and harass patients and clinic workers, or worse. As part of PLAN, Scheidler introduced the idea of “regional directors” to coordinate their shared mission to end abortion. Starting with PLAN’s 1985 convention in Appleton, Wisconsin, he only welcomed attendees who espoused “militant” anti-abortion activism, according to James Risen and Judy L. Thomas’s book *Wrath of Angels: The American Abortion War*.<sup>7</sup>

Some of those attendees and their close contacts would become the most notorious and often jailed activists of their time. John Ryan, the original “rescuer” of St. Louis, Missouri, attended the early conventions to explain his tactics in clinic blockading, and eventually formed Pro-Life Direct Action League.<sup>8</sup> Joan Andrews, the movement “martyr” who served years<sup>9</sup> in prison for criminal trespass at clinics in multiple states,<sup>10</sup>

attended when she was not in jail. Don Treshman, of Rescue America;<sup>11</sup> Andrew Burnett,<sup>12</sup> of Advocates for Life Ministries of Portland, Oregon;<sup>13</sup> and Chris Slattery,<sup>14</sup> who was an Operation Rescue member in New York City before starting a chain of crisis pregnancy centers<sup>15</sup> there; all attended or spoke at the yearly gatherings.

Francis (Franky) Schaeffer, son of evangelical theologian Francis Schaeffer, was not just a PLAN convention speaker; he worked closely with Scheidler and wrote the foreword for the 1993 edition of *Closed*. In his foreword, Schaeffer praised Scheidler and his use of “direct action” against clinics, comparing him to Mother Theresa in Calcutta or Jesus driving the money changers from the temple. “We cannot wait for the ‘abortion problem’ to be solved for us,” he writes. “Street by street, neighborhood by neighborhood, we must fight this necessary battle until legalized abortion is relegated to the barbaric past, along with slavery and cannibalism!”

Franky Schaeffer has since renounced his role<sup>16</sup> in helping to forge the powerful alliance of Catholics and evangelicals in what is now the social conservative movement, citing his belief that the leaders were more interested in winning and retaining Republican majorities than ending legal abortion.

When members met in 1994,<sup>17</sup> it was to discuss how much violence is acceptable when it comes to stopping abortion and closing clinics. The battle lines were drawn at that Chicago meeting, as the coalition began to fray over whether it was ever justifiable to commit murder<sup>18</sup> to stop a doctor from performing abortions. While members of PLAN like Burnett in Oregon supported the idea of “Defensive Action,”<sup>19</sup> Scheidler and others declined to do so.

Scheidler’s book has a chapter called “Violence: Why It Won’t Work,” in which he explains how violence against an abortion provider or building would make the movement look bad. Even so, he hedges: “We must point out for the sake of proper perspective, however, that no amount of damage to real estate can equal the violence of taking a single human life,” in this case referring to abortion.

He also frequently discusses, in both his writing and in-person remarks, about his continuing support for those who have used violence in the past. “We’ve

had trouble with other pro-lifers,” Scheidler told me this summer when I met him in his office in Chicago.<sup>20</sup> “We had those who went off the deep end, and then started shooting and bombing and all that stuff. We knew these people, and we had meetings with them. We even have met them after they get out of prison, and so on. They’re still pro-life. They just went too far.”

### SHIFTING TACTICS

For himself, however, Scheidler prefers the “direct action” tactics he enthusiastically embraced, such as “blitzes.” Clinics had great difficulty in fending off activists such as Scheidler, other PLAN members, and eventually Operation Rescue. During the 1980s and 1990s, clinic “blitzes,” “rescues,” and barricading became so common that eventually the federal government passed the federal Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances (FACE) Act, ensuring that anti-abortion activists could no longer use “rescue”-style tactics to keep clinics closed and patients from passing through the doors.

While FACE was a blow to PLAL, Scheidler’s manual still offered many other ways to shut down a clinic. Scheidler encouraged hospital pickets<sup>21</sup> for those facilities that either offered abortion care themselves or had doctors on staff that provided those services at unaffiliated clinics. He developed another chilling tactic called “adopting abortionists,” his term for sending cards to a provider or supporter’s home, calling them to try to talk, dropping off business cards at their offices, or, as he suggested in his book, even what many would call stalking.

In one chapter of *Closed*, Scheidler crows about an activist’s success in using “adoption” tactics:

He accompanied her on lobbying missions to Springfield, following her

from one legislator’s office to another and all the time praying for her conversion. He attended her seminars and encouraged his friends to fill up the front rows at every lecture she gave. He challenged her to public debates, organized people to question her at her talks, sent her pro-life literature,

Christmas party.

Both mailings came just months after PLAL systematically and methodically pressured<sup>22</sup> Dr. Chastine’s private practice into severing ties with her. PLAL’s tactics included protests, letters to other businesses sharing the space, and threats of more public actions against the building if their professional relationships continued.

Scheidler and PLAL helped design tactics such as pressuring providers, blocking clinics, so-called “sidewalk counseling,” and clinic pickets. But even more current, popular anti-abortion tactics, like conducting public relations campaigns “exposing” Planned Parenthood, have roots in Scheidler’s work. As early as the 1980s, PLAL smeared Planned Parenthood as a “threat to children,” and claimed the organization had sinister aims in providing information about sexuality, pregnancy prevention, and “contraceptive drugs and devices.” PLAL also accused Planned Parenthood of potentially giving abortion referrals to young teens without the consent of parents.

Such talking points echo in current campaigns by Live Action,<sup>23</sup> a

youth-based anti-abortion and anti-birth control movement that primarily engages in hidden camera “gotcha” videos purporting to “expose” Planned Parenthood affiliates and other providers of reproductive health care services. Live Action has been a leader in efforts to pressure Congressional lawmakers into defunding the family planning agency and works with other anti-abortion conservative political organizations like Susan B. Anthony List,<sup>24</sup> Students for Life,<sup>25</sup> Americans United for Life,<sup>26</sup> and others, including PLAL.

### THOSE GRAPHIC FETUS IMAGES

Today, Scheidler’s organization may be more the base of the anti-abortion movement than the face of it, but when it does

**Scheidler and PLAL helped design tactics such as pressuring providers, blocking clinics, so-called “sidewalk counseling,” and clinic pickets. But even more current anti-abortion tactics, like conducting public relations campaigns “exposing” Planned Parenthood, have roots in Scheidler’s work.**



*Ann Scheidler, Joe Scheidler’s wife, helps run PLAL’s office and organizational operations. Photo by Wendi Kent.*

and took every opportunity to try to get her to stop promoting abortion. He succeeded.

Decades later, Scheidler’s advice for establishing direct contact with those who perform or support abortion has been mostly discarded, but some of his ideas occasionally reappear. In 2013, Dr. Cheryl Chastine, a reproductive health and abortion provider at South Wind Women’s Center in Wichita, Kansas, received two pieces of mail to her home address, both sent from Pro-Life Action League. The first was a letter from Joe’s wife Ann, PLAL’s Vice President, asking her to meet for a cup of coffee to discuss why Dr. Chastine performs abortions. Later, she received an invitation to the League’s

don its public face, it likes to use graphic imagery. PLAL still commits to “counseling” outside clinics in Chicago, as well as training “sidewalk counselors” at yearly national conventions, such as the one held in Minnesota, in 2013, or Alabama, in 2014.<sup>27</sup> Its most public events, however, are the “Face the Truth” tours, which take place for one full week each year during the summer, as well as for one day each month during the spring and fall.

On a Face the Truth tour, members of PLAL place large, graphic images of fetal and embryonic remains along a street or public venue, ranging from abortion clinics to major sidewalks in downtown

Chicago. The tours, which PLAL said it began in 2000, are similar to the Center for Bio-Ethical Reform’s (CBR) Genocide Awareness Project, which mounts graphic aborted-fetus displays on campuses and universities, or those of Created Equal, a newer Ohio campaign from Mark Harrington, formerly with CBR.

**Thirty years after Scheidler published the definitive handbook on how to close an abortion clinic, there are fewer than 800 abortion clinics left in the country. Those clinics that remain are still susceptible to harassment, financial pressure, frivolous lawsuits, medical complaints, and massive anti-abortion public relations campaigns. In other words, they remain susceptible to almost every tactic Joe Scheidler first outlined in 1985.**

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The goal of such projects, according to Eric Scheidler, Joe’s son and the current executive director of PLAL, is to make people recognize the realities of abortion. The tactic represents an escalation from the early days of picketing at abortion clinics, when Joe Scheidler and others tried to stop patients from entering the building by handing out pamphlets that would often contain similar images.

The images are of grisly post-abortion remains that Scheidler says are real. He often obtained the subjects himself. In *Abandoned: The Untold Story of the Abor-*

### PLAL’S WIDENING SCOPE

For all its influence and reach, PLAL remains a rather lean operation. On its tax documents, it claims only about \$1 million<sup>31</sup> in revenue in 2013, mostly from donors it chooses not to disclose, and less than \$13,000 in sales from sidewalk counseling tools and other anti-abortion activism products.<sup>32</sup>

In the same year, PLAL spent about \$450,000 on compensation, not including benefits, with over \$200,000 of that going to Joe, his wife Ann, and their son Eric. The organization’s biggest expenses are printing, shipping, and postage (perhaps not surprising considering the leaflets, pamphlets, large graphic photos, and other materials PLAL uses in its events).

Considering PLAL’s activism that purposefully pushes the lines of legality, it is surprising that it reported a mere \$158<sup>33</sup> in legal expenses in 2013.

PLAL’s influence in today’s legal abortion battle landscape isn’t felt only in the U.S. PLAL has long been supportive<sup>34</sup> of Youth Defence, an Irish anti-abortion group that “has been criticized by politicians for adopting the militant tactics of American antichoice activists,” according to Allie Higgins of Catholics for a Free Choice,<sup>35</sup> who also reports that Scheidler’s book is used as a handbook for activist tactics by the group. Eric Scheidler joined the group in Ireland<sup>36</sup> for an international pro-life youth event in 2010. This year,

the international pro-life youth conference was held in California<sup>37</sup> with Youth Defence, PLAL, and others.

Speaking at this year’s event<sup>38</sup> was Bernadette Smyth of Northern Ireland’s Precious Life. Smyth, who appears to emulate Scheidler’s tactics in her own country, once dismissed criticism of Scheidler’s activities, stating, “Joseph is not guilty of anything but saving women and unborn babies from abortion.”<sup>39</sup> In November of 2014,<sup>40</sup> a judge found Smyth guilty of harassing the head of the Marie Stopes clinic in Belfast, Ireland.

### SCHEIDLER’S LEGACY

Now, 30 years after Scheidler published the definitive handbook on how to close an abortion clinic, there are fewer than 800 abortion clinics left in the country. Those clinics that remain have become even more susceptible to harassment, financial pressure, frivolous lawsuits, medical complaints, and massive anti-abortion PR campaigns.

In other words, they remain susceptible to almost every tactic Joe Scheidler first outlined in 1985. The defensive stance of giving Kevlar vests to clinic providers and forming clinic defense teams has had little positive impact.

With the right to a legal, safe abortion increasingly in jeopardy, the need to proactively fight the evolving tactics of the anti-abortion movement is critical. In the 1980s and 1990s, the threat that Scheidler and his cohorts posed to legal abortion access led to a federal lawsuit that managed to distract and hold off the pro-life movement for more than a decade. That lawsuit also led to the drafting and passage of the FACE Act. Today, abortion rights supporters must consider how to take similar bold action to exploit weaknesses in the anti-abortion movement and stop it from continuing to cut off what legal access remains. ☹

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## Polly Williams, p.2

1. Williams' program is described as the first voucher program in the nation, but it was preceded by programs used by states to fight desegregation. In 1964, the Supreme Court found county and local tuition grants and tax credits used to fund White students in private schools to be unconstitutional.
2. The program that passed was added to the Budget Amendment Bill by Democratic Senator Gary George, but drawn from previous bills authored by Polly Williams. Pro- and anti-voucher activists and education scholars credit Williams. See John F. Witte, *The Market Approach to Education: An Analysis of America's First Voucher Program* (Princeton University Press, 2000).
3. Matthew J. Brouillette, "Vouchers," *School Choice in Education: A Primer for Freedom in Michigan* (Mackinac Center, 1999), <http://www.mackinac.org/2081>.
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**Challenging the Right, Advancing Social Justice**

## The Art of Activism

*Spotlighting the efforts of artists and organizations who are engaged in the struggle for social justice and are helping build the movement through their work.*

When Meredith Stern (whose artwork is also featured on the front cover) chooses where to live, she embraces the “act locally, think globally” ethos. That’s why, once she put down roots in Providence, Rhode Island, the printmaker and collage artist began naturally forming collaborations with fellow artists for social justice. A member of the JustSeeds artists’ collective since 2007, Stern has contributed to a variety of books, posters, group shows, and collaborative projects all focused on the struggle for justice.

“Ever since college I’ve been involved in organizing at the same time as art. I see art and culture as an integral part of human life,” Stern says. Stern enjoys making things such as posters and smaller prints that people might use in their everyday lives, rather than for a gallery show that might be seen by a handful of folks. She aims to spread her posters’ messages widely, but her larger project is to rebuild the cultural wing of social justice movements.

Stern has had a lifelong connection to grassroots activism, but couldn’t understand why the movements of the



*“Teach Resistance” (2012), by Meredith Stern. Linoleum block print with spray paint stencils. A tribute to the sit-in protests that started in Greensboro, NC.*

1990s and early 2000s didn’t seem to welcome her art. “It seemed that within activist circles, art and culture were dismissed as unnecessary,” she explains. “But art does play a role in promoting ethics, as a moral compass, and a reflection of society and the people within it. How,” she recalls thinking, “do I continue to make work that has a life, that has a place?”

Stern says she believes that with the rise of Occupy and Black Lives Matter, social justice movements are beginning to make room for art. “I’m pretty excited that people are starting to see art and culture as part of social movements. To see that it’s all connected,” she says.

When asked what she might turn to next in her art, Stern’s answer is clear: “Institutional racism is so massive. The only way that our society is going to move forward is if we head-on address institutional inequalities.” Stern is taking part in a collaborative project, *Bridge to the*

*Gulf*, that links climate change and poverty with the lived experiences of people in the Gulf states.

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