

In *Our* Voice

Excerpts from Publications



Polygamists Respond to Myths and Stereotypes

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Press Release

Polygamy Must be Decriminalized

In today's politicized environment, polygamy is a highly emotional issue, as any issue going to people's deepest beliefs would tend to be. However, if one were to take the practice out of its emotionally charged context and examine it from a purely reasoned stance, there would be found no cogent argument against its practice by willing adults. Its universal practice in the world today, in one form or another and throughout history, belies the argument that monogamy is an underlying institution of human society.

Laws are made for the purpose of protecting citizens, not regulating religion. Anti polygamy laws are prejudicial. Instead of providing protection, these laws create criminals of law-abiding people who simply practice the principles of their religion. Plural marriage is a deeply held religious belief and will not be abandoned. Polygamy will live on because it is a God given right. History bears this out. If Utah intends to safeguard the interests of its citizens, there must be no more tampering with purely religious rights. Measures now on the statute books curtailing the exercise of religious liberty, must be blotted off.

A few of the most noted opponents of our faith are in the habit of speaking of plural marriage as abuse; and others, echo the words without knowing or caring how incorrectly it is applied. Those who pretend that abuses of one person upon another are inherent in polygamy are speaking to a myth that cannot be substantiated by fact. The fact is that there is no "compelling social interest" in outlawing the practice beyond the feelings of people who are acculturated to the belief in monogamy from their peculiar experiences. We maintain that, divorced of all emotionalism, and strictly from reason, the arguments against polygamy have no case.

The Anti-Bigamy Statute forced people to go underground and live their religion in isolated and remote circumstances. Today, the Attorney Generals of office has assured us they are not prosecuting for adult bigamy. However, recent highly publicized court cases within polygamy that have been prosecuted have had the crime of bigamy attached to them. These cases create fear of government involvement because polygamists think they will go to jail for living their religion. Utah must recognize the religious freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution and provide for those within polygamy the safety to pursue the help they need.

...Polygamy must be decriminalized so that we can have better cooperation between polygamist communities and government agencies in eliminating abuse and other universal social ills that plague us as well as the monogamistic communities.

We as polygamist women do most solemnly and truthfully declare that we are not held in bondage, but that we enjoy the greatest possible freedom,



Decriminalization

What does decriminalization Mean?

Decriminalization would change the verbiage of the current bigamy statute so that it truly reflects the crime of fraud.

Bigamy is historically meant for someone who legally marries another spouse while still married. It is fraud because all parties are not known to each other.

We are not asking for another type of legal marriage. Our relationships are religious commitments. We already have laws covering unmarried—cohabiting couples where family law is concerned. The courts have been dealing for decades with blended families.

—CPAC

Concerning decriminalization...

“Even for those of us who disapprove of polygamy, there is no denying that it is a practice with deep and good-faith religious meaning. The fact that it is used by abusers and pedophiles is no more reason to prohibit polygamy than spousal abuse is reason to prohibit monogamy. Indeed, if the primary purpose of criminalizing polygamy is to prevent the abuse of children, then legalization would be a far better option.

...Stripped of the unsupportable claim that polygamy is inevitably

linked to pedophilia, the criminalization of polygamy comes down to a sectarian definition of sin and a political judgment as to legitimate relationships. What is left is prejudice masquerading as principle and religious advocacy that is little more than religious bigotry.

It is time to guarantee the free exercise of religion in America. It is time to decriminalize polygamy.

—Jonathan Turley
Shapiro Professor of Public Interest Law
at George Washington Law School

“Polygamists are American citizens and human beings, and the anti-polygamy laws are unconstitutional. ...[they] promote seclusion and in an unfortunate and isolated situation where abuse occurs, these laws inhibit the identification and prosecution of perpetrators. ...Decriminalize polygamy; women and children suffering under abuse will feel safe to go to the law for protection.”

—LeAnne Timpson
Administrator, Masada Charter School

“A group of people denying the rights of any other group of people is a violation of the constitution.”

—Mark Shurtleff
Attorney General of the State of Utah

will be mine.

I will, however, have a lot of experience from my parents to help me make the choice that is right for me. Here, children my age are encouraged to learn the history of our world. Next spring, I will be traveling the Mediterranean with my senior class and our high school history teacher. We will tour the land while learning the architectural past and garden structures and the story of the people who inhabit those lands.

As I think about the opportunities and support I have had all of my life, I feel bad for those that have no parents, no home, and no love. Those are the three things that I will always be able to claim. I am grateful to my family for the life I live and hope that I can do the same for my children.

-Mary, 18



A Lifestyle of My Choosing

“Freedom is not merely the opportunity to do as one pleases; neither is it merely the opportunity to choose between set alternatives. Freedom is, first of all, the chance to formulate the available choices, to argue over them—and then the opportunity to choose.” C. Wright Mills

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. My name is Amanda and I'm thrilled to be here and have a chance to defend my lifestyle. My family hasn't been blessed with the opportunity to

live this sacred principle yet but I'm associated with many friends and other direct family members who are living polygamy. The love and support I receive from these people is incredible and I wouldn't want to be around a different group of people. Being where I am and doing what I believe is one of few choices that has given me so many blessings and opportunities. I only wish I could change the stigma society has about polygamy. I can't see how it's wrong for consenting adults to enter into a very sacred convenient with each other when they're not harming anyone. Polygamy isn't the horror story you might think it is. It's true that the story changes with groups and individuals but I rarely come across what society might call terrible in my community. I've been to many schools, lived in several locations, and had a variety of religions to choose from. I chose the work Joseph Smith Jr. restored in it's entirety because by contrast, everything is brought to your sense, and after all the contrast I had growing up with divorced parents, the Work is the only thing that made sense to me. I see Celestial marriage as a blessing not a burden and although I'm not married yet, it's celestial marriage or bust for me.

Now I can't say that my life is always a bed of roses, find me someone who honestly can, but I know every thorn I come across is an opportunity in disguise. My family and religion helped me see that. You are free to choose what you want in your life and the same applies to me. I choose this lifestyle and no amount of money, promises, or chocolate will change my mind.

-Amanda 18

socially and religiously, that our homes, are happy ones, and we are neither low nor degraded; for the principles of purity, virtue, integrity and loyalty to the government of the United States have been instilled into our minds and hearts since our earliest childhood. We therefore most respectfully request your honorable body to right the wrongs in legislation against polygamy. Honorable, intelligent, and unprejudiced inquiry will reveal the true state of affairs.

Presented by Joyce Steed to the Utah Republican Caucus, Feb. 2005

Letters and Opinions

Polygamy is Not the Problem!

Polygamy itself is not a social problem, regardless of how remote or self contained it may or may not be. If the concern is about people being motivated by lust, then the majority of our nation, regardless of culture or lifestyle, is guilty. For every Brian Mitchell or Stanley Rimer there is a Mark Hacking or Scott Peterson somewhere out there. Untold numbers of crimes in the world have been committed as a result of a “revelation” or a “command from God”. Crimes against women and children are not confined to any one religion, marriage system or culture. What difference does it make whether or not the LDS Church once embraced polygamy? Why do people insist on bringing them into the picture? Polygamy was on the earth long before Mormonism. Many people are in a stir about Warren Jeffs. Well, he does not own polygamy any more than President Hinkley does. Let me say it again, “POLYGAMY IS NOT THE PROBLEM”! Polygamy is no more a danger to society than is monogamy. Every woman should have the right to her choice of husband. The ratio of males to females should have no bearing on the matter. If seven females chose to marry the same man, they should have that right if all parties are in agreement, regardless of the number of eligible single men.

While so many are crying about women marrying into polygamy, please save a tear, as well, for all the women who are forced to live in single loneliness or end up as road kill in the ditches and along the byways of monogamy's great and mighty thoroughfare. As for the children, their chances of a happy and fulfilled life in a polygamous family are multiplied, not divided. I can say that from experience. Any sane person knows that, if you have a sliver in your finger, you take out the sliver; you do not cut off your hand. There are already laws in place to address crimes against women and children whether in polygamy, monogamy, celibacy, or any other lifestyle. There is no reason for Arizona to start hitting its head against the wall as Utah has been doing for over a hundred years now. There are more polygamists in Utah today than ever before in spite of its anti-polygamy laws. Let's keep a cool head and not allow the wild-eyed hate groups and sensational media to run the show.

Letter from Marlyne Hammon to the Arizona Republic, Nov. 9, 2005

More on Victims in Polygamy...

No one denies that victimization sometimes happens within polygamous cultures. The perpetrators are identifiable and their actions match the profile of an abuser. Some crimes are horrific and disheartening and very often when people talk about victims in polygamy they associate the victim with the worst kind of abuse. Naturally our first reaction is to stop the perpetrator and demand punishment. Every good person wants to lend to the solution and stop the abuse.

There is another side to the story! The polygamous people have experienced great difficulty in achieving the “access and awareness” that good communities must have. This is a result of a 150-year history of events and hate policies against them. It is critical for anyone who wants to be a catalyst for genuine progress to have a clear understanding of the road that brought us where we are today. In the past 150 years over 1,100 men and women have served time in prisons in Utah and Arizona with various charges, but the underlying reason was that they were polygamists. When people in our culture speak about these eleven hundred individuals we say Mother or Dad, Grandma or Grandpa. You see, this is acutely personal to us. ...If we want to reach out to the families that are in crisis we must not be afraid to acknowledge the factors that exist to make victims vulnerable. You and I listen to stories of high profile polygamist abuse cases and feel sad and angry at the reports. I would not discredit the need for support and intervention in these cases but my experience was very different. ...The jumping-off point to provide access and awareness to those who

are vulnerable is to stop the victimization and destabilization of families that would otherwise be functioning families; in addition, to send a message that it is inappropriate for States to target investigations and differentially impose penalties on an unpopular minority religion. We must have information disseminated about the necessity of governments acting responsibly towards their citizens and knocking down the laws that sanction or sponsor the hate against individuals who hold beliefs that are not embraced by the larger sector.

While we work to grant protection to victims within polygamous communities, we must be cognizant of the real issues that are inhibiting access and awareness in the culture. Good communities are not made by allowing the marginalization and class distinctions of intolerance, but by granting equal protection. Polygamy must be decriminalized to begin chipping away at the walls that 150 years of bad policy and intolerance have erected.

Joyce Steed—Published in The Spectrum on February 14, 2007



I am worthy of love and respect. I am unafraid to use my mind. I strive for health and peace. I trust my heart. I take pride in the integrity of my spirit. I believe in what is true to me. Trust yourself. Think for yourself. Act for yourself. Speak for yourself. Be yourself.

- Theral, 22

A Choice of My Own

I have lived in a polygamist culture for most of my life. I have made the choice to someday live this Principle and I don't expect you to understand the reasons for this choice. But I do expect you to defend my right to make that choice.

This is a choice so many people have made in the past. And because they have made this choice, they have been alienated. They have been persecuted and prosecuted but their resolve remained. Mankind has always persecuted what they don't understand. Sadly, that has been a natural reaction to anything that challenges the status quo.

But because you are ignorant of something is no reason to want to destroy it. Understanding and reason are two of our greatest tools as human beings. In the heart of every American is written the immortal second sentence of the Declaration of Independence. This promise has been a source of hope and promise for a better life for immigrants from all over the world. But because of our beliefs, we've been denied this promise.

Because of their beliefs, many of our people have been incarcerated and had many of their basic human rights stripped from them – mainly life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. I did not come here today to ask for your permission to live my beliefs. I

shouldn't have to. I came here to defend a principle I hold so dearly. As Thomas Paine once wrote, 'The time of the sunshine patriot and the summer soldier is over. These are the times that try men's souls.'

- Tyler, 19

Polygamists' Youth and Family Rally

I am the 14th child in a large family and I have several moms. My mothers are talented people, working at a variety of careers. Among them I can find the advice that I need. All my mothers love me and work hard to create a family environment that will help us to grow and be happy, productive people.

Throughout my teenage years, I felt the same as any other teenager. My mother drove me crazy. However, in my family I was able to find understanding and support through another mother, a younger one, who connected more with my generation. I could talk openly with her about my problems. She knew the situation because she was in the family and was able to give me the help I needed. Throughout my [troubles] my own mother was able to relax because she was confident the mother I was turning to shared the same value system she did and would help and encourage me to make good choices.

My family loves me and will support me in my process of becoming what I want to be. Today, I am 18 and on the brink of adulthood. I have many avenues available to me. I love school. Last year, I was a junior and the classes I took were world history, trigonometry, physics, graphic design, speech and choir. Now, I want to go to college. Whatever career I pursue or choice I make, the choice

One person's story of abuse is just that. It is an individual story. I cannot heal the hurt, but I refuse to claim the story as my own. Compared to many monogamous children, my childhood was a heaven on earth. The greatest abuse I have suffered in my lifetime is the fear and anxiety brought on by ignorant, hateful people who did not know me but hated me for the thing I cherished most, my family. No number of law officers could have given me the safety and security I felt within my own family and community.

I am guessing that the writer has been unsuccessful in applying for control of some of the Safe Passage grant money. Her article sounds like "sour grapes" to me. She obviously knows too little about the Safety Net Committee to make the kind of judgments she does. I have sat in many of the Safety Net meetings and I can tell you they are not a forum set up to legalize polygamy. Nothing could be further from the truth. We know there are some very wonderful people on the committee and there are others who carry the same spirit as those who used to spit upon us in the streets. One of the greatest accomplishments of the committee is that people are coming together to talk with understanding and some reason, which is unprecedented in our lifetimes.

We are not slaves of our religion or lifestyle. If there are those among us who desire otherwise we say, "Go, and God bless." As American citizens we cannot sit quietly by while the crusaders of hate try to oppress us and deny our rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Now that Rosa Parks has departed the bus, we owe it to our posterity to move forward.

Marlyne Hammon—Published in The Spectrum on October 20, 2006.

Polygamous Youth Speak in Defense of Lifestyle

**Salt Lake Tribune Polygamy Blog
August 19, 2006**

Be Yourself

I believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous and in doing good to all men. I believe that by living a certain set of principles I can create the person that I want to become. I have traveled to surrounding communities since I was a small child.

I work every day with people of all walks of life. While I enjoy many of my associations with these people, their way of living is not for me. I have had every opportunity to see what their lifestyles have to offer and it isn't what I want.

I have been exposed to both sides of the equation and have made an informed and educated decision. I am making choices to create the character I am pursuing. I like what I see in my home, I like what I see in my community. I claim the privilege of worshipping almighty God according to the dictates of my conscience and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where or what they may. I do claim this privilege. I require this right for me and I require this right for you.

I have permission to be exactly who I am. I have the right to feel what I feel and to believe in the vision that I see. It is OK to think what I think and to dream what I dream, to love everything that I love. I never ever have to deny my true self or pretend to be something I am not.

The Legislature is No Moral Voice of Reason

One has to wonder how people define belief. You can only believe what lawmakers allow? Brent Holloway in his editorial piece, "Laws of this country against polygamy should be obeyed," printed March 8, forgets that for centuries the very issues by which he illustrates his point (slavery and skin color) were legislated (and by his logic, appropriate) in favor of the white man. The Legislature is no moral voice. People have to push at the laws they feel are unjustified whether they are against black people being free or polygamists practicing the mandates of their belief system. The fundamental flaw of Holloway's logic is in the view that we must always conform our conduct to man-made laws in this country. The United States was founded on a revolution that came out of protesting what citizens deemed to be unjust laws. The implications of this are that revolution must always be an option for the citizenry when they are oppressed by bad (in their view) legislation and, therefore, civil disobedience is a legitimate action against bad law. Perhaps this may not be true of other countries, but here in America we revere our revolutionary foundations.

Polly Hammon—Published in The Spectrum on March 18, 2007

Before you Condemn Polygamy, Realize This

Before you ask me to give up my lifestyle, show me that yours works. Show me that a monogamist marriage is sacred, that it works for at least a lifetime. Currently, more than 60% don't. Show me children

who don't fret and worry about "if" and "when" their family will be torn apart. Show me the strength and support families. Show me homes filled with the wisdom of the aged, not institutions littered with the lonely and the heartbroken, or show me hallways of hospitals lined with family and friends to celebrate glad tidings or to share sorrows. Show me places of safety where I can educate my children, not schoolyards of the alienated and the abandoned. Show me children raised in the stability of family not the sterility of daycare. Show me heroes made of sterner stuff than what it takes to dunk a basket or throw a touchdown. Show me the nightly news without a rundown on the latest from a society obsessed with who is cheating on whom or a marriage commitment that is measured in hours.

Show me women who are not yearning after an illusion created by Hollywood—who are not anxious about the natural progression of life, who don't fear that each change or wrinkle is a marker of possible abandonment. Show me a society so happy with its choices and fulfilled from living those choices that they haven't medicated themselves for depression and with addiction. Show me minds honed by principle and hearts enlarged by love. Show me that your society is willing to love more than its own—that children are not referred to as "stepchildren" or "accidents." Show me children who are loved and nurtured from the moment of conception, instead of 40 million choices of murder. Show me a society where motherhood is honored and a woman does not have to do what it takes to be "picked" by a male more concerned with the façade of her face than the

Before you Condemn...cont.

content of her character. Show me a society that does not abandon its daughters to a Singles' Ward with the futile admonition of "Be patient and fill your lives with other things."

Show me a society where religion provides an unalterable standard, and Truth is not for sale or bartered for political expediency—where the words and life of the Savior and other wise men are not just glib recitations but the work of a life eager for the changes and growth wrought by their words upon the soul. Show me a religion that appeals to my intellect and provides the answers to the haunting questions of humanity:

Why am I here?

Where did I come from?

Where am I going?

Show me a society that is willing to allow people the liberties and inalienable rights endowed by our Creator to worship Him at the dictates of our conscience—my conscience sees the works of Fathers Abraham, Jacob, and Moses—rather than a society that commands in the place of our freedoms the Romans' mandate of monogamy. Contrary to the efforts of some individuals today, man does not convert a belief at the sword point of compulsion.

Show me these things so that I may worry less about you, that I may know that you have some of the joy I've known. As for the principles I strive to live by, I love how the living of them invites me to live on a higher plane. If I were to abandon them, how would I greet Mother Sarah or Father Abraham, the Prophet Joseph and countless others? **How can I betray my God?**

Polly Hammon—Published in The Spectrum on March 3, 2005

Don't Criticize, Legalize

After reading The Spectrum's editorial last Sunday and listening to the replies of the Texas legislature to Utah Attorney General Mark Shurtleff's testimony, I must ask the question: Wouldn't it make Shurtleff's job easier if polygamy were decriminalized? He then would be taking heat only for the allegation of not being diligent enough in pursuing criminals and protecting victims, a point he can easily defend. In truth, he is spending countless hours and resources to investigate polygamists.

Huge pressure has been brought to bear in the area of Hildale/Colorado City, as well as against some groups in Salt Lake, to a point that resembles "witch hunt" status. It appears that public sentiment is increasing to "deliver some heads," which leads to short-sighted proposals that undermine the task of pursuing real criminals. Providing access, awareness and remuneration to actual victims loses its focus in these efforts.

If polygamy were decriminalized, it wouldn't be necessary for thousands of people to be committing a crime in Utah by simply maintaining relationships with one another. We can debate whether or not polygamists are committing other crimes (abuse, tax evasion, welfare fraud) at the same rate as the rest of the population, but decriminalization would give the law enforcement establishment a chance to concentrate on real issues.

It would also alleviate some of the burden on the AG's office. Instead of spending time explaining why Utah has a felony level law on it's books being ignored by thousands of it's

I'm not a slave to polygamy

In response to the article, "Polygamy needs federal probe," I cannot in good conscience allow such untruth to stand uncontested. Anyone who knows the story of the 1953 raid, the story of Vera Black, the stories of polygamous families torn apart by political office seekers and self-righteous do-gooders knows that Utah and Arizona were not dragged kicking and screaming into the fray. I was raised in a polygamous family in Colorado City during an era when we were trying to put our lives back together after the devastation of the 1953 raid. We learned to keep our mouths shut in order to protect our families and the homes we loved. Because that was our habit, we have not spoken up in protest when vicious lies have circulated about polygamy. We who have been still in the midst of the storms of accusation and lies are the victims whose voices have not been heard.

The voices that have been heard are from a few people who have suffered abuse in polygamous households, much like many children in monogamous household have suffered. They claim that polygamy did it. Any sane person knows that marriage does not commit the crime. People do. They have become emboldened by our lack of protest. No lie is too bold, such as, a "graveyard for murdered children and a death rate of 50 percent of children." There is hardly a shred of truth in that whole article. Such claims are insane. If it were even remotely true, you know the law would be swarming all over it. Such people are crusaders who would incite a frenzy to destroy the very lives of those whom they claim to be trying to save, the children of polygamy.

citizens, the effort could be spent where there is legitimate need. I think everyone would agree that the demand on the Attorney General's office to charge and adjudicate 40,000 polygamists wouldn't make Utah's streets safer. (Have you ever worried that a polygamist would break into your home? When was the last time someone was mugged by a polygamist? Did any of those funny-dressed people in St. George stores ever offer your child drugs or pornography?) We mustn't allow popular clamor to divert resources from genuine need! It has become popular to proclaim that the polygamous lifestyle fosters abuse and coercion; this simply defies reason. If honest investigation were made into cases of abuse, one would find that real offenses were perpetrated by an individual, not a stereotype. If polygamy were decriminalized, light would shine on a culture that has been pressured into secrecy for more than a century in Utah and Arizona.

Joyce Steed—Published in The Spectrum on June 12, 2005

