

About

by Angela DiGiovanni - Wednesday, March 15, 2017

<http://familiesnotfelons.org/about/>

"Families, Not Felons" became the slogan and chant for the march to the Utah State Capital in opposition of HB99, the House Bill that keeps plurally married men, and now makes their wives, subject to being felons, punishable by up to five years in prison and could increase to 15 years if in conjunction with another crime such as abuse or fraud.

Opposers of the bill say that it is religiously charged and targets a minority group. It would be hard to argue otherwise, as Representative Noel from Kanab, who introduced the bill, is on record saying, "They've hijacked my religion and I actually resent that." He went on, by calling polygamous sects "organized crime" and complained that the public confuses polygamous groups such as the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints with his church and said it "insults and bothers" him, and "They are an apostate group and they are no part of my religion."

In fact, history shows that the practice of polygamy IS part of Representative Noel's religious history and is taught in his modern day religion's canonized Scriptures in D&C 132. Ironically, he is the product of polygamy. Furthermore, so are many of the modern Saints in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints - "his religion". The Latter-day Saints risked and lost their lives after several extermination orders in other States, trekking across America in the brutal winter on foot to find refuge in Utah to live their religion freely. The group that once fought and died for their freedom to live polygamy and escape religious persecution, has now become the persecutors. Ironic.

If any other minority group replaced plural families in this bill, such as African-Americans, Indians, Gays, Muslims, etc., there would be public outrage and this would never fly. I believe that it is because plural families are living in the shadows and the world does not know them. What they don't know, they are either afraid of, or they are subject to believing whatever broad generalizations they receive from the media. And of course, the media will present whatever is dramatic. So, of course, most people think that the sect in Colorado City and Texas, known as the FLDS, specifically lead by Warren Jeffs, which is characterized by abuse and fraud, is a representation of all of polygamy in general. Such is not the case any more than TV Evangelist fraudsters are representations of all of Christianity.

Painting all polygamists with the same broad brush as 'organized criminals' is as absurd as attributing the same charge to all Catholic Priests. Does it happen? Sure. You can find fraud and abuse everywhere, including in monogamous marriages. Should monogamists have trumped up charges, because they are monogamists, if found guilty of abuse or fraud? No? Then why should polygamists?

I recognize that every minority group has had to fight for their rights and liberties under the Constitution of the United States. Plural families will not be exempt from that fight. But they are afraid, and rightfully so. This generation of polygamists live with memories of not being allowed to call their father "Dad" for fear of prosecution, and grandfathers that went to prison for being plurally married. They were children who had rocks thrown at them by their peers for being 'weird', and who were shunned by the outside

world.

But they are likewise so, so tired of the bullying. They are so, so tired of taking it. They are so, so tired of seeing every other minority group get acceptance or tolerance, but for them, things are moving backwards. And they are particularly baffled that the very people that share their history have turned against them when they are only holding to the fundamental beliefs of their common roots. It is the modern-day mainstream church that has moved away from the original teachings of their common Prophet, Joseph Smith, who restored the ancient Israelite practice of plural marriage.

One can only speculate why some of the leaders and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints are so bent on separating themselves from and persecuting the people who have held to the original doctrines of their church, even in the face of finding a way to make friends with the gay community (which they opposed heavily with Prop 8 in California)...

So this movement of "Families, Not Felons" has now become an effort to call out those plural families living in the shadows. The world needs to hear your stories. They need to see all the beautiful, strong women that choose to live this way. They need to see that your normal, every day lives are very similar to their own. They need to hear from you what it feels like to live on the fringes of society and be outcasted and misunderstood. They need a reason to support you. They need voices and faces to make it personal. They won't be moved by the faceless and nameless. The time is now to make history and to create a better world for our children, to live and love freely. Be that city on a hill. Let your light shine. Let us fear not... If we all stand together, we will not stand alone.

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