From Phyllis Schlafly

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Censorship in Shreveport

Censorship is alive and kicking in America. It has reared its ugly head in a courtroom in Shreveport, Louisiana, and those cheering it on are a Planned Parenthood lawyer, ACT-UP's area president, an abortion clinic operator, and ACLU-type activists. But, funny thing, People for the American Way hasn't rushed in its lawyers to defend the books under attack.

The target of this censorship assault is not obscene magazines that portray women abused, tortured and raped; not filthy rock records that glorify drugs, suicide, violence, or killing cops; not child pornography used. by pedophiles to seduce children. What, then, is the material so offensive that a judge is being importuned to ban its use with children?

The books that some want to toss on the bonfire are two abstinence health curricula: Sex Respect and Facing Reality, both published by Project Respect of Golf, Illinois. Written specifically for public schools, they provide straightforward instruction on health, and they scrupulously avoid any reference to God, religion, or religious or moral precepts.

Sex Respect, which has been widely used in middle schools for the last seven years, gives age-appropriate information and reinforces healthy attitudes that lead adolescent teens to assert their right to say No to premarital sex, similar to the "Just say No" training against illegal drugs. Facing Reality, a high school course, teaches students to face the reality of the triple threats of drug use, alcohol, and pre-marital sexual activity.

So what's wrong with that? Isn't it good to teach children to abstain from sex, drugs and alcohol? I guess not -- at least not if you are in the business of selling contraceptives, abortions, health care for venereal diseases, social services to broken families, alcohol, drugs, playboy-style magazines, or entertainment featuring a promiscuous lifestyle. There's too much money to be made out of all of the above, and not much money to be made if teenagers are healthy.

The Shreveport plaintiffs are seeking an injunction to halt the teaching of Project Respect's sexual abstinence curricula in the public schools. The judge heard four days of testimony and is expected to rule any day.

The plaintiffs' argument is that merely promoting abstinence is actually illegally promoting "a religion." They cannot cite any religious language in the textbooks, so they have fabricated their case out of strained inferences of a handful of commonly used words.

For example, their witness Rabbi Michael Matuson told the court that it is impossible for the word "spirit" to be used in other than a religious context. He also objected to the statement in

Sex Respect that "human reproduction has a higher meaning than animal reproduction" on the ground that his dog will go to doggy heaven when it dies.

Dr. William Coulson, a clinical psychologist who testified for Sex Respect, summarized the defense when he said, "The reason Johnny can't tell right from wrong is no one has told him what is right from what is wrong. Project Respect's programs te11 children right from wrong… Abstinence before marriage is the only viable option if our civilization is to continue."

Unlike typical sex education courses which have no data to prove they reduce promiscuity, Project Respect's courses have been evaluated by outside experts and can demonstrate objective progress. One evaluation showed that, before the course, 31 percent strongly agreed with the statement, "The best way for young people to avoid an unwanted. pregnancy is to wait until they are married before having sex."

After the course, 51 percent of the same students strongly agreed with that statement. When combined with those who just "agree," the totals were 66 percent before and 85 percent after.

Ten years ago, the word "abstinence" was virtually unmentionable in public school sex education classes. Five years ago, a grid used in sex ed classes in Florida, listing the advantages and disadvantages of various methods of birth control, warned of the "disadvantage" of abstinence: "warm, loving relationships are not enjoyed."

The secular teaching of abstinence as a healthy lifestyle for unmarried teenagers was pioneered by Project Respect and its director, Kathleen Sullivan. It has spread rapidly throughout the country as parents became aware of the horrendous social, physical, psychological, and emotional consequences of the anything-you-are-comfortable-with-is-OK, contraceptive-based courses that have almost universally been taught to public school teenagers for the last 20 years.

Project Respect's successes in educating America's youngsters about the health risks of premarital sexual activity are what prompted the Shreveport lawsuit to ban Sex Respect and Facing Reality.

The case was brought against one local school district under Louisiana state law. It is clear that those with a financial interest in a promiscuous lifestyle intend to continue challenging abstinence education in state after state.