

# The Blumenfeld Education Letter



"My People Are Destroyed For Lack Of Knowledge" HOSEA 4:6

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The purpose of this newsletter is to provide knowledge for parents and educators who want to save the children of America from the destructive forces that endanger them. Our children in the public schools are at grave risk in 4 ways: academically, spiritually, morally, and physically — and only a well-informed public will be able to reduce these risks.  
"Without vision, the people perish."

## The International Reading Association, Newsweek, NBC and the Federal Trade Commission Gang Up on "Hooked on Phonics"

Anyone who has been listening to the radio during the past five years has become more than aware of the ubiquitous ads for Hooked on Phonics, a reading program manufactured and distributed by Gateway Educational Products Ltd., of Orange, California. According to *Newsweek* of May 20, 1991, the program consists of eight cassette tapes with reading drills set to music, five soft cover workbooks and 380 flashcards. The program sells for about \$200 these days with a 30-day, money-back guarantee.

How good is the program? We have had conflicting views from people we respect. Some think it's great, others think it's not. But what is not debatable is the huge number of people who have bought the program. Why are ordinary people willing to shell out over \$200 for a reading program when their children are in schools that are supposed to be teaching reading free of charge? The reason is obvious: the free, public schools are not doing the job, and so parents have become so alarmed, so desperate, that they are willing to do whatever it takes to make sure their children become literate. They know that without good liter-

acy skills, their children will never make it in the working world.

However, a secondary result of the Hooked on Phonics advertising campaign is that the word "phonics" has gotten so much publicity, that more and more parents are beginning to ask why the public schools no longer stress phonics. This has alarmed the educationists to the point where they decided that Hooked on Phonics had to be discredited. Their first attack came in the *Newsweek* article mentioned above. The initial salvo came from Jean Osborn, associate director of the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois, who said, "As instructional design, this really stinks." She was seconded by Peter Mitchell, executive director of the International Reading Association (IRA). The article ended with this paragraph:

With so much recent publicity about illiteracy and school reading problems, quick fixes like Hooked on Phonics are tempting. Educators say would-be buyers should use such programs the way they might start a liquid diet: with wariness and only under expert supervision.

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Apparently, the blast in *Newsweek* did not have much of an impact on the buying public, since most Americans don't read *Newsweek*, and those who do don't need Hooked on Phonics. Meanwhile, the IRA complained to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) that Gateway was guilty of false advertising, promising parents that their children could learn to read at home with Hooked on Phonics, without the supervision of a professional educator.

The FTC bureaucrats, knowing nothing about the reading war except what the IRA told them, began investigating Gateway. Apparently, the FTC's investigation was "leaked" to NBC where Jane Pauley's "Date-line" show decided to do one of its "exposés" on consumer fraud. The program, aired on Dec. 13, 1994, was indeed devastating to Gateway, because the people who need to learn how to read do watch television, but were now warned that Gateway, in its promotion of Hooked on Phonics, was engaged in false and misleading advertising. It's interesting to note that the NBC program was aired the day before the FTC released its findings. But it can take weeks, if not months, to prepare a television program. Which means that NBC may have been privy to confidential government information conveyed to them either by FTC staff members or the IRA which had made the original complaint.

John Shanahan, Gateway's president, was so taken aback by the NBC-FTC attack that he immediately turned to his lawyers for advice. Since they too knew nothing about the reading war, they advised him to sign an FTC consent order agreeing to remove from Gateway's advertising any claims that could not be backed up by "scientific evidence." It was assumed that once the consent order was signed, Gateway could get back to business.

## The Target Was Phonics

In January 1995, Robert Sweet, president of the National Right to Read Foundation, issued the following statement and summary of the FTC consent order:

In August, 1994 Gateway Educational Products Ltd, creators of Hooked on Phonics, on advice of counsel, signed an FTC consent order agreeing with FTC staff recommendations to remove from their advertising any claims that could not be backed up by "scientific evidence." FTC staff claims that Hooked on Phonics (HOP) claims that it "can teach reading in a home setting without a teacher or tutor."

It would appear on the face of it that this attack on HOP was orchestrated by opponents of phonics, and that if this ruling is allowed to stand that it could be applied to almost any teaching material that cannot be backed up by "experts" who believe that "phonics instruction may not help many people with reading problems who suffer from dyslexia or other disabilities." . . .

According to reports from the FTC the challenge of misleading advertising by Hooked on Phonics came from within the FTC itself. Yet the reference to unnamed "outside experts" who advocate "whole language," the preferred teaching technique of The International Reading Association, The National Education Association, and teachers colleges and universities, leads to a conclusion that the target for this FTC complaint was aimed squarely against the phonics movement in this country. Parents are the most vocal proponents of phonics, and because the schools aren't doing the job, parents are being forced to pay twice to teach their children to read. This ruling, if allowed to stand, would certainly put a chill on the teaching of children at home unless one is a certified, professional teacher.

## THE ANTI PHONICS MOVEMENT

The antagonism of the education industry and its professional associations against teaching intensive, systematic phonics in schools is almost palpable. Hooked on Phonics, because of its comprehensive advertising has become synonymous with phonics in the minds of the public. Whatever improvements may be needed in the product itself, or modifications to the advertising claims, it is clear that many, many children and adults can read today because of this and other products like it. . . . For the FTC to weigh in

on this debate without giving it a full hearing, from proponents, opponents and users does a disservice to the thousands of children and adults that are learning to read with these age old teaching methods.

The attack on HOP, coupled with the NBC dateline exposé is one more attack on the pro-phonics movement in America. The research on phonics is in, and it is unequivocal. Phonics works. Whole language, on the other hand is a disaster. The illiteracy rate in America is clear proof of that.

#### FTC REQUIREMENTS FOR HOP

1. Producers of educational material "must possess adequate substantiation for HOP [place phonics product here] efficacy claims alleged in the complaint, as well as for any claims that any educational program or product will be effective for teaching reading or provides any other educational benefit."

2. "Educational program or product means any program or product that provides instruction in any field of study, including but not limited to any aspect of reading." [Rather sweeping!]

3. "The substantiation level required is competent and reliable evidence, which when appropriate must be competent and reliable scientific evidence." [There are 70 years of research supporting phonics, none supporting whole language!]

4. "Competent and reliable scientific evidence means tests, analyses, research, studies, or other evidence based on the expertise of professionals in the relevant area, that has been conducted and evaluated in an objective manner by persons qualified to do so, using procedures generally accepted in the profession to yield accurate and reliable results." [Name any public school reading program that meets this test.]

Here is what the FTC claims HOP advertisements implied:

1. Will quickly and easily teach those with reading problems or disabilities to read, regardless of the problem, and will enable these users to improve significantly their reading levels and classroom grades.

2. Can teach those with dyslexia, attention deficit disorders, and other learning disabilities to read.

3. Can teach reading in a home setting without a teacher or tutor.

4. Effectively teaches reading comprehension skills.

5. Has helped nearly one million students learn to read at home.

FTC staff claims the following:

1. "Most experts believe that individuals learn-

ing to 'read' must acquire a complex series of skills." [Who are the experts?]

2. "Many experts believe that phonics — learning to sound out letters and letter combinations — is an important step in learning to read, *but that readers must develop word recognition and comprehension skills as well.*" [This defines whole language.]

3. "Phonics instruction may not help many people with reading problems who suffer from dyslexia or other disabilities." [This from the very "experts" who have created a nation of illiterates!]

The deadline for public comment on the consent order was February 17, 1995. According to the FTC:

"The proposed consent order has been placed on the public record for sixty (60) days for reception of comments by interested persons. Comments received during this period will become part of the public record. After sixty (60) days, the Commission will again review the agreement and comments received and will decide whether it should withdraw from the agreement or make final the agreement's proposed order."

#### Bob Sweet comments:

Why would the FTC involve itself in such a fierce debate unless there was some encouragement from the education establishment? Is it proper, or even legal for the FTC to release information to a major television network before its ruling is released to the public? Making sure that advertising is not misleading is one thing, but to place the restrictions implied by the holdings of the FTC ruling on a product (HOP) that is extremely popular with the American people, has a well advertised 30 day money back guarantee, and is helping turn back the tide of illiteracy created by government schools makes no sense. Hooked on Phonics should be applauded not pilloried!

We agree with Bob Sweet that the FTC is being manipulated and used by the educationist "experts" who favor whole language. They have a monopoly on the reading programs in the government schools, and now they want to use the power of government to curtail the sale of phonics programs in the private marketplace. They have succeeded

in causing great financial damage to Gateway, but the reading war is far from over. In fact, this FTC ruling will greatly intensify the battle. For example, here are excerpts from a letter dated Feb. 8, 1995, to the FTC from Michael Farris, president of the Home School Legal Defense Association:

Dear Commissioners,

This organization represents 45,508 families with approximately 125,000 children who are being taught at home by their parents. More than 96% of home school parent-teachers have never been trained as professional educators. The vast majority of home school reading instruction could be correctly labeled as "intensive phonics" in its approach.

Enclosed you will find the latest study of the achievement of home school families. This study demonstrates that indeed home schooling students are being taught reading by using phonics without the "benefit" of trained professionals. . . .

Farris then provides data on reading scores made by home schoolers who took the Iowa Test of Basic Skills in 1994. They achieved national percentile rankings for grades K through 8 as follows: K—99; 1—88; 2—84; 3—75; 4—77; 5—78; 6—75; 7—75; 8—75. Farris continues:

We are deeply concerned about any proposed ruling coming from the above-referenced case. To the extent that such a decision sets a precedent which in anyway is premised on either of the following notions, we strenuously object:

—Phonics alone is an insufficient method of teaching reading in English.

—Reading instruction requires professional instruction.

Both of these assumptions lack any scientific validity. You have proof in your hands that 16,000 students are successfully defying these assumptions. The principle academic failure of the public schools in this country has been the abandonment of phonics for the "whole language" approach. The whole language methodology is nothing more than sophisticated guessing and does not involve true reading. It is appropriate for the reading instruction of the deaf, those learning to read Chinese, and other rare cases, but the vast majority of Americans will learn to read best with phonics.

Please do not enter an order in this case that is either based on these principles or sets any precedent for any other entity other than *Hooked on Phonics*. We are saddened that this organization caved in to the pressure of your staff to agree to a consent decree. Home schoolers report tremendous success in using this program, although it is used by only a tiny fragment of home schoolers. Its normal application in the home schooling community is remedial instruction for children who were previously enrolled in the public schools. Most home schoolers employ a regular phonics curriculum that looks and works much like the kind of materials used by the public schools when American public schools were the envy of the world.

Please do not compound an educational tragedy by siding with the anti-phonics, anti-parent forces in this country. Moreover, the FTC should not interfere with free trade in this nation unless there is clear fraud. If any fraud is involved, the fraud has been perpetrated by those who are responsible for the soaring illiteracy rate in this country.

How can any "experts" claim that they know how to teach reading when the National Assessment of Educational Progress in 1992, concluded that only 24% of fourth grade public school children in America are reading at the level of "proficiency" or better? If the FTC is interested in protecting educational consumers, that glaring failure and not a successful program like *Hooked on Phonics* should be the focus of your efforts.

The overwhelming feeling in the "new Washington" is that the government sides with the insiders too often to deny real people their rights. Action by the FTC which picks on a phonics supplier at the request of those who have perpetuated a vast academic failure may become the newest case study of how government has gone "too far."

Please use common sense and refuse to allow your staff to badger legitimate people into submission to an ill-advised consent order.

The FTC's goal should be to protect consumers. This proposed order protects only the educational establishment and may well be truly harmful to millions of consumers.

We couldn't agree more! Mike Farris is right on target. A letter to the FTC from Betty G. Price of Professional Reading Services, Roanoke, Virginia, states:

Whoa, please, on your complaint against Hooked on Phonics, file #9223021. First of all, have you any

proof that Hooked on Phonics has been detrimental to anyone? Anyone? I seriously doubt it. . . .

You are absolutely wrong when you state that "... phonics instruction may not help many people with reading problems who suffer from dyslexia or other disabilities." This is the only way that we, in therapy, can effect a complete remediation. I have taught over 2,000 individuals to read privately and remediated hundreds in the classroom. You are also wrong when you state that reading cannot be taught in a home setting without teacher or tutor.

Gentlemen, you should check the credentials of whoever is giving you advice because as a specialist, I can assure you that the information is erroneous! A big legal bag may well be opened by this action.

The Orlando *Sentinel* published this editorial on January 17, 1995:

The Federal Trade Commission has bludgeoned Gateway Educational Products, which produces the \$230 "Hooked on Phonics" program, into abandoning its core advertising theme. According to the FTC's political staff — all Clinton appointees — testimonials from "Hooked on Phonics" users are "unsubstantiated claims." Never mind generations of evidence that phonics instruction — largely abandoned in government-run schools in favor of trendy "look-say" and "creative spelling" methods — is an effective method of teaching language skills. . . .

It is one thing to protect Americans from false advertising. But federal officials are taking their Big Brotherism another step in their campaign against the phonics program. The decision by bureaucrats to decide for the whole country whether a particular product or service is worthwhile is a clear infringement upon the individual rights of Americans.

If all the Federal Trade Commission has to do with its time is to harass Americans who refuse to knuckle under to the educracy, then perhaps it ought to be put on the chopping block when the new Congress starts looking at agencies to cut out of the government.

Last but not least is this remarkable letter to Ms. Toby Levin of the FTC by Richard M. Thompson, president of Richmarc Motion Picture Productions, dated Feb. 6, 1995. He writes:

This letter is in response to a recently aired program on NBC's "Dateline" show about Hooked

on Phonics.

As you can see from the letterhead, I am in the motion picture production business; specifically television commercials and network documentaries. We've been in business since 1977. My network clients include "60 Minutes" "48 Hours" "Eye to Eye" "America Tonight" "Street Stories" "CBS Sports" "Day One" "20/20" "Turning Point" and others. Having done this work for 15 years now I have built a reputation within the industry and it is because of that reputation that I do not do work at NBC. A few years ago, I was called to shoot the story about the General Motors exploding truck. I was on the job until I found out what they planned to do and removed myself from it. Clearly what they were planning for the story was staging and unscientific and most of all biased.

It was that predetermined bias that outraged me in the airing of the story about Hooked on Phonics. Being in the advertising industry, I am always skeptical of claims made in ads and generally find that my skepticism is with foundation. I've responded to just a few of these ads. Of the ads I've responded to, two have lived up to their promises. One of them is Hooked on Phonics.

My children are 8 and ten years old. The youngest has been having trouble with reading in spite of the fact that we read together at bedtime. Late in 1994, we invested in the Hooked on Phonics program. It has become a daily event of quality time together that both kids look forward to. Our ten year old daughter has always enjoyed reading but has experienced problems with comprehension. She is working in the part of the Hooked on Phonics program that improves reading comprehension and the results are fantastic.

Jonathan, our 8 year old, is reading better than we could have hoped for. He is taking on whole books and reading them with impressive speed, expression and comprehension—and we are only half way through this course!!! Jonathan has gone from quietly embarrassed about his reading skills to very proud and his teacher has noted a marked improvement since November. . . .

It is my understanding that some sort of ruling is coming from your office in response to the story NBC aired. . . . With my experience, I can look at a show like NBC aired and see that clearly their mission was to do "Gotcha" journalism and would stoop to whatever means necessary. They did things like get derogatory interviews from people who purchased the product on credit and defaulted. Naturally these deadbeats are going to say anything that will get them out of having to pay their obligation. The program does not deliver overnight results. . . .

Don't allow some shoddy journalist, trying to

make a name at others' expense, to prevail in this situation. Hooked On Phonics is one of the few products that delivers more than they promise and in a time when education is at the forefront of parental concern, this is one tool that contributes positively and should be supported to the fullest by all who are concerned about improving education.

By the time you receive this newsletter, the FTC will have either finalized its consent order, revised it, postponed it, or dropped it. Whatever the FTC does, the reading war will go on.

## US to Sign UN Convention On Rights of Children

Hillary Rodham Clinton, in a eulogy for the late UNICEF director James Grant, has said that the U.S. will signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The treaty, which became international law in 1990, has been signed by 176 countries and ratified by 169 of them, thereby making it law in their own countries. The U.S. has been the only major industrial nation to withhold its endorsement.

Grant had set a goal that the remaining 21 countries would come on board by the year 2000. This would make the convention the first in history to be ratified universally. Grant, the crusading American executive director of UNICEF for 15 years, died of cancer on Jan. 28 at the age of 72.

A crowd of 2,500 attended his memorial service Feb. 11th at the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine in New York, including Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and actress Liv Ullman, a UNICEF goodwill ambassador. The U.S. ambassador to the UN, Madeleine Albright, intends to sign the treaty next week, Clinton said. It must then be ratified by the Senate.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes a child's right to education, basic health care, leisure and play. Because

the convention deals with education, adoption and child welfare, which in the U.S. are primarily the responsibility of the states, former Pres. George Bush did not sign it in 1990.

The U.S. will, however, attach some reservations and explanations to its acceptance of the treaty and make sure that it will not interfere with states' rights or the federal criminal justice system, the White House said. (*Boston Globe*, 2/12/95)

### Comment:

No mention of parents rights in the reservations. This is another case in which the First Lady has committed the United States to laws its people do not want. And this time the laws are international in character, diminishing U.S. sovereignty and superceding the U.S. Constitution which already provides everyone in America, including children, the legal protection they need from criminal abuse. This is just one more step on the road to the New World Order which the Clintons and their humanist buddies are obviously in favor of. The new Republican-controlled Senate must reject this convention regardless of the reservations attached to it by the Clintonistas.

In our Newsletter of October 1991 (Number 62) we published a detailed analysis of this UN convention written by a distinguished Australian jurist, Mr. Charles Francis of Melbourne. He cited Articles 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16 as the most dangerous for parents. He wrote:

These Articles will prove a panacea for spoilt brats in the future Western world, will make it impossible for many parents to exercise proper control or discipline over their children, and will tend to place teachers in a far more dominant position in the determination of the destinies of children. . . . Article 12 assures to a child the right to express views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. The purposes behind this Article are not necessarily readily apparent. It would suggest that whenever a parent purports to lay down



the law on any subject within the home—as, for example, the time by which a fourteen-year old daughter is to be home in the evening—there is now, at the very least, a charter for protracted debate. It would also seem, however, that Article 12 was probably included as a preliminary right to enable children to ventilate elsewhere their disagreement with parental rulings. Because Article 12 couples within it an insistence on the right of the child to be heard in judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, it is apparent that the intention of this Article does not simply relate to such matters as the custody of the child in divorce proceedings between parents, which are judicial, not administrative proceedings. Article 12 is also fairly plainly a preliminary right to enable the child to enforce the rights guaranteed by Articles 13-16 in proceedings against the child's parents. . . .

#### Article 13

Article 13 assures to the child the right to freedom of expression, which is declared to include "freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds." In practice, I believe Article 13 will make it impossible for parents to resist exposure of children in schools and elsewhere to material which parents find objectionable on religious, moral or other grounds. . . . No longer will a parent necessarily have the right to withdraw a child from extracurricular classes, such as sex education, if the parent disapproves of the way the subject is taught. The parent who sought to prevent a teacher informing his fourteen-year old son that he should consider adopting a gay life-style would be at risk of being held to be in breach of the U.N. Convention.

#### Article 14

Article 14 declares the "right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion." By the Convention, parents and guardians are afforded only the limited right to direct children in the exercise of this right. . . . As the only parental right mentioned in the Article is the right of parents to direct, it seems implicit that a parent in the future will not be able to require a young child to go to Church or Sunday School if the child does not wish to do so. . . .

Parents may also find that Article 14 can create difficulties for them if they are confronted with a relatively young child who wishes to join some fringe religious sect, or an adolescent who wants to join a satanic cult. The parent would have a right to advise, but not necessarily any right to intervene. . . .

#### Article 15

Article 15 "recognizes" the rights of the child to freedom of association and the right to freedom of peaceful assembly. Such rights could make it difficult for parents to resist associations for their children with persons whom parents find objectionable or whom they consider (perhaps with complete justification) to be a bad influence on their children.

To me these rights . . . are peculiarly inappropriate rights to be given to young children or adolescents. When this Article becomes law, we can look forward to demonstrations in our cities organized by children. . . .

#### Article 16

Article 16 includes protection of the child's right not to be "subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy." The inclusion of the word "arbitrary" may permit children to resist intrusion by parents into anything that children consider to be private to them, including medical treatments, and presumably any intrusion whatever which may occur in the child's bedroom or any other part of a home set aside for use of a child. . . .

Supporters of the Convention will, of course, immediately point to Article 5 as being a safeguard for the rights of parents. . . . Article 5 requires the State party to the Convention to respect the rights of parents "to provide, in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention." It is to be noted, however, that the right "to control" the child is omitted from Article 5, presumably a deliberate omission. . . .

[The Convention] suggests that parental conduct will be subject to external scrutiny. Indeed, it is implicit in the Convention that the signatories to it will police parents within their countries to ensure compliance with the Convention. . . . We can look forward, therefore, to a new bureaucracy which will investigate children's complaints, drag parents in for questioning whenever it thinks it appropriate, and arbitrate on family disputes. . . .

Those parents who already tend to exercise too little control over their children will be provided with a quite adequate excuse for their irresponsibility. They will now say . . . that the State does not permit them to control their children, so that the control and discipline of their children is a matter for the government.

For those responsible parents, who exercise proper control over their children and who endeavor to bring them up as well disciplined citizens with a

sense of duty to the community in which they live, the task in the future will be immeasurably more difficult.

Obviously, the not-so-subtle goal of the UN Convention is to get the children away from the influences of their parents, particularly Christian parents, so that they can be indoctrinated in the pagan, socialistic tenets of the New World Order. Will the UN Convention affect home schooling? The psycho-educators will no doubt claim that the children are being denied much needed socialization, that they are being kept at home against their will or against the compelling, politically correct interests of the community. The UN Convention must be rejected by the U.S. Senate, and in its place a Parents Rights Bill must be passed.

## 18 US Women Awarded Rhodes Scholarships

A record number of US women were named Rhodes scholars for the third straight year, and more women than men received the prestigious scholarships to attend Oxford University. Eighteen women and 14 men will head to Oxford next fall. Among the 32 are three from Massachusetts: Benjamin Jones of Falmouth and Princeton University; Sarah Light of Belmont and Harvard University; and Diana Sabot of Williamstown and Dartmouth University.

Seventeen women were named Rhodes scholars last year and 16 in 1992. The scholarships, created in 1902, were opened to women in 1976. Selection is based on academic achievement, integrity, leadership and athletic prowess. Many of the students named as Rhodes scholars have also given community service. Several volunteered as tutors for inner-city children, one tutored prison inmates and another worked at a

center for sexual assault victims.

Students from 23 schools won the scholarships. Harvard had six winners and Princeton followed with three. The 32 students were chosen from 1,253 applicants. About 60 scholars were chosen from 17 other countries, officials said. The program, administered through Pomona College in Claremont, Calif., was established by the estate of Cecil Rhodes. (*Boston Globe*, 12/12/94)

### Comment:

The builders of the New World Order must cull out from the cream of our youth the future leaders of the kind of world government Cecil Rhodes envisaged. Frank Aydelotte, America Secretary to the Rhodes Trustees, writes in *The American Rhodes Scholarships: A Review of the First Forty Years* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1946):

Rhodes saw . . . that the central problem of the modern world is peace, and that peace can be obtained only by providing some means of securing justice between nations without resort to war. He saw that that unrestricted national rivalry with all its machinery of armies and tariffs, would destroy civilization unless it were controlled by some international authority strong enough to substitute for international anarchy the reign of law and order and justice.

Rhodes Scholars in all walks of life have shown a lively concern with this problem. . . . They have taken a prominent part in the work of such organizations as the Council on Foreign Relations, the National Policy Committee, the League of Nations Association, Union Now, the United Nations Association, the Commission for the Study of the Organization of Peace, the Universities Committee on Post-War International Problems, the Institute of Pacific Relations, the World Peace Foundation, and the research groups attached to the State Department. . . .

In such ways are Rhodes Scholars doing their part to realize in some form the dream of Rhodes for a peaceful and orderly world.

It should be noted that all of the organizations mentioned by Aydelotte are or were in the vanguard of the movement for the New World Order.