

NOSHA NEWS

Newsletter of the New Orleans Secular Humanist Association
Winter 2005

New Orleans Secular Humanist Association

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NATIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Council for Secular Humanism
American Humanist Association
Atheist Alliance International
American Atheists, Inc.

MEETINGS

1st & 3rd Sundays
1:30 p.m.
Smith Branch Library
6301 Canal Blvd.
New Orleans

AMERICAN ATHEISTS PRESIDENT VISITS NOSHA

On the weekend of January 8-9, NOSHA was honored by a visit from the President of American Atheists, Ellen Johnson, and her colleague, Conrad Goerringer, Senior Staff Writer for *American Atheists Magazine*. Johnson's visit to our community and around the country is a call to action not only to atheists, but to freethinkers of every ilk—a call to action to have our voices



heard. It's time to "come out of the closet" and be heard as a voting block as other minority groups have done in recent years.

Harry Greenberger, NOSHA president, hosted a potluck dinner at his

home on the evening of January 8. In the photo above, Harry (right) has presented our visitors with some New Orleans gifts. The party was one of the best-attended social events NOSHA has sponsored.

At NOSHA's regular Sunday meeting on January 9, Johnson addressed more than 65 people. Using rare archival video footage, she explored the legacy of Madalyn Murray O'Hair (founder of American Atheists) and how her ideas continue to impact current social policy issues such as the faith-based initiative and First Amendment disputes over prayer and religion in the public square. Johnson is pictured above as she addressed a rapt audience. (A special thanks to Robert and Roberta Carrow Jackson and The Philomusia Concern of Covington for the photograph.)



Johnson's talk was followed by a lively discussion with many audience members voicing their concerns and apprehensions regarding the potential reactions of the general populace to a more public face of freethinkers. More discussion followed in the next several days on NOSHA's on-line discussion group. That exchange touched on the message of Johnson's talk, and voiced some of the concerns our members have. (See excerpts from the on-line exchange on the following page.)

NOSHA DISCUSSES VISIT FROM AMERICAN ATHEISTS PRESIDENT

(To sign up for the NOSHA on-line discussion group, you may contact the NOSHA webmaster, Dave Schultz, at dave.schultz@nicholls.edu.)

TR: We had more than 60 people at our meeting today to hear Ellen Johnson, president of American Atheists. She gave an excellent introduction to the life and accomplishments of Madalyn Murray O’Hair.

Ellen ended her presentation with a call to action; a call to join her organization in leading the effort to protect our rights, as atheists, humanists, and freethinkers of every color and stripe. If you were fortunate to be there, you saw both the intelligence and the passion Ellen brings to our cause.

If O’Hair blazed the trail for us, Ellen Johnson is paving and widening the road. She has already established herself as the articulate and rational guest commendator of choice when TV and radio broadcasters seek the non-religious point of view. Since becoming the leader of American Atheists, Ellen organized a rally in Washington that received extended coverage on cable news network, and spearheaded the creation of a political action committee to let our elected representatives know we expect a place at the table.

JO: I have been involved with the political scene in Louisiana for over 20 years. I don’t think any candidate would survive in that arena if he/she thought like we do. We are talking about the most backward state in the union. Even Mississippi bypassed us nearly a decade ago and they still try to ban books in their libraries.

Ellen heads an organization of only 2200 members. When I offered the suggestion to start in the colleges where most major political changes were first created, she objected to it on the basis of lack of time and money. Per-haps we could institute an incursion into the college scene with some secular wisdom.

TR: I think Ellen’s response to your and several other suggestions was totally pragmatic. As you note, American Atheists is not a huge organization. Resources (both people and money) are limited. Rather than launch new chapters, I think American Atheists is working hard to create partnerships with existing organizations. The Godless Americans March on Washington and the Godless Americans Political Action Committee are examples of that effort. Clearly, Ellen is trying to get more members signed up so that the organization can do the things suggested.

I do agree that we should support student organizations. LSU has a freethinker group, and some of their members were in attendance on Sunday. I don’t know of a similar group at any other local school. How would we do about starting and supporting such groups?

Finally, as was also discussed Sunday, there is definitely a negative reaction in the general population of the U.S. to the word “atheist.” The cure for this is to simply use the word as much as possible and put a human face on it. Every time I tell someone who knows me that I am an atheist, I am hopeful it helps one more person realize that we are not monsters. Atheists are moral, kind and patriotic. I have no doubt that the first openly atheist candidate for public office in our city/parish/state will get trounced. But hopefully in time, the

atheist label will not automatically disqualify from election. I think that is the gist of Ellen’s suggestion: we need to come out of the closet and run for public office, the sooner the better. Recall that until relatively recently no Catholic could get elected President.

CK: I think the best thing to do is bring together as many “like-minded” people as possible of all ages whether we are secular humanists, atheists, freethinkers, non-believers, agnostics, ethical culturists, or whatever we call ourselves.

As more and more people realize we are NOT alone, more will agree to come out to gatherings where we can forge social alliances and bond intellectually as a community. And the more of us who come “out”, the more likely we are to be seen as a credible force to bring about cultural and societal change.

One problem with “non-joiners” (as our group admitted at Ellen’s presentation) is that we’ve become more isolated because people like us haven’t had a regular place to go every week where we feel accepted, and as a result are more likely to feel alone.

MM: C makes good points. One of the best parts of AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] and other 12-step groups is listening to other people’s stories, and realizing you are not alone. Same with gay, lesbian, transgender and bisexual groups.

I think it is instructive that openly gay persons can be elected, and ex-drunks can even be president. Before the recent Lawrence decision (making anti-sodomy laws un-constitutional) it is important to note the last previous time SCOTUS had looked at the issue, one justice said he didn’t know any gay people. All of his law clerks at that time were gay, but closeted. If they had come out, the decision would very likely have gone the other way.

We are where gays were before Stonewall. Look to gay history, and copy it if atheists are ever to get any respect. Today, many politicians worry about the gay vote (in certain areas), but nobody worries about the atheist vote.

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OF INTEREST TO HUMANISTS . . .

DETROIT—An argument over God’s existence recently led to the murder of a Detroit-area non-believer. The shooter, a 49-year-old man, told police that the 62-year-old victim told him just before the shooting that there was nothing that could make him believe in God. When the shooter asked the victim how long it would take him to become a believer, the victim answered, “Not until I hear Gabriel blow his horn.” With that, the shooter opened fire. The shooter told police he had done it because the victim was “evil” and “not a believer.” Later the shooter admitted that although he himself believed in God, he admitted that perhaps there isn’t one. One supposes he didn’t hear Gabriel’s trumpet before the victim died.

HARARE, ZIMBABWE—It isn’t enough that this country’s leader is a dictator and has little regard for human rights, now on the eve of national elections Robert Mugabe’s government is prosecuting people who say so. He has prosecuted individuals for calling him “thick-headed”, accusing him of “chasing away tourists” with his actions, and for advocating out loud his removal from office. If Mugabe has the power to prosecute people for their very thoughts, why is he even bothering to hold elections?

TORONTO, ONTARIO—In early December, Canada’s highest court ruled that the government could redefine marriage to include same-sex couples, although religious officials could not be forced to perform unions against their beliefs. Government officials predict the legislation will easily pass in Canada’s parliament in early 2005 making it the third country (after the Netherlands and Belgium) to do so. Similar legislation is also pending in Catholic Spain.

MONTGOMERY, AL—A bill has been introduced in the Alabama legislature which would prohibit the use of public funds for “the purchase of textbooks or library materials that recognize or promote homosexuality as an acceptable lifestyle.” The bill’s sponsor said his motive was to protect children from the “homosexual agenda.” If the bill passes, novels with gay protagonists and college textbooks that suggest homosexuality is natural would have to be removed from library shelves and destroyed. One opponent likened the bill to “Nazi book burning.”

MUSTANG, OK—Enraged over a superintendent’s decision to remove a nativity scene from an elementary school Christmas program, local voters took out their anger by defeating \$11 million dollars worth of bond measures. The money would have paid for repairs to existing buildings and building of a new elementary school. The superintendent explained his actions as following legal opinions that continuing the religious content of the annual program would bring lawsuits regarding church-state separation.

DOVER, PA—This Pennsylvania school district has rejected charges that plans to include references to an alternative to Darwin’s theory of evolution would be illegal. Despite a lawsuit brought against them by the ACLU, the district plans to move forward with reference to “intelligent design” in its biology classes. Lawyers said that no actual teaching of creationism or “intelligent design” will be done, but teachers will be required to read a statement saying that Intelligent Design is an explanation of the origin of life that differs from Darwin’s view, and that if students want to read more about it, they can read a book called *Of Pandas and People* which they can find in their school library.

WASHINGTON, DC—According to outgoing U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft, some federal judges are jeopardizing national security by issuing rulings contra-dicting President Bush’s decisions regarding international treaties and agreements, such as those regarding prisoners being held at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Ashcroft stated, “The danger I see here is that intrusive judicial oversight and second-guessing of presidential determinations in these critical areas can put at risk the very security of our nation in a time of war.” (Too bad the AG doesn’t read the Constitution, or he’d know that Congress has not passed a declaration of war.) Worse than that lapse of constitutional knowledge, though, is Ashcroft’s statement that “Courts are not equipped to execute law. They are not accountable to the people.” (Well, duh! Isn’t that the whole point? It’s called checks and balances, I think.) One can only hope that the new AG knows the Constitution a little better . . . but that’s probably wishful thinking.

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MEMBERS PUBLISHED LETTERS

The following letter by **Charles Barbric** appeared in the *Times-Picayune* on November 4, 2004:

Hmm, let’s see now: Here’s how you win re-election in the United States: First, you take the surplus of the previous administration and turn it into a large deficit.

You allow millions of jobs to be outsourced to foreign countries. You give tax relief to the wealthiest citizens while claiming that this will help small businesses and middle class Americans. You give no importance to the fact that Medicare and Social Security are headed for bankruptcy. Then you launch an unnecessary, expensive, unprovoked attack on a country the size of Oklahoma, halfway around the world, claiming that it’s in the interest of our national security.

You base your decisions on false information, if not outright lies, involve Americans in yet another Vietnam-type quagmire.

All this and much more, while spending most of your time on vacation at your Texas ranch. Aspiring presidents, this is how you win in America. Take note.

The following letter by **J. Michael Malec** appeared in the *Times-Picayune* on November 13, 2004:

Re: “Eight strikes,” Our Opinions, Nov. 8.

I must take exception to your editorial position regarding the legislation sponsored by Rep. Ken Odinet mandating treatment for third- and fourth-time DWI offenders. I testified in support of the bill when it was heard in committee, and here’s why.

A first DWI conviction can be the result of a driver deciding to drive home from a party or bar when he shouldn’t. Punishment is entirely appropriate as a deterrent. The second offense also should earn punishment, and at a higher level.

When a person has a third DWI, they have, by definition, a problem with alcohol. No amount of incarceration will change that, but treatment can. Such persons are proven to be more sick than criminal. They need help. Odinet’s legislation forces them to get it, and contrary to most people’s opinion, forced treatment has been shown to be just as effective as voluntary treatment.

As the story was reported, the problem seems to be with enforcement, not with the law. I agree that after two tries, the third and fourth offenses in the Odinet legislation, imprisonment may be necessary as a public safety measure, but treatment must be continued in jail or prison.

After two failures at treatment, sick or not, he is considered a criminal, and Odinet’s progressive legislation recognizes that. Our courts need to be on a central database to identify persons who have gone beyond our compassion for an addicted person.

Odinet was trying to provide for the best possible long-term solution to a major problem. I agreed with him then, and I still agree.

The following letter by **Robert Carver** appeared in the *Mobile Register* on January 2, 2005:

I was chagrined to read that former Alabama Chief Justice Roy Moore spoke in Opp the other day. I am amazed that anyone wants to listen to a man who I believe is delusional when it comes to understanding the Constitution and respecting the laws of our great nation.

Moore stated that those justices who correctly ruled against his illegal placement of the decalogue monument were “ruling by their own feelings. There is no intention of ruling by law.”

He further stressed his credulity by stating that the atheists protesting his talk “don’t want the truth.” What is obvious is that Moore loves attention and will seek it out by any means possible to feed his massive ego. His rulings regarding religious matters were made by his own feelings, with a total disregard for the constitutional separation between religion and the state.

As a historian, I would gladly recommend some remedial history classes Moore could take to learn that the United States was not founded as a Christian theocracy, but rather as a constitutional republic based on the rule of law. The Founding Fathers made sure that citizens were guaranteed their civil liberties to be protected against the tyranny of the majority.

Moore and those who agree with his revisionist views believe that “might makes right.” They hate the idea of freedom for those who are different or who disagree with their views.

If we do not stand up for our freedom now, Moore and his ilk will continue to push their pernicious “myth-information” about our constitutional rights. Education and making our voices heard are the best way to protect and defend our Constitution.

Freedom of and from religion is worth protecting for our generation and the generations of Americans yet to come. If Moore’s views prevail, then we become what we claim we hate the most about the terrorists who attack us around the world: faith-based fanatics determined to destroy the rights of free people to choose their own beliefs.

We must act now to defend the truth and to defend freedom. Roy Moore and his allies must learn that their lies and distortions will not be tolerated in a free and just nation.

The following letter by **Joe Cook** appeared in the *Times-Picayune* on January 7, 2005 (it should be noted that he wrote in his role as Executive Director of the Louisiana ACLU):

Re: “Abstinence not a religious issue,” Your Opinions, Dec. 25.

The Rev. Benjamin Piovan has misrepresented the position of the American Civil Liberties Union. We actually support “abstinence-plus” programs that teach abstinence plus comprehensive sexuality education free of government-endorsed religious content.

The First Amendment protects the right to receive information and ideas based on science and public health, rather than politics and ideology.

Messages about both abstinence and contraception have proven most effective in delaying sex among young people, lowering the teen pregnancy and abortion rate and in protecting teens from sexually transmitted diseases. Compelling evidence shows that abstinence-only education falls short in Louisiana and elsewhere. Also, we have never endorsed underage drinking or drug use.

The ACLU does, however, champion a strict separation of church and government in keeping with the Founders’ intent. The Governor’s Program on Abstinence has acknowledged using tax dollars to promote religion, and has agreed to stop. But program officials have not kept their promise to uphold the

law, which threatens the religious freedom of everyone, including Father Piovan.

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DID HE SAY THAT?

“Freethought Fragments,” a page-a-day calendar, includes a quotation per page and is offered again for year 2005. Unbeknownst to NOSHA president, **Harry Greenberger**, a page was allocated to him.

An insert from the publisher giving thanks to those who assisted also stated, “Behind every quote is a larger concept, an ideal, and a story of courage, and this site has many more of the inspiring words that have been kept out of the limelight for too long.”

The over 300 quotations were from richly varied sources, including Robert Ingersoll, Carl Sagan, Mark Twain, Homer Simpson, Spinoza, John Lennon, Friedrich Nietzsche and Madalyn Murray O’Hair. The page for August 19 quotes from Harry’s talk at the 2002 Godless Americans March on Washington: **“You know about our Catholic religious bacchanalia—Mardi Gras—followed by the forty days of Lent, when you give up something you enjoy to convince God that you are really sorry for the bad things that you did during Mardi Gras.”**

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NUMBER OF UNCHURCHED IS GROWING

In a recent nationwide survey of more than 10,000 Americans conducted by the Institute for Jewish & Community Research in San Francisco, about one in six answered “none” or “no religion” of described themselves as secular, humanist, ethical-culturalist, agnostic or atheist.

Residents of the West lead the nation in the proportion of those who don’t identify with any religion—24% compared to 14% for the rest of the country, except for New England, with 21%. The president of the institute conducting the study, Gary Tobin, commented that the ranks of the unchurched will continue to grow and will soon outnumber the Baptists.

The study also found that those who were raised without a religion are much more likely to raise their children with no religion as well.

This report echoes similar finding by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life which earlier this year reported a 16% figure of no religious denomination, and The Barna Group with found that atheists and agnostics total 11%.

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AM I BLUE?

Edd Doerr

Yes, clinically, because on November 2 so many millions of my fellow Americans flunked our quadrennial national intelligence test. They voted for fantasy over fact. They voted against their own economic interests, against their own civil liberties, against protecting the environment and moving toward energy independence and keeping good jobs in this country, against this country” and the world” safety and security. They voted for George II” mistaken adventure in Iraq and for sending more of their children to slaughter and be slaughtered.

Yes, I’m blue, in the political/geographical sense that I was one of the more urban, educated, informed, and “secular” voters

who supported and campaigned for John Kerry and John Edwards.

By the time you read this column you will have seen the election analyzed, reanalyzed, picked apart, and despaired over *ad nauseum*. But in a column dedicated to church-state and religious liberty concerns there is still much to be said.

Among the all too few bright spots on November 2 are these virtually unnoticed items: George Bush's own congressional district reelected Chet Edwards, a Democrat who has been an outspoken defender of church-state separation. And South Dakotans voted 53% to 47% to defeat a state constitutional amendment to allow the legislature to provide transportation and food service for "sectarian schools." This continues the trend of voter rejection of attempts to divert public funds to faith-based schools in 26 statewide referenda between 1966 and 2004. Interestingly, South Dakotans defeated this measure most heavily in the counties that voted strongest for Bush, according to a county by county analysis by my colleague Al Menendez.

Then, too, Californians voted to provide \$3 billion for embryonic and other stem cell research.

It is useful to recap the damage that the second Bush administration will surely try to inflect on church-state separation and religious liberty, the subjects on which this column specializes.

The Supreme Court. George II has made it abundantly clear that his two favorite justices are Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas, the most anti-separation duo ever to serve in the Court. With three or four vacancies expected on the Court in the next four years, expect Bush to nominate clones of these two. On page 4 of Ken Foskett's new biography, *Judging Thomas: The Life and Times of Clarence Thomas*, we read: "Senior aides to President George W. Bush, whose father put Thomas on the Court, have consulted Thomas about succeeding William H. Rehnquist as the nation's next chief justice." Now there's a helluva scary thought! Further, as the lower federal courts are traditionally stepping stones on the way to the Supreme Court, we can expect Bush to flood the Senate with nominees well to the right of the moderates nominated by Bill Clinton, many of whom were turned down by Senate Republicans.

The only protection the country has against Bush's remaking the federal courts in his own image is the thin blue line of Senate Democrats, hopefully augmented by a few moderate Republicans, who are not afraid to use their one remaining weapon, the filibuster.

Congress. Bush's congenial Congress can be expected to continue pushing for the privatization of education and social services, a drive intended to compel American taxpayers to support "faith-based" operations exempt from most anti-discrimination rules applicable to public institutions. Bush and his myrmidons are flipping the bird at Ben Franklin's wise dictum in his *Poor Richard's Almanac* exactly 250 years ago: "When a religion is good, I conceive it will support itself; and when it does not support itself, and God does not care to support it, so that its professors are obliged to call for the help of the civil power, 'tis a sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one . . . God helps them that help themselves." Until more Americans wake up, only the courts can halt the worst violations of the spirit and letter of the First Amendment.

Executive Branch. What Bush cannot get done by Congress he tries to do by executive order. One example is his order to allow tax-funded faith-based charities to discriminate in hiring and to promote sectarian religion. Another is his refusal in 2003 and 2004 to deliver \$34 million approved by Congress to the UN Population Fund, despite his own advisers' approval of the grants. Still another is his ideologically and religiously motivated thumbs-down on federally funded embryonic stem cell research. (R.I.P. Christopher Reeve.)

Reproductive Rights. Although *Roe v. Wade* may not be in immediate peril, Congress, state legislatures, and federal and state courts have slowly and in diverse ways gradually eroded reproductive rights. In December 2003 I addressed the Women's National Democratic Club in Washington, a few days after Bush signed into law a congressional ban on so-called "partial-birth" abortions (bans ruled unconstitutional in recent months by federal courts in California, Nebraska, and New York) surrounded by a grinning, exclusively male photo-op cheering section. As I noted to the WNDC audience, if women were proportionally represented in Congress, instead of making up only about 15% such legislation could not pass. November 2 added only five seats for women.

Bush won on November 2 largely because religious fundamentalists—Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish—were harnessed to a political bandwagon and/or rose to great prominence in one of our historic political parties. Led by unscrupulous "pastors" (etymologically, those who herd sheep or other docile creatures), fundamentalist preachers and televangelists put their version of "faith" ahead of science, reason, common sense, and the nation's best interests. More moderate, progressive, and liberal Protestants, Catholics, and Jews resonate to what John Kerry said about religious values that support inclusion, fairness, social justice, peace, and deeds ("faith without works is dead").

In the months and years ahead Humanists and moderate to progressive "people of faith" across the spectrum will need to think, rethink, and strategize to bring our country back on course toward a more egalitarian, free, humane, and progressive path.

(Edd Doerr, is president of Americans for Religious Liberty and immediate past president of the American Humanist Association. The above column was originally prepared for publication elsewhere; it is published here at the request of the author.)

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"I don't see . . . at least from my perspective, how you can be president without a relationship with the Lord."

-- President George W. Bush

"As democracy is perfected, the office of president represents, more and more closely, the inner soul of the people. On some great and glorious day the plain folks of the land will reach their heart's desire at last and the White House will be adorned by a downright moron."

--H.L. Mencken (1880-1956)

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LIGHT ONE CANDLE
Harry Greenberger

In Dr. Peter Anderson's UNO course on Death and Dying, one session is devoted to the topic of an afterlife. For this recent class the invited speakers were a Catholic priest, a Muslim imam, and me (representing secular humanism). The priest and

imam made presentations on the concept of an afterlife as envisioned by their religions, followed by my admonition to the class that there is insufficient evidence for any of the outcomes presented, no matter how closely they adhered to the strictures required for entrance to the "other side." In order to discuss the afterlife promises, we each provided background for the teachings of our respective positions. Interestingly, the imam discounted the scientific theory of evolution and espoused intelligent design creationism as science.

I opened my presentation with the following lines from "The Rubaiyat" of Omar Khayyam:

I sent my Soul through the Invisible,
Some letter of that After-life to spell.
And by and by my Soul return'd to me,
And answer'd "I Myself am Heav'n and Hell."

The students had numerous questions for each of us, but most had never heard from an atheist, who, while advocating living a full, but moral life, had no fear or concern about the eternal consequences of such non-belief. Thus, many were encouraging me to give up my "certainty" in exchange for theirs.

Dr. Anderson requires each student to write a letter to one of the speakers, which he then forwards to us. In his cover letter, Dr. Anderson wrote, "Once again my students rated the guest speakers as the absolute best part of my class this semester." Out of a fairly large class, only three wrote to me and I wanted to share with you parts of their letters.

One student, who had spoken to me after the class, wrote, "Thank you for speaking to our class...and for adding me to the NOSHA Email list. I am enjoying the information and looking forward to attending some meetings..." Another wrote, "I have been thinking about what you were saying about 'live for this life, not an afterlife'. I could not agree with you more--so many people do not take such a realistic approach to living and dying. Just wanted to let you know I really appreciated your honesty. I cannot understand why people get so upset when you say 'I believe there is no God'" And this final letter which justified my appearance before that class: "...thank you because most people we have don't really say how they feel, and you came and told us how you felt and what you stand for and you did not back down. I just want to say thank you. You have changed by life."

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WITH SPECIAL THANKS

NOSHA wishes to thank all its dues-paying members for the past year and hopes that you will continue your interest in our organization and help us to achieve our objectives. Please tell a friend or two and help keep numbers grow.

NOSHA would like to extend our gratitude in particular to two extraordinary benefactors in 2004. They have made special contributions and with those contributions have endorsed not only our goals, but the humanist perspective as well, and encouraged our continued endeavors. A big **THANK YOU** to the **Louis and Virginia Clemente Foundation** and to **Dr. Gene Usdin**.

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"Religion is an insult to human dignity. With or without it you would have good people doing good things and evil people doing evil things. But for good people to do evil things, that takes religion."

-- Steven Weinberg (Nobel prize-winning physicist)

HISTORY OF GOD

*Gods were created in ancient times by prehistoric men,
To explain the many mysteries that existed way back then.
There were gods of fire and gods of rain.
Gods caused death and gods caused pain.
Whenever an unexplained event occurred
Work of the gods was the explanation heard.
In a complex world that seemed cruel and unkind
Gods gave men peace of mind.
And as man's knowledge and sophistication grew
The comfort from belief in gods did too.
An Egyptian pharaoh was one of the first
to see the sun as the source of all life on earth.
So he said, " instead of many gods there would be just one.
That would be Aton god of the sun."
Then Moses leader of the captive Hebrews decreed
One god was all his people would need.
The Hebrew concept of god moved west
Carried by prophets with a religious zest.
Today tho nature's mysteries are solved by man's
knowledge gains
The belief in a mythical god remains.*

Don Boos 2001

(Don Boos is a NOSHA member. Thank you, Don.)

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BARBARA FORREST TO BE HONORED

NOSHA board member and Professor of Philosophy at Southeastern Louisiana University, **Dr. Barbara Forrest**, will receive the 2004 Ben Smith Award on February 26 for her many outstanding efforts to protect intellectual freedom in Louisiana. The award, given annually by the Louisiana ACLU, will be presented at the Annual Ben Smith Dinner to be held at the Fairmont Hotel, February 26, starting at 6:00 PM. Keynote speaker for the evening is the Rev. Barry Lynn, executive director of Americans United for the Separation of Church and State. Tickets are **\$60 and reservations may be made by calling the ACLU at 522-0628.**

As of this writing, at least four NOSHA members are planning to attend. If at least eight of us attend, we may have a table designated to our group for an additional \$100. A member has graciously volunteered to meet that cost. So, if you decide to attend, please let **Harry Greenberger** know and we can make arrangements for the NOSHA table. You can call Harry at **282-5459**. Let's have a good turnout for Barbara.

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Dues for 2005 are due. For only **\$15** you can support NOSHA and receive this newsletter. A membership form is below. Be sure to check the line for "newsletter by mail" if you want a paper version. Otherwise, if you have e-mail, that's how you'll receive it. You may send your dues payment to Connie Gordon, 2509 Giuffrias Ave., Apt. 603, Metairie, LA 70001.

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A BIG THANK YOU!

NOSHA would like to thank all the many people who have helped at events over the last few months, and especially those who have volunteered for NOA-TV tapings and those who have spoken at NOSHA meetings.

NOSHA had two distinguished speakers during the month of November. **David Utter**, director and co-founder of the Juvenile Justice Project in Louisiana spoke at the November 7 meeting, and **Bruce Nolan**, religion page editor for the *Times-Picayune* addressed us on November 21. NOSHA members **Veronica Collins** and **Glen Sandberg** spoke on December 5 and January 23, respectively. Thank you!

At the regular NOSHA meeting time on December 19, the winter solstice was celebrated with appropriate readings, original poetry, good food and merrymaking. Thanks to all who served on that planning committee. It was a fun party.

We were honored on the weekend of January 8-9 to have been visited by **Ellen Johnson** and **Conrad Goerringer** of American Atheists, and we thank them for putting us on their schedule. And thanks to **Lanny Goldfinch**, **Don Bruce**, and **Harry Greenberger** for chauffeuring our guests around.

There have been two NOA-TV tapings in the last few months. On December 4, the ACLU’s **Heather Hall** discussed the shortcomings of the governor’s abstinence only program with **Harry Greenberger**, **Connie Gordon**, and **Michael Malec**. And on January 15, **Joseph Billingsley** of the Gulf South Booksellers Association and **Glen Bryant** with the New Orleans Public Library discussed banned books with Harry, Michael, and **Jack Whorton**. Again, thanks to you all for participating.

And finally, thanks once again to **Sally Mooney** for coordinating food and movies for potluck movie nights, to **Gina Cedotal** for the delicious carrot cake she made for the winter solstice celebration, and to **Polly Tango** for her untiring efforts to help Harry set up and clean up before and after parties and meetings.

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WHERE IS GOD?

*As you take your bible off the shelf,
This is alleged to be god’s word.
Written by Scribes who claimed to have heard
The voice of god, or so they said.
But the voice was only within their head.
When people hear voices others cannot hear,
They’re mentally ill is what we fear.
But when they claim the voice is god.
We view them as holy rather than odd.
So in your search for god, the answer you find,
God exists one place, and that’s in man’s mind.*

Don Boos 2004

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

- February 5 **NO MEETING** – Happy Mardi Gras!
- February 12 Potluck Movie Night at Harry’s House
- February 19 Regular Meeting – speaker Dr. Marc Rosenblum, Asst Prof Political Science, University of New Orleans
- February 26 ACLU Ben Smith Award Dinner honoring Dr. Barbara Forrest, Fairmont Hotel
- March 6 Regular Meeting – program to be announced
- March 19 **DARWIN DAY** – University of New Orleans, meeting room, times, and speakers to be announced
- March 20 Regular Meeting – program to be announced
- April 3 Regular Meeting – program to be announced
- April 17 Regular Meeting – program to be announced

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The **NOSHA book discussion group** continues to meet on regular NOSHA Sundays at noon at the Plantation Coffee House (Canal Blvd. just south of the railroad underpass). We are currently reading *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* by Susan Jacoby. Our next meeting date will be February 19 when we will be discussing chapters 6 and 7. Join us, won’t you?

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The following quotes are from Joseph Campbell (1904-1987), American folklorist and expert on mythology:

“Eternity is not the hereafter . . . this is it. If you don’t get it here, you won’t get it anywhere.”

“Every religion is true one way or another. It is true when understood metaphorically. But when it gets stuck in its own metaphors, interpreting them as facts, then you are in trouble.”

New Orleans Secular Humanist Association (NOSHA) was formed to provide an opportunity for like-minded people to meet and exchange ideas and to promote awareness of secular humanist viewpoints in the community. We are committed to the application of reason and science to the understanding of the universe and to the solving of human problems. We reject efforts to explain the world in supernatural terms and to look outside nature for salvation. We strive to make the public aware of the importance of the separation of church and state, to oppose the teaching of creationism and other religious doctrines in the public schools, and to provide a voice of reason when superstition is presented in the media. We believe in enjoying life here and now, and in cultivating moral excellence. We believe in the fullest realization of the best and noblest we are capable of as human beings.

To become a friend of THE NEW ORLEANS SECULAR HUMANIST ASSOCIATION, complete, clip, and mail in the following form:

Check one: New Member Renewing Member Mailing list only Newsletter by mail

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone and/or e-mail: _____

2005 Annual dues are \$15.00. A renewing member can bring in a new member, two for one -- \$15 for two when one is new. Mail to Connie Gordon, 2509 Giuffrias Ave., Apt. 603, Metairie, LA 70001.

Please send \$4.00 if you are a non-member and would like to receive the newsletter by regular mail.

**NOSHA
5331 Bancroft Dr.
New Orleans, LA 70122**