

# NOSHA NEWS

Newsletter of the New Orleans Secular Humanist Association  
Winter 2006

## New Orleans Secular Humanist Association

330 Julia St., Apt. 233  
New Orleans, LA 70130

(a 501c3 corporation)

<http://nosha.secularhumanism.net>

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## NATIONAL AFFILIATIONS

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

## MEETINGS

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Month, 2:00 pm  
Old Metairie Branch  
Jefferson Parish Library

## N.O. COX CABLE TV

CH 77 "Humanist Perspective"  
Sat. midnight; Sun. noon

CH 78 "Atheist Viewpoint"  
Tues. 10:30 am; 10:30 pm

## NOSHA IS ALIVE AND WELL



The revived and reconstituted NOSHA met for the first time post-Katrina on December 18, 2005 to celebrate the winter solstice and the renewal of friendship and hope. About 30 people came together to celebrate the return of the light at the home of NOSHA board member Lanny Goldfinch. Lanny's home was one of the few in the city of New Orleans to have survived unscathed by the ravages of Katrina and the floodwaters of her aftermath. Thank you, Lanny, for graciously offering your home for our first post-Katrina meeting.

Although a great many of our members have lost homes and businesses and other property, they are slowly returning to the area and are eager to reconnect with their old friends and with NOSHA and the part of their pre-Katrina lives they represent. All our NOSHA friends from the surrounding area, including some from hurricane-ravaged southern Mississippi have also reconnected. We have had to find a new meeting place, but that hasn't deterred us. It is truly great to have NOSHA back together again.

In the days and weeks immediately following Hurricane Katrina, we sent out a plea to our e-mail list to find out where our NOSHA members landed. Although many were in other Louisiana cities and in nearby Mississippi, a great many were spread across the country. A number of people were in various Texas cities—Houston, Dallas, Fort Worth. Some went to other surrounding states, such as Alabama, Tennessee, Arkansas. Still others joined relatives in Atlanta, Washington D.C., and Boston, and upstate New York and Virginia, and NOSHA president Harry Greenberger went to his sister's in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. Welcome back!

## MEMBERS' PUBLISHED LETTERS

(Note from the editor: Due to Hurricane Katrina, the Fall 2005 NOSHA NEWS was not published. Some of the following letters would have been published in that newsletter.)

The following letter, written by **BeBe Roberts Freeman**, appeared in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* on August 6, 2005:

On the same day that six Marines are killed in Iraq, and the day before 14 more Marines are killed in Iraq, George Bush leaves town for yet another 30-day vacation. What is wrong with this president? How can he be so arrogant and insensitive to the suffering caused by his decision to take the country to war?

Of course, none of his relatives are there. Maybe if his twins were in the National Guard, he might think it important enough to forgo his vacation to stay at work to resolve the conflict.

The following letter, written by NOSHA President **Harry Greenberger**, appeared in the *Times-Picayune* on August 8, 2005:

The born-again mindset of our president surfaced again in his defense of “intelligent design” as a scientific explanation of our existence equal in validity to universally accepted evolution through natural selection.

ID is another marketing tool of religious right extremists, replacing their discredited creationism mythology. President Bush continues to expose his scientific illiteracy, confusing religion with science.

In the same meeting with reporters Bush said, “part of education is to expose people to different schools of thought.” Great idea! Let’s introduce classes in atheism.

The following letter, written by **Barbara Forrest**, appeared in the *Baton Rouge Advocate* on January 21, 2006:

For the third time in recent months, syndicated columnist William Rusher has misinformed *Advocate* readers about “intelligent design,” which, I repeat, is creationism.

Not one intelligent design proponent has done any science to support it. Not one of the handful of scientists who have subordinated their integrity to their religious preferences to become intelligent design proponents (none of whom is a practicing evolutionary biologist) uses the “theory” of intelligent design as a practicing scientist.

And how do I know this?

I know because I was one of the expert witnesses in the trial that grew out of the Dover, Pa., School Board’s misuse of its authority by enacting a policy of misinforming children about the science they were in school to learn. It was my job to show the judge (a

conservative Republican appointed by President George W. Bush) exactly what intelligent design is.

It is religion. It is not science. It is a movement carried out in alliance with the Religious Right to undermine the Constitution and public education.

The judge, to his credit, recognized the truth when it was presented to him.

And he did not take kindly to learning that two of the School Board members from Dover whom Rusher defends had lied under oath during their depositions. They may now face perjury charges.

I am a firm believer in the right to free speech, but I am also a firm believer in the truth.

Rusher is getting away with misinforming the public because he does it within the safety of a newspaper column.

To the extent that young people read the newspaper, which we rightly urge them to do, they should not be misled by Rusher’s total disregard for the truth about the science of evolution.

I urge *The Advocate* to replace Rusher with another columnist who knows what he’s talking about and who will educate readers rather than mislead them.

The following letter, written by **Harry Greenberger**, appeared in the *Times-Picayune* on January 22, 2006:

I’d like to know how and when God told Mayor Ray Nagin that he wanted New Orleans to be majority African-American.

Was that before or after he designed the flood that destroyed so many African-American neighborhoods?

\* \* \* \* \*

### DOVER, PA CASE TAKES CREATIONISM OUT OF THE CLASSROOM

On December 20, 2005, U. S. District Judge John E. Jones ruled in *Kitzmiller v. Dover* that intelligent design “is a religious view, a mere re-labeling of creationism and not a scientific theory, and that teaching it in public school science classrooms violates the U. S. Constitution. Pennsylvania ACLU Legal Director Witold Walczak declared the verdict as “truly a victory for the Constitution.

A large part of the ACLU’s case in *Kitzmiller v. Dover* was that “intelligent design” as it was proposed to be taught in Dover schools was religious creationism in disguise. Southeast Louisiana University philosophy professor, Dr. **Barbara Forrest** (and NOSHA board member) gave some of the most compelling testimony in that regard. Her affiliation with NOSHA was even challenged on the stand.

Although the victory is a great one for the Constitutional separation of religion and government, we know the challenge is far from over. But congratulations to you, Barbara, NOSHA is very proud of you.

## PROS AND CONS OF INCLUDING INTELLIGENT DESIGN, CREATION SCIENCE, AND OTHER FORMS OF PSEUDO- SCIENCE IN PUBLIC SCHOOL CURRICULA

**Ron Good\***

During the past decade (1995-2005) a form of pseudo-science known as *intelligent design* has caught the attention of the media, resulting in a misunderstanding among the public that scientists are questioning well-established explanatory theories such as *Darwinian evolution*. The earlier pseudo-science known as *creation science* has morphed into *intelligent design* and both can be traced to religious beliefs that precede Charles Darwin and modern science. Before modern science became established in public school curricula and then, to some extent, in the mind of the public, religious belief/supernatural cause dominated nearly all thinking about our natural environment. The evolution and movement of stars and planets, the origin and evolution of living things, the origin and nature of the building blocks of nature, and all other aspects of our natural world were thought to be directed by one or more supernatural forces. As scientists began to discover nature's laws many religious believers thought their gods were being demoted to less important positions and they fought against scientific explanations of natural phenomena, and in some cases they killed the scoundrels who dared to speak out in favor of reason. These religious believers either could not or would not understand that nature's laws need no supernatural intervention to function properly.

One of the arguments used by some religious believers is the *argument from incredulity*; it seems incredulous or unbelievable that complex objects like eyes and wings and nature's other wonderful things can evolve without an intelligent designer behind them. This argument has taken different forms over the years and currently uses the complexity of the living cell as the object of design that is simply too complicated to have arisen using nature's laws rather than guidance from a supernatural designer. Because most people do not understand biochemistry or scientific evolution explanations very well, they are not in a position to critique the pseudo-science of intelligent design (ID) and many tend to agree that both evolution and ID should be taught in public school science classrooms. The equal treatment doctrine, they argue, is a fairer path to take in a democracy like ours.

So what is the harm in saying that an intelligent designer is or might be behind the structure and function of a living cell or other wonderful objects in the world? Most people who are asked this question cannot see that harm would result and, in fact, they believe that students in public schools should have an opportunity to hear all "reasonable" arguments on issues such as this and then

decide for themselves. After all, is this not the American way?

If we take the ID approach, each science concept or principle that seems complex or difficult or unbelievable to students would be prefaced with a statement by a teacher or a textbook that what follows in the science curriculum may or may not be explainable by scientific methods. It just might be the case that the planets and the stars are directed daily, minute-by-minute by a supernatural force that can never be detected. Gravity waves, after all, have not yet been detected by all of science's expensive machines. Even though Newton's laws seem to work quite well for all the objects that we see in our environment, it might be possible that supernatural forces, directed by a superhuman god, are at work behind the scenes keeping our clockwork universe in good working order. Also, it might be possible that invisible hands push the continents on Earth forming mountains and continually changing the face of our planet. It is even possible that each component of each atom and molecule in the universe is moved by these invisible hands according to quantum theory's laws. To say, as ID does, that there must be a superhuman intelligence behind all wondrous objects and events in nature suggests that scientific explanations are unnecessary or, perhaps, that scientific explanations of our environment are inconsistent with certain religious beliefs. Conflicts between science and religion have existed since Galileo Galilei and Isaac Newton and their contemporaries, about four centuries ago, established science as the best way of understanding our natural world, and these conflicts continue today.

Each time the creationists/scientific creationists/ID proponents have tried to get their pseudo-sciences into public school classrooms they have been exposed for what they are, religionists in scientists' clothing. Even though their words change as they continue their quest, their fundamental purpose stays the same, get their religious beliefs into public schools so students are not convinced by science that nature has no need of a grand, supernatural designer; in other words, invisible hands are not needed behind the scenes to plan and direct our wondrous universe. To allow ID or any other form of pseudo-science to invade the science curriculum would be a perversion of legitimate science education in America or any other country that tries to educate its citizens according to democratic ideas based on the best scientific evidence available. Fortunately, our courts have sided with reason, so far at least.

Perhaps in a current-events class or a philosophy class or a comparative religions class, ID and other forms of pseudo-science could be introduced and analyzed in our public schools. The various court cases in which ID and creation science have been involved might be studied to determine why these pseudo-sciences in particular keep

popping up in the media and school board agendas and legislatures. The history of the creationists might become a legitimate area of study in some areas of the curriculum, but religion and other forms of pseudo-science should not be confused with natural science by allowing it to become a part of the science curriculum in public schools. ID and creation science have no scientific agenda or methods. They merely have the claim that some objects are too complex to have arisen without the helping hand of a supernatural creator. There is no way to test this claim because, by definition, the supernatural is beyond human inspection. If this approach had been taken by Galileo and Newton and Darwin and Einstein and the thousands of other scientists who have contributed to the growing knowledge base of our world, we would have made no progress in science during the past four centuries.

The National Academy of Sciences (NAS), The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), The National Association of Biology Teachers (NABT), The National Science Teachers' Association (NSTA), and all other legitimate science and education organizations understand that scientific creationism and intelligent design are simply ruses by some religionists to inject religious belief into public school curricula and into the minds of citizens. Through politics and persuasion, not science, the creationists hope to influence people into accepting their claims, much as many organized religions try to convince people that their brand of religious practice is the one to follow. The popular media love a good story and they provide pseudo-sciences like creation science and ID with a platform on which they can preach their belief systems. With an American President in their corner, the ID proponents will likely find it easy to get the kind of media attention they need to further their agenda.

\* The author is Professor of Science Education Emeritus at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge and from 1968 to 1987 he served in a similar position at Florida State University in Tallahassee. He is a former editor of the *Journal of Research in Science Teaching* and a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. His most recent book is *Scientific and Religious Habits of Mind*, Lang, 2005. Professor Good was a speaker at the New Orleans second Darwin Day celebration in February 2001.

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**Harry Greenberger is working on an article about the experiences of secular people related to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath throughout the Gulf south. If you have any stories involving yourself or others with whom you have had contact in the past several months, which might be unique from a secular perspective, please contact Harry. E-mail: [hpgreenx@yahoo.com](mailto:hpgreenx@yahoo.com) or snail mail: 330 Julia St., Apt. 233, New Orleans, LA 70130.**

## THE SEASON OF LIGHTS

**Timothy Ruppert**

*(The following was written on December 24, 2005 and posted on the web. Thanks, Tim.)*

It's Christmas Eve, the day before the day chosen to remember the birth of a baby.

It's popular to think of Christmas as being the "reason for the season," but as anyone who knows their history and theology knows, the winter celebration is about more than Jesus.

It is the season of lights.

The deepest, darkest day of winter, the Winter Solstice, has always been an important day for humans. That's when the New Year used to begin. That's when the days would begin to grow longer, and the promised return of spring became real. It's unfortunate that over the centuries the calendar has been adjusted, corrected and manipulated so that the New Year no longer falls on Winter Solstice on the modern calendar by four days.

And we cannot overlook Hanukkah, another religious tradition that recognizes the despair of darkness, and the hope of light.

It is no accident that all of these things come at this time of year. This is the season of lights, a time when all of us can celebrate the changing of the season, the elongation of days, and the return of light. With the New Year comes new opportunity and hope.

New Orleanians are experiencing this in a very special way this year. Having had our city ravaged by Hurricane Katrina, we are more than ready for a new beginning. We're ready to close out 2005, a year that will reside in the history of catastrophe next to 1965 and 1927.

We're looking for any sign of help, any indication that this winter will end soon, and that our city will again bloom.

The darkness is inescapable. Whole areas of the city, neighborhoods and boulevards that used to be lit up with life are now dark. Even the street lamps are off. Even the porch lights are extinguished.

To celebrate this season of lights, some of us have put up the traditional holiday decorations. In the part of the city where I now reside, the "sliver by the river," there are homes and businesses with bright and colorful Christmas lights. And why not? We need the light. We crave the light.

I continue to cling to the belief that the light is coming. I have hope this season of lights will be the threshold to better things, the birth of a New Year that will bring a new New Orleans.

Happy Holidays to all.

*(This and others of Tim's essays and opinion pieces may be found at <http://timsnamelessblog.blogspot.com>.)*

## SOCIETIES WORSE OFF 'WHEN THEY HAVE GOD ON THEIR SIDE'

Ruth Gledhill

(The following article appeared in *The Times* of London on September 27, 2005. Ruth Gledhill is the *Times* Religion Correspondent.)

Religious belief can cause damage to a society, contributing towards high murder rates, abortion, sexual promiscuity and suicide, according to research published today.

According to the study, belief in and worship of God are not only unnecessary for a healthy society but may actually contribute to social problems.

The study counters the view of believers that religion is necessary to provide the moral and ethical foundations of a healthy society.

It compares the social performance of relatively secular countries, such as Britain, with the US, where the majority believes in a creator rather than the theory of evolution. Many conservative evangelicals in the US consider Darwinism to be a social evil, believing that it inspires atheism and amorality.

Many liberal Christians and believers of other faiths hold that religious belief is socially beneficial, believing that it helps to lower rates of violent crime, murder, suicide, sexual promiscuity and abortion. The benefits of religious belief to a society have been described as its "spiritual capital." But the study claims that the devotion of many in the US may actually contribute to its ills.

The paper, published in the *Journal of Religion and Society*, a US academic journal, reports: "Many Americans agree that their churchgoing nation is an exceptional, God-blessed, shining city on the hill that stands as an impressive example for an increasingly skeptical world.

"In general, higher rates of belief in and worship of a creator correlate with higher rates of homicide, juvenile and early adult mortality, STD infection rates, teen pregnancy and abortion in the prosperous democracies.

"The United States is almost always the most dysfunctional of the developing democracies, sometimes spectacularly so."

Gregory Paul, the author of the study and a social scientist, used data from the International Social Survey Programme, Gallup and other research bodies to reach his conclusions.

He compared social indicators such as murder rates, abortion, suicide and teenage pregnancy.

The study concluded that the US was the world's only prosperous democracy where murder rates were still high, and that the least devout nations were the least dysfunctional. Mr. Paul said that rates of gonorrhoea in

adolescents in the US were up to 300 times higher than in less devout democratic countries. The US also suffered from "uniquely high" adolescent and adult syphilis infection rates, and adolescent abortion rates, the study suggested.

Mr. Paul said: "The study shows that England, despite the social ills it has, is actually performing a good deal better than the USA in most indicators, even though it is now a much less religious nation than America."

He said that the disparity was even greater when the US was compared with other countries, including France, Japan and the Scandinavian countries. These nations had been the most successful in reducing murder rates, early mortality, sexually transmitted diseases and abortion, he added.

He said that most Western nations would become more religious only if the theory of evolution could be overturned and the existence of God scientifically proven. Likewise, the theory of evolution would not enjoy majority support in the US unless there was a marked decline in religious belief, Mr. Paul said.

"The non-religious, proevolution democracies contradict the dictum that a society cannot enjoy good conditions unless most citizens ardently believe in a moral creator.

"The widely held fear that a godless citizenry must experience societal disaster is therefore refuted."

(Thanks to NOSHA member **Tom Stine** for forwarding this article to us.)

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"Believing there is no God gives me more room for belief in family, people, love, truth, beauty, sex, Jell-O and all the other things I can prove and that make this life the best life I will ever have."

-- PENN JILLETTE, the vocal half of the comedy-magic duo Penn & Teller, speaking on National Public Radio's weekly series "This I Believe"

"Man is kind enough when he is not excited by religion."

-- MARK TWAIN, from "A Horse's Tale"

"Science can destroy religion by ignoring it as well as by disproving its tenets. No one ever demonstrated, as far as I am aware, the non-existence of Zeus or Thor—but they have few followers today."

-- ARTHUR C. CLARKE, science fiction author

"Imagine the people who believe such things and who are not ashamed to ignore, totally, all the patient findings of thinking minds through all the centuries since the Bible was written. And it is these ignorant people, the most uneducated, the most unimaginative, the most unthinking among us, who would make themselves the guides and leaders of us all; who would force their feeble and childish beliefs on us; who would invade our schools and libraries and homes."

--ISAAC ASIMOV, science fiction writer

"Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprise."

-- JAMES MADISON, 4<sup>th</sup> President of the United States

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**SPECIAL THANKS**

NOSHA would like to express our grateful appreciation to those of you who made special monetary contributions in the last few weeks. When a call went out for dues payments, several of you sent considerably larger contributions.

We also received notes and contributions from several former NOSHA members who have moved out of state over the last several years, but who remain interested and supportive. Thank you.

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**NOSHA BOARD MEMBERS REELECTED**

At the January 21, 2006, NOSHA meeting, all 5 board members whose terms expired were reelected, and one new member was added to fill a vacant slot. Charlotte Klasson will join previously elected board members. Via an e-mail election afterward, all officers were reelected. Board members and officers are listed on the masthead of this newsletter.

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**THANKS TO NYC ATHEISTS**

In the weeks following H. Katrina, NOSHA heard from secular groups and individuals from around the country. All wanted to know what they could do to help. When Ken Bronstein, the president of the New York City Atheists learned that NOSHA’s collection of books and videos were lost, he sent a monetary donation to help with reestablishing our library.

Then in mid-January, we learned that Ken Bronstein would be passing through New Orleans on a return trip from the West Coast. Several of us joined Ken for dinner and conversation. He had toured the destruction in the city earlier in the day and went away resolved that secular organizations around the country needed to establish some type of disaster relief effort, too. We enjoyed meeting Ken Bronstein and thank him for his contribution and hopes for our city’s recovery.

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**NOSHA MEETING TIME AND PLACE CHANGES**

Due to the devastation of the Smith Library in New Orleans, NOSHA has had to find a new meeting place. We have found a nice room at the Old Metairie Library in Jefferson Parish, but it is not available on Sundays. Therefore, we have changed our meeting time to Saturdays at 2:00 PM and are only meeting once a month.

The Old Metairie Branch of the Jefferson Parish Library is located at 2350 Metairie Road. From I-10 exit at Bonnabel and go south to where Bonnabel ends at Metairie Road. Turn right on Metairie Road and proceed about ½ mile. The library is on the left with some parking immediately in front of the library. There is additional parking across the street. You may enter the meeting room without going through the library.

The next two NOSHA meeting dates are February 18 and March 18. See you there.

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**DARWIN DAY 2006**

Because of the extensive damage and displacement of faculty at the University of New Orleans, they are unable to host Darwin Day this year. NOSHA will celebrate the birthday of Charles Darwin at our regularly scheduled meeting at **2:00 PM on February 18** at the **Old Metairie Branch** of the Jefferson Parish Public **Library**, 2350 Metairie Road, in Metairie.

There will be two speakers, with topics relevant to the recent topic of intelligent design creationism. Please join us for:

- Steven Darwin:** “Charles Darwin and Intelligent Design”
- Barbara Forrest:** “Slam Dunk for Science and the Constitution: The Dover Intelligent Design Trial”

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**Scene:** Doctor showing an X-ray to his patient.  
**Patient:** TB? My God! Are you sure?  
**Doctor:** Afraid so. But we caught it early.  
**Patient:** So, my prognosis is good.  
**Doctor:** Depends. Are you a creationist?  
**Patient:** Why yes, yes I am. Why do you ask?  
**Doctor:** Because I need to know whether you want me to treat the TB bug as it was before antibiotics...or as the multiple-drug-resistant strain it has since evolved into.  
**Patient:** Evolved?  
**Doctor:** Your choice. If you go with the Noah’s Ark version, I’ll just give you streptomycin.  
**Patient:** Um...what are the newer drugs like?  
**Doctor:** They’re intelligently designed.

The above cartoon captions were copied from “Doodlesbury” by Garry Trudeau as it appeared in the comics on December 18, 2005.

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The 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:**

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

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone and/or e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

**To encourage members and friends to reconnect with NOSHA, we have reduced 2006 annual dues to only \$5.00.** Make checks payable to "NOSHA" and mail to Connie Gordon, 2509 Giuffria Ave., Apt. 603, Metairie, LA 70001.

**Special Incentive from American Atheists:** Dues paying members of NOSHA during January and February of 2006 ONLY can receive a free six-month membership in American Atheists and a six-month subscription to *American Atheist* magazine. If you would like to take advantage of this offer please indicate by checking the box below:

[  ] I would like to become a member of American Atheists

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