

NOSHA NEWS

Newsletter of the New Orleans Secular Humanist Association
Summer 2004

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

HAPPY SOLSTICE!



On Sunday, June 20, about 30 hungry NOSHA members assembled in City Park to celebrate the Summer Solstice. We gathered under the oaks and enjoyed a

potluck picnic with great food, great company, and even better conversation.

Once enough fried chicken, potato salad, pizza, and watermelon had been consumed, about half the group enjoyed a stroll through the park's new Besthoff Sculpture Garden. At right several of us are gathered under the "spider"



sculpture. In spite of the sweltering heat and little shade in the garden, we made it through.

Finally, a few brave stragglers made one final sojourn in celebration of the solstice. Five weary souls rode the new Canal Street streetcar from City Park to its terminus at the river and back again. The Canal Street line was recently reintroduced to the city after a long absence. The cars are quaint and comfortable (air-conditioned) and make parking downtown or in the Quarter unnecessary. Rides are a bargain at \$1.25 each way (exact change required).

If you didn't join us on that Sunday solstice afternoon, or if you haven't joined us for any of our other social activities, maybe you will consider attending our next event. NOSHA isn't all business; we do like to play together now and then. Our next social event will be a potluck movie night on Saturday, July 25 at Harry Greenberger's home at 5331 Bancroft Drive in New Orleans. The movie is "The Mission" starring Robert DiNiro. It should be good; past movie choices have always induced lively discussions afterwards. We would like to get to know more of our members, so consider joining us on the 25th.

EMERGENCE OF THE ISLAMIC CREATIONISTS

(The following review was submitted by a NOSHA member who, out of concern for the topic, asked that it be printed here. It is reprinted exactly as it appeared in the journal *Cladistics* 20 (2004) 215-217. It is reprinted here with permission of the author and the journal.)

Darwinism Refuted. By Harun Yahya [pseudonym]. Goodword Books, New Delhi, 2003. 376 pp., \$9.95 paperback.

The Evolution Deceit. By Harun Yahya [pseudonym]. Ta-Ha Publishers Ltd, Istanbul, 1997. 280 pp., \$13.25 paperback.

“Creationist” probably invokes an image of an American evangelical protestant Christian, but American creationists do not have the corner on the misinformation market. There is a growing movement of creationism that is truly global, and the Abrahamic faiths of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam seem to be leading the way (Branch, 2002). In Turkey, for example, Islamic creationism has gained considerable momentum and Islamic-favored creationism is taught alongside biological evolution, if evolution is taught at all (in the US this is analogous to “equal-time” for Biblical creationism). Indeed, instead of creationists fighting for time in education, Turkish biologists are fighting to have evolution included in secondary school curricula (Koenig, 2001). I am not implying that all Muslims are creationists. The same degree of literalism associated with Biblical interpretations is seen with the Qur’an (Alnoor, 2002).

At the moment, the most popular Islamic creationist is Adnan Oktar, a Turkish author who writes under the pen name Harun Yahya. Two of his recent books, *Darwinism Refuted* and *Evolution Deceit*, are flagrantly anti-evolutionary and implicitly anti-science. By creationist standards, these two books are very slick, with glossy pages, copious illustrations (photo credits are not given), and are accompanied by a well-designed webpage (<http://www.harunyahya.com>) where these books, among others, can be downloaded for free.

Despite the fanfare, Yahya’s message in both books is the same: the process of evolution has not and cannot occur. The concept persists through the concerted efforts of the agenda-driven media and scientific community. *The Evolution Deceit* is peppered with excerpts from the Qur’an and focuses on “exposing” evolution’s scandals (e.g., Piltdown Man) and the apparent materialistic agenda of the evolutionists. *Darwinism Refuted* asserts that it is geared to more *advanced* readers than *The Evolution Deceit*, but neither book is very technical and both rely on a scientifically naive reader. In keeping with the creationist tradition, these books are more about criticizing evolution than supporting creationism. Such a tactic, and most of Yahya’s arguments, are principally taken from Biblical creationists’ sources. Consequently, rebuttals of many of Yahya’s arguments can readily be found in Futuyma (1983) and Godfrey (1984). For this review, I will address Yahya’s most glaring mistakes, omissions, and logical inconsistencies.

Yahya claims that evolution lacks a mechanism, and attempts to dispose of natural selection and mutation as potential agents. As evidence of the non-existence of natural selection, Yahya cites Wynne-Edwards’ (1965) suggestion that animals self-regulate their own populations and there is no competition for food. Wynne-Edwards’ hypothesis of group selection is controversial and may be limited to specific circumstances but if Wynne-Edwards was correct, it only changes the level of

selection from individuals to groups (Sober and Wilson, 1998). Yahya ignores other factors that may influence natural selection, such as predation, fecundity, differences in life-span, and competition for mates or pollinators. Perhaps most damning to Yahya’s assertion is that natural selection can be detected in the wild (e.g., Johannesson et al., 1995).

Mutations are presented as only being harmful because, as Yahya claims, organisms were created perfectly and have remained so. This purely religious perspective is slightly different from the claims of the Biblical literalists, which purport a degradation of perfection soon after creation (<http://www.icr.org/pubs/imp/imp-085.htm>). Because perfection is given without context it is difficult to know what aspect of the organism is being alluded to, but if organisms were created perfectly then one must wonder why so many species have gone extinct. Despite Yahya’s claims that “no useful mutation has been so far observed” (*Darwinism Refuted*, p. 28) there are various examples of beneficial mutations that were inexcusably missed by Yahya, such as those documented by Bull et al. (2000) and Imhof and Schlotterer (2001).

Several chapters in *Darwinism Refuted* are devoted to discussing a lack of evolutionary intermediates in the fossil record, or rejecting specimens that were thought of as candidates. For example, Yahya makes the claim that “the fossil record is quite complete, and it clearly reveals that creatures from the Cambrian Age did not have ancestors” (2003, p. 62). Amazingly, there is no mention of the Ediacara or other Neoproterozoic fossils that may potentially be ancestral to Cambrian species. Yahya claims that some transitions are impossible for ecological or physiological reasons. For example, Yahya claims that the transition to land is impossible because “If amphibian eggs were laid on land, they would immediately dry out, killing the embryo.” This, of course, completely ignores several salamanders (e.g., *Desmognathus aeneus*) and anurans (e.g., *Thoropa lutzi*, all *Eleutherodactylus* spp.) that do this very thing (see Duellman and Trueb, 1986).

A chapter of *Darwinism Refuted* is relegated to the claim that the Second Law of Thermodynamics precludes evolution and the origin of life. Yahya makes the standard mistake of failing to differentiate between open and closed systems, but this argument is also fallacious, because complexity is predicted from evolution not only at the level of phenotype (McShea, 1994), but also at the level of genetic systems (Edelman and Gally, 2001). Yahya employs numerous statistics to support his objection to a natural explanation to the origin of life. The evolution of life may indeed be unlikely but it nonetheless happened (Kluge, 2002). Furthermore, the statistical inference of history may be questioned on the grounds that historical events are unique, and in the case of species they are necessarily unique (Kluge, 2002, 2003).

Yahya transparently misrepresents homology as ‘a tautological argument, advanced on the bases of no other evidence than an apparent physical resemblance’ (2003, p. 228). This, of course, ignores the transformation series concept of character as evidence of species relationships (Hennig, 1966; see also Grant and Kluge, 2004)! As part of his discussion of homology, Yahya declares, “The myth of human-chimp similarity is dead” (2003, p. 239). Yahya compares the similarity in DNA sequences between humans and chimpanzee

(given as 98% to 99%) and shows the similarity of genes, not sequences, between humans and nematodes as 75%, and presents these figures as comparable. Yahya claims that from these figures there is no molecular evidence of common ancestry. Phenetics aside, similarity is a relativistic term that requires at least three points of reference (Kluge, 2003). In the same chapter, Yahya makes the claim that DNA analysis (=phylogeny), does not agree with any evolutionist family tree (2003, p. 238). As evidence, he cites six studies in *Darwinism Refuted* (2003), but none were published after 1986. The argument appears to be that an unresolved “universal” phylogeny is evidence to reject evolution but the logic that led to this conclusion is not presented. What does creationism have to say about resolving relationships? Without knowing how a supernatural being goes about creating, is it possible to construct a hypothesis?

Darwinism Refuted includes a chapter devoted to the newest creationist darling: intelligent design. The proponents of intelligent design argue that apparently irreducible complex systems cannot, or are unlikely to, have evolved because the component parts do not function in isolation. Examples of intelligently designed objects are eyes and ears and, the now ubiquitous example, flagella. The most important book of the intelligent design movement is *Darwin's Black Box* (Behe, 1998; rebuttals can be found in Ussery, 1999 and Pennock, 2001). Another facet of intelligent design is the supposition that information in the form of DNA cannot be generated from natural processes. Yahya uses a number of quotes to suggest that the information content of DNA is not a material-based property, but instead ascribes it mystical qualities.

Earlier, I asserted that Yahya's books are anti-science. Creationists presume to have absolute truth, such that empirical evidence cannot falsify their knowledge claims. Because their knowledge is absolute, there is no encouragement to test and explore areas that would conflict with supposedly known assertions. In other words, there is no pursuit of objective knowledge (*sensu* Popper, 1959) and no need for science. Further, Yahya is a philosophical idealist and sees the world as ‘only a collection of images created to test man’ (1997, p. 232). Ironically, this presents Yahya with an interesting dilemma. If the observable world suggests creation, as he insists throughout his books, and there is a deceiving entity ruling the universe, then creation must be a deception.

Creationists world-wide are becoming increasingly aggressive in their push to introduce their ideas into the public arena and, in too many instances, they have become successful (Scott & Branch, 2003). The lesson for working scientists is that we should not ignore the well-funded and highly motivated creationists. Therefore, responding to creationists is important not just in public debates but also in the primary literature, so those striving for excellence in science education can cite such works. Indeed, Yahya challenges evolutionists to respond to “scientific findings” (2003, p. 11) that supposedly refute evolution, which, according to Yahya, “is nothing but a deceit...based not on science but brainwashing, propaganda, and fraud” (1997, p. 192). The readers and contributors of *Cladistics* should be more than qualified to meet this threat by publicly responding, and I urge them to do so.

Acknowledgments

Glenn Branch of The National Center for Science Education provided numerous resources. I would also like to thank Brian Crother for providing comments on earlier versions.

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HOSPITAL SERVICES FOR THE NON-RELIGIOUS

Harry Greenberger

In the Spring issue of *Secular Humanist Bulletin* Joe Beck writes under the heading "Religious Discrimination Hits Home," about his experience after entering a hospital for emergency admission. (Some of us know Joe Beck as the producer of "The Humanist Perspective" television programs distributed by the Council for Secular Humanism for airing on local public access stations.) Regarding his hospital experience Joe wrote, "While completing the required paperwork in the emergency room, I requested, in writing, to speak with a humanist, nonreligious support counselor, and I indicated that I did not wish to be visited by a religious chaplain." Nonetheless, he later was visited once by a Catholic chaplain and again by a Presbyterian minister. Joe further wrote, "Had I been Jewish, Baptist, or Muslim, he (the chaplain) would have undoubtedly been willing to help locate a fellow member of the cloth, and the hospital would have had the names and telephone numbers readily available."

That article, together with my recent experience as a patient in Memorial (Baptist) Hospital, on which occasion the Living Will form was brought to my room for consideration by a volunteer couple from a local church, encouraged me to examine the policies of our local hospitals regarding provision of requested "counselors."

My letter to seventeen area hospitals included the following paragraph: "For these reasons, we request that you offer a nonreligious consultant to any of your patients who might desire such a visit, to the same extent you now provide clergy to everyone. The name and telephone number of a NOSHA volunteer for that purpose was also provided.

Having received only a couple of responses, a follow-up letter was sent requesting that they notify us whether they will or will not provide this alternative to religious counseling. At the time of this writing, I have received the following responses:

Bywater Hospital. The Medical Staff Coordinator requested additional information, which I supplied. No further contact.

Ochsner Clinic Foundation. Pastor Care Coordinator & Chaplain agreed to add our consultant to their list of spiritual advisors.

St. Charles General Hospital. Patient Advocate will list our volunteer under a "nonreligious" category

Doctor's Hospital. Advised that they call from a list of volunteers who are not all identified as religious.

Tulane University Hospital Clinic. Customer Service Administrator requested additional material and my understanding is that our representative will be added to their list of "consultants."

Methodist Hospital. Director of Pastoral Care will keep our name on file for patients who request nonreligious.

West Jefferson Medical Center. Chair of Pastoral Care Committee will add to their consultant list a category "nonreligious" for us.

As of this writing, the 10 remaining hospitals have not replied.

Without the availability of a secular consultant, it is easy to envisage situations where a seriously ill nonbeliever may have no secular sympathetic visitor or must rely upon his or her

family for advice and support, when in many, if not most, cases our families do not approve of our atheism and will only make those emotional and possibly painful hospital days less bearable. It is not inconceivable that when patient and family see that the



end of life is imminent, a religious family member might pressure the poor infidel into receiving the Lord before it is too late. My attempt to alleviate this problem has been less than successful.

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A NEW HERO

The word was out before the week-long commemoration of President Reagan's life that his son, Ron Reagan, was a nonbeliever. During the many offered prayers everyone else's head was bowed and eyes closed, but Ron could be seen with his head held high and eyes open. His tribute to his father was sincere and heartfelt, including his statement that his father was now "at home" and "free" -- not "in heaven" nor "with God." Subsequent television interviewers were particularly interested in Ron's "political" reference in his farewell to his father which went something like this: My father was a deeply religious person but unlike many politicians he did not wear his faith on his sleeve for political advantage.

Unlike many nonbelievers who are squeamish when it comes to identification as "atheist," Ron Reagan, on the Larry King show, when asked about any political ambitions, replied, "I'm not really cut out to be a politician. You know that I sometimes don't know when to shut up. That could be a drawback. I'm an atheist. So there you go right there. I can't be elected to anything because polls all say that people won't elect an atheist."

Thanks Ron. We owe you!

(Editors note: There are districts in California where even an atheist could get elected. Ron should give it a try.)

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It doesn't matter if there is one atheist or 30 million atheists, we are equal under the law.

Larry Darby, Atheist Law Center

OF INTEREST TO HUMANISTS . . .

BATON ROUGE--The state Senate recently sent a bill to Governor Blanco that will remove the terms "legitimate" and "illegitimate" from state laws dealing with children. Now the legal terms will be "children born of marriage" and "children born out of marriage." Why do any such terms need to be used? Whether the old terms are used or the new, an unwarranted stigma is still implied.

WASHINGTON—According to an article that recently appeared in the *Catholic News Times*, Pope John Paul II not only believes that the world is on the brink of the final confrontation of good and evil, he believes that George W. Bush may, in fact, be the anti-Christ. He believes that Bush's constant references to his deep Christian beliefs and to "evil-doers" as well as his preemptive strike on Iraq are all signs of the anti-Christ as described in the Book of Revelation.

VATICAN CITY—It's too little too late, but the Catholic Church has finally apologized for the inquisition. For 700 years from the 12th to the 19th century, the church tortured, burned and condemned those they saw as heretics, unfaithful, or witches. Among those the inquisition went after was Gallileo who had the audacity to suggest that the earth was not the center of the universe. Mostly, those who were executed simply disagreed with the doctrines of Catholicism.

AUSTIN—Although Unitarian Universalists have for decades presided over marriages, births, and memorials, the Texas Comptroller has decided that a Denison, Texas Unitarian church isn't really a religious organization for tax purposes because it "does not have one system of belief." Over the last few years, the same comptroller has denied tax-exempt status to at least 17 groups. Among them, the aforementioned Unitarian church, the North Texas Church of Freethought, and the Ethical Culture Fellowship in Austin because they "did not mandate belief in a supreme being." Although the tax dollars involved are miniscule, it seems like a blatant mix of church and state to me.

SACRAMENTO—Gov. Schwarzenegger wants to repeal a state law that requires animal shelters to hold stray dogs and cats for up to six days before euthanizing them. That just costs too much money I guess. He proposes a three-day requirement for strays. He's easy on dogs and cats; he proposes immediate death for hamsters, rabbits, birds, snakes, potbellied pigs, and turtles. Most of these animals are highly adoptable after a short holding time, but Arnie must not be an animal lover.

RALEIGH—The North Carolina Supreme Court has ordered a judge in that state to stop using a revised oath missing the phrase "so help you God" and administer the witness oath as spelled out in the state's constitution. He was also ordered to open his court sessions with the bailiff proclaiming "God save the state and this honorable court." One wonders if non-believing or non-Christian witnesses are required to swear on the Bible, too.

WASHINGTON—On the eve of the war in Iraq, Bush administration lawyers spelled out in a memo a rather far-reaching view of the president's power. It suggested that he had a "constitutionally superior position" to Congress and an "inherent authority" to prosecute the war. The memo further maintained that the president as military commander "cannot be

restrained" in any way with regard to interrogation of prisoners of war. We probably would not yet know of this memo had it not been for the atrocities uncovered at Abu Grahیب prison. Constitutional and legal scholars are appalled. Me, too!

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MEMBERS' PUBLISHED LETTERS

The following letter from **Michael Malec** appeared in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* on May 12, 2004:

As I sat in the House Criminal Justice committee meeting last Thursday, I could not believe I was hearing a black legislator (Derrick Shepherd), a black educator (Elliot Willard) and a black criminal court judge (Ben Willard) advocating a bill that would make it easier for police to harass young black males.

In my years of working for the ACLU, one of my most important projects was combating racial profiling. It felt like a slap in the face to hear black leaders supporting House Bill 1626, which would criminalize a clothing style mostly worn by black youth.

I did not testify against the bill because I thought (wrongly) that it would never make it out of committee. My thanks to Chairman Danny Martiny and Rep. Donald Cazayoux for opposing this ridiculous and dangerous legislation.

I ask the members of the Black Caucus, and any other representative who believes in liberty, to kill this bill on the floor to prevent the legal harassment of young whose only crime is dubious taste in fashion.

The following letter from **Kit Senter** appeared in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* on July 6, 2004:

I lived on Citrus Road at the Soniat Canal in 1969. Camille didn't flood the streets. Now in May of this year, police were blocking my exit off Earhart to Clearview during a heavy rain.

The difference between 1969 and 2004 is cement. The rain used to go into the ground, but now it is runoff that has to be pumped out. The "solution" to the problems is more pumps, pipes and rerouting the water with cost estimates of \$50 million to \$60 million.

When are we going to learn? Cement causes flooding. We should be thinking of solutions that call for less cement. Whenever possible, use a type of permeable material, so that the rain can get into the ground.

Instead, we are paving everything in sight. The public school near me has "modernized" and has paved over the entire playground.

Trees absorb a lot of water. We should be planting them everywhere. But we are doing the opposite—cutting them down to pour more cement. Is this urban planning?

The following letter from **Harry Freeman** appeared in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* on July 12, 2004:

Tony Goudeau says he has come to realize that the majority of The Times-Picayune's readers cannot read and comprehend on their own. He goes on to say if they would read they wouldn't "attack the government."

Well, I can read. In Friday's paper I read that 3,000 Louisiana National Guard members are now having to go to Iraq

to risk their lives to help bail the administration out of this mess. I read that five American soldiers were killed and 20 wounded in Iraq. And I read that the Pentagon somehow inadvertently destroyed the Bush National Guard service records that would shed light on the question of whether he is lying about ever showing up to Alabama to do his service.

Mr. Goudeau might be better advised to encourage people *not* to read. Otherwise, more and more people will see the Bush administration for what it is: a lying bunch of incompetent bumblers.

The following letter from **Connie Gordon** appeared in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* on July 14, 2004:

To amend the U.S. Constitution for the sole purpose of defining marriage as the “union of a man and a woman” is an affront to those sage men who founded this nation and wrote that amazing document which has become an example for countless new democracies around the world.

The concept of marriage as the right-wing supporters of the proposed amendment see it is solely a religious one. In this nation, marriage is, and has been since its beginning, a civil union under the law. There is no law requiring the sanction of marriage by any religious body. Proponents of the amendment want to ban same-sex unions because of their own prejudice against homosexuality, a predominantly religious prejudice.

To amend the Constitution for religious reasons is in itself unconstitutional.

Once before this country has had to amend the Constitution to ban the immoral and despicable mistreatment of fellow human beings, when slavery was finally abolished. It took another 100 years before interracial marriage was legal. Let us not set up the need for another amendment 100 years hence so that same-sex unions will be legal across the nation, as they should be now.

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NOSHA MEMBERS ELSEWHERE IN THE PRESS

In the last month, two other NOSHA members have been prominently displayed elsewhere in the press.

The June 2004 *New Orleans Magazine* contained a feature article entitled “The Lyrics of Her Life” on local singer Jeanne d’Avray, known to NOSHA members by her married name **Jeanne Okamoto**. Jeanne, who is currently the “chanteuse” at Andrea’s Restaurant has “been around” (her own words). She survived the Nazi invasion of her native Romania, married three times, and lost her only son in the Vietnam war. After leaving Romania, she entertained her way across Germany and France before coming to the United States. She entertained around the U.S., and finally married her third husband, a Japanese American, in Hawaii. They relocated to the New Orleans area and have loved it here. Unfortunately, “the love of [her] life” passed away in 1990, but Jeanne goes on.

We should all find the chance to go by and hear Jeanne some evening at Andrea’s. Her voice is described as gravelly and well-traveled, “one that resonates somewhere between the range of German sex symbol Marlene Dietrich and whimpering French songbird Edith Piaf.”

The June 27 issue of the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* contained an article “The Night They Raided the Quorum” commemorating the raid 40 years ago of the French Quarter’s Quorum Coffee Shop. The Quorum was in the 1960s “a bohemian gathering place that many viewed as a smoldering ember of social unrest.” It was a gathering place of artists, intellectuals, and civil rights activists. The charges brought against 71 people on that June night in 1964 disturbing the peace, but a vice squad chief alleged that the site was the “scene of Communist propaganda, homosexual parties and integration agitation.”

The founder of the Quorum (who was not present that night) was a 21-year-old radical of his day, our own NOSHA board member **Lanny Goldfinch**. In the article Lanny is described as “a 1960s radical by anyone’s measure.” He was reportedly thrown out of three churches (for asking too many questions) and a meeting of communists (as a suspected police infiltrator). He also “created a minor disturbance at a pro-segregation meeting (for refusing to stand during the playing of ‘Dixie’).” Lanny, as we know is still a bit of a rabble rouser. He recalled in the article, the Quorum was the site of some of the first “teach-ins” to discuss the increasing crisis in Vietnam, and that many of the shop’s clientele would become some of the early “dope-smokers” and counter-culturists.

VOLUNTEERS CORNER

Seven NOSHA members volunteered to take telephone bids at the WYES (Channel 12) Showboat Auction fundraiser on Saturday, May 15. We were acknowledged on air and could be seen on camera several times wearing our NOSHA T-shirts. Thanks to **Harry Greenberger, Gina Cedotal, Jennifer Wooley, Polly Swan, Charlie Bishop, Dave Schultz, and Connie Gordon** for their participation.

NOA-TV TAPING

Since the last newsletter, NOSHA members have participated in three taping sessions for our program on NOA-TV, “The Humanist Factor.”

On May 28, we taped two shows on our founding fathers and religion in early America and one show on defining atheist, agnostic, humanist, etc.

On June 5, we were honored to tape two programs interviewing the visiting **Larry Darby**, founder of the Atheist Law Center in Birmingham, Alabama.

On June 26, three different interviews were taped. **Heather Hall**, Louisiana ACLU Public Education Associate discussed the Spring legislative session and bills relevant to the humanist effort. Our own **Lanny Goldfinch** discussed “A Secular Humanist’s Use of Jesus”. And finally, several members discussed the “Bush Theocracy.”

Thanks to all of the above participants as well as **Harry Greenberger** (always the moderator), **Michael Malec, Joseph Billingsley, Connie Gordon, and Dave Schultz**.

It would be nice to see some additional faces at the next taping. Please let Harry Greenberger know of your willingness to participate. These and other programs are aired only on New Orleans Cox Cable channel 77 at midnight Saturday and noon on Sunday.

OTHER NOSHA DOINGS

Since the last newsletter, there have been only three regular NOSHA meetings, with much partying, socializing, and volunteering, in between.

In addition to the summer solstice picnic described on the front page, a potluck movie night was enjoyed on May 29 at Harry's house. The movie was "Bob Roberts", produced and directed by and starring Tim Robbins in the title role. **The next potluck movie night is scheduled for July 24. The movie is "The Mission" starring Robert DiNiro and Jeremy Irons, winner of the 1986 Cannes Film Festival 's Palm d'Or.**

At the May 2 meeting, several of the participants in the NOSHA book discussion group summarized the first book they had just finished, *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* by Steven Pinker.

NOSHA member **Richard Martin** addressed the May 16 meeting discussing "Controversies of Adaptive Psychology (with special emphasis on mating selection and sexual strategies)."

We were honored on June 6 with a visit by Alabama atheist activist and founder of the **Atheist Law Center** in Birmingham, **Larry Darby**. Larry discussed his experiences with elected officials in Alabama with regard to securing a rainy day alternative location for a rally for reason to counter a religious group's national day of prayer. No official was willing to cooperate with an atheist organization.

At the July 18 meeting, the speaker was Dr. **Tim Mead** of Nicholls State University who discussed "An Absence of Religion, Secular Humanism, and a Celebration of Life." His talk was an overview of secular humanism and the scientific arguments against religion.

Join us at a future meeting or social event. The calendar of scheduled events follows:

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

July 24 – Potluck Movie Night - "The Mission" – at the home of Harry Greenberger, 5331 Bancroft, 6:00 pm – let Sally Mooney know what dish you're bringing at smoone@dcc.edu or 483-9862.

August 1 – regular meeting – we will view three recently aired programs on our NOA-TV show "The Humanist Perspective" followed by discussion of content and ideas for future shows.

August 7 – NOSHA program taping NOA-TV 11:00 am

August 15 – regular meeting – first of a new discussion format "Let's Talk About . . ." the first topic will be "Community Outreach"

September 5 – regular meeting – topic to be announced

September 19 – regular meeting – topic to be announced

October 3 – regular meeting – topic to be announced

October 17 – regular meeting – topic to be announced

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He, who will not reason, is a bigot; he, who cannot, is a fool; and he, who dares not, is a slave.

William Drummond
Scottish writer (1585-1649)

PALE BLUE DOT

Carl Sagan

On June 6, 1990, at Carl Sagan's urging, the Voyager-1 spacecraft's camera was swiveled toward Earth and a photograph was taken from a distance of 3.7 billion miles. The resulting picture was of a brilliant arc of the Milky Way galaxy, with the tiniest, almost invisible pale blue dot in the center. Sagan, in Pale Blue Dot wrote . . .

Look again at the dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilizations, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every "superstar," every "supreme leader," every saint and sinner in the history of our species—on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.

The Earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena. Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors, so that, in glory and triumph, they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot. Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of this pixel on the scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner, how frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to kill one another, how fervent their hatreds. Our posturing, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the Universe, are challenged by this point of pale light.

Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping, cosmic dark. In our obscurity, in all this vastness, there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves. The Earth is the only world known so far to harbor life. There is nowhere else, at least in the near future to which our species could migrate. Visit, yes. Settle, not yet. Like it or not, for the moment the Earth is where we make our stand.

It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another, and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known.

* * * * *

"Avoidable human misery is more often caused not so much by stupidity as by ignorance, particularly our ignorance about ourselves. I worry that, especially as the Millennium edges nearer, pseudoscience and superstition will seem year by year more tempting, the siren song of unreason more sonorous and attractive. Where have we heard it before? Whenever our ethnic or national prejudices are aroused, in time of scarcity, during challenges to national self-esteem or nerve, when we agonize about our diminished cosmic place and purpose, or when fanaticism is bubbling up around us—then, habits of thought from ages past reach for the controls. The candle flame flutters. Its little pool of light trembles. Darkness gathers. The demons begin to stir."

Carl Sagan from *Demon Haunted World*

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: _____

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.

NOTE: The year for which you have last paid membership dues is reflected in the upper right corner of the mailing label.

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