

Newsletter of the  
New Orleans Secular Humanist Association

# NOSHA NEWS

Summer 2012

**New Orleans Secular Humanist Assoc.**

(a 501c3 corporation)

4314 Bancroft Drive  
New Orleans, LA 70122  
[www.nosha.info](http://www.nosha.info)

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**GENERAL MEETING**

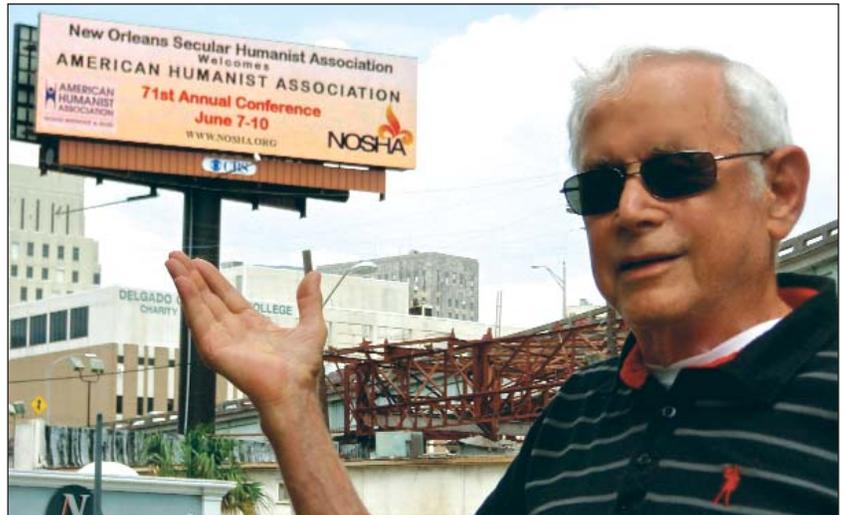
3rd Saturday of the month, 4pm  
Dominion Learning Center  
Audubon Park Zoo

**NOSHA TV**

New Orleans Cox Cable  
**CH 76** "Humanist Perspective"  
Fridays, 8:30am & 8:30pm  
Saturdays, Midnight & Sundays, Noon  
**CH 99** "Atheist Viewpoint"  
Sunday, 3:30pm; Monday, 8:30am;  
Tuesdays, 10:30am & 10:30 pm

## NOSHA Hosts AHA Convention! Over 350 Humanists Come to Town

*"We pulled out the stops for the American Humanist meeting."*



**Harry Greenberger** (above), president of NOSHA, highlights the billboard that NOSHA used to welcome AHA conventioners into town. Over \$4000 was raised by NOSHA members and supporters to make the weekend even more unique... as only New Orleanians can do! (photo by *Marshall Harris*)

Thanks to the tireless efforts of **Harry Greenberger** who put New Orleans on the radar of the board for the **American Humanist Association**, we were overjoyed to be chosen as the host city for their 2012 annual meeting in June.

Dignitaries such as **Gloria Steinem**, **James Randi**, **Ira Flatow** and **Herb Silverman** were but a few of the big names in town for the festivities. *See more about the conference on page 7.*

## Walter Block - October Speaker

**"Should Secular Humanists have supported Ron Paul?"** Professor of Economics at Loyola University and Senior Fellow with the Ludwig von Mises Institute, **Walter Block** poses this question to NOSHA on **October 20**.

Since 1976, he has authored thirteen books and will have copies of his most recent title, *Ron Paul for President in 2012: Yes to Ron Paul and Liberty* on hand to sign.

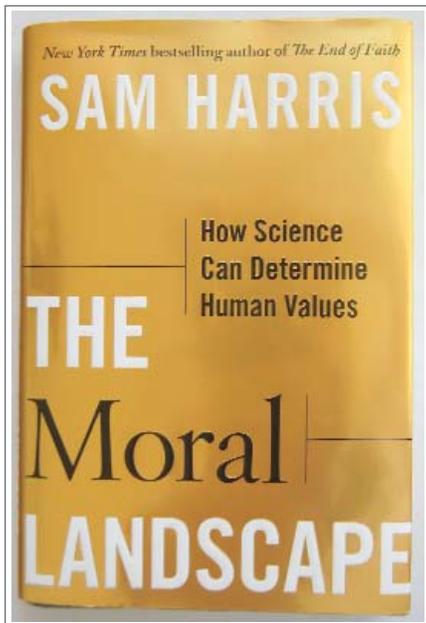


## Summer Book Review:

### *The Moral Landscape* Sam Harris (2011)

Having enjoyed *The End of Faith* (2005) and *Letter to a Christian Nation* (2007), I eagerly awaited the 2010 publication of Sam Harris' *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values*. I've finally been able to give this book the time and attention it deserves, and highly recommend it to anyone interested in secular ethics, even though I find it somewhat incomplete.

In *The Moral Landscape*, Harris attacks the willingness of the scientific establishment to accept the notion that science has little or nothing to say about morality and values, a position perhaps best summarized in Stephen Jay Gould's proposal that science and religion occupy "non-overlapping magisteria." While giving us



much to think about, including descriptions of some interesting ethical conundrums, Harris' reasoning is readable and straightforward. Morality, he asserts, is about the well-being of sentient creatures. Assuming no spiritual realm or eternal soul, well-being must then be about conditions in the

physical world around us, and about the biological realities of the human brain. The important details being aspects of the observable universe, morality must be subject to logic, reason, systemization, and all the experimental testing science can devise. Harris is careful to emphasize that science might not yield one right answer, that there might be many ways to enhance human well-being. But he is also clear that there are many ideas about human well-being that are objectively, scientifically wrong.

For me this was a fascinating read, but not especially eye-opening, as I already agree with the basic premise. The idea of rational and secular ethics is at least as old as Aristotle, even if modern science has steered an odd course around it. I doubt the book will convince anyone

not already in agreement, whether they are religious believers or are scientists who accept the currently prevalent separation of scientific "what" from religious "why." *The Moral Landscape* is only the beginning of a very long argument, not its conclusion.

Perhaps as an anthropologist myself I am a bit biased, but I would strongly encourage Dr. Harris, and the other "New Atheists" as well, to read more thoughtfully about the anthropology of religion, some parts of which they tend to dismiss too lightly. Harris wants very much to blame religion for many social problems, and deservedly so. But "religious" violence is usually an indicator of political and economic problems that can't be solved just by making religion go away.

Contrary to the view of the New Atheists, people rarely come to blows directly over religion. At least where violence is protracted, repetitive, or organized, we must look for mundane causes, usually based in unequal distributions of wealth and power. The quintessential example of this is "The Troubles" in Northern Ireland, a struggle over ethnic identity, political privilege, and economic access, regularly and deliberately mischaracterized as "sectarian strife."

Merely removing religion from the mix would do nothing to address the underlying social problems. Similarly, the perceived problems of "Islamic terrorism" will not be solved without addressing the internal inequalities afflicting many countries dominated by that religion. If we stop our analysis the moment we've identified a "religious" conflict, we are making ourselves pawns of the oppressor.

Any scientific approach to the enhancement of human well-being will have to do a good job of distinguishing root causes from superficial appearances. It's also going to require bringing a lot more than Harris' own neuroscience to the table. As has always been the case, engineering a healthy society overlaps Philosophy, Anthropology, Political Science, and Economics, as well as the sciences of the mind.

*Reviewed by Jim Dugan, NOSHA Board Member and Ph.d. candidate in anthropology at Tulane University.*

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**For more reviews, go to [www.nosha.info](http://www.nosha.info) and click on the "Archive" page to see the other reviews that have appeared on our website and in past newsletters.**

## Freethinker Social Aid & Pleasure Club Joining up with Save Our Cemeteries



Through the efforts of **Rose Mortillaro**, **Dave Thomas** and **Joyce Kisner**, NOSHA's first official volunteering project for our *Freethinker Social Aid & Pleasure Club* was to work with **Save Our Cemeteries** and a crew from **Hands On New Orleans** as part of the seasonal clean up efforts in May.

Volunteers removed graffiti on Voodoo Priestess **Marie Laveau's tomb** which is routinely defaced by tourists who seek Laveau's blessings from beyond the grave, along with the wall vaults in the back of St. Louis 1 cemetery located along Basin Street. The irony of this was not lost on NOSHA's volunteers, but it was still a very successful outing.

"There were tons of tour groups that came through to see the tomb and asked us questions about the work we were doing. I really enjoyed interacting with the visitors and explaining the project," said Mortillaro.

Thomas also felt this was a very positive and worthwhile project which gave our group good visibility.



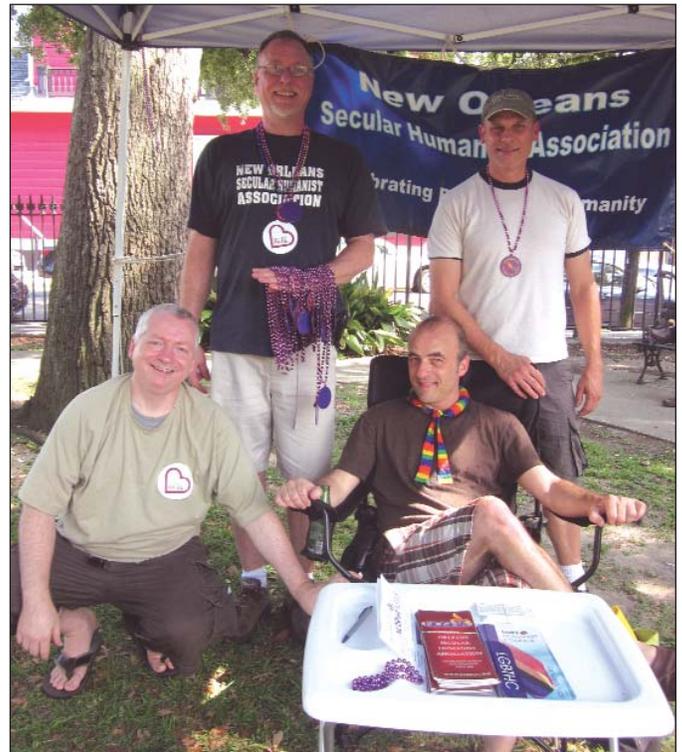
**Rose Mortillaro** (left) and **Courtney Payton** show off the colorful markings on Laveau's tomb they removed during that day.

If you would like to be put on the volunteer list or have a project that you would like to organize for NOSHA, please contact **Rose Mortillaro** (rosejmort@aol.com).

Our effort aims to increase the visibility of secular humanists in our community and provide NOSHA members with more opportunities to socialize and interact.

## More Community Visibility

NOSHA reaches out to other audiences as often as possible and one of our traditions is to "table" at the annual Pride Festival held in late June. We'd like to thank **Jim Dugan** for organizing this activity. Dugan has also done an informational meeting at the LGBT Community Center in the Marigny to introduce secular humanism to gays, lesbians and transgender people.



Clockwise from top left: **Jim Dugan**, **Peter Lignieres**, **William Gautreaux** and **Ricky Adams** in Washington Park.

## Polls Show "Nones" Are Growing

Several surveys on religion this summer indicated that more and more of us are losing our religion:

**Gallup** reported that **only 44%** of Americans have "a great deal" or "quite a lot" of confidence in "the church or organized religion." It was 68 percent in the mid-1970s.

The **Pew Center** reported that there are now nearly "one in five Americans (19%), the highest number of people ever documented who check "None" for their religious affiliation."

The new "Nones" are disproportionately younger, single and educated. But **USA Today** said the main way the category grows is from "switchers" or people who become Nones after growing up in a religious group.

It's just a matter of time, folks, but the numbers are on our side!

# Reason Rally 2012

## *NOSHA Represents!*

It's been said many times that getting atheists and non-believers together for any extended period of time is like herding cats. We simply don't have the temperament to comply for very long, if at all, we're told. In 2011, the



Several members of NOSHA made the trip: **Bridgette Barber** from LaPlace, NOSHA board member **Beth Deitch** and **Harry Greenberger**, NOSHA president.



**Doug and Yvette Parfait** from Slidell were in attendance.  
(Rally photos were provided by Doug Parfait.)

rumors began to fly that there would be a march or rally organized for the secular crowd in Washington, D.C. sometime in 2012 to declare that "...we're here and we're real," so naturally everyone held their breath to see just how many would attend, or if it would even happen.

But on March 24, a pretty decent crowd, that some thought may have numbered as many as 25,000 before it would end nine hours later, gathered on the National Mall on a cool, drizzly Saturday to listen to countless luminaries from the non-belief and secular world talk about the importance of reason, education, science and morals that

come from our desire to benefit humankind rationally and without superstition. Kinda cool, huh?

Of course, **Richard Dawkins** was there. And **Sean Faircloth** and **James Randi** and **Michael Shermer**. So was **Annie Laurie Gaylor** and **Lawrence Krauss** and **Roy Speckhardt** and **Herb Silverman**. There was **Elizabeth Cornwell** and **Taslina Nasrin** and **Greta Christina** and **Jamila Bey**. And **Nate Phillips** and **Eddie Izzard** and **Todd Stiefel** and **Dan Barker** and **Hemant Mehta**. (If you don't recognize some of these names, Google them and familiarize yourself with their specific causes and organizations.)

**Michael Shermer** ended his statement with this inspiring reference to Martin Luther King, Jr., who said, "*Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.*"

Shermer concluded:

*"The force behind this moral arc is reason and science. To that end let us "Thank Reason" for our blessings of liberty. Thank Reason for our democracy. Thank Reason for our rights. Thank Reason for our prosperity. And Thank Reason for our freedom."*



**Who is that unmasked man with Harry?**

While we can't chalk it up to divine providence this time, it was quite the coincidence that a long lost friend and champion of NOSHA would show up in that sea of humanity miles from home.

**Doug Stewart**, former board member of NOSHA and self-styled evangelizing atheist from Mandeville who moved to Greenville, South Carolina in the summer of 2010, was ambling along looking for a place to plunk down his chair. By some odd chance, before "Old Doug" walked too far, he passed near the Louisiana delegation and was luckily recognized by "**New Doug**" Parfait who had seen him in various photos from past NOSHA events.

Of all the places to have a spontaneous reunion, it couldn't have been better! It's a small world after all.

## More Letters To The Editor by NOSHA Members

*Greenberger keeps Times-Picayune busy this summer!*

### Another option for fellowship

Friday, July 20

**Re: "Many in U.S. losing faith in religion," Page A1,  
July 16**

I'm happy to see that *The Times-Picayune* has given front page coverage to the secularization of our country, which is far behind Western Europe in such movement away from organized religion. Many now report that they are "spiritual" but not "religious."

For those who have left churches and those who remain only for reasons of camaraderie, we have for more than a decade offered a new "home" in New Orleans where like-minded people enjoy friendships, educational meetings and social get-togethers.

Come on over.

**Harry Greenberger**

**New Orleans Secular Humanist Association**  
New Orleans

### Obesity fueled by lack of access

Sunday, August 19

When talking about obesity in America it is important to understand that being overweight is not simply a matter of willpower.

Many studies show the connection obesity has with poverty and education. It is not as easy as saying some people don't have enough willpower to lay off french fries, sugary sodas and ice cream.

In truth, low income households cannot afford to buy the high-protein foods recommended by the latest South Beach diet.

High carbohydrate foods are cheaper, more filling and more easily available than the fresh fruits and vegetables recommended by nutritionists for a long and healthy life.

Louisiana should not be embarrassed because its people have low levels of willpower and self-control; it should be embarrassed because so many of its citizens live below the poverty level.

It's important for those who have comfortable lives to understand that poverty condemns people to a life of misery and illness, and it should not be seen as a reason for ridicule and condemnation.

**James R. Conrad**

New Orleans

**So glad to keep James Gill**

Tuesday, August 28

**Re: "A guide to our upcoming changes," Page A1,  
Aug. 26.**

It is great news for his devoted followers that columnist James Gill will continue to entertain and inform us in print and electronically after *The Times-Picayune* changes.

His narrow-minded critics will retain their whipping boy while the rest of us rejoice.

**Harry Greenberger**

New Orleans

*If you have a letter to the editor published, please  
send it to [charlotte@nosha.info](mailto:charlotte@nosha.info)*

## **NOSHA CALENDAR**

### **Freethought Day**

Friday, October 12

**The annual observance by freethinkers  
and secularists of the anniversary of  
the end of the Salem Witch Trials.**

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### **NOSHA Monthly Meeting**

Saturday, October 20 at 4pm

**Dominion Learning Center, Audubon Zoo**

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### **Election Day**

Tuesday, November 6

**Don't Forget to Vote!**

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### **Carl Sagan Day**

Friday, November 9

**Dedicated to Carl Sagan and the beauty  
of science, skepticism and inquiry.**

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### **Church / State Separation Week**

November 24-28

**Inspired by the invaluable work of  
organizations like *Americans United*  
for the Separation of Church and State and  
*The Institute for First Amendment Studies.***



## SPECIAL THANKS TO AHA CONFERENCE DONORS

In May, NOSHA made a special request of our many members and friends to help us make the American Humanist Association's annual conference held this past summer in New Orleans

a little more memorable.

Over \$4000 was raised which funded a welcome billboard, special touches for the Friday night reception (hosted by NOSHA!) complete with a Second Line band and other notions for attendees.

*We'd like to thank the following people who donated to this major event:*

**Col. Lawrence & Hanna Abrahams**  
**Ricky Adams**  
**Francisco & Amy Alecha**  
**Douglas Bartlett**  
**Joseph Billingsley**  
**Joe & Martha Boudreaux**  
**Sheila Curry**  
**Ernest & Susan Fitzgerald**  
**Will Hunn**  
**Connie Gordon**  
**Dave Thomas & Joyce Kisner**  
**Charlotte and Thomas Klasson**  
**Bruce Lobitz**  
**Brad Mayeux**  
**Markwell & Paulette Nager**

**Rusty Parker**  
**Darlene Reaves**  
**Dave Schultz**  
**Bill Sierichs**  
**Lisa & Nick Suarez**  
**Jerry Zachary**  
**Stephen Voelkel**

*The following people contributed \$100 or more:*

**Louis Bonnacaze**  
**Don Borngesser**  
**Howard & Helen Bostock**  
**Jean Cassels & Craig Hood**  
**Steve Darwin**  
**Beth Deitch**  
**Bob Dillemoth**  
**Barbara & Clark Forrest**  
**Harry Freeman**  
**Harry Greenberger**  
**Justin Hinckley**  
**Mike Jolley**  
**Georges Maillot**  
**Percy Prestenbach**  
**Howard Stanley**  
**Keith Welsh**

*Special thanks go to the **Council for Secular Humanism** for their donation of \$1000 towards the cost of the billboard and **Barbara Forrest** who gave an additional \$180 from the sale of her book during the conference.*

***Thank you to all of our donors who make our activities possible!***

NOSHA relies on annual memberships to fund our monthly programs and advertising to promote secular humanism in the Greater New Orleans area.

*We'd like to recognize the following members for contributing at higher levels.*

### **Martyrs (\$100-249)**

Louis Bonnacaze  
 Justin Hinckley  
 Charlotte & Thomas Klasson  
 Douglas & Yvette Parfait  
 Kathleen Thach

Chris Cook  
 Paulette Hurdlik  
 Mark Meunier  
 Grant & Suzy Smith  
 Marie Taylor

Barbara & Clark Forrest  
 Kishore Kamath  
 Jeff Murray  
 Dr. Raoult Ratard

### **Patron Saints (\$250-499)**

Beth Dietch

Georges Maillot

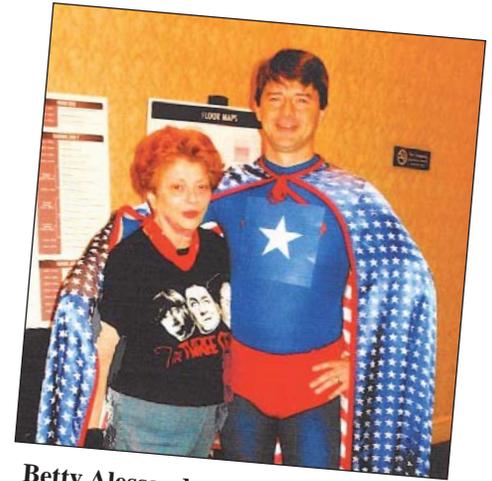
Steve Darwin

**We hope you will consider including NOSHA in your will.**

Please contact Board President Harry Greenberger if you have interest in making a bequest.

# AMERICAN HUMANIST ASSOCIATION 71ST ANNUAL CONFERENCE

**Barbara Forrest** addresses the audience on *“Match Made in Heaven: How Religious Right Politics Is Damaging State Lawmaking.”*



**Betty Alessandra** was glad she attended the Sunday session because she had a close encounter with **Captain America** who bolted into the taping of **“The Humanist Hour”** podcast to cause a stir for his friend and show host, **Todd Stiefel**.



**Patricia and Patrick Lestrade**, (photo left) volunteered to assist with conference check-in and **Chad Matise, Rose Mortillaro and Beth Deitch** (above) helped pass out beads for our Second Line parade to the Welcome Reception hosted by NOSHA.

*“NOSHA considers hosting the AHA Conference in New Orleans as a highlight of its history and hopes that our Welcome Reception provides a taste of the city’s flavor.”*

*“For New Orleans and the rest of the country, NOSHA people project a recovery from the Tea Party religious reactionaries and through the upcoming generations an enlargement of a secular society.”*

~ Harry Greenberger from *Humanist Network News*

The conference theme was **“The Atheists Go Marching In”** and the 2012 Humanist of the Year Award recipient was **Gloria Steinem**, the award-winning author, journalist and activist for equality who is best known for her work against gender bias, abuse of children and protecting the rights of indigenous peoples.

“Gloria Steinem’s life’s work of standing up for the disenfranchised is the embodiment of humanist values,” said American Humanist Association Executive Director **Roy Speckhardt**. “Without her dedication to achieving equality for all, America might still be in the dark ages.”



No superstition here! One conference goer knew what to do when the band started playing! Over 300 people attended from June 7-10.

# Support secular humanism in 2013!

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- \$100 Martyr
- \$250 Patron Saint
- \$500 Archangel
- \$\_\_\_\_\_ Other

*Please keep my donation anonymous* \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to NOSHA and mail to:

**Gordon, NOSHA Treasurer  
2509 Giuffrias St., Apt. 603  
Metairie, LA 70001**

*Contributions in excess of basic dues  
are tax deductible.*

*You can also pay online via  
[www.nosha.info](http://www.nosha.info)  
using PayPal.*



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 the solving of human problems. We reject efforts to denigrate human intelligence, to explain the world in supernatural terms, and to look outside nature for salvation. We believe in enjoying life here and now and in cultivating moral excellence. 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 the fullest realization of the best and noblest we are capable of as human beings.

## **NOSHA News**

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