

NOSHA NEWS

Newsletter of the New Orleans Secular Humanist Association Winter 2010

New Orleans Secular Humanist Association

4314 Bancroft Drive
New Orleans, LA 70122
www.nosha.info
(a 501c3 corporation)

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NATIONAL AFFILIATIONS

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

MEETINGS

3rd Saturday of month, 2:00 pm
Dominion Learning Center
Audubon Park Zoo

N.O. COX CABLE TV

CH 76 "Humanist Perspective"
Sat. midnight, Sun. noon
CH 78 "Atheist Viewpoint"
Tues. 10:30am; 10:30 pm

NOSHA STREETCAR AD RIDES AGAIN

Thanks to your generous contributions, we were able to run the streetcar ad, which originally ran in February 2009, for the entire month of February 2010. Again, the car ran the length of Canal Blvd. to the end of the line in City Park. When our ad ran last year, it was noticed by the *Wall Street Journal's* Maurice O'Sullivan: "Just in time for this year's Lenten season, an ad in gaudy Mardi Gras colors on the side of a New Orleans streetcar proclaims, 'Don't Believe in God? You Are Not Alone.' . . ." Gaudy?! What's gaudy about purple, green and gold?!



Charlotte Klasson snapped this photo of **Rose Mortillaro**, **Harry Greenberger**, and **Ricky Adams** posing with our ad.

NOSHA wants to thank all of you who gave so generously last year for our first streetcar ad and for our billboard (see the Winter 2009 and the Summer 2009 newsletters, respectively). Together with more generous giving, we were able to re-run the above streetcar ad and still have funds left over for something else (suggestions are welcome).

Bus ads and billboards around the world keep popping up with such sentiments as (picture of happy child) "Please Don't Label Me. Let Me Grow Up and Choose for Myself," "Are you good without God? Millions are," "There's Probably No God. So Stop Worrying and Get on with Your Life," or "Not Religious? You're not Alone."

PUBLISHED LETTERS

The following letter by **Jean Cassels** appeared in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* on February 5, 2010:

Re: “*High Court’s decision is final,*” *Metro*, Jan. 29.

Our president and vice president know well that what the Supreme Court decides is law.

However, they have the right to express their disagreement and to work to pass laws that will ameliorate this terrible judgment by the court.

Before this ruling corporations already had free speech through financial contributions, but it was through PACs. They had to file a federal disclosure and show the name of every individual who put money into the PAC, and every contributor had to be a U.S. citizen. Now with this new ruling, megacorporations, even foreign corporations, can throw limitless amounts of money into our political process.

The laws, now written, say human people can contribute only \$2,300 to a presidential campaign, but billionaires through their corporations now have no limits. They already have inordinate influence through the billions they spend on lobbyists to Congress.

Imagine through this new ruling who will be in control of our democracy: not the individual voter contributor but the huge corporations with their vast amounts of money, all hidden behind innocent sounding names such as “Coalition for our Children’s Future,” which was in truth a front for a corporation called Triad, aka Koch Industries.

Behind these corporate screens foreign governments will be able to flood our TVs with ads and manipulate our elections and our government.

Our democracy used to be “of the people, by the people and for the people.”

Corporations are not humans; they are not people.

Unless something is corrected, we can say good-bye to what remains of our democracy.

The following letter by **Patrick Murphy** appeared in the *Houma Courier* on March 2, 2010:

It was refreshing to read “The problem is not Obama,” a recent letter by Audrey George.

No pretense and no sham.

Her “do not criticize until you know all the circumstances” is shared by millions.

I’m tired of the anti-Obama diatribes by many of your guest columnists.

Most of the diatribes profess to be religious, church-going Christians.

I can’t see a trace of the sermon on the mount in their hateful, spiteful monologues.

I’ve studied many Bibles at length and such negativists are called a brood of vipers who can’t see the

mote in their own eyes while criticizing the speck in others.

It is time to sound the alarm. I do not intend to spend my eternity in their treacherous company.

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LIBRARY CENSORSHIP

Jim Dugan

It would be unfair to claim that religion necessarily leads to censorship. Likewise, it is unfair to claim that humanists and other secularists are somehow above that sort of thing. Nevertheless, in these United States, religious alliances often lurk behind attempts to censor books in schools and public libraries.

I’ve been studying examples of such censorship efforts over the last nine months, and have been astounded by the scope of the problem in just that length of time. In West Bend, Wisconsin, some citizens wanted the public library to remove, re-shelve, put warning labels on, or otherwise restrict access to a list of over 40 books they claimed were obscene, including titles such as *Baby Be Bop*, *It’s Perfectly Normal*, *Geography Club*, and *Gay America: Struggle for Equality*. In Leesburg, Florida, another 40-odd books were challenged, including many volumes in the *Gossip Girls* and *Alice* series of teen novels, as well as more notable works such as *The Bermudez Triangle* and *Looking for Alaska*. Other challenges, involving a handful of book or even just a single title, are common occurrences throughout the country, especially in school libraries, and occasionally in school curricula. In Riverside County, California, officials of the Menifee School district actually removed copies of the Merriam-Webster’s dictionary from elementary school classrooms because it defined objectionable terms. In Culpeper County, Virginia, an attempt was made to drop the definitive edition of Anne Frank’s *Diary of a Young Girl*, because in this expanded edition the author mentions her vagina. The writings of Toni Morrison, winner of a Nobel Prize and a Pulitzer, are often challenged, including *The Bluest Eye*, which has been termed “the bestiality book” by some challengers (I read it, and it does contain the word *bestiality*, exactly once, without any definition of the term or any description of such an act).

So what does religion have to do with any of that? Motivations for challenges to books vary widely. Common claims are that a book is too sexually explicit, contains vulgar language, undermines religious faith, teaches witchcraft, or promotes homosexuality. Some of these claims are made in all sincerity, while some are invented or exaggerated by individuals who don’t want to be honest about their motivations. In many challenges, though not all, religious motivations are eventually revealed. Challengers to Anaya’s *Bless Me Ultima* tend to state up front that they are worried that

young readers might find their Catholic faith questioned in its pages. Challengers to the *Harry Potter* series usually just say outright that the books teach or promote witchcraft. Others, such as the Wisconsin challengers mentioned above, are more subtle. They claimed the books they challenged were just obscene, although anyone paying attention to the details could easily see that most of the challenged books were gay affirming, or at least neutral about sexual orientation. The religious motivation behind this was kept under wraps, but the leader of that challenge tipped her hand on her blog, basing her position on what (she claimed) Jesus said about homosexuality.

It is not terribly surprising, then, that book challenges sometimes meander into the creationism-evolution debate. When the Wisconsin book challengers felt they were getting a lot of local political traction, some in their group approached the local library about restricting access to books on evolution. Another approach sometimes taken is to claim that the library itself is somehow censoring creationist books because the library doesn't maintain an equal number of creationist and evolutionist titles. Either way, they are seeking to reduce the readership of books supporting evolution and increase readership of creationist materials.

Another oddly religious angle in library censorship debates is one I have come to call “proof-texting the law.” Would-be censors rely on a very small number of pseudo-experts to explain how the law supposedly supports their position. Some incessantly Recite the phrase “protecting children is not censorship” as if it were a mantra. Their legal analyses rely heavily on taking isolated phrases from different law and court decisions, stripping each of its context, then combining them in ways never envisioned by the original authors. This is not proof of the religious affiliations of these legal analysts, but I know of only one field of study that actually promotes this methodology, and that is the style of biblical exegesis employed by some fundamentalist Christians.

Few of these book challenges succeed. In most cases, whether because of public outcry or court order, the challenged books are put back on their original shelves, and access restrictions are dropped. Courts have defined public libraries as “limited public forums,” places in which rules protecting Free Speech are vigorously enforced. The legal framework in public schools is somewhat different, but school administrators cannot remove books merely out of personal disapproval of their content. Not a few of these challenges have become political hot potatoes in their local communities, with the Wisconsin battle being especially bitter and divisive. Administrators in the Menifee and Culpeper County school districts learned the hard way that media

coverage can bring scorn and ridicule that is international in scope. Success, for the book challengers, often depends on their ability to “fly under the radar.” As long as they can keep their challenge small and quiet, they might just get away with it.

Banned Books Week, an event designed to raise awareness of this problem, maintains a website at www.bannedbooksweek.org. The American Library Association maintains lists of frequently challenged books at www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/banned/frequentlychallenged. My own documentation of the issue is at www.BannedInWestBend.info.

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AN AUTHOR AMONG US

Last Fall, two new faces began appearing regularly at NOSHA events. Dr. Richard de la Chaumière and his wife Esther have become NOSHA supporters after moving to south Louisiana from California. They live nearer Baton Rouge, where Richard has established a Freethinkers group, but manage to make it down to New Orleans for NOSHA meetings and events.

What you may not know about Richard, is that he is actually **Richard de la Chaumière, Ph.D.**, a California licensed clinical psychologist and professional philosopher, and that he has published a book entitled *What's It All About? A Guide to Life's Basic Questions and Answers*. Following are some excerpts from that book:

“The spirit of inquiry is one of the perfections of the human race, part of what makes us what we are. At its most idealistic, seeking truth is its own reward and is independent of personal advantage. It doesn't need to be justified by the possibilities of status, money, or fame. Our belief in the primary value of truth is not necessarily based on an absolute certainty. It requires a certain faith, or at least the hopeful hypothesis that in the long run it will lead to something better, if not for us as individuals, at least for our species. For Bartend Russell, ‘it is not by delusion, however exalted, that mankind can prosper but only by unswerving courage in the pursuit of truth.’ For some of us we have such a drive and passion for truth that we can't stop ourselves. We have no choice; it's our nature, our calling.”

“Freud stated, ‘The moment a man questions the meaning and value of life, he is already sick...’ He went on to explain, ‘By asking this question one is merely admitting to a store of unsatisfied libido...’ From our observations of truth seekers, it seems that the more usual reason for falling into confusion is that we become top heavy, living too much in our minds and so our lives get out of balance. We forget the common sense of meeting our basic human needs, living as though we were pure intellects. The mind is a great place to visit, but no place to live.”

“Among the estimated ten million species on the planet, an unparalleled power of conscious awareness has evolved a unique *species—Homo sapiens*. With exquisitely developed sensitivities, we can delight in the abundant pleasures of our senses. With unprecedented intelligence, imagination, and language capabilities, we can celebrate our creations in the arts and literature, our discoveries in science, our inventions in technology, and the other glories of human culture. With our unique form of conscious

awareness, we are not only part of nature, as are other creatures, but with our minds we can stand outside of nature and reflect both on nature itself and on our own human nature. Without parallel among all other life forms on Earth, we have evolved the conscious experience of self-identity as a subject distinct from all else as object. But with self-awareness comes death-awareness. With self-consciousness comes the capacity to worry—increasingly aware that life is full of uncertainties, that life can go wrong for us. In time we discover the Tree of Good and Evil.”

Dr. de la Chaumière’s book is available at Amazon.com and Barnes & Noble.com, or directly from the publisher at wisdomhousepress@aol.com for a price of \$19.95.

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OTHER NOSHA HAPPENINGS

At the November 2009 meeting, we parted slightly from our usual format of having a guest speaker. Instead we saw a film. To commemorate the 150th anniversary of the publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*, we viewed two parts of the BBC television documentary “The Genius of Charles Darwin” which was written and hosted by Sir Richard Dawkins. Special thanks to **Doug Stewart** for acquiring the video for us. **Dave Schultz** introduced the video with a reading from Darwin’s magnum opus.

We were very lucky to have as our guest speaker for our December meeting, Dr. **Darrel Ray**, author of *The God Virus: How Religion Infects Our Lives and Culture*. Immediately following the meeting, Dr. Ray



sold and signed copies of his book. A little later in the evening, president **Harry Greenberger** hosted a reception for Dr. Ray at his new home on Bayou St. John.

In case you were on another planet in January and February, our own New Orleans Saints won all of their post season games and finally their first Super Bowl. Since our regular January meeting date coincided with the NFL playoffs, we opted for bringing the Saints fans among us together for a potluck and game viewing. Again, **Harry Greenberger** hosted us at his home.

Coming down to the wire and no speaker for our February meeting, our own Dr. **Barbara Forrest** stepped up to be our speaker. Dr. Forrest is professor of philosophy at Southeastern Louisiana University and co-author of *Creationism’s Trojan Horse: The Wedge of Intelligent Design*. She gave us an update on recent Louisiana legislation and board of education efforts



entitled “Back to the Future: The Louisiana Science Education Act of 2008.” This legislation will allow teachers in this state to present “alternative” materials to the accepted curriculum, potentially opening the door to the teaching of creationism in public school classrooms. For more on this and related topics, you can go to Barbara’s website at the Louisiana Coalition for Science at <http://lasciencecoalition.org>.

On the evening of March 13, Harry once again opened his home to NOSHA members and friends, this time for a potluck movie night. Following an hour of great feasting, we viewed the Julia Sweeney video, “Letting Go of God.” Many in the room could identify so well with Julia’s recollections and musings of her Catholic upbringing and letting go of faith for rationalism and reality.

On March 17, 2010 Harry Greenberger hosted a reception at his home for members of the **Humanist Chaplaincy** group from **Harvard** University who were in the city during their spring break for a week of service, partnering with the Center for Ethical Living and Social Justice Renewal. The group’s leader, Greg Epstein has written a book entitled *Good without God: What a Billion Nonreligious People Do Believe*.

Finally, for our March 20 meeting, we returned to the guest speaker format. Dr. **Peter J. Broncazio**, a professor emeritus at Brooklyn College in New York addressed the meeting on “The Truth About the Bible.” He also sold and signed copies of his book, *The Bible from Cover to Cover*. Afterwards he admitted he had only covered about half the story in his talk in hopes of being invited back for the rest. We will definitely entertain that idea. Several members said his was one of the best talks on the subject they had ever heard. About

ten of us enjoyed with Peter and his wife Ronnie at Mandina’s Restaurant on Saturday evening.



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WE’VE GOT PAY PAL

This is just a friendly reminder. If you haven’t yet joined NOSHA for 2010, or if you want to make an additional contribution to help defray meeting expenses and speaker fees, you can now do so from the comfort of your easy chair.

PayPal is available for you to become a member and it’s only \$20.00. Or any additional amount would be welcome.

Just go to <http://www.nosha.info/about.html> and look for the PayPal buttons.

And while you’re there, just take a look around the website. There’s lots of information about NOSHA past and present for you to peruse.

A special thank you goes out to our website administrator, **Charlotte Klasson**, for her efforts in making this possible.

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COMING EVENTS

Still tentatively scheduled for the month of April is the Deep South Humanist Conference. Details are forthcoming.

Our speaker for the May 15 meeting will be Ellen Johnson, immediate past president of American Atheists. The topic of her presentation is still to be determined. You can expect some type of social event to be a part of her visit as well.

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NOSHA HAPPY HOUR

For more than a year, we’ve been hosting a happy hour on the first Wednesday of every month. Each month there has been a different locale, trying out a variety of different watering holes around the city. The regulars may be zeroing in on a favorite spot soon.

April’s happy hour will be on Wednesday, April 7 at 6 pm at the Monkey Hill Bar at 6100 Magazine St. Come have a beer or a glass of wine and join the chat.

SPEAKERS NEEDED

If you know of anyone whose expertise would be of interest to NOSHA, please ask them and then let any member of the NOSHA board know.

Or if you have a topic on which you would like to lead a group discussion at a NOSHA meeting, please step up.

And finally, if there is any author or speaker of the caliber of those mentioned above, let us know who you’d like to see address a future meeting.

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“ALL THINGS DULL AND UGLY”

Monty Python

All things dull and ugly, all creatures short and squat
 All things rude and nasty, the Lord God made the lot
 Each little snake that poisons, each little wasp that stings
 He made their brutish venom, He made their horrid wings

All things sick and cancerous, all evil great and small
 All things foul and dangerous, the Lord God made them all

Each nasty little hornet, each beastly little squid
 Who made the spiky urchin? Who made the shark?
 He did

All things scabbed and ulcerous, all pox both great and small

Putrid, foul and gangrenous, the Lord God made them all

Amen!

* * * * *



Personal problems? Philosophical issues?
 Stress? Unexplained fatigue? Depressed?
 Let’s talk about it.
LISA SUAREZ, MEd, LMFT
 Systemic Therapist at CARE Institute
 Email: LisaS@carenola.com
 Phone: (504)896-1000, VoiceMail x82

DARWIN COMMEMORATION

This was the first year in many years when there was no official Darwin Day celebration in New Orleans. We hope to correct that omission next year. But in the mean-time, we would like to share with our readers some of Darwin’s thoughts on religiosity. The following excerpts are from what has become the bible of evolution, *On the Origin of Species*, first published in 1859, some 20 years after the voyage of the *HMS Beagle*.

“During these two years (October 1836 to January 1839) I was led to think much about religion. Whilst on board the *Beagle* I was quite orthodox, and I remember being heartily laughed at by several of the officers (though themselves orthodox) for quoting the Bible as an unanswerable authority on some point of morality. I suppose it was the novelty of the argument that amused them. But I had gradually come, by this time, to see that the Old Testament from its manifestly false history of the world, with the Tower of Babel, the rainbow as a sign, etc., etc., and from its attributing to God the feelings of a revengeful tyrant, was no more to be trusted than the sacred books of the Hindoos, or the beliefs of any barbarian. The question then continually rose before my mind and would not be banished,—is it credible that if God were now to make a revelation to the Hindoos, would he permit it to be connected with the belief in Vishnu, Siva, &c., as Christianity is connected with the Old Testament. This appeared to me utterly incredible.”

“But I was very unwilling to give up my belief;—I feel sure of this for I can well remember often and often inventing day-dreams of old letters between distinguished Romans and manuscripts being discovered at Pompeii or elsewhere which confirmed in the most striking manner all that was written in the Gospels. But I found it more and more difficult, with free scope given to my imagination, to invent evidence which would suffice to convince me. Thus disbelief crept over me at a very slow rate, but was at last complete. The rate was so slow that I felt no distress, and have never since doubted even for a single second that my conclusion was correct. I can indeed hardly see how anyone ought to wish Christianity to be true; for if so the plain language of the text seems to show that the men who do not believe, and this would include my Father, Brother and almost all my best friends, will be everlastingly punished. And this is a damnable doctrine.”

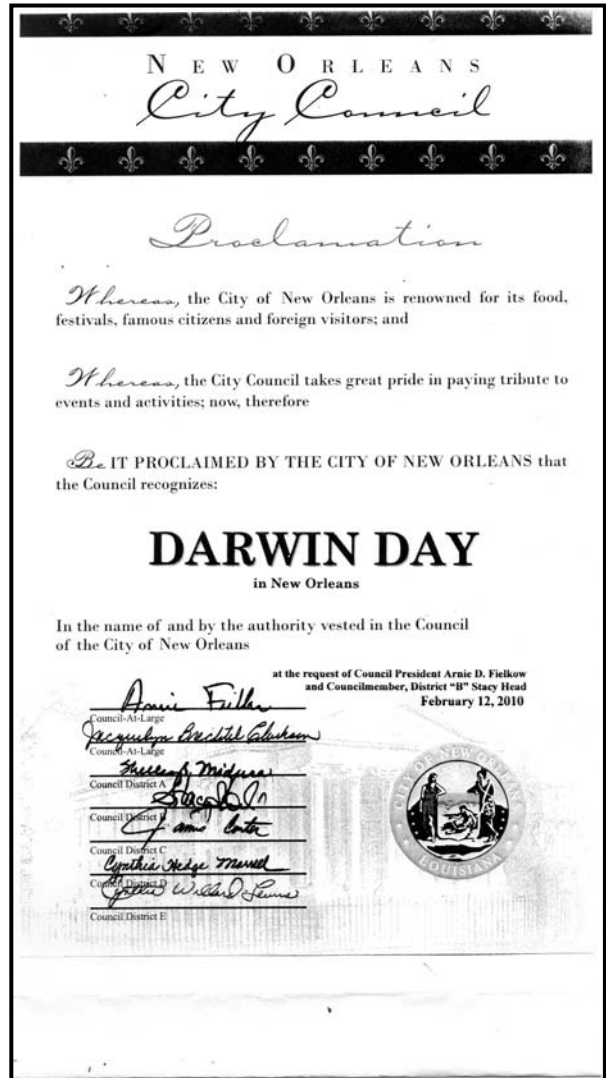
“Although I did not think much about the existence of a personal God until a considerably later period of my life, I will here give the vague conclusions to which I have been driven. The old argument of design in nature, as given by Paley, which formerly seemed to me so conclusive, fails, now that the law of natural selection has been discovered. We can no longer argue that, for instance, the beautiful hinge of a bivalve shell must have been made by an intelligent being, like the hinge of a door by man. There seems to be no more design in the variability of organic beings and in the action of natural selection, than in the course which the wind blows. Everything in nature is the result of fixed laws.”

“At the present day the most usual argument for the existence of an intelligent God is drawn from the deep inward conviction and feelings which are experienced by most persons. But it cannot be doubted that the Hindoos, Mohomadans and others might argue in the same manner and with equal force in favour of the existence of one God, or of many Gods, or as with the Buddhists of no God. There are also many barbarian tribes who cannot be said with any truth to believe in what we call God: they believe indeed in spirits or ghosts, and it can be explained, as Tyler and Herbert Spencer have shown, how such a belief would be likely to arise.”

“A man who has no assured and ever present belief in the existence of a personal God or of a future existence with retribution and reward, can have for his rule of life, as far as I can see, only to follow those impulses and instincts which are the strongest or which seem to him the best ones. A dog acts in this manner, but he does so blindly. A man, on the other hand, looks forwards and backwards, and compares his various feelings, desires and recollections. He then finds, in accordance with the verdict of all the wisest men that the highest satisfaction is derived from following certain impulses, namely the social instincts. If he acts for the good of others, he will receive the approbation of his fellow men and gain the love of those with whom he lives; and this latter gain undoubtedly is the highest pleasure on this earth. By degrees it will become intolerable to him to obey his sensuous passions rather than his higher impulses, which when rendered habitual may be almost called instincts. His reason may occasionally tell him to act in opposition to the opinion of others, whose approbation he will then not receive; but he will still have the solid satisfaction of knowing that he has followed his innermost guide or conscience.”

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In February, **Harry Greenberger** was once again successful in influencing the New Orleans City Council. The Council actually declared February 12 **Darwin Day** in the City of New Orleans, and presented Harry with the following **proclamation**.



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 supporter of THE NEW ORLEANS SECULAR HUMANIST ASSOCIATION, complete, clip, and mail in the following form:

Please check: New Member Renewing Member Newsletter by e-mail only Other contribution

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone and/or e-mail: _____

2010 Annual dues are \$20.00. Make checks payable to “NOSHA” and mail to Connie Gordon, 2509 Giuffrias Ave., Apt. 603, Metairie, LA 70001.

NOTE: For those of you who receive the newsletter by standard mail, the year for which you have last paid membership dues is reflected in the upper right corner of the mailing label.

NOSHA
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