

NOSHA NEWS

Newsletter of the New Orleans Secular Humanist Association
Spring 2004

New Orleans Secular Humanist Association

5331 Bancroft Dr.
New Orleans, LA 70122
<http://nosha.secularhumanism.net>

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Michael Malec
Sally Mooney
Vitas Paukstaitis

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

GAY MARRIAGE'S TIME HAS COME

Connie Gordon

The results of a new poll regarding gay marriage appeared in today's paper (April 11). By a margin of 55% to 41%, those polled agreed with the statement, "If gays are allowed to marry, the institution of marriage will be degraded." Nearly half favored a constitutional amendment specifically defining marriage as between a man and woman. Only about 25% of those polled said that gay couples should be allowed to marry, while 38% said civil unions should be allowed. The most astounding finding in the *Los Angeles Times* poll was that six in ten people (60%) said "homosexual relationships are 'against God's will'" but that same percentage conceded that they were sympathetic to the gay community and believed same-sex marriages in this country were inevitable.

It is the belief by the religiously conservative that homosexuality is an abomination (against God's will) that will, in my opinion, prevent a large percentage of the country's citizens from appreciating the same rights as all others. The time has come for homosexual marriage to be sanctioned nationwide just as interracial marriage is at long last legal in every state. As recently as 1958, a poll found 96% of whites disapproved of marriages between blacks and whites, but in 1997, 77% approved. Perhaps if we could educate the masses on the inconsistencies of the Bible's bans with modern society, more people would realize the hypocrisy in their disdain for same-sex marriage.

For example, Exodus 21:7 suggests that fathers should sell their daughters into slavery. This passage further suggests that if the girls don't behave themselves, their purchasers are within their rights to sell them away to foreign lands, or they could just take them as additional wives. It seems we no longer find either slavery or polygamy palatable.

Exodus 35:2 specifically says that it is forbidden to work on the Sabbath. To do so condemns one to death. Tell that to the employees of the movie metroplex I visited today as well as all the fast-food restaurants or all the other retail businesses routinely open on Sunday.

The skin of a swine is considered unclean and should never be touched by human flesh (Leviticus 11:7-8). There goes football! Further on in the same chapter of Leviticus, it specifically says that only scaled creatures taken from the water may be consumed. To eat all others would be an abomination. I wonder how many gay-bashing, Sunday footballers enjoy a shrimp or crab dinner with a dozen raw oysters now and then?

As far as I can discern, the only really strong message against homosexuality appears in Leviticus 18:22 where it states "thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind: it is abomination." This and other "thou-shalt-nots" regarding the flesh appear in the chapter immediately before the one containing the Ten Commandments, and we know how inappropriate those are to modern society. All of these abominations, by the way, are punishable only by banishment from the kingdom of heaven.

Gay Marriage continued from page 1

There are far worse threats to the cohesiveness, happiness, and betterment of humankind than barring two devoted individuals of the same gender from receiving the same civil bonuses of lifetime commitment as heterosexual couples. Perhaps if we all read the books of Leviticus and Exodus and educate ourselves to the hypocrisy therein, we can educate the masses to a better understanding.

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CONGRATULATIONS

Speaking of marriage, NOSHA’s **Del McGinnis** was wed to Mr. Stephen Brennan on February 22. Del, a long-time NOSHA member is a professor of English and the honors program director at Delgado Community College. Stephen is an English professor at LSU-Shreveport. We know that Del and Stephen have been in this long-distance relationship for many years, so it must be the real thing! It will be NOSHA’s loss, but Del is retiring in the summer and will move to Shreveport. We’ll miss you, Del, but wish you both every happiness!

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NOA-TV TAPING

NOSHA continues to tape programs for the New Orleans Cox Cable channel 77. Locally taped programs and programs produced by the Council for Secular Humanism in Amherst, NY are broadcast every Saturday at midnight and Sunday noon. Unfortunately, only viewers in Orleans Parish receive this programming, but the shows are being taped. You may borrow the tapes, and/or we will show some of them at future NOSHA meetings.

On March 31, the ACLU’s **Joe Cook** discussed Church/State Separation with NOSHA members **Lanny Goldfinch**, **Joseph Billingsley**, and **Jennifer Wooley**, and **Christina Cucera** of Planned Parenthood of Louisiana discussed threats to a woman’s right to choose with NOSHA’s **Michael Malec**, Jennifer Wooley, and Joseph Billingsley. On April 3, two programs were taped with **David Goldberg** of End of Life Choices and NOSHA members **Connie Gordon**, **Dave Schultz**, and Jennifer Wooley. In addition, Connie, Dave and Jennifer taped a discussion of how they came to be humanists and what it has meant to their lives. **Harry Greenberger** moderated all discussions.

Thank you to all who participated in the last two taping sessions. If you would like to participate in future tapings, please call Harry Greenberger at 282-5459.

CREATIONISM’S TROJAN HORSE

On March 9, Octavia Books in New Orleans hosted a book signing to introduce the new publication by NOSHA board member **Dr. Barbara Forrest** (and co-author Paul R. Gross). Several NOSHA members were in attendance, but one who could not attend submitted his review and thoughts on the book. *Creationism’s Trojan Horse: The Wedge of Intelligent Design*, published by Oxford University Press is available at several area bookstores and on-line at Amazon.com.

Vitas Paukstaitis submitted the following review of *Creationism’s Trojan Horse*:

Although I was unable to attend Barbara Forrest’s signing last week, the book is excellent and really hits home the extent of the IDers’ duplicity and “by any means necessary” tactics, and what is far worse, the breadth of their success. That a small group of wingnuts, completely outside the scientific mainstream and contributing no reasonable data (let alone independent research) have influenced school boards, public opinion, and politicians throughout the country is shocking. I have had conversations with various acquaintances (school teachers among them) who were under the impression that MANY scientists were abandoning Darwinian evolution as an adequate explanation for complexity, an impression, as it turns out, that was fostered almost entirely by this tiny group of agitators.

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MEMBERS’ PUBLISHED LETTERS

The following letter from **Joseph Billingsley** appeared in the *Times-Picayune* on February 6, 2004:

Janet Jackson’s exposed breast provokes a public tirade or outrage and shock, but the deeper offense of the Super Bowl halftime show occurred before the ventilation of Jackson’s wardrobe.

In a rhetorical flourish leading up to the entertainment, organizers of the halftime show offered viewers a pep talk for democratic liberation, urging them to choose to be independent, to choose to vote, to choose to think for themselves.

Maybe somebody forgot to tell them the Super Bowl was airing on CBS, which denied Super Bowl airtime this year to issue ads from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and from the political advocacy group MoveOn.org.

Members letters continued from page 2

That halftime display of freedom and democratic piety was nothing but hypocrisy and cynicism. We should find it far more repugnant than a display of Janet Jackson.

Think for ourselves? Please. CBS and the backers of the Super Bowl don't want us to think about anything more than which beer to drink.

The following letter from **Timothy Ruppert** appeared in the *Times-Picayune* on February 27, 2004:

Your Feb. 25 editorial cartoon depicts Ralph Nader shooting John Kerry in the foot as they are about to start a footrace against George Bush. This is probably the way the election is seen by the Democratic National Committee, disgruntled Al Gore voters or those who are simply so fearful of a two-term President Bush they will vote for anybody else.

May I make some suggestions for a more accurate editorial cartoon?

First of all, Ralph Nader should be shown starting miles behind the two major party candidates. Blatantly obstructionist laws make it difficult, if not impossible, for anyone other than Democrats and Republicans to get on the ballot.

Also, if Ralph Nader is depicted as running for the presidency on his own two feet, then the two major party candidates should be shown riding in limousines. They should be chauffeured by their corporate paymasters and would be joined by all the special interest groups for an invitation-only party in the back of the limo.

Yes, a more accurate editorial cartoon would look quite different from what was printed Wednesday. But I admit it wouldn't be very funny. After all, the joke being perpetrated by the two major parties is on us.

The following letter from **Harry Greenberger** appeared in the *Times-Picayune* on March 29, 2004:

Re: "Supreme Court hears argument against Pledge of Allegiance," Page 1, March 25.

The story states that "justices across the ideological spectrum appeared to be searching for reasons why he (Newdow) should lose."

We who rely upon the wisdom of those justices can only hope that they are, instead, searching for the correct interpretation of the U.S. Constitution's separation of church and state.

When the words "under God" were inserted into the Pledge of Allegiance by the Congress, at the urging of the Knights of Columbus, President Eisenhower, upon signing it into law, said: "From this day forward, the millions of our schoolchildren will daily proclaim in every city and

town—every village and rural schoolhouse, the dedication of our nation and our people to the almighty."

That was an unconstitutional involvement of government with religion 50 years ago, and the court now has its opportunity to rectify that affront to the First Amendment.

Claims by the religious right and some courts that the long-standing use of the word "God" in government expressions is only "ceremonial deism," and not the prohibited support of religion, are illogical.

Godspeed Michael Newdow!

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You will recall the front page of the Winter 2004 newsletter featured the Proclamation of a Day of Reason in the City of New Orleans. The above photograph was not available at that time. Pictured are city councilman Marlin Guzman presenting the proclamation to NOSHA president Harry Greenberger.

The following congratulatory letter was received from the Secular Humanist Society of New York.:

Dear Mr. Greenberger:

Congratulations on your success in having a Day of Reason proclaimed in New Orleans, and on your excellent January 8 invocation, which we have just read in the latest NOSHA News.

A resolution will be introduced at the February 12 membership meeting of the Secular Humanist Society of New York to follow NOSHA's lead, and to begin our own campaign to get the New York City Council to also proclaim an annual Day of Reason.

Toward that end, is there any advice, information caveats you can offer us? Thank you in advance for any help you can give us.

Signed John Rafferty, Editor, PIQUE, the newsletter of SHSNY

OF INTEREST TO HUMANISTS . . .

HARVEY, LA—As he was passing out tests, a public high school history teacher pulled back the religiously mandated head scarf of a female muslim student and said to her, “I hope God punishes you. No, I’m sorry, I hope Allah punishes you.” He later added, “I didn’t know you had hair under there.”

This was the final straw for the young Iraqi woman whose family asked that the teacher be removed from the school. Throughout the school year he had apparently made other remarks including the fact that he thought she was Indian, not Iraqi. A member of the young woman’s family said he never expected such behavior from a teacher. The teacher initially dismissed the incident, saying, “I’m not worried at all. All of this has been resolved.”

Although, the teacher was at first transferred to another school, he was soon placed on leave without pay, pending a hearing. Such insensitivity and ignorance, especially from a teacher, should not and can not be tolerated.

NASHVILLE—The Southern Baptist Convention voted to withdraw from the Baptist World Alliance, saying it has become too liberal and advocates “aberrant and dangerous theologies.” A task force report recently reported the Alliance was so deviant as to promote women as pastors, frequently criticized the Southern Baptist Convention’s missions board, supported a woman’s right to choose, and had financed “questionable enterprises.” All of these things the task force called “anti-American.”

LONDON—At a recent General Synod of the Church of England a new version of the traditional story of the “three wise men” was considered. Church hierarchy agrees that not only about how “wise” they all were, but even as to their gender. Consensus seems to be with replacing all references to the “wise men” with the term “magi”. The term “magi” refers to learned persons from Persia and is not a gender-specific term.

BOULDER, CO—When University of Colorado football coach Gary Barnett was asked to comment on allegations that a teammate raped his former female place-kicker, he responded, “You know what guys do, they respect your ability. Katie was a girl, and not only was she a girl, she was terrible.” As if being a lousy place-kicker justified rape--this coach is the worst kind of role model for his male players and should be literally ridden out on a rail.

DENVER—About 300 people of different faiths turned out recently to clean up a synagogue that had been vandalized with swastikas and other anti-Semitic graffiti. The graffiti appeared on the eve of a Jewish holiday Purim and the second weekend of the Mel Gibson movie, “The

Passion of the Christ.” After that movie opened, a Denver Pentecostal church posted a sign on its lawn, which read, “Jews Killed The Lord Jesus.”

WASHINGTON—An public elementary school teacher was recently suspended for showing his social studies class excerpts from “The Passion of the Christ.” He said he believed the movie connected historical events from the class text. How’s that? Of course, a bigger question is how did he get a copy of a newly released film?

TORONTO—An Amish man from Pennsylvania who had entered Canada before Christmas to visit his ailing father has been denied re-entry to the United States because he doesn’t have a picture ID. Among the Older Order Amish there is strict adherence to the Bible’s prohibition of graven images—therefore, no photos, no ID. Meanwhile, the man’s wife and son are back in Pennsylvania awaiting his return. You’ve gotta love the Homeland Security Act.

SAN FRANCISCO—A Federal judge has denied a Justice Department request for the medical records of women who had undergone “intact dilation and extraction”, the so-called partial birth abortion. Abortion providers have argued that the procedure is sometimes necessary to preserve a woman’s health. The proposed ban by the Feds has been blocked temporarily and the Justice Department wanted the records to prove that the procedure is unnecessary. The judge ruled that the abortion records would violate the privacy of patients even if names were removed and called the request by the government a “fishing expedition.”

SALT LAKE CITY—The Utah Legislature has finally done away with firing squads for executing condemned prisoners. They had actually used this archaic method of execution as recently as 1996 for the execution of John Albert Taylor; the gruesome deed was even televised. Actually, Idaho and Oklahoma retain the firing squad on their books, but have not used it in the modern era. So, congratulations to Utah for making execution more humane.

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YOU ARE NOSHA

Recognizing that we can always be better than we have been, and that sometimes a group’s mission may call for changes, a **survey of opinions** of everyone on our mailing list has been circulated—by E-mail to those on the internet, and by inclusion in this newsletter for all others. Help us to make NOSHA as vibrant and responsive as we can by returning the survey by E-mail or postal mail now before you forget.

This is also a good opportunity for NOSHA supporters who have not yet sent their 2004 dues in, to make that commitment to the organization.

PAST NOSHA MEETING TOPICS

As you are completing the afore-mentioned survey, you might be interested in knowing who past NOSHA speakers have been and/or what topics have been discussed. This might help you in making suggestions for the future. You might want some speakers to return, or the following list may suggest new topics or speakers of interest.

One of our earliest speakers was a former Irish priest, Patrick Murphy who told us why he had become a priest and why now he is a secular humanist. Patrick is still a NOSHA member, but lives in Houma; he could possibly be persuaded to return.

Several philosophy professors from area universities have addressed such topics as ethical theories; morality and ethics without religion; philosophical naturalism; philosophy, freedom, and faith; and critical thinking. Other academics have spoken from their fields on topics such as origins of evolution and the ultimate fate of the universe; academic freedom; little appreciated facts about organic evolution; physiology and epidemiology of faith; Shakespeare as a secular humanist; and the Fundamentalist impulse.

Other area professionals have addressed NOSHA as well. Local attorneys have spoken about the juvenile justice system in Louisiana, why prisons don't prevent crime, the fight against the "Choose Life" license plate, and a debate on the pros and cons of the death penalty. Unitarian ministers have spoken on evolution and human purpose; and freedom, liberty and justice in the 21st century. And there have been several discussion regarding death and dying and death with dignity issues.

NOSHA members have volunteered to lead discussions of interest to themselves. Such topics as freedom of religion in the first amendment; rationalism, reason or rebellion; selected topics from Noam Chomsky; the Christian roots of Nazism, and the search for extraterrestrial intelligence have been presented in this manner. Book reviews have also been presented. Is there some humanist-relevant topic you could discuss? Do you know someone who could? Let us know what you would like to hear.

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DARWIN DAY 2004

The 5th annual Darwin Day was held at the University of New Orleans on February 14 at the new Lindy Boggs Convention Center. This was the fourth time UNO hosted the event, and once again it was well done. There were two speakers, Dr. Patty Gowaty and Trent Holliday,

followed by a panel discussion on the topic of the challenges of teaching evolution in Louisiana.

Dr. Gowaty, a behavioral ecologist from the University of Georgia, made a presentation entitled "Darwin's Dangerous Legacy: Sexual Selection and Sex Roles." She stressed the importance of Darwin's sexual selection ideas and talked about how and why the males of so many species are bizarrely colored and ornamented. She talked about the mechanisms of sexual selection in various species

Dr. Holliday, a Tulane University anthropologist posed the question "How Busy is the Human Family Tree?" and then answered the question with an update of the most recent discoveries and the newest clues they present. There are currently about 22 species in the paleontological record, which might be described as human ancestors. The earliest hominid find was discovered in Chad and dates to about 6-7 million years.

Serving on the panel discussion were Dr. Holliday and Gowaty, as well as Dr. Steve Darwin of Tulane and Dr. Jerry Howard of UNO. The moderator was NOSHA's own Dr. David Schultz of Nicholls State. Several area high school teachers really added to the discussion. In response to some of their remarks, Dr. Gowaty said that people are generally scientifically illiterate and therefore don't understand the complexities of whence scientists come to what they call "facts." She further said that students need to have an appreciation of science as a process and to understand what is meant by "theory."

NOSHA is very grateful for UNO's continued efforts to make Darwin Day an annual event. We think it is especially important to understand the importance of Charles Darwin's contributions to the understanding of science and evolution and the place of humankind in the world. We are especially grateful to Dr. Robert Cashner, Vice Chancellor of Research and Dean of the Graduate School at UNO who has taken on the responsibility and commitment to continue the event.

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At the NOSHA meeting of March 21, Dr. Robert Cashner made a presentation on "A Brief Overview of the Lake Ponchartrain Estuary: Impacts on Fish Communities over 50 Years of Disturbance." All of us live, work and play around Lake Ponchartrain every day, and found the talk very interesting and informative.

Our real reason for inviting Dr. Cashner to address a NOSHA meeting was so that we could honor him for all his hard work and dedication to continuing Darwin Day as an annual event at the University of New Orleans.

NOSHA vice president, Dave Schultz, presented Dr. Cashner with our second Humanist Award. The award, a brass and wood plaque read:

**New Orleans Secular Humanist Association
Presents its
Humanist Award
To
Robert Cashner, Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School and Vice Chancellor of
Research and Sponsored Programs
University of New Orleans**

For his dedicated effort to foster a broader understanding of the importance of the application of science and reason to the betterment of humanity through his promotion of Darwin Day as an annual event at the University of New Orleans

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OTHER NOSHA DOINGS

Since the last newsletter, there have been four regular NOSHA meetings with several interesting topics of interest. In addition, Darwin Day at UNO was celebrated on February 14 (see above), another potluck movie night was enjoyed, five more NOA-TV programs were taped, Dr. Barbara Forrest’s new book was introduced (see page 2), and several outside events of interest were endorsed by NOSHA.

At the February 1 meeting, the line in the Declaration of Independence “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights . . .” was discussed by the group. What is the meaning of “equal” and what did Jefferson mean by “creator” when he wrote the document in 1776?

On March 7, Mr. Kenyon Farrow, Southern Regional Coordinator for Critical Resistance, addressed NOSHA about the prison industrial complex in the United States and made a case for prison abolition. The major focus of Farrow’s organization is prison abolition. He supported his position with astounding statistics. For example, the United States has only 5% of the world’s population, but we house 25% of the world’s prison population in our jails. Fifty percent of the U.S. prison population is in the South where most death penalties are carried out.

On March 21 we presented Dr. Robert Cashner with NOSHA’s humanist award (see above). Before the presentation, he addressed the room on a topic from his own research interests (also above).

Mr. David Goldberg, Communications Director, End of Life Choices (formerly Hemlock Society) presented the NOSHA meeting with a greatly informative talk on April 4. He had spoken earlier that morning at the First Unitarian Universalist Church and had given two interviews the evening before for NOSHA’s NOA-TV tapings. Mr. Goldberg assured us that it is never too early

to plan for how we want our final days and months to be. We think because we are still young, that having an estate will is enough, but having a Living Will that instructs our loved ones as to how we wish to be treated in emergency life-sustaining situations is equally important. He explained that the state of Oregon is at present the only place in the United States where physician-assisted death is legal. Bills are under consideration in other states, including Maine, Hawaii, Vermont, California, and Arizona. He stressed that we should all be able to die as we choose, that it is a fundamental human right, saying that we should enjoy the “dignity, compassion, and control at the end of life as through the rest of life.”



David Goldberg, Communications Director, End of Life Choices, addresses NOSHA, April 4.

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HARRY HAS BEEN BUSY

NOSHA President, Harry Greenberger, was named “Atheist of the Month” for the month of March by the American Atheist Association.

Freethought Today, the newspaper of the Freedom from Religion Foundation, printed the city council proclamation of a Day of Reason and the content of Harry Greenberger’s invocation to the New Orleans City Council on January 8 in their March issue.

Harry Greenberger was invited to address a philosophy class at the University of New Orleans on the topic of death and dying and the afterlife.

CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

May 2 – Regular Meeting – NOSHA book discussion group will discuss *The Blank Slate: The Modern Denial of Human Nature* by Steven Pinker

May 15 – NOSHA volunteers will work the telephone bank for WYES-TV Channel 12 Art Auction

May 16 – Regular Meeting – Topic to be announced

May 29 – NOSHA program taping NOA-TV 11:00 am

June 6 – Regular Meeting – Topic to be announced

June 20 – Regular Meeting – Summer Solstice

June 26 – NOSHA program taping NOA-TV 11:00 am

July 4 - NO MEETING – Happy Independence Day!

July 18 – Regular Meeting – Topic to be announced

August 1 – Regular Meeting – Topic to be announced

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

August 15 – Regular Meeting – Topic to be announced

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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.

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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