

New York City Atheists Inc.

MARCH 2007

Serving the Tri-State area • An affiliate of American Atheists & Center For Atheism Vol. IV Issue No. 3

WEB: NYC-ATHEISTS.ORG COOPER STATION - Box 93, NY, NY 10276-0093 212-330-6794

ATHEISM IS A CONCLUSION NOT A BELIEF

UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

MARCH

Mar. 1*	Thursday	5:00 P.M.	NYCA Movie Nite - First Thursday of Month
Mar. 11**	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club
Mar. 20***	Tuesday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Meet-Up
Mar. 29**	Thursday	6:30 P.M.	NYCA Monthly Meeting (new location)

APRIL

Apr. 5	Thursday	TBA	NYCA Movie Nite - First Thursday of Month
Apr. 8**	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club
Apr. 13****	Friday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA – Madalyn Murray Birthday Dinner
Apr. 17***	Tuesday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Meet-Up
Apr. 26**	Thursday	6:30 P.M.	NYCA Monthly Meeting (new location)

* IFC Center – 323 Sixth Ave. (West 3RD St.)

** [Garden Restaurant – 145 East 60th St. \(Lexington / Third\)](#)

Cost: Individual checks plus \$5 suggested donation — Reservations not required

*** Village Pourhouse – 64 Third Ave. (11th St.)

**** TBA

WEDNESDAYS

THIS WEEK IN ATHEISM CABLE SHOW
6:30 PM-CH 57 (MANHATTAN CABLE)
LIVE STREAMING: [WWW.MNN.ORG](#)

SEEKING CABLE SHOW GUESTS
CALL: KEN BRONSTEIN / 212-535-7425

THURSDAYS

NYC ATHEISTS CABLE SHOW
7:00 PM-CH 67 (MANHATTAN CABLE)
LIVE STREAMING: [WWW.MNN.ORG](#)

ATHEISTS BOOK CLUB CABLE SHOW
7:30 PM – CH 67 (MANHATTAN CABLE)
LIVE STREAMING: [WWW.MNN.ORG](#)

2007 NEW YORK CITY ATHEISTS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION SEE PAGE 8

NYC Atheists Inc. is a 501-C3, non-profit, non-partisan educational association.

Our meetings and membership are open and all are welcome (both non-believers and believers) atheists, agnostics, humanists, freethinkers, skeptics, secularists, separation-of-church/state advocates and individuals who are questioning and searching beliefs.



KENNETH BRONSTEIN

PRESIDENT'S "SERMON" Page 2
ATHEISM: GIVES YOU COURAGE TO DO WHAT'S RIGHT

Religion teaches obedience to authority. Religion teaches humility. Religion teaches to wait for justice in heaven instead of working for a better society here on earth. Religion's real motivation is not the betterment of society, but to convert individuals or the retention of those they already have. In our society, being an Atheist requires courage and gives one courage. Atheists have the courage to think outside the box and are moral because it is right, not out of fear.

When What's Right Is Wrong

Atheism has permeated and influenced my life decisions, my attitudes toward people, and my work. For example, when I was an officer in the U.S. Army during the early 1960s, I was assigned to represent young soldiers who had gone AWOL (away with out leave). Army officers receive military legal training, and can then volunteer as defense counsels in military courts. The most common cases heard in these courts are AWOL cases, and the courts are restricted in sentencing the accused up to six months in the brig, loss of two-thirds pay for six months and the loss of all promotions.

Before I could serve as counsel, I had to spend three months serving on a military jury. This experience was enlightening. About 99 percent of the time, the jury would vote for the maximum penalty. After watching these court trials for three months, I concluded that "throwing the book" at teenagers who had committed a non-violent offense, with no property damage or hurt to anyone or anything, was not right. I felt these boys should get a second chance. I tried convincing the other jurors to give lighter sentences, with limited success. I became convinced that as a defense counsel, I needed a new approach.

My first change, as defense counsel was to visit the accused in the brig. The accused developed a trust in me, because it showed I was interested in them. Most defense counsels would interview the accused in the jury waiting room for 15 minutes before the trial. During my visit to the brig, the accused and I had a "reality" discussion about why it was an unwise to go AWOL. Never did I throw any religious platitudes at these boys like chaplains dispensed. (No, I would not pray for their soul, tell him that they offended god, or that they were surely headed for hell and damnation if they didn't do right!) Instead, I leveled with these boys. We discussed pragmatic things, such as how to survive their army stint and how, after their military service, they could go on to become productive citizens. In the trial, I had the accused take the witness stand (which was very unusual in the military). Their personal stories of confusion or being needed at home were moving. I think this went a long way in convincing the juries to be lenient in their sentencing.

I was so successful in getting reduced sentences for these boys that the Sixth Army General (a three-star general) had his Adjunct-General request that I resign as defense counsel. I respectfully informed him that I would not, and if they relieved me of my duties as defense counsel, I would appeal it up the chain of command and make sure that the press was well informed. As a result, there was no further word from the military brass and I continued as defense counsel for the next year.

In doing what I felt was the right thing for these boys, I think my strong sense of the here and now, my belief that all humans have some good in them and can be rehabilitated, and that these boys' decision making was hampered by the lack of equality in education, opportunity and home life—my atheist outlook on life—gave me the courage to do what was right even when someone else thought it was wrong. I was not handcuffed by any religious dogma; my atheism helped me have the common sense, courage and confidence to buck the system. I'm hoping there are a lot of men out there, now working as farmers and clerks, teachers and construction workers, who may remember a young military officer who believed in them and tried to put them on the right road.

UPCOMING MARCH EVENTS

Page 3

March 1 Thursday 5:00 PM
NYCA First Thursday of Month Movie Nite

Location: IFC Center, 323 Sixth Ave. (W3rd St.)
Directions: A,B,C,D,E,F,V to W4th St.
St./Washington Sq. or Number1 to Christopher
St. / Sheridan Sq.

Movie: An Unreasonable Man

In 1966, General Motors, the most powerful corporation in the world, sent private investigators to dig up dirt on Ralph Nader, an obscure 32-year old public interest lawyer, who had written a book critical of one of their cars, the Corvair. The scandal that ensued after the smear campaign was revealed launched Ralph Nader into national prominence and established him as the leader of the modern Consumer Movement. Over the next 30 years and without ever holding public office, Nader built a legislative record that rivals any contemporary president. Many things we take for granted including seat belts, airbags, product labeling, no nukes, even the free ticket you get after being bumped from an overbooked flight are largely due to the efforts of Ralph Nader and his citizen groups. Yet today, when most people hear his name, they think of the man who cost the Democrats the Presidential election. After sustaining his popularity and effectiveness over an unprecedented amount of time, he now has become a pariah even among former friends and allies.

March 11 Sunday 12:00 P.M.
NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club

Location: Garden Restaurant
145 East 60th St. (Lexington and Third)
Reservations: Not required
Cost: Individual checks plus \$5 donation

Guest: TBA
Book: TBA

The NYCA library includes over 600 books as well as numerous CDs, DVDs, cassettes, videotapes, newsletters and magazines.
Contact: Pat Berger – NYCA Librarian
PGBNYC@AOL.COM / 212-489-5644

March 20 Tuesday 7:00 P.M.
NYCA Meet-Up
Location: Village Pourhouse
64 Third Ave. (11th Street)
Casual conversation and drinks with your fellow freethinkers.
Cost: Free (cash food and bar)
Register at <http://atheists.meetup.com>

March 29 Thursday 6:30 P.M.
NYCA Monthly Meeting

Location: Garden Restaurant
145 East 60th St. (Lexington and Third)
Reservations: Not required
Cost: Individual checks plus \$5 donation

Speaker: Margaret Downey – President AAI
Subject: Atheists Alliance International (AAI)

Ms. Downey was recently elected president of Atheist Alliance International (AAI), which has forty-four member societies in the United States and 10 in other countries. AAI, founded in 1991, is an umbrella organization for local, autonomous, religion-free groups. Its purposes are to help establish and strengthen the religion-free community at the grassroots level and to achieve visibility and acceptance for Atheists as respected contributors to discussions of public policy.

Ms. Downey has been a First Amendment activist for more than twenty years. She is founder and president of the Free-Thought Society of Greater Philadelphia and the Atheist Anti-Discrimination Support Network, a national watchdog committee that works to protect freedom of conscience.

In assuming the presidency of AAI, Ms. Downey said her goal is to help build a strong coalition of Freethought organizations into an effective national voice.

"This nation was founded with the hope and expectation of creating one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

"That goal can be realized only if all citizens are treated equally before the law, with no governmental preference shown for skin color, national origin, age, gender or religious opinion," Ms. Downey stated.

Ms. Downey has a long record of advocacy and litigation to establish the civil rights and civil liberties of nontheist citizens. She has been most persistent in opposing government support for the Boy Scouts of America due to its discriminatory exclusion of Atheists and gays from membership and she has been a continuing voice in defending the First Amendment against government promotion of religious phrases, mottos and icons.

She has served as an Atheist community expert for two conferences of the United Nations Freedom of Religion or Belief Committee.

**MADALYN MURRAY O'HAIR
BIRTHDAY PARTY
APRIL 13, 2007**

**NYC ATHEISTS
BLOOD DONATION DAY
MAY 3, 2007**

*Book review by Tim Callahan--
Dover, Pennsylvania:
The Battle for Our Children*

The attack on teaching evolution in Dover Pennsylvania was headed by two of its school board members — Alan Bonsell and Bill Buckingham — both of whom wanted creationism taught in the district's schools.

Buckingham wanted the school district to buy 220 copies of the ID biology book *Of Pandas and People*. When School Superintendent Richard Nilsen balked at purchasing the book, Buckingham revealed that he controlled enough board votes to block approval of the previously approved biology text and would not release the votes unless the board agreed to purchase *Of Pandas and People*. He told teachers and opposing board members, "If we don't get our book, you don't get yours."

The school board's tactics became increasingly dictatorial from that point on. The board arbitrarily determined the new science curriculum with no input from the science faculty.

The political climate at the outset of Dover did not favor the furtherance of teaching evolution. In the wake of Bush's reelection at the end of 2004, a school board in Grantsburg, Wisconsin, imposed a policy to criticize evolution. South Carolina, Tennessee, Michigan, Oklahoma, and Texas introduced similar statewide legislation. In California, a coalition of Christian schools sued the University of California for violating the Constitutional rights of students by refusing to give credit for creationist biology classes. Florida introduced legislation making it possible for students to sue professors for offending their religious beliefs. In Missouri, conservative legislator Cynthia Davis introduced legislation requiring biology textbooks used in the state to include a chapter on alternatives to evolution. Against this political background, the plaintiffs in Dover went forward with their case in the fall of 2005.

School Board Bullies

In Dover itself public support for the board began to wane following the filing of the suit. The defendants themselves also appeared to be abandoning their former bullying, no-compromise support for putting god into the science curriculum: When deposed prior to the trial, Buckingham and Bonsell denied ever mentioning creationism at any meeting, which contradicted witnesses and press reports. Board members also insisted they didn't see ID as religion.

Further, the ID camp began to unravel. After the conservative think tank, Discovery Institute, pulled its support, chief ID defendant William Dembski refused to testify, as did his ID colleagues Stephen Meyer and John Angus Campbell, all of whom demanded to have their own personal attorneys to look after their interests in the trial. The Thomas More Law Center refused. As a result of the impasse, all three were out as expert witnesses for the defense. Eventually, Meyer and Campbell were reconciled and agreed to testify without having their own lawyers; but Dembski remained intractable and had to threaten to sue the Thomas More Center to be paid for more than 100 hours he had already spent on the case. At \$200 an hour, this meant he was eventually paid more than \$20,000 for not testifying.

From this point on the case went steadily downhill for the defense. Jon Buell, publisher of *Pandas*, tried to intervene in the case on the side of the defense. When cross-examined by plaintiffs' attorney Eric Rothschild, Buell stated that he wanted to make sure that *Pandas* wasn't represented as a creationist text. Rothschild confounded him by producing a letter Buell had written that stated: "Our commitment is to see the monopoly of naturalistic curriculum in the schools broken. Presently school curriculum reflects deep hostility to traditional Christian views and values, and indoctrinates students to this mind-set through subtle, but persuasive arguments." The letter also said how important it was to stop schools from denying the notion that man was created in God's image. Rothschild asked Buell how he could write such a letter in regards to the book and not have any idea that *Pandas* would be viewed as a creationist text. Buell didn't answer, and the judge rejected his intervention.

Sneaking Faith into Schools

Following that, the presentation of witnesses for the plaintiffs proved devastating and was followed by even more ruinous cross-examination of the defense witnesses. Perhaps most harmful to the ID case was the testimony of Barbara Forrest, a professor from Louisiana who had been attacked in very personal and insulting terms by the Discovery Institute and whom the Thomas More Law Center had fought to keep off the witness list.

Forrest demonstrated convincingly that *Of Pandas and People* was originally a creationist text. In the 1986 draft *Pandas* said that creation means that life forms appear abruptly through the agency of an intelligent creator. In the 1993 draft, the words "creation" and "creator" were replaced respectively by "intelligent design" and "designer."

Forrest also dredged up quotes by Discovery Institute leading lights Phillip Johnson and William Dembski, illuminating the "wedge strategy" and showing the aim of Discovery was to teach creationism as a tool for spreading the

Christian faith. Dembski, for example, was quoted as saying: "Intelligent Design should be viewed as a ground-clearing operation that gets rid of intellectual rubbish that for generations has kept Christianity from receiving serious consideration."

The cross examination of Michael Behe (Lehigh University professor - ID Advocate) proved to be devastating to the scientific credibility of Intelligent Design. For example, Behe had said that a population of one billion bacteria would take 100 million generations to produce a novel protein feature through Darwinian evolution. At first, this seems so astronomical as to be an insurmountable barrier. However, Rothschild got Behe to admit that growing 10,000 generations of bacteria in a lab would take two years. Therefore, 100 million generations would take about 20,000 years, an eye blink in geological time. Finally, Behe was forced to concede that there are about 10 quadrillion bacteria in one ton of soil — about 10 million times as many bacteria as Behe said would require 100 million generations to produce a novel protein.

Behe had also claimed that his theory of irreducible complexity was testable in a laboratory. Simply take a species of bacteria lacking a flagellum, place it in an environment that would favor mobile organisms, grow it for 10,000 generations — again, a mere two years — and see if a flagellum began to evolve. However, Behe had never done this. Rothschild asked him why he hadn't performed this make-or-break experiment, one that could falsify either evolution or ID. Behe responded: "It would not be fruitful."

Board Voted Out

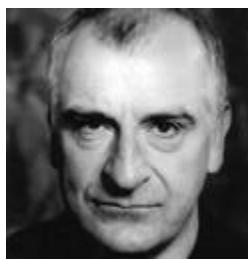
So devastating was the trial to the defendants' cause that four days after it ended, before Judge Jones had even handed down his verdict, the voters in Dover went to the polls and voted the entire board out of office. With predictable petulance, Conservative leader Pat Robertson said on the 700 Club in response: "I'd like to say to the good citizens of Dover, if there is a disaster in your area, don't turn to god. You just rejected him from your city, and don't wonder why he hasn't helped you when problems begin."

On December 20, 2005 Judge John E. Jones III rendered his verdict in Kitzmiller vs. Dover. He found that the board's ID policy was unconstitutional, that the board had sought to inject religion into the classroom, while undermining the teaching of science, and that intelligent design was a religious proposition, not science. He further characterized the Board's policy as "breathtaking inanity." For carrying out his duty of enforcing the law of the land, Judge Jones was subsequently vilified by the Discovery Institute, conservative commentator Bill O'Reilly, and Ann Coulter, the latter of whom wrote: "They didn't win on science, persuasion, or the evidence. They won the way liberals always win: by finding a court to hand them everything on a silver platter."

Before the trial, Judge Jones, a Bush-appointed moderate Republican who once led an unsuccessful attempt to privatize Pennsylvania's state-owned liquor stores, was characterized by the Discovery Institute as one of their own.

While the trial in Dover will not bring about the demise of either creationism or ID, it may have set enough of a precedent to keep ID out of the school systems. □

ATHEISTS BORN IN THE MONTH OF MARCH



Douglas Noël Adams
March 11, 1952 – May 11, 2001

An English author, comic radio dramatist, and amateur musician, he is known most notably as author of the *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* series.

Adams was a self-declared "radical atheist," though he used the term for emphasis, so that he would not be asked if he in fact meant agnostic. He stated in an interview with American Atheists

that this made things easier, but most importantly that it conveyed the fact that he really meant it, had thought about it a great deal, and that it was an opinion he held seriously. He was convinced that there is no god, having never seen one shred of evidence to convince him otherwise, and devoted himself instead to secular causes such as environmentalism.



B. F. Skinner

March 20, 1904 – August 18, 1990

An American psychologist and author. He conducted pioneering work in experimental psychology and advocated behaviorism, which seeks to understand behavior as a function of environmental histories of experiencing consequences.

Skinner received his Bachelor's degree in English in hopes of becoming a writer. He wrote for the school paper but saw himself as an outsider, since he was an atheist in a religious school, and often criticized the school and its beliefs.



Pierre-Simon, Marquis de Laplace
March 23, 1749 – March 5, 1827

A French mathematician and astronomer who put the final capstone on mathematical astronomy by summarizing and extending the work of his predecessors in his five volume *Mécanique Céleste* (Celestial Mechanics) (1799-1825). This masterpiece translated the geometrical study of mechanics used by Isaac Newton to one based on calculus, known as physical mechanics.

"I had no need of that hypothesis". ("Je n'avais pas besoin de cette hypothèse-là," as a reply to Napoleon, who had asked why he hadn't mentioned god in his book on astronomy)
"The weight of evidence for an extraordinary claim must be proportioned to its strangeness." (known as the Principle of Laplace)

PROUD TO BE AN ATHEIST!

Editor's Q and A

Our Q & A columnist, Cassandra, has moved to Bora Bora, where she is attempting to convert the Boravians from worshipping woodpiles. Her place has been taken by our editor. Please send questions c/o the newsletter.

Dear Editor:

Why do we lie to our children about things like Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, god, angels, heaven and hell?

--Sophia
Woodlawn, N.J.

Because we were lied to ourselves. "It can't be that bad," we think, "if our parents themselves told us these little white lies." There is something in humankind that wants to perpetuate tradition.

But there is no reason why we can't break the pattern and teach our children what is real and what isn't. We can say, for example, "The man in the Santa costume is pretend, Junior. He is playing the part of a fairy-tale Santa just like actors on a stage play people who never existed." Or we can say, "There is no person called god. He is just a figment of someone's imagination." Or, "The idea of heaven and hell is a fairy tale, like Hansel and Gretel or Little Red Riding Hood. No one has any proof that heaven and hell exist." To my own children I would often add, "Sometimes people use the promise of rewards in heaven or eternal punishment in hell to make you behave, but I want you to behave well just because it's the right thing to do here on earth."

We are searching for:

Monthly Meeting Room
Thursday Nites: 6:00 – 9:00 P.M.
Seating 35-50
Cost: FREE OR INEXPENSIVE
Call: Ken Bronstein – 212-535-7425

Another reason we sometimes fall prey to lying to our children is that we want to spare them the hardships of living in grown-up land, at least for a while. We live in a child-centered society in the US; we want to give our children a happy, idyllic childhood. We want them to escape the responsibilities of adulthood for a while and live in fairy-tale land while they are young. So we let them fly with Peter Pan to Never-never land or believe that a Tooth Fairy put money under their pillow. It's just a leap and a jump from that to their believing that angels are looking over them while they sleep. Not that reading these fantasies and myths isn't enjoyable—most certainly, it is—but it's important to emphasize to the child that that's what they are—myths and fantasies. I myself loved the Wizard of Oz when I was a kid—and a big part of it was, I think, that the Wizard turns out to be a big fake in the end, just like god.

I think most kids feel cheated when they grow up and find out that Harry Potter's Wizard school is a fake, that it's just plain illogical to think sleighs can fly in the sky and that there is no heaven or hell. So they've been "good" all their lives for a fake reward! How can they trust their parents and teachers ever again?

Why do we want to spare our children the so-called harshness of real life? Real life can be more fascinating and challenging than fantasy. And if real life has its hardships, we can teach our children the concept of down-to-earth problem solving. That is, don't just dream of a life in heaven that is free of hardships; find ways to make life on earth a little less difficult. There's no need to curse the darkness when you can invent a light bulb. □



February 11, 2007

Brunch and Book Club Meeting
Guest Speaker: Professor Philip Kitcher
Author: *Living With Darwin*



February 22, 2007

Monthly Meeting
Guest Speaker: Lori Brown
Director: Secular Coalition For America

RENEW / JOIN NYC ATHEISTS

Through our programs and activities, we work to bring awareness of our principles, our vision and, above all, of our existence as atheists. We do it through our website, our meetings and events, our cable shows, our library and book club, our street tabling and our newsletters --all of which are funded by your membership.

With the continued growth of our membership, we gather strength in numbers and will more effectively counteract the threat of a looming theocracy.



NYC ATHEISTS — 2007 MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

First Name: _____ Last Name: _____

Street Address: _____ Apt No.: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____ @ _____ Phone: (____) _____ - _____

NYC Atheists Inc. is a non-profit (501-C3), non-partisan, educational association with these purposes and goals:

1. To promote the total and absolute separation of church and state
2. To educate and inform the public about Atheism
3. To provide a forum for discussion about Atheism
4. To develop and engage in educational, cultural, charitable and social activities that are beneficial to the members of NYC Atheists Inc., the Atheist community and the community at large.

YOUR 2006 MEMBERSHIP DUES ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE

Basic __ \$ 25 Friend __ \$ 100 Sustainer __ \$ 250 Patron __ \$ 500 Benefactor __ \$ 1000

Signature: _____ Date: _____

**CHECK PAYABLE TO: NYC ATHEISTS INC. - SEND APPLICATION
 TO: NYC ATHEISTS INC. MEMBERSHIP - COOPER STATION P.O. Box 93 NY, NY 10276-0093**