

New York City Atheists Inc.

Serving the Tri-State area

An affiliate of American Atheists, Atheist Alliance International & Center For Atheism

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

212-330-6794

OCTOBER 2007

Vol. IV Issue No. 10

ATHEISM IS A CONCLUSION NOT A BELIEF

UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

OCTOBER

Oct. 14*	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club
Oct. 16**	Tuesday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Meet-Up
Oct. 25***	Thursday	6:30 P.M.	NYCA Monthly Meeting
Oct. 31****	Wednesday	TBA	Halloween Parade

NOVEMBER

Nov. 11*	Sunday	12:00 P.M.	NYCA Brunch, Library, Book Club
Nov. 20**	Tuesday	7:00 P.M.	NYCA Meet-Up
Nov. 29***	Thursday	6:30 P.M.	NYCA Monthly Meeting

* Press Box Restaurant & Pub – 932 Second Ave. (49/50th) 2nd Floor

** Stone Creek Bar and Lounge – 140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex)

Register at <http://atheists.meetup.com>

*** To Be Announced

**** Call Ken Bronstein - 212-535-7425 for Details

WEDNESDAYS

THIS WEEK IN ATHEISM CABLE SHOW

6:30 PM-CH 57 (MANHATTAN CABLE)

LIVE STREAMING: WWW.MNN.ORG

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

PROUD TO BE AN ATHEIST!

2007/2008

NEW YORK CITY ATHEISTS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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

Whenever there is a newspaper article or TV program about Atheism, you can be sure that the reporter has contacted the opposition—maybe a church spokesperson or a preacher—to get their rebuttal. Al Sharpton always seems to be available for that purpose. That is how the Press considers it is being “fair”; that is the way the media demonstrates that it is “presenting both sides” or “letting the readers or viewers make up their own minds” about whatever issue is being presented. But, in contrast, 99 percent of the time when the topic is religion or some religious issue, a spokesperson from the Non-Believer community is *not* contacted to present our point of view or a rebuttal.

For example, after the death of fundamentalist minister Jerry Falwell, many prominent people were quoted by the press, giving tributes and commentary about Falwell’s life to the media. But what reporters contacted Richard Dawkins or Daniel Dennett for their comments? What media person had the insight to interview Ellen Johnson, Margaret Downey, Edwin Kagin or Paul Kurtz about Jerry Falwell? To the best of our knowledge, *no one*. Yet you may be sure that all of these prominent Atheists had something to say about Jerry Falwell’s life. In fact, Ellen Johnson, president of American Atheists, issued a press release commenting on Falwell’s death. While pointing out that American Atheists extended condolences to his family for their loss, she deplored the harm that this man had perpetrated on American society. Yet I don’t believe that Johnson’s timely and intelligent press release was picked up by any prominent media despite the media’s boasts of presenting all sides of an issue.

Another example of the media’s neglect of Atheism is the paucity of coverage of the recent Atheist Alliance International Convention. Only one or two second-rung media outlets gave this outstanding event any newspaper space or air time. The *Washington Post* evidently covered it as a local event, printing Sam Harris’s speech (probably gleefully, since he was critical of Atheists) even though the convention featured four best-selling celebrity authors. I looked in vain for coverage of the Convention in the *New York Times*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, the Philadelphia newspapers, the TV Networks, but evidently, as far as they were all concerned, we are chopped liver.

What makes the media ignore us when it’s time for them to get the opposing view? There are several reasons, I think. First of all, we need to let them know that we are here, and that we *care* about this unfairness in coverage of us and our events. To do this, we need to: (1) contact media publishers, (2) complain privately to these publishers and (3) complain publicly.

Does this kind of pressure on the media work? It did for the conservatives, who about a decade ago began vociferously complaining about the “liberal media” and protesting that the conservative viewpoint wasn’t being given enough air time or space. The result: Now we have Fox News, Bill O’Reilly and Ann Coulter, among other irritants, as the media bowed to the demands of conservatives. A few web sites have arisen to counter what is increasingly becoming a conservative domination of the media (and that includes religious conservatives)—for instance, these are the web-based media watchdog groups FAIR and *Media Matters for America*, both dedicated to countering ultraconservative bias in the media—but there is no group out there that is dedicated to making sure that the voice and outlook of Atheist Americans is not overlooked or deliberately ignored.

What we need to do is, first, gather data proving that there is inequality in the amount of time and space allotted by media to the Atheist viewpoint. This will require that we monitor various media outlets.

All of the dedicated Atheists out there who regularly read a particular newspaper or watch a particular TV news or TV magazine show such as 20/20 or *Nightline*, we want you to start keeping track of how many times the religious viewpoint is aired without a response or rebuttal from an Atheist group. (This is an interesting way to be an activist while being a couch potato.)

Once we have specific data (i.e., “Channel 13 presented an hour on the life of Billy Graham on this date and this time without once presenting a comment from those who felt he was doing a disservice to America”), once we have some documentation of what we are alleging, even a week’s worth of observations, then we can move ahead and contact publishers, TV producers and radio personalities through all the resources at our disposal, including press releases, letters to publishers, articles and meetings with media bigwigs. So come on, all you couch potatoes out there, this is where you are indispensable. Monitoring the media while doing your thing may be the biggest, the best thing you can do for posterity without even getting out of your Lazy Boy. We're looking forward to hearing from you! ☐

I would appreciate your comments. Ken Bronstein at NYCATHEISTS@AOL.COM or 212-535-7425

UPCOMING OCTOBER EVENTS

October 14 Sunday 12:00 P.M.
NYCA Brunch, Book Club, Library

Location: Press Box Restaurant & Pub
932 Second Ave. (49/50th) 2nd Floor
Cost: Lunch Buffet - \$20 includes juice, coffee, soda, tax and tip. (Alcoholic drinks extra)

After brunch, we go to the NYC Atheists’ library located on West 48th street.
Pat Berger, NYCA Librarian, has selected Bertram Russell’s “*Why I Am Not a Christian.*” Attendees should purchase, and have read, the book. The book can be purchased from Amazon www.amazon.com

October 16 Tuesday 7:00 P.M.
NYCA Social Gathering (Meet-Up)
Location: Stone Creek Bar and Lounge
140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex)
Casual conversation and drinks with your fellow freethinkers.
Cost: Free (cash food and bar)
Register at www.meetup.com

October 25 Thursday 6:30 P.M.
NYC Atheists Monthly Meeting
Subject: TBA
Location: TBA
Cost: \$5 Donation to help cover the cost of the room rental

October 31 Wednesday 6:00 P.M.
Halloween Parade
Call Ken Bronstein – 212-535-7425 for details
Join New York City members as we march in our monk costumes in the New York City Halloween Parade. After parading, we party.

<p><u>NYC Atheists Affiliations</u> National Atheism Groups American Atheists Atheist Alliance International Center for Atheism - Home Page Secular Student Alliance Camp Quest: It's beyond belief</p> <p>Lobbying Groups: Secular Coalition for America The Institute for Humanist Studies</p>
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<p>Total Separation Of Church and State</p>

<p>ATHEIST PRIDE</p>

<p>DEMOCRACY NOT THEOCRACY</p>

<p>Stem Cell Research Is Pro-life</p>

The ‘Four Horsemen’ Help Make Atheist Convention A Smashing Success

Best Selling Authors Bring Notoriety, Controversy, Humor

By Jane Everhart

Washington, DC—The opening night cocktail party of the Atheist Alliance International (AAI) Convention was wall-to-wall Atheist celebrities in the ballroom at the Crowne Plaza Hotel—but who expected Tom Wolfe, celebrity author of *Bonfire of the Vanities*, to appear?

Yet there he was, in all his sartorial splendor—off-white suit, spats, red tie—cheek by jowl with Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens and Daniel Dennett (whom the corridor buzz quickly dubbed *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*)—and he seemed a walking testament to the importance of this September 27-30 AAI convention in Arlington, VA, which had been sold out for months and reportedly had a waiting list of 600.



Dawkins



Dennett



Harris



Hitchens

But more surprises were yet to come: Everyone who was a mover-and-shaker in the New Atheism, it appeared, was destined to show up at this convention, including the mysterious Somalian author and critic of Islam, Ayaan Hirsi Ali; actress Julia Sweeney; the Atheist rapper, Greydon Square; the entire staff of *The Rational Response Squad*, including the beautiful Kelly of *Nightline* TV fame, and the comedian known for religious parody “Pastor Deacon Fred.”

Also seen coursing through the hallways were the philanthropist Larry Jones; the ebullient Atheist lobbyist Lori Lipman Brown; Darwin’s grandson, Matthew Chapman and—was it an apparition or did she actually appear for a second?—the elegant Ellen Johnson, president of American Atheists. Even Jesus wandered in by the outdoor pool one evening and, on that

beautiful warm autumn night in Washington, did not walk on water.

The palpable excitement at the opening cocktail party continued throughout the entire convention as attendees mingled with the celebrities. Here was Chris Hitchens, drinking a beer on the hotel veranda in torn Levis with his shirttail hanging out. (“Nice to see Chris dressed up for the event,” said one attendee.) There was Dawkins, who appeared to be in a state of perpetual righteous indignation, in a Hawaiian shirt, signing autographs as fast as he could write. There was Daniel Dennett, looking like Darwin with his generous white beard, rising from the audience to ask a question of another speaker just like you and me. And there was Ayaan Hirsi Ali, regally marching into the Ballroom for her presentation, surrounded by an entourage of majestic oversized security guards.

Religion Empowers Suicide Bombers

In the end, the Ballroom proved not quite large enough for the overflow crowd, so three nearby conference rooms were commandeered, where the overflow audience watched the presentations on screens. One of my favorite speakers was the first, psychiatrist J. Anderson Thomson, Jr. M.D. of Charlottesville, VA, who discussed the *Psychology of the Suicide Bomber* and the religious influences that drive these martyrs to destroy themselves for a cause. Thomson pointed out that religion, which plays a seminal role in their martyrdom, uses persuasive psychological techniques on the would-be suicide bomber, including what he described as “kin psychology”—that is, the religion redirects the potential bomber’s family loyalties so that the religion becomes “pseudo kin.” Religion also uses the techniques of empowering the disenfranchised and minimizing fear of death. “To really understand suicide terrorists [and stop their proliferation], we must face the fact

that religion is a dangerous man-made phenomenon,” Thomson said.

Dawkins’ “Out” Campaign

Richard Dawkins reported that he has now sold 1.25 million copies of his book, *The God Delusion*, and that the book has been translated into 31 foreign languages. In his talk, he focused on his newly established organization, *The Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science*, and its “Out Campaign,” which centers on five “Outs”: “Come Out” (as an Atheist), “Reach Out,” (to others who might be Atheists), “Speak Out,” (go and tell the world about Atheism), “Keep Out” (Keep religion out of government, science and schools) and “Stand Out,” (damned if I know what that means. Maybe that we need to become more visible in our communities?) Dawkins cautioned, however, that though his Out campaign means Come out of the [Atheist] closet, please don’t out anybody but yourself.

Dawkins also showed clips of some of his video interviews with the media to illustrate how the press has edited them to twist what he had actually said to the interviewer. (Welcome to America, Mr. Dawkins, where the conventional wisdom is, “The only person who enjoys a free press is the guy who owns one.” Otherwise you are at the mercy of the press, who chop, cut, edit and misinterpret to their heart’s content.)

Still, we must give Dawkins his props. Unlike some Atheist authors who write books and then retire to their Ivory Towers to contemplate their navels, Dawkins has used his prestige, and his profits, to set up his Foundation. “I am one of those scientists who feels that it is no longer enough just to get on and do science,” he says. “We have to devote a significant proportion of our time and resources to defending science from deliberate attack by organized ignorance.”

Dawkins’ Foundation plans to sponsor research into the psychological basis of “Unreason” and to oppose religion’s “well-financed efforts to teach creationism in science classes.” The Foundation will also keep a database of Atheist lecturers by region; supply (free or cheaply) DVDS, tapes, podcasts and booklets to non-profit organizations; do some independent publishing;

give to major-disaster victims of tsunamis and earthquakes; raise the public consciousness about religion and the oppression of children, and organize conferences. Whew! If all this comes about, Dawkins will be a one-man Sherman tank against the religious establishment. While he magnanimously offered, at this convention, to nominate Ayaan Hirsi Ali for the Peace Prize, I can’t help thinking that someone should nominate *him* for a Nobel.

Dennett Explains; Hitchens Entertains

At a lunch with a group of Beltway Atheists during the convention, the women and I decided that while Christopher Hitchens is the sexiest of the Four Horsemen, Dennett is the nicest. What if we got him to shave off his beard, one woman said. Noooo, the others chorused: We need a George Bernard Shaw persona in the movement! And so the philosopher/author/Tufts professor Dennett (*Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*), with prodigious facial hair flowing, got a standing ovation for his presentation at the convention, in which he explained, with depth and simplicity and insight, how otherwise intelligent people become drawn into religion. Basically, it’s because society pressures you into it with guilt and shame and every kind of psychological leverage at its disposal.

Hitchens, reveling in his bad-boy Dylan Thomas image, caused titters and gasps during his talk when, bored with one question directed at him, he responded, “Your question doesn’t give me enough of an erection.” He is the *agent provocateur* of the Atheist movement, and I think we’d have to invent him if he didn’t exist. He’s the adventurer, the F. Scott Fitzgerald, the observer and raconteur of the New Atheism. He’s at his best speaking off the cuff, during the question period. His convention presentation seemed perfunctory, but still provided a few *bon mots* to pass on from his experience traveling through America on his book tours. “People everywhere think religion is a teacher of morals. But I say it is a teacher of *evil*.” “Charity breeds poverty.” “Republican ecumenism is: Everybody should have a faith; we don’t care what it is.” And his rant against Mother Theresa, who, he says, withheld condoms from poverty-stricken people in the hellhole slums of Calcutta, was

vivid enough to knock her off her saintly pedestal.

The Perfidy of Sam Harris

Sam Harris was the first “New” Atheist to make a big splash on the best seller list with *The End of Faith*, and he duplicated his best-sellerdom a couple of years later with a second book, *Letter to a Christian Nation*. Alas, Sam Harris was the biggest disappointment of the Convention for me. [see Editor’s Q and A]

I’m sorry, but one does not come to an *Atheist* convention given by the American *Atheist* Alliance and tell them that there’s no reason for them to exist as *Atheists*. Nor does one come to an Atheist convention, where reason and logic is king, and tout the joys of transcendental meditation. It sounds goofy, I know, but that’s what Sam Harris did. The whole audience sat politely listening to his ill-thought out diatribe—except for a few people, including this writer, who, in my best “the emperor is naked” mode, booed at the end of Harris’s talk.

Kelly of *The Rational Response Squad* was the first to jump up after his talk and, apparently in response to Harris’s saying that he does not wish to be associated with an organization whose main concept is the *absence* of something, asked Harris if the early American Abolitionists were not in fact centered around developing the absence of slavery. Then Daniel Dennett arose and after saying in a nice way that he respects getting in touch with one’s inner spirit through silence and meditation—yet, he pointed out, those guys who meditate in caves for 15 months

seldom emerge with anything profound or significant.

What’s the explanation for Sam’s weird tirade demeaning the word “Atheist” and championing meditation? One person I spoke to had the answer: Sam has been in his Ivory Tower too long. He’s been contemplating his navel, accessing the Internet and taking his hate email much too seriously.

More sensible, and more in touch with reality, I thought, was African-American Atheist rapper Greydon Square. A child of foster homes and the streets, Greydon (his real name is Eddie Collins) served in Iraq in the Army. Today, he is attending the University of Arizona, majoring in astrophysics (he calls himself the Black Carl Sagan). I watched him perform with Brian Sapient one evening by the hotel pool and I was taken by the merciless beat of rap, the fascinating apparition of a Black and White duo and the words of Atheism set into street poetry. I thought, *this young man is going to bring Atheism where it’s needed—into the streets.*

So, what about Tom Wolfe? Why did he appear among us? Rumor has it, he is going to be one of the speakers at next year’s American Alliance International convention, which will take place on board the Queen Mary anchored in Long Beach Harbor, CA. But I suspect that Tom, a contrarian journalist as long as I can remember (who can forget *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine Flake Streamline Baby?*), is doing research for something he is going to write about us. And that means, ladies and gentlemen, we are hot. □

SUPPORT GROUP

We are organizing a support group for Atheists with the purpose of providing solace, courage and comfort to Atheists with problems and adversities, not depending on religion or the supernatural but instead using reason, logic and fellowship. If you are interested in taking part in such a support group, either as a participant or leader, call Ken Bronstein at 212-535-7425.

New York City Atheists Board of Directors

To propose or nominate someone for the 2008 NYC Atheists Board of Directors, Contact Ken Bronstein - 212-535-7425
Must be a member of NYC Atheists.

**Man invented god
god did not invent man**

Betrayed by Sam Harris

Dear Editor,

Is it true that you booed author Sam Harris's speech at the Atheist Alliance International convention in Washington DC last month? And that you told reporters that you are going to give Harris back his books? What's going on?"

Puzzled in Poughkeepsie

Dear Puzzled,

Yes, it's true; I did boo Sam Harris's speech at the AAI convention. What I was angry about was his statement that he "didn't want to be part of an organization whose whole concept rested on the absence of something." How dare he come to our convention, talk with us, eat with us, and then tell us that he didn't want to be part of us? Though I was the only one to boo after he gave his speech (everybody else sat there apparently stunned at the rudeness), others booed him at the Awards Banquet and Harris was the only celebrity who did not get a standing ovation.

When I got back to New York City, I reread the transcript of Sam's speech, "*The Problem with Atheism*," published in its entirety in, I think, the *Washington Post*. Guess what, I could not find the statement I objected to anywhere in his speech! I read the speech twice, looking for that sentence, which I had written down in my notebook. Then I looked at the top of the speech and saw: "This is an *edited* transcript of a talk given at the AAI convention..." OK, add injury to insult: The sentence that made me angry must have been an off-the-cuff remark that Harris had edited out of the transcript for posterity.

But the first question hurled at Harris after his speech indicated that others had heard the same words. Kelly, the single-name beauty of the Internet's *Rational Response Squad*, famous for debating two evangelists on *Nightline*, jumped up and pointed out to Harris that the pre-Civil War "Abolitionists" had been organized with a negative goal in mind: the absence of slavery. I can add another, more contemporary organization: MADD, or Mothers Against Drunk Driving.

Harris's whole thesis, in his convention speech, was that we should eliminate the word "Atheist" from our vocabulary and our organization names because the word has a bad image. In accepting the label of "Atheist," Harris says, "...we are consenting to be viewed as a cranky sub-culture. We are consenting to be viewed as a marginal interest group that meets in hotel ballrooms."

A marginal interest group that meets in hotel ballrooms? You got some place better to meet, Sam? *Marginal?* That's just temporary, Sam. The whole point of our collective efforts is *to make religion marginal*, not us.

Harris continued: "We should not call ourselves atheists. We should not call ourselves secularists or humanists or secular humanists or skeptics or naturalists or anti-theists or freethinkers or brights. We should not call ourselves anything. We should go under the radar—for the rest of our lives."

For someone like me, who has fought for four years to make the word "Atheist" acceptable and to convince society that it is OK to be an Atheist, and further, that one should be proud to be an Atheist—"Say It Loud, Say It Proud, I'm an Atheist!"—these were words that cut to the quick, these were the words, in my mind, of a reactionary and a coward. *Go under the radar?* Throw away my Atheist tee shirts, my Atheist baseball cap, my Atheist pen? And the bumper sticker that says "Atheists Do It Better"? Not on your life.

What's wrong with the word "Atheist" anyway? Is the word "Presbyterian" any more decorous or melodious? I don't think so. Yet I don't see any Presbyterians saying, Hey, let's ditch this crazy name. Or what about Episcopalians? What does the word Episcopalian *mean* anyway? Yet they've stuck to it for a couple of centuries and it has become meaningful to them and society. Remember, the word "Puritan" was once a curse in England; the Puritans came here to the New World to escape persecution. Today, it's hard to

believe that the Puritans were ever persona non grata.

Harris also feels that we should discard the word "Atheist" (and apparently every other name for our movement) because "every religious person thinks he has a knockdown argument against atheism." What, if we called ourselves Memes, would that argument disappear? Doesn't Harris know that, whatever we are called, the religionists know us as Those Who Do Not Believe in god. But try putting TWDNBIG on a bumper sticker.

Then, of course, Harris points out, there's the political embarrassment when people throw in your face that the perpetrators of the "greatest crimes of the 20th century" allegedly were Atheists. Indeed, this was the first question that was raised from the audience on *ABC Nightline* during Kelly and Brian Sapien's debate with the Evangelists. It's a toughie, and insidiously underhanded because it subtly implies that if these bad guys were Atheists, then all Atheists

must be evil. But Atheism is a philosophy, not a directive. It is possible for anybody, villainous or virtuous, to be a nonbeliever. If a person is motivated to do evil because of greed or politics or war, it's not fair or logical or honest to put the blame on his secularism. Atheists can't choose, or limit, who adopts our philosophy; all we can do is disavow their unhumanist actions and teach our adherents that both Atheism and technology must be used for the good of humanity.

Everything Harris said at the AAI convention is wrong, and cowardly, and escapist. Let us face the criticism and innuendos flung at us and explain them scientifically and rationally. Let us keep the name Atheist until we no longer need to. Sam, go back to your Ivory Tower and transcendental meditation in your cave. I am sending you back your books.

--Jane Everhart, Editor

This newsletter is published by
New York City Atheists Inc.
Publisher – Kenneth Bronstein
Editor – Jane Everhart



NYC ATHEISTS — 2007/2008 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 2007/2008 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**