

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

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KENNETH BRONSTEIN

PRESIDENT'S "SERMON"

YES WE CAN, YES WE DID, YES WE WILL!

The NY Media Doffs Its Hat to Atheist Bus Ads

Last Saturday, the New York City media responded to our call. At a busy intersection on Columbus Circle, as the world passed by our street-tabling tent, a goodly chunk of the New York press corps descended on us, listened to us, photographed us, interviewed us, taped us and questioned us about our bus-ad campaign.

It was, for us Atheists, a media extravaganza, more outpouring of attention than we had ever hoped for, to mark the debut of our 12-foot-long poster—"YOU DON'T HAVE TO BELIEVE IN GOD"—on buses that were at that very moment careening through Manhattan.

The press conference we held that day was an important breakthrough for Atheists. Despite the stiff competition from attention-getting news like Michael Jackson's death, Gay Pride Week, the New York Senate in total meltdown and the Madoff prison sentencing, we were able to draw a rousing media response to our press conference. It showed us that our message is important out there, that we are timely, that what we are saying is startlingly ground-breaking to many, that we have enthusiasts everywhere and that we must continue to take bold steps to keep our cause out there in the public eye.

The media circus is over for now, but the buses with our atheist message on them are still blazing a trail throughout the city. We must not drop the ball now. The time is ripe.

Why This Is the Right Time

The bestselling books on atheism opened doors for us. Then, in a stroke of luck for our cause, Obama's voice on Inauguration Day uttering a single word, "nonbelievers," in a list of the kinds of people America is composed of, reverberated around the world as none other since the words "cease fire" halted World War II

crossfire. That one word, *nonbelievers*, floating in the ether of a billion TV sets worldwide, opened doors for us even wider.

At the same time, polls were showing a rise in the number of Americans who are not affiliated with any religion—up from some 14 percent in past years to an unprecedented 25 percent now. Religions, on the other hand, are going through difficult times with scandal after scandal blemishing their reputations, Catholic-school closings on the rise and some Catholic churches being abandoned because of poor attendance. And fundamentalist sects are losing some of their clout with the election of Obama and the loss of powerful advocates in the White House.

It is the right time, my fellow Atheists, to seize the day. There is much that needs to be done. Among my top priorities are the following:

- 1) A campaign to get Congress to tax churches and to use the resultant revenue to improve the lives of all Americans.
- 2) A drive to convince Congress to halt the Faith-Based Initiatives programs that currently purport to dispense charity to the impoverished through churches. Better, I think, is distribution of charity through professional social workers with no tinge of religious coercion, hidden or overt.
- 3) The elimination of special rights or privileges of any kind for religion. Let churches pay for their water supply, garbage removal and other municipal services!
- 4) The removal of government-paid chaplains in our police and fire departments and other agencies. This may be the most outrageous infringement of religion into the

public arena visible today. NYC Atheists has already begun discovery on this project.

The bus-ad campaign is only a beginning. It says: we are here, we are moral and ethical, we live among you, we are good citizens. To build on this image, to use it to press for our cause, we need to crank up our activity on all fronts.

We need lawyers to help us in our projected lawsuits. We need professional fundraisers to help us get the funds to finance our projects. We need skills, we need teamwork, we need money. But one of our biggest problems in the atheist movement is that, for some reason, we are not a magnet for the funding that religion attracts like flies on honey.

Maybe the reason is, the religionists have one up on us: They are selling life after death, heaven, forgiveness of sins, a whole package of hope and fantasy. Give us your money, they say, and you will spend a luxurious eternity in heaven. Fundamentalist TV evangelist Tammy Faye Bakker said on her deathbed that she didn't mind dying because she felt she was going to a heaven that is like a Walmart where she could shop all day.

We Atheists, on the other hand, have nothing to sell but reality. We're not peddling celestial security or heavenly real estate. We want life to be good for everybody right here, right now, on earth, soon. Reality is a lot tougher to hook your hopes onto than Graceland in the sky. But I think reality is enough. We can see what we've got to work with, we know what we've got to do and, hopefully, we will live to see actual results.

Here's what we need, here's what I'm asking our constituency to contribute:

- 1) Raise enough money to match the cost (\$10,000) of the initial bus-poster campaign, which was donated by an anonymous donor, so we can go into Phase II of our campaign, which will carry our atheist buses into all five boroughs of Manhattan. You can make your tax deductible donation this way:
 - A. NYC Atheists website WWW.NYC-ATHEISTS.ORG (credit card)
 - B. Mail check to: NYC Atheists / Bus Poster Campaign / Cooper Station P.O. Box 93 / NY, NY 10276
- 2) Find and contact lawyers willing to help us with our legal suits to get religion out of government agencies, hospitals, schools, textbooks and school curriculums. Ask your uncle, your brother-in-law, your college roommate. Someone out there, some lawyer or paralegal, will answer our call.
- 3) We need professional fundraisers to help us raise the money for our projects. If you have had experience in fundraising, or know someone who does, enlist them for our atheist cause. We have a lot of catching-up to do to match the fundraising expertise of most charities and churches.
- 4) Write a letter to your Representative or Senator about atheist issues. Legislators are known to be most affected by, and respond to, personal letters from constituents. Tired of textbooks calling us a "Christian nation?" Blast the wrongful texts in a letter to Senator Schumer. I have a feeling he'll understand how you feel about that Christian nation stuff. Or whisk an email to the head of New York's educational system. Bug city council members. You have a right. They are our representatives.

I also want to hear (Ken Bronstein / 212-535-7425) from each and every one of you about what you are doing to advance our cause. Going to a lecture or a brunch is not enough. I know that Woody Allen is purported to have said "Showing up is 80 percent of the job," but I want the other 20 percent from our members. ☐

**YOU DON'T HAVE TO BELIEVE IN GOD
TO BE A MORAL OR ETHICAL PERSON**

WWW.NYC-ATHEISTS.ORG



NYCA Poster Bus Rolls Out on on 42nd Street



**NYCA president Ken Bronstein addresses the Media
at June 27th Press Conference**



Crosstown buses carry Atheist message throughout Manhattan

Editor's Q & A

'How Do I Find the Secularist Group That's Right for Me?'



By Jane Everhart

Dear Editor,

In your Q and A column of June 2009, you asserted that various secular and freethinker groups have different political outlooks. How do I find the group that's right for me? In any secularist group I've sampled, whenever I ask what their political orientation is, they claim they have none.

--Raul from Rockaway

Dear Raul,

In the competition for members, most secular organizations will claim they have no political outlook. And that may be true in that they gladly accept all dues-paying members. But once you are in the group, you may be able to sense its political bent. Or you may not. Look for clues in things like the books the group reads in its book club, the speakers they choose, the type of activities they sponsor or the political opinions of the top leaders.

I admit it's hard for a newbie to sort out the politics. It's a shame, too, because if you choose the wrong organization for you, it may turn you off to secularism altogether, not realizing that there are other groups out there that may be more suitable for you.

Why the Reluctance?

Why do secular organizations not want to admit their political viewpoint? There are several reasons, I think. One is, they consider themselves above politics (even as they participate in it). Another is, they think politics is irrelevant in the scientific world (though of course we know that it is not irrelevant if the opposition to stem cell research is any indication). Or else their particular political outlook is not in favor this year so they'd rather not discuss it. What's Politically Correct this year may be very un-PC next year.

I must give credit for being up-front to at least one organization, the SKEPTICS, whose top board member, Dr. Michael Shermer of California, founder of SKEPTIC magazine, tried to convince convention goers, from

his bully pulpit as a speaker at the Long Beach, CA 2008 convention of the Atheist Alliance International (AAI), that it is a joyful thing to be a Republican.

Unfortunately, it was an inauspicious time, just before the Obama explosion, to advocate right-wing politics, but nevertheless, there was a certain contrarian hubris to Shermer's announcement in an auditorium full of people who are generally thought to be mostly Liberal and passionately immersed in liberal causes. Shermer also admits he is a Libertarian, so if your politics lean in that Utopian direction, the Skeptics may be the group for you.

If a Bad Fit, Leave

I do feel it is important to find the right group so you can work for your secular cause with comfort and passion. Sometimes a person may find that he or she is a bad fit in a particular organization only after they have joined, and this can make it uncomfortable for everybody concerned. It can happen to anybody in any organization. About a year ago, we in NYCA found that one visible member was a bad fit for our middle-of-the-road-with-concern-for-civil-rights political outlook. The person eventually joined a very conservative, right-wing organization, where he is much happier. And so are we.

I find it hard to understand how one can separate atheism from certain other causes that are generally considered liberal. For example, the fight for legal abortion, long considered a liberal cause, is inextricably tied to religion's opposition to abortion. The church has also consistently opposed the broadening of civil rights for women and gays. Thus, we atheists share a common foe with those Liberals struggling for civil-rights equality.

But logic has never entered into the emotional minefield where politics and religion cross. Choose your secularist organization with your heart and, yes, your intuition. As a psychology maven, I must tell you that the best way of choosing your atheist organization, when nobody is telling you where they stand, is through subliminal cues, which is the scientific way of saying intuition. Bottom-line is, I hope you choose us. ☐

Media Comes Out in Droves for NYCA Press Conference

Atheist Bus Ads Grab City's Press

By Jane Everhart

It was close to one o'clock before they started arriving. (Had our week-long efforts to contact the press been in vain? Oh, the phone calls, the press releases, the frantic emails!) Then suddenly they were there, a swarm of reporters from TV, newspapers, radio stations, and even some independent film producers, instinctively forming a semi-circle around our street-tabling tent on Columbus Circle with their entourage of camera crews, assistants, gofers, their tripod video cameras pointed at us. They sprang from nowhere or from trucks parked around the corner. I spied the logos of Channel 11, Fox news, Daily News, CNN and WCBS on mikes and cameras.

It was June 27th, a beautiful, sunny spring Saturday afternoon in midtown Manhattan, a perfect day for a press conference to announce NYCA's bus-advertisement campaign.

Our president, Ken Bronstein, sat at a table at the front of our tent poised to give his press speech, a cluster of TV microphones forming a bouquet in a basket in front of him. Two NYCA members held the 12-foot-long bus banner at the level of Bronstein's table so the press could see it. Other members encircled him in back. Crowds gathered behind the cameramen, craning their necks to see what was happening.

Prez Captures Press

Then Bronstein spoke. His voice resounded clearly and skillfully across the sidewalk--though by that time, I was so awed by the press turnout, he could have been reciting the Gettysburg Address and I would not have known the difference. Still, I heard snatches of his accomplished presentation, facts about our bus advertisement campaign: "Twenty buses for 30 days...12-foot-long signs...anonymous donor...Atheist pride." You could have heard a pin drop. The press was paying attention.

Then Bronstein announced, "Questions, please." The reporters were not shy: *Why did you do this?* they wanted to know. *Have there been any bad repercussions, any defacing of the signs? What do you hope to accomplish?* On and on, they questioned. Stragglers from the press stayed, questioning, interviewing our members, until 3:30 PM and beyond.

NYC Responds to Us

We Atheists were tired; it was a successful, tiring, exhilarating day. The New York City press had responded to us. The City, the supposedly cold, uncaring

city, had come to us, had cared, had listened to us, and some of its media, I suspected, supported us. I thought of the smaller successes that the Gay movement had made before it all added up to the big success of Gay acceptance, and I realized: We had a minor triumph this day.

That evening, friends reported that we were seen on Channel 11. Two radio stations ran interviews with us, one an interview with this writer that had been taped that very morning.



Barrage of Media Reports

The next day, there was a barrage of media reports about our bus campaign when CNN, Fox news, MSNBC, WPIX, ABC and CBS radio kicked in, along with newspapers The Daily News and Newsday. (And of course the NY Times had run a preliminary article the day before, which had undoubtedly added to all the hoopla).

Perhaps the most controversial of all media reports about us was, of all things, MSNBC's "Countdown with Keith Olbermann" on Sunday evening. It seems that Olbermann gave his bronze "Worst" award (3rd place) to us for saying that we want atheists to come out of the closet while refusing to disclose the name of the "anonymous donor" who made the bus ad campaign financially possible.

Anonymous Donor Rapped

Though Olbermann's bronze award annoyed some atheists, most shrugged—including this writer. For me, as publicity manager for NYCA, the important thing was that Olbermann had held up our bus sign on national TV and given us nationwide publicity. The so-called "bronze award" was almost inconsequential. You've heard the expression "damning with faint praise?" Well, as far as I was concerned, Olbermann was really praising us with faint damnation. □

Letters to Editor

Bus Ad Campaign



To the Editor,

I live in Philadelphia. I am very excited to see the NYC bus campaign! We're getting closer. Thanks for the work you do.

--Zokapi, Philadelphia

To the Editor,

I am very happy to see this [bus ad campaign]. The message is beautiful. Not intimidating, not confrontational, but beautiful. Fantastic job!

--Matthew LaClair, Kearney, NJ

To the Editor,

I am so glad the buses are rolling! I have been trying to get people together to pull this off for a while and I should have known you could do it easily with flying colors! Please keep me informed about any related events and I will gladly muster more troops to celebrate! Serious congratulations and thank you!

--Charles Zorn, New Rochelle;
Acting Director of New York Brights

To the Editor,

Hello from India! Congratulations on the buses. I know you have been planning that for a while and it was a very important project for you. Well done. I'm having a great time in India and I've been getting a lot of work done. I'm scheduled to go to Kashmir next week, but the situation there is looking very shaky and several people are advising me not to go. There was a grenade attack close to the hotel where I'll be staying and there are protests going on frequently, so the Indian army is clamping down hard. They've established a strict curfew which, when combined with the general strike called for by the separatists, means that I'd be walking into something of a ghost town occupied primarily by angry (and not without reason) secessionists and trigger-happy soldiers. I'm waiting to hear back from the Chief Minister of the State Omar Abdullah to see what he recommends. Some of my practical stances on the matter of religion and secularism have been shifted with more

thought and consideration. I've been reprioritizing various aspects of what I've come to view more as the immediate struggle for secularism than the battle against religion. It's something I'm sure I'll end up writing about at greater length. Give my regards to everyone at the Meetups. When is the next Meetup? I'll see if I can make it.

--Natty Adams, in India

Nathaniel ("Natty") Adams has been NYCA's Meetup discussion leader frequently. He is currently in India on an extended visit and will be going to graduate school at Columbia University in the fall.

To the Editor,

I forwarded the New York Times article about your bus-ad campaign to numerous friends. On the subject line of the email, I put: "Atheists attack. Look out!" with the note below that we Atheists are really not bad people. And we're in larger numbers than most people realize. All we ask is the same respect we give to others. It's great that we're out there on the bus ads! Let's see what tolerance is extended to us by the religious.

--Ted Leibowitz, Greenwich Village

To the Editor,

I want to applaud your efforts to make atheism more widely known. I have several friends who went from being devout Christians to atheists once they learned there were more of us and that it was completely acceptable. I think your campaign was a good move and I hope to see more efforts along these lines

--John Dow, New York

Taxing Churches

To the Editor,

Ken, re your article "How the God Business Gets Away with Being Tax Free" [May 2009, Page 1], I shared it with friends in San Diego and elsewhere. It was a big hit. Thank you so much for shining the light on this.

---Howard Ellis. San Diego

UPCOMING JULY EVENTS

CALL: 212-330-6794 FOR LAST MINUTE CHANGES

JULY 12, 2009 (SUNDAY)
NYC Atheists Brunch / Speaker

12:00 PM

Speaker: Sibanye



Subject: My Life as a Black Atheist

“This is not a generalization: Black people go into shock when another Black person tells them they are an atheist. Old ladies will hit you with their purse. They quickly recover, but you will have your race card revoked.

It is that serious.” Sibanye, who is 50 years old, has been the CFI-Harlem Coordinator for the past five years. CFI-Harlem is the only Black atheist meet-up in the country.

Location: Press Box Restaurant & Pub
 932 Second Ave. (bet. 49th & 50th Streets)

Cost: Brunch, \$20 (includes selection of Buffet entrees and salad, one soft drink, coffee, tax, tip.)

JULY 21, 2009 (TUESDAY) 7:00 PM
NYCA Meetup

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

Group Leader: John A Wagner, Ph. D.
 Professor (Weill-Cornell Medical College)

In our effort to introduce new ideas, new discussion styles and new leaders to our Meetups, we are presenting this month Dr. John Wagner, who is one of our regular street tablers.



In our June gathering discussed our bus campaign which displays the slogan, “You don’t have to believe in god to be a moral and ethical person.” Our discussion included many topics, but often focused on how atheists and freethinkers relate to those with a belief in god(s).

This month, we will build on that conversation and ask how atheists can be moral in the absence of a god who provides rules of behavior.

- * If atheists don’t have ‘the ten commandments,’ do we have any commandments?
- * Do atheists live by commandments?
- * Do atheists live by moral principles?
- * If so, what are they?

Exciting discussions with fellow freethinkers! You are welcome to say what you think.

Cost: Free, but participants are expected to purchase a drink or food to compensate Stone Creek for use of their room.

JULY 30, 2009 (THURSDAY) 6:30 PM
NYCA MONTHLY MEETING

Speaker: TBA

Subject: TBA

Location: SLC Conference Center–352 Seventh Ave./16th Floor-(29/30th St.)

Cost: We ask for a donation of \$5 to help cover the cost of room rental

ATHEISM IS A CONCLUSION
NOT A BELIEF

UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

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JULY 2009

July	4*	Sat.	10:15AM	NYCA July 4 th Barbeque / Fireworks
July	6	Mon.	7:00 PM	NYCA Philosophy Club
July	12**	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch/Book Club/Library
July	21***	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up and Discussion
July	30****	Thur.	6:30 PM	NYCA Monthly Meeting

AUGUST 2009

**EXCEPT FOR STREET TABLING,
NEW YORK ATHEISTS ON VACATION FOR THE MONTH OF AUGUST**

- * **Location: Call 212-535-7425**
 ** **Press Box Restaurant & Pub – 932 Second Ave. (49/50th St.) – 2nd Floor**
 *** **Stone Creek Bar and Lounge – 140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex)**
 **** **SLC Conference Center–352 Seventh Ave./16th Floor-(29/30th St.)**

NYCA CABLE SHOWS

Wednesdays:	5:30 PM	Atheism in History	(Manhattan Cable # 57)
	6:30 PM	This Week in Atheism	(Manhattan Cable # 57)
Thursdays:	7:00 PM	NYC Atheists	(Manhattan Cable # 67)
	7:30 PM	Atheists Book Club	(Manhattan Cable #67)

**NYCA
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In This Issue

Page 1: We Did It! – Bus-Ads Roll

Page 3: Bus Campaign Photos

Page 4: NYCA Draws Big Press Turnout

Page 6: What's the Right Secular Group for You?

Page 6: Letters Laud Bus Ad Campaign

Page 7: Upcoming Events