

## NYC ATHEISTS INC.



WEB: NYC-ATHEISTS.ORG - BOX 6060 NY, NY 10150-6060 - 212-330-6794

AN AFFILIATE OF AMERICAN ATHEISTS

VOL. VIII ISSUE NO. 11

NOVEMBER 2011

## Victory! Winning Decision Stands In Utah Cross Case



12 Roadside Crosses

When American Atheists, Inc. won its five-year legal battle last year to have the state of Utah remove 12 large steel crosses erected by state authorities near a highway to honor 12 fallen state troopers, the victory was somewhat mollified by the knowledge that Utah would be appealing to the U.S. Supreme Court.

But on October 31, 2011, American Atheists (AA) members were jubilant: The U.S. Supreme Court had declined to review the Utah case further--and therefore, AA's winning decision stands.



Edwin Kagin

AA, along with several Utah plaintiffs, had sued to have the commemorative crosses removed on the grounds that the crosses are a Christian symbol on public land. Edwin Kagin, the National Legal Director for AA, states: "We presented this case and won at the 10th Circuit Court of Appeal. The Supreme Court correctly declined to review the case further; therefore the decision stands. We are looking forward to the state of Utah removing the crosses."

### Powerful Opponents

"Our opponents in this fight were numerous and powerful, including the Family Research Council, three senators, 12 congressional representatives and the Attorneys General from 20 states," says Dave Silverman, president of American Atheists. "They insisted that dead troopers can only be memorialized by 12-foot-tall steel crosses on public land. Their justification for using the crosses? Their incredible claim was that the cross is not a Christian symbol, but rather a secular symbol of 'peace and death.' Their intent behind

secularizing the cross was to avoid the constitutional issues with public placement," Silverman continues. "Had the Christian Right won this case, we would soon have seen 'secular crosses' in schools and courtrooms all over the country."

### Victory a Legal Precedent Now

American Atheists' victory will now be a legal precedent in our lawsuit against the World Trade Center "miracle" cross as well as other church and state lawsuits around the country, asserts Silverman. "We've made good law, and we've taken a solid step toward protecting our country from those who will stop at nothing--even using dead troopers--to edge this country toward theocracy."



Dave Silverman

"We have no problem with honoring fallen troopers. They should be honored," adds Silverman. "But erecting divisive religious icons that violate the very constitution the fallen troopers had sworn to uphold is not the way to honor those troopers who gave the ultimate sacrifice for the citizens of their state."

### Battle Goes On

"It is our hope, now that the appeals process is over and the courts have found the crosses unconstitutional, that the State of Utah will find a more honorable and non-divisive way to honor their fallen troopers. Those fallen troopers, their loved ones and the citizens they swore to protect deserve such recognition," Silverman notes. And, he adds, "While we relish our victory, we cannot rest on our laurels. We can never let our guard down. Even now the next battle is being planned. We are ready." □

## Why We Need to Question the Religious Beliefs of Candidates



By Tyson Gill

We all know this infamous story but it can't be repeated often enough. In a 2007 GOP Presidential debate, the moderator asked if any of the candidates did *not* believe in evolution. Three leading hopefuls for the highest office in our land raised their hands. Those candidates included Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kansas), Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee (R), and Rep. Tom Tancredo (R-Colorado).

It was not particularly shocking that Conservatives would proudly deny evolution. What was far more disappointing was the media and public response to this exchange. Most were outraged NOT because these candidates denied scientific reality, but because the question was asked at all. After the debate, many media figures issued strong statements that such questions were “out of bounds.” They argued passionately that one’s beliefs are irrelevant to a candidate’s qualifications for President. They asserted that any questions relating to faith are improper and should never even be raised.

This taboo continues today among even the most liberal media personalities. In response to recent concerns raised by an Evangelical Christian regarding candidate Mitt Romney’s Mormon faith, Liberal TV host Chris Matthews again lectured us about this in his October 13<sup>th</sup> show. He argued that questions of faith are not only irrelevant but expressly out of bounds.

### Why Can't We Ask a Candidate's Faith?

There are two fundamental problems here; one focuses on faith and the other on fact. The first problem is that the media is not intellectually honest in telling voters that they cannot consider matters of faith as part of their evaluation. It is perfectly reasonable to favor a candidate that shares our beliefs and values. Even Chris Matthews would quickly condemn a candidate whose faith told him to glorify suicide bombings. It seems obvious that this position of enforced tolerance only applies when it is an “acceptable” belief that is being questioned. But who decides what beliefs are acceptable, Chris Matthews?

But it is the second fundamental problem that is the far more important concern. Namely, the denial of facts required for this defense of faith. When we take the

position that questions touching upon faith are “out of bounds,” many questions intended to judge a candidate’s capacity to assess facts, accept facts, and draw fact-based conclusions become out of bounds. As a result, we can no longer even ask about a candidate’s belief regarding facts like evolution because it is protected under “faith.”

### Beliefs Influence Policy

Sadly, nothing could be more important than the intellectual capacity of our President to arrive at objective analyses and decisions. Evolution is a perfect litmus indicator of a candidate’s capacity for fact-based thinking. Any candidate so invested in belief as to disregard the most conclusive body of knowledge ever accumulated by mankind or so disingenuous as to do so for political reasons, is probably not qualified to make Presidential decisions.

If a candidate denies evolution, it is legitimate to be concerned whether they will just as easily deny global climate change, historical lessons, economic realities and other crucial issues of fact. It is reasonable to be skeptical of that candidate’s capacity to make uncompromised, fact-based decisions about the future of this nation and this planet. Despite efforts to make America a religious nation, our President is still the secular leader of a secular government.

We as atheists should certainly work toward a day when one of us can hold high office in America. But more importantly, we should do everything we can to ensure that whoever takes office is as rooted in objective reality as possible. We cannot do that if we are cowered by media policemen who make matters of faith and fact taboo in public discourse.

But we must continue to press questions about belief and fact until they can no longer be dismissed as off-limits. We should carefully assess the level of risk that the beliefs of a candidate may influence his or her public policy positions and probe this with questions intended to expose their faithfulness to facts. Ultimately their policies, and our nation, will succeed or fail based upon the president’s adherence to the actual objective facts of those situations. □



KENNETH BRONSTEIN

## PRESIDENT'S "SERMON"

**ATHEISM****Gave Me a Passion for Life and Freedom**

Have I mentioned that at the age of 13, in the middle of my Bar Mitzvah, I realized that I was an Atheist? Right there, in front of maybe 400 conservative Synagogue congregants including my blissful mother and bored father, as I recited in Hebrew my weekly Torah portion what roiled in my mind was: All of this is a fairy tale, g-d is made up, none of this makes any sense. I knew, at that moment, in some part of my mind, that this Bar Mitzvah was my swan song to Judaism.

Actually, my defection from Judaism--from any religion--had begun long before that, when I was about five years old and solemnly entertaining subversive thoughts about Santa Claus: *How could he make all those toys himself? How could Santa know if every child had been good or bad or what everyone wanted? How could he deliver everything worldwide in one night?*

That was the way my mind churned at five, and it was probably the same kind of analytical questioning that years later caused me to get my first college degree in engineering.

**Adult Conspiracy Against Kids?**

At five, you don't know that you are being a critical thinker; you think you are entertaining a lot of embarrassing questions that adults, in some kind of conspiracy against kids, don't want to answer. Or, they will say, "Oh don't worry your head about things like that," or "Go out and play."

At age eight, I began Hebrew school. Was I the only boy in class who challenged the Old Testament myths, like the flood or Adam and Eve? The old bearded teachers weren't happy with my questions, so I must have been the only one. It wasn't until I got to college that it felt comfortable to ask questions because, in college, the professors didn't act like you were challenging their beliefs when you asked questions.

What were these secrets that adults seemed to be keeping from their kids? Determined to find out, at about 11 or 12 years old, I read everything I could get my hands on about other religions--Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Catholicism. The Encyclopedia Britannica was a big source. But all religions seemed "made up" to me.

I think it was my realization that there is no scientific evidence of life after death that was the final touchstone

that turned me into a dedicated Atheist. You see, if there's no afterlife, then this is it, this is all you will ever get--80 years, give or take, on planet earth. If there's no afterlife, then you'd better optimize your time on earth, enrich it, make it your passion to live well, do good, have a happy life, function well. I can honestly say that Atheism--once I realized that was the name to give my lack of belief in religion or myths or an afterlife--became the framework for expanding and enriching my life.

How can I describe the freedom that this realization of my finite life gave me? I was liberated from the baggage of religion; I was freed from guilt. My lifestyle choices were suddenly not restricted, I didn't have to fulfill anybody's expectations but my own, I wasn't tied to a class system or a set of someone else's rules. I vowed that I would never live a lie or believe in delusions. I would rely on realism, reality, honesty and evidence-based truths. That was my mantra; that was my moment of emancipation.

**Battling for Atheists' Rights**

How can I describe the passion for life that this freedom gave me? I went on to get two more college degrees, one master's degree in business, one in math education. I worked in a creative capacity for a top corporation. I traveled around the world--at least twice--from the North Pole to Antarctica, from Siberia to Patagonia. I raised a son who became a physician. I taught school on my Sabbaticals--one year I taught in a Black college in the South, one year in a Los Angeles Hispanic ghetto. I learned to dance the Twist. As an officer in the military, I defended Army deserters before a military court.

Nowadays I'm having even more fun battling the bigots of America to get civil rights for Atheists. I invested wisely and in my retirement, I've earned the right to tell anybody I want to go to hell. As lives go, I'd say I have had a full, happy, fulfilling one so far, wouldn't you?

Could I have done all that if I had not decided to be an Atheist? I think some religious people can be happy but I suspect it must require them to have split personalities so they can embrace their faith in one part of their life while living in a technologically and scientifically advanced world that really repudiates their faith-based thinking. I'd like to say to them: Come and join me in my freedom and passion for life; you have nothing to lose but your falsehoods. □

## Editor's Q and A

### Outstanding Atheists of 2011



*By Jane Everhart*

Dear Editor,

Usually, at this time of year, you give accolades to your favorite Atheists of the Year. I can't wait for this year's choices. Can you tell us how you pick them?

--Raymond from Red Hook

Dear Ray,

I like to honor people who have done a lot for the Atheist movement or come up with new ideas or moved into a leadership role in the movement in some way. This year's choices include some new faces and some longtime members I want to honor because of their cumulative work for Atheism. There are some who have bounced enthusiastically into the spotlight but also some who quietly contribute a lot behind the scenes. See if you can guess who's who.

#### The Bible Expert/Entrepreneur



Rad Mason

Radcliffe Mason, a big teddy bear of a man, is possibly the most beloved member of NYCA ever. A Vietnam veteran who never complains about the injuries he brought home from Vietnam, Rad is a Bible expert who knows that book backward and forward, and at NYCA's Street Tabling, will debate any religious person, any time--and win. Rad is also a newly minted entrepreneur: After many atheists admired his self-designed T-shirts that said things like "I'm an Atheist--Debate Me," Rad decided to go into the T-shirt business online. You'll see his ads in our newsletter from time to time. Need a gift for an atheist friend?

Access: [www.zazzle.com/theatheist/gifts](http://www.zazzle.com/theatheist/gifts) for all sorts of fun atheist stuff. Or write your own tee shirt message and Rad will get it made for you.

#### The Enthusiast



David Orenstein

All of a sudden, David Orenstein is everywhere. He runs our "Friday Night Book Club and Thinking Person's Meaningful Meetup," he's been a speaker at our Monthly Meeting ("History of the Universe in 18 Minutes") and he's the level-headed, sensible voice you hear speaking up at many of our Meetups. David, who is Director of Library Services at a New Jersey college and also teaches anthropology, doesn't let his two Master's degrees and Ph.D. weigh him down: He is a natural-born leader and teacher who comes up with zany ideas like letting his friend in France join in our book club discussion via Skype.

#### The Philanthropist



Willie Fuchs

Willie Fuchs (it's not William, but Willie, from the German) is that tall, handsome fellow who always sits in back at Meetups and doesn't say a whole lot but when he does, you listen. Willie, who is a business analyst/graphic artist for the NYC Housing Authority, became a dedicated Atheist in 2001 after a marathon reading of two dozen books on Atheism. This July, Willie decided to encourage Atheist arts by buying out the whole movie theatre for Atheists to attend the New York premiere of "The Ledge," a film by Matthew Chapman, the great-grandson of Charles Darwin. After viewing the film, we all went out to dinner to celebrate Chapman and Willie's philanthropy. A wonderful evening for all and a great beginning for Atheist Arts. Bravo, Willie!

### The Intellectual



Tyson Gill

Tyson Gill-- author, scientist, teacher, Peace-Corps veteran--is another NYCA member who seems to be everywhere at once. Wisconsin-born Tyson has a Ph.D. in inorganic chemistry and worked for many years as a research scientist. But it was his recent stint for the Peace Corps in rural South Africa, teaching science in “a challenging environment of belief-based thinking”--i.e, superstition and magic--that made him into what he calls “an evangelist for science and fact-based thinking.” Tyson has recently started, and will manage, an online Discussion Forum for NYCA. Tune in to this important new discussion community via a link on our web site.

### The Atheist Lawyer



Danielle Mathey

Who knew you could be an attractive female, an atheist and a legal prodigy too? American Atheists knew. Getting Wyoming-based attorney Danielle Mathey as counsel in our suit to remove the so-called “Miracle Cross” from the 9/11 Museum at Ground Zero was a public relations feat. Danielle, who works (nationwide)

out of her father’s legal office in Green River, Wyoming, comes with outstanding credentials: After graduating from top, top Northwestern University law school in Chicago, she won a clerkship with the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals in Georgia, a training ground for upward-mobile young lawyers. Then she landed a plum job at the prestigious international New York law firm (2,000 lawyers) of Skadden, Arps. Having held onto to her New York license, she now hopes to make legal history for us.

### The Organizing Team



Elaine and Eric Stone

What can I say about my Atheist friends Elaine Stone and Dr. Eric Stone that I haven’t said before? Together, they founded and lead the Westchester Atheists. Every Fourth of July, for seven years now, Elaine and Eric have hosted a Barbecue for New York atheists at their Chappaqua home so we can get out of the city and breathe fresh air. Elaine, a piquant and creative homemaker, has a wry sense of humor that has, on occasion, inspired a whole Atheist convention to laughter. Eric, who has a Ph.D. in psychology from Yale, does brainy research at New York University when he’s not writing smartly sharp reports about Atheist topics. Good people. Good Atheists, they inspire us and keep us going. □

---

## House Reaffirms ‘In god We Trust’ as National Motto

Just when you thought Atheists were making some headway in this country, the House of Representatives on November 1 passed a measure reaffirming “In god We Trust” as the national motto of the U.S., reportedly to encourage its display in public buildings and send a message to those who seek to remove god from the public domain.

The resolution required a two-thirds vote to pass, and did so easily, 396 to 9. Rep. Justin Amash of Michigan was the lone Republican voting no, joining eight other Democrats, Representatives Gary Ackerman and Jerrold Nadler of New York, Judy Chu, Mike Honda and Pete Stark of California, Emanuel Cleaver of Missouri, Henry Johnson of Georgia and Robert Scott of Virginia.

“We need to make clear to the people in this country that our motto is ‘In god We Trust,’ and encourage them to proudly display that motto,” said Rep. J. Randy Forbes (R-Va.), chairman of the Congressional Prayer Caucus and sponsor of the measure.

Jerry Nadler, the only Democrat to engage in debate against the measure on the floor, said “It’s an exercise to tell people who may not believe in god, ‘You don’t really count, you’re not really an American.’”

At least one Atheist leader quickly emailed her vituperation to fellow Atheists: “These people, so desperate to not spend money, authorized this \*\*\*\* to be put on every federal building in the country,” commented Marie Alena Castle of Atheists for Human Rights, Minneapolis. “Maybe it’s their idea of a jobs bill. Their real motive is to trash Atheists.” □

*It's New!***NYC Atheists Debuts an Online Discussion Forum!**

If you are unfamiliar with discussion forums, it may be helpful to differentiate them from other social networking venues such as web sites, chat, Twitter, Facebook and blogs. All of these are tools for sharing information and connecting people, but they each accomplish this in very different ways:

\*A **Web Site** is designed to provide static information. It describes your group or organization, but doesn't really do much to promote interaction beyond perhaps providing a contact page.

\* **Chat sites** are places where people can get together online and "talk" to each other in real time but they are also used for online meetings or live social group discussions.

\***Twitter** lets people type short messages that go out to all people who choose to "follow" them. It's like mass email, except you don't specify recipients; rather, they choose to listen for your messages. Twitter is very powerful for quickly spreading a message to a large number of followers.

\* **Facebook** is like Twitter in that people can post short messages on their "Wall" for their friends to read. But it is more two-way than Twitter in that friends can also comment on those posts.

\* **Blogs** provide a place where you can publish your thoughts. These can be anything from a public diary to a collection of in-depth articles. Like Facebook, readers can comment on these blog articles if they wish.

\*As the name implies, the focus of a **Discussion Forum** is discussion. These forums are designed for more interactive and in-depth dialogue than any of the other social networking venues. Information in a discussion forum is highly organized, searchable and far less transient than in those other media.

For these reasons, discussions can take place in nearly real-time or over the course of many months. Forums are the proven venue of choice for corporate customer support since all interaction automatically produces a relatively permanent knowledge base of information.

A discussion forum is organized into Categories, like say "Movies." Inside each category are Topics, such as "Gone with the Wind." In each topic people can write "Posts" and a series of posts forms a discussion "Thread." It is generally desirable to "stay on topic" and not "derail" a thread.

**Lurkers, Trolls and Flamers**

If supported by a friendly, active user base, a discussion forum can become a rich community experience. Discussion forums can degrade if tainted by lurkers, trolls, and flamers. A lurker is someone who "lurks" around, reading posts but never contributing. A troll is someone who loves to derail threads by making outrageous comments to incite arguments. A flamer is someone who insults or provokes through "flaming" rants and attacks people personally.

We invite you to visit the NYCA forum, register, and become an active participant in our online community. You can find a link to the forum on the front page of the NYC Atheists Web Site. General interest sections as well as specialized categories of interest to our community have been set up for you. The forum has far too many capabilities to document here, but you can explore and learn about them over time.

Anyone can join the discussion forum, you do not need to be a member of NYC Atheists, and registering for the forum does not make you a member or put you on any mailing lists. If you have any questions or suggestions feel free to direct them to the forum administrator, Tyson Gill at [tysongill@hotmail.com](mailto:tysongill@hotmail.com).

**JOIN**

**NYC ATHEISTS – FACEBOOK**

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/New-York-City-Atheists/187304681037>

**This newsletter is published by  
New York City Atheists Inc.  
Publisher – Kenneth Bronstein  
Editor – Jane Everhart  
NYCATHEISTS@GMAIL.COM**

**UPCOMING NOVEMBER EVENTS**  
**CALL: 212-330-6794 FOR LAST MINUTE CHANGES**

**NOV. 9, 2011 (WED.) 7:00 PM**  
**NYC ATHEISTS LIVING W/O RELIGION GROUP**

**GROUP LEADER: LINDA BLAIKIE, L.C.S.W**



**SUBJECT: "Frenemies"** We all have toxic friendships and don't know how to get out of them. What do you do when a so-called friend is undermining or sabotaging you but still pretends to be your friend?  
**LOCATION:** Moonstruck Diner - 449 Third Ave. /31<sup>st</sup> -2nd Floor  
**COST:** Free to members (can join at meeting if desired), but participants are expected to purchase a drink or food to compensate Moonstruck for use of their space.

=====  
**NOV. 13, 2011 (SUN.) 12:00 NOON**  
**NYC ATHEISTS BRUNCH / SPEAKER**

**SPEAKER: MARGARET DOWNEY**



**SUBJECT: My Journey to Becoming an Atheist and Skeptic.** Downey, a nationally prominent Atheist leader, tells her story and encourages people to write their own journey story  
**LOCATION:** The Press Box Restaurant  
932 Second Avenue (bet. 49<sup>th</sup> & 50<sup>th</sup> Sts.) -2nd Floor  
**COST:** BRUNCH is \$20, which includes a selection of Buffet Entrees, salad, one soft drink, coffee, tax and tip.

=====  
**NOV. 15, 2011 (TUES.) 7:00 PM**  
**NYC ATHEISTS MEETUP**

**GROUP LEADER: MICHAEL DORIAN**



**SUBJECT: Why the big divide between Us and Them?** Should unshakeable faith in a god be considered psychopathy, delusion—or a useful self-defense mechanism that helps people grapple with some of the harsher aspects of human existence? Led by the perceptive filmmaker, playwright and educator Dorian.  
**LOCATION:** Stone Creek Bar and Lounge  
140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex)  
**COST:** Participants are expected to purchase a drink or food to compensate Stone Creek for use of their space.

**NOV. 17, 2011 (THUR.) 6:30 PM**  
**NYC ATHEISTS MONTHLY MEETING**

**SPEAKER: ANDREW REVKIN**



**SUBJECT: "CLIMATE SCIENCE AND POLITICS"**

Former *New York Times* journalist and author Andrew C. Revkin has covered subjects ranging from the Amazon to the Asian tsunami, from the troubled relationship of science and politics to climate change at the North Pole. From 1995 through 2009, he covered the environment for *The New York Times*. He is currently the senior fellow at the Pace Academy for Applied Environmental Studies at Pace University and continues to write his "Dot Earth" blog for *The Times* Op-Ed section.

**LOCATION: SLC Conference Center**  
**352 Seventh Ave./16<sup>th</sup> Floor-(29/30<sup>th</sup> St.)**

**COST:** We would appreciate a donation of \$5 to help cover the cost of room rental.

=====  
**NOV. 18, 2011 (FRI.) 6:30 PM**  
**NYC ATHEISTS BOOK CLUB and Thinking Person's Meaningful Meetup**

**MODERATOR: DR. DAVID ORENSTEIN**



**BOOK:** Surprise! We will discuss a book authored by NYCA member Tyson Gill, entitled, *Belief in Science and the Science of Belief*.

Free book download:  
[http://www.lulu.com/product/ebook/belief-in-science/17488149?productTrackingContext=search\\_results/search\\_shelf/center/2](http://www.lulu.com/product/ebook/belief-in-science/17488149?productTrackingContext=search_results/search_shelf/center/2)

Come and talk to the author! A rare opportunity to discuss a book with the author himself present!

**LOCATION:** Stone Creek Bar and Lounge  
140 East 27<sup>th</sup> St. (3<sup>rd</sup>/Lex)

**COST:** Participants are expected to purchase a drink or food to compensate Stone Creek for use of their space.

## UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

CALL: 212-330-6794 FOR LAST MINUTE CHANGES

### NOVEMBER 2011

Nov.	9*	Wed.	7:00 PM	NYCA Living Without Religion Group
Nov.	13**	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch / Speaker
Nov.	15***	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up
Nov.	17****	Thur.	6:30 PM	NYCA Monthly Meeting
Nov.	18***	Fri.	6:30 PM	NYCA Book Club

### DECEMBER 2011

Dec.	11**	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch / Speaker
Dec.	14*	Wed.	7:00 PM	NYCA Living Without Religion Group
Dec.	XX***	TBA	TBA PM	NYCA Book Club
Dec.	XX*****	TBA	TBA PM	NYCA Solstice Party
Dec.	XX***	TBA	TBA PM	NYCA Meet-Up

- \* Moonstruck Diner – 449 Third Ave. (31st) – 2nd Floor
- \*\* 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.)
- \*\*\*\*\* TBA

### NYCA CABLE SHOWS

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

NYCA  
P.O. Box 6060  
NY, NY 10150-6060

### In This Issue

- Page 1: Atheists Win in Utah Cross Case**
- Page 2: Ask Candidates About Their Faith!**
- Page 3: A Better Life with Atheism**
- Page 4: Outstanding Atheists of 2011**
- Page 6: New Atheist Discussion Forum**