

NYC ATHEISTS INC.



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AN AFFILIATE OF AMERICAN ATHEISTS

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KENNETH BRONSTEIN

In the nearly eight years since I've been president of New York City Atheists, I've seen NYCA grow from 12 people sitting around a conference table to hundreds of members and a nationwide reputation of being the most active and most effective affiliate of American Atheists in the country. We produce four Cable TV shows a week, five meetings a month (six, since we added our new Book Club), two Solstice parties a year, a Fourth of July Barbecue, a Halloween party and a New Year's Eve party. Every Saturday, when the weather is good, you'll see us street tabling at Columbus Circle in our yellow Atheist tent.

Two of our six monthly meetings are generally talks by highly professional or scientific speakers, which means that NYCA presents *22 lectures a year* for the benefit of our Atheist followers. I don't believe any Atheist organization anywhere in the country comes close to that.

Our 'Firsts'

What's even more astonishing is the number of "firsts" NYCA has accomplished over the years. We were the first in the U.S. to have an Atheist bus-poster campaign: For a whole month, city buses careened around the Manhattan carrying our message, "*You Don't Have to Believe in God to Be a Moral or Ethical Person.*" And we were the first Atheists to conduct a successful press conference, right on the street, about this campaign, with more than a dozen media reporters attending and a bevy of TV cameras pointing at me as I spoke from our Atheist tent.



We were the first to sponsor an Off-Broadway show about Darwin and the first to present Act One of a play about Madalyn Murray O'Hair at the Joe

PRESIDENT'S "SERMON" Oh, What a Year It Was!

In 2011, We struggled, We Fought, We Learned

Franklin Supper theater. We were the first to produce Atheist comedy shows with an all-secular cast of comedians, and we were the first to march in the Greenwich Village Halloween parade under the NYC Atheists banner.



Paul Herzich – NYCA Comedy Show Producer

We were also the first Atheists to demonstrate against the Pope (so far as we know); the first to sue the Catholic church when its Brooklyn Bishop made robocalls during an election; the first Atheists to sponsor an Atheist cruise to Newfoundland; the first Atheists to demonstrate at the Republican National Convention and the first Atheists to get invited to Mayor Bloomberg's Interfaith Breakfast.

We Lobby, We Demonstrate, We March

All those "firsts" are in addition to our lobbying in Washington and Albany on Atheist issues, publishing a monthly newsletter (which has acquired followers in California, Florida, Washington DC, Boston), demonstrating in Washington DC for the "Atheists in Foxholes" campaign and again at the U.S. Supreme Court to support the Michael Newdow Pledge of Allegiance suit. During all this, we were actively working to publicize our cause, and we have evidently captured the attention of the public by being written about in media as diverse as the *New York Times* to *The Daily News* to *Time Out* and more radio stations and TV channels than I can enumerate here.

Additionally, and quite peripherally, we have estimated that NYCA has been responsible over the years for eight marriages or engagements of couples who met at our meetings, or about one coupling a year. Recently, we were proud to announce the births of two Atheist babies, Josh Widelec of Long Island,

son of one of our frequent newsletter contributors, **Ron Widelec**, and Fidias, the son of **Merillat Staat** and **Manuel de Leon**, a couple who met at our Stone Creek Discussion Group and were married about a year later.

Surprises in 2011

With all this going on, could 2011 possibly have held any more surprises or “firsts?” Surprisingly, it did!



World Trade Center “Miracle Cross”

I will always remember 2011 as the year we filed our suit to get the so-called “miracle cross” out of the Ground Zero Museum, the year AA won its legal case in Utah to remove highway crosses from public land, and the year we fought hard in the media to take the word “heaven” off a street sign. We learned to laugh at hate letters and made history by presenting comedy shows consisting solely of Atheist comedians. Here’s a brief blow-by-blow description of some of the fascinating things we enjoyed (and endured) in 2011 and what we learned from them:

January

After having presented several wildly successful Atheist Comedy shows in 2010, our comedy maven and volunteer producer, NYCA member **Paul Herzich**, explained at the January Brunch why humor is a revolutionary weapon: “*Nothing is sacred in comedy*,” reported Herzich, a psychotherapist by day who has been, at one point in his career, a comedy club owner himself.

What we learned: Atheists have an unquenchable desire for comedy, and comedy is revolutionary. Look for more Atheist comedy presentations in the future! Paul Herzich, recovering now from an accident, is already on the prowl for new Atheist talent.

February

February was our Science month in 2011. New York University biology professor **Richard Borowsky** told us at our Brunch “*Why Some Fish Don’t Have Eyes*” (think evolution!) and, at our monthly meeting, Dr. **Adam Ratner**, a professor at Columbia University, warned us about the coming scare of bacteria developing resistance to *all* antibiotics. In February, evolution took center stage because in both talks, evolution was the medium for adaptation. In eyeless fish, evolution created a benign adaptation, but in antibiotic resistance, we sounded the clarion call that evolution does not necessarily favor mankind—it can sometimes favor the lowly bacteria.

What we learned: Keeping up with science is crucial for Atheists, both politically and personally. NYCA tries to keep our members on the cutting edge of scientific issues and advances.

March

In March, NYCA newsletter editor **Jane Everhart** did the unusual by interviewing her own “Born Again” daughter for our NYCA newsletter. **Brook Everhart**, who lives in Colorado, and who remains a Christian, told Atheists “*How to Beat the Churches at Their Own Game*.” At our Brunch, NYCA member **Radcliffe Mason** spoke on “*My Road to Atheism--A Black Person’s Experience*.”

What we learned: The Personal is Political!

Also in March **Nathaniel (“Natty”) Adams**, who was to speak at our Discussion Group on “*Is Atheism Ignoring the Arts?*” brought a surprise to our group: Filmmaker **Matthew Chapman**, grandson of Charles Darwin, who told us about his movie, “The Ledge,” which may be the first Hollywood movie with an Atheist sensibility outside of documentaries like Bill Maher’s “Religulous.”



Matthew Chapman

Also in March, New York University professor Dr. **Tyler Volk** discussed death at our Monthly Meeting in a most unusual way. In a talk titled “*Lust to Dust: A Scientist Looks at the Cycle of Life from Birth to Death*,” Dr. Volk pointed out that death is a necessary biological event that perpetuates life, greens the planet and infuses global progress.

What we learned: The world needs, and subsists on the noble Arts...and death!

April

Our first woman-philosopher, **Japa Pallikkathayil**, an assistant professor of philosophy at New York University, told us at Brunch about how moral and political philosophy is used to justify the state’s use of coercion in getting us to do things like pay taxes. At our monthly meeting, NYCA member **Dr. Tyson Gill** discussed his wonderful book, “*Belief in Science and the Science of Belief--A Guide to Fact-Based Thinking*.”

And all over America, billboards cropped up blazing the messages, ‘YOU KNOW ITS A MYTH’ and ‘YOU KNOW THEY ARE ALL SCAMS,’--a new thrust by our parental affiliate, American Atheists.

What we learned: Women philosophers, rare as they are, can give us some profound insights about how philosophy is put to use by governments. Plus, we're all doomed if we don't engage in fact-based thinking!

May

NYCA traveled to Des Moines, Iowa for the American Atheists' annual convention, and what a time of joy and enthusiasm it was! AA's youthful new president, **David Silverman**, inspired a wave of righteous anger with his audacious billboards all over Des Moines proclaiming "YOU KNOW THERE IS NO GOD!" Fundamentalists picketed the convention, and "Jesus" appeared again, channeled by our old friend, comedian **Troy Conrad**.



Dave Silverman

On the home front, we heard Dr. **Greg Bognar**, assistant professor at the New York University Center for Bioethics, talk about medical ethics: "*Who Should Get the Kidney Transplant--You or Someone Else?*" And NYCA member Dr. **David Orenstein**, anthropology professor and library director, gave a smashing talk on "*The Evolution of the Universe in 40 Minutes.*"

What we learned: Bioethics is tough; studying the universe is fun. Conventions are exciting, educational and inspiring.

June

June is synonymous with moon and wedding bells and we had our share: Long time members **Maria Astifidis** and Dr. **Harry Graber** tied the knot, as did our support-group leader **Linda Blaikie** and Dr. **Jeffery Osterman**.

In line with the mood, our monthly-meeting speaker was **Darrel Ray**, author of "Sex and Secularism," who talked about-- what else?--the sex lives of secularists, which, it turns out, happen to be pretty good, thank you. At our June Brunch, the vivacious young lawyer **Ayanna Watson**, founder of Black Atheists of America, told us about her journey from Christianity to Atheism and why she took on the difficult task of introducing Atheism to the Black community.

What we learned: Atheists are doing all right when it comes to love and sex, but taking on the Black religious community is a tough assignment.

July

The media hit us like a ton of bricks in July when a young Brooklyn reporter discovered a new street sign in Brooklyn that said "Seven in Heaven" (referring to seven firemen who died on 9/11) and asked us what we thought of it. We didn't like it much, and when that news got out, we suddenly became the Grinch, Scrooge and the anti-Christ all wrapped into one. Pity for the bereaved firefighters of Brooklyn took over even our rank and file, who thought we wanted to sue over the preposterous signage. We didn't want to, and we didn't.



"Seven in Heaven" Way

What we learned: The religionists are experts at wringing the heartstrings of the citizenry even as they slyly insert their messages into our public spaces and streets.

Meanwhile, **Jamila Bey**, a rising star in the Washington, DC Black Atheist movement, came to New York to tell us at Brunch, "*Why People of Color Resist the Atheist Movement.*" And Dr. **Adam Shapiro** of the University of Chicago came to tell us about the "*History of Clashes between Religion and Science in America.*" Alas, many of our most intellectual listeners grumbled that Shapiro spent too much time telling us how religion has supposedly *helped* scientific research by establishing hospitals and universities.

Also in July, NYCA member **Willie Fuchs** bought out the entire IFC theatre where Matthew Chapman's atheist movie, "The Ledge," was making its Manhattan debut, and donated the tickets to our members. After the film showing, NYCA members went to dinner together to celebrate what may be one of the first steps towards mainstream Atheist arts.

What we learned: Opposition to Atheism comes in many forms that are going to be difficult to counter, including Black churches that are community centers and established religious institutions that claim to "help science."

September

September 2011 will always be historic for NYCA: It is the month in which American Atheists filed a suit to have the so-called "miracle cross" removed from the 9/11 Museum, with three top NYC Atheists members as plaintiffs: myself, **Jane Everhart** and **Dennis Horvitz**. In response to this, and to our stance on the word "heaven" in a street sign, we were inundated by hate letters. Ms. Everhart used the hate letters to advantage by writing a humorous piece about

them for the newsletter.

Journalist **Paul Gregory** came from Washington DC to tell us at Brunch why Americans dislike Atheists, and our legal counsel in the “miracle cross” suit, **Danielle Mathey**, spoke to us from Wyoming on Skype at our monthly meeting about why she felt that our 9/11 suit is a strong constitutional case.

What we learned: Atheists are disliked because most Americans are religious and we’re not. We also learned that our “miracle cross” suit is a strong one because the 9/11 museum, which houses the so-called “miracle cross,” is funded and maintained by the federal government with millions of dollars of tax money. If that is not a direct violation of the Establishment clause of the U.S. Constitution, what is?

October

Bible scholar **Gary Greenberg** gave a fascinating talk at Brunch on “*101 Myths of the Bible: How Ancient Scribes Invented Biblical History*,” which attracted scores of Atheist bible critics. **Janis Landis** of the **Final Exit Network** spoke to us at the monthly meeting on “*The Right to a Death with Dignity*.”

What we learned: Greenberg’s dissection of the Old Testament confirmed once again that the Bible is a compilation of inaccurate myths. Landis revealed the hypocrisy behind our government’s refusal to let terminally ill people end their own lives when, in our wars, the government itself places healthy young people into the jaws of death.

November

We win the cross case in Utah! The Supreme Court refuses to review the decision by the 10th Circuit Court of Appeal, so AA Legal Director **Edwin Kagin** declares our Utah lawsuit a win. This bodes well for our 9/11 law suit because the Utah win has set a precedent of forcing Christian crosses to be removed from public property.

Margaret Downey blazes a trail by speaking to us at our Brunch about her personal journey to Atheism. Her private story, illustrated by clips, moves us to tears and laughter. Our monthly speaker, journalist **Andrew Revkin**, points out how climate science is hampered by politics, which is turn is vastly influenced by religion in the U.S.

What we learned: We all have stories to tell about coming into Atheism in an environment that is not receptive to us, but, alas, not many individuals have the talent and the guts to tell it publicly as Downey did. And, to save our environment, we need the same kind of guts to prevail on those who are in power.

December

Our Brunch was packed to the gills, standing room only, with students from Princeton who came to hear science author **Richard Panek** tell the inside scoop behind the latest Nobel Prize winners in Physics--namely the rivalry between two science teams to see which would be first to nail down the discovery of the accelerating expansion of the universe.

Our December 16 Solstice party and Open Mike was an over-subscribed smashing success with songs and humor and the wonderful food of Les Sans Culottes, a Manhattan French restaurant.

What we learned: We are indeed a family, a thriving, happy community, and Ivy League students are pounding at the portals to gain access--at last!

With another successful year under our belts, keep tuned to this newsletter to see what events we have planned for 2012. Look for a resolution of our suit against the 9/11 museum in 2012, ever more exciting speakers, funnier comedians, bigger parties, animated discussions, exciting conventions and a march on Washington. Be there! ☐

Renew your NYC Atheists Inc. Membership!

This is the Season for renewals, so don’t forget NYC Atheists!
Your dues and contributions are an educational 501-C3 tax -free contribution, and are 100% deductible.

If you are a basic member now, consider increasing to a higher category:
Friend, \$100, Sustainer, \$250, Patron, \$500, Benefactor \$1000.

You can donate via check or web site. Make checks payable to NYC Atheists Inc. and send to: NYC Atheists Inc. (Membership), P.O. Box 6060, New York, NY 10150-6060. Or there is a donation form on NYC-Atheists.Org. See the enclosed Membership flyer!

Have you considered giving a NYCA membership to your favorite Atheist or Agnostic as a holiday or birthday gift? And remember NYCA in your estate planning! Why leave your money to a religious person? Our civil rights efforts for Atheists’ goals can move ahead faster if you make NYCA the beneficiary of an insurance policy, bank account, IRA or property. Let your money work for YOUR cause when you no longer need it.

A Tribute to Christopher Hitchens Author, Atheist, Adventurer, Hero (1949-2011)



By Nathaniel Adams

Sometimes it's hard (even for an Atheist) not to wish there was some lovely place where all the best people go after they die. We know there's no reason to suppose such a thing exists, but the desire is at least an understandable one. On December 15, 2011, Christopher Hitchens, always the great debater, ended "the long argument" he was having with "the specter of death," and whatever virgin sheets of paper were left on his desk are reasons enough to mourn his passing. Confronting death is one of the most problematic and contentious issues in Atheism, and a common point made in defense of religion is the comfort and meaning it can give. It was perhaps Hitch's last great contribution to Atheism to show us all how to face death without fear, with humor and without recourse to superstition.



Young Hitchens

When he was diagnosed with esophageal cancer, one of the first statements Hitch made (over and over again, as he often did when he wanted to make sure people got the point) was that any rumors of a deathbed conversion *Brideshead Revisited*-style were either completely untrue or the result of a mind ruined by illness and drugs, and were not to be taken seriously. He was perfectly frank, open and honest about the fact that his lifestyle was almost certainly the reason for his illness and, pointing to his long history of showing up in war zones with a drink in one hand and a cigarette in the other, he admitted that he'd been taunting the reaper for some time. There was never any question for Hitchens that his condition was due to some combination of genetics (his father died of the same disease) and the fact that cancer cells are more inclined to develop and grow under certain influences – and not thanks to an angry god or a calculating karma (much as many of his religious opponents may have liked that).

Sparkling Wit, Ferocious Righteousness

Hitch, avoiding self-pity, had his genome sequenced by Dr. Francis Collins of the Human Genome Project, in the hopes that some shred of the information in his cells might help someone else down the line. He also offered

himself as a subject for any experimental treatment that could advance the field of oncology, however incrementally. And, finally, he gave his body for scientific study after his death. Hitchens was determined that his death, like his life, would make at least some small contribution to the struggle for reason and knowledge.



Hitchens in Afghanistan

One of Hitchens' great contributions to Atheism was that he was physical proof that a man with no religion could have a profound and innate moral sense, and we're very lucky that so moral a man also happened to be one of the most eloquent members of our species. Hitchens' voice was a much-needed counterpoint to other Atheist icons. Richard Dawkins could seem a bit too much the stuffy professor at times, Sam Harris so even-keeled and rational as to appear almost emotionless and Daniel Dennett just far too nice. Hitchens brought sparkling wit and a ferocious righteousness to the party, and it was he who took the battle to another front: showing that this was as much a war about literature, art, history and culture itself just as much as it was an issue of science vs. superstition. Hitchens was, if you'll forgive the phrase, the "soul" of the Atheist movement.

Courage, Honor and Conviction

Hitchens' ability to see the stretched and tangled relationships between politics, art, religion, reason and human life, along with his unparalleled skill with a pen or at a podium and, most remarkably, his knack for being able to respect and treat with dignity many of his interlocutors while simultaneously holding their beliefs in contempt and ridicule, made him one of Atheism's most talented icons. He was an Atheist who counted many believers among his friends and comrades while never compromising his own views or being equivocal in his opinions of theirs. And of course, his manifold enemies, be they dictators, priests, fellow intellectuals or other assorted hypocrites, were given no quarter and no mercy.

The death of Christopher Hitchens is a tragedy for Atheists around the world. Civilization has lost one of its greatest defenders and, as he well knew, the barbarians are always just at the gates. So it's important to now take inspiration from Hitch and continue to fight in the name of the things he held most dear: free speech, free inquiry, wit, irony, scholarship, art and reason, and that we try to show even half as much courage, honor, conviction and decency as he did. Hitchens is survived by his wife, three children, more than two dozen books, hundreds of articles, and countless hours of memorable conversation and debate. □

Nathaniel ("Natty") Adams was leader of the NYCA Discussion Group for several seasons. He left to earn his Master's degree in journalism at Columbia University and is currently writing a book.

Letter to Editor

'Atheism Gives a Passion for Life'

To Kenneth Bronstein,

Thanks for your lovely piece in the November NYCA bulletin. My experience of becoming Atheist was almost identical to yours--same age, same kinds of thoughts-- except that I dealt with Episcopal priests and teachers. My feelings about it now--for me, more than fifty years later--are just like those you so eloquently describe in your piece. I feel that I never made a better decision. Thanks for sharing your experience.

--Alex Dunlop - Manhattan

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REASON RALLY (SATURDAY) MARCH 24, 2012 WASHINGTON D.C. – NATIONAL MALL

The Reason Rally is an event sponsored by many of the country's largest and most influential secular organizations. It will be free to attend and will take place in Washington, D.C. on March 24, 2012 from 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM at the National Mall.

NYC Atheists will set up transportation at special rates.

AMERICAN ATHEISTS, MARCH 25-26, 2012 CONVENTION WWW.ATHEISTS.ORG

The Annual Convention of American Atheists will be held March 25th and 26th, 2012 (following the Reason Rally) at the Bethesda North Marriott and Convention Center in Bethesda, MD.

This year's theme: "Come out! Come out! Wherever you Are!" will feature Speakers Richard Dawkins and P.Z. Myers.

Purchase convention tickets: WWW.ATHEISTS.ORG

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

JAN. 8, 2012 (SUN.) 12:00 NOON
NYC ATHEISTS BRUNCH / SPEAKER

SPEAKER: MARGOT ADLER



SUBJECT: THE FAST-GROWING U.S. VAMPIRE FAD –WHAT’S THAT ABOUT?

Margot Adler, author, National Public Radio (NPR) personality, and granddaughter of pioneer psychoanalyst Alfred Adler, thinks she knows what’s going on. Adler has a theory about why vampires have such traction in our society. It has to do with--surprise!--power, morality and fear of things we can’t control. She will examine vampires as a metaphor for what’s wrong in our society today.

LOCATION: The Press Box Restaurant
 932 Second Avenue (bet. 49th & 50th Sts.) -2nd Floor

COST: BRUNCH is \$20, which includes a selection of Buffet Entrees, salad, one soft drink, coffee, tax and tip.

JAN. 11, 2012 (WED.) 7:00 PM
NYC ATHEISTS LIVING W/O RELIGION GROUP

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



SUBJECT: NEW YEAR’S RESOLUTIONS!

Are they a good idea or are we setting ourselves up for failure? Are New Year’s Resolutions just another way to put off things we know we should do? Come hear what our psychology guru, Linda Blaikie, a licensed therapist, has to say about how we often fool ourselves with New Year's resolutions.

LOCATION: Moonstruck Diner - 449 Third Ave. / 31st -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.

JAN. 17, 2012 (TUE.) 7:00PM
NYC ATHEISTS MEETUP

GROUP LEADER: MICHAEL DORIAN



SUBJECT: RELIGION AND RIGHT-WING POLITICS.

Why are so many religious people tied to right-wing ultra-conservative politics? What is behind it? Are these right-wing religious Fundamentalists preventing progress or, as they often insist, just preserving deeply rooted American principles? With an election coming up, this topic is a keg of dynamite.

LOCATION: Stone Creek -140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex)
COST: Free, but participants are expected to purchase a drink or food to compensate Stone Creek for their space.

JAN. 20, 2012 (FRI.) 6:30PM
NYC ATHEISTS BOOK CLUB

GROUP LEADER: DAVID ORENSTEIN



BOOK: “Monkey Girl: Evolution, Education, Religion and the Battle for America’s Soul” by Edward Humes. The drama of the Dover, PA court case in which parents sued to keep Intelligent Design out of school textbooks—before a Bush-appointed judge!

LOCATION: Stone Creek -140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex)
COST: Free, but participants are expected to purchase a drink or food to compensate Stone Creek for their space.

JAN. 26, 2012 (THUR.) 6:30 PM
NYC ATHEISTS ANNUAL MEETING

HOST: KEN BRONSTEIN – NYCA PRESIDENT

SUBJECT: 2011 review, exciting 2012 plans and your suggestions welcome! Tell us your ideas!

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.

UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS

CALL: 212-330-6794 FOR LAST MINUTE CHANGES

JANUARY 2012

Jan.	8*	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch / Speaker
Jan.	11**	Wed.	7:00 PM	NYCA Living Without Religion Group
Jan.	17***	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up
Jan.	20***	Fri.	6:30 PM	NYCA Book Club
Jan.	26****	Thur.	6:30 PM	NYCA Monthly Meeting

FEBRUARY 2012

Feb,	8**	Wed.	7:00 PM	NYCA Living Without Religion Group
Feb.	12*	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch / Speaker
Feb.	17***	Fri.	6:30 PM	NYCA Book Club
Feb	21***	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up
Feb.	23****	Thur.	6:30 PM	NYCA Monthly Meeting

- * Press Box Restaurant & Pub – 932 Second Ave. (49/50th St.) – 2nd Floor
 ** Moonstruck Diner – 449 Third Ave. (31st) – 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)

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