### NYC ATHEISTS INC.







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

AN AFFILIATE OF AMERICAN ATHEISTS

212-330-6794

VOL. IX ISSUE NO. 3

**MARCH 2012** 



### PRESIDENT'S "SERMON"

### Let's Show America!

### A Secular 'Woodstock' in Washington To Show Our Strength and Numbers

There are some things we Atheists want to tell America on March 24th: That we are here and not going away. That we are more numerous than they ever knew. That we are coming out of the woodwork now. That we want to be counted and recognized. We want our issues to be considered, we want a seat at the table, we want a voice in our government!

We don't want to be pushed aside anymore or demonized or marginalized. We want to claim our civil rights as tax-paying, law-abiding, proud and open Atheist Americans!

That will be our message to the world on Saturday, March 24th as we fill the National Mall in Washington. BE THERE!

Be there and be counted! If you missed Woodstock in the 1960s, if you missed Abby Hoffman's "Levitation of the Pentagon," if you missed taking a Freedom bus to the South, if you missed the Vietnam protests or the "I Have a Dream" talk by Dr. King, this is your opportunity to be a part of history! This is your chance to be counted, to make a difference, to change the world.

This is your chance to be able tell your grandchildren someday, "Yes, I was there at the National Mall in 2012 when it was filled with courageous Atheists demonstrating for our rights, and I was there when Richard Dawkins said those immortal words, 'Mr. President, Atheists are American citizens just like you!'

"I WAS THERE," you will tell them, "when the Mall was filled with beautiful, fervent Atheists from all rungs of society, blue collar to college students, doctors, nurses, retired people, construction workers, teachers, homemakers, government workers, all of us with one voice, showing the world that we care about America, that we are good citizens and that we want our place in the sun."

### Four Main Goals of the Reason Rally

"Come Out of the Closet." We want to show the nation that secular Americans come from all walks of life, that they are from your family, your neighborhood, your workplace. They are your doctor, your car mechanic, your barber, the cop on the beat, the deli owner. We are some 40 to 50 million strong now, more than all other minorities put together.

Protest Against the Mounting Erosion of Separation of Church and State. In education alone, religion is trying to sneak Intelligent Design into our textbooks and courses, establishing charter schools as fronts for religion, bringing prayer back to schools and using home schooling. Similar religious encroachment goes on in government, the military, the media, museums, corporations, everywhere.

**Urge Secular Civil Rights.** We want to end discrimination against Atheists. We want to be able to run for office. We want to stop the demonization of Atheists as immoral or unpatriotic people. We want to be proudly open Atheists, unafraid to assert our nonbelief.

**Motivate Future Activism.** We want our Reason Rally to be a celebration of Atheism, a positive experience for all who take part. We want participants to meet Atheists from other parts of the country. We want participants to be inspired, motivated and involved, and carry their inspiration home for future activism.

### The Reason Rally: Who, When, Where

**WHO:** All the major secular organizations are involved in organizing the Reason Rally: American Atheists / American Humanist Association / Atheist Alliance of America / Center for Inquiry / Freedom From Religion Foundation / Freethought Society / Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers / Secular Coalition for America / Secular Student Alliance / Society for Humanistic Judaism / The Brights / The Richard Dawkins Foundation.

WHEN: Sat., Mar. 24th (10 AM to 4 PM) WHERE: The National Mall, Washington, D.C. (Right side -Facing Washington Monument)

**SPEAKERS/ MUSIC/ COMICS:** Richard Dawkins / P Z Myers/ Tim Minchin / Taslima Nasrin / Paul Provenza / James Randi / Adam Savage / Bad Religion / Jessica Ahlquist / Dan Barker / Jamila Bey / Greta Christina / Sean Faircloth /Annie Laurie Gaylor / Lawrence Krauss / Ron Lindsey / Shelley Segal / David Silverman / Roy Speckhardt / Rep. Pete Stark / Indra Zuno

### **How to Get There**

You can go for the day or stay overnight. Make your reservations early.

**Traveling Friendly**: Look for other NYCA members and group together. Many will be wearing our blue NYCA baseball cap.

**By Bus**: This is the most inexpensive way to get there, costing from \$25 to \$50 round trip. The most popular bus lines to Washington are Bolt, Chinatown-Bus, DC2NY, Megabus. You can do a google search online for time of departure and return. (Note: We are not using a charter bus as we feel the cost would be prohibitive: \$150 for the round trip.)

By Train: WWW.Amtrak.com for times, reservations and cost, which ranges from \$75 to \$100 round trip. Faster than the bus.

By Car: If you elect to drive, please contact us for car pools and splitting gas costs.

Airplane: Delta has a Saturday flight at 8:45 AM. Cost about \$160 round trip.

Almost all forms of transportation end up in Union Station! **Best bet: Simply take a taxi from Union Station to the National Mall.** It takes about 10 minutes and costs about \$10, less if you share the ride with another Atheist. (We do not recommend taking the subway to the Mall as it involves one transfer.)

To take the 30-minute walk to the mall from Union Station:





Go to the front of Union Station (above), 1st Street / Massachusetts Ave. – across from National Postal Museum (above)

Cross over Mass. Ave. then counter-clockwise around Columbus Circle to Louisiana Ave. NW

Right onto Louisiana Ave. to Constitution Ave.

Right onto Constitution Ave.

Left onto Third St. NW

Right at Madison Drive NW to National Mall Rally site near 12th St. facing Washington Monument.

Please see either Ken Bronstein or Jane Everhart to sign in. (Wearing Yellow Vests)

### Some Personal Reminders

**Rally Attire:** Wear neat, clean clothing, comfortable shoes. You may bring a fold-up stool, water, sun glasses, a chair stool. Bring cameras, video cameras and cell phones, if you can, for intergroup communication and recording the events.

You may also bring a back pack, snacks, water, medications, kleenex. We will provide NYCA baseball caps and posters.

**Personal conduct:** Be polite. Use a Buddy system. Do not block others. Clean up afterwards. No yelling or heated debates; no violence, threats, profanity or bashing of religion. Treat Police or Park Rangers with respect. If they ask you to move, **do it;** no back talk or argument. Stay in assigned areas.

**Signs & Placards:** No sticks or weapons of any kind allowed. NYCA will provide posters and placards. If you bring your own, they should be no more than 2 x 3 feet in size. No hate speech, profanity, or obscene language, please.

Misc: There will be Porta-san toilets available. We will pass out cue cards with our bulleted message on them, in case the Press interviews you. Contact Ken Bronstein or Jane Everhart should you have any problem. Above all, have fun! This is a day to remember for the rest of your life. Washington DC will be enjoying Cherry blossom time March 20 – April 27th

### Editor's Q and A

### A True Story: How Business Uses Religion



Jane Everhart

Dear Editor,

Atheists seem to believe that religion is an important asset to the corporate world, but I have worked in a big corporation for many years and have found that religion is not mentioned in our offices and cubicles and, in fact, nobody talks about their religion from nine to five. I suppose there are prayer meetings now and then in some companies. But NYCA president Kenneth Bronstein has been so good about telephoning a corporation's Human Resources department when he is advised about such a meeting in any New York company and reminding them that this kind of activity opens the company up to law suits, that many big companies, at least in New York, do not allow prayer meetings on their premises any more. So my question is, what makes you so sure that business and religion are intertwined? Have you ever noticed it in your own work experience?

-- Randy from Red Hook

Dear Randy,

One of the good things about being a journalist, as I have been for most of my career, is that you get to find out things that other people don't. I started as a beat reporter covering Montvale, NJ, on the *Bergen Record*, a New Jersey daily newspaper. My beat was the City Council, the School Board and the police station. There were about two crimes a year in Montvale, NJ, but I learned a lot about what was going on in town just by hanging around the police station.

Then I moved to New York, where I became a writer/editor on publications such as *Cosmopolitan* and *Newsday* and later worked on business magazines covering the real estate, medical, pharmaceutical and jewelry industries. I thought of myself as an investigative journalist and, in fact, I won three awards for journalism during my career, one for "Timely, Pertinent Reporting," one for "Reporting on Controversy" and one for "Analysis." I keep those plaques up on my wall to remind myself that audaciousness is sometimes rewarded.

You learn insider things when you work on business magazines because, to get your story, a large part of your work involves interviews with influential people. For

example, I have interviewed the Nobel Prize Winner in cell biology, Dr. Gunter Blobel of Rockefeller University (for two hours); Jackie Onassis' boyfriend, Maurice Templesman (for a jewelry magazine) and Warren Buffett about his purchase of a jewelry store in Omaha, Nebraska. You learn a lot of insider things talking to the top guy.

### I Turn Freelancer

In 2000, when I was Senior Editor on *Medical Tribune*, a publication for doctors, the company went belly up. Tired of the 9-to-5 world, I decided to freelance. I called up every place I had ever worked and told them I was available for freelance work. That's something publishers love to hear because, as a former employee, you know exactly what they want. I was quickly able to pay the rent solely through freelance work.

How freelance assignments work--and most neophytes don't realize this--is: You don't put pen to paper until you have a written contract, or "story letter," which tells you what kind of a story the publisher wants, how much they will pay you, how many words they expect you to write and the kill-fee—or what you get if they don't like your story. Often the editor in chief will do some preliminary work to pave the way for you if the person they want you to interview for the story is a bigwig.

Thus it happened that in about 2006, I was assigned by a retail magazine to interview Mr. Joshua Black (not his real name), the founder and president of Leisureland, a chain of some 70 hobby stores in the Midwest. Mr. Black's chain stores had been dangerously close to bankruptcy in the mid-1990s, but he managed to turn the business around and, eventually, he even doubled the number of stores he owned. My job was to find out how he did it; it was seen as an upbeat success story. Retail publications love success stories.

### A Remarkable Story

I made an appointment to tape a telephone interview with Mr. Black from his headquarters in Kansas City. He allotted an hour to the interview but we actually ended up talking for nearly two hours. He told me a remarkable story about how he managed to turn around his hobbystore chain in the mid-1990s.

Joshua Black had never finished high school. At age 16, he went to work as a salesman in a local hobby store and found he was good at selling things. Flash forward 15 years: Joshua Black has been so loyal an employee that the hobby store owner decides to sell the store to him. Joshua, now married with two children, buys the store and enlists his wife to manage it with him. The Blacks do well, and in the succeeding years they establish other hobby stores in the Midwest, because buying merchandise in larger quantities allows them to give their customers better prices, a practice called "economy of scale." Business is good in the 70s and 80s; scrapbooking has become popular; fishing, crocheting and such hobbies occupy people in the Bible Belt. Joshua expands his chain throughout the Midwest and acquires a whopping 54 leisure-time stores.

### **Bankruptcy Looms**

But business falls off in the mid-1990s. Is it the onset of the computer and computer games? Or the newer, bigger hobby stores that are cropping up in the Blacks' market segment? Joshua Black's business falls off dramatically. He closes some stores. When he has only 30 remaining stores and the bankers are knocking on his door, Joshua Black, now a grandfather, calls a company-wide meeting at his Kansas City headquarters.

Some 30 store managers, Joshua Black, his wife and children fill the meeting room at headquarters. What happens next amounts to a prayer meeting. Joshua Black tells them all to get to their knees as he leads the prayer. He tells god that he will give the church 10 percent of all of Leisureland's profits if god helps him stay in business. And as an added incentive for god, Black promises to proselytize for his church if the stores become profitable.

Well, of course, you know the punchline. The stores' business did indeed turn around. Business soars. Joshua Black not only opens up the lost stores but opens up new ones throughout the Bible Belt states. It appears that god has come through for the Blacks! Joshua not only gives 10 percent of his profits to his church but he publishes Christian Bibles in Chinese, which he arranges to have distributed in China as the bonus he promised to god.

### My Disbelief in Miracles

You can imagine my perplexity, sitting in my apartment in New York listening to this Kansas millionaire's "success" story I was taping. What, I wondered, am I going to tell my reader? That if business is poor, they should fall to their knees and call on god? That would not fly at Harvard Business School. The whole story sounded unsophisticatedly bizarre to me. Could this corporate president and millionaire really believe that god saved his company? (Yes, Mr. Black was dead

serious. Where he lives, everybody believes in god and everybody believes that god is in charge of their lives.)

As it turned out, years after his close brush with bankruptcy, Mr. Black was still reimbursing god for His financial help at the Blacks' time of crisis. The Black family even bought a small Bible publishing house, devoted it to publishing Bibles translated into Chinese and Russian and were distributing the Bibles regularly in China and East European countries.

### What Really Happened?

After the interview, listening in my home office to the tape of my interview with Joshua Black, I guessed at what probably actually happened. News of the Blacks' promise to god leaked out (or was leaked by someone in the company) to newspapers in the Bible Belt, where loyalty to religious merchants is fervent. I suspect the story of the Blacks' devotion to god and their church created a kind of--well, brand loyalty. Any merchant who can commune with god, lavishly support his local church and send Bibles to heathen countries--that's the merchant of choice in the Bible Belt.

In the end, I wrote the story straight, emphasizing the economies of scale as the main clue to Mr. Black's business turnaround and downplaying his entreaties of the Holy Spirit, an idea that I felt wouldn't have much traction in the publishing world. I never let my publisher, or Mr. Black, know about my perplexity-even amusement--at the thought of god helping leisure-time stores to become more profitable. And there are indeed elements that are funny: Imagine a roomful of portly store managers on their knees, praying that god make their cash registers ring.

### The Untold Story

Both Mr. Black and his customers believed in god's intervention and that's what made it work. I came away from the experience feeling that somehow everyone had benefited in some way in this symbiotic relationship of religion and business in a Bible Belt market: The Joshua Black family made money, their churches got a nice dividend-- undoubtedly millions of dollars--the customers got bargains and some puzzled Chinese got a bad translation of the Bible.

No one ever knew that a writer, sitting in a hi-rise in Manhattan, saw the whole story as a web of tribal mumbo jumbo being used to boost sales through superstition. My publisher approved the story I wrote, readers learned from the story, and Mr. Black loved it. But the real story, I knew, remained untold: How business, in some communities, uses religion as a public relations tool to boost sales and create customer lovalty.

### **Catholics Would Deny Access to Birth Control**

### Why Obama's Decision Should Stand



By Ron Widelec

Many American Catholics are up in arms over the recent decision from the Obama administration stating that under the new healthcare law, Catholic organizations (including Universities and schools) cannot have their healthcare plans refuse to cover birth control.

These Catholic organizations have argued that under the First Amendment they cannot be forced to have their healthcare plan cover birth control because it violates their freedom of religion. Once again, a religious organization thinks that freedom of religion allows them to do something that would actually deny rights to their employees. These Catholic organizations apparently think that they can dictate the sexual practices of their employees when they are in the privacy of their own home.

Many people, including some non-Catholics, have jumped on the bandwagon, claiming to be on the side of "religious freedom." However, that is not what this case is about.

### **Catholics Want Special Treatment**

The reality is that Catholics are demanding something that would be considered absurd if demanded by a less mainstream religion. For example, imagine a Jehovah's Witness 'Witness hall' deciding that the healthcare plan they provide their staff will not cover blood transfusions or dialysis treatment, because these two common

medical practices are taboo to Jehovah Witnesses. Imagine a Mosque deciding that their employees would not be covered for insulin for diabetes because insulin is made from pigs. Very few Americans would be supporting these ridiculous ideas. Yet, when it is proposed by a larger, more generally accepted religion, suddenly it is legitimate.

### **Old Battle Against Women**

This is yet another example of the backward-thinking Catholic Church fighting a centuries-old war against the rights of women and trying to influence sexual choices of others, even those who are not Catholic. In the U.S., these policies have manifested themselves as antiabortion, anti-birth control and anti-sex education campaigns. In third-world countries, especially in Africa, the Catholic Church's anti-condom programs have allowed for the accelerated spread of AIDS across the continent.

The Obama administration should not back down to the Catholic Church despite the potential impact on the 2012 election. The decision was both morally right and entirely consistent with the First Amendment of the Constitution.

Ron Widelec is an educator who lives on Long Island with his wife and new baby, Joshua. He frequently writes for our newsletter on timely topics.

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First Name:	La	ast Name				
			Apt No.:			
City		State				
Email:	<u>@</u>	Phone: (				
	Basic Plus \$ 50, Benefactor_		Sustainer \$ 250 Life \$ 5,000			
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### The Biggest Reason to Rally Is Reason



By Tyson Gill

On March 24<sup>th</sup> we Atheists will rally in Washington D.C. to seek parity in a nation that mostly marginalizes nonbelievers. Some people may wonder: How are Atheists a persecuted class? How are Atheists discriminated against? We have the right to vote, we can sit in the front of buses and we can get legally married.

If you do not believe that Atheists suffer from real prejudice, then you must explain why the vast majority of us remain closeted and dare not let our Atheism become known in our communities or workplaces. If you believe that we are represented by our government, then you must explain how that is possible when it is virtually impossible for any Atheist to gain public office. If you believe that our secular-humanist worldview is not under attack by religious zealotry, then you must explain why we are forced to defer to religious intrusion into many social and personal aspects of our lives.

We Atheists can and must stand up and speak out so we can no longer be ignored by lawmakers and demonized by religious evangelists. If we do not, if we fail to speak for ourselves, no one is going to speak for us. If we do not rally in solidarity with fellow Atheists, we have no right to complain when religious fundamentalists trample upon our civil rights and intimidate us personally.

### Will Superstition Rule the U.S.?

But this rally is far, far more important than merely a bid to gain social influence for our vastly underreported and underrepresented demographic. It is far more important than someday electing a rational Atheist President who can actually admit to believing in evolution. It is more important even than protecting our right to fundamental services such as contraception or a woman's right to choose. It is not called the "Rally for Atheism" but rather it is called the "Reason Rally" because it is part of a far greater struggle for reason itself. It is a rally for the future of a planet literally threatened by religious destabilization and non-scientific thinking about crucial global issues like climate change.

### Need a Government of Reason

This is not a battle merely for Atheists and for secular rights, but for a future enlightened by reason, not held hostage to superstition. I urge everyone who is concerned about protecting the Separation of Church and State to join us in solidarity. I urge everyone who is concerned about the overreach of religious fundamentalism to join us in Washington.

If you consider yourself agnostic and don't want to see religious ideology eclipse reason, join us. If you are a reasonable Christian who understands that the Separation of Church and State is a very good thing for you, join us. If you are a member of a minority religion who doesn't want to suffer under the tyranny of a religious majority, join us. If you fled from another country with an oppressive theocratic government, join us and lend your voice.

Don't sit on the sidelines, making excuses and criticizing the efforts of those who put themselves out there. You may feel like a mere a drop of water, but without every drop the glass can never be filled. One grain of sand is all it takes to tip the scales.  $\square$ 

Tyson Gill is the author of "Belief in Science and the Science of Belief: A Guidebook to Fact-Based Thinking."

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

MAR. 14, 2012 (WED.) 7:00 PM NYC ATHEISTS LIVING WITH ATHEISM GROUP

**GROUP LEADER: LINDA BLAIKIE** 



**SUBJECT: ROMANCE** 

What is romance? Do we, as Atheists, disdain romance in our preference for reason and logic? Don't we too need a little romance and fluff in our lives?

**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.

MAR. 11, 2012 (SUN.) 12:00 NOON NYC ATHEISTS BRUNCH / SPEAKER

**SPEAKER: ALAN MANN** 

Professor of Anthropology, Princeton University



# SUBJECT: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE HUMAN, AND HOW DID WE EVOLVE THIS UNIQUE CAPABILITY?

Dr. Mann is a physical anthropologist whose expertise includes paleanthropology and human adaptation evolution.

**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.

MAR. 16, 2012 (FRI.) 6:30PM NYC ATHEISTS BOOK AND FILM CLUB

**GROUP LEADER: DAVID ORENSTEIN** 



FILM: "CREATION" – A 2010 film about Darwin's life, starring Jennifer Connelly and Paul Bettany, and focusing on Darwin as a very human person.

**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.

MAD 00 0040 (THE)

MAR. 20, 2012 (TUE.) NYC ATHEISTS MEETUP 7:00PM

**GROUP LEADER: MICHAEL DORIAN** 



SUBJECT: "Come Out, Come Out, Wherever You Are!" is the theme of the American Atheists' convention in March. Are we living up to that notion?

**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.

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MAR. 29, 2012 (THUR.) 6:30 PM NYC ATHEISTS MONTHLY MEETING



**SPEAKER: ELLEN JOHNSON,** Director of "Enlighten the Vote," a non-partisan Political Action Committee working to get Atheists elected to office. She is the former president of American Atheists.

SUBJECT: "LET'S PLAY HARDBALL"

What we can do to get the right people elected and what we can do to run for office ourselves.

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

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

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### **UPCOMING EVENTS AND MEETINGS**

CALL: 212-330-6794 FOR LAST MINUTE CHANGES

### **MARCH 2012**

Mar.	11*	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch / Speaker
Mar.	14**	Wed.	7:00 PM	NYCA Living With Atheism Group
Mar.	16***	Fri.	6:30 PM	NYCA Book & Film Club
Mar.	20***	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up
Mar.	23****	Fri.	8:30AM – 4 PM	Secular Coalition Lobby Day
Mar.	24*****	Sat.	10AM - 4PM	REASON RALLY
Mar,	25-26*****	Sun Mon.		American Atheists Convention
Mar.	29****	Thur.	6:30 PM	NYCA Monthly Meeting
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### **APRIL 2012**

Apr.	8*	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch / Speaker
Apr.	11**	Wed.	7:00 PM	NYCA Living With Atheism Group
Apr.	17***	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up
Apr.	20***	Fri.	6:30 PM	NYCA Book & Film Club
Apr.	26****	Thur.	6:30 PM	NYCA Monthly Meeting

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- \* 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.)
- \*\*\*\*\* Hyatt Regency Washington on Capitol Hill 400 New Jersey Avenue NW Washington, DC
- \*\*\*\*\*\* National Mall Washington, D.C.
- \*\*\*\*\*\*\* Bethesda North Marriott and Convention Center in Bethesda, MD.

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### **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)

NYC Atheists P.O. Box 6060 NY, NY 10150-6060

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