

NYC ATHEISTS INC.



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AN AFFILIATE OF AMERICAN ATHEISTS

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KENNETH BRONSTEIN

PRESIDENT'S "SERMON"

"What Will Be Your Epitaph?"

Will You Improve the World and Leave Your Mark?

Sometime during your life you've probably heard someone say, "I know I was put on this earth for a purpose." Usually it's a religious person who says this and what they mean is that god has some purpose in mind for them.

For Atheists, the idea of a purpose-driven life is a much harder sell because we ourselves must decide what our purpose is. There is no celestial being telling us what life goal He has in mind for us. There is no all-knowing overlord in charge of our To-Do list checking off what we must accomplish for His cosmic plan.

Will You Leave Behind a Better World?

Yet a purpose-driven life is just as desirable, just as satisfying and just as necessary for an Atheist. It is perhaps even more necessary for Atheists because we don't expect any reward in heaven. Whatever reward we get for having lived a purposeful, productive and beneficent life will be right here on earth, etched onto the minds of our fellow men, written into the history of society and onto the walls, statuary and the canvases of our artists and artisans.



George Bernard Shaw

How will you be remembered? What will be your epitaph? As the famous Atheist playwright George Bernard Shaw, author of "Pygmalion," once said, "I measure a life not by the number of years but one's impact on making it a better world."

How, you may well ask, can one person impact on making it a better world? If you can say, when Atheist history is made, "I was there. I contributed," then you have made an impact. Were you at the Reason Rally? Good. You can say, "I was there. I contributed." Did you lobby with the 300 Atheists led by the Secular Coalition in Washington? Good. You can say, "I was there. I contributed!" Did you sing a song, write a paper, inscribe a placard? You were there. You contributed! You will be counted when history affirms us.



Reason Rally – Washington D.C.

But the Rally was then. This is now. There is much, much more that needs to be done by Atheists to advance secularism and hold back the waves of religious untruths. Sometimes we do it by working quietly, sometimes vociferously, sometimes behind the scenes, sometimes front and center in the eye of the storm.

For example, here's a quiet, modest effort I would suggest for any Atheist activist: You are called upon, as a juror or a new citizen, to swear an oath on a Bible that you will defend the laws of the U.S. As an Atheist, you can exert your right to decline to swear on a Bible in court, or any other place, and instead--it is your legal right to do this--request to recite a nonreligious "Affirmation" in place of the oath. You are entitled by U.S. constitutional law to choose between an oath, which is Biblical, or an affirmation, which is not. But few people know this and even fewer people take advantage of it. Yet this right goes back generations: On March 4, 1853, Franklin Pierce became the 14th President of the United States and was the first and only President who "affirmed" rather than swore to the oath of office.



Franklin Pierce

I might also cite one of my own less-public efforts on an Atheist issue. When the New York Legislature was considering renting public school premises for use by churches, I sent an email to every single Assemblyman and Senator of New York State (their addresses are on the State Legislature's web site) pointing out that if they allow religions to use public schools, there may be unintended consequences: Every cult and obscure religion, from Scientology to voodoo, will have gained the right to enter school premises. Surprisingly, I received responses from 15 legislators who thanked me for pointing this out; several wrote me saying that they "had never thought of that."

Be an Atheist Ambassador

There is even more that you can do publicly to advance the Atheist cause, particularly in an election year. For one thing, you can join our NYC Atheist Activists group. We will be working on all levels in the 2012 elections--local, state, and national. We will be involved in political campaigns and issues both on a personal level and as a group. For example, in the last presidential election, I happened

to be in Florida before the election. I went house to house, knocking on doors in a suburb of Miami, asking people to vote for Obama. As a group, NYC Atheists will be checking out the candidates, soliciting votes, speaking publicly, volunteering at candidate's headquarters, making calls, helping strategize.

Some things you can't do alone, and we are here for you for group actions. Even though some of our actions may seem small and isolated--how many times do we have to ask to "affirm" in a court situation before it becomes the norm?--but remember, our actions are cumulative. Each one counts, and when citizen after citizen requests affirmation in court, legislators pay attention.

Become a Better You

Did I mention that these actions to make our society a better place benefit you, too? When you take actions to right a wrong or protect your rights or bring more equality and fairness to citizens, you become more in charge of your life and your circumstances. You become stronger, more self-confident, more optimistic. You have taken your place in the world, you know your purpose.



Indira Gandhi

I often think of Indira Gandhi, who said, in 1984, "I don't mind if my life goes in the service of the nation. If I die today, every drop of my blood will invigorate the nation." The following day, she was assassinated by Sikh militants.

I like to think that that Indira Gandhi left her mark on the world. She had a purpose in life of her own choosing. She knew that we all must die eventually--nobody gets out of this world alive--but she used her time on this planet in both small ways and in leading her larger group to make the world a better place. So can you. □

Atheists Don't Send Hate Letters



By Jane Everhart

Dear Editor,

I am wondering if the hate letters that NYC Atheists gets have abated now that there has been more in the media about us and maybe people are getting accustomed to Atheism. I think you handled the hate letters pretty well--with a sense of humor!--but I'm still appalled that people would write such obscenities to a complete stranger.

--Carrie from Cobble Hill

The deluge of hate letters--which also included a spate of hate telephone calls from all over the country--has indeed tapered off, but I just recently received a phone message that was scary, and it is etched forever in my telephone messages. The caller, a male, said-- and I quote exactly:

*"I would like to join this here church I was reading about on the internet. The thing is, I'm from Tennessee and I'm about to be moving up there in a couple weeks. I'm a Klans member and I'm just wondering if I can wear my uniform to that there church. Call me back at F**ktheism.com."*

The caller may be referring to recent articles on the internet reporting that several Atheist organizations around the country, including Michael Newdow's followers, have decided to designate themselves a "church" in order to achieve tax-free status and get other benefits that churches get. I found it rather unnerving that the image of the Ku Klux Klan was invoked in the call. Apparently the fundamentalists have refined the style of their threats so that if hauled before a judge, they can say, "But sir, I was only asking a question about attire." Yet, of course, the Ku Klux Klan threat hangs in the air in that message.

Then it suddenly occurred to me: I have never heard of an Atheist writing hate letters or making threatening phone calls to religious people! Never. To the best of my knowledge, no one has ever seen a hateful missive or heard of a threatening phone call from any Atheist.

Why Don't Atheists Retaliate?

Why, I wondered, do Atheists not retaliate in kind when it comes to hate messages? Why don't Atheists ever engage in obscenity, rudeness or threatening comments when dealing with religionists? In other words, why are we so "nice" to those professing faith even though, deep down, we indeed have a profound antipathy to those who try to foist their beliefs in our faces? There are several theories about why Atheists don't retaliate to hate letters, including the following:

(1) **Atheists believe in reason.** A hate letter that spouts obscenities and tells us we are doomed to hell is hardly reasonable. We don't feel the need to respond in like manner. We don't feel the need to try to untangle the irrational thoughts of the faithful. Or as someone profoundly noted, "You can't fix stupid."

(2) **Atheists are better educated.** It is a fact pointed out by numerous polls: The more education you get, the more likely you are to become an Atheist. Some 92 percent of scientists are said to be nonbelievers. Educated people generally have more extensive vocabularies and don't resort to communicating with four letter words. A Carl Sagan or Sam Harris would not be likely to respond to someone who writes to them, "Go to hell, you f**k," in similar terms. True, Sagan might have

responded by pontificating on the lack of physical evidence for the existence of a hell, but it is not likely that in doing so he would need to invoke a four-letter word describing sex.

(3) Atheists do not blame the religious individual for his or her beliefs. Atheists understand that religious people have generally been indoctrinated and brainwashed in childhood. We know that belief in non-existent beings is a delusion, and that religion is a mass delusion, ingrained by Pavlovian conditioning. Therefore, while we might feel pity for the believer, we are not likely to condemn the religious individual either verbally or via a hate letter. We do not blame the victim.

(4) Atheists do not “hate” the victim of religious conditioning. If we hate anything, we hate the lies and fabrications of religion rather than the individual who believes them. The totally convinced religious person is not aware that they are deluded into believing in something that does not exist. So we are dealing with a kind of naive credulousness that, for most Atheists, elicits pity rather than hate.

(5) Atheists are focused. Atheists, particularly those who are members of Atheist organizations, are focused on goals bigger than convincing any individual believer that there is no god. We want to achieve a secular society. We try not to waste our time or our ire on any one faith-besotted person. We are focused on the big picture.

(6) Atheists are not repressed in dealing with, or understanding, natural human instincts-- at least not the way that religious people are, and thus,

when frustrated by an opposing view, we do not explode with angry sexual or bathroom words. Most hate letters resort to words that their religion disapproves of--four-letter words that smack of sex, death and the bathroom. Why, for instance, do hate letter writers conjure up the sex act when writing to us? Most frequent are the words “f**k,” “s**t,” “hell” and “damn.” We are most often told in hate letters that we are damned to hell, but if that isn’t strong enough, the letter writer will wish diseases like cancer on us or a painful death or that our loved ones die or be punished. I would surmise that religious repression of natural instincts can cause a volcanic eruption of words about anything that religion labels sinful, including sex.

(7) Atheists are too busy. It takes time and effort to take pen to paper, address an envelope and stick a stamp on it. It takes time to look up a phone number, dial it and leave a sometimes-lengthy vituperative message. It takes a certain disregard of the cost/effectiveness ratio, too. How effective is that hate letter? I can personally tell you that most hate letters and hate messages are laughable, puny and ineffective. A hate letter accomplishes nothing except maybe to make the perpetrator feel that he (and it’s usually a he) has done something about what he perceives is a threat to his way of thinking.

These are the reasons that we at NYC Atheists Inc. give little weight to hate letters or threatening phone messages, including the most recent one cited above. In the end, a hate message is just an empty gesture from a powerless and shallow mind. □

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NYC ATHEISTS – FACEBOOK

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

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The Unholy Duo: Religion and Corporations

Are They Uniting to Control Our Government?



By Tyson Gill

We live in interesting times, especially here in America. This election year we have reached a critical point of no return in the ascension of two powerful movements; religious influence over social policy and corporate influence over economic policy. If we fail to push back on both of these this year, it will take generations of repeated struggles and suffering to return to any modicum of sanity.

The religious Right has been on a mission for the last 40 years to dominate and control social policy, and they have largely succeeded. These fanatics relentlessly advance four steps forward toward theocratic policies for every one step they are temporarily forced back. Few can deny that our elected officials at all levels are almost totally consumed with catering to the ceaseless demands of the religious Right – most visibly on abortion but also in almost every aspect of public policy.

At the same time and largely in concert, corporate influence has been quietly gaining ground in leaps and bounds. Our founding fathers were so very terrified of unchecked corporate power that until the mid-1900's many states still had laws in place to prevent corporate growth from threatening democratic rule. But today, culminating with the ruinous Citizens United decision, corporations now enjoy unprecedented power to buy elections and thereby own a government truly beholden to them. Once they succeed in finally dismantling all Union opposition, their victory will be complete. They will be free to ignore the environment, discard health and labor rights and dismantle all of the hard-fought protections that have safeguarded and enhanced the welfare of the working class for generations.

Oligarchy: Rule By the Few

I hesitate to put forth this term because it sounds so unthinkably far-fetched, but here it is: theocratic oligarchy. To the extent that America has become, and will continue to become, more of a theocratic oligarchy than a democracy, government officials will continue to cater to the religious Right for votes and to the corporate elites for money. They will continue to privatize everything they can siphon a few short-term bucks off of, they will continue to replace elected governments as they are doing in Michigan, and they will leave the 99% to the mercies of Christian charity.

It's not like this will be unprecedented. The history of nations, past and present, is replete with examples of nations that have suffered under this crushing combination of religious repression and economic servitude. One need not go way back to the Pharaohs of Egypt or even the aristocracies of Europe. One can look today at dictatorial regimes in the Middle East or Africa, where brutal faux democratic leaders exploit religious zealotry as their tool to hoard all the national wealth in the hands of an elite few while the masses are repressed and impoverished.

Fighting Back

How can we fight back? It's simple. Until our election system is changed, if you want your interests to be represented in Washington and in State capitals, you need at least one of two things. You need either truckloads of money or you need to represent a large and very vocal voting block – but ideally both. And the power of the latter is fading fast, drowned out by big money.

Religious Conservatives not only understand this game but have been playing it to win since feeling their oats during the Carter/Reagan era. We secularists have thus far failed miserably to respond with anything near the determination needed to rise to their challenge. We have remained largely silent and unorganized.

If we would only fight back, we have the powerful advantages of rationality and reason and fairness on our side. Our ideas would clobber theirs in a fair fight for public opinion. Yet we largely surrender this battle without even engaging in anything more than occasional skirmishes.

Need a Voting Bloc

If we are to truly mount a defense, we need to get far more involved - not just as Atheists and secular individuals, nor even as independent secular organizations, but as a united and identifiable voting block that elected politicians and corporations can no longer afford to ignore. We need to craft a message of mainstream humanist values that will win over large swaths of voters and even reasonable Christians who are uneasy with the frightening extremism of the Right.

Long term, we need to get far more involved in local elections and mobilize across the various secular communities to elect secular candidates who will resist the social repression by the Right and the economic subjugation by the 1%.

Vote to Defeat Romney

But more immediately, right now, we must rapidly band together to defeat Right wing offensives, particularly anti-union and voter suppression in states all across the nation. Further, we must step up to ensure that Barak Obama gets re-elected. I understand any lack of enthusiasm; I am as disappointed in President Obama as anyone. I resent having to reward a President who is far right of even Clinton; an incumbent who has consistently ignored progressive values.

So let's be very clear, my vote for Obama will not be a vote for him, it will be a vote against Romney. Mitt Romney is a bad caricature of a privileged frat boy. He has no ethical depth beyond the divine right of nobility. From his perspective, if you cannot afford a private education or for-profit healthcare, then by definition

you don't deserve it. Wealth is his only measure of worth, and if you don't have it you are not worth anything. The words and deeds of Mitt Romney reflect nothing but extremist Capitalism turned malignant.

Dismantling Our Democracy?

If secularists and moderate religious Americans allow extremists – either extreme religious zealots and extreme “economic Darwinists” - to continue to dismantle our democracy, if we don't lay down a Rubicon to protect the common good this very year, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that the America we love will become nothing more than a thin façade concealing a religious oligarchy that will continue to decline into third-world corruption and oppression. ☐

Dr. Tyson Gill--author, scientist, teacher, Peace-Corps veteran--has a Ph.D. in inorganic chemistry and worked for many years as a research scientist. He is the author of the highly recommended book, “Belief in Science and the Science of Belief--A Guidebook to Fact-Based Thinking,” available on Amazon.com.

NYCA Debuts New Advanced-Writers Group

In our ongoing effort to encourage secular arts, New York City Atheists has started a new kind of writers group: It is dedicated to advanced writers--those who have already been published or are very close to being published. “We feel there are plenty of Writers Workshops in New York catering to the beginning writer. Our workshop is different in that our emphasis is on helping writers in our group get published,” says Jane Everhart, one of the NYCA founders of the group, “We are focusing on needs of the advanced writer.”

Leader of the Writers Group is Elizabeth Gordon, an MFA-Fiction candidate at City College. She has had the invaluable experience of working with writers John Irving, Larry McMurty and Andre Dubus in their Writers Workshops. She has also worked as a journalist on various publications in the Boston area and in New York.

First Meeting Held in May

The first meeting of the Writers group was held on May 24 in the Conference room of a building on the upper East Side. Nine writers attended, most of whom have already been published. Among the writers accepted to the group are a medical doctor, a lawyer and three Ph.Ds. Though the group's current effort involves assessing how ready for publication is the work of the various writers in the group, the Workshop will eventually focus on inviting literary agents, editors and publishers to help writers become aware of the steps toward being considered by the publisher most suitable for their work.

Still Spots Available

The next meeting of the group will be on June 21 at 7 o'clock. If you are an advanced writer and want to apply for admission to the group, send a short unpublished manuscript to NYC Atheists at the NYCA's email address. The best types of writing to offer for our consideration are: original fiction, memoir, short story, book chapter, novel excerpt, humor or one act of a play. No editorials or opinion pieces, please. There is no charge to be part of the group but you must be a member of NYC Atheists Inc. ☐

UPCOMING JUNE EVENTS

CALL: 212-330-6794 FOR LAST MINUTE CHANGES

JUNE 10, 2012 (SUN.) 12:00 NOON
NYC ATHEISTS BRUNCH / SPEAKER

SPEAKER: DR. DAVID ORENSTEIN



SUBJECT: THE JOY OF ATHEISM

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.

JUNE 13, 2012 (WED.) 7:00 PM
NYC ATHEISTS LIVING WITH ATHEISM GROUP
GROUP LEADER: LINDA BLAIKIE



SUBJECT: ARGUING.

Do you know how to argue constructively? Is there a person alive who has never engaged in an argument that they later regretted? Learn how to turn an argument into a constructive discussion that leaves you with benefits instead of rancor.

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.

JUNE 15, 2012 (FRI.)
6:00-7:00PM / HAPPY HOUR – Host: Lianna
7:00 PM / NYC ATHEISTS FILM & BOOK CLUB
HOST: Dr. David Orenstein

FILM: “IN GOD WE TEACH” - A documentary by Vic Losick about the experiences of Matthew LaClair, the Kearney, NJ high school student who taped his history teacher illegally preaching in class and reported it to school officials. Filmmaker Vic Losick will be present to answer questions after the showing. Not to be missed!

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.

JUNE 19, 2012 (TUE.) 7:00PM
NYC ATHEISTS MEETUP
GROUP LEADER: MICHAEL DORIAN

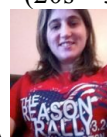


SUBJECT: IS IT OKAY TO MAKE JUDGMENTS ABOUT PEOPLE BASED ON THEIR BELIEFS?

It’s not profiling, Michael says, because people choose their religious beliefs. Profiling is undesirable when it is based on race, gender, sexual orientation or ethnicity because those are not a choice. For adults, belief is a decision, and it's an important one for us in an election year.

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.

NYC ATHEISTS YOUNG MOVERS & SHAKERS
(20s – 30s)



HOST: LIANNA

JUNE 21, 2012 (THUR.) 7:00 PM
LOCATION: Bahama Mama's -
215 Washington St, Hoboken, NJ

June 24, 2012 (SUN.) 1:30 PM
LOCATION: BARCADE: 388 Union Ave
(Between Ainslie & Powers Streets) Brooklyn, NY

JUNE 28, 2012 (THUR.) 6:30 PM
NYC ATHEISTS MONTHLY MEETING

SPEAKER: A.J. JOHNSON



SUBJECT: ATHEISM AND MINORITIES

A.J. Johnson, recently appointed the director of development for American Atheists, will discuss the relationships between Atheism and Minorities.

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

JUNE 2012

June	10*	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch / Speaker
June	13**	Wed.	7:00 PM	NYCA Living With Atheism Group
June	15***	Fri.	6:00 / 7:00PM	NYCA Happy Hour / Book & Film Club
June	19***	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up
June	21****	Thur.	7:00 PM	NYCA Young Movers & Shakers
June	24*****	Sun.	1:30 PM	NYCA Young Movers & Shakers
June	28*****	Thur.	6:30 PM	NYCA Monthly Meeting

JULY 2012

July	4*****	Wed.	10:15 AM	NYCA July 4th Barbeque /Chappaqua, NY
July	8*	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch / Speaker
July	11**	Wed.	7:00 PM	NYCA Living With Atheism Group
July	17***	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up
July	20***	Fri.	6:00 / 7:00PM	NYCA Happy Hour / Book & Film Club
July	26*****	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)**
 **** **Bahama Mama's - 215 Washington St, Hoboken, NJ**
 ***** **BARCADE: 388 Union Ave (Between Ainslie & Powers Streets) Brooklyn, NY**
 ***** **SLC Conference Center–352 Seventh Ave./16th Floor-(29/30th St.)**
 ***** **GRAND CENTRAL STATION – Grand Hall – Info Kiosk**

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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