

NYC ATHEISTS INC.



WEB: NYC-ATHEISTS.ORG

BOX 6060 NY, NY 10150-6060

212-330-6794

AN AFFILIATE OF AMERICAN ATHEISTS

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PRESIDENT'S "SERMON"

In God We Do Not Trust... And We Go to Court to Prove It

*Michael Newdow, the New Clarence Darrow,
Demonstrates His Persuasive Skills in Court*



KENNETH BRONSTEIN

It was a beautiful midsummer day, the perfect kind of day, I thought, to go to court to hear Michael Newdow argue against the use of words "In god We Trust" on American money.

Newdow, renowned nationwide for his finesse, his legal skill and his masterful use of language in the courtroom, is, without doubt, our new Clarence Darrow. It has already become a legend in the legal community that when Newdow went before the Supreme Court several years ago to argue that the words "Under god" do not belong in the American Pledge of Allegiance, though the case was thrown out for his alleged lack of "standing," the Supreme Court Justices complimented Newdow on "the best-presented argument they have heard in these hallowed halls."



Michael Newdow

So when I entered the Second District Courthouse in lower Manhattan on August 6th, with my fellow Atheist and NYCA officer Jane Everhart in tow, I came not only as a plaintiff in the *Newdow v. The United States of America* case, but also in anticipation of being present when history is being made and watching a legendary legal star in action.

Law Students Come to Observe

There were a lot of people there that day to hear Dr. Newdow (he is a medical doctor as well as a constitutional attorney). Most of the plaintiffs were present, perhaps a dozen of us, including Newdow's mother, Roz Newdow, who is a plaintiff in the suit. Interestingly, a whole class of law students from the

prestigious New York Law School were also in attendance. They were brought to hear the arguments of a master by Professor Nadine Strosser, ex-president of the American Civil Liberties Union, who teaches constitutional law at the law school.



Professor Nadine Strosser

It was a large, bright, wood-paneled courtroom, with the Judge's desk on a platform, placing him above us ordinary mortals. We all arose for the entrance of U.S. District Judge Harold Baer, himself a legend in legal circles. Judge Baer has written a book titled *Judges Under Fire: Human Rights, Independent Judiciary and the Rule of Law*, which has caused controversy in the legal community--but more about that later.

Defense Claims 'Secular Purpose'

The defense presented its case first, basically arguing that the phrase "In god we trust" is not a religious term. I was amazed that the defense attorney actually claimed that the phrase is "civic" in nature and has a "secular purpose." I have always felt that the claim that "In god We Trust" is secular is kind of a Wizard of Oz defense--like, if you repeat something often enough, it begins to sound true?

The defense attorney pointed out that the phrase seems to have originated in the fourth paragraph of the song "The Star-Spangled Banner," written during the War of 1812.

A little back history: In 1956, the nation was at a particularly tense time in the Cold War and the United

States wanted to distinguish itself from the Soviet Union, which promoted state atheism. So the 84th Congress passed a joint resolution declaring “IN GOD WE TRUST” the national motto of the U.S., replacing the unofficial motto *E pluribus unum* (from many, one) which had been adopted when the Great Seal of the United States was created in 1782.

The law that adopted the new motto was signed by President Eisenhower in 1956, and the motto was progressively added to paper money over a period from 1957 to 1966. “In god We Trust” first appeared on U.S. coins in 1864 and has appeared on currency since 1957.

In defending the motto that day, the U.S. defense attorney put forth what the defense usually claims in cases of this sort: that the phrase has been in existence so long, it is a part of U.S. history; it has lost its purely religious meaning and therefore does not violate the First Amendment of the U.S. constitution and that it obviously does not indicate the government’s endorsement of “any particular sect or creed.”

Audience Wants Newdow

But the audience was there to hear Dr. Michael Newdow, including, apparently, the Judge, who seemed to brush aside the defense impatiently, as though we had heard these old arguments often enough. After Newdow took the mike, you could have heard a pin drop in that courtroom.



New Hampshire License Plate

Newdow spoke in easy-going conversational tones, rather like a private conversation between him and the Judge, on which the audience just happened to be eavesdropping. Newdow’s voice did not have the stentorian tones I expected. His strong suit was, I was to see, the sagacity of his brief: the intricacy, originality and common sense of his legal arguments. He brought up a number of fascinating points, but the ones that most caught my attention were the following:

- The defendants are attempting “to revise history and pervert reality by claiming that the motto serves secular purposes,” Newdow asserted. The phrase “In god we trust” is an “unequivocal government endorsement of a religious notion,” and is meant to espouse Christian monotheism. Its proponents are, in fact, “using the machinery of state to push religion.”
- Newdow pointed out that our civil rights are violated when citizens who do not believe in god

are forced to carry on their persons a religious statement that contradicts their beliefs. Newdow cited a New Hampshire case in which the plaintiffs were opposed to the state motto, “Live Free or Die,” inscribed on all New Hampshire license plates. Plaintiffs sued and won, with the court holding that no one should be forced to display an ideological message on his private property.

- Newdow scoffed at the idea that removing the motto from our currency “would show preference for those who believe in no religion over those who do believe.” He countered that idea by pointing out that “ending governmental favoritism for one group is not favoring another. It is simply ending the favoritism for the first.”

Newdow skillfully decimated each of the government’s defenses and at the end, Newdow brought up the Judge’s controversial book (he actually brought a copy with him), which dealt with Judge Baer’s judicial opinion in a drug case in which Baer ruled that the police did not have reasonable suspicion sufficient for searching the drug-dealer. Baer’s opinion had led to an uproar in legal and government circles and instigated a re-hearing in which Judge Baer eventually reversed his ruling. The storm the case had created eventually resulted in Baer’s book, *Judges Under Fire...*



Judge Harold Baer

Newdow complimented the Judge’s courage in that legal controversy and pointed out that though a decision for the plaintiffs in this case “will heap ridicule and derision upon the court by politicians, commentators and clergy,” he urged the Judge to rule that “In god We Trust on our money is unquestionably a violation of the constitution.”

Judge Baer thanked Newdow “for publicizing my book” with a touch of humor. But I felt that Newdow’s reference to the Judge’s book had a serious intent. It showed the court that Newdow had done his research and was well aware of the subtle influence of past events upon the culture in which he was presenting his case today.

Discussion Avid at Lunch

Professor Strosser invited us to join her, Dr. Newdow and the New York Law School students at lunch in a conference room at the law school. I happened to sit next to a student who was a recent graduate of Duke Divinity School and it afforded me an interesting opportunity to probe the thinking of a religious person on this issue.

Cont. on page 6...

Meet Your Group Leaders!



By Jane Everhart

Dr. David Orenstein Leader of NYCA Book and Film Club

Dr. David Orenstein is a native New Yorker and full professor at Medgar Evers College (City University of New York), where he teaches anthropology and also serves as Department Chair of the College's Library. Dr. Orenstein has spoken nationally and internationally on a wide range of topics including free expression, Atheism and how various technologies impact social revolutions. He is completing a book about those who have done good in the world without god, an international ethnography of those who choose public service for the sake of humanity rather than to serve any particular faith. It will be published in 2014. His writings can be found at www.davidorenstein.info and also www.paleolibrarian.info.



David is known among his fans and followers for his buoyant, cheerful enthusiasm and his solid preparation for his NYCA Book and Film Club, held on every third Friday of the month. You haven't read the book he's discussing? No matter: David will have such a thorough compendium of it onscreen that you almost don't need to read it. The insights he provides about every single film or book he brings to his club are Dawkins-worthy, Hitchens-worthy, eye opening and sometimes even life changing. Bravo, Dr. Dave!

Linda Ford Blaikie, L.C.S.W

Leader of NYCA 'Living With Atheism' Support Group

Linda Ford Blaikie has been a psychotherapist in private practice since 1974. Prior to that, she was a Registered Nurse working in neurosurgery. She also holds a BA in creative writing from San Francisco State College. She is currently co-writing a book with Dr. David Orenstein for which she is interviewing Atheists from all continents on their journeys through life without the help of any belief in god to ease the existential terror of living. Linda grew up as a religious Catholic and therefore has great compassion for the transition from religious belief to Atheism. For three years, she has been running a monthly support group for NYCA on how to navigate your emotional life as an atheist. She can also be viewed at her website www.lindablaikie.com.



If you've ever attended Linda's NYCA Support group, you know it's a little like talking about your problems to a friend who is a lot smarter than you are. Linda does not hesitate using her own personal experiences to illustrate a point. Her bright, empathetic perceptiveness makes you aware that she understands the complexities of your problem and is always on your side. Touche', Linda!

Michael Dorian



Leader of NYCA Tuesday Night Discussion Group

Michael Dorian is a documentary filmmaker and New York Regional Director for American Atheists Inc. His first film, "Pizza! The Movie," had its North American broadcast television premier on The Documentary Channel in 2009. He is currently co-directing "Refusing My Religion," a documentary about preachers turned Atheist activists, within the larger context of America's declining religiosity. His script "Alva," about the life of Thomas Edison, won top honors in the 2009 Tribeca Film Institute's screenwriting competition. Dorian has been an Atheist since his early teens but became an activist only after 9/11. He is very close to his family, has never lived more than 20 minutes from midtown Manhattan (except for the year he lived in Paris), and has had the same ferocious but sexy cat for more than 16 years. He is a graduate of Fordham University and says he "would like nothing more than to put the last nail in the coffin of religion within his lifetime." If you have ever attended a Michael Dorian discussion group, you know he has a vast vocabulary of words starting with the letter F. Like fatuous and flamboyant. Handsome, spirited, radical in the true meaning of the word, meaning "going to the root," Michael leaves no doubt in his discussions where he stands on the topic. But he leaves you thinking and hungering for more. Hurray, Michael!

The NYC Atheists' Advanced Writers Group Is Looking for a Few Good Men...and Women

Last year, in its ongoing efforts to encourage secular arts, NYCA started a new kind of Writers Group, dedicated to advanced writers--those who have already been published or are very close to being published. The goal was to help these advanced writers get their books published in the very competitive world of mainstream publishing.

The group was an immediate success and has been going strong for more than a year now. Two of our advanced writers are in the query stage--that is, they are seeking a literary agent; two are finishing their novels; one has just had a previous book re-published and two (they are co-authors) are anticipating the forthcoming publication of their book in 2014. Because one member has dropped out to begin a new novel, we have openings for one or two new members. While we want to keep our group small in order to have time at each meeting to give serious attention to every manuscript, we hereby invite serious writers to submit applications.

Led by 'Betz' Gordon



Leader of our Writers Group is Elizabeth ("Betz") Gordon, an MFA-Fiction candidate at City College of New York. She has studied under authors John Irving, Larry McMurty and Andre' Dubus in their Writers Workshops. She is known and prized as a very competent and sensitive teacher and critiquer who cares about each writer's progress and improvement.

You must be willing to come to one meeting a month and to read, and constructively critique, the work of your fellow Writers Group members in terms of "How publishable is this?" and "How can we help the writer improve it to meet the requirements of today's publishing world?"

To Submit an Application

To submit an application, send us a sample of your *unpublished* writing, (up to 10 pages) plus your writing resume' and a letter telling us what your goals are. We do not charge a fee for attending the Writers Group, but you must be a serious writer, either fiction or non-fiction, committed to getting your work published and to helping your fellow members of the Writers Group get published.

In summary, to submit an application to: NYC Atheists Advanced Writers Group - Box 6060 - NY, NY 10150-6060:

1. A sample of your unpublished (i.e., not changed by an editor) writing
2. Your Writers' resume' (where published, if published)
3. A letter telling us what you think we can do for you and whether you are willing to commit yourself to attending the group once a month and reading the manuscripts of other group members.

- Jane Everhart

Matthew Zeno (1983-2013)



Matthew Zeno, a longtime member of NYC Atheists, died suddenly on July 8, 2013 as the result of a subway accident. Matt, who lived in Brooklyn, was known for his skateboard, his Mohawk haircut and his rap poetry, one of which was published in this newsletter. He was particularly active in the Tuesday night discussion group, where his ironic anecdotes about life as an Atheist in the Black community often caused laughter. We will miss Matt.

Our condolences to his family and friends.

Lessons from the Birmingham Jail

What Would Martin Luther King Say About Our Wimpy Atheist Actions?



By Tyson Gill, PhD

In April of 1963, Martin Luther King found himself enduring harsh treatment in the Birmingham jail. He had been incarcerated, along with some fellow non-violent protestors, for disobeying a blanket injunction against “parading, demonstrating, boycotting, trespassing and picketing,” which they had done in response to a long history of brutal racism and segregation in Alabama and broken promises negotiated through more conventional political action.

While in jail, a Negro trustee slipped King a newspaper and he read an article co-written by a group of eight well-intentioned Alabama clergymen. The clergymen acknowledged that social injustice existed, but criticized King and his activities as “unwise and untimely.” They argued that political action should be restricted to the courts and the ballot box; that the protests violated the law; that the demonstrations caused tension and that it was not the right time for such action.

In response to these “sensible” admonishments for moderation, King began to write his famous “**Letter from Birmingham Jail**” in the margins of the newspaper and continued it on scraps of paper smuggled in to him. In his letter, he eloquently refuted their specific criticisms and also shared his feelings about their calls for “moderation.” Regarding well-intentioned white moderates, he wrote this:

“I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Council or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to ‘order’ than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: ‘I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action ...’ Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection. ”

King’s observations and advice was not only relevant to

the Black struggle, but are universal in their applicability to any social justice movement. While the Atheist movement is certainly not comparable to the Black experience in many ways, we can and should listen to what King said about such movements. Leaders of the Atheist movement today are quite likely to express a similar sentiment. Perhaps something like this:

“I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the moderate Atheist. They continually offer the very reasonable-sounding counsel of moderation. Now is not the time, they say. Action will only make us look angry; it is undignified; it will put off our opponents; it will confirm their impression of us; things will get better if only we don’t make waves; it’s not a big deal; we’re the mature ones. The only thing these moderate Atheists really seem to be passionate about is complaining within their safe inner circles and stridently urging inaction. The only thing they seem to be truly militant about is doing nothing.”

This in no way suggests that we Atheists should be or even need to be “angry.” Suggesting that the only alternative to complacency is anger presents a false choice. As King continually strove to do, we must find the balance between inaction and extremism. In that same letter he wrote “*We need emulate neither the “do-nothingism” of the complacent nor the hatred and despair of the black nationalist.*”

Become ‘Extremists for Love’

He further wrote that the accusation of extremism is a badge of honor. He pointed out in his letter that all great persons in history were extremists. As he concluded, “*So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice?*”

So it is up to us Atheists to answer that same question both individually or collectively. Will we be extremists for the preservation of the status quo of belief and superstition, or extremists for the promotion of a society based on objective truths and fact-based thinking?

And the accusation of extremism by Atheists is incredibly premature, so much so as to be purely a preemptive tactic by our opponents. We are not [yet] involved in any significant direct action. King pointed out that there are four essential stages of any successful activism. First, the participants must agree on their goals; second, they must attempt to negotiate through legal means; third, they must prepare themselves for the consequences of direct action, and finally they must execute direct actions. We atheists are mostly still in stage one, arguing about our goals. Many label our initial attempts to “negotiate” through political action and legal litigation as extremism.

Not Facing Armed Riot Police...Yet

Few of us are prepared to pay the price for taking direct action. Our most “direct” action was perhaps our Reason Rally in Washington DC last year – which was really more of a negotiation-stage action. Those who are putting forth billboards and Atheist monuments are perhaps our boldest activists. Laudable, but hardly

facing down armed riot police – and hardly extremism. With regard to calls for stopping at negotiation as the only vehicle for change, King saw direct action as the pre-requisite for negotiation. As he wrote in his letter: *“The purpose of our direct-action program is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation. I therefore concur with you in your call for negotiation.”*

Perhaps we Atheists should agree upon what we really care enough about sufficiently to force our opponents to negotiate – and more importantly, to force our status-quo moderate Atheist “friends” to cease taking the extremist position for the status quo by default. Every one of our moderates who criticizes the calls for negotiation or direct action allows our opponents to paint those few of us who attempt to bring about change as “angry radical extremists.” ☐

Dr. Tyson Gill is the author of “Belief in Science and the Science of Belief: A Guidebook for Fact-Based Thinking,” available on Amazon.com.

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Publisher – Kenneth Bronstein
Editor – Jane Everhart
NYCATHEISTS@GMAIL.COM**

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If you are a basic member now, consider increasing to a higher category: Basic \$25. Basic Plus, \$50; Friend, \$100; Sustainer, \$250; Patron, \$500; Benefactor \$1000; Life \$5000.

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 our website: www.nyc-atheists.org

And remember NYCA in your estate planning! Why leave your money to a religious person? Our civil rights efforts for Atheist 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.

Cont. from page 2...In god We Do Not Trust

“What did you think of the case?” I asked the divinity student. She responded that she felt it was a “frivolous” case because the phrase “In god We Trust” “does not hurt anybody.”

“Well, what if the phrase used on our coins had been ‘In god We Do NOT Trust’--would you still think it is harmless?” I asked her.

Her eyes widened in surprise. “I don’t think that would be right. I would find that offensive,” she declared. Reader, I needed to say no more. The student instantly “got” my point and so did the other students.

We said goodbye to Dr. Newdow a little sadly that afternoon. It would be a while before we see him again, and my colleague Everhart had obviously found a new Atheist demigod; I could see she was enthralled by the courage and forthrightness of this physician-cum-constitutional attorney who was willing to take on a country full of rabid religionists just because it is the right thing to do. We don’t know when Judge Baer’s decision will come down, but we do know that what we witnessed that day in court is, win or lose, the rise of a new Atheist-American hero. ☐

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

SEPTEMBER 8, 2013 (SUN.) 12 NOON
NYC ATHEISTS BRUNCH
SPEAKER: BETH LAMONT



SUBJECT: "Humanism as a Philosophy in My Life with Corliss Lamont." Her life before Corliss, their life together and her efforts now to continue Corliss's Humanist work. The widow of the famous contrarian carries on his legend.

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.

SEPTEMBER 11, 2013 (WED.) 7:00 PM
NYC ATHEISTS LIVING W/ ATHEISM

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



SUBJECT: Criticism: How do you handle it?
 How do you know if it is meant to help you or destroy you? On the job, how you handle criticism may be vital to your career.

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.

SEPTEMBER 17, 2013 (TUE.) 7:00PM
NYC ATHEISTS DISCUSSION MEETUP
GROUP LEADER: MICHAEL DORIAN



SUBJECT: Special guest will be Faisal Saeed Al Mutar, young Iraqi activist who started the Global Secular Humanist Movement that now has 200,000 Facebook followers. He was given political asylum in America this year after threats to his life.

LOCATION: Stone Creek -140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex)

COST: Free, but participants are expected to purchase drink or food to compensate Stone Creek for their space.

SEPTEMBER 20, 2013 (FRI.)
NYC ATHEISTS BOOK AND FILM CLUB

GROUP LEADER: DAVID ORENSTEIN



6:00 PM: HAPPY HOUR
6:30 PM: BOOK & FILM CLUB

FILM: "Contradiction" by Jeremiah Camara
 Camara, a documentary filmmaker, travels across the country to explore the impact of religion in African American communities. He addresses the paradox of the abundance of churches coupled with the abundance of societal ills and whether there is a correlation between high-praise and low-productivity.

LOCATION: Stone Creek -140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex)

COST: Free, but participants are expected to purchase drink or food to compensate Stone Creek for their space.

SEPTEMBER 26, 2013 (THUR.) 6:30PM
NYC ATHEISTS MONTHLY MEETING

SPEAKER: HARLEIGH TENSEN – GRADUATE OF NEW YORK LAW SCHOOL



SUBJECT: "IN GOD WE DO NOT TRUST."

A discussion of the Newdow lawsuit to take "In god we trust" off U.S. currency.

LOCATION: SLC Conference Center– 15 West 39th St.(3rd Floor)

COST: We ask for a donation of \$10 to help cover the cost of room rental.

**GOD
 IS NOT A REGISTERED VOTER**

**UNLESS YOU BELIEVE IN REINCARNATION
 DO IT NOW
 GET INVOLVED**

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

SEPTEMBER 2013

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

OCTOBER 2013

Oct	9**	Wed.	7:00 PM	NYCA Living With Atheism Group
Oct.	13*	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch / Speaker
Oct.	15***	Tue,	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up Discussion Group
Oct	18***	Fri.	6:00 / 6:30 PM	NYCA Happy Hour / Book & Film Club
Oct	31****	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 – Manhattan
 *** Stone Creek Bar and Lounge – 140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex) – REAR ROOM
 **** SLC Conference Center – 15 WEST 39TH STREET – 3RD FLOOR

NYCA CABLE SHOWS

		<u>TWC</u>	<u>RCN</u>	<u>FIOS</u>
Wednesdays: 5:30 PM	Atheism in History	57	84	35
6:30 PM	This Week in Atheism	57	84	35
Thursdays: 5:00 PM	NYC Atheists	67	85	36
5:30 PM	Atheists Book Club	67	85	36

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

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