

NYC ATHEISTS INC.



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AN AFFILIATE OF AMERICAN ATHEISTS

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MAR. & APR. 2015



KENNETH BRONSTEIN

Somewhere in my 10-year tenure as president of NYC Atheists, it occurred to me that I am basically an Atheist “activist.” And that NYCA is a group composed mainly of Atheist activists. Oh, not that reading Atheist books or listening to Atheist lectures isn’t worthy in itself; in fact, we do plenty of that. Lectures on cutting-edge science are an important part of our program.

But somewhere along the timeline of my tenure, I realized that we are not going to change anything for Atheists unless we make it happen. We are a minority in the USA--the biggest minority, they say: We are a bigger segment of the U.S. population than Blacks and Jews combined. Yet we do not have the respect of our fellow citizens and we do not have the civil rights that both those minorities have made enormous strides toward achieving.



Pete Stark – Ex-U.S. Congressman who was an Atheist

There are still seven states that say in their bylaws that an Atheist cannot run for office. There is, currently, not a single member of Congress that will say he or she is an Atheist! Our president still signs off his TV talks with “god bless you” and “god bless America.” Our nation’s official motto, confirmed by a huge majority vote in Congress recently, is “In god we trust.” Our school children make their daily pledge of allegiance to one nation “under god.” And in our wallets, we carry the dollar bills that claim “in god we trust” even though we Atheists do not believe that trusting god is the way to go financially or otherwise.

Atheists Cut Off From Democracy

In short, we Atheists have been cut off from

“PRESIDENT’S SERMON”

Why You Should Be an Atheist Activist *Don’t Just Sit There--Do Something!*

participating fully in our democracy. We have been forced to accept that the delusions and claims of our religious citizens surround us, envelope us and dominate us, and that we even carry reminders of their religion in our pockets in the form of dollar bills. Our Atheist leaders are reviled with obscene hate mail and at least one of them, Madalyn Murray O’Hair, was murdered. Our public school boards are packed with people who take every opportunity to put their religious beliefs into our public school textbooks and curricula. There are many places where we won’t be hired if we admit we are Atheists--and if we are hired, we are advised to keep silent about the fact that we are Atheists. In the military, our soldiers are constantly coerced to become Christians. Also in the military, it appears that our lives could be in danger if we dare admit we are Atheists.



Madalyn Murray O’Hair

There is no doubt in my mind that Atheists in the U.S. are, if not exactly second-class citizens, then the most disrespected, shunted-aside, suspected and reviled segment of our nation. We are made to feel guilty and ashamed because we do not go along with the untruths of the majority (notice I don’t use the word “lies.” They are not deliberate lies since religious people actually believe these untruths.)

Atheists are basically deprived of our civil rights in voting simply because there usually is no Atheist running for office. We are outnumbered, outvoted and overruled by the Religious Right who believe in, and support, powerful religious organizations such as The Moral Majority, the Christian Coalition or Focus on the Family, all of which are dedicated to forcing their will and their values on us.

Cont. →

It wasn't long before I realized, as president of NYCA, that in order to work for the civil rights of Atheists we had to make waves. History is not made by those who sit and pontificate.

We Evolved Into Activists

I decided to study what Black people, homosexuals and feminists have been doing in recent history to advance their causes. At one point, our Director of Communications, Jane Everhart, and I hid ourselves down to a meeting of the gay activist group, Act-Up, in Greenwich Village. I invited the filmmaker who had made a movie about Act-up to come speak to NYCA. I taped feminist leader Robin Morgan for our NYCA Cable TV show.

It wasn't long before I realized: I, and the organization, have been gradually and quietly moving out onto the barricades and streets and into courtrooms for our Atheist cause from the very beginning. It wasn't planned. It just evolved. Yes, friends, evolution takes place even within Atheist organizations.

Nothing Happens Unless We Act

Here's what I found out: There's a saying that those in power will not make changes unless they are forced to. Not until the underdogs, the oppressed, the exploited or the persecuted create such a stir that it is less trouble to give in a little than to cope with the ruckus--only then do most changes take place in our society.



Act-Up Demonstration at St. Patrick's Cathedral

That's why, in the early days of the AIDS crisis, the members of Act-Up laid down in the aisles of St. Patrick's Cathedral in a "Die-in." That's why Black citizens marched through cities like Selma in the deep South dodging water hoses and snarling police dogs. That's why hundreds of thousands of women marched down Fifth Avenue in 1970 demanding equal rights. That's also why, today, Black citizens march in Ferguson and stop traffic on the Brooklyn Bridge. That's why defenders of Free Speech carry "Je Suis Charlie" placards in Paris! Nothing, absolutely nothing, happens, I have become convinced, unless we "*Act Up*."

The trouble is, it isn't easy to act up. It isn't comfortable: It means we've got to go out in public and present ourselves to the media and the elements and the world. It means we've got to take the derision of our enemies and still keep our courage up. It means putting ourselves on the line and holding on to our self respect even when we

don't win every time, even when we get hate mail and catcalls.

It Takes Courage

When we demonstrated in Foley Square in the "Miracle Cross" case, it was bitter cold and we froze even in our down coats. When we rallied in Washington D.C. at the Reason Rally, we got soaked by the rain. In Foley Square, we had to ignore the taunts of a religious person who shouted that we would all go to hell. When we picketed the Pope in 1995, the cops made us stay behind barricades.



NYC Atheists Miracle Cross Demonstration

Despite all that, let's face it, it wasn't as bad as what happened in the deep South to our Black friends, some of whom were dragged into police vans and taken to jail. Or the brave protesters at the anti-Vietnam rallies who were tear-gassed. As peaceful demonstrators who stayed within New York's limits and boundaries, we Atheists have not been physically harmed at any of our demonstrations.

Bringing Our Views to World

And you know what? It felt good to be out there demonstrating. I have to admit, I felt good being out there. It felt positive, it felt buoyant and hopeful. We weren't just talking to ourselves anymore. We were out there presenting our views to the world. We were putting ourselves on the line. We were showing the world that we are serious about our rights and will stand up for them.

Those Atheists who have demonstrated with us say that they would do it again. There is something about being part of a group demonstration that is powerful and life-changing. You think: Well, if I die tomorrow, at least I will know I have done something for humanity.

So why aren't more Atheists activists? I've done a lot of thinking about that and come up with some theories about why some of us haven't jumped on the opportunity to delve into activism, including the following:

Wanting to be "liked" by the opposition. This type of non-activist Atheist is fearful that the entire religious community will not like him--or us--if we come out publicly demanding our rights. We aren't being "nice," they think. These Atheists often put forth the idea that they want to "work with" religionists to make changes; we give these Atheists the unwieldy name of "accommodationists." Once these Atheists

find out that religionists don't like us anyway, no matter how nice we are, and they aren't going to work with us to achieve our goals, which are the opposite of theirs, these Atheists often wake up to the contradictions of their position. We Atheists must keep in mind that we are not in a popularity contest; we are out to fight for our rights.

Bystander/noninvolvement mentality. I call this the "someone else will do it" Atheist. This kind of nonbeliever may actually think activism is a good way to fight for our civil rights but they personally don't want to go to the trouble. It's the "Let Jack do it" type of personality. But once they try it, the bystander Atheist often revels in the joy of activism and can't be stopped.

Feelings of impotence or powerlessness. This is the "one person can't possibly make a difference" type of Atheist. They feel they will not have an impact, so what's the use? This Atheist often gains confidence when surrounded by others. Sometimes it's important for us all to be aware that not every action pays off immediately--but cumulatively, it adds up. Think of all the actions that the AIDS activists had to engage in before the authorities took them seriously.

The isolationist. This is the Atheist who says he or she "doesn't get involved." "I'm not a joiner," is their mantra. This is often the same person who privately complains about the lack of respect and acclaim that Atheists face. If you don't fight for your own cause, what are you going to fight for?

Fear of Consequences. Will your mother see you on television picketing for the Atheist cause? I'm reminded of the young man at the Reason Rally in Washington who carried a placard that said, "Hey Mom, I'm an Atheist!" which he held up to the television cameras every chance he had. In a world where people often fear the consequences of coming out as an Atheist, it's important to come out. Many

gays had been blackmailed for being gay until they came out publicly. Once Atheism (or gayness) is openly accepted, the negative consequences disintegrate.

Provincialism. Some of our members who come from small towns have never had any experience with public demonstrations; they have never seen one except on television, let alone take part in one. They have no idea that a successful demonstration is aimed at the media for greater saturation of our message. They don't realize why you need placards (for visuals on TV) or chants (for sound effects). It's a whole new world for them. But once they realize that one goal of activism is to get our message out to as many people as possible via media coverage, they are often hooked. It's fun to look at yourself on TV the next day. The feeling of pride and accomplishment tops everything.

Speak Truth to Power

But what if--physically, or for some other reason--you can't join us on the picket line though you would like to? You can contribute money to pay for our placards, our audio-visuals and the other expenses involved in a demonstration. Remember, our opponents are loaded with money. Religions tithe their members and it's not unusual for a family to donate \$25K a year to their church. In contrast, NYCA asks only \$25 a year in membership fees. We have no cathedrals, no gold vestments, no big-tent meeting places. We basically operate on a shoe string, so your contribution is important to us.

One of my favorite sayings is, "How you live today has the potential to impact all eternity." Your presence at our next demonstration or your financial contribution to it takes on a deeper meaning when you realize that because there is no afterlife, your activism is your legacy to the future. This is how you can leave your mark on the world. □

Volunteer / Bring a friend / Come out

Washington Post – February 6, 2015

CRITICS POUNCE AFTER OBAMA TALKS CRUSADES, SLAVERY AT PRAYER BREAKFAST

President Obama has never been one to go easy on America. As a new president, he dismissed the idea of American exceptionalism, noting that Greeks think their country is special, too. He labeled the Bush-era interrogation practices, euphemistically called "harsh" for years, as torture. America, he has suggested, has much to answer given its history in Latin America and the Middle East. His latest challenge came Thursday at the National Prayer Breakfast. At a time of global anxiety over Islamist terrorism, Obama noted pointedly that his fellow Christians, who make up a vast majority of Americans, should perhaps not be the ones who cast the first stone.

"Humanity has been grappling with these questions throughout human history," he told the group, speaking of the tension between the compassionate and murderous acts religion can inspire. "And lest we get on our high horse and think this is unique to some other place, remember that during the Crusades and the Inquisition, people committed terrible deeds in the name of Christ. In our home country, slavery and Jim Crow all too often was justified in the name of Christ."

Some Republicans were outraged. "The president's comments this morning at the prayer breakfast are the most offensive I've ever heard a president make in my lifetime," said former Virginia governor Jim Gilmore (R). "He has offended every believing Christian in the United States..."

MEET A FRIENDLY NYC ATHEIST

From Prague to New York, a Talented Filmmaker Is Turned On by Atheism



Eric Stunzi

You've seen Eric Stunzi many times at NYCA meetings, though you may not have actually been aware of him: He's the tall, good-looking guy in charge of all our audio-visual taping. NYCA feels lucky to have him: Eric's varied background includes writing a screenplay for a prime time CBS teleseries, associate-producing a documentary and writing and directing a 90-minute TV pilot in Prague.

Eric hails from Darien, Connecticut, and graduated from Darien schools. He attended Boston University for a while but the call of adventure is apparently in his veins. He moved to California, where he held many jobs, including that of newspaper reporter. At only age 24, he sold a script to the "White Shadow" CBS television series. He also co-produced a documentary film and studied acting with Jeannie Berlin. It was a background that was to serve him well in his next step: a move abroad.

In the early 1990s, Eric had saved enough money to go to Europe. He chose post-revolutionary Prague, Czechoslovakia, as his base. "Things were happening there," he explains. It turned out to be an exciting move for him. He not only worked as a liaison for CNN, he directed and produced a movie financed by a Czech film company. His years in Prague were exhilarating, he says, full of youthful exuberance, poetry readings, parties and creativity.

In time, family matters brought Eric back to the U.S. In 2007, Eric and his (now) wife moved to New York, and Eric discovered New York City Atheists by going to one of our discussion groups at the Stone Creek cafe. Inspired by the rise of neo-Atheists like Christopher Hitchens, Eric's creativity bubbled to the surface again: He created, with the aid of a foundation grant, a glossy CNN-style TV news pilot called "**Secular Independent News**," a weekly Atheist news program. You can see the pilot on YouTube:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WxHOxuxvric> It is still in the development stage but we feel it presages the growth of a new, vigorous secular media for the 21st Century. □

I accept church rule personally,
but not in public life.



Joe Biden

BELIEVERS

ARE

"SUPERSTITIONERS"

Are We 'Naturally' Religious?

Or Do We Need to Rid Ourselves of Primitive Ways?



By Tyson Gill, Ph.D

The claims are often made by some that we humans are inherently religious, that deep belief in the supernatural is our default state and that it is somehow wrong to struggle against our most innate tendencies in a futile effort to reject our nature. It is easy to see why religious types would advance this position. But this idea is intentionally or unintentionally suggested as well by some scientists whose research or comments are eagerly picked up and put forth by believers as evidentiary testimonials, whether or not the particular scientific work cited intended to go that far or not.

However, whether merely mistaken rationalizations, exaggerated misinterpretations, or erroneous conclusions, this is not a view shared by everyone, particularly not by this author.

It is obvious why religious believers would promote this assertion, but less clear how some scientists could support it even indirectly. It is simply unreasonable to imagine that early humans could have survived without an extremely "scientific" relationship with the natural world. A tiger is a tiger regardless of what one might choose to believe about it. In fact, Dr. Carl Sagan dedicated an entire segment in his "Cosmos" series to dispelling this myth, pointing out how, of existential necessity, early humans had to be highly fact-based in examining spoor or animal tracks, for example, and determining the best course of action to avoid danger or to hunt for food.

Imagination May Have Saved Lives

Our brains, as essentially pattern-recognition machines, have indeed evolved to err on the side of false positives. That is, we are more likely to survive if we imagine a tiger in the trees even when none exists. And this is likely the key underlying mechanism that enables us to believe in far more fantastic ideas, like a god in the heavens when none exists. While our penchant for imagining has benefits, it also makes us susceptible to the cancerous, even malignant, development of delusional religious beliefs, and it does not mean that those beliefs are either inevitable or desirable.

Many believers and some scientists correctly identify our predilection for false positive pattern recognition and then incorrectly conflate *susceptibility* with *desirability*. They ignore the scale and scope of the beliefs as well. It would be like correctly pointing out that we humans have a susceptibility to infection, and then concluding that systemic ebola infections, or debilitating religious delusions, must therefore be a natural and desirable state.

Spreading the Religious 'Infection'

And just as with other infectious agents, some of us are more susceptible than others to infection by beliefs. Some of us are easily infected while others are outright immune to them. But most of us have some degree of immunity. Still, given a high enough dosage in the right environment for a long enough period of time and most of us will succumb to religious belief eventually.

In point of fact, churches and other organized religions have to expend a huge amount of resources and effort to "infect" their flocks with their beliefs. They must begin intensive exposure efforts at a vulnerably young age, over a very long period of time to finally succeed at spreading their infections. Even then it does not always hold and our natural belief immunity systems often resist. This dramatically refutes the idea that belief is natural and unavoidable.

Belief simply is not our natural default state nor is it a desirable one. It is purely a social construct that exploits low level vulnerability in our natural belief-immune systems. As such, all it takes to eliminate religion is to stop promoting it--and isolating and treating those that suffer from it like we do measles or polio. □

Dr. Tyson Gill is a scientist who has served in the Peace Corps in Africa. 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.

ATHEISM IS A NON-PROPHET ORGANIZATION



IN THE NEWS



NYC ATHEISTS BRUNCH

LOSING THEIR RELIGION: MORE WOMEN JOIN THE UNSPIRITUAL SET

<http://www.religionnews.com/2015/02/20/losing-religion-women-join-unspiritual-set/>

ENGLAND MULLS LEGALIZATION OF IN VITRO TECHNIQUE GIVING BABY DNA OF THREE PARENTS

<http://www.religionnews.com/2015/02/03/england-mulls-legalization-vitro-technique-giving-baby-dna-three-parents/>

ATLANTA FIRE CHIEF SUSPENDED AFTER DISTRIBUTING HIS RELIGIOUS BOOK TO EMPLOYEES

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2014/11/26/atlanta-fire-chief-suspended-after-distributing-his-religious-book-to-employees/>

MISSISSIPPI LAWMAKERS WANT TO MAKE BIBLE THE STATE'S OFFICIAL BOOK

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/01/13/us-usa-mississippi-bible-iduskbk0km03020150113>

CHRISTIAN PUBLISHER PULLS HEAVEN BOOK AFTER BOY RETRACTS STORY

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/gleanings/2015/january/boy-who-came-back-from-heaven-retraction.html?paging=off>

LOUISIANA GOVERNOR (BOBBY JINDALS) ASKS U.S. GOVERNORS: COME WORSHIP JESUS

<http://blogs.cbn.com/thebrodyfile/archive/2015/01/21/brody-file-exclusive-bobby-jindals-letter-to-americas-governors-come.aspx>

WHOREHOUSE SUES LOCAL CHURCH OVER LIGHTNING STRIKE!

<https://www.facebook.com/humanistsocietyofgainesville/posts/523903084309985>

NO, ASTROBIOLOGY HAS NOT MADE THE CASE FOR GOD – LAWRENCE KRAUSS

<http://www.newyorker.com/tech/elements/astrobiology-made-case-god>

LIVE IN A CHURCH: CHAPEL-TURNED-HOME FOR SALE

<http://blog.sfgate.com/ontheblock/2015/01/21/live-in-a-church-chapel-turned-home-for-sale/>

WE MADE THE (AFA) AMERICAN FAMILY ASSOCIATION ENEMIES LIST

<http://www.afa.net/bigotrymap#>

NORTH CAROLINA SUPREME COURT HEARS ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST VOUCHERS

http://www.newsobserver.com/2015/02/24/4580723_nc-supreme-court-hears-arguments.html?rh=1

AMERICAN ATHEIST BLOGGER HACKED TO DEATH IN BANGLADESH

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/27/american-atheist-blogger-hacked-to-death-in-bangladesh>

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

MARCH 8, 2015 (SUN.) 12 NOON
NYC ATHEISTS BRUNCH / SPEAKER

SPEAKER: DANIELLE MUSCATO: AMERICAN ATHEISTS PUBLIC RELATIONS DIRECTOR

Danielle Muscato is a writer, activist and public speaker. A former Christian praise & worship musician, she has been active in the Atheism movement since 2009 and with American Atheists since 2013.

SUBJECT: "AMERICAN ATHEISTS: THE 'MARINES' OF THE ATHEIST MOVEMENT"
How AA is taking the lead in Atheist activism.

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.
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MARCH 17, 2014 (TUE.) 7:00PM
NYC ATHEISTS DISCUSSION MEETUP

GROUP LEADER: MICHAEL DORIAN



SUBJECT: MICHAEL, AS USUAL, WILL SELECT AN EXCITING AND CONTROVERSIAL TOPIC.

LOCATION: Stone Creek -140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex) – REAR ROOM
COST: Free, but participants are expected to purchase drink or food to compensate Stone Creek for their space.
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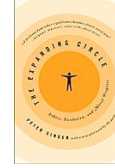
MARCH 20, 2015 (FRI.)
6:00 PM - HAPPY HOUR
6:30 PM - BOOK CLUB

NYC ATHEISTS BOOK CLUB

HOST: DAVID ORENSTEIN, Ph.D



SUBJECT: PETER SINGER'S BOOK, "THE EXPANDING CIRCLE: ETHICS, EVOLUTION AND MORAL PROGRESS."



What is ethics? Where do moral standards come from? Are they based on emotions, reason or some innate sense of right and wrong? For many scientists, the key lies entirely in biology--especially in Darwinian theories of evolution and self-preservation. But if evolution is a struggle for survival, why are we still capable of altruism?

LOCATION: Stone Creek -140 East 27th St. (3rd/Lex) – REAR ROOM
COST: Free, but participants are expected to purchase drink or food to compensate Stone Creek for their space.
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MARCH 26, 2015 (THUR.) 6:30PM
NYC ATHEISTS MONTHLY MEETING

SPEAKER: DAVID MADISON, Ph.D



David Madison was a Methodist minister for 10 years; he lost his faith, realized that he was gay, married (same sex) and became an Atheist. He has a Ph.D in Biblical Studies from Boston University.

SUBJECT: "10 TOUGH PROBLEMS IN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT AND BELIEF: A MINISTER-TURNED-ATHEIST SHOWS WHY YOU SHOULD DITCH THE FAITH"

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.

BECOME A NYC ATHEISTS MEMBER

ATHEISM IS A CONCLUSION – NOT A BELIEF

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

MARCH 2015

MARCH	8*	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch / Speaker
MARCH	17**	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up Discussion Group
MARCH	20**	Fri.	6:00 / 6:30 PM	NYCA Book / Film Club
MARCH	26***	Thur.	6:30 PM	NYCA Monthly Meeting

APRIL 2015

APRIL	12*	Sun.	12:00 PM	NYCA Brunch / Speaker
APRIL	14**	Tue.	7:00 PM	NYCA Meet-Up Discussion Group
APRIL	17**	Fri.	6:00 / 6:30 PM	NYCA Book / Film Club
APRIL	30***	Thur.	6:30 PM	NYCA Monthly Meeting

- * Press Box Restaurant & Pub – 932 Second Ave. (49/50th St.) – 2nd Floor
 ** 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>MNN</u>	<u>RCN</u>	<u>FIOS</u>
Wednesdays:	5:30 PM	Atheism in History	1997	84	35
	6:30 PM	This Week in Atheism	1997	84	35
Thursdays:	5:00 PM	NYC Atheists	67	85	36
	5:30 PM	Atheists Book Club	67	85	36

NYC ATHEISTS
BOX 6060
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