

# PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

## Upcoming SHSNY Programs and Events

**Happy Hour: Last Sunday of the Month, 5PM via ZOOM**

– See [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com) for details

**Monthly Brunch:** Sunday, April 19, 2023. from Noon–2:00 PM, The \*\*Manhattan Indian Flavor\*\* Restaurant, 311 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave., corner of E. 18<sup>th</sup> St., NYC

**Topic:** How could American education (K–post graduate studies) be made more humane? led by Dorothy Kahn

**NonFiction Book Club,** April 6<sup>th</sup>, 7:30 PM

Book: *And There Was Light: Abraham Lincoln and the American Struggle*  
by Jon Meacham

– See [meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com) for details.

**Fiction Book Club,** 7:00pm April 12<sup>th</sup>

Book: *Lessons in Chemistry*  
by Bonnie Gamus

Zoom:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84734035691>

Meeting ID: 847 3403 5691

Join by Skype for Business:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/84734035691>

## SHSNY Doings

Our next live event, the **Day of Reason**, will feature **Richard Carrier** as speaker. We are holding it on **May 7th** at **Stout NYC, 133 West 33rd** Street, NY, NY.

The next **monthly brunch** is being held on March 19<sup>th</sup> at the Manhattan Indian Flavor restaurant, 311 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave. on the corner of East 18<sup>th</sup> St. After lunch Dorothy Kahn will moderate a discussion on a provoking topic: How could American education be made more humane?

The **Happy Hour** get togethers are held on the last Sunday of the month. Emails will be sent out a few days prior, giving the Zoom link, id and password.

The nonfiction bookclub meets Wednesday, April 6<sup>th</sup>. The fiction bookclub meets next on Wednesday, April 12<sup>th</sup>. You will find the Zoom id and password on the SHSNY calendar on the website: [www.shsny.org/calendar-of-events.html](http://www.shsny.org/calendar-of-events.html) and this will be sent out by email.

If you have a comment or material you'd like to appear in the next issue of PIQUE, please email it to [editor@SHSNY.org](mailto:editor@SHSNY.org)

## Thomas Paine memorial

President Biden Signs Bill to Honor Thomas Paine —

The Thomas Paine Memorial Association (TPMA) is pleased to announce that on December 27, 2022, President Biden signed a congressional bill to endorse the creation of a monument dedicated to the life and work of Founding Father Thomas Paine.

Under the leadership of Congressman Jamie Raskin (D-MD) and Congresswoman Victoria Spartz (R-IN), House Bill 6720 — the congressional bill that endorses a Washington, D.C. monument to honor Thomas Paine — was included in the 2022 Omnibus Package. The package was passed by both the House and Senate in late December 2022.



*1 Pennsylvania sculptor Zenos Frudakis with a seven-foot-high Thomas Paine*

The TPMA will now begin working with the National Capital Memorial Advisory Commission (NCMAC) on advancing the project with a goal of unveiling the monument in 2026, which would coincide with the 250th anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence.

— sent in by John Wagner. From The Freethought Society News

## Ethics and Morality in Public Leadership

Carl Marxer

Revelations of fraud have arisen concerning the newly elected New York Senator George Devolder-Santos. He was elected in the fall of 2022 to represent New York's 3rd congressional district, which covers part of northern Long Island and northeast Queens. The New York Times published an article reporting that he has apparently misrepresented many aspects of his life and career, including his financial, education and employment history.

In 2022 Santos ran against Democrat Robert Zimmerman. The seat was left open when incumbent Rep. Tom Suozzi, a Democrat, ran unsuccessfully for the Democratic nomination for governor rather than for re-election to Congress. Robert Zimmerman was a superdelegate to the 2016 Democratic National Convention from New York. Zimmerman supported Hillary Clinton for the Democratic Presidential nomination in 2016. Withdrawn or disqualified candidates for the race included Melanie D'Arrigo (Working Families Party), Mekita Coe (People's Party), Navjot Kaur (D) and Maryann Maltese (D). Santos admits he lied and says he doesn't think it is a big deal when he assumed office in January.

Modern political campaigns have focused on digging up dirt on opposing candidates as part of the normal process of running for office. Although uncomfortable, it has become part of our election process. Candidates often divvy up their advertising budgets in an allotment of percentages of negative political ads vs. positive ads about their own candidate. It is extremely puzzling why Santos' misleading claims weren't accused or revealed by his political rivals during the election.

Santos has relied on the cover of being aligned with Donald Trump. House Republicans don't seem to want to challenge Santos and his claimed background, as it would possibly upset the thin balance of the Republican control of the House. This course of action does not seem to support humanist values.

All of this brings into question how ethics and morality are determined in politics and in our judicial system. A thin majority of republicans are aligned with the 'religious right'. But ethics and morality are out, in favor of *winning at all costs*. David Cole on *Democracy Now!* said in comments about the Supreme Court ruling on abortion: "So this is a radical court that is intruding upon our liberties, our safety, and it's doing it all in the name of a sort of commitment to a historic vision of the Constitution as it was drafted, when it was drafted, and imposing that on the American people more than 200 years later."

Here is the definition of morality in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: "In the normative sense, 'morality' refers to a code of conduct that would be accepted by anyone who meets certain intellectual and volitional conditions, almost always including the condition of being rational. That is, a person meets these conditions is typically expressed by saying that the person counts as a moral agent. It can be understood as having the function of making it possible for people to live together in groups. So 'morality' cannot be taken to refer to every code of conduct put forward by a society."

In a move to address some of these shortcomings in the education of morality and ethical issues, Yale University announced the establishment of the new Center for Public Theology and Public Policy at Yale Divinity School. Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II will be the founding director of the new Center and join the faculty of the Divinity School as Professor in the Practice of Public Theology and Public Policy. The Center will focus its work on the intersection of theology, social justice, and public policy. The Center will build bridges beyond the Yale Divinity School to include students at the Yale Law School.

In a Yale Law School announcement, Rev. Barber's bio includes being "the pastor of Greenleaf Christian Church in Goldsboro, North Carolina (since 1993) and past-president of the North Carolina conference of the NAACP (2005–2017). Rev. Barber is, among other things, the founder of Repairers of the Breach, a leadership development organization, in 2014 to expand and build a national movement rooted in moral analysis, moral articulation, and moral action. In 2016, he led a moral revival tour that covered 26 states and attracted thousands. In 2017, he and colleagues launched a revival of the 1968 Poor People's Campaign that was spearheaded by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and many others. Rev. Barber has earned a B.A. degree (1985) from North Carolina Central University and M.Div. degree(1989) from Duke University and a D.Min. degree (2003) from Drew University along with various honorary degrees.

Like Martin Luther King Jr., Barber is lauded for his abilities as an orator and an organizer. He has received standing ovations for his rallying speeches at the Democratic National Convention. He has led some of the largest and most visible direct action protests in recent decades, sometimes leading to his arrest and days behind bars. He huddles with union organizers and fast-food workers.

The Yale endeavor will be a continuation and institutionalization of Rev. Barber's decades-long moral movement-building work that grows out of his understanding of theology and practice of public ministry."

So it seems that we are going to be asked to rely on the use of Christian religious principles to restore ethics and morality to our governmental leadership. It is unfortunate that there is not a secular leader that can rise to prominence and lead our interests in the separation of church and state. It is the foundation that our country was found on. Oddly, it cannot be recognized as a 'conservative' ideal. The party of limited government intervention has hijacked the true meaning of the founding of our country and seeks to impose government control of our lives along with control of abortion rights, the ending of social programs, the prohibition of books and classes that discuss black history as it relates to the US and is even seeking to prohibit drag queen shows. Seems to me to be hypocrisy on steroids.

Ultimately, the humanist view of morality is incredibly empowering. It means asserting that human beings have it within us to work out what is the right and wrong thing to do – using reason, empathy, compassion, and respect for the dignity of every person. Humanists hold that we need to think for ourselves about what sort of person we want to be, and what are the consequences of our actions. Though every moral choice is different, there is a golden rule – treat others as you would like to be treated yourself. Weigh up consequences using reason, experience, empathy, and respect for others. This is what we expect from our political and judicial leaders.



## Mayor Adams. The separation of Church and State

### *Adams, Discussing Faith, Dismisses Idea of Separating Church and State*

— from the New York Times, Feb. 28, 2023

Mayor Eric Adams suggested that banning organized public school prayer was a mistake, saying, “When we took prayers out of schools, guns came into schools.”

At the annual interfaith breakfast hosted on Tuesday Feb. 28<sup>th</sup> by Mayor Eric Adams, the mayor’s closest aide, Ingrid Lewis-Martin, took the stage to introduce Adams, declaring that the Adams administration “doesn’t believe” in the separation of church and state, characterizing the mayor of New York City as “definitely one of the chosen” as she introduced him.

“Ingrid was so right,” Mr. Adams said, to the astonishment of some of the religious leaders who filled the New York Public Library’s glass-domed reception hall on Fifth Avenue. “Don’t tell me about no separation of church and state. State is the body. Church is the heart. You take the heart out of the body, the body dies.”

“I can’t separate my belief because I’m an elected official,” he continued, over scattered applause. He went on to suggest that his path to the mayoralty was divinely ordained, saying that when he implements policies, he does so in a “godlike approach.”

### *Response to Mayor Adams statement:*

SHSNY board member **John Wagner** sent the following note to Mayor Adams on the mayor’s website:  
Dear Mayor Adams,

I was extremely distressed to hear and read about your recent remarks about the separation of church and state and prayer in schools. As a non-religious Secular Humanist, I strongly support the principals that were established when our government was established. The first amendment has helped minimize the types of religious disputes that were the scourge of Europe for centuries and continue to cause conflict around the world. Freedom of religion must include freedom **FROM** religion. Religious practice should not be supported (or discouraged) by the government.

If there is no separation of church and state, then how can you see me as a good citizen? I have no religion, but I live an ethical life based on Humanist ideals, and I strive to increase the quality of our city and nation.

I represent the American Humanist Association at the UN, where we believe in the freedom of religion **OR BELIEF** as promulgated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Do you?

If you do not value the separation of church and state, then, even though I am a founding member of the Four Freedoms Democratic Club, I can't support you as mayor. I must find an alternative in the next election, even if that alternative is a Republican.

Sincerely,  
John A Wagner



Response from **David Orenstein**, former president of the SHSNY:

America has had a puritanical past, a founding on modernity with secular constitutional democracy, and now after many years (decades really) of being on the right side of liberal democracy, we are now targets.

This same religious influence is impacting what books are allowed in K-12 classrooms and libraries, what can and cannot be taught in certain higher education institutions, and limiting free speech for the sake of “religious freedom.”

Now more than ever, as the US is still moving away from religion and belief in a god, we have to stick to our secular democratic politics and advocacy.

Cheers,  
David

Let's not forget Mayor Adams' chief advisor and closest aide, **pastor** Ingrid Lewis-Martin. She affirms his views in all of this. She took the stage to introduce Adams at the interfaith breakfast, declaring that the Adams administration ‘doesn’t believe’ in the separation of church and state.

She also opposes congestion pricing. She is dead set against congestion pricing for automobiles coming into midtown and downtown NYC. Lewis-Martin sees supporters of NYC bike lanes as "outside groups" and "special interests", rather than "constituents". She probably likes riding around downtown in a Cadillac Escalade, feeling anointed.

— **Brian Lemaire**

Response from Texas pastor Robert Jeffress, senior pastor of the First Baptist Church of Dallas: “God bless Mayor Adams. I would say the mayor is exactly right.”



## President Carter's message in the Voyager Spacecraft

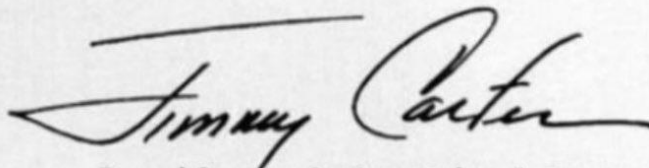


In the summer of 1977, President Carter penned a three-paragraph letter to accompany the Voyager spacecraft. Today, that letter is travelling beyond our Solar System — the first letter in our planet's history to do so.

This Voyager spacecraft was constructed by the United States of America. We are a community of 240 million human beings among the more than 4 billion who inhabit the planet Earth. We human beings are still divided into nation states, but these states are rapidly becoming a single global civilization.

We cast this message into the cosmos. It is likely to survive a billion years into our future, when our civilization is profoundly altered and the surface of the Earth may be vastly changed. Of the 200 billion stars in the Milky Way galaxy, some -- perhaps many -- may have inhabited planets and spacefaring civilizations. If one such civilization intercepts Voyager and can understand these recorded contents, here is our message:

This is a present from a small distant world, a token of our sounds, our science, our images, our music, our thoughts and our feelings. We are attempting to survive our time so we may live into yours. We hope someday, having solved the problems we face, to join a community of galactic civilizations. This record represents our hope and our determination, and our good will in a vast and awesome universe.



President of the United States  
of America

## Personal Credo — Reply to Anton Spivack

Helen Bennett

I loved Anton Spivack's article! It reminded me of my own Credo, which I wrote a few years ago as a Unitarian Universalist:

I would like to quote from Ann Druyan, the wife and collaborator of that great scientist and non-believer, Carl Sagan.



“When my husband died, because he was so famous and known for not being a believer, many people would come up to me—it still sometimes happens—and ask if Carl changed at the end and converted to a belief in the afterlife. They also frequently ask me if I think I will see him again. Carl faced his death with unflagging courage and never sought refuge in illusions. The

tragedy was that we knew we would never see each other again. I don't expect ever to be reunited with Carl. The great thing is that when we were together, for nearly twenty years, we lived with a vivid appreciation of how brief and precious life is. We never trivialized the meaning of death by pretending it was anything other than a final parting. Every single moment that we were alive and we were together was miraculous—not miraculous in the sense of the inexplicable or supernatural. We knew we were beneficiaries of chance...That pure chance could be so generous and so kind...That we could find each other, as Carl wrote so beautifully in *Cosmos*, you know, in the vastness of space and the immensity of time...That we could be together for twenty years. That is something which sustains me and it's much more meaningful...The way he treated me and the way I treated him, the way we took care of each other and our family, while he lived. That is so much more important than the idea that I will see him someday. I don't think I'll ever see Carl again. But I saw him. We saw each other. We found each other in the cosmos, and that was wonderful.”

I feel as she did about someone I loved. It does not require a real heaven to remember the heaven I knew here on earth.

There are two worlds, the world of concrete reality, which is the world of science, and the world of the imagination. Each is real, but in a different way. We must not confuse the two. If we do, we live in a fairy tale, like most of the religious people of the world. But we cannot solve mundane problems and come to a better way of living with the fairy tale suppositions of traditional religion, which confuses imagination with fact.

I also believe that no religion or philosophical view has a monopoly on truth or goodness, but all are united by the attitudes of their people of good will. Caring people of all three of the major “religions of the Book,” as well as the adherents of non-theistic, rationalistic humanism, agree that unprovoked aggression, torture, and pain are bad and that innocent people should not be persecuted or killed for the crimes of their families or ancestors. Both the God-fearing and



atheists of good will believe in justice, equality, and peace. All want their children to grow and thrive in a fair world that provides the basic needs of human existence, including the love of their fellow man. All people of good will condemn terrorism and torture. All are truly tolerant of their neighbors' point of view, and do not teach that non-believers are condemned to hell. People who are not tolerant of others create their own hell here on earth, and sometimes their innocent victims have to mop up the debris and go on to triumph in the long run.



## What is Secular Humanism?

The first major protest by what we may recognize as modern secular humanism was the defense of **freedom of inquiry** against ecclesiastical and political censorship. The fates of Giordano Bruno, burned at the stake, and Galileo, shamed and sentenced to house arrest, for challenging traditional views of the cosmos, are central to the humanist call for freedom.



Bruno is known for his cosmological theories, which extended to include the Copernican model. He proposed that the stars were distant suns surrounded by their own planets, and he raised the possibility that these planets might foster life of their own, a cosmological position known as cosmic pluralism. He also insisted that the universe is infinite and could have no "center".



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