

# PIQUE

The Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

## Upcoming SHSNY Programs and Events

**ZOOM Happy Hour, Every Sunday. 5PM** ZOOM Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9806344432?pwd=c0NrNUoweDVGWWho2diYmJlVjVkdz09#success>

Topics include a wide range of timely and humanistic issues

**Sunday Brunch & Conversation** Sunday, March 20th  
Noon-2PM  
The Globe Restaurant 158 E. 23rd. St., NYC

Topic: Democracy. Is it worth it?

**Non-Fiction Book Club**, March 3rd, 7:00 PM, Via ZOOM

Book: Dirty Work by Eyal Press

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

**Fiction Book Club**, March, 9th, 7:30 PM - Online via ZOOM

Book: Our Country Friends by Gary Sheteyngart

- See Meetup.com for details

## Modernity and its Discontents

Dr. David I. Orenstein

The world which we've created remains a fragile place. We are reminded daily of the difficult times in which we live. It is a very confusing time to be a human. These are times of plenty and scarcity, extremist violence and invigorated social justice movements, unbelievable technological innovation and spreading ignorance that threatens the very foundations of reason and secular democracy.

For more than two years, the globe has been fraught by an ongoing pandemic the likes of which has not been seen for more than one hundred years. Because of COVID-19, we've lost too many family, friends, and other loved ones.

Now to make matters worse, Vladimir Putin, the oligarchical leader of Russia, has begun to implement an aggressive campaign to retake provinces that have received international acknowledgment as sovereign states.

The United States is not immune to the ravages of our human capability to be sadly so inhumane to each other.

Voting maps are being redrawn and state laws are being passed that inhibit every citizen from having the equal and autonomous right to vote. Legislation to reduce or entirely remove a woman's right to reproductive freedom is growing across the nation. Many forms of media and many elected to high office eagerly seek to wedge us and fracture every political discussion.

Case in point the "Don't say Gay" bills passed in Tennessee and now about to be signed into law by Governor DeSantis of Florida. These laws have support within Republican legislators simply because they stop modernity while simultaneously awarding power to white Christians.

## Modernity (Continued)

### Humanist Should Support The “Do No Harm Act”

by John A Wagner

When it was passed and became the law of the land in 1993, the Religious Freedom Restoration Act had a simple, laudable purpose; to provide protections for religious exercise#. That purpose is consistent with our Humanist values. When it was conceived, RFRA was intended to safeguard the rights of every person to think independently, to express ideas freely, and to exercise their religious practice without fear of reprisal.

Sadly, the law now being misused to discriminate against religious minorities, women, LGBTQ people, and others under the guise of religious freedom. It is now being used to deny qualified potential parents because they are the “wrong” religion or because of their sexual orientation. It is being used by employers to withhold employee’s insurance coverage for birth control, that is mandated by federal law. It is being used by government contractors to discriminate against potential employees on the basis of their sexual orientation and other protected characteristics.

Some conservatives support RFRA in its current form and support the idea that religious freedom trumps other liberties. Indeed, because of pressure from religious conservatives, many states have passed laws that allow discrimination against the LGBTQ communities, women, and other protected groups.

These bills that are becoming law essentially demand that if facts, or past and current reality confronts any religious belief, promotes feelings of self-examination or guilt, or creates any social discomfort, that white people shouldn’t be forced to be confronted with facts, or past and present realities.

If the “Don’t Say Gay” bills and laws do not meet the definition of blasphemy, then there must be another definition of blasphemy that I am unaware in our lexicon.

As secular humanists this is what we must confront. As citizens of the United States and as global citizens we must stand together against the anarchy offered by the old, new and in some cases growing religious and anti-democratic movements.

There is much at risk and much we can lose as secular humanists and as modern humans when we deny our modernity. If we are not links in a positive chain to make the world safer, richer and kinder, then we have lost to future generations the gift that the past down and given us.

That is a gift secular humanists should not take lightly. I know I never will.

### Global Success at the Globe

We are slowly return to in-person programming at SHSNY. Trends in COVID-19 are freeing us up, albeit carefully and with a focus on making every event safe. At the February 2022, GLOBE program almost twenty vaccinated



humanists came together for community, fun and wonderful discussion. Our next program at the Globe will be in March, and it will focus on the nature of Democracy. Hope to see you there! Remember to bring proof of vaccination.

### [Do No Harm Act](#) (Continued)

There is now a proposal in congress to correct many of these problems at a national level by modifying RFRA@. The “Do No Harm Act” limits the use of the RFRA to prevent it from being used in cases of discrimination, or in disputes regarding child abuse and labor, salary and collective bargaining, access to healthcare & reproductive care, public accommodation law violations, and government-contracted social services. The “Do No Harm Act” is currently supported by over one hundred civil rights, LGBTQ, health, labor, and faith groups\*.

This is an opportunity to support our Humanist values. Take a minute to write your senator or representative in congress and urge them to support the “Do No Harm Act.” If you live in a state that has passed or proposed acts that would undermine free speech, allow discrimination against a protected minority, or damage our access to medical care; now is the time to act! Religious freedom should not mean the right to harm other or to impose your religious views on citizens or on our tax-supported government institutions!

### [Flooding the Zone](#)

By Brian Lemiere

Sam Harris's latest *Making Sense* podcast is entitled *The Future of American Democracy*. It deals with the threat to American democracy posed by many in the pro-Trump movement and the Republican Party. For this podcast, Harris spoke with David Frum and other writers from **The Atlantic** magazine. A few excerpts here:

“**Sam**: Yes. As you say, it's a deliberate tactic (flooding the zone with shit). And it creates an asymmetry. Because what happens in response to that blizzard of lies is an increasingly frantic attempt to contain the damage. And every single misstep there gets scored by a very different set of norms. So if the Atlantic or the New York Times gets a story wrong, or we rely on the Steele dossier for anything to substantiate Russian influence here, . . . It seems, for the people who care about the integrity of facts, and the coherence of an argument, the little missteps seem to pollute the entire case against Trump. Trump and his enablers and the propagandists on that side, all they have to do is create a mess, and if you cleaning it up, people who care about the integrity of journalism have to be held to norms of honesty and coherence that become harder to enforce when there are a thousand fires to put out rather than just one.

**David Frum**: Sam, you made a point about what happens in the main-stream media in the traditional values of a truthful conversation and truthful journalism, which is what happens when the New York Times has to run a correction. Or when we find out that the Steele Dossier is largely unreliable. It used to be, when there was a reasonably common consensus about the rules of conversation, the rules of evidence, that a correction in The Atlantic, say, actually bolstered the credibility of The Atlantic. You would demonstrate your credibility by owning up to and fixing your mistakes. But since Trump doesn't EVER acknowledge a mistake, there isn't ever a commonly-adjudicated lie or mis-statement on the Trump side, then the score is "The New York Times has had ten errors, and Trump has had none."the dynamics of it.”



## **Anarchy!** By Jonathan Engel

Maybe you remember this: in September 2020 the United States Department of Justice, then under the auspices of William Barr, issued a statement declaring three American cities, all of which had Democratic mayors, to be “anarchist cities”. The statement said, “The U.S. Department of Justice today identified the following three jurisdictions that have permitted violence and the destruction of property to persist and have refused to undertake reasonable measures to counteract criminal activities. New York, NY; Portland OR; and Seattle, WA”.

This was as ridiculous then as it sounds now. There is no Federal statute that authorizes the Justice Department to make declarations as to supposedly “anarchist cities”, nor to withhold Federal funding from such cities, as Trump and Barr threatened to do. So this was a lawless attempt to punish alleged lawlessness which wasn’t actually happening. Apart from the effects of Covid, New York was still New York. As comedian Josh Gondelman joked at the time, “Remember: in this anarchist jurisdiction alternate-side parking rules are in effect”.

Fast forward to the present. Proving themselves once more to be masters of projection, it is of course Republicans who believe that laws and rules are optional, at least for them. A few recent examples:

--Over the past year and a half we’ve seen video after video of Trump supporters refusing to wear masks in places where they are required..

## **Anarchy!** (Continued)

--Reps. Marjorie Taylor Greene, Andrew Clyde and others have wracked up thousands of dollars in fines (to be paid by their donors, no doubt) for refusing to follow mask and metal detector rules currently in place in the House of Representatives.

--Lawful subpoenas, whether from Congress or elsewhere, are being simply ignored. In law school I was taught that if a party objects to a subpoena they must go to court to ask for the subpoena to be quashed. Otherwise, they must obey it. Unless of course they belong to the New Anarchist Party (a/k/a the GOP).

--We learned this week that when he was president, Trump routinely shredded, burned and/or flushed official documents despite the existence of the Presidential Records Act and other laws that requires the preservation of such documents. Never has there been such a lawless administration, not even Nixon’s.

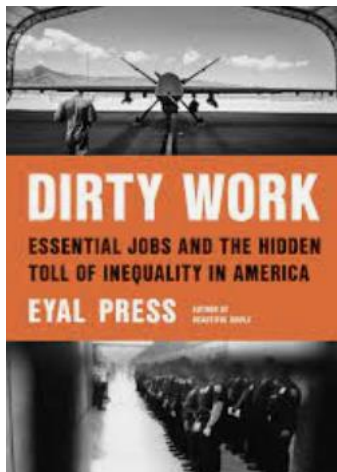
--Then there were the events of January 6, 2021. Take another look at all the video, if you can stomach it. You will see malevolent thugs trying to use violence and terror to prevent lawfully elected representatives from carrying out their duties. (What you won’t see, by the way, is legitimate political discourse). If you want to know what anarchy looks like, this is it.

A functioning society needs laws, rules, and regulations. If you feel a law is unjust, you can lobby to have it changed. Or you can commit civil disobedience, as did civil rights protestors in the ‘50s and ‘60s, and you accept the consequences (arrest and jail) for your actions. But to simply ignore laws you don’t like invites anarchy, which is antithetical to a fair and just society. So it looks like Trump and Barr were right that we should be afraid of anarchy. They just omitted the part about the anarchists being them.

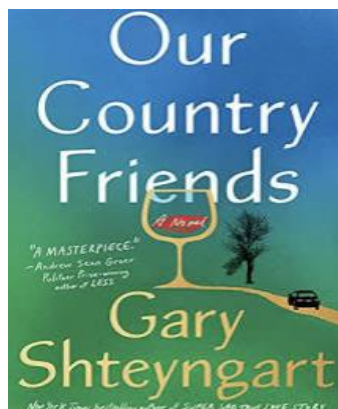
## Spotlight: SHSNY Book Clubs

The SHSNY has ongoing book club groups which meet monthly via Zoom and hope to resume in-person meetings shortly. This month's books are two great selections:

The Non-Fiction Club Presents:



The Fiction Club Presents:



See details on SHSNY's Meetup.com page for meeting dates, times and access.

## Membership and Giving to SHSNY

Your membership and financial support of SHSNY goes a long way. It helps us to continue to provide fun, interesting, and thought-provoking events and programs each month and throughout the year.

To our members we pledge to always put your needs first. To those who come to our programs, we hope that you will always see SHSNY as a lighthouse for both reason and community.

The SHSNY board all serve as a group of dedicated volunteers, but we can't do it without your help. Membership and giving is simple. You can mail us a check or go to [www.SHSNY.org](http://www.SHSNY.org) to join. Here's a breakdown of membership options:

Membership includes a subscription to PIQUE.

**Individual Membership:** \$40 per year (tax deductible)

**Family Membership:** \$65 per year (tax deductible)

**Student Membership** \$20 per year (tax deductible)

**Subscription to PIQUE only:** \$30 per year (12 issues)

## The Secular Humanist Society of New York Board

Dr. David I. Orenstein, Board President,  
Members: Nancy Adelman, Kevon Cameron, Jonathan Engel, Dorothy Kahn, Brian Lemaire, David Madison, Carl Marxer, Claire Miller, John Wagner

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ARTICLE

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EVENTS AROUND THE  
WORLD ARTICLE

