

PIQUE

The Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

Upcoming SHSNY Programs and Events

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**First Sunday & Last Sunday ZOOM
Happy Hours of the Month, 5PM
ZOOM**

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

Sunday Brunch & Conversation
Sunday, November 20, 2022.
Time: Noon–2PM, The Globe
Restaurant, 158 E. 23rd. St.,
NYC

Topic: “Civilizations Rise & Fall:
Have we learned anything from
Past Cultures”, Led by Dorothy
Kahn

Non-Fiction Book Club, Nov. 3rd,
7:00 PM

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

Book: Rules: How We Learn by Stanislas
Dehaene

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

Fiction Book Club, Nov. 16th,
7:30 PM

Book: TBA + Planning for 2023

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

Letter in a Bottle

(Reprinted from TheHumanist.com)

Dr. David I. Orenstein

Our October in-person **Freethought Day** live event was a wonderful success. While we did not reach room capacity, the good will, community spirit, wonderful (if an overwhelming amount) food and our speaker, Professor Aaron Rabinowitz, were each exuberant. The feedback from those who attended was, “we need to do more of these.” Which is a great compass point as we still try to balance live and virtual programming in the Age of Covid, as more of us see the pandemic in the rearview mirror now.

November draws us into the holiday season with Thanksgiving at the end of the month, followed by other secular and consumer rituals like Black Friday. It is also election month, and the mid-terms will prove to be a nailbiter across many races for Congress, the Senate and Governorships, as well as so many local races. The people we elect speak for us, so vote wisely this season as never before has the future of secular democracy been on the table.

SHSNY Board member, Nancy Adelman, has opened her home in Manhattan to host an election watch party. Details are in this month’s issue of PIQUE.

Sometimes, I am frightened that I will outlive my country. I will outlive the post-World-War-II world where antisemitism and racism are considered vile rather than normalized perspectives. I fear that civil, equal, and human rights are on the wane. I fear that, in our own country and around the world, the acceptance of secularism and democracy are under deep and constant assault by a trifecta of conspiracy theorists, alt-right influencers, and anti-democratic politicians.

In World War III, Which Side Will We Be On?

By Jonathan Engel

There is a world-wide struggle going on right now. On one side we have the forces of liberal democracy, who support: free and fair elections; the rule of law that applies to everyone; the guaranty of basic human rights; etc. On the other side we have fascism: bogus elections (if they're held at all); a fixed court system; no redress against the rich and powerful; the use of violence and intimidation for political ends, etc. Current liberal democracies (however imperfect) include the countries of the European Union (save Poland and Hungary, which are teetering in the other direction), the UK, Canada, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea. Countries that are fascist, or at least headed in that direction, include Russia, China, Iran, Brazil, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia.

Notice that I have not put the United States in either category. That may seem strange, as for decades we have regarded ourselves as a leader and protector of liberal democracies everywhere. But in case you haven't noticed, not everyone in the United States is committed to liberal democracy. In fact one of our two major political parties (guess which one) is embracing fascism as a means to take and keep power. The evidence is everywhere and keeps mounting. Republicans, taking their cues from fascist in chief Donald Trump, will only accept the results of their election contests if they win. In Arizona armed, masked vigilantes are watching and photographing people casting their votes in election drop boxes in order to intimidate early voters, who tend to vote for Democrats. Meanwhile, in Florida, Governor Ron DeSantis' so called "Election Integrity Squad" is arresting (Black) people who voted in a previous election in the good faith belief that they were eligible. The message DeSantis is sending is quite clear: if you're a Black Floridian voting could get you arrested, so think twice before casting your ballot. So think twice before casting your ballot.

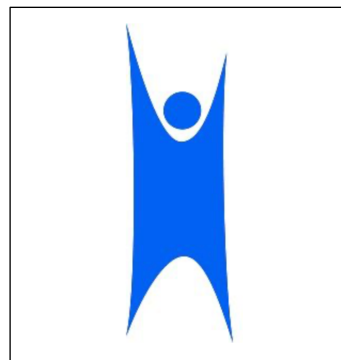
However, what gives me hope are the rise of the Nones, the decrease in formal religiosity, and the acceptance of natural rather than supernatural causes for why we exist are each wonderful. In addition, the next generation of humanist thinkers who are less blemished by real or imagined feelings of disrespect are fascinating to watch take the stage.

We may have lost Hitchens and Sagan but there are many eager to take their sublime leadership place. More than a decade ago, I lent my voice to the movement in blogs, books, and lectures across the world. Now is the time for newer voices to do the same and for us to support them as much as possible. Last month's speaker was a bring and shining element of that future.

Which Side? (Continued)

And this is just the tip of the Republican fascist iceberg that is waiting to sink our democracy. Let's also not forget the violent coup attempt of January 6, 2021. There are quite a few Capitol police officers who will never forget it, that's for sure.

So in the World War III battle between fascism and liberal democracy, which side will the U.S. be on? Rep. Kevin McCarthy, who could well be the next Speaker of the House, has indicated that if Republicans take control of Congress, he will work to undercut our support for Ukraine in its battle for survival against Russia. Let's remember what's happening over there: Russia, a fascist state, attacks its much smaller neighbor, the burgeoning democracy Ukraine, because, well, it could, and its leader is a stone-cold fascist. Republicans favor fascists around the globe because that's what they want for this country. As outlandish as it may seem, if Republicans get hold of the government any time soon, we will be siding with fascism over liberal democracy, both abroad and at home.



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 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)

SECOND NOTICE of SHSNY Special Election – Voting Information

The SHSNY will be holding a special election beginning January 2, 2023 through January 17, 2023. During this time, SHSNY members in good standing will have access to vote for candidates to fill open board positions.

All voting will be conducted electronically. As with the recent election of board members in 2021-2022, the voting will take place via the Internet. A link to the voting website will be made available by December 15th to members of the SHSNY community.

If you are a SHSNY member in good standing and wish to serve on the board, please email, info@shsny.org, to notify us of your intent. You must email us by November 30th, to have your name placed on the ballot for nomination.



Election Night Watch Party at Board Member Nancy Adelman's Home

SHSNY Board member, Nancy Adelman, has graciously opened her home to the Society's members who might want to watch the coming mid-term election news and results in community. This is a new outreach event, and while none of us on the Board would ever tell you who and how you should vote, it's always fun and exciting to watch history unfold with like-minded fellow NYC humanists.

Especially since this election is so pivotal in terms of where we go as a country on a host of humanist issues. From reproductive freedom, civil rights, "religious freedom" and many other topics, who gets voted into office this month will have the power to change our lives and this nation for years to come.

If you're interested in seeing the events unfold in community, please contact Nancy at her two email addresses, nancyleadelman@yahoo.com, or nadelman@nyc.rr.com

Banned Books about Secular Humanism and Atheism

By Carl L. Marxer

As long as there have been books, there have been book burners. The United States has periodically gone through periods of voice suppression, often spurred on by moral panics. During these periods, books we now recognized as classics are targeted. The recent wave of censorship in America is accompanied by a rise in a virulent form of Christian nationalism. Some of these people believe their religious beliefs allow them to dictate and control what others read, see and experience. In 1967 a federal judge tried to ban secular humanist textbooks from Alabama public schools. Today in 2022 and beyond, communities in every state are trying to do the same. Some people may fear knowledge, because too much of it might lead others to question the religious “truths” that fundamentalists hold as gospel and use to control others. Here is a short list of books banned by the Christian right for religious reasons.

His Dark Materials - Philip Pullman

Published by Scholastic

This much lauded trilogy, full of references to and inspired by a range of literary classics, has been criticized mostly in the USA for its apparent attack on the church and religion in general. Pullman does admit the books are about “the killing of God”. To add to the books’ controversial nature, passages alluding to the sexual awakening of its main female character, Lyra, have been removed in some editions. Fiction. Also available in the following formats: Braille, Giant print, Talking book.

One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest - Ken Kesey

Published by Penguin

One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest was challenged and banned by a number of US schools in the 70s and 80s for being pornographic, for glorifying criminal activity and for promoting secular humanism. This is the unforgettable story of a mental ward and its inhabitants, especially the tyrannical Big Nurse Ratched and Randle Patrick McMurphy - immortalized on film by Jack Nicholson - the brawling, fun-loving new inmate who resolves to oppose her. Fiction. Also available in the following formats: Braille, Talking book

As I Lay Dying - William Faulkner

Published by Vintage

As I Lay Dying is regularly cited as being one of the great works of 20th century American fiction. The book is narrated by 15 different characters over 59 chapters. It is the story of the death of Addie Bundren and her family’s quest to honor her wish to be buried in the town of Jefferson. It has been banned and challenged by numerous schools in Kentucky and Maryland for reference to masturbation, abortion and the questioning of the existence of god. Fiction. Also available in the following formats: Braille, Giant print, Talking book

The Origin of Species - Charles Darwin

Published by Penguin classics

This book challenged many of the deeply held beliefs in the western world by introducing the theory of evolution by means of natural selection. It was banned for a time at Trinity College, Cambridge, where Darwin was a student. Non-fiction. Also available in the following formats: Braille, Talking book, also Free downloads from the Internet

Cat’s Cradle – Kurt Vonnegut

Like many Vonnegut novels, Cat’s Cradle tackles numerous issues, such as the nuclear arms race and religion. In 1972, the Strongsville, Ohio School Board banned the book without stating an official reason. Notes from the meeting include references to the book as completely sick and garbage. However, this ban was overturned in 1976. Fiction. Available in paperback and online.

Banned Books - Continued

Slaughterhouse Five - Kurt Vonnegut

Dell Publishing

Historically, it has always been controversial and subject to censorship, for its language, sexual and irreligious themes, use of outdated terms now deemed offensive and for its criticism of US forces during WWII. It has been a regular title on the US Most Banned Books list for years and no doubt will continue to be.

Fiction, Comic fiction, Fantasy, Non-fiction, Science Fiction, Modern classic

Also available in the following formats: Braille, Giant print, Talking book

The Color Purple - Alice Walker

Published by Phoenix

The Color Purple received the 1983 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, but that hasn't stopped it being a target for censors. Taking place mostly in rural Georgia, the story focuses on female black life during the 1930s in the Southern United States. It addresses the numerous issues, including their exceedingly low position in American social culture. It was banned in a Californian School for its troubling ideas about race relations, God and sexuality and its violent content.

Fiction Also available in the following formats: Braille, Giant print

Frankenstein - Mary Shelley

Published by Vintage

Mary Shelley's classic 1818 book details a man obsessed with creating life through the reanimation of dead tissue. He succeeds, only to be haunted and tormented by his grotesque creation. Over the past two centuries, the book has been banned for being indecent, objectionable and obscene. Christian groups have protested the book, claiming that it's in conflict with the principles of their faith.

Fiction Also available in the following formats: Braille, Talking book

Germinal - Emile Zola

Published by Wordsworth Classics

A book about the conditions of mines in northeast France and dealing with the social concerns of the working class, for which it was seen as radical for the time of its publication in 1885. It was attacked by right-wing groups for inciting revolution. The Vatican made it prohibited reading for Catholics.

Fiction Also available in the following formats: Braille, Talking book

Are there other books you know of about Secular Humanism or Atheism that have been banned? Let us know at: editor@shsny.org.

ALSO...look at The American Library Association's list of banned and challenged books at, <https://www.ala.org/advocacy/bbooks>

The SHSNY Freethought Day Brunch – A Great Time Was Had by All

On October 15th, we held our annual Freethought Day brunch in a wonderful Italian eatery, Tony's di Napoli, on 3rd Avenue. Our speaker, Professor Aaron Rabinowitz offered a mind-expanding lecture on the nature and definition of luck and how humanists may best approach the idea of "being lucky."

Judging from the responses of the twenty or so attendees, the SHSNY co-sponsored talk, the restaurant's location and food, and the fellowship were all part of making the event such a great success.



In Reason We Trust

SHSNY Board: Dr. David Orenstein (President); Nancy Adelman, Kevon Cameron, Jonathan Engel, Dorothy Kahn, Brian Lamaire, Laurence Mailaender, Carl Marxer, Claire Miller, John Wagner

**Mailing Address: SHSNY, P.O. Box 7661, FDR Station,
New York, NY 10150**

Selected Humanist News and Events from Around the Nation and the World

Humanist International calls for immediate UN investigation of intimidation and reprisals against humanists

<https://humanists.international>

Several humanist organizations give UN evidence in study to halt witchcraft accusations and persecutions

<https://humanists.international>

Humanist disaster recovery doing what others aren't doing

<https://Thehumanist.com>

AHA Board Election Results

<https://Thehumanist.com>

Atheist wins settlement after suing Christian Nationalist lawmaker

<https://atheists.org>

California Congressman Jared Huffman announces at FFRF convention that he does not believe in god

<https://ffrf.org>

New Poll examines the good, the bad and ugly about how Americans view the Separation of Church and State

<https://au.org>

Connections Humanist Community of New York (not affiliated with SHSNY). Meetup.com various events. Check it out.

The Sunday before Thanksgiving begins annual Church/State Separation Week!!!