

# PIQUE

The Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

## Upcoming SHSNY Programs and Events

**Weekly ZOOM Happy Hour,**  
Every Sunday except when we meet at the Globe. 5PM ZOOM

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

Topics include a wide range of timely and humanistic issues

**Sunday Brunch & Conversation** Sunday, May 15, 2022. Time: Noon–2PM, The Globe Restaurant, 158 E. 23rd. St., NYC

Topic: Ukraine Dissent & the Media

**Non-Fiction Book Club,** May 5<sup>th</sup>, 7:00 PM, Via ZOOM

Book: TBA

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

**Fiction Book Club,** May 11<sup>th</sup>, 7:30 PM – Online via ZOOM

Book: Bell Canto

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

**Day of Reason Event – May 7<sup>th</sup>**  
**Speaker: Ron Millar, CFE**  
**Stout Bar, Greene Room**

See Flyer in this Month's newsletter for details

## Humanism As the Cure for What Ills Humanity

Dr. David I. Orenstein

What has become very clear to me is that without our freethought community the hopes of a safer, richer and kinder humanity dwindle. Freedom of thought is a human right. It is an equal right. It is at once a liberation, as it is in some places around the globe, a Scarlet Letter. And for those people who are not free to express their ideas and conclusions, there is ongoing danger to life, imprisonment, shunning and other retribution against the nonbeliever and their family.

So here's the thing and probably the core reason as to why I identify as a humanist and non-believer. I see humanism and the conclusion that there isn't a divine force in the universe, as the ultimate acceptance of nature and reality. That because I see this as such, it equally informs my ability to have and lead a just, moral and happy life.

I've kicked the tires of various religions and have found them wanting. I've read other spiritual philosophies, and because of my curiosity still research competing views of how best to be in the world. However, as I look to the history and current actions of organized faith traditions and spiritual movements, I see so much lacking.

But thank the cosmos for each of us! According to the statistics, atheists, agnostics and humanists as a group have the highest level of COVID-19 vaccine adoption. Somewhere north of 90%. Beating out EVERY other social, ethnic, racial and religious group category. Perhaps this is why reason matters most and humanism serves as my (and our?) view of how best we should treat ourselves, as well as

## A Humanist Poem for Ukraine

### THE WAR IN UKRAINE

It's hard to know why Putin would  
Defy the world, as only *he* could.  
With tanks, and planes, and saber rattling  
Setting the pace for ceaseless battling.

When the brave Ukrainians put up a fight,  
Putin reminds us of his might,  
“I’ve got nukes!” he proudly rants—  
He tries to scare us—but he can’t.

The entire globe is his enemy now,  
From the Western nations to Moscow.  
Biden leads the NATO alliance,  
Assured of mutual compliance.

Zelensky, the former actor and clown,  
Does all he can to take Putin down;  
And with all the sanctions, the Russian  
ruble  
Is worth no more than a mound of rubble.

The Russian people are on the march,  
Led by the Russian oligarchs,  
Who may soon resist with all they’ve got  
To reclaim their dignity—and yachts.

Oh Putin, you are beyond disgrace,  
A blight upon the human race;  
May you sink with that fellow who  
defined  
The rot that emerged in '39.

Helen Bennett  
March 3, 2022

others and the planet. There are deep moral, social and evolutionary consequences to our vaccine adoption and they are each positive.

Those best prepared to lead the expanding conversations are the same people in our diverse movement and community. The non-believers, humanists and secularists who fight for reason and kindness both in the present and for generations to come.

So break those chains! Do not be a slave. Do not ask permission to think and be who you truly are. But learn to bask in our modernity and your liberation as a nonbeliever.

## SHSNY Marching For Science!

A small band of dedicated SHSNY members and supporters came out in late April to join hundreds of other New Yorkers in marching for science, science education, the environmental movement and reason. We also proudly showed off our new SHSNY gear. The t-shirts got plenty of positive comments from the crowd.



## It's In the Constitution

Jonathan Engel



Right-wing Republicans in the United States (and let's face it; today's Republicans are divided between the far-right and the far-far-right), love to say how much they revere the Constitution. And yet they often seem oblivious to what that document actually says. Case in point: the Senate confirmation hearings for Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, President Biden's choice to replace Stephen Breyer on the Supreme Court.

I'm honing in here on Senator Lindsay Graham (R-SC). Graham is an attorney, having received a Juris Doctor degree from the University of South Carolina School of Law. He has served in the Judge Advocate General Corp. in the U.S. Air Force, first as a defense lawyer and then with the Air Force's Chief Prosecutor in Europe. So you would think he would have a basic knowledge of the Constitution. But he must have been absent from law school on the day the lesson was given on the founding document's Article 6, Paragraph 3: *"The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the members of the several State legislatures, and all executive and judicial officers, both of the United States and the several States, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support the Constitution; but no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States"*.

Note that this is the only place in the original Constitution (before amendments) that mentions religion at all. The important part here is that *"no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States"*. It means that a person's religious beliefs are not relevant to their ability to carry out their official governmental duties, and so are not a proper line of inquiry to someone who is seeking a government position.

## Constitution (Continued)

And yet; and yet; here are some direct quotes from Senator Graham's questioning of Judge Jackson: *"You have a wonderful family. You should be proud. And your faith matters to you. What faith are you, by the way? I'm just asking this question because how important (sic) your faith is to you. On a scale of 1 to 10, how faithful are you in terms of religion? You know, I go to church probably three times a year, so that speaks poorly of me. Do you attend church regularly?"*

Let's remember that the purpose of this kind of hearing is to allow U.S. senators, who have a duty to "advise and consent" regarding Federal court appointments, to assess a nominee's fitness for a lifetime appointment to the bench. But the Constitution says that there may never be a religious test for public office. So where does Lindsay Graham get off asking Judge Jackson about her religious beliefs and practices?

I suspect that Senator Graham knows all of this. But why let a small detail like the Constitution (which he supposedly "reveres") get in the way of making a spectacle of one's self on national television while at the same time garnering kudos from the radical religious right for your "piousness"? To Graham and his ilk the Constitution is vitally important right up to the point when it becomes inconvenient. Then they just ignore it.

## In Remembrance: Richard Leakey, 1944 - 2022

Brian Lemaire

Richard Leakey died In January, 2022. Exploring in the Olduvai Gorge in Kenya, Richard Leakey found fossils of some of the earliest members of the Hominid family tree. He greatly expanded the scientific knowledge and understanding of this family tree. Our last common ancestor with today's apes, monkeys, and chimpanzees, the other existing primates, goes back maybe nine million years. But the hominids did not follow a simple progression from there.

The family tree saw many branches which then died out. This was all laid out in his 1992 book *Origins Reconsidered*. Based on the fossil evidence, the "testimony of the spade", he deduced when and why our ancestors first walked upright on two feet. The reasons have to do with climate changes on the African savanna. Our ancestors



## Spotlight: SHSNY Book Clubs

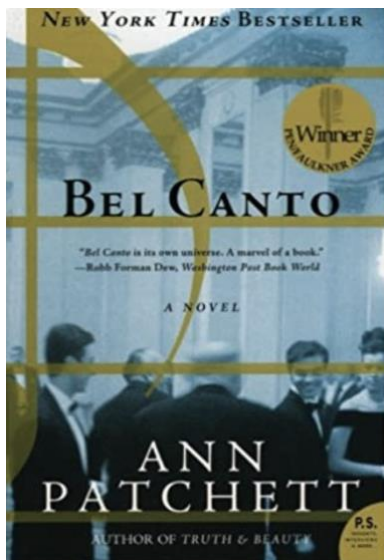
The SHSNY has two fantastic ongoing book club groups which meet monthly via Zoom.

May's book selections are:

### The Non-Fiction Club Presents:

**TBD**

### The Fiction Club Presents:



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

## Leakey (Continued)

started out as tree-dwellers, but when conditions changed, and fewer trees grew in the region, they adapted to traveling longer distances on the plains. On two feet.

In 1989 the president of Kenya appointed Leakey head of the country's Wildlife Service. Leakey immersed himself in an ambitious program to encourage wildlife and human populations to thrive side by side. He gained fame for taking on poachers who threatened to wipe out Kenya's elephants and rhinos.

## Ketanji Brown Jackson – Liberalist Judge and Humanist Ally Confirmed to US Supreme Court

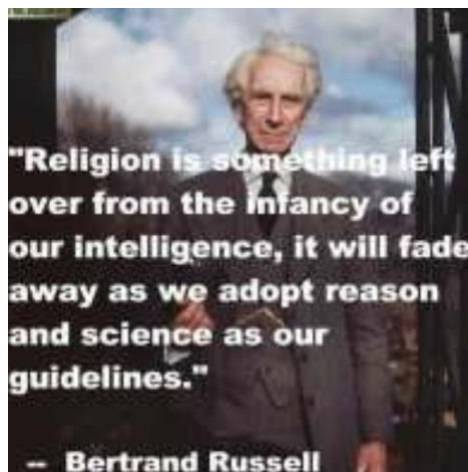
Carl Marxer

Ketanji Brown Jackson has been confirmed by the US Senate to replace Justice Stephen Breyer when he retires this summer. Jackson will join a court that is currently composed entirely of Catholics and Jews. These religious groups only make up 23 percent of the US population. She will be the only black woman ever to serve on the court.

She was born in Washington, DC and grew up in Miami Florida. She attended Harvard University where she studied government. Jackson worked as a staff reporter and researcher for Time magazine. She returned to Harvard Law School and served as supervising editor of the Harvard Law Review. She graduated Harvard in 1996 with a Juris Doctor cum laude.

Jackson began her legal career as a law clerk for several judges, including Supreme Court Associate Justice Stephen Breyer. Jackson served as a judge for the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia from 2013 to 2021.

When questioned by Lindsey Graham, R-SC, about her religious beliefs, Ketanji Brown Jackson had to remind him that "there's no religious test in the Constitution under Article 6", referring to the part of the Constitution that prohibits public officials from submitting to religious proof tests.



## THIS MONTH

### Mark Your May 2022 Calendar: SHSNY Day of Reason Speaker and Event

The SHSNY Day of Reason speaker this year will be Ron Millar, the Director of the Center for Freethought Equality (CFE).

The CFE is an outstanding humanist organization that advocates for secularism at the state and federal level. CFE also works directly with congresspersons, supports the Congressional Freethought Caucus, and provides political contributions to those currently elected and those looking to serve the nation, who support the separation of church and state.

Mr. Millar's talk is titled, "**No Longer Invisible: Politically Empowering the Atheist and Humanist Community**" It will be a fantastic event and one you won't want to miss.

Details of the program - as to location, time and cost, can be found at the end of this month's newsletter.

We hope to see you there!



Secular Humanist Society of New York

## Jackson (Continued)

Jackson limited Graham's spiritual questioning by saying: "Senator, I am reluctant to talk about my faith in this way just because I want to be mindful of the need for the public to have confidence in my ability to separate out my personal views."

Alice Thomas, is associate professor at the Howard University School of Law. She reacted by saying that for the senators to ask her about her faith was not only wrong but unfair. She went onto say, "In an employment situation, you can't ask people about their faith."

In 1797, the Senate unanimously ratified the Treaty of Tripoli, which emphatically declares that "the Government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian religion." But today, the separation of church and state is under assault. Republicans lead the change of philosophy by professing their fidelity to the Constitution, which clearly establishes the separation of church and state with the first amendment.

## 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)

## HUMANIST NEWS AND EVENTS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

### Upcoming Conferences:

**Humanist International Convention** –  
June 3-5  
Glasgow, UK

**American Humanist Association** –  
June 24-26, Online, via Zoom

**Freedom from Religion Foundation** –  
Oct. 28-30  
San Antonio, TX

### NEWS HEADLINES:

Humanists Take Action. <https://thehumanist.org>

Nigerian Humanist Jailed for 24 Years.  
<https://theguardian.com>

Conservative lawmakers and judges have recast religious neutrality as religious bigotry. <https://slate.com>

A recap of the American Atheists conference in Atlanta <http://religionnews.com>

Congress passes a bill that makes it easier to punish groups overseas that violate internationally recognized human rights, which frequently involves religious persecution.  
<https://www.realclearreligion.org>

### 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

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

### Donohue, Catholic Apologist, Gets it Wrong Again

Dennis Middlebrooks

According to Donohue, "Slavery has existed in every part of the world, and it was rarely considered to be morally wrong until Christianity condemned it. In fact, when the U.S. was founded in the late 18th century, Western Europe was the only place in the world where slavery did not exist.

It is ironic to note that white people today feel obliged to provide reparations to black people when white people were the first to object to slavery. They sure didn't object in Latin America, Africa, the Middle East or Asia—they thought it was normal."

- William Donohue, Catholic League For Religious And Civil Rights

#### Here are the facts:

Slavery did indeed exist in parts of Western Europe in the late 18th Century, since slavery was legal in Great Britain, France, Portugal and Spain. There was also serfdom in Russia. To be sure, the vast majority of the slaves were held outside of Europe in the various Western Hemisphere colonies of Great Britain, France, Portugal and Spain.

Slavery existed in Christian Europe from the 4th Century C.E. to the 19th Century C.E.. Great Britain did not abolish slavery until 1833, and slavery was only abolished in the USA in 1865.

The vast majority of Christians supported slavery in the late 18th Century, including the various Christian churches. The very Christian slaveowners of the U.S. South would probably have retained slavery into the 20th Century were it not for the Civil War. Catholic Brazil did not abolish slavery until 1888. And apparently Donohue feels that the Spanish and Portuguese slaveowners of Latin America and Cuba were non-white.

Many abolitionists in the USA were not Christians, e.g. Thomas Paine, William Lloyd Garrison, and the family of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw of the famous Black 54th Massachusetts Infantry in the Civil War.



THE SECULAR HUMANIST SOCIETY  
OF NEW YORK

PROUDLY PRESENTS OUR ANNUAL

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**DAY OF  
REASON  
EVENT**

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SATURDAY, MAY 7TH  
11:30-2:00PM

The Greene Room inside Stout  
Bar, Penn Station  
133 West 33<sup>rd</sup> Street, NYC



SHS  
NY

NYC Atheists

BBN  
NYC  
EST. 2016

CENTER *for*  
FREETHOUGHT  
EQUALITY

cf in NYC  
CENTER FOR INQUIRY

The SHSNY Day of Reason speaker this year will be **Ron Millar**, the Director of the Center for Freethought Equality (CFE).

Mr. Millar's talk is titled, *"No Longer Invisible: Politically Empowering the Atheist and Humanist Community"* It will be a fantastic event and one you won't want to miss.

We hope to see you there!

**SEATING IS LIMITED  
TO FIFTY (50) PEOPLE  
SO RSVP NOW!  
FIRST COME FIRST  
SERVED**

**Price is \$45.00 Per Person and  
Includes Admission to the  
Talk and Three Course Prix  
Fix Menu. Drinks are  
Optional**

**Go to SHSNY.Org to register  
for the event. We accept  
Debit/Credit Cards & PayPal**