

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

November, 2017

Please donate to Humanist Hurricane Relief - see below. Then, answer: What is “paideia”, and why does “sacred” keep appearing in these pages? What Constitution myths need debunking, can men “get” #MeToo, and has “guilty until proven innocent” taken over our justice system? Will multiple murder in Las Vegas even matter, can we revise our opinion of McCain, and will there be a quiz? Yes, on page 11, and it’s all about, um ... *him*, you know, President Trump. Happy Thanksgiving. — JR

GIVE NOW TO HELP THE HURRICANE VICTIMS IN THE NAME OF HUMANISM, AND SHSNY WILL DOUBLE YOUR DONATION

It took a while, but SHSNY has finally been cleared to raise funds for hurricane relief on Facebook and, as we promised on the front page of October PIQUE (“Your Dues Doing Good”, page 1) ...

*SHSNY will match your contribution
to secular hurricane relief dollar-for-dollar,
up to a total of \$1000.*

You can help the victims of hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria — *as a humanist* — through our Facebook platform or by check, and your contribution, along with SHSNY’s matching contribution, will be channeled to Foundation Beyond Belief, the leading national freethought organization whose mission is “to unite the humanist community in volunteer and charitable efforts”. So ...

GO TO FACEBOOK

... at <https://www.facebook.com/SHSofNY/> and follow the simple instructions to make your donation, using PayPal or your credit card. It’ll only take a minute, and you’ll feel better all day long.

OR WRITE A CHECK

... made out to SHSNY, with the words “Hurricane Relief” written on the Memo line. Mail it to:

SHSNY
P.O. Box 7661, FDR Station
New York, NY 10150-7661

... and we’ll match that amount and forward it to Foundation Beyond Belief.

Do it today, please. *Today today today today today today!*
Questions? Send them to editor@shsny.org ... or phone 646-922-7389, and leave a call-back number.

YEAH, YEAH, 58 DEAD IN LAS VEGAS, BLAH BLAH, “NOT THE APPROPRIATE TIME”, SAME OLD, “THOUGHTS AND PRAYERS”, MORE OF THE SAME, “RIGHTS OF LAW-ABIDING” ...

John Rafferty

Let’s face it: we know damn well that nothing will change no matter how many country-music concert-goers or Florida clubbers or Connecticut first-graders are murdered in the name of the Second Amendment. And we know equally well that right now a dozen or more infamy-wannabees are oiling their assault rifles and wondering how they can beat Stephen Paddock’s record numbers.

But—I suppose it’s a matter of not being able to help myself—let’s take a look at what some of America’s leading conservatives, one past, two present, have had to say about gun control and the Sacred Second Amendment.

Conservatives on the Second Amendment: THE GREATEST FRAUD

Warren Burger

Chief Justice of the United States, 1969-86

(From an interview with Charlayne Hunter-Gault on the PBS MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour, 12/16/1991)

If I were writing the Bill of Rights now there wouldn’t be any such thing as the Second Amendment ... which says that “a well-regulated militia, being necessary for the defense of the state, the people’s right to bear arms ...” This has been the subject of one of the greatest pieces of fraud, I repeat the word fraud, on the American public by special interest groups that I have ever seen in my lifetime.

Look at those words ... “a well-regulated militia”. If the militia, which was going to be the state army, was going to be well regulated, why shouldn’t a sixteen or seventeen or eighteen, or any other age persons be regulated in the use of arms, the way an automobile is regulated?

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**Conservatives on the Second Amendment:
THE REAL REASON**

Dick Ahles

(Reprinted from "The Second Amendment's connection to slavery", on theday.com, 4/7/2013)

For those who accept the NRA fiction that the Second Amendment is a God-given right that cannot be infringed or abridged, interpreted or altered, here's a little history that should disrupt that ill considered belief.

It tells us the Second Amendment was added to the Constitution, not to uphold the citizen's right to own and keep his guns but to uphold his right to own and keep his slaves.

You can read about it at length in a richly detailed and heavily footnoted 1995 *University of California Law Review* article, "The Hidden History of the Second Amendment", by Carl T. Bogus, a professor of law at Roger Williams University. He is also the author of a "a generally admiring biography" of the conservative icon William F. Buckley that has won critical praise from both *The New York Times* and Buckley's own *National Review*.

His law review study, sent to me by a reader, maintains that a well regulated militia may or may not have been considered necessary to the security of all the new states but for the slave-owning states it was a matter of life and death.

This was especially true of the largest and most important state, Virginia, where 44 percent of its residents were slaves and the slim, white majority lived in fear that the new nation's concept of liberty and justice for all might prove contagious.

Slave rebellions were infrequent but horror stories about them haunted southerners. They especially dwelt upon an uprising in South Carolina on a Sunday morning in 1739 when slaves broke into a storehouse, seized guns and powder and marched south, killing whites and setting fire to their homes along the way. The colony's lieutenant governor rushed to a church and alerted the male worshippers, who were required by law to carry their guns, even to church. They left the service, pursued the slaves, killed scores of them and suppressed the revolt.

But the colonies did not rely on poorly trained militias in their revolution. A regular army, readied for battle by British-trained American officers and foreign sympathizers like the Prussian Baron von Steuben and the Marquis de Lafayette, was hastily formed when colonial militias – minutemen, if you will – proved ill prepared at best.

South Carolina kept most of its militiamen at home out of fear of uprisings by their slaves. And after the war the South worried that anti-slavery sentiment would empower Congress to disarm the militias and destroy the region's principal instrument of slave control.

And so, before it voted to become the vital ninth state to ratify the Constitution, Virginia held a constitutional convention of its own in 1788 and passed a Declaration of Rights, including one that stated, "That the people have the right to bear arms; that a well-regulated militia, composed of the body of the people trained to arms, is the proper,

natural and safe defense of the United States."

Note the similarity to the Second Amendment, as finally written by Virginian James Madison, a principal framer of the Constitution who originally opposed amending it. Madison changed his position after fellow Virginians passed their own declaration of rights, then blocked his quest for a Senate seat and only narrowly elected him to the House.

But also note how Madison reversed the Declaration of Rights text, putting not the right to bear arms first, but the reason behind that right, the need for a well-regulated militia. Contrary to popular myth, there was no public outcry for the right to bear arms, except in the new southern states. Also notice he omitted the words about a militia being a proper means of defense for the United States, possibly assuming that was understood.

Ever since gun control became an issue following the attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan, I have tried to understand why that awkwardly constructed amendment was written as it was, with so much emphasis on the need for a well-regulated militia. This study is the best explanation I have seen.

As the author states, "To bear arms was a term that meant participating in military affairs, not merely carrying a weapon" and with the southern states concerned about the future of slavery, that well-regulated militia was not a right, it was a means of survival.

Then, there is the more succinct observation by contemporary historian Gary Wills:

"One does not bear arms against a rabbit."

**Conservatives on the Second Amendment:
REPEAL THE SECOND AMENDMENT**
Bret Stephens

(Excerpted from The New York Times OpEd page, 10/5/2017)

I have never understood the conservative fetish for the Second Amendment. From a law-and-order standpoint, more guns means more murder. ... From a personal-safety standpoint, more guns means less safety. ... From a national-security standpoint, the Amendment's suggestion that a "well-regulated militia" is "necessary to the security of a free State," is quaint. The Minutemen that will deter Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-un are based in missile silos in Minot, N.D., not farmhouses in Lexington, Mass.

From a personal liberty standpoint, the idea that an armed citizenry is the ultimate check on the ambitions and encroachments of government power is curious. The Whiskey Rebellion of the 1790s, the New York draft riots of 1863, the coal miners' rebellion of 1921, the Brink's robbery of 1981 – does any serious conservative think of these as great moments in Second Amendment activism?

And now we have the relatively new and now ubiquitous "active shooter" phenomenon, something that remains extremely rare in the rest of the world. Conservatives often say that the right response to these horrors is to do more on the mental-health front. Yet by all accounts Stephen

Paddock would not have raised an eyebrow with a mental-health professional before he murdered 58 people in Las Vegas last week.

What might have raised a red flag? I'm not the first pundit to point out that if a "Mohammad Paddock" had purchased dozens of firearms and thousands of rounds of ammunition and then checked himself into a suite at the Mandalay Bay with direct views to a nearby music festival, somebody at the local F.B.I. field office would have noticed. Given all of this, why do liberals keep losing the gun control debate?

Maybe it's because they argue their case badly and — let's face it — in bad faith. Democratic politicians routinely profess their fidelity to the Second Amendment — or rather, "a nuanced reading" of it — with all the conviction of Barack Obama's support for traditional marriage, circa 2008. People recognize lip service for what it is.

Then there are the endless liberal errors of fact. There is no "gun-show loophole" per se; it's a private-sale loophole, in other words the right to sell your own stuff. The civilian AR-15 is not a true "assault rifle", and banning such rifles would have little effect on the overall murder rate, since most homicides are committed with handguns. It's not true that 40 percent of gun owners buy without a background check; the real number is closer to one-fifth.

The National Rifle Association does not have Republican "balls in a money clip", as Jimmy Kimmel put it the other night. The N.R.A. has donated a paltry \$3,533,294 to all current members of Congress since 1998, according to *The Washington Post*, equivalent to about three months of Kimmel's salary. The N.R.A. doesn't need to buy influence: It's powerful because it's popular.

Nor will it do to follow the "Australian model" of a gun buyback program, which has shown poor results in the United States and makes little sense in a country awash with hundreds of millions of weapons. Keeping guns out of the hands of mentally ill people is a sensible goal, but due process is still owed to the potentially insane. Background checks for private gun sales are another fine idea, though its effects on homicides will be negligible: guns recovered by police are rarely in the hands of their legal owners, a 2016 study found.

In fact, the more closely one looks at what passes for "common sense" gun laws, the more feckless they appear. Americans who claim to be outraged by gun crimes should want to do something more than tinker at the margins of a legal regime that most of the developed world rightly considers nuts. They should want to change it fundamentally and permanently.

There is only one way to do this: Repeal the Second Amendment. Repealing the Amendment may seem like political Mission Impossible today, but in the era of same-sex marriage it's worth recalling that most great causes begin as improbable ones. Gun ownership should never be outlawed, just as it isn't outlawed in Britain or Australia.

But it doesn't need a blanket Constitutional protection, either. The 46,445 murder victims killed by gunfire in the

United States between 2012 and 2016 didn't need to perish so that gun enthusiasts can go on fantasizing that "Red Dawn" is the fate that soon awaits us.

Donald Trump will likely get one more Supreme Court nomination, or two or three, before he leaves office, guaranteeing a pro-gun court for another generation. Expansive interpretations of the right to bear arms will be the law of the land — until the "right" itself ceases to be.

Some conservatives will insist that the Second Amendment is fundamental to the structure of American liberty. They will cite James Madison, who noted in the *Federalist Papers* that in Europe "the governments are afraid to trust the people with arms". America was supposed to be different, and better.

I wonder what Madison would have to say about that today, when more than twice as many Americans perished last year at the hands of their fellows as died in battle during the entire Revolutionary War. My guess: Take the guns — or at least the presumptive right to them — away.

The true foundation of American exceptionalism should be our capacity for moral and constitutional renewal, not our instinct for self-destruction.

A few more thoughts on the same subject ...

One only wishes Wayne LaPierre and his NRA board of directors could be drafted to some of these scenes, where they would be required to put on booties and rubber gloves and help clean up the blood, the brains, and the chunks of intestine still containing the poor wads of half-digested food that were some innocent bystander's last meal. — *Stephen King, Guns*

PROPOSAL ACCEPTED

(Transcribed from the movie "Men In Black")

Monster Bug from Outer Space: Place your projectile weapon on the ground.

Redneck Edgar: You can have my gun, when you pry it from my cold dead fingers.

MBfOS: Your proposal is acceptable. ... *Zap!!*

FROM A DUTCH ANTI-GUN TV COMMERCIAL

Operator: 911, what's your emergency?

Caller: I'm wounded! I need thoughts and prayers!

Operator: I'll send an ambulance, sir.

Caller: No! I said thoughts and prayers!

WHY WE LIVE IN NEW YORK #317

In Texas you can legally own more guns than sex toys; there's a god-given right to own guns, but definitely not more than six vibrators. A 1973 sex toy law makes it illegal for someone to possess "six or more obscene devices or identical or similar obscene articles ...".

But there is rebellion. According to the school penal code, guns are allowed on the University of Texas at Austin campus while sex toys are banned. So Jessica Jin organized the year's best-named student protest: "Cocks not Glockes".

The Humanist Activist

GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

Dorothy Kahn

“Innocent until proven guilty” is at the heart of American jurisprudence, yet thousands of Americans who will ultimately be acquitted of criminal charges are punished by being remanded in custody awaiting trial, disrupting their lives, damaging their relationships, and exposing them to a harsh prison environment.

In the USA, this confinement can last for months or even years until their guilt or innocence is judged in a court of law. Thus, far too many have suffered punishment without ever being judged guilty. The problem is aggravated by regular postponement of trial dates, extending the punishment even before a trial begins.

This travesty is even more unjust because the majority of those caught up in that horror are marginalized citizens, people “of color”, the poor or the mentally ill. As a result of this system, many people in this position “cop a plea”, that is, they make a false admission of guilt and accept the nasty consequences of having a criminal record. This is simply not fair, and it runs contrary to our core values as humanists.

The engine that drives this shameful state of affairs is the assumption that bail, a deposit of cash with the court, is needed to guarantee appearance for trial. While the wealthy and the privileged can usually arrange for bail, others are not so lucky, and that assumption is heartily supported by the bail bond industry that profits from the system. But according to Robin Steinberg and David Feige, writing for The Marshall Project¹, “The entire pretrial-detention system could be ended tonight – if only judges would set personal-recognition bonds or other forms of bail that involve signing a promissory note rather than surrendering cash up front.”

However, this common sense solution is not being implemented in New York. Rather, the city plans to create a “pretrial-services system” at an estimated annual cost of \$18 million.¹ That system is, in fact, almost as bad and possibly worse than the current one, since it substitutes a de facto sentence of probation on unconvicted defendants.

Another group, The Bronx Defenders, points out that such draconian measures as pretrial detention or pretrial service systems would often be unnecessary if judges and attorneys made proper use of the New York State Bail Statute. To help move toward a more humane system, the Bronx Defenders has

“... created teaching materials and conducted trainings for public defenders, private attorneys and judges on alternative forms of bail. As a result of our initiative in the Bronx, 12 judges have used alternative forms of bail, resulting in the pre-trial release of countless clients.”²

Hopefully, the educational approach will continue to make progress, sparing many innocent New Yorkers unfair detention, onerous bail, or “pretrial service systems”.

Another reason to be cautiously optimistic about a reduction in the number of people who get entangled in the

justice system is the trend that was initiated by opinions of the court and implemented by Mayors Bloomberg and de Blasio. New policies have curtailed “stop and frisk” tactics, “cut back on arrests for low-level marijuana crimes, launched a new community-policing program, and put more emphasis on addressing the mental-health causes of crimes”.³ Both “stop and frisk” and arrests for minor crimes feed the bail problem, increasing the numbers of “innocent until proved guilty” incarcerated on notorious Rikers Island.

As a secular humanist, I believe that the criminal justice system should have more respect for human rights. We should support the work of the Bronx Defenders² initiative to educate judges and attorneys and encourage our city representatives to support efforts to eliminate the appalling social effects of our present bail system.

1. <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2015/07/09/the-problem-with-nyc-s-bail-reform#>.

2. <https://www.bronxdefenders.org/programs/bail-reform-initiative/>

3. <https://citylimits.org/2017/07/05/de-blasio-and-the-difficult-task-of-closing-rikers-island/>

ON “SACRED” LIFE

Remo Cosentino

To the Editor: For a long while I have tried to find support for a growing belief, fostered by secular humanism and many articles in PIQUE, that “All life, every bit of it, is bound together by a shared evolutionary history that was birthed and nurtured in this knowable universe ...” (Ed Gibney, *Evolutionary Philosophy*). It appears this belief has a name: Sacred Naturalism. I’m not prepared to swallow the whole premise proposed by Alice Andrews ... but it was nourishing enough to investigate further.

More importantly, those of us who emerged from the chrysalis of Catholicism, and still may feel that life is sacred, yet without the need of a higher being to bless and shepherd us through life, may be reinforced in the belief that there is a higher purpose to life on earth than self. I crossed that threshold many years ago, but it needs reinforcement from time to time. For all these reasons, I thought to forward the attached post [*below*] and see if there is anything in it that would be of interest for PIQUE. – *Remo Cosentino*

SACRED NATURALISM

Alice Andrews

(Excerpted from an “Evolutionary Philosophy” blog post, “An Evolutionary Imagination for Sacred Naturalism”, 10/20/2017)

If you’re not familiar with Sacred Naturalism, it’s something I came up with about five years ago to address the real human need to feel a part of something greater than the self, to participate in “the sacred”, to share this experience with others, and to do it *without* the supernatural.

As the evolutionary moral psychologist, Jonathan Haidt, explains: “The psychology of sacredness may (or

may not) have co-evolved with belief in gods, but it is now a very general aspect of human nature." Part evolutionary ethics, part spiritual ecology, part secular humanism, and part radical ecopsychology, Sacred Naturalism has various meanings to people who identify as sacred naturalists. Here's evolutionary philosopher Edward Gibney on what Sacred Naturalism means to him:

"All life, every bit of it, is bound together by a shared evolutionary history that was birthed and nurtured in this knowable universe, which ought to be loved and respected. There is no planet B. The secular, therefore, is sacred. And even though our wild imaginations can fill the unknown – and potentially unknowable – mysteries of the universe with a near infinite canon of myths and hopes ... they are not the thing. They are mutable, replaceable. And easily done so. Our need to survive here, however, by knowing, sharing, and wisely navigating the natural world ... is universal."

The evolutionary and cognitive sciences (including psychology) have pointed to the adaptive and psychosocial benefits of religion. But one need only check Facebook, read the *Times*, or watch CNN to see how the world's major religions are also repressive and threatening to life and the planet.

So one objective of the Sacred Naturalism project is to give a name to and for all those who are not represented by traditional religions (atheists, agnostics, secularists, humanists, religious naturalists, spiritual naturalists, "new ageists", as well as those who identify as nontraditional religious, and nonreligious spiritual) in order to connect, unify, and organize us. ... Our desire to form coalitions and alliances such as this is likely instinctual, an evolved psychological adaptation that was selected for via group selection, kin selection, or both (multilevel selection). ... It's also likely due to some higher-level evolutionary algorithm.

Another goal of the Sacred Naturalism project is to support the cultivation and flourishing of what we're currently calling *sacred sites / sacred spaces*. These are sites, spaces, and centers which are the center of community life, where people can come together regularly, as well as other times, for music and words of science; philosophical wisdom, such as evolutionary ethics; poetry; contemplative practices; rituals and art; prosocial work; and ceremonies.

Comment: Although almost all readers of PIQUE would agree with physicist Lawrence Krauss' fiat that there is no "sacred" in science – and by extension in secular humanism – I felt that this viewpoint was interesting, even challenging enough to stimulate further thoughts, and even debate, in these pages. The website for sacred naturalism is at <http://www.sacrednaturalism.org/> - JR

LAWRENCE KRAUSS ON "SACRED"

(Excerpted from "All Scientists Should Be Militant Atheists", The New Yorker, 10/8/2015)

In science, of course, the very word "sacred" is profane. No ideas, religious or otherwise, get a free pass. The notion that some idea or concept is beyond question or attack is anathema to the entire scientific undertaking. This

commitment to open questioning is deeply tied to the fact that science is an atheistic enterprise. ... In my more than thirty years as a practicing physicist, I have never heard the word "God" mentioned in a scientific meeting. Belief or nonbelief in God is irrelevant to our understanding of the workings of nature

Comment: But "belief in God" is not what Ms. Andrews or our own Remo, above, are talking about, is it? Still, can we really separate "sacred" from "divine"? Readers? - JR

GUYS: JUST IN CASE YOU THINK THE #MeToo MOVEMENT IS AN OVER-REACTION OR A WITCH HUNT

Jackson Katz

(Transcribed from a Facebook post by philosopher Valerie Tarico of this excerpt from Katz's, The Macho Paradox: Why Some Men Hurt Women and How All Men Can Help, forwarded by Gretchen Robinson)

I draw a line down the middle of a chalkboard, sketching a male symbol on one side and a female symbol on the other. Then I ask just the men: What steps do you guys take, on a daily basis, to prevent yourselves from being sexually assaulted?

At first there is a kind of awkward silence as the men try to figure out if they've been asked a trick question. The silence gives way to a smattering of nervous laughter. Occasionally, a young a guy will raise his hand and say, "I stay out of prison."

This is typically followed by another moment of laughter, before someone finally raises his hand and soberly states, "Nothing. I don't think about it."

Then I ask women the same question.

What steps do you take on a daily basis to prevent yourselves from being sexually assaulted? Women throughout the audience immediately start raising their hands. As the men sit in stunned silence, the women recount safety precautions they take as part of their daily routine. Here are some of their answers:

Hold my keys as a potential weapon. Look in the back seat of the car before getting in. Carry a cell phone. Don't go jogging at night. Lock all the windows when I sleep, even on hot summer nights. Be careful not to drink too much. Don't put my drink down and come back to it; make sure I see it being poured. Own a big dog. Carry Mace or pepper spray. Have an unlisted phone number. Have a man's voice on my answering machine. Park in well-lit areas. Don't use parking garages. Don't get on elevators with only one man, or with a group of men. Vary my route home from work. Watch what I wear. Don't use highway rest areas. Use a home alarm system. Don't wear headphones when jogging. Avoid forests or wooded areas, even in the daytime. Don't take a first-floor apartment. Go out in groups. Own a firearm. Meet men on first dates in public places. Make sure to have a car or cab fare. Don't make eye contact with men on the street. Make assertive eye contact with men on the street.

Comment: No comment. - JR

SHSNY CALENDAR: NOVEMBER - JANUARY

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

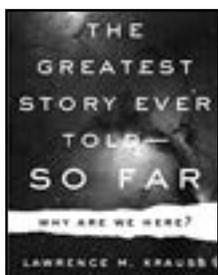
THURS, NOV 2, 7-8:30 pm
THE COMMUNITY CHURCH
OF NEW YORK

28 East 35 St. (front lounge)
We'll discuss

**THE GREATEST STORY
EVER TOLD – SO FAR:
Why Are We Here?
Lawrence Krauss**

*In the beginning there was light.
But more than this, there was gravity.
After that, all hell broke loose...*

Award-winning theoretical physicist Lawrence Krauss tells the dramatic story of the discovery of the hidden world of reality – a grand poetic vision of nature – and how we find our place within it.



Krauss beautifully explains how our refusal to believe that there are unknowable cosmic truths has rewarded humanity with brilliantly precise answers to puzzles previously obscured by the fog of dogmatic assurance.

The Greatest Story challenges us to re-envision ourselves and our place within the universe, as it appears that “God” does play dice with the universe.

In the incisive style of his scintillating essays for *The New Yorker*, Krauss celebrates the greatest intellectual adventure ever undertaken – to understand why we are here in a universe where fact is stranger than fiction.

– Paperback and Kindle available.

*Join us even if you haven't
finished reading.
The SHSNY Book Club
is open to all ... and free!*

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURS, DEC 7, 7-8:30 pm
Community Church of New York
**HOMO DEUS: A BRIEF
HISTORY OF TOMORROW**

Yuval Noah Harari

Harari, best-selling author of the international phenomenon *Sapiens*, returns with an equally original, compelling, and provocative book, turning his focus toward humanity's future, and our quest to upgrade humans into gods.

Homo Deus explores the projects, dreams and nightmares that will shape the twenty-first century – from overcoming death to creating artificial life. It asks the fundamental questions: Where do we go from here?

– Paperback and Kindle available.

SHSNY BOOK CLUB

THURS, JAN 4, 7-8:30 pm
Community Church of New York
**THE EVANGELICALS:
The Struggle to Shape America**
Frances FitzGerald

“A page turner: . . . Anyone curious about the state of conservative American Protestantism will have a trusted guide in this Bancroft and Pulitzer Prize winner . . .

“We have long needed a fair-minded overview of this vitally important religious sensibility, and FitzGerald has now provided it.”
(*The New York Times Book Review*)

– Paperback and Kindle available.

SAVE THE DATE
WED, DEC 20 6:30-10:30
Reasonable New York
Winter Solstice Party 2017
Paulaner Brauhaus
265 Bowery

More info in December PIQUE.

SHSNY MOVIE NIGHT

MON, NOV 20, 6:30 pm
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)
SEVEN DAYS IN MAY

Should the nation's top generals rein in the President? On questions of war, peace, and nuclear confrontation, who's in charge?



Sound familiar? Okay, in this 1964 thriller, roles are reversed and the generals are the bad guys and the President is sane – but don't miss the chance to see Burt Lancaster and Kirk Douglas at the very top of their form in “one of the best political films of all time”.

After-Film Discussion:

Let's compare crises: 1964 v. 2017.
SHSNY Movie Night is FREE.
(But put something on the bar besides your elbow.)

BRUNCH & CONVERSATION
SUN, NOV 19, 11:30 am
The Gem Saloon
375 Third Ave. (27 St)

Bright and lively, with a broad brunch/lunch menu, The Gem is our new Sunday-morning home. We have the first-floor, behind-the-bar room to ourselves (and



we've rearranged seating to cut down noise). So see the menu at

thegemsaloon-nyc.com, and come join 20 or more of your fellow freethinkers for food, fun and convivial conversation, including the Dorothy Kahn-led ...

After-Brunch Discussion:

*In a world of 7+ billion people,
how moral is it to have children?*

SHSNY CALENDAR: NOVEMBER - JANUARY

GREAT LECTURES ON DVD

WED, NOV 15, 7 pm

Stone Creek Bar & Lounge

140 East 27 St (Lex-3rd Aves)

PLATO AT THE GOOGLEPLEX:

Why Philosophy Won't Go Away

Rebecca Goldstein

Stephen Hawking said philosophy is dead. Plato would disagree, says acclaimed philosopher and novelist Rebecca Goldstein, who provides a dazzlingly original plunge into the drama of philosophy, revealing its hidden role in today's debates on religion, morality, politics, and science.



Philosophy is not obsolete, and the ancient questions that Plato asked are still relevant in the age of cosmology and neuroscience, crowd-sourcing and cable news.

Imagine that Plato came to life in the 21st century and embarked on a multicity speaking tour. How would he handle the host of a cable news program who denies there can be morality without religion?

What would Plato make of Google and the internet, and of the idea that knowledge can be crowd-sourced rather than reasoned out by experts?

With a philosopher's depth and a novelist's imagination and wit, Goldstein probes the deepest issue confronting us by allowing us to eavesdrop on Plato as he takes on the modern world.

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STUDYING HUMANISM

MON, NOV 27, 6:30-8:30 pm

Community Church of New York

28 East 35 St. (Gallery)

2017-18 Meeting #3

KIERKEGÅRD

and

"Fear and Trembling"

Considered a "founding father" of Existentialism (the subject of our October study), 19thC Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard anticipated Sartre, Beauvoir, and the whole of the 20thC with the concept that we all have choices in life, and that freedom consists in using that choice.



He attacked the philosophical and ecclesiastical establishments of his day for misrepresenting the highest task of human existence—namely, becoming oneself in an ethical and religious sense.

Kierkegaard-fascinated Elaine Heller will lead our discussion.

Required Reading:

Just half an hour at Wikipedia:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fear_and_Trembling

PLANNING AHEAD

The usual SHSNY schedule (barring holidays and weather calamities) is ...

Book Club: First Thursday

at the Community Church of NY

Movie Night: Second Monday

at Stone Creek Lounge.

Brunch: Third Sunday

at The Gem Saloon

Great Lectures on DVD:

4th Wednesday

at Stone Creek Lounge.

Studying Humanism: Last Monday

at the Community Church of NY

More info: www.shsnny.org

and/or 646-922-7389

An Evening with

DAVID MADISON

MON, NOV 13, 6:00 pm

Community Church of New York

28 East 35 St. – Gallery

Meet the author of

TEN TOUGH PROBLEMS

IN CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

AND BELIEF

David Madison earned his PhD in Biblical Studies from Boston University School of Theology in 1975. For nine years, he had served as pastor for two congregations in Massachusetts, until his deep interest in the Bible got overshadowed by skepticism.



He was raised on the northern Indiana prairie in the 1940s and 1950s, where, as he puts it, "two religions commanded the loyalty of the locals: basketball and conservative Christianity—and in that order." He didn't have much use for basketball, but the "runner-up cult" was the one for him. It was a devotion that would take him years to undo.



As he reflected on the many problems that hobble Christianity, David's concept for the book gelled. There are, in fact, far more than ten problems, but the deconstruction of Christianity can be accomplished more efficiently by gathering them into ten categories, and we all like top-ten lists.

So come and hear what this engaging, witty minister-turned-atheist has to say. The evening promises to be educational, entertaining ... and fun.

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**“SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE
ISN’T IN THE CONSTITUTION”
... AND OTHER AMERICAN MYTHS**

Part 1

Jonathan Engel

(Editor: This is Part 1 of Jon’s boil-down of his outstanding presentation to an appreciative full house at our Freethought Day celebration last month. Thank you, Jon. — JR)

There are people in the United States today who seek to deny that our Constitution separates church and state, or even that it should. Such people deny not only the importance, but the very existence of the separation of church and state in the Constitution, and they use certain myths to promote these beliefs. In this essay I will examine three of these myths to see if there is any truth to them: “Separation of Church and State Isn’t in the Constitution”; “The Ten Commandments are the Basis for Our Laws”; and “Even If the Government Can’t Promote a Specific Religion, It Can Promote Religion in General”. Our method for conducting this examination will be the use of reason and logic, the tools of the humanist and the freethinker.

Of course, the actual words “separation of church and state” do not appear in the Constitution. But that does not mean that the framers, signers and ratifiers of the U.S. Constitution did not intend this concept to be an important pillar of our governing institutions. They did. How do we know this? The Constitution, before its amendments, mentioned religion in only one place, Article 6, Paragraph 3, which says in part “no religious test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public trust under the United States”. If separation of church and state was not intended, why would the Founders have crafted the document that directs how our government shall operate, and only mention religion to say that no one has to believe it (or any particular version of it) in order to hold public office, thus separating a person’s government responsibility from their religious beliefs?

We can also look for guidance in this area at the words of James Madison, the primary draftsman of the Constitution and the sole draftsman of the Bill of Rights. In 1803 Madison wrote this on the subject: “The purpose of separating church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries.” It is simply not logical to believe that someone as erudite as James Madison would talk about the *purpose* of separating church and state if he didn’t think that separation existed in the first place. And he’s clear as to what that purpose is: to keep us from killing each other over whose religion should dominate.

But there’s another very simple counter-argument that I want to posit to those who spout the “separation of church and state isn’t in the Constitution” canard. We all know that the Constitution provides for a separation of powers between three branches (Executive, Legislative, and Judicial), and that it contains a “system of checks and balances” to keep any one branch from becoming too powerful. But the

phrases “separation of powers” and “system of checks and balances” do not appear anywhere in the Constitution. But does this mean that these two principles were not intended? Of course not. We can see from the document itself and from the words of its drafters that this was exactly what was intended. Just like separation of church and state. We didn’t need these exact words to appear in the Constitution to know that these concepts were intended as governing principles of our country.

The next myth we want to examine is “*The Ten Commandments are the basis for our laws*”. At least that’s what many people say, and most Americans seem to accept this as fact, without really thinking about it. But is this true? Let’s use reason and logic to decide. If this is true, then we would expect to see a high degree of correlation between the Ten Commandments and our laws. So let’s take a look at the Ten Commandments and see if that correlation really exists:

No. 1: “*I am the Lord thy God; Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.*” This statement comes from the Old Testament of the Bible, and so from the God of Jews and Christians, who both hold the Old Testament as a holy text. But the U.S. Constitution, in its First Amendment, guarantees the right to the free exercise of religion. Therefore, in our country, our most important law states that you can worship any god you please. And so here we see that our Constitution not only fails to support Commandment No. 1, it directly contradicts it. Certainly, the First Amendment, which is one of our most important civil laws, did not spring from the Ten Commandments.

No. 2: “*Thou shalt not make idols.*” See No. 1 above. United States law allows people to make idols and worship them as they wish. And so again we see no correlation between this Commandment and our Constitution.

No. 3: “*You shall not take the name of the LORD, your God, in vain.*” Our right to Freedom of Speech guarantees our right to take the name of this or any other god in vain. Once again, we see not only a failure of correlation, but a direct contradiction of one of the Commandments.

No. 4: “*Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*” While there are still a few jurisdictions in this country that retain some kind of “blue laws” (laws that mandate store closings on a particular day of the week, usually Sunday) they are few and far between. For the overwhelming majority of Americans, shopping is something they can do any day of the week, especially now with e-commerce so ubiquitous. Again, extremely little correlation, if any.

No. 5: “*Honor Thy Father and Mother.*” Most people would say that this is the right thing to do, but this Commandment is nowhere reflected in our laws.

No. 6: “*Thou shalt not murder.*” Unquestionably, murder is enshrined in our local laws as one of our most serious crimes. So we do find full correlation here, although the prohibition against murder is seen in societies that pre-date the Bible, and so it is open to question whether our own current prohibition stems from the Bible’s Ten Commandments, or from man’s earliest moral practices that are simply reflected in the Ten Commandments.

TRUMP, McCAIN, PAIDEIA AND DEMOCRACY

David Brooks

(Reprinted from "The Essential John McCain", The New York Times OpEd, 10/19/2017)

It turns out that John McCain's most important service to American democracy was not rendered in a P.O.W. camp in Vietnam. It's being rendered right now in the U.S. Senate.

In the first place, McCain seems to be the only member of Congress who insists on holding hearings and working toward compromise [on] major legislation. This would seem to be the very elemental prerequisite of good government — like a doctor seeking a diagnosis before performing surgery — but McCain appears to be the only member, or at least the only Republican, willing to risk unpopularity to insist upon a basic respect for our sacred institutions.

Second, McCain is one of very few Republicans willing to stand up for the American story. Human beings can be rallied around one of three things: religion, tribe or ideals.

Donald Trump and the campus multiculturalists want to organize people by ethnic tribe, which has always been the menacing temptation throughout our history. But McCain seeks to preserve our traditional rallying point — our ideals. My colleague Bret Stephens has already quoted from McCain's speech on Monday at the National Constitution Center. I'd encourage you to read the whole thing because this should be the rallying cry around which the nation rediscovers its soul.

Third and most important, McCain still believes that *paideia* is essential for democracy. *Paideia* is the process by which we educate one another for citizenship. *Paideia* is based on the idea that a healthy democracy requires a certain sort of honorable citizen — that if we're not willing to tell one another the truth, devote our lives to common purposes or defer to a shared moral order, then we'll succumb to the shallowness of a purely commercial civilization, we'll be torn asunder by the centrifugal forces of extreme individualism, we'll rip one another to shreds in the naked struggle for power.

As the brilliant Spanish philosopher Javier Gomá Lanzón reminds us, most moral education happens by power of example. We publish the book of our lives every day through our actions, and through our conduct we teach one another what is worthy of admiration and what is worthy of disdain.

Public figures are the primary teachers in this mutual education. Our leaders have outsize influence in either weaving the moral order by their good example or ripping it to shreds by their bad example.

McCain's career has had its low moments, as all of ours do — a banking scandal, Sarah Palin — but he exemplifies a practical standard of excellence to an extraordinary degree: enduring in Vietnam, seeking compromise legislation on everything from immigration reform to campaign spending, condemning torture after 9/11.

Moreover, I don't think there's another politician

No. 7: "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Generally speaking, adultery is frowned upon in our society, at least publicly, but is frequently merely shrugged at in practice. But the important thing for our analysis is that adultery is not a criminal offense in virtually all jurisdictions. And so we have another Commandment that fails to fully correlate to our secular laws.

No. 8: "Thou shalt not steal." See No. 6 above. Again, this Commandment does correlate to our laws, although it is open to question whether this Commandment really is the source of our laws against stealing, or if Commandment No. 8 merely reflects human tradition that pre-dates the Bible.

No. 9: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." There is strong correlation here, as perjury (intentionally lying under oath) is a crime in all jurisdictions. Not one of our most important statutes, judging by the severity of sentence, but a crime nevertheless.

No. 10: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's possessions." Are you kidding me? Coveting our neighbor's possessions is practically our national pastime. Whole TV shows are based on this one concept; without it, our entire consumer-driven economy might fall apart. And there are certainly no laws on the books that forbid it.

So what do we see here? Of the Ten Commandments, there are three that have correlation to our laws, three that are directly contradicted by our most important law, the Constitution, and four that have no real application to our laws at all. In other words, only three have correlation to our laws, while seven do not. Based on this analysis, is it reasonable to assert that our laws "stem from the Ten Commandments"? It certainly does not seem so.

But we're not done yet. If our laws are based on the Ten Commandments, it is logical to assume that all, or at least most, of our most important laws would be contained in the Ten Commandments. So let's take a look at some of our most important prohibitions of which the Commandments make no mention: kidnapping, rape, child abuse, treason, assault and battery, terrorism, slave holding, illegal weapons possession, narcotics dealing, improper handling of toxic waste. How could the Ten Commandments be the basis of our laws when they don't mention any of these very important prohibitions? When they contain a Commandment against coveting our neighbor's new Mercedes, but not against rape or child abuse?

To recap: when we look at the Ten Commandments, we see very little correlation between those Commandments and our current American laws. And, in fact, we see a number of outright contradictions. And we also see that many of our most important laws are not mentioned in the Ten Commandments at all. Ergo, you can only say that the Ten Commandments are the basis for our laws if you have a supernatural worldview that is divorced from verifiable reality, or if you have a political agenda in which you are trying to subvert the separation of church and state in order to inject your own, personal religious beliefs into the public sphere, where they clearly do not belong.

(Jon's conclusion will run in December PIQUE — JR)

now living who devotes so much of his speeches to little biographies of his own exemplars, people like James Stockdale, Bud Day, Morris Udall and Master Sgt. Roy Benavidez. He has turned his own heroes into educational resources for his country, and used them to evangelize our national ideals.

These sorts of testimonies help weave a shared moral order, which is necessary to unite, guide and motivate a diverse country.

That is an essential bulwark in the age of Trump. That is what needs rebuilding. Books will someday be written on how Trump, this wounded and twisted man, became morally acceptable to tens of millions of Americans. But it must have something to do with the way over the past decades we have divorced private and public morality, as if private narcissism would have no effect on public conduct.

It must have something to do with the great tide of moral libertarianism from Herbert Marcuse on down. This tide taught that progress meant emancipating the individual from shared moral orders. It taught transgression was always delightful and that morality was individual and optional.

The acceptability of Trump must also have something to do with millions of religious voters being willing to abandon the practical wisdom of their faiths – that what exists inside a person is more important than what is external, that no bad tree yields good fruit, that you should never trade spiritual humility for worldly ferocity because in humility there is strength and in pride there is self-destruction.

We've reached a point in which the tasks of paideia have been abandoned and neglected. "One could say," Gomá writes in his book *Public Exemplarity*, "that we are looking for the ideal of a virtuous republic composed of citizens relieved of the burden of citizenship."

It's not working out. Gomá continues, "In a time of freedom such as ours marked by subjectivism and vulgarity, a tolerance not tempered by virtue will lead inevitably toward barbarism."

Barbarism and vulgarity we have in profusion. Through his daily utterances, Trump is influencing the nation in powerful ways, but none would call it paideia. Few would say he is spreading a contagion that we'd like our children to catch.

The moral fabric of society is invisible but essential. Some use their public position to dissolve it so they can have an open space for their selfishness. McCain is one of the strongest reweavers we have, and one of our best and most stubborn teachers.

The 2017 Annenberg Constitution Day Civics Survey of U.S. adults finds that 37 percent can't name any of the rights guaranteed under the First Amendment. Only 26 percent can name all three branches of government; 33 percent can not name any. And in a sign of growing belief in Trump's "fake news" lie, 39 percent of Americans would now allow Congress to stop the news media from reporting on any issue of national security without government approval ... and to hell with the First Amendment.

THE PHONY CHRISTIAN WHOOPS IT UP WITH THE CRAZY CHRISTIANS

Michael Stone

(Excerpted from *Progressive Secular Humanist on patheos.com*, 10/13/2017)

Donald Trump became the first sitting president to address the Values Voter Summit, a gathering of anti-gay Christian extremists who aim "to preserve the bedrock values of traditional marriage, religious liberty, sanctity of life, and limited government that make our nation strong".

Speaking to the most deplorable Christian extremists, Trump called the U.S. a "nation of believers" strengthened and sustained by the "power of prayer".

We are stopping cold the attacks on Judeo-Christian values. As we approach the end of the year – you know, we're getting near that beautiful Christmas season that people don't talk about anymore. They don't use the word Christmas because it's not politically correct. You go to department stores and they'll say Happy New Year and they'll say other things; it'll be red, they'll have it painted but they don't say it. Well, guess what? We're saying Merry Christmas again.

And, Trump-eting his non-existent accomplishments, he also told the Values Voters:

I will tell you, I left Texas, and I left Florida, and I left Louisiana, and I went to Puerto Rico, and I met with the president of the Virgin Islands.

The Virgin Islands is, of course, a U.S. territory, and its president is ... Donald Trump.

MORE TRUMP GLEANINGS: OCTOBER, 2017

"Now, you know, I was a good student. I always hear about the elite. You know, the elite. They're elite? I went to better schools than they did. I was a better student than they were." – Donald Trump in a speech to supporters 8/23/2017

"Donald Trump was the dumbest goddam student I ever had." – Professor William T. Kelley, who taught marketing at Wharton School of Business and Finance, University of Pennsylvania, for 31 years.

And according to Vanity Fair:

Several months ago, former chief strategist Steve Bannon told Trump that the risk to his presidency wasn't impeachment, but the 25th Amendment—the provision by which a majority of the Cabinet can vote to remove the president. When Bannon mentioned the 25th Amendment, Trump said, "What's that?"

AND NOW THERE'S A NEW STANDARD IN CRITICAL THINKING

Occam's Razor: "Given two competing theories that make the same predictions based on the available facts, the simpler is the better." – William of Ockham, 1287-1347

Trump's Razor: "Ascertain the stupidest possible scenario that can be reconciled with the available facts, and that will be the truth." – Josh Marshall, *Talking Points Memo* 2017

THE NOVEMBER 8 ANNIVERSARY QUIZ: A CELEBRATION OF A YEAR OF DONALD TRUMP

John Rafferty

Gee, has it actually been a whole year since we woke up on the morning after last November 8 to a continent-wide “WTF”? Have we really spent twelve months staring goggle-eyed at cartoon characters like Mnuchin and The Mooch? Is that gone-viral image of George W. Bush with the caption, “Miss me yet?” not a joke anymore?

Sadly, the answer is Yes to all of the above. So let’s take a few minutes at this anniversary mark to assess what we know about our forty-fifth ... um ... you know ... *President*.

Go, and no looking at your neighbor’s paper.

1. Donald Trump has not revealed his tax returns because:

- a. They will reveal that he’s no billionaire;
- b. They will reveal that he owes the Russians hundreds of millions of dollars/rubles, and that the Russians own him;
- c. Probably both of the above;
- d. Those returns are still being audited – *really* – and not available because the incompetent IRS is a “complete disaster”, as everybody knows, everybody knows.

2. Donald Trump did not win the popular vote in the 2016 presidential election because:

- a. 3 million more also-angry but more thoughtful voters thought, “Whoa, wait a minute ...” before pulling the lever;
- b. The Russian hacking operation was still in beta format – they’ll do better next time;
- c. Probably both of the above;
- d. Wrong! Fake news! He *did* win the popular vote, except for millions of illegals. And if you don’t count libtard California – which *shouldn’t* count – *he won! Bigly!*

3. Donald Trump has already had more cabinet officers and other senior appointees resign in disgrace or while under investigation than any other recent president because:

- a. He has no government experience, appoints only toadies and sycophants, and has no idea what he’s doing;
- b. His appointees are toadies and sycophants with no government experience and no idea what they are doing;
- c. Probably both of the above;
- d. He is a born leader and brilliant visionary who is being undermined by traitors, moles and, really, everybody except Ivanka, Jared, Eric, and Junior. No, wait – not Junior. And, um, maybe, maybe not Jared.

4. Donald Trump has called the Mueller investigation into possible Trump campaign collusion with Russians to swing the 2016 election “fake news” because:

- a. He knows there’s nothing “fake” about the collusion;
- b. He knows that public airing of his Russian business dealings will expose him as a phony (*see 1.b., above*);
- c. Probably both of the above;
- d. Because it *is* fake, totally made up by liberal media like the “failing *New York Times*”, which “nobody reads”, and CNN, which he “totally doesn’t watch, totally”.

5. Donald Trump refused to condemn “alt-Right” white supremacist violence in Charlottesville, yet did condemn mostly black NFL players protesting police violence

against blacks, because:

- a. He has a personal history, on the public record, of racist discrimination and racist remarks, going back to the 1970s;
- b. He knows that while not all of his supporters are racists, all the racists in America are his supporters;
- c. Probably both of the above.

d. No, no, he blamed “some” of the whites, “a few” among the “many fine people” who marched under Nazi flags, and as he said, he really, really does “love the blacks”.

6. Donald Trump did not hurry Hurricane-relief help to Puerto Rico, as he did to Houston and Florida, because:

- a. He still blames Puerto Rico and everyone in it for the 2015 failure/bankruptcy of his P.R. golf resort;
- b. He didn’t know Puerto Ricans are American citizens;
- c. Probably both of the above;
- d. He did, *too*, hurry, getting the relief effort going in just two weeks after the storm. “Ask anybody,” he actually did an “incredible job”, as “everybody says, just ask anybody”.

7. Donald Trump has not built “the wall”, repealed Obamacare, or signed any major legislation because:

- a. He has no idea how Congress works, and wasn’t paying attention to “How a Bill Becomes a Law” in 5th Grade;
- b. He has spent more time on golf courses than he has in the Oval Office;
- c. Probably both of the above;
- d. It’s everyone else’s fault – he’s “ready with my pen”, for everyone else to get to work.

8. Donald Trump has brought us to the brink of nuclear war with North Korea by repeatedly insulting the equally egomaniacal Kim Jong-un because:

- a. The “fake news” liberal media was paying way too much attention to “Russia” and needed to be distracted;
- b. None of the other leaders at the G20 and NATO meetings took anything he said seriously, cared what he tweeted, or paid him anywhere near enough attention, *so there*;
- c. Probably both of the above;
- d. He is a brilliant global strategist and warrior who “knows more than the generals” and will “make America great again” by, if necessary, nuking 25 million Asians.

9. Today, a full year after the election, when you hear or read the words “the President”, in your mind’s eye you see:

- a. Barack Obama;
- b. Mount Rushmore and/or the Lincoln Memorial and/or any number of actors who have played the president;
- c. Probably both of the above;
- d. Donald J. Trump. *I said “Donald J. Trump”, goddammit!*

Score Your Knowledge of Donald Trump:

Score 2 points for every (a) or (b) answer you chose; score 5 points for each (c) answer; score 0/zero/nil/nada points for each (d) answer.

What Your Score Means:

- 34-45 points: You’re a rabid, anti-Trump ideologue*.
- 26-33 points: You’re a good judge of bad character.
- 17-25 points: You need to sharpen your shit detector.
- 0-16 points: You’re an idiot.

*Like me.

THANKS TO ... WHOM?

John Rafferty

(Reprinted from PIQUE, November, 2003)

This month most American families will gather on the fourth Thursday to join in the uniquely American ritual of setting aside a whole day to eat themselves silly, watch football, and fight with their relatives. Tens of millions of those Americans will also, just before the eating-silly part, join in the only prayer they'll mutter all year, something (thankfully) short that usually begins, "Lord, we thank you for all ..."

Okay for them. But those of us who don't talk to imaginary friends have to ask, to whom do we talk? Most of us feel thankful, but whom do we thank?

This year at my family's table I think I'll thank Abe Lincoln for instituting the holiday in the first place. The 1621 Pilgrims-and-Indians affair was a one-day one-timer, as was Washington's in 1789, which was actually about our new nation's success in the late unpleasantness with England. Lincoln's Day of Thanksgiving, too, had more to do with politics and battlefield victories in the Civil War than about bountiful harvests and roasted turkeys. But then so did the Emancipation document, his other big Proclamation of 1863. I'll thank Lincoln for Thanksgiving.

While I'm at it, I'm going to thank those same god-obsessed Pilgrims, who would have created a theocracy here if they could, but who nonetheless conceived the idea

of a country based not on geography, ethnicity or ancient hates, but on an ideal, a "city on a hill".

I'll thank the Founders, who risked their lives and fortunes to win a country for me, and made the Pilgrims' ideal a possibility. And I'll thank the tens of millions of Americans who have since served and defended my country – and me and mine.

I'll thank the generations of slaves on whose scarred black backs so much of my country's wealth and power were built. Then I'll thank the hundred million or more of the "wretched refuse" – micks and dagoes, beaners and hebes and chinks—who have since stood in courtrooms to announce that they wanted to be Americans, swore allegiance to my country, and contributed their talents and their sweat to the building of our city on a hill.

No, it's not perfect, it's not "undimmed by human tears", but we're still building our city, all of us.

That's who I'm going to thank: all of us. I'm thankful not just that I'm an American – which is an accident of birth, and there's no one but my parents, who are gone, to thank for that – but that I live in this country with so many other Americans, millions of whom I disagree with about dozens of issues, but nearly all of whom share my ideals, nearly all of whom I can count on to return to me the respect I give them, and who count me their fellow American. For which I thank them.

This Thanksgiving, I thank us.

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58 dead? What else is new?
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SHSNY will double your giving
to Humanist Hurricane Relief
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