

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

January 12, 2021

As humanists, the Board and membership of the Secular Humanist Society of New York support democracy and a peaceful transfer of power, and we decry Wednesday's attempted coup. Those responsible, from the thugs on the ground to their political enablers, including the current president, must be held to account.

– Jonathan Engel, President, SHSNY

“AMERICAN CARNAGE”

DONALD TRUMP HAS ACCOMPLISHED THE IMPOSSIBLE: HE HAS HUMILIATED AMERICA

John Rafferty

Banana Republic. Shithole Country. Tinpot Dictatorship. Take your pick of descriptors of what the world's oldest and once most successful democracy, “leader of the free world” and “the last best hope of mankind”, has become.

On January 6, 2021 – a date that will live in infamy just as surely as December 7, 1941 and September 11, 2001 – thousands of domestic terrorists, white supremacists and armed Christian Nationalists – incited and cheered on (from the rear, of course) by their lying and delusional would-be Mussolini – invaded and despoiled the Capitol of the United States, some of them chanting “Jesus is my savior. Trump is my president.”

The sun had not yet set on their bloody insurrection before right-wing media began its orchestration of lies and excuses: these weren't “real” Trump supporters, they were “Antifa” provocateurs. Look at the pictures: of the flag most at home at a Klan rally; of the thug in Nancy Pelosi's office who “didn't steal anything, I just took a souvenir”; and of the “Christian patriot” in the “Camp Auschwitz” shirt with its SMWNE caption (“Six Million Was Not Enough”).

“See you on January 6 – it's gonna be wild,” Trump promised his cult in December.

It was. Five Americans are dead, including a young police officer defending the Capitol and a young woman who, her grieving and angry family says, had succumbed to the insane stolen-election and QAnon conspiracy theories promoted by Donald Trump.

“Remember this day forever.” – Donald J. Trump to his cult, just before they marched into treason, January 6.

We will, Mr. Trump, we all will. Turn the page ...



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SHSNY, P.O. Box 7661, F.D.R. Station, New York, NY 10150-7661 / www.shsny.org

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H. RES.

Impeaching Donald John Trump, President of the United States, for high crimes and misdemeanors.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. CICILLINE submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on _____

RESOLUTION

Impeaching Donald John Trump, President of the United States, for high crimes and misdemeanors.

1 *Resolved*, That Donald John Trump, President of the
2 United States, is impeached for high crimes and mis-
3 demeanors and that the following article of impeachment
4 be exhibited to the United States Senate:

5 Article of impeachment exhibited by the House of
6 Representatives of the United States of America in the
7 name of itself and of the people of the United States of
8 America, against Donald John Trump, President of the
9 United States of America, in maintenance and support of
10 its impeachment against him for high crimes and mis-
11 demeanors.

ARTICLE I: INCITEMENT OF INSURRECTION

12 The Constitution provides that the House of Rep-
13 resentatives “shall have the sole Power of Impeachment”
14 and that the President “shall be removed from Office on
15 Impeachment for, and Conviction of, Treason, Bribery, or
16 other high Crimes and Misdemeanors”. In his conduct of
17 the office of President of the United States—and in viola-
18 tion of his constitutional oath faithfully to execute the of-
19 fice of President of the United States and, to the best of
20 his ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution
of the United States, and in violation of his constitutional
duty to take care that the laws be faithfully executed—
Donald John Trump engaged in high Crimes and Mis-
demeanors by willfully inciting violence against the Gov-
ernment of the United States, in that:

On January 6, 2021, pursuant to the Twelfth
Amendment of the United States Constitution, the Vice
President of the United States, the House of Representa-

tives, and the Senate met at the United States Capitol
for a Joint Session of Congress to count the votes of the
Electoral College. Shortly before the Joint Session com-
menced, President Trump addressed a crowd of his polit-
ical supporters nearby. There, he reiterated false claims
that “we won this election, and we won it by a landslide”.

3

1 He also willfully made statements that encouraged—and
2 foreseeably resulted in—imminent lawless action at the
3 Capitol. Incited by President Trump, a mob unlawfully
4 breached the Capitol, injured law enforcement personnel,
5 menaced Members of Congress and the Vice President,
6 interfered with the Joint Session’s solemn constitutional
7 duty to certify the election results, and engaged in violent,
8 deadly, destructive, and seditious acts.

9 President Trump’s conduct on January 6, 2021 was
10 consistent with his prior efforts to subvert and obstruct
11 the certification of the results of the 2020 presidential
12 election. Those prior efforts include, but are not limited
13 to, a phone call on January 2, 2021, in which President
14 Trump urged Georgia Secretary of State Brad
15 Raffensperger to “find” enough votes to overturn the
16 Georgia presidential election results and threatened Mr.
17 Raffensperger if he failed to do so.

18 In all of this, President Trump gravely endangered
19 the security of the United States and its institutions of
20 government. He threatened the integrity of the democratic
21 system, interfered with the peaceful transition of power,
22 and imperiled a coordinate branch of government. He
23 thereby betrayed his trust as President, to the manifest
24 injury of the people of the United States.

4

1 Wherefore President Trump, by such conduct, has
2 demonstrated that he will remain a threat to national se-
3 curity, democracy, and the Constitution if allowed to re-
4 main in office, and has acted in a manner grossly incom-
5 patible with self-governance and the rule of law. President
6 Trump thus warrants impeachment and trial, removal
7 from office, and disqualification to hold and enjoy any of-
8 fice of honor, trust, or profit under the United States.

WHAT LIBERALS GET WRONG ABOUT RELIGIOUS CONSERVATIVES

John Stoehr

(Excerpted from *religiondispatches.org*, 11/19/2020)

On Monday, the *Times* ran an article as significant as it was generally overlooked. It was a short interview with Matthew Sheffield, a key architect of the right-wing media apparatus that not only spreads “alternative facts” but maintains an “alternative reality” that millions of Americans inhabit. He says ...

“Almost all right-wing support in the United States comes from a view that Christians are under attack by secular liberals. This point is so important and so little understood. Logic doesn’t matter. Fact-checking doesn’t matter. What matters is if I can use this information to show that liberals are evil. Many of them are not interested in reporting the world as it is, but rather to shape the world like they want it to be.”

Where to begin? First, perhaps, is the central role of nihilism. Everything is as good or bad as everything else, and nothing matters—unless it can be used against the enemy. Reasonable people engaging in the democratic process in good faith will always be at a disadvantage when facing people who care about nothing but power. Deferring to the authority of facts and reason is itself democracy in practice. Denying the authority of facts and reason is itself something else in practice. It’s authoritarianism.

Second, the conundrum of liberalism. Why are white evangelical Protestants (WEPs) and white conservative Catholics (WCCs) hostile to the LGBTQ community? Why do they believe equal accommodation laws violate their religious freedom? Liberals often tell themselves the reason for such hostility is fear—specifically that they fear what they do not understand. The solution, therefore, is education. Once WEPs and WCCs understand that a lesbian, say, isn’t a monster, they will accept her as a political equal.

What liberals do not understand is that, the more they communicate factually and logically, the more these people feel persecuted; the more persecuted they feel, the more they go to war. (Put another way, the more good faith goes in, the more bad faith comes out.) Liberals fail to understand that WEPs and WCCs understand everything they need to know, which is everyone who is not a WEP or a WCC is the enemy. When it comes to the enemy, nothing matters, except the cold-blooded prosecution of power. When liberals answer power with facts, they lose. They must answer it with more power.

Third, political equality is a perversion of God’s law. Liberal appeals to political equality, therefore, fall on deaf ears—if they’re lucky. Mostly, they arouse enmity, because asking WEPs and WCCs to accept as true the equality between men and women is asking them to profane God. The old orders of power (God over Man, men over women, white over Black, etc.) are God’s law, and they are defended in His name. Asking WEPs and WCCs to recognize the equality of a transgender woman, say, is a double perver-

sion since any deviation from man-wife norms is a literal abomination.

Fourth, the appeal of Donald Trump. Forget about religion for a minute to remind yourself who the president is. He doesn’t care about anything but himself. WEPs and WCCs think anyone who isn’t a WEP or a WCC is the enemy. Put these together, and you have what is, for all intents and purposes, a cult-like movement comprising millions of Americans who already felt the slow muddle of modernity was Christian genocide not otherwise specified. These people don’t want a freely elected president. They desire a king to rule them in this world just as they desire a king (Jesus Christ, King of Kings) to rule them in the next.

WHY? THEY HATE US, THAT’S WHY

Anonymous Bev on Facebook

To answer the question – Why do people continue supporting Trump no matter what he does? – a lady named Bev answered it this way on Facebook:

“You all don’t get it. I live in Trump country, in the Ozarks in southern Missouri, one of the last places where the KKK still has a relatively strong established presence. They don’t give a shit what he does. He’s just something to rally around and hate liberals, that’s it, period. He absolutely realizes that and plays it up. They love it. He knows they love it. The fact that people act like it’s anything other than that proves to them that liberals are idiots, all the more reason for high fives all around.

“If you keep getting caught up in ‘Why do they not realize this problem?’ and ‘How can they still back Trump after this scandal?’, then you do not understand what the underlying motivating factor of his support is. It’s ‘Fuck liberals’ – that’s pretty much it.

“Have you noticed he can do pretty much anything imaginable, and they’ll explain some way that rationalizes it that makes zero logical sense? Because they’re not even keeping track of any coherent narrative, it’s irrelevant. ‘Fuck liberals’ is the only relevant thing. Trust me, I know firsthand what I’m talking about.

“That’s why they just laugh at it all because you all don’t even realize they truly don’t give a fuck about whatever the conversation is about. It’s just a side mission story that doesn’t matter anyway. That’s all just trivial details – the economy, health care, whatever. ‘Fuck liberals.’

“Look at the issue with not wearing the masks. It’s about exposing fear. They’re playing chicken with nature, and whoever flinches just moved down their internal pecking order, one step closer to being a liberal.

“They consider their very existence to be superior in every way to anyone who doesn’t hate weakness as much as they do. They consider liberals to be weak people that are inferior, almost a different species, and the fact that liberals are so weak is why they have to unite in large numbers, which they find disgusting, but it’s that disgust that is a true expression of their natural superiority.

“Go ahead and try to have a logical, rational conversation with them. Just be forewarned.”

SECULAR POWER IS CHANGING AMERICA

James A. Haught

Here's a dramatic example of the growing power of Americans who say their religion is "none": Last spring, progressives in the Washington state legislature, backed by Planned Parenthood, mandated that all public schools must teach sensible, practical sex education. The goal: to prevent teen pregnancy, reduce sexual disease, save girls from "date rape", caution grade-schoolers about predators, foster respect between sexes, and the like. Democratic Gov. Jay Inslee signed it into law.

Conservative churches and Republicans erupted in outrage. Congregations signed petitions to repeal, forcing a referendum in the Nov. 3 election. But the hidebound opponents lost 58-42. Thus Washington became the first state to have sex education approved by public vote.

Danny Westneat of the *Seattle Times* wrote that the church defeat occurred "because of Washington state's most profound political development in recent years - the religion gap". He explained: "We talk all the time about the gender gap in voting, the education gap and the urban-rural divide. But in our state, an even bigger influence on local politics is religion. Or rather, lack of religion.

"In surveys of state voters released for the 2020 election, the group answering 'none' to the question of 'what is your religion?' easily forms the largest religious group in this state. The 'nones' made up 34 percent of the state electorate this year ... far higher than evangelical and born-again Christians at 19 percent, or Catholics at 14 percent. Also, 45 percent of Washington voters answered 'never' when asked how often they go to church."

Westneat said this godless cohort is a powerhouse in Washington politics. "Now, the 'nones' rule local politics, [and] tend to be strongly pro-science and against anything that smacks of morality-policing." He warned politicians: "Either appeal to the 'nones' or forget it."

Washington, Oregon and the "Left Coast" have evolved away from religion faster than some parts of America, such as Dixie's Bible Belt - yet they seem to indicate where the whole nation is heading. ... America now is losing religion faster than any other nation.

Gallup says American churches lost twenty percent of their members in the past two decades. Barna says two-thirds of teens raised in church drop out in their twenties. Southern Baptists lost two million since 2005. Once-prestigious "mainline" Protestantism is fading to a shadow. Meanwhile, churchless Americans began soaring in the 1990s and climbed past one-fourth of the population. They tend to hold compassionate social views, making them the biggest faith group in the Democratic party base. Researcher Ryan Burge of Eastern Illinois University credits them with tipping the 2020 election to Democrats.

Most of these "nones" are young, and the young vote at lower rates than seniors.

But if they continue rising as a progressive political force, America will be a better place.

A MEDITATION: WE MUST GROW PAST OUR INABILITIES TO LEARN FROM HISTORY OR ACCEPT THE VALUE OF SCIENCE

Part 1

David I. Orenstein

(Excerpted from *Humanist.com*, 1/6/2021)

It was Socrates who noted, "True wisdom comes to each of us when we realize how little we understand about life, ourselves, and the world around us." Centuries later, French philosopher Denis Diderot would co-author a tree of knowledge that essentially put the concept of "knowing" into a three-tiered taxonomy conditioned by Memory, Reason, and Imagination. It was the work of Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz, each playing a major role in the development of rationalist philosophy, and David Hume's support of skepticism that also helped develop more modern humanist traditions and philosophy.

Today, we might agree or disagree with these and other moral and scientific philosophers. However, their focus on the importance of both reason and knowledge remains steadfast and their work stands in determined opposition in so many discussions today. Sadly, there are too many debates and commentaries that lack an acceptance of rational truth, gleefully misunderstand history, and discredit and disrespect science. Each is forging a diminished public life and endangering public health and safety around the globe.

A huge bomb went off in Nashville in late December 2020. Millions are ill and hundreds of thousands have died due to a terrible pandemic. Racial inequity is systemic. Food insecurity and homelessness are rising. And access to education and the number of people enrolled in higher education is dropping.

Closing yet another year, especially with the mutually agreed awfulness of 2020, usually brings about reflection. In some cases it forces us to review our past ideas, judgments and actions. It may also make us think about how we individually and collectively can improve the future.

Many of us make New Years' resolutions each year to internally think and externally act better, a version 22.0 or 45.0 or 59.0, depending on our age. Some of us may make end-of-year choices on which charities to support and we may rethink our efforts and our needs in relation to others.

Still, I wonder if that is enough. Perhaps it is because of the pandemic, but I worry that in many instances we are so blinded by the immediate that we lose connection to both the past and the future. Such blindness leads to dangerous ideas and actions that lessen our chance to be humane to one another.

Are we so stymied by the present that we neglect learning about the past? Or are we so consumed by the present that we cannot collectively imagine a positive future? And why, for instance, is science and expertise viewed by many with suspicion or as a threat?

Doesn't rational truth sustain us better than magical thinking? While the acceptance of ideas without evidence

or proof are suitable and even lauded by faith-based communities, how and why did this spill over into conspiracy-laden politics? What has happened to the idea that obtaining and accumulating unbiased knowledge is a social good?

In every generation we find the majority of people are caught up in the politics and economics of the day. People are swayed by the media or indulge in gossip, or use technologies that appear to make life livable but in fact eliminate both connection and compassion. We humans most often live in “the now” and, if we do plan at all, it’s usually for the very immediate future.

For the majority of our species, “the now” offers both the comfort and the standard to which we attempt to understand and live through our life experiences and present selves. It takes a large amount of time and energy to truly understand the past and work on exploring or creating the far future.

Perhaps the way we’ve structured society leaves little energy or time for the majority of our species to contemplate or truly understand the implications of our history and our future?

From an evolutionary perspective, if everyone spent time summarizing the past or attempting to invent the future, few of us would be working on the immediate problems in the present. That could indeed stop us, almost ironically, from knowing the past and preparing for the future. Also ironically, I might add that our present problems are usually the result of decisions or actions created FOR US because of actions taken BY US.

In essence we may be doomed to be a species that tends to give the gift of knowledge and reason in equal proportion to our creation of situations that sustain our ignorance. But I will touch more on this later.

Humans left collective life behind many thousands of years ago. Both biological and social evolution has allowed us to live more complex lives by stratifying our societies. Simply put, stratification allows a few to work in areas that benefit the many or the whole. The world changed dramatically once we began farming and domesticating wild plants and animals. The move from band life to staying put and laying stakes, to changing whole geographies for generations to follow, allowed our ancestors and their social world to change and adapt dramatically.

But stratification, like all human creations, provides its own double-edged sword. It allowed us to compartmentalize our cultural ideas, our biases, our responsibilities to each other, our duties and our modes of living. It also meant that individuals can leave the past and the future to others to understand, create, or solve. It ultimately allows an ever-smaller group of experts to process and organize knowledge, making the rest of us end-users of their activities and imaginations.

(Editor: The conclusion of Prof. (and SHSNY Vice President) Orenstein’s essay will appear in next week’s PIQUE. – JR)

If there is no God (and there isn’t) then we made up morality. And I’m very impressed. — Jennifer Michael Hecht

OH, AND BY THE WAY ...

John Rafferty

(Excerpted and assembled from various sources)

This week, while we were watching Washington, the daily death toll from COVID-19 crossed 4,000 for the first time, according to the COVID Tracking Project. COVID-19 hospitalizations also reached a new peak.

States reported 1.9 million tests, 266,000 cases, 132,370 COVID-19 hospitalizations, and a record 4,033 deaths. The 7-day average for deaths is now over 2,750, also a record.

And things are only going to get worse.

In the coming months, state and local health departments will have to stand up mass-vaccination clinics that can handle hundreds or even thousands of people a day in the middle of a pandemic, when crowds are dangerous. Thousands of doctors’ offices and pharmacies across the country will also need to learn how to handle and administer unusually fragile vaccines. And eventually, as the pool of people eager to get a vaccine is exhausted, public-health officials will need to persuade the uninterested, the reluctant, and even the skeptical to get vaccinated, so that communities can reach the 70 to 90 percent necessary for herd immunity. The hardest work still lies ahead.

Knowing coronavirus vaccines were coming under “Operation Warp Speed”, the Trump administration got ready for a huge rollout:

- In early October, Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar promised “100 million doses” would be ready to go by the end of 2020.
- A month later that was revised to 40 million doses.
- On December 21, Vice President Mike Pence tweeted, “Under Operation Warp Speed, we’re on track to vaccinate 20 million before years end.”
- In reality, 20 million doses haven’t even been distributed. The CDC says that by the end of the year, only 3-4 million people had actually received the vaccination.

AMERICA TAKES LEAD FROM BRITAIN IN DUMBSHIT OLYMPICS

(Excerpted from thedailytrash.co.uk, 1/8/2021)

America is once again leading Britain in the Dumbshit Olympic competition to decide the most idiotic country on the f**king Earth.

The UK slipped into the lead in November, when it was still pointlessly claiming it would break international law for Brexit, while the US voted for someone sane. But the US has come roaring back after a sitting president incited a coup without any consequences apart from a Facebook ban.

Anglo-American relations expert Professor Mary Fisher said: “It’s been a rollercoaster ride since 2016, when we voted for Brexit and they topped it by electing Trump.

“Since then it’s been a constant race to the bottom. For every idiotic EU negotiation on our side the US would pull out of climate change agreements. For every ‘red, white and blue’ Brexit, they’d have a confected outrage about a kneeling football player. So the US is winning right now.”

SHSNY CALENDAR: JANUARY – MARCH 2021

FICTION BOOK CLUB ONLINE

The SHSNY Fiction Book Club meets online via Zoom for the duration of our enforced isolation. Join the Zoom Meeting at <https://zoom.us/j/97467470190?pwd=dGdEbTkwV0pSRmZRWHYvajFoTXlrZz09>
Meeting ID: 974 6747 0190
Passcode: Read

TUESDAY, JAN 12, 7:30 pm **THE LYING LIFE OF ADULTS** Elena Ferrante

With this new novel about the transition from childhood to adolescence to adulthood, Ferrante proves once again why she has become one of the world's most read and beloved writers. Another gripping, highly addictive, and totally unforgettable Neapolitan story.

– *Paperback & Kindle.*

TUESDAY, FEB 9, 7:30 pm **DRESSED FOR DEATH** Donna Leon

Commissario Guido Brunetti of the Venice police solves murders while navigating Italian society, politics and family life.

TUES, MARCH 9, 7:30 pm **MR. BRIDGE** and/or **MRS. BRIDGE** Evan S. Connell

Mr. Bridge is a classic portrait of a man, a marriage, and the manners and mores of a particular social class in the first half of twentieth-century America.

Mrs. Bridge completes the group portrait of a family, closely knit on the surface but deeply divided by loneliness, boredom, isolation, and sexual longing.

HUMANIST BOOK CLUB

Harry French will send the linking codes for the Zoom meetings. Send your address to: htfrench46@gmail.com
Meanwhile, do the reading ...

THURS, FEB 4, 7:00 pm **CASTE: THE ORIGINS OF OUR DISCONTENTS** Isabel Wilkerson

Pulitzer-winner Wilkerson's portrait of an unseen phenomenon in America: a hidden caste system, a hierarchy of human rankings. A #1 *NYTimes* bestseller, long-listed for the National Book Award.

"An instant American classic and almost certainly the keynote nonfiction book of the American century thus far." – Dwight Garner, *The New York Times*

THURS, MARCH 4, 7:00 pm **A LOT OF PEOPLE ARE SAYING:** *The New Conspiracism and the Assault on Democracy* Nancy L. Rosenblum and Russell Muirhead

Conspiracy theories are as old as politics. But conspiracists have introduced something new: conspiracy without theory. And the new conspiracism has moved from the fringes to the heart of government with Donald Trump. What is to be done about it?

THURS, APRIL 1, 7:00 pm To be announced

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HUMANIST HAPPY HOUR ONLINE

SUNDAY, JAN 10, 5:00 pm

Pour something, grab a snack, and join 15 or more humanists and rationalists for lively conversation in our SHSNY Happy Hour!

Zoom in at
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9806344432?pwd=c0NrNUoweDVGWWho2ditvYmJlEVjVGdz09>
Meeting ID: 980 634 4432
Passcode: SHSNy
Join by Skype for Business
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/9806344432>

MONDAY MOVIES: MUSICALS!

Let's have some fun, screening, talking about, and simply enjoying the best "all-singing, all-dancing" Hollywood (and other) classics. Rent 'em on Amazon (\$3.99), watch, then Zoom in at ...
<https://zoom.us/j/92351454127?pwd=OVg5NnBaUFc4NWtLbHJJNW1vZ1Y1Zz09>
Meeting ID: 923 5145 4127
Passcode: watch

MONDAY, JAN 18, 8:00 pm **A FUNNY THING HAPPENED ON THE WAY TO THE FORUM**

Zero Mostel! Sondheim music and lyrics! "Something that's gaudy, something that's bawdy, something for everybawdy ... comedy tonight!"

MONDAY, FEB 1, 8:00 pm **SWING TIME**

Some critics have called this 1936 classic the greatest of all the great Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers films. And with music by Jerome Kern and lyrics by Dorothy Fields ("Just the Way You Look Tonight"), no argument.