

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

September, 2007

We're back, and this month's bonus-point question is: What is "hate"? We say good-bye to a great and good humanist, talk to kids about butterflies and death, announce some changes of our own, drink in barroom wisdom from two of religion's biggies, razz a new Dumbth nominee, consider un-confirming religion, ponder little piggies in China and un-evolved pigs on American TV, and wonder who's allowed to be an American, and who's allowed to be (really, no, *really*) born again. — JR

Photo: Twin towers of the World Trade Center.

Caption: This September 11, imagine a world without religion.

IN DEFENSE OF HATE CRIME PREVENTION

**Norm R. Allen, Jr., Executive Director,
African Americans for Humanism**

I do not know the details of the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act (PIQUE, June 2007, "This is America, We Don't Punish People for What They Think," by John Rafferty). However, I am in general agreement with those who support this kind of legislation. The intent of such laws does not seem to be to make hate a crime. The original idea was to show that crimes committed by bigots against members of historically oppressed groups have an effect on the entire group (though such laws could be used against members of minorities who commit hate crimes against members of the majority).

For example, if White supremacists from the south side of Buffalo commit violent acts against innocent Blacks from the east side, the crimes have far-reaching effects and consequences. The bigots are sending out a message that Blacks are not welcome in their neighborhood — not just the crime victims. That message generates fear among many Blacks. Many Black people would stop traveling to that side of town to live, work, play, conduct business, etc. (By the way, when people are charged with hate crimes, there is usually strong evidence that hate was a major motivating factor in the commission of the crime. This could include the use of racial slurs, racist graffiti, membership in hate groups, threats to Blacks to stay away from White women, etc.) This in effect becomes a crime against the Black community in general.

Conversely, let's say a group of Latinos were to attack a Black man without racial provocation. That would not constitute a hate crime. The Latinos would not be sending a message that Blacks are not welcome in their neighborhood. (On the other hand, you might be aware of the Latino gang members in Los Angeles who murdered Blacks because of their race. They committed hate crimes.)

It is important to recognize the historical context that encouraged people to pass hate crime legislation. Throughout history, White supremacists in particular have used hate, violence and intimidation to oppress non-Whites. (And they have done so ruthlessly and effectively, especially in the American South.) People have passed laws against hate crimes to help combat this kind of madness. The fact of the matter is that I know of no

cases in which non-White bigots use violence and intimidation to keep Whites out of their neighborhoods and to subject them to segregation and oppression. Still, the law should be applied consistently. If Black bigots attack Whites because of their color, the victimizers should be charged with hate crimes.

Finally, Mr. Rafferty suggests that raving bigots like Fred Phelps and Michael Richards could be charged with hate crimes because of their speech. This is the common logical fallacy known as the slippery slope. As far as I know, laws against hate crimes have only been used when violent crimes have been committed. As humanists, we need not fear, and we must remain fully committed to the defense of free speech — even when it offends.

ON SLIPPERY SLOPES

Clyde Haberman

(Reprinted from “An Easy Target, But Does That Mean Hatred?” in The New York Times, 6/26/07)

Hate-crime laws have long had their skeptics, and the one enacted by New York State in 2000 is no exception. The law increases the penalties for wrongdoing committed out of hatred of the victim because of factors like race, religion, age, sexual orientation or disability. Beat up someone for being, say, Jewish or black or gay, and you will do extra prison time if convicted. The theory is that a crime motivated by hatred can affect an entire community, not just the victim.

But as critics see it, the law punishes thought. The actions themselves—assault, for example, not to mention murder—are already serious crimes. Adding years to a mugger’s sentence because he dislikes Jews or blacks or gays amounts to a penalty for holding beliefs that society considers unacceptable. So the critics would say.

And there lies an Orwellian slippery slope, they say. What other thoughts might one day be deemed impure? Some object to the creation of different classes of victims; they say it undermines the 14th Amendment’s guarantee of “equal protection of the laws.”

Now a case in Brooklyn adds a new twist, in the form of a question that goes to the heart of the law:

Can you have a hate crime without hate?

Yes, the Brooklyn district attorney says. But to a lawyer for three men charged with murder, that is “absurd.” It is up to a state judge in Brooklyn to decide who is right.

The case is rooted in the death of Michael J. Sandy, 29, last October. According to the charges, the three men used an Internet chat room to lure Mr. Sandy to a secluded area in Sheepshead Bay known as a gay trysting spot. They were in search of money and drugs, it is charged, and thought that a gay man would be an easy target, unlikely to put up much resistance or to report the crime.

The charges say that they beat Mr. Sandy, but that he broke free and ran onto the nearby Belt Parkway, where he was hit by a car. Five days later, he died.

The defendants are accused not only of murder but also of murder as a hate crime. It is the hate-crime charge that their lawyer, Gerald J. Di Chiara, wants tossed out. They bore no ill will against gays, Mr. Di Chiara says. “The crimes alleged are not crimes of hate but rather crimes of opportunity,” he wrote the judge, Justice Jill Konviser-Levine of State Supreme Court.

The distinction that Mr. Di Chiara makes is significant, some would say.

Not Brooklyn prosecutors, however. They acknowledge that there is no evidence of “an animus toward gay men” by the defendants. But blatant hatred is not required under the 2000 law, they say. If it were, the law would have explicitly said so.

What it says instead is that a person commits a hate crime when he makes someone a target “in whole or in substantial part because of a belief or perception regarding the race, color, national origin, ancestry, gender, religion, religious practice, age, disability or sexual orientation of a person.” The prosecutors say that the three men picked on Mr. Sandy precisely “because of a belief or perception” about him—namely that a gay man would make a soft target.

The statute’s language, they told the judge, is “unambiguous.”

Would that life were so simple.

The law also says that “proof of race, color, national origin” and all the rest “does not, by itself, constitute legally sufficient evidence” to substantiate a hate crime charge. More is presumably needed. Like what? Mr. Di Chiara cited a State Senate memorandum from 2000 that spoke of limiting prosecutions to “only those who are truly motivated by invidious hatred.”

Invidious hatred? Not on the part of his clients, the lawyer said. They were just looking for easy pickings.

Under the prosecution’s interpretation, he said, hate crime charges could be brought against a mugger who attacks an old woman in the belief that she will offer little resistance. Or against a burglar who goes after an illegal immigrant figuring the victim won’t go to the police.

One might also conclude, Mr. Di Chiara said, that “all sex crimes are hate crimes because the victims were chosen ‘because of’ their sex.” Yet you do not see rapists routinely prosecuted as hate criminals.

Slippery slopes. They are what happens, some say, when the law does not let actions speak for themselves, and climbs into people’s heads in often fruitless attempts to figure out what is rattling there.

TWO LETTERS-TO-THE-EDITOR ***THE TIMES DID NOT PRINT IN JULY***

To the Editor:

The June 25 *New York Times* carried an article stating that Rudy Guliani was being berated by Roman Catholic Church leaders for actually supporting abortion by not wishing to impose his anti-abortion beliefs on non-Catholics. A day or so later, Dov Hikind, who represents Orthodox Jews, stated that he could not support abortion because it was against his religious beliefs.

While Hikind has the right to oppose abortion on moral grounds, as an elected official he does not have the right to impose his religious beliefs on the rest of us. (Nor do any “religious leaders” have the right to impose their hypocrisy on us; we all too often read about abortion foes caught taking their children or lovers to abortion clinics.)

And that is precisely why I strongly support separation of church and state – because some, if not most religious leaders of all faiths still attempt to roll back history to the time when religious law was intertwined with civil law and the state tortured and burned those who did not adhere to religious law. (Our progress from those days has had many setbacks, and in the case of current Islam, has advanced not at all.)

Let those “leaders” and their believing followers act in accord with their beliefs, but leave the rest of us alone.

— *Art Harris*

To the Editor:

If a marketer of a product tried to place an ad that used misleading claims or out-of-context quotes, *The New York Times* would reject it out of hand. Why then, did the *Times* allow Hobby Lobby to run a full-page (A7) advertisement in the Independence Day issue headlined “In God We Trust” that used out-of-context “quotes” to sell the bogus notion that the United States was founded as a “Christian nation”?

To cite just four examples of the ad’s many mendacities, it characterized as Christian proselytizers such Deists and Unitarians as Jefferson, he of the “wall of separation” between church and state, who in 1823 wrote to John Adams that “The day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus ... will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter”; Adams himself, who wrote to Jefferson, “I almost shudder at the thought of alluding to the most fatal example of the abuses of grief which the history of mankind has preserved – the Cross. Consider what calamities that engine of grief has produced!”; Franklin, who famously said, “Lighthouses are more helpful than churches,” and who “found Christian dogma unintelligible”; and Madison, who wrote Virginia’s “Memorial and Remonstrance against Religious Assessments” that advanced fifteen arguments why government should not support religion.

Why should the hucksters who sell religion, specifically Christianity, get away with false and misleading advertising in the pages of the *Times*?

— *John Rafferty, Secretary,
Secular Humanist Society of New York*

WE HAVE ANOTHER DUMBTH NOMINEE: DEBBY SCHLUSSEL

(Based on Broadsheet on salon.com 6/15/07, and on debbieschlussell.com 6/14)

Photo: Debbie Schlusssel

Debbie Schlusssel, a nationally popular right-wing blogger and Ann Coulter wannabe, commented June 14 on a new Yale University study which found that the more daughters a congressman has, the more likely it is that he votes to support reproductive rights.

Ms. Schlusssel opined: “The conclusion they want you to get from this is that pro-life Congressmen are insensitive to women and don’t have contact with any. But I’d draw a different conclusion: Congressmen who are liberal are more likely to have slutty daughters.”

Ms. Schlusssel joins Congressman Dana Rohrbacher (past global warming may have been caused by “dinosaur flatulence”) and radio clown Rush Limbaugh (the Virginia Tech mass-murder gunman “was a liberal”) in the race for the 2007 SHSNY Dumbth Award for the year’s most clueless, anti-rational remark.

**SAY GOODBYE
TO YOUR RELIGIOUS PROGRAMMING
Ken Bronstein**

(Reprinted from Mr. Bronstein’s “President’s ‘Sermon’” in July NYC Atheist Newsletter)

Atheists have a saying: “All babies are born atheist.” What that means is that a child is born a blank slate. He or she becomes a Christian, Jew or Muslim because they are taught to be Christians, Jews or Muslims by their parents and their community. Put another way: There is no such thing as a Christian, Jewish or Muslim child; they are, rather, the child of a Christian, Jewish or Muslim parent.

Most children are, in effect, indoctrinated, instructed, programmed or brainwashed from birth into whatever religion their parents are, over a period of many crucial learning years. The programming may be subtle (prayers and Sunday school) or adamant (daily Hebrew School) or brutal (see the documentary film, *Jesus Camp*) but it is there: years of pressure into a belief system. The child has no say in the process, often no way out and no one to offer opposing views. Moreover, the child often is psychologically pressured by the need to belong, to be accepted in the community and to please his parents.

The Jesuits say, “Give us a child until he is seven, and he is ours forever.” In Pavlovian terms, that may be all too true. If you recall, the scientist Ivan Pavlov taught dogs to salivate (an autonomic response that the dog is not in control of) at the sound of a bell rather than at the smell and sight of food. But what few people know is that when Pavlov tried to reverse the process, he was not all that successful. Only a few of the dogs were able to regain their natural, autonomic salivation to food itself. The salivation to a bell was forever engraved in the brains of most of the experimental dogs.

Thus it is astonishing to me that despite all the conditioning to a religious system that most children experience—from the infant Baptism to the teenage Bar Mitzvah or Confirmation that we are forced to undergo—quite a few of us ultimately reject it. Some of us have apparently acquired the courage, the knowledge and the chutzpah to go against our early religious programming and declare ourselves emancipated.

But is there any way to announce this to the world? Though there are many rites and rituals to induct us *into* religion, I’ve discovered that there aren’t any to get us *out* of it.

Therefore, I’m suggesting that what parents do to indoctrinate a child into their religion should not be considered permanent and irreversible. I would like to propose what I call a reversal or dismissal ceremony—I’m searching for the right word—a renunciation, a voiding, a pardoning of the parents, when the child reaches his or her majority. My legal argument is that because the child is a minor, anything that was done to him that “brands” the child should not be considered valid or permanent. For example, you have a right to change your name legally if you don’t like it. So you should have the right, and the responsibility, in the question of faith, to dismiss, reject, change or not change what was done to you as a child.

I am proposing an Un-Confirmation or Un-Bar Mitzvah ceremony, available to anyone who has undergone a religious affirmation ceremony, often under duress from their parents. The person declaring his or her freedom from the religion they were indoctrinated into should hopefully have achieved some independence from their parents, and therefore may be as old as 25, 30, or even older.

So far, no secular organization has come up with a ceremony disavowing one’s former religion, but I believe it is a very important and positive action, revealing one’s true self to the community before supportive friends and colleagues. A life-affirming decision, such as avowing one’s dedication to truth, science, reality and secularism, is surely as important a feat as standing in front of an altar as a child and declaring oneself submissive to Jesus or Allah or Yahweh. Thus, I feel it is incumbent on us, as secular

leaders, to develop such a ritual and introduce it to the world. I would appreciate your comments.

— Ken Bronstein at nycatheist@aol.com.

JESUS AND MO WALK INTO A BAR ...

Illustration: Panel from Jesus & Mo cartoon

Jesus: You still mad about the Rushdie knighthood, Mo?

Mohammed: My mind is a turmoil of conflicting emotions. On the one hand, I am enraged that these puny infidels dare to insult the 1.5 billion people of the one true faith by honoring that apostate and blasphemer. They are worms who deserve to be crushed underfoot.

On the other hand, I am saddened by this display of Islamophobia. Why does the world persecute my people? We just want to live our lives in peace according to the will of God. Why must they torture our minds with their mockery?

Jesus: So, you are torn between self-righteousness and self-pity?

Mo: I can't decide which I prefer.

JESUS AND MO ENLIGHTEN THE ATHEIST BARMAID

Jesus: Barmaid, your criticism of theism is too crude.

Mohammed: Yeah, it's easy to attack people who believe in a literal, infinite, omniscient, beneficent, immortal deity.

Jesus: Sophisticated believers are different.

Mo: People who are mature in their faith know that God is a metaphor.

Barmaid: A metaphor for what?

Jesus: For the infinite, omniscient, beneficent, immortal deity, of course.

Barmaid: Wow, that *is* sophisticated.

JESUS AND MO, ON A PARK BENCH, CONSIDER THE BARMAID'S ARGUMENTS

Jesus: So she's like all "Problem of Evil." And I'm like, "Theodicy, barmaid." And she's like, "What's that?" So I'm like, "Theodicy provides reasons to believe in a loving God when faced with the reality of evil. Like maybe evil's not really evil, or it exists to allow us to be good, or God's plan is beyond our comprehension." And she's like, "It sounds like theodicy is not about reasons to believe – it's about excuses for believing."

Mohammed: So what were you like then?

Jesus: I was like, "Whatever."

Mo: Well said.

(Follow the conversational cartoon adventures of Jesus and Mohammed at www.jesusandmo.net.)

ALBERT ELLIS, 1913-2007 PSYCHOTHERAPY REVOLUTIONARY AND HONORARY MEMBER OF SHSNY

(Based on the NYTimes obituary, 7/25/07)

Photo of Albert Ellis

Albert Ellis, the founder of Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT), who died July 24 at the age of 93, had been an Honorary Member of the Secular Humanist Society of New York since 1989.

Sharp-witted and often tart-tongued, Dr. Ellis was called by both detractors and acolytes “the Lenny Bruce of psychotherapy,” yet was ranked ahead of Freud in a 1982 survey of clinical psychologists who were asked to name the figure who had exerted the greatest influence on their field.

Developed in the 1950s, REBT challenged Freud’s deliberate, slow-moving methodology. Where the Freudians maintained that a painstaking exploration of childhood experience was critical to understanding neurosis and curing it, Dr. Ellis believed in short-term therapy that called on patients to focus on what was happening in their lives at the moment and to take immediate action to change their behavior. “Neurosis,” he said, was “just a high-class word for whining.”

His basic message was that all people are born with a talent for “crooked thinking,” or distortions of perception that sabotage their innate desire for happiness. But he recognized that people also had the capacity to change themselves. The role of therapists, then, is to intervene directly, using strategies and homework exercises to help patients first learn to accept themselves as they are (“unconditional self-acceptance”) and then to retrain themselves to avoid destructive emotions — to “establish new ways of being and behaving.”

Dr. Ellis was the author or co-author of more than 75 books, many of them best sellers, including *A Guide to Successful Marriage; Overcoming Procrastination; How to Live With a Neurotic; The Art of Erotic Seduction; Sex Without Guilt; A Guide to Rational Living*, and *How to Stubbornly Refuse to Make Yourself Miserable About Anything — Yes, Anything*.

In 1990, Dr. Ellis addressed an SHSNY audience at the Institute for Rational-Emotive Therapy (later the Albert Ellis Institute). A report of that lecture follows.

AN HOUR WITH ALBERT ELLIS

(Reprinted from an unsigned article in PIQUE, Vol. 2, No. 6, October, 1990)

Albert Ellis, the noted psychotherapist who has been a humanist for decades and who signed Humanist Manifesto I in 1973, addressed 20 of our group on September 16.

The following notes do not begin to cover the succinct points Dr. Ellis made, and it is recommended that readers consult his books for clearer explanations, particularly (as those who attended know) as it is not easy to summarize Dr. Ellis’s views.

A group such as ours [SHSNY] allows us to be constructively active, he observed, and membership has its own psychological benefits. A group can carry on educational campaigns, can uphold liberty, can picket for certain noble causes. Key issues include fighting all kinds of addiction, crime, war. Overpopulation is a major problem, and humanists have to work for education concerning birth control as well as abortion rights. Ecology is another major concern inasmuch as our environmental safety is being threatened.

If humans war with each other and are unable to compromise or see how important it is to be flexible in everyday activities, then it follows they will approve of nations that are inflexible and analogously war-like. By ridding ourselves of the core of our hostility to

others and seeing that differences are to be expected and can be tolerated, we can disapprove of certain “screwed-up humans” but need not be hostile toward them.

Humanists are open-minded, non-dogmatic, non-Jehovian. Using the scientific method, humanists set up falsifiable hypotheses. A falsifiable hypothesis, as Karl Popper has shown, leads one to facts that can then lead to different hypotheses. We learn by testing hypotheses that truth is not absolute.

Unfortunately, “the goddamn movies are partly to blame” for people’s interest in magic and “that old fart Jehovah,” inasmuch as almost every other movie appears to include the supernatural or the magical. But humanists are interested in reality, not magic and absolutism, and in developing human potentialities. Science is intrinsically humanistic, but beware “transpersonal science,” which is metaphysical and leads to faith healing, the worshipping of gurus, New Age, and the like.

A humanist enjoys his long-range hedonism. He eats, drinks, and is merry for today and tomorrow (i.e.: not just for today, which could be destructive, as Epicurus knew). He has no heavens, hells, gods, devils. If he finds bad things, he works to rid himself of them. He has the ability to actualize and change himself. He tends to care for others. He tends to be individualistic, not subservient. He is not tied to the past, as Freud said. If he is disturbed, he admits his problem, then discards the “musts” and “shoulds” which were involved in his problem. A psychotherapist recognizes his work is closely related to humanism. But not to the mystical humanism of the Association for Humanistic Psychology.

More and more, scientists are helping mankind to be more flexible. By knocking down a theory, they thereby falsify a hypothesis in order to learn, and this leads to un-authoritarianism as well as to new hypotheses. New Age cults, on the contrary, are dogmatic and only pretend to be scientific. The challenges for secular humanism include not only New Age but also fundamentalism, censorship (“the harm of censorship is worse than the harm of pornography”), political dictatorships, and crime/drugs/alcohol.

“My hope is that as the newer philosophy of science prevails and we teach people to put up hypotheses that are falsifiable, then we can attack anti-humanism,” Dr. Ellis said, adding that he is optimistic about the future.

THE END, AS WE KNOW IT: TEACHING KIDS ABOUT DEATH

Noell Hyman

(Excerpted from Ms. Hyman’s Agnostic Mom column on HumanistNetworkNews.org, 6/14/06)

Among the wind-blown blossoms that flew around our feet, my three-year-old, Aiden, spotted a yellow butterfly that lay dead on the parking lot of my doctor’s office. I paused to let my Mr. Curiosity examine it. “It’s dead,” he muttered.

This concerned him. I suppressed my initial inclination to comfort Aiden with the words, “Yes, it’s dead and in heaven now.” Instead I explained, “His brain stopped working. His life is all done now.”

My concept of death has reincarnated into an entirely new animal since leaving religion. ... My kids held on to our previous idea of heaven when we left religion. ... Later, the kids asked about death, wondering if people are sad or hurt when they are dead.

“When someone dies, their brain shuts off,” I told them. “So they can’t be sad. And they can’t feel pain. And we have all the memories of that person and the things they did and how they made us feel.” ...

It is important to experience the mourning and the sad feelings of missing a loved one, but we can also celebrate their life with all its joys and difficulties. We can share stories, look at pictures, and laugh at the quirks and unique traits of the person who is gone. Such a focus at the time of a death should give our children an appreciation for the significance and brevity of life. ...

As we returned to the car to go home, Aiden wanted to see the dead butterfly one more time. ... I could have rushed him on or tried distracting him with another topic. But I knew that both the ideas of a butterfly and of death were important to him at this time.

Finally, we found the yellow butterfly where the wind had blown him a few feet away. We stared for a while. Looking at death from my current paradigm, I talked to Aiden about the happy life the butterfly had. Its life was over and it was short, but it was a good one. It got to fly in the sky and look for beautiful flowers.

Aiden wanted to pick it up. I was hesitant at first to let him touch a dead insect, then changed my mind. This was a chance for him to examine the body of a butterfly. It was also an opportunity to look at death close up. I wanted to give Aiden associations of confidence and gratitude rather than avoidance or anxiety.

I passed the butterfly to a fascinated Aiden. We pointed out the head, the eyes, the legs, the antenna.

It was time to go but Aiden wasn’t ready to leave his specimen. Again, with hesitation, I let Aiden bring the butterfly with him in the car.

We drove to the school to pick up Trinity from kindergarten. Aiden showed her the dead butterfly. She expressed a little pity, but then said, “At least he’s not sad. His brain shut off. So he’s dead, but not sad.”

In a discussion on my blog regarding teaching kids about death, one of my readers commented that he uses a book called *Lifetimes* by Bryan Mellonie. He explained that the book describes the lifetimes of various living things and focuses on the life that happens in between birth and death.

He explained, “I tell my kids that they do continue, not only in the life matter and lineage cycle, but as part of the world/universe per se. The world produced life and us along with it. We are not separate from it. Like a drop of water taken from the ocean and re-turned, when we die we return to the world. ... My reader then explained the results. “If you asked either one of them [my kids] what happens when they die, they will tell you, ‘We go back to the world.’”

Another reader gave this idea: “One thing that helped with my kids was the concept of the circle of life. I asked them to think about what would happen if no one died but we kept having babies. They figured out pretty quickly that this was not a good option.” ...

I love these ideas of using positive concepts when talking about death in general. Our children need to see us deal with death. I do not hide them from it (unless it is particularly gruesome) when they hear about someone dying. We discuss how sad it is, and then I focus the conversation on that person’s life before they died.

In my opinion, death is really about life. It is the conclusion of what was hopefully a fulfilling one. Death makes life meaningful.

We can talk with our children about the sadness that we feel when a person leaves us. We can talk about the love we had for that person, about the joy they gave us, and how they made us laugh and think. And we can talk about the joy our loved ones had while they were here.

AN INTERESTED PARTY COMMENTS ON IMMIGRATION AND THE 14TH AMENDMENT

Remo Cosentino

As always, July PIQUE was well done and thought-provoking. I especially was lifted by the article on the 14th Amendment by citizen Epps and by Bob Murtha's comments on our current immigration battles.

As an immigrant, I learned early to hold dear my right to full citizenship, albeit naturalized. I believe the times and the teachers when I came to America (perhaps WWII also was a factor) bred a better group of citizens. They taught as the meaning of citizenship; better still they included all in the promise of America, native born and immigrants. I am mindful of the incarceration of the Japanese, a manifestation of workings of the "know nothings." And there were many instances when I was called a "wop" – which only hardened me against those who would deny me my rightful place in this country.

I wish I had the confidence of Walter Issacson that America will right itself and not slide inexorably to failure as a democracy. I am more persuaded by Al Gore's and Chris Hedges's doubts (*Ed: Remo is referring to three more articles in July PIQUE*). At this point in our history there is far more wrong then right. PIQUE intelligently and accurately, I believe, mirrors the state of America's psyche at this moment: it's in a poor state.

CITIZENSHIP AS BIRTHRIGHT IS ONE OPTION

Philip O. Livingston, MD

While presenting the case for automatic citizenship for children of illegal immigrants born in the U.S., Robert Murtha's article "Citizenship is (and should be) a Birthright" in July PIQUE went on to denigrate all who would restrict immigration. Mr. Murtha states that nativists "feared that the U.S. would be overrun by the "mongrel" Chinese race, drunken Papish Irish and beer-swilling Germans" 140 years ago and "They are still with us. They still want to restrict immigration."

While individually most legal or illegal immigrants are wonderful human beings, there are over 6.6 billion inhabitants on this planet and many of them would like to be U.S. citizens. The issue, it seems to me, is not whether we restrict immigration but how and how much we restrict it. The U.S. population is now over 300 million and growing at a rate (conservatively) of between 1.06% (1) and 1.2% (2) per year, and this growth rate is accelerating (as the rate of immigration has accelerated), not decreasing. This represents a U.S. population doubling time conservatively of 66 years or 58 years, but realistically probably closer to 50 years.

There are of course near-term reasons for keeping the immigration flood-gates open. Agriculture and industry have come to count on easy access to cheap low-skill or high-tech skilled immigrants to maintain production and keep prices low. Consequently, there is a significant lobby for opening our borders, and this lobby is supported by the rapidly

expanding immigration lawyer lobby. An additional concern is that the social security system will place a greater burden on the young if we were to reach a zero-growth population level as has happened in Europe and Japan. But for the long term, say for our grandchildren or their children, can the U.S. really maintain the quality of life it now has when there are 1 billion U.S. citizens in 80-100 years? Water quality and quantity, air quality, congestion, open spaces are just a few of the considerations.

So how much of our rate of population growth is immigration fueled? More than 80% is due to current immigrants and their children (post 1970 immigrants), and since the immigration rate has greatly increased since 1970, this percent is also accelerating (3). So not just “know-nothing” nativists want to restrict immigration, but any U.S. citizen has just cause to want such restrictions. Reasonable people can argue over the level at which to restrict immigration and whether it should be based on the contribution the immigrant would make to the U.S. economy, a first-come first-served waiting list, family ties, or by Mr. Murtha’s article’s birthright.

One final concern, when PIQUE presents articles or editorials from writers with a vested interest in the subject matter they are presenting, shouldn’t the readers be advised of the writer’s professional bias or possible conflict of interest? It might have been reasonable to state Mr. Murtha’s occupation, immigration lawyer, in the article or heading.

(1) *Ferguson, Andrew R.B., “Review of the Collapsing Bubble,” by Lindsey Grant, Optimum Population Trust, Great Britain, September, 2006.*

(2) *Population Reference Bureau web site, www.prb.org*

(3) *Camarota, Steven A., “Births to Immigrants in America, 1970 to 2002,” Backgrounder, Center for Immigration Studies, Washington, D.C. July, 2005; Center for Immigration, Immigration Statistics*

BOB MURTHA REPLIES

Dr. Livingston’s letter is very interesting but addresses itself almost entirely to issues that I did not discuss. I do not denigrate “all those who would restrict immigration.” I denigrate nativist “know nothing” nationalists and their ilk whose opposition to immigration I take to be irrational. (I believe that this is another manifestation of the so-called “culture wars.”) Dr. Livingston’s arguments against immigration, however, are not irrational; they are Neo-Malthusian and address the presumed long term negative consequences of continued population growth.

I’d be glad to write something about the evils/benefits of immigration for PIQUE. I’d need a month or so to put it together. Please let me know.

P.S. I suspect that Dr. Livingston might be a member of a ZPG or NPG type organization. If so, it might be appropriate to identify it. I certainly don’t object to being identified as an immigration lawyer and AILA member.

THE EDITOR SAYS “ENOUGH,” FOR NOW

Bob (and Phil and Remo):

I’m going to let the argument rest with Phil’s letter in rebuttal to you and your re-rebuttal — unless other readers weigh in. I’ve had three or four comments (which is a lot) about the July issue and this topic being “too political,” and not “secular humanist.” I saw the question not so much as a political one, but as a human rights issue—which definitely

falls within the secular humanist arena. What actually motivated me was the Epps article on the 14th Amendment and its extension of basic rights to more citizens. That article, in its final three paragraphs, brought up the current immigration debate. So I asked our in-house immigration lawyer, you, for your comments—which I appreciate as thoughtful and interesting—just as I value Phil’s rebuttal.

But I’m going to rein this in. I’m a Democrat and a green, but I don’t want PIQUE to be an organ of the Democratic or Green party, or to drive away conservatives and libertarians — we need all the good people we can get, and I have said several times, “If you want to talk about George Bush’s faith-based initiatives, this is your forum; if you want to criticize his tax policies, write a letter to the *Times*.” We won’t be able to avoid politics next year, so I think I’ll ratchet back this fall. If immigration becomes a major policy question in next year’s election, I’ll ask you all to write whatever you want.

— John

THE LAST WORD ON "THE LAST TIMES"

God

(Excerpted from “God: The Last Word” in Beam Me Up, Jesus: A Heathen’s Guide to The Rapture, by Jim Gerard.)

I bet you want to know about ... how should I put it ... My future plans. Especially those regarding you. It’s always about you, isn’t it?

First, there is no Rapture. That’s right — you heard Me. I mean, did you really expect Me to summon 144,000 of you at once? And to disappear you out of your clothes? Do I look like David Copperfield?

I don’t do magic.

And that whole bit about Me empowering Satan and then spending seven years fighting him on Earth ... like I need that *mishigas*? I don’t have enough to do? You believe that, you’re spending too much time playing Dungeons and Dragons. Besides, I got no beef with Satan. He does his thing; I do mine.

I’ve heard a lot of complaints from you people who think I’m aloof, who wonder why I haven’t revealed myself more obviously (what do you expect Me to do, go on *The View*?), why I don’t respond to your prayers, and why I “allow” all kinds of tragic mayhem—like six-year-olds gang-raped in Africa—to happen. ...

Ever since the beginning, all you people have ever done is fight each other, connive for power, lie, rob, cheat, and engage in mass murder. You turn the page on genocide, yet hyperventilate if someone parks in your space. ... I’ll tell you why I don’t reveal myself to you.

I’m too embarrassed to show my face!

Even now, I’m sure you’re not listening. You’re too preoccupied with your own salvation. You’re dying to know who gets saved and who’s Left Behind. Well, let Me tell you: it’s a crapshoot.

After all, who am I to judge?

RELIGION AND POLITICS ROUNDUP: WE ARE NOT MAKING THESE UP

Missouri: George Stephanopoulos of ABC News asked Republican presidential candidate Romney about a Mormon teaching that Jesus will come to the U.S. when he returns to reign on earth. Mr. Romney responded that the Messiah will return to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem, “the same as the other Christian tradition.”

“That’s not true, Jesus is coming back to Missouri,” Tom Grover, a Logan, Utah, talk show host, said. “It’s the L.D.S. Church’s 10th article of faith that Zion will be built upon the American continent.”

Of course he’s coming to Missouri—Jesus is an American!

The Grand Canyon: On a “This Week With George Stephanopoulos” program shortly after the first Republican “debate” (when three candidates raised their hands to indicate that they don’t believe in evolution), Sam Donaldson opined that they had to play up to the GOP’s religious conservative base, but could at least have responded as John McCain did, that he believed in evolution but could not look upon the splendor of the Grand Canyon and not believe that God was involved.

“Trust me,” George Will deadpanned on Sunday morning TV, “the Colorado River did it.”

The Vatican: Because Amnesty International reversed its long-time neutral stance on abortion in April and adopted a policy urging governments to ensure access to abortion services for women in cases of rape or incest or when pregnancy presented a risk to a woman’s life or health, Cardinal Renato Martino, head of the Pontifical Council on Peace and Justice, on June 13 announced “the suspension of any financing to Amnesty on the part of Catholic organizations and also individual Catholics.”

Next day, Amnesty International announced that it had never received any financing from the Vatican or from any official Roman Catholic organizations.

China & Tibet: The Chinese office of religious affairs has issued a new directive making it illegal for any of Tibet’s “living Buddhas”—or anyone else—to be reincarnated without permission. As of September 1, all reincarnation applications must be submitted to religious affairs officials (presumably before death) for approval.

This madness is a further attempt by the occupying Chinese government to limit the authority of the Dalai Lama, since his next “incarnation,” without a permit, would be “illegal.” But the present Dalai Lama, 64, says that if his successor is chosen in the traditional way, the baby boy would be born outside Chinese control.

Nyah, nyah.

And in other news from the Middle Kingdom, the National Population and Family Planning Commission has decided to “soften” the advertising messages promoting China’s one-child-only policy. New billboards and banners will shout slogans such as “Both boys and girls are parents’ hearts” and “The mother earth is too tired to sustain more children.”

These will replace such long-time crowd-pleasers as “One more baby means one more tomb” and “Raise fewer babies and more piggies.”

Idaho: The fact that the Senate recently invited a Hindu leader to deliver the daily invocation has sent Congress-man Bill Sali (R-Idaho) over the edge.

“We have not only a Hindu prayer being offered in the Senate, we have a Muslim House member now, Keith Ellison from Minnesota. Those changes are not what was envisioned by the Founding Fathers,” he said.

Sali says America was built on Christian principles derived from scripture, and the only way the U.S. has been allowed to exist in a world so hostile to Christian principles is through “the protective hand of God.”

Sali is class president of Congress’s GOP freshmen.

Missouri, again: Governor Matt Blunt of Missouri has signed new legislation classifying abortion clinics as “ambulatory surgical centers,” in order to force them to spend as much as \$2 million to upgrade to the standards of full-service hospitals, or close down. The new law also prohibits people affiliated with abortion providers from teaching or supplying materials for sex education courses in public schools.

Governor Blunt signed the law at a cross-shaped lectern in the sanctuary of Concord Baptist Church.

LETTERS OF APPRECIATION – APPRECIATED

Another stellar PIQUE! Thanks. And *bonne vacance!*

— *Phil Appleman*

Just a note to say that your newsletter is the very best that I see from humanists! Keep the un-faith!

— *Robert B. Tapp, Professor Emeritus of Humanities, Religious Studies, South Asian Studies, Univ. of Minnesota; Dean Emeritus & Faculty Chair, The Humanist Institute*

Thank you for the issues of PIQUE. It is a very nice newsletter.

I liked the article in the July issue on the 14th Amendment. On the issue of citizenship, I am personally opposed to “open borders” and granting citizenship to people who have entered here illegally. I also do not support the notion that children born of illegals should be granted citizenship, as this has been used by many people to justify staying in the U.S. If it takes an amendment to the Constitution to prevent this, so be it.

I have to wonder why so many of my fellow freethinkers support the “open borders” position of the Vatican, which understands that the vast majority of “undocumented workers” are Catholic. I am not indifferent to the transformation of American society into an appendage of Latin America. Freethought is not very valued south of the Rio Grande as far as I can tell. I think many recent immigrants (legal and illegal alike) would deprive the non-religious of their civil rights in a New York minute if given the chance. This is certainly true of Muslims, but also of the devout Christians who hail from nations with established churches.

I think Isaac Asimov was right when he wrote, many years ago, that the ideal population of the world would be about 1-1.5 billion. When he wrote that, the global population was about 4 billion. It is now nearly 7 billion. The USA has 300 million (not counting 12-20 million illegals in the country). New York has over 8 million (vs. 7 million 20 years ago) and is still growing. The blackouts we are experiencing are directly

related to this rapid growth. We live in a world subordinate to an ideology that says that “growth” is not only inevitable but always desirable as an end in itself.

The issue of overpopulation, overdevelopment, and overexpansion should be of paramount concern to humanists and freethinkers. Coming to grips with this crisis may entail embracing “politically incorrect” positions on immigration and economic matters.

Thanks again for the PIQUE issues.

— *Dennis Middlebrooks*

Ed: A “very nice” newsletter? What the hell are we doing wrong? (Mr. Middlebrooks is a former SHSNY President.)

**THINK TV’S DUMB?
WATCH IT GET DUMBER THIS FALL.
NO, WAIT, DON’T WATCH.**

(Based on Stuart Elliott’s ad column in the NYTimes, 5/21)

Sure there are angels! And vampires and ghosts! There must be — I see them all the time on TV! Characters on this season’s new shows include vampires, clairvoyants and immortals, some of whom can revive the dead or travel through time ... on shows like “Pushing Daisies” and “Eli Stone” on ABC; “Moonlight” on CBS; “Reaper” on CW; “The Sarah Connor Chronicles” and “New Amsterdam” on Fox; and on NBC, “Bionic Woman,” “Chuck,” “Journeyman,” and a new “reality” show from Israel hosted by Uri Geller that “searches for the next great mentalist.”

On TNT, Holly Hunter plays a detective assisted by an angel in “Saving Grace,” and Telemundo offers “Las Brujas de South Beach,” about three long-legged witches in modern-day Florida. Those newbies join returning series-for-the-stupid like “Lost” on ABC, “Ghost Whisperer” on CBS, “Smallville” and “Supernatural” on CW and “Heroes” and “Medium” on NBC.

AND WHAT YOU WON’T SEE ON CBS OR FOX ...

... is a commercial promoting Trojan condoms. In the spot, women in a bar sit next to huge, hairy pigs, one of whom changes into a handsome young man after he purchases a condom from a vending machine.

The tag line: “Evolve. Use a condom every time.”

Photo: Still from commercial, huge pig next to attractive young woman at a bar

Both CBS and Fox—which accept ads for erectile dysfunction and genital herpes products—have rejected it. CBS says it’s “not appropriate,” and Fox “objected to the message that condoms can prevent pregnancy.”

Why, because condoms *can’t*? Or because the fact that they can doesn’t quite square with the “condoms don’t work” lie of Fox’s most fervent followers, the Christian Right? Or maybe it’s that “E word” in the tag line.

**JOHN RAFFERTY IS THE NEW PRESIDENT OF SHSNY,
ELAINE LYNN IS SECRETARY**

At a meeting of all eight members of the SHSNY Board August 15, John Rafferty was elected unanimously as the new President of SHSNY, filling the vacancy caused by the resignation of Conrad Claborne from that office and from the Board in June.

The Board also unanimously elected Elaine Lynn the new Secretary of SHSNY.