

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

August, 2018

Into the dog days of summer, and the long night of the American soul. What can we say about the lying, thieving traitor who daily fouls the office of Washington, Lincoln, and Roosevelt? Herein, some of us try, both seriously and satirically (don't miss *The Queen*). We also celebrate America's best times and traditions, build our political vocabulary, take a fresh look at MeToo, try resurrecting Jesus, shame one of his SuperChristian fans, and pick the clever winner of our Caption Contest. —JR

IN DONALD TRUMP'S AMERICA, 2018



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A post-Fourth message:

AMERICA'S FINEST HOUR

David Rafferty

(Reprinted from "What is America's finest hour?" in Greenwich (CT) Time, 6/26/2018)

This Independence Day let's ask: What as a nation is the greatest thing we've ever done? Our defining legacy; the thing that if human history were suddenly frozen in amber should be what we'd want to be most fondly remembered for.

The American Revolution itself might be the obvious choice. The crowning achievement of the Enlightenment, our revolution galvanized much of the world into believing that the laws of men could supersede the rights of kings, and kick-started the idea of nations founded on individual and collective rights.

That would be a fine choice, but an argument could be made that government by the people, for the people was inevitable someday, somewhere. Maybe we were just lucky to be first. If so, to be truly memorable we would have to do something staggeringly magnificent to prove to the world that the American Experiment wasn't just a fluke. That the American success story wasn't just a happy circumstance of distance from the Old World and a resource-rich continent ready and available to be exploited. No, to find our finest hour we would have to prove we had the determination to stand firm against history and push back against the worst tendencies of the Old World. And just as importantly, help mold the world in our best image.

Which is exactly what we did when we helped liberate Old World Europe from fascism in World War II. That military victory however, was only the beginning of the great American moment. Some might even say that was the easier part, because once the fighting was done it was time to win the peace. The gargantuan heavy lifting, leveraging our economic and military might and steeled by our sense of moral obligation, allowed the United States to rebuild the world in its image. That image, originally expressed in our Enlightenment origins, meant we advocated for and created a liberal democratic international order not just to counter-balance Communism, but because we knew that the future of humankind was cradled in our collective humanity.

Call it "The American Way", but this sincerity of purpose wasn't just about economics, ideology or being the toughest hombre on the block. We so dearly believed in a society based on a free press, free judiciary, honest elections, human rights, free trade, and protection of the environment that we instilled those ideas and moral authority first in the countries we defeated then rebuilt, and then spread them with alliances around the world. America was the LeBron James of world powers. We said, "Get on my back, play like me, and I'll lead you to greatness." We knew we'd succeed when others did as well, and we had the blueprint to make it happen.

We created a great, global democratic order that terrified dictators and presidents-for-life and gave hope and freedom to millions. For decades the United States was that shining

city on a hill, the beacon the world looked toward wanting to emulate. We were a colossus that even when struggling or flawed, through our commitment to real freedoms and individual dignity, represented the greatest hope and the deepest aspirations of humanity. *That* is the greatest thing we ever did. Yet here we are, throwing it all away.

Call it the "Trump Doctrine", which involves coddling up to despots, dictators, fascists and thugs while deliberately, unnecessarily and under false pretenses, fracturing the Western alliances and community of democracies that oversaw those decades of peace and prosperity and won the Cold War. President Trump falsely disparages previous foreign policies as leading from behind; but his Doctrine, disgustingly, is retreating from the front.

Independence Day is coming up and we should celebrate the revolution not just for what it meant to us, but to the rest of the world. Starting July 5 though, and clear through to Election Day, we need to think about who we are and who we are becoming. Because the thugs, phonies and grifters currently in power, who lie about the law, commit atrocities and invoke the Bible in their defense, and who chose dictators over allies, are killing the best of who we can be. America isn't "winning" anything, and America First cannot mean America Alone.

YET ANOTHER REASON TO KEEP CHURCH AND STATE SEPARATE

Jonathan Engel

Trump supporters, those conservative, so-called "values voters", have had their way, and so children are now being forcibly separated from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border, even within families fleeing repressive regimes and who are requesting asylum. The cruelty of this practice (which is done in *our* name) is being reported and discussed in many forums, and so I will not cover that ground anew here.

But there is another aspect of this situation that I believe merits further review, i.e. the inane misuse of religious arguments in the discussion. A careful examination of this issue once again demonstrates the importance of separating church and state, as well as the utter foolishness of failing to do so.

For some people, the act of separating young children from loving parents offends their religious sensibilities. After all, Jesus did say, "I was a stranger, and you welcomed me." But then J. Beauregard Sessions, our (OMG) Attorney General, counters with "I would cite you to the Apostle Paul and his clear and wise command in Romans 13 to obey the law of his government for his purposes." So I guess if Sessions had been a judge at the Nuremberg Trials he would have accepted the "I was only following orders" defense. For biblical reasons, of course. There has been some pushback, with some Christians claiming that Sessions quoted the Bible out of context and that the Bible actually requires the opposite of what Sessions says it does. This entire conversation is ridiculous and should have no place in discussions of public policy.

Let's start with the fact that this discussion is playing out only with reference to the Christian Bible. What does the Koran have to say? Or the Talmud, or the Tripitaka? Should the government really be in the business of deciding which so-called "holy books" to consult when making policy? And what happens when the policy is challenged in court? Will judges be hearing theological arguments in order to interpret our secular laws? When did we turn into Iran?

We should also keep in mind that the Bible was written thousands of years ago by men (no women, of course) who didn't know: the earth revolves around the sun; the germ theory of disease; the atomic composition of matter; how old the earth is; how big the earth is; ad infinitum. Not to mention the dubious nature of "Biblical morality" itself. As Bill Maher says, "I'd rather not get my morality from a book that says that sex is bad but slavery is okay."

The bottom line is that scripture can be twisted to essentially say whatever it is that you want it to say. Combine that with the fact that the United States is currently a diverse country that is home to people of differing religions (and sects within religions), including "none of the above", and you can easily see what a mess we step into when secular government is driven by religious considerations. As President Grant once said "Leave the matter of religion to the family altar, the church and the private school supported entirely by private contributions. Keep the church and state forever separated."

It is to be expected that for some people, religious beliefs impact their way of looking at secular issues, and that's okay. A person may arrive at their secular policy beliefs partially from their religious convictions (or not). But to use the scripture of your own personal religion as your argument in the sphere of civil government is to invite a never ending theological debate when we should be making arguments based on logic, reason, and our secular laws. To do otherwise would invite chaos. As James Madison said: "The purpose of separation of church and state is to keep forever from these shores the ceaseless strife that has soaked the soil of Europe in blood for centuries."

Public opinion is often wrong, mob opinion is almost always wrong, [and] religious opinion is wrong by definition. — *Attributed to Christopher Hitchens*

HELPFUL ADVICE

Stephen Pastis

(Transcribed from the comic strip "Pearls Before Swine", 7/7/2018)

Psychiatrist: So, Rat, how can I help you today?

Rat (on the couch): Well, doctor, I have this terrible sense of dread lately. Like everything in the world is about to go very, very wrong.

Psychiatrist: True. We're all screwed.

Rat: Some psychiatrists give helpful advice.

Psychiatrist: Okay ... flee.

BRUSH UP YOUR POLITICAL VOCABULARY

Anu Garg

One of my favorite online sites, A.Word.A.Day with Anu Garg, announced that its theme for the last week in June was words associated with politics. Why? Quoting Pericles, Anu said, "Just because you do not take an interest in politics doesn't mean politics won't take an interest in you."

Let's review Anu's review of five political words you may want to know more about in the coming months. — JR

Monday, June 25

malfeasance (mal-FEE-zuhns)

noun: An illegal action, especially by a public official.

Etymology: From Anglo-Norman malfaisance (wrongdoing), from Latin malefacere (to do wrong), from mal- (bad) + facere (to do). Earliest documented use: 1663.

Tuesday, June 26

nepotism (NEP-uh-tiz-uhm)

noun: Favoritism shown to relatives and friends, especially in business or political appointments.

Etymology: From Italian nepotismo, from Latin nepos (grandson, nephew). Ultimately from the Indo-European root nepot- (grandson, nephew) that is also the source of the words nephew and niece. Earliest documented use: 1669.

Notes: Popes in the Catholic Church conferred important positions to their sons. Since a pope had taken the vow of chastity, his son was euphemistically called a nephew.

Wednesday, June 27

emolument (i-MOL-yuh-muhnt)

noun: Payment, salary, or fees from an office or employment.

Etymology: From Latin emolumentum (profit, advantage), from ex- (out) + molere (to grind). Earliest use: 1480.

Thursday, June 28

collusion (kuh-LOO-zuhnh)

noun: A secret cooperation for fraud, treason, etc.

Etymology: From Latin colludere (to play together, to conspire), from col- (with) + ludere (to play), from ludus (play). Ultimately from Indo-European root leid- (to play), which also gave us allude, delude, elude, illusion, ludicrous, Ludo, ludic, and prelude. Earliest use: 1397.

Notes: From the literal meaning "to play together" to the current meaning "to conspire", this word has gone to the wrong side of town. And "conspire" means, literally, "to breathe together", meaning to be in harmony.

Friday, June 29

impeach (im-PEECH)

verb tr.:

1. To charge a public official with misconduct in office.
2. To challenge the credibility of someone.

Etymology: From Anglo-Norman empecher (to ensnare), from Latin impedicare (to catch or entangle), from pedica (fetter), from pes/ped (foot). Earliest use: 1380.

First they came for the verbs, and I said nothing because verb-ing weirds language. Then they arrival for the nouns, and I speech nothing because I no verbs."

IMPORTANT SAFETY INFORMATION REGARDING TRUMP TWEETS

John Ficarra

(Reprinted from www.newyorker.com 6/21/2018)

Trump Tweets are not for everyone. Do not read Trump Tweets if you suffer from high blood pressure or are susceptible to alternative facts, historical misrepresentations, or right-wing-nutjob conspiracy theories.

Common side effects include headache, confusion, changes in mood, profanity-laced tirades, bitter family arguments, and, in some instances, projectile vomiting. Profound shame at being an American citizen has also been known to occur. If a sudden urge to move to Canada lasts for more than four months, see your travel agent.

Stop reading Trump Tweets immediately if you experience thoughts of ramming your fist through a wall. Clinical studies have shown that Trump Tweets have a more harmful effect on women. If you are pregnant or plan to become pregnant, be sure to read Trump Tweets carefully, especially those concerning federal cuts to neonatal care.

Avoid driving while taking in Trump Tweets. Instances of driving off a cliff have been reported.

Excessive consumption of alcohol while reading Trump Tweets is permissible. In fact, it is encouraged.

Do not read Trump Tweets if you are allergic to the phrases "FAKE NEWS!", "NO COLLUSION!", or "CROOKED HILLARY!", or have experienced an adverse reaction when exposed to shameless hypocrisy.

People who work for the White House should closely monitor Trump Tweets before reporting to work, to confirm that they still have a job.

Trump Tweets have been shown to cause a rise in neo-Nazi behavior among certain individuals with a family history of bigotry.

Sudden stoppage of reading Trump Tweets has been known to result in feelings of euphoria and giddiness and an over-all better feeling about oneself. These effects are temporary.

In rare instances, you may find yourself agreeing with a Trump Tweet. Seek professional help immediately.

If you think that Mexico is only sending drug dealers and rapists ... but also worry that Mexicans are going to take your job ... what exactly do you do for a living?

MEET AN ATHEIST: CHRIS ROCK

When you're black there's like no religion to turn to. It's like, Christianity? I don't think so. White people justified slavery and segregation through Christianity, so a black Christian is like a black person with no f***king memory.

– *Outtake from the 1989 documentary, "Who Is Chris Rock?"*



FOREIGNERS FLOCK TO U.S. TO GIVE BIRTH TO "ANCHOR BABIES". WAIT, WAIT, IT'S OKAY, THEY'RE WHITE. AND RICH! AND RUSSIAN!! Katie Zavadski

(Excerpted from "Russians Flock to Trump Properties to Give Birth to U.S. Citizens", on *Daily Beast*, 9/6/2017)

While the president rails against children of undocumented immigrants, wealthy Russians rent his condos—at huge costs—so they can have American kids.

[H]undreds of Russian parents flock to the U.S. annually for warm weather, excellent medical care, and, more importantly, birthright American citizenship.

And many stay at President Donald Trump's properties in Florida.

While Trump rails against U.S.-born children of undocumented immigrants, his Florida properties have become a playground for birth tourists from Russia's upper crust. The *Daily Beast* has discovered several companies are advertising rentals in Trump properties to expectant Russian parents.

While the Trump Organization does not directly profit from subleases of privately owned condos, it does benefit from Russian patronage of the nearby Trump International Beach Resort. (The Trump Organization did not return requests for comment.)

Sunny Medical Center openly advertises citizenship as one of the primary benefits their clients receive. Owner Vera Muzyka told *The Daily Beast* that all the women using Sunny Medical Center's services openly tell U.S. officials that they are coming for birth tourism.

One Russian mom of a newborn U.S. citizen told *The Daily Beast* that she runs a support group for women making birthing plans without the help of a company. At any given time, 50 members of her online group are in Miami to give birth, she said. Muzyka estimated in 2014 that 40 to 60 women from former Soviet countries give birth in Miami each month.

On the campaign trail [in 2015-2016], Trump argued that children born to undocumented parents don't have a legal right to citizenship.

"I don't think they have American citizenship and if you speak to some very, very good lawyers—and I know some will disagree, but many of them agree with me—and you're going to find they do not have American citizenship,"

Trump told Bill O'Reilly. "We have to start a process where we take back our country. Our country is going to hell."

"When Trump was elected, he said he wanted to eliminate citizenship based on place of birth," birth tourist Tanya Yanygina told *The Daily Beast*. "But he said that in reference to people from the Middle East and Mexico."

Comment: Really, ya think? – JR

**REMEMBER: WHEN DEBATING THESE PEOPLE,
YOU GODLESS ELITIST INTELLECTUALS,
TO RESPECT THEIR SINCERELY-HELD BELIEFS**

Part 2

John Rafferty

Apparently, Democratic Senator Chuck Schumer didn't read my post in PIQUE last month (with the same title as above), in which I quoted the actual lunatic and hateful words of four of the right-wingers he wants us to engage "civilly". So let's quote three more.

San Bernadino (CA) Deputy D.A. Michael Selyem

Fuming about liberal gadfly California Congresswoman Maxine Waters: "Being a loud-mouthed c*nt in the ghetto you would think someone would have shot this b*tch by now."

He also posted a doctored picture of Michelle Obama holding up a sign saying, "Trump grabbed my penis."

Christian broadcaster Rick Wiles

[Democrats are] "fanatical baby killers. They're crazy. They're demonic. They're going to kill Republicans and by 2020, on election day, they're going to kill Republican voters, they're going to block Republicans from voting.

"People like [Rachel] Maddow and CNN's Anderson Cooper on television is evidence that America has been 'homosexualized' and is 'no longer a Christian nation'. ...

"America, you've been homosexualized. You've been Jewdy-ized. I'm just telling it how it is. She was spewing out, last night, calls for revolution. She was telling the left, 'Take a deep breath, we're at the moment, it's coming, we're almost there, we're going to remove him from the White House.'

"We're about 72 hours — possibly 72 hours — from a coup. Be prepared that you're going to turn on the television and see helicopters hovering over the roof of the White House with men clad in black rappelling down ropes, entering into the White House. Be prepared for a shootout in the White House as Secret Service agents shoot commandos coming in to arrest President Trump.

"That is how close we are to a revolution. Be prepared for a mob — a leftist mob — to tear down the gates, the fence at the White House and to go into the White House and to drag him out with his family and decapitate them on the lawn of the White House."

Author Thomas Nelson

"There's no polite way to say it. Atheists today are the most arrogant, ignorant and dangerous people on earth. ... Yes, these atheists are loud, nasty, unapologetic and in-your-face. But while their arrogance is annoying, it's nothing compared to their ignorance. ...

"The truth is, the atheist position is incapable of supporting any coherent system of morality other than ruthless social Darwinism. That's why it has caused more deaths, murders and bloodshed than any other belief system in the history of the world."

(From *foxnews.com* — of course — 3/28/18, and reprinted in July 2018 CDHS newsletter, *Humanist Monthly*.)

**PUTTING WORDS IN DONALD'S MOUTH
(ANGELA'S, TOO)**

Last month we ran this virally infamous photo of a petulant Donald Trump acting out toward real world leaders at the G7 summit in June — and asked you to put words (funny, savvy, prescient, whatever) in his mouth. Or in Angela Merkel's. Or both.



You came through with some beauts.

Merkel: If you're going to serve vanilla ice cream, Donald, you've got to serve chocolate sauce to everyone, not just yourself. Do you understand? — *Brian Lemaire*

Merkel: It's way past your bedtime, Donald. Go to bed NOW — and alone! — *Helen Bennett*

Merkel: I heard you invited Justify, the Triple Crown winner, to the White House, Donald, but the filly said, "Neiiigh, if I wanted to see an asshole I wouldn't have come in first."
— *Donna Marxer*

Merkel: I should have thought your good German father would have taught his idiot son not to rumple his tie.

Trump: I've humped a least a dozen cleaning ladies prettier than you, and they ALL said I was SMART! — *Bob Ondricek*

Trump (to himself): Why are those bozos focusing on that dumpy Kraut? What am I — *gehakte leber?*
— *Charlotte Pomerantz & Bob Murtha*

Trump: Why should I acknowledge a "3", at best?

Merkel: *Mein Gott!* — *Dennis Middlebrooks*

Merkel: We're unanimous, Donald: you're an a**hole.

Trump: I'm rubber, you're glue; everything you say bounces off me and sticks to you. *I win!* — *John Rafferty*

Merkel: Mr. Trump, you're being unreasonable.

Trump: Good, that's how I got to be President. — *Larry Shaw*

Merkel: Yes, you are.

Trump: No, I'm not.

Merkel: Okay, you're not.

Trump: Yes, I am. — *Joel Galker*

AND THE WINNER IS ...

Trump: The less immigrants we let into our countries the better.

Merkle (correcting Trump's English): The fewer.

Trump: You better not call me that until my third term.
— *Flash Light* ... who will receive a copy of Richard Milner's *Darwin's Universe: Evolution from A to Z.*

SHSNY BOOK CLUB: AUGUST - OCTOBER 2010

SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURS, AUGUST 2, 7-8:30 pm
THE COMMUNITY CHURCH
OF NEW YORK

28 East 35 St. (front lounge)
We'll discuss
FASCISM: A WARNING
Madeleine Albright

A personal and urgent examination of Fascism in the twentieth century and how its legacy shapes today's world, written by one of America's most admired public servants, the first woman to serve as U.S. secretary of state



A fascist, observes Madeleine Albright, "is someone who claims to speak for a whole nation or group, is utterly unconcerned with the rights of others, and is willing to use violence and whatever other means are necessary to achieve the goals he or she might have."

Fascism, she shows, not only endured through the 20th century but now presents a more virulent threat to peace and justice than at any time since the end of WWII.

Here is a book for our times that is relevant to all times, written by someone who has not only studied history but helped to shape it.

Charles Heller will lead the discussion.

– *Paperback and Kindle available.*

Join us even if you haven't finished reading.

The SHSNY Book Club is open to all ... and free!

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MEET US ON MEETUP

www.meetup.com/shsnny-org/

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@SHS_NewYork

SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURS, SEPT 6, 7-8:30 pm
Community Church of New York
WHAT IS POPULISM?
Jan-Werner Müller

Who are the people who claim to represent "the people"? And who are "the people" anyway, and who can speak in their name?

In this groundbreaking volume, Jan-Werner Müller argues that at populism's core is a rejection of pluralism. The book proposes a number of concrete strategies for how liberal democrats should best deal with populists and, in particular, how to counter their claims to speak exclusively for "the silent majority" or "the real people".

Tim Greene will lead.

– *Paperback and Kindle available.*

SHSNY BOOK CLUB
THURS, OCT 4, 7-8:30 pm
Community Church of New York
THE RIGHTEOUS MIND:
Why Good People are Divided
by Politics and Religion
Jonathan Haidt

Drawing on his 25 years of groundbreaking research on moral psychology, Haidt shows how moral judgments arise not from reason but from gut feelings. He shows why liberals, conservatives, and libertarians have such different intuitions about right and wrong, and he shows why each side is actually right about many of its central concerns. Haidt gives us the key to understanding human cooperation, as well as our eternal divisions and conflicts.

Harry French will lead.

– *Paperback and Kindle available.*

WOULD YOU LIKE TO LEAD A BOOK CLUB EVENING?

Let's talk, at editor@shsnny.org.

BRUNCH & CONVERSATION
SUN, AUGUST 19, 11:30 am
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)

We gather in the saloon's back room, where the pub-grub menu includes a \$15 breakfast special, the Bloody Marys are hot, the beer is cold, and conversation sparkles.

Come join 20 or more fellow

freethinkers for food, fun and convivial conversation, including the Dorothy Kahn-led ...

After-Brunch Discussion:

Should we trust the intelligence agencies?



DRINKING REASONABLY
WED, AUGUST 15, 6-10:00 pm
Whispers Restaurant & Bar
210 West 94 Street
(Broadway - Amsterdam Ave)

The NYC Skeptics' Drinking Sceptically event has expanded to include all of the groups in the Reasonable New York Coalition.

Drinking Reasonably promotes fellowship and networking among skeptics, critical-thinkers, and like-minded individuals in a casual, relaxed atmosphere. We discuss the issues of the day and whatever else is on our minds. But most of all, we have fun!

Come at 6:00 and enjoy Happy Hour prices until 7:00.

Don't drink? Don't let that stop you from joining in the conversation and the fun.



SHSNY CALENDAR: AUGUST - OCTOBER 2010

Rescheduled from July 25:

GREAT LECTURES ON DVD

WED, AUGUST 1, 7 pm
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
140 East 27 St. (Lex-3rd Aves)
THE MYTH OF

MIRROR NEURONS

Dr. Gregory Hickok

In this myth-busting talk based on his new book, U.C. Irvine cognitive scientist Dr. Gregory Hickok calls for an essential re-consideration of one of the most far-reaching theories in modern neurosciences and psychology.

Ever since the discovery of mirror neurons in macaque monkeys in 1992 there has been a stream of scientific studies implicating mirror neurons in everything from schizophrenia and drug abuse to sexual orientation and contagious yawning.

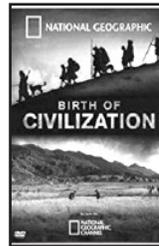
Dr. Hickok provides deep insights into the organization and function of the human brain and the nature of communication and cognition.

GREAT LECTURES ON DVD

WED, AUGUST 22, 7 pm
Stone Creek Bar & Lounge
National Geographic's
**THE BIRTH OF
CIVILIZATION**

National Geographic journeys back 15,000 years to trace humanity's incredible journey through time. Beginning with humanity's exodus from the ice age and chronicling milestones such as hunter-gatherer, farmer, builder, and city organizer, *The Birth of Civilization* reveals how humankind managed to conquer the world.

Combining the absorbing perspectives of an international team of experts with dramatic reenactments, the film explores the motivation of early humankind and its epic transformation to reveal the inspiring story of the invention of civilization.



new SHSNY Monthly Event!
SHSNY FICTION BOOK CLUB

Premiere Meeting:
TUES, SEP 11, 7:00 - 8:30 pm
Nancy Adelman's apartment
205 Third Ave (6H)
(Between 18-19 Streets)

**Come for Wine, Cheese, and
sparkling conversaton about
LIFE AFTER LIFE**

Kate Atkinson

What if you could live your life again and again, until you got it right? This "audacious, ambitious book that challenges notions of time, fate and free will" (*NYTimes review*) asks and answers that question. Brilliantly.

"Kate Atkinson's new novel is a box of delights. Ingenious in construction, indefatigably entertaining, it grips the reader's imagination on the first page and never lets go. If you wish to be moved and astonished, read it." — Hilary Mantel, author of *Wolf Hall*.

— Paperback and Kindle available.

**To reserve your seat on the sofa,
and/or to nominate the next
book for us to read,
contact: editor@shsny.org**

PLANNING AHEAD

The usual SHSNY schedule is ...

Book Club: First Thursday
at the Community Church of NY
Fiction Book Club: 2nd Tuesday
at Nancy Adelman's apartment

Brunch: Third Sunday

at Stone Creek Lounge

Drinking Reasonably

Third Wednesday

at Whispers Restaurant & Bar

Great Lectures on DVD:

4th Wednesday

at Stone Creek Lounge.

More info:

www.shsny.org

and/or 646-922-7389



MONICA, TATIANA, AND ME (TOO)

Cheryl Payer

The “Me Too” movement is long overdue, but the shocking revelation of the abuse of power for sexual benefits by famous people has in some cases overshot its proper limits. For one conspicuous example, the Monica Lewinsky scandal has been resurrected and stretched and shrunk into the Procrustean bed of the current “Me Too” model, with the intent of shaming Bill Clinton.

Prominent people who should know better, including Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, columnist Maureen Dowd, and journalist Matthew Yglesias, assert that the affair between Monica and Bill must have been sexual harassment on the sole ground of an imbalance of power between them, and the difference in their age. I’ve never been a fan of the Clintons and would not consider Lewinsky’s behavior at the time a “role model” of any type. I have no opinion (because too few facts) on the other women who have accused Bill Clinton of potentially serious real crimes such as rape and sexual assault. But let’s get some facts on the table:

Monica was twenty-four, well above the age of consent when she entered the affair with Clinton.

She went of her own accord to the Oval Office, bearing a pizza and flashing her thong, and returned voluntarily to participate, many times, in the sexual follies that took place there. No one subjected her to involuntary detention, except Kenneth Starr.

I never met Bill Clinton, but all accounts and visual records indicate that at the time of the affair he was healthy, virile, in radiant health and in the prime of his life. A babe magnet, even without the Presidency to polish his aura. And as Henry Kissinger famously noted, “Power is an aphrodisiac.”

Monica herself says that she was not a victim and has never denied her enthusiasm for the affair. In her post-Me Too interview, she denies that her relationship with Bill was sexual assault and reaffirms her eagerness for the “intimacy” while nevertheless calling it, with Me Too hindsight, a “gross abuse of power” (over whom, we may ask?). Contrast Stormy Daniels’ scornful account in the 60 Minutes interview of her “let’s get it over with” encounter with future President Donald Trump, inaccurately described in the press as an “affair”. What happened to “believe the women?” Just look at the bliss on Monica’s face in the photos that showed him hugging her in public. Although it is more than curious that a woman who now describes herself as an intensely private person chose the most public person in the world, and married to boot, to fall in love with.

It is true that, politically, Bill Clinton was the most powerful person in the world. So here’s a few more pertinent facts:

No one in the world has more political power than the president of the United States. No person, male, female or pansexual, could have sex with the president as an equal on this criterion. Does this mean that Me Too must condemn all U.S. presidents, and other powerful people, to celibacy, or at best monogamy with a spouse who might have been more

equal at the time of marriage? Good luck with that.

And here’s a more shocking fact: there are no two people in the world who are absolutely equal to each other. Considering only men and women in the professions, the statistics show without a doubt that equality between the sexes, powerwise, is rarely if ever possible. If good sexual relationships are even possible, they must rest on a good-natured tolerance or accommodation of those differences. One need not go as far as calling “love” the factor that balances them out.

Here’s another bombshell, known throughout history (Delilah?) and prehistory but apparently not to be acknowledged today: women, above all young women, have power over men, including powerful men, because of their nubile and gullible immaturity. And women at the age of twenty, give or take five years, are at the peak of this power. In the words of a Marge Piercy poem, “women’s lives are shaped like cheap coffins”. A twenty-year-old woman, or man for that matter, is at the wide point of the coffin, because at the peak of her or his sexual power. Few of them know this in time to exploit it, or want to. Countless young nubile women are instead exploited by their parents or their pimps for monetary or political gain. Young women throughout the life of the species have been used by schemers to tempt and destroy powerful men (Samson?), with or without the knowledge or consent of the young person. Such a plot almost succeeded with Bill Clinton.

While contemplating Monica I was reminded of Tatiana, the heroine of Pushkin’s 1833 verse drama *Eugene Onegin* and the opera by Tchaikovsky based on it. Tatiana is much younger than Monica was, about seventeen, virginal, bookish and romantic, who is isolated with her reading and her romantic dreams on her family’s rural estate. Onegin, the title character, is the sophisticated Moscow-based owner of the neighboring estate, who meets Tatiana on a visit. He scarcely notices her, but he is the first man she has met that fits her preconception of a romantic hero. She therefore writes him a letter offering herself and her love, implicitly her body, but artlessly makes it clear that he has stepped into the model of her romantic fantasies, derived from books and steeped in her isolation.

Onegin receives the letter and rejects her, kindly, gently, and deprecating his own inability to love. He advises her not to continue coming on to worldly gentlemen, as they will not all be as scrupulous as he when offered a young girl’s submission. He’s a wee bit supercilious, but on the whole his response is the very model of what one would hope from a sensitive male post-Me Too. Mike Pence and I could agree, most likely, on nothing else, but I don’t think either of us could find Onegin’s initial response to Tatiana at all inappropriate.

Is Onegin rewarded for this, in Pushkin’s or Tchaikovsky’s fiction? You must be kidding. Years later at a Moscow ball, he encounters the grown-up Tatiana, now gorgeous and married to a wealthy elderly gentleman (a general), maybe her parents’ way of cashing in on her beauty. Now Onegin becomes a jerk. The tables are turned. He begs

Tatiana to leave her husband for him. She admits she still loves Onegin (on the basis of what?, a modern sensibility asks cynically), but she is bound to her husband and will not break her vows. The cynic may note that her marriage has brought her removal from her rural isolation into Moscow's high society—the desire that first prompted her crush on Onegin. Rejected, Onegin is left alone and disconsolate. The audience sighs with satisfied *schadenfreude* at his despair.

So is there a Me Too moral in Tatiana's story? That some young women, in any century, will find a way to accost men they find attractive? That if women are to be truly equal, this is a necessary stage in their empowerment? That powerful or famous men attract sexual opportunists? That not all men will make the self-denying choice? That failing to offer love, or refusing such an offer, has its own costs, impossible to foresee at the moment? I don't know whether Bill Clinton assaulted any other woman, but Monica said at the time that she was a victim of the press and Kenneth Starr, not of Bill Clinton. I believe her. And now some pundits want to use Me Too, and Monica, against the Clintons, facts be damned.

EL AL FLIES INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

Hemant Mehta, the Friendly Atheist

(Excerpted from "El Al Will Boot Ultra-Orthodox Jews from Planes if They Refuse to Sit by Women, on progressive Secular Humanist at patheos.com, 6/27/2018)

In a move that should have happened a long time ago, Israeli national airline El Al announced that it would no longer accommodate ultra-Orthodox Jewish men who refuse to sit next to women. ...

"Any passengers refusing to sit next to other passengers will immediately be removed from the aircraft."

Don't assume this came out of nowhere. It's not that they finally saw the light. It arguably took a powerful tech company to push them to this conclusion. That company, Nice, said that its employees would no longer be flying El Al due to the discriminatory policy. ...

The question for the airline became, which customers do we upset: Ultra-Orthodox Jews or everybody else? That question has hovered in the air for a while, but the pressure was finally enough that they had to make a decision.

They didn't even try to half-ass it. They always had the option of saying passengers who had their own rules about who they could or couldn't sit next to would just have to buy two seats. They didn't do that. They went straight to kicking those people off the flight. Good move.

It shouldn't have taken this long. It's good to see that, now, even religion isn't an excuse for bigotry on El Al.

READERS RESPOND

To the Editor: The newsletters just keep getting better and better, John. Unlike our current democracy. May not see a hopeful change in my lifetime, but it is coming. If the Repubs and other dictators don't cause the collapse of the world first. I look forward to reading PIQUE every month and print out some of the articles to hand around.

— Nan Owens, Humanists of Florida

SH**HEAD OF THE MONTH

GOP CONGRESS CANDIDATE MARK HARRIS

(Excerpted from "GOP Congressional Candidate: God Says Women Are 'Helpers' Only", by Michael Stone at Progressive Secular Humanist on patheos.com, 7/6/2018)

North Carolina congressional candidate Mark Harris, a former Baptist pastor who won NC's 9th Congressional District GOP primary in May, believes women should serve their husbands, because

"Only one title is given to a woman in all of scripture ... the title given to a woman is 'helper'."



In a 2013 sermon, Harris, then pastor of Charlotte's First Baptist Church, spoke about "God's plan for biblical womanhood", and the modern difficulties for American women "to live out and fulfill God's design".

"In our culture today, girls are taught from grade school ... that what is most honorable in life is a career, and their ultimate goal in life is simply to be able to grow up and be independent of anyone or anything."

Comment: Um, yeah, Mr. Harris, growing up independent and on their own two feet sounds like a fairly healthy pursuit for what is fully half the human race.

And as to womanly titles, Mr. Harris might actually read his Bible, rather than just thump it, and find that no less than Yahweh Himself renamed Abraham's Sarai to become Sarah, which means "Princess" ... that Deborah was formally titled both "Prophet" and "Judge" ... and that Solomon's visiting co-equal in wisdom was the fecking QUEEN of Sheba. — JR

BRAD WHEELER UNDOES A DEATH

To the Editor (of PIQUE): The "Big Question", found on the last page of each issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*, will in September be, "Whose untimely death would you most like to reverse?"

Too chicken to use my own name, I borrowed Steve McQueen's alias and listed thumpity-thumping Lubbock as my home.

As for the text, I was most proud of my concision, as I'm usually a failure at the "whole brevity thing" and as this subject comes under "don't get me started".

Can't wait to see if the mag will have the cojones to print "Jesus" with my explanatory test or that of any of the other zillion people who will no doubt enter the same person, with various supporting ideas.

Now if could just think of something for *The New Yorker* cartoon caption contest.

Your pal,

Harvey

Begin forwarded message:

To: bigquestion@theatlantic.com

Whose untimely death would I most like to reverse?

Jesus of Nazareth.

Had Jesus not been made a martyr but had instead lived out his life as an itinerant and controversial rabbi,

humanity would have been spared much of the war, credulity, and suffering caused through the religion which became Christianity. Good people would have found other reasons to be and to do good while the criminally and abusively inclined would have lacked possibly the best means of concealment ever created.

Harvey Mushman
Lubbock, Texas

PARTISAN DIVIDE? RURAL WHITE RULE? IT'S GOING TO GET WORSE

Philip Bump

(Excerpted from "In about 20 years, half the population will live in eight states", in The Washington Post, 7/12/2018.)

In response to *Post* opinion writer Paul Waldman's essay about the current power of the minority in American politics ...

Paul Waldman@paulwaldman1

In the age of minority rule, a Supreme Court justice appointed by a president who got fewer votes is confirmed by a party in the Senate that got fewer votes, to validate policies opposed by most Americans.

... the American Enterprise Institute's Norman Ornstein offered a stunning bit of data on Twitter.

Norman Ornstein@NormOrnstein

I want to repeat a statistic I use in every talk: by 2040 or so, 70 percent of Americans will live in 15 states. Meaning 30 percent will choose 70 senators. And the 30 percent will be older, whiter, more rural, more male than the 70 percent. Unsettling to say the least.

In broad strokes, Ornstein is correct. ... Eight states will have just under half of the total population of the country, 49.5 percent, according to the Weldon Cooper Center's estimate. The next eight most populous states will account for an additional fifth of the population, up to 69.2 percent — meaning that the 16 most populous states will be home to about 70 percent of Americans.

Geographically, most of those 16 states will be on or near the East Coast. Only three — Arizona, Texas and Colorado — will be west of the Mississippi and not on the West Coast.

Ornstein's (and Waldman's) point is clear: 30 percent of the population of the country will control 68 percent of the seats in the U.S. Senate. Or, more starkly, half the population of the country will control 84 percent of those seats.

His tweet goes further, suggesting that the demographics of those states will differ from the larger states, as well, and, therefore, so will their politics.

It's self-evident that the 34 smaller states will be more rural than the 16 largest [and] eleven of the 16 most-populous states will have over-65 populations that are below the median density nationally. Twenty-two of the 34 less-populous states will have over-65 populations that are over the median density.

In the current political context, older voters means more Republican voters.

MR. TRUMP: DON'T TEAR DOWN THIS WALL!

Susan Jacoby

(Reprinted from "The White House Is Tearing Down the Wall Between Church and State", The New York Times OpEd, 7/5/2018)

(Ms. Jacoby is an Honorary Member of SHSNY and the author of The Age of American Unreason in a Culture of Lies.)

Many Americans were shocked when Attorney General Jeff Sessions turned to the Bible — specifically, Paul's epistle to the Romans — to justify President Trump's policy of separating migrant children from their parents. This scriptural justification for a political decision should not have surprised anyone, because Mr. Trump's administration has consistently treated the separation of church and state as a form of heresy rather than a cherished American value.

Attacks on the wall of separation established by the founders — which the religious right likes to call "a lie of the left" — are nothing new. What has changed under Mr. Trump is the disproportionate political debt he owes to extreme religious conservatives, whose views on church-state issues — ranging from the importance of secular public education to women's and gay rights — are far removed from the American mainstream.

The very meaning of the phrases "religious liberty" and "religious freedom" — traditionally understood as referring to the right of Americans to practice whatever faith they wish or no faith at all — is being altered to mean that government should foster a closer relationship with those who want to mix their Christian faith with taxpayer dollars. This usage can be found in numerous executive orders and speeches by Mr. Trump and his cabinet members. Changes in language have consequences, as the religious right's successful substitution of "pro-life" for "anti-abortion" has long demonstrated.

Religion-related issues, especially if buried in lengthy government documents, can often seem obscure, but they dominated the news at the end of June, when the Supreme Court upheld Mr. Trump's travel ban targeting majority-Muslim countries and struck down a California requirement that anti-abortion, state-licensed pregnancy clinics provide notice to their clients that abortion is an option. These significant rulings were immediately overshadowed by the retirement from the court of the frequent swing voter Anthony M. Kennedy, which now gives Mr. Trump the opportunity to nominate a predictable religious conservative who would most likely support the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*.

While it is impossible to overstate the long-term importance of the next court appointment, Mr. Sessions and many of his fellow cabinet members offer textbook examples of the everyday perils of entangling religion with politics. Mr. Sessions's citation of the opening verse of Romans 13, which admonishes that every soul must be "subject unto the higher powers" and that there is "no power but of God," inflamed an already bitter debate over immigration.

the White House press secretary, Sarah Huckabee Sanders, followed up with a reminder that it was “very biblical” to enforce the law. Neither went on to quote Verse 10, which proclaims, “Love worketh no ill to his neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”

Many pro-immigration religious leaders, including Catholics, Protestants, Jews and Muslims, took umbrage at the biblical justification for a policy that could hardly be described as loving. Their objections, however, were based mainly on the idea that Mr. Sessions had picked the wrong verse.

It was left to secular organizations to identify all religious rationalizations as the fundamental problem. The Center for Inquiry, a secular think tank, and the Freedom From Religion Foundation, on whose honorary boards I serve, issued strong condemnations — as did the Americans United for Separation of Church and State. Rachel Laser, president of Americans United, put it succinctly: “The separation of church and state means that we don’t base public policy on the Bible or any religious book.”

And yet Trump administration officials have used fundamentalist biblical interpretations to support everything from environmental deregulation to tax cuts.

Scott Pruitt, who resigned as head of the Environmental Protection Agency in disgrace Thursday, exited with a letter that repeatedly used the word “blessed” to describe his service. Mr. Pruitt, a former trustee of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, had asserted (while he still had a job) in an interview with the Christian Broadcasting Network that Americans who want stricter environmental standards are contradicting the Bible. He said, “The biblical worldview with respect to these issues is that we have a responsibility to manage and cultivate, harvest the natural resources that we’ve been blessed with to truly bless our fellow mankind.” The trenchant headline recounting the interview in Baptist News read: “God Wants Humans to Use Natural Gas and Oil, Not ‘Keep It in the Ground,’ says E.P.A. Chief.”

Many evangelical Christians do not share such theocratic fantasies. These evangelicals, like former President Jimmy Carter, are spiritual descendants of Roger Williams, who was banished from the Puritan theocracy of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and founded the first Baptist congregation in colonial America. Williams is also credited as the first person to use the phrase “wall of separation,” in a 1644 response to the theocratic Puritan clergyman John Cotton. (There should be a “wall of separation between the garden of the church and the wilderness of the world,” he wrote.) Thomas Jefferson used the expression in a famous 1802 letter to a Baptist congregation in Danbury, Conn.

Williams is an inconvenient figure for today’s religious right, which asserts that the only purpose of the “wall of separation” was to protect religion from government — not government from religion. That was true in early colonial America, but the other side of the equation was well understood by the time the Constitution — which never mentions God and explicitly bars all religious tests for public office — was written. Destructive religious wars in

17th-century Europe, among other factors, had led many Americans to the realization that governments could indeed be threatened by a close identification with religion.

President Trump’s appointees seem unconcerned about whether statements praising the godliness of mixing religion and politics will offend secular and many religious Americans.

Ben Carson, the secretary of housing and urban development and a devout Seventh-day Adventist, has described commitment to the separation of church and state as “crap”, prompted by “political correctness”.

At a December cabinet meeting, Mr. Carson was asked by Mr. Trump to say a prayer thanking God for the recently passed tax cut bill. Mr. Trump also took a jab at the press pool and said, “You need the prayer more than I do, I think.” Speaking to Mr. Carson, he added: “Maybe a good prayer and they’ll be honest, Ben.” Mr. Carson responded by thanking the Almighty for a “courageous” president.

Mr. Sessions took on a larger mission last fall when he sent a 25-page memo on “protections for religious liberty” to every federal agency. It warned that government “may not exclude religious organizations as such from secular aid programs, at least when the aid is not being used for explicitly religious activities such as worship or proselytization.”

Andrew Seidel, a lawyer with the Freedom From Religion Foundation, notes that although it’s hard to know what this will mean in practice, “It’s an invitation — but one that carries great authority — to go further and further and further in shrinking the distance between church and state.”

Last but not least is Education Secretary Betsy DeVos. Ms. DeVos, raised as a strict Calvinist, has devoted much of her life to promoting private and religious schools over public education. She is particularly proud that last year’s tax bill expanded the education savings accounts known as 529s so that they can now be used to pay for private schools, starting from kindergarten.

In May, Ms. DeVos visited New York City, which has the largest public school system in the country. She did not inspect a single public school. Instead, she stopped by two Orthodox Jewish schools and spoke at a fund-raiser where she was introduced by Cardinal Timothy Michael Dolan. In her speech, she expressed support for tax credits to help pay tuition for private schools.

While applauding state initiatives to aid these schools, Ms. DeVos opposes any federal program that would create a new bureaucracy. That is not enough for Cardinal Dolan, who wants federal money (presumably because he knows that New York is unlikely to divert more taxpayer dollars to private schools).

“Some states will need more prayers and more action than others to bring about needed changes,” Ms. DeVos acknowledged.

As someone who believes that the separation of church and state provides equally needed protection for government from religion and for religion from government, I am grateful that laws speak louder than prayers — and take longer to craft on this earthly plane.

Post-Tea-with-Trump Bulletin from the UK:

I'VE MET SOME D**KHEADS IN MY TIME BUT WOW, SAYS QUEEN

(Ripped off from the thedailymash.co.uk, 7/14/2018)



The Queen is marveling that, after 66 years on the throne, she has just met the biggest knobhead of her reign so far. Her Majesty, who is 92 years old, thought she had seen it all before but admitted to servants that, boy, was she wrong.

She continued: "My jaw's still on the floor. I have never in all my life spoken to such a colossal dickhead, and I've met Robert Mugabe.

"Seriously, all the guys that are history to you? Nixon and Harold Macmillan and the Shah of Iran? I've met the lot, and they were a parade of walking cocks in suits, but this guy?

"Like one minute in he's telling me that he has the Royal Warrant on his golf course. No you haven't, you knob, and you know how I know you haven't? Because it's my warrant because I'm the f**king Queen.

"President? This dickhead makes dictators look democratic. Honestly, Ceasescu, Emperor Hirohito and General Pinochet put together have nothing on this tool. What an absolute twat."

She added: "Well I can't abdicate now. The next one could be even worse and I'd hate to miss it."

SENSELESS SLAUGHTER: PRAISE JESUS!

Michael Stone

(Excerpted from "Christian Trophy Hunter Thanks God After Killing Giraffe", at Progressive Secular Humanist on patheos.com, 7/3/2018)

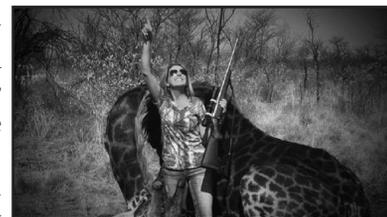
SuperChristian trophy hunter Tess Thompson Talley is defending her senseless killing of a "rare black giraffe".

In a since-deleted post on Facebook, Talley posted a photo of her and the dead giraffe, writing:

"Prayers for my once in a lifetime dream hunt came true today! Spotted this rare black giraffe bull and stalked him for quite awhile."

Talley, a trophy hunter from Kentucky, killed the giraffe last year. However, recently *Africa Digest* posted a tweet expressing outrage at the senseless, cowardly, and cruel killing of the magnificent animal, while calling Talley a "white American savage".

The sad truth is that cowardly and morally deficient trophy hunters like Talley (*and the Trump Brothers - don't forget Junior and Eric! - JR*) travel to Africa every year to engage in canned hunts and collect "trophies" such as warthogs, elephants, zebras, lions, and giraffes, with entire tour companies dedicated to the so-called "sport".



"Prayers for my once in a lifetime dream hunt came true today!"

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You put words in Donald's
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