

PIQUE

Newsletter of the Secular Humanist Society of New York

February 9, 2021

Happy Valentine's Day – love somebody. Herein we make it plain that we love science, but are not so crazy about science denial, psychics, or bogus Christian “persecution”. Crazy? We introduce the Weekly Index thereof and the latest nuttiness from Texas. We wonder what liberals get wrong about conservatives, cheer an anti-Bible rant, review American racism, tweak the War on Drugs, and promote a Zoom talk by one of our own. We got only two responses to our COVID-Day-of-Remembrance? question, but let's try again: How do you think the post-pandemic world will change? – JR

WHAT WILL CHANGE? YOUR OPINIONS PLEASE

John Rafferty

Wow, it's been a really fun eleven months, hasn't it? But someday, maybe even this year, we'll come up out of our high-rise burrows and into everyday fresh air and restaurant tables-for-four and subway commutes. Back to normal? Probably not, say the experts.

What do *you* think will change? Will we again shake hands when we meet? How about friendly hugs? ... cheek-to-cheek and even air kisses ... packed dance floors ... live theater ... movie multiplexes ... church services ... public swimming pools ... SRO rock/pop concerts ... theme parks?

When we go back to the office will we again wear neckties every day? (*Gloria Steinem: What animal starts every day by putting a noose around its neck?*) Will women squeeze their feet into high heels for any event less than a new-business presentation? Um ... bra-less Fridays?

Your opinions, please ... to editor@shsny.org. Please!

DENYING SCIENCE Jonathan Engel

When we think of “science denial” we usually think about the denial of hard science, and with good reason. The most obvious example is the denial of the science around climate change. But we've also seen the denial of the science of wearing masks during a pandemic and the denial of the science behind the need for clean air and clean water. Hell, we've even seen the denial of scientific weather reports, which thanks to former President Trump we now know can be altered using a simple Sharpie, no science required.

But the denial of hard science is only the most visible sign of this phenomenon, the tip of the iceberg, as it were.

Underlying the denial of hard science is the denial of the scientific method.

The scientific method requires us to cast off preconceived notions and dogma in favor of openminded inquiry. It requires the careful sifting of reliable evidence to separate fact from fiction, as well as the willingness to question our assumptions and always seek to falsify our conclusions. That's right, scientists try to prove themselves wrong because that's the only way to make sure that they are truly right. For many people this isn't easy because it requires them to live with uncertainty. In science there is no deity that supposedly has all the answers. People who rely on the scientific method don't say “god” when they don't know something; they say they don't know, and they live with and even embrace that uncertainty, which also serves as an impetus to more research and truth-seeking.

If that doesn't sound like the way most Americans think, that's because it isn't. We live in a land of conspiracy theories that are completely divorced from reality, no less reliable evidence. In today's America “I think”, “In my opinion”, and “people are saying” have replaced “the evidence shows”. And then of course there's the persistent influence of religious beliefs. The people of the United States are some of the most religious in the western world. The problem is, religion requires belief in things for which there is no, or contradictory, evidence. Such unfounded beliefs are frequently referred to as “faith”. This is antithetical to science, in which evidence always comes before belief.

If human beings want to survive and prosper in the coming centuries, we must hew closely to the scientific method. Fantastical notions and magical thinking are fun in novels and movies, but in real life they lead us down black holes of ignorance and impede human progress.

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“PRO-BUSINESS”? NO, ANTI-SCIENCE

Libby Anne

(Excerpted from “It’s not about the economy, it’s about being anti-science”, at Love, Joy, Feminism on patheos.com, 1/28/2021)

It was never about business or the economy.

The Wisconsin state Legislature is poised to eliminate the only statewide mitigation effort in place against the coronavirus pandemic just as a new, more contagious strain of COVID-19 is expected to become widespread within weeks.

Republicans in the Assembly plan to take up a resolution passed by the state Senate that would end Democratic Gov. Tony Evers’ latest health emergency declaration, which he issued to mandate face masks through March. Its passage would end the requirement. The effort is leaving health officials scratching their heads.

That’s because removing the mask mandate doesn’t help anyone. It’s not like removing restrictions on inside dining, or gyms, where restrictions absolutely do cut into businesses’ bottom line. In this case, having a mask mandate actually *helps* businesses, as it reduces spread of the virus with very little cost. In fact, consistent mask wearing actively helps workers and business owners feel that it is safe to remain open or work. ...

Mask mandates are arguably pro-business.

In April, Republicans frequently opposed health mandates or sought their repeal on the argument that they harmed business. And it’s true! Banning or restricting indoor dining does harm businesses! But, as public health experts were quick to point out, *so does the unchecked spread of a deadly virus*. The solution was always to provide funding and support to ensure that businesses could meet public health requirements without going under. That, of course, was rarely Republicans’ solution.

But the central point remains: in April and beyond, Republicans have claimed that their opposition to public health measures stemmed from a desire to protect business. The Wisconsin GOP’s plan to eliminate that state’s mask mandate in a rejection of the state’s Democratic governor shows that it was never about business or the economy: *it was about being anti-science, and about naked partisanship*.

As this long pandemic year has stretched out, I have increasingly felt that Republicans’ response to the pandemic was governed not merely by the narcissism of the demented populist they had front and center for much of it but also by a widespread conservative disbelief in science and distrust of scientists. You can’t spend years arguing that scientists are faking evidence for evolution, or that climate change is a conspiracy theory, without undermining trust in science and, by default, in public health experts.

I’m not sure which is more potent: conservatives’ ready-to-go distrust of science and scientists, or their knee-jerk reaction to be against anything “liberals” are for—even if that’s public health. Either way, the Wisconsin GOP’s effort to remove the state mask’s mandate, for no real reason, underlines the danger of this milieu.

WHAT LIBERALS GET WRONG ABOUT RELIGIOUS CONSERVATIVES

John Stoehr

(Reprinted from religiondispatches.org, 11/19/2020)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHY DO THEY CRY "PERSECUTION"? BECAUSE THEY WANT PERSECUTION!

David G. McAfee

(Excerpted from "Christian Persecution Explained By Atheist Religious Studies Grad?", on patheos.com, 1/27/2021)

The Christian persecution complex seems strange to an outsider. Why do so many fundamentalist Christians feel like everything is an attack on them? As an atheist who has a degree in Religious Studies with an emphasis on Christianity and Mediterranean Religions, I can confidently tell you it's because they are dogmatically required to think that way. ...

With a Christian majority (65 percent of American identify as Christians), in a nation with a thinly veiled church-state separation that caters to Christianity, it seems outrageous that any Christian would claim to be persecuted. ... All over the internet, you'll find Christians claiming everything from Starbucks cups to religious education courses violate their right to be free of persecution.

It's not as if all Christians exhibit this persecution complex, but perhaps they should, if they take their own holy texts as gospel, because the source of this trend is the Bible.

Matthew 5:10 says, "*Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*"

2 Timothy 3:12 says, "*Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.*"

1 John also says, "*Do not be surprised, brothers, that the world hates you.*"

Most importantly, however, the Bible actually cites persecution of Christians as a predictor of the End Times. Jesus purportedly says, for instance, that this type of discrimination will increase, foreshadowing the savior's return.

Matthew 24: *Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake.*

And one need not look far to see some Christian group claiming that this prophecy is being fulfilled right now.

Hallelujah!

So, for some Christians, finding persecution is more than just a desire to be a victim. Their faith, and often their sense of self, is tied to it.

DARWIN AS APICAL FREETHOUGHT ANCESTOR A "SPEAKING OF HUMANISM" TALK BY OUR OWN DAVID ORENSTEIN

The American Humanist Association invites you to join its February event on Zoom, Thursday, February 11, 6:30-8pm ET. Come celebrate International Day of Women & Girls in Science and Darwin Day!

Darwin's work in biology supported the work of scientists, freethinkers, and social activists in the United States and Europe. Building on such work has led us to the global pursuit of a humane understanding of our world. We stand on the shoulders of humanist giants who, in turn, stood on Darwin's seminal works to inform their ideas and activism.

A Member of the Board of SHSNY, Dr. David Orenstein is a tenured full professor of anthropology at CUNY - Medgar Evers College. He is an internationally-known speaker and author on science education, evolution acceptance, and human rights. Dr. Orenstein is also the American Humanist Association's representative to the United Nations. Early training as a primatologist has led to his lifetime of humanist activism and concern for our understanding of the cosmos, the Earth and our shared humanity.

Join on Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/91843782348>.

THIS WEEK'S INDEX OF CRAZY John Rafferty

Steven Brandenburg believes that the Earth is flat and that the sky is not really the sky but a "shield put up by the government to prevent individuals from seeing God".

Until he was arrested he was the overnight pharmacist at Aurora Medical Center in Grafton, Wisconsin, who thought the Covid vaccine would make people infertile and implant them with microchips. So in December he took the Center's vaccine supply out of refrigeration overnight, causing the ruin of 600 potentially life-saving vaccinations.

Anderson Cooper had a chat on air with the QAnon-er who had thought Cooper was a robot.

Cooper: "Did you, at the time, believe that Democrats, high-level Democrats, and celebrities were worshipping Satan, drinking the blood of children?"

Jitarth Jadeja: "Anderson, I thought you did that. And I would like to apologize right now for thinking that you ate babies. But, yeah, 100%. ... I at one stage believed that QAnon was part of military intelligence, which is what he ["Q"] says. But on top of that, that the people behind him were actually a group of fifth dimensional intra-dimensional extraterrestrial bipedal bird aliens called Blue Aliens."

I THOUGHT THIS WAS SETTLED 156 YEARS AGO

On Jan 26, Texas Rep. Kyle Biedermann (R-Fredericksburg) filed Texas House Bill 1359, the Texas Independence Referendum Act. It would allow Texans to vote on whether the Texas Legislature should create a committee to develop a plan for the state's secession from the United States and the establishment of an independent Republic of Texas.

Question: *So, Kyle, bubbie, Slave State again, or Free? - JR*

SYSTEMIC RACISM? YOU BET.

(Editor: We Americans are facing up to the reality of our racism more openly and more honestly than we ever have before. No one but the most vicious brute can watch a video of a black man being suffocated to death by a white policeman and not be moved to question some basic assumptions about our society. Who and what the hell are we? Is white racism as American as apple pie?)

Before you say "Not in my America," consider the history of official American racial law and practice condensed in the following excerpt from Alex Ross's review, How American Racism Influenced Hitler, of several new books about Hitler in The New Yorker of 4/23/2018. – JR)

As for Hitler and America, the issue goes beyond such obvious suspects as Henry Ford and Charles Lindbergh. Whitman's *Hitler's American Model*, with its comparative analysis of American and Nazi race law, joins such previous studies as Carroll Kakel's *The American West and the Nazi East*, a side-by-side discussion of Manifest Destiny and Lebensraum; and Stefan Kühl's *The Nazi Connection*, which describes the impact of the American eugenics movement on Nazi thinking. This literature is provocative in tone and, at times, tendentious, but it engages in a necessary act of self-examination, of a kind that modern Germany has exemplified.

The Nazis were not wrong to cite American precedents. Enslavement of African-Americans was written into the U.S. Constitution. Thomas Jefferson spoke of the need to "eliminate" or "extirpate" Native Americans. In 1856, an Oregonian settler wrote, "Extermination, however unchristianlike it may appear, seems to be the only resort left for the protection of life and property." General Philip Sheridan spoke of "annihilation, obliteration, and complete destruction". To be sure, others promoted more peaceful—albeit still repressive—policies. The historian Edward B. Westermann, in *Hitler's Ostkrieg and the Indian Wars*, concludes that, because federal policy never officially mandated the "physical annihilation of the Native populations on racial grounds or characteristics", this was not a genocide on the order of the Shoah. The fact remains that between 1500 and 1900 the Native population of U.S. territories dropped from many millions to around 200,000. ...

American eugenicists made no secret of their racist objectives, and their views were prevalent enough that F. Scott Fitzgerald featured them in *The Great Gatsby*. (The cloddish Tom Buchanan, having evidently read Lothrop Stoddard's 1920 tract, *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy*, says, "The idea is if we don't look out the white race will be—will be utterly submerged.") California's sterilization program directly inspired the Nazi sterilization law of 1934. ...

When Hitler praised American restrictions on naturalization, he had in mind the Immigration Act of 1924, which imposed national quotas and barred most Asian people altogether. For Nazi observers, this was evidence that America was evolving in the right direction, despite its specious rhetoric about equality. The Immigration Act, too, played a facilitating role in the Holocaust, because the quo-

tas prevented thousands of Jews, including Anne Frank and her family, from reaching America. ... The German Foreign Office found it "astounding" that other countries would decry Germany's treatment of Jews and then decline to admit them.

Hundreds of thousands of Americans died fighting Nazi Germany. Still, bigotry toward Jews persisted, even toward Holocaust survivors. General George Patton criticized do-gooders who "believe that the Displaced person is a human being, which he is not, and this applies particularly to the Jews who are lower than animals."

(Note: Thanks, Joel Galker, for alerting me to this. – JR)

"I DON'T CARE ABOUT YOUR GODDAMN RELIGION"

A clip from a Nov 5, 2018 episode of The Young Turks liberal/progressive news and opinion show on YouTube has gone viral. The clip features host Ana Kasparian going off on the attempt by many conservative Christians to justify their opposition to a woman's right to choose by referencing and quoting the Bible. Find this on YouTube:

"I don't care if you're Christian. In fact, I will fight for you to have your religious liberty and practice your Christianity. I believe in that.

"I don't believe in Christianity, which means that *you* do not get to dictate the way I live *my* life based on your religion. I don't *care* what the Bible says. You have every right in the world, all those women who identify with your religion have every right in the world to not get an abortion, to not take birth control. But they do not have the right to dictate *my* life and what I decide to do with *my* body. I don't care about your goddamn religion.

"I'm so tired of having non-stop conversations about what the Bible says. You live your life in the way that you interpret the Bible. Again, I don't care. But you don't get to take the Bible and tell me, well the Bible says this in this chapter in this verse. *I don't care.*"

THE ONLY VICTORY EVER IN THE HALF-CENTURY "WAR ON DRUGS"

Oregon's state law decriminalizing all drugs officially went into effect last Tuesday, February 1. Measure 110 was overwhelmingly approved by voters last November.

The Drug Decriminalization and Addiction Treatment Initiative reclassifies the possession of small amounts of drugs as a civil violation, subject to either a \$100 fine or a completed health assessment by a designated center. The initiative uses taxes from the sale of marijuana, which was legalized in 2014, to partially finance addiction recovery centers and services.

Comment: Hey, Governor Andrew Cuomo ... hello? – JR

A FURTHER THOUGHT ON THE ABOVE

Who would have thought that one day we'd be smoking weed at a family gathering, but that the illegal part would be the family gathering?

A PERFECTLY RATIONAL EXPLANATION

Dennis Middlebrooks

In an interview with the German language newspaper *Staats-Zeitung*, famed astrologer Susan Miller explained why she failed to predict the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

"I did not see the pandemic coming, because I was not looking for it. I had no idea that something like that could happen. If Jupiter and Pluto come together, as was the case on April 4, that normally signifies prosperity. I did not know that Pluto also rules over viruses. Moreover, Jupiter has the power to increase everything it comes into contact with.

"When I checked the horoscope for the 1918 Spanish Flu, I saw that Jupiter and Pluto were in conjunction and almost fell off the sofa!* There was a major outbreak of Yellow Fever in 1795, when Jupiter and Pluto again came together. But I would not like to think that every time there was a conjunction between Jupiter and Pluto, people will think that there will be a great virus outbreak."

How's that for a rational explanation? That goddamn virus-spreading Pluto!

**Imagine how bad Spanish Flu could have been if Jupiter and Pluto had indeed fallen off the sofa! - JR*

READERS RESPOND

To the Editor: In conversation recently you said that now that Umpray is no longer president you're going to take PIQUE in a post-He-Who-Shall-Not-Be-Mentioned-As-Often direction. Reading PIQUE now, the new direction looks to be about contra "patriotic" racism.

So, Whatsisname didn't create racism but he legitimized it and gave it some serious cred ("good people on both sides"). Had he just been corrupt and kept a lowish profile there would be no fewer racists, racist persecutions, "social conservatives", racial intolerance, harassment, police shootings, beatings and asphyxiations, harassment, economic and social discrimination legitimized and sometimes encouraged or permitted by legislation, chiefs of police and office holders. Nothing new about that; racism and other hates continue to thrive in America with or without Him.

Grateful as I am that He is on the downswing (for who knows how long), his brand of "patriotism" existed long before he became president and is still doing well in the states and in Congress. The good news is that progressivism too is on the upswing and there are indications that thanks to Him it won't with a whimper quickly subside. Humanists, Atheists, Apatheists, Secularists, Nones especially might need a kick in the ass (aka timely reminder) to get politically busy, stand up, stand together or at least donate to progressive causes, organizations, candidates. - Joel Galker

P.S.: how about a column in PIQUE where members can anonymously report the pro-human/ Humanist/ progressive political, human rights, etc., efforts/donations they've made? Demonstrations attended, emails to their Congressional, state and city reps, signing probably useless petitions, etc.? - Joel

Response: You start. - JR

COVID-19 MEMORIAL

Helen Bennett

Over 400,000 Americans perished,
And each was a person so deeply cherished.
A husband, a wife, a sister or brother,
A lover, a friend, a dad or a mother.
Some were teachers who nourished the young,
And each was a song as yet to be sung.
We've got a vaccine to meet the great need,
A shot was developed at warp speed,
But the rollout was hindered by a vast bureaucracy
That spoke of the limits of past autocracy.
Now that we've got a new president
We're assured of good will and some competence,
And soon, with good luck and cooperation,
We'll get that much needed vaccination.
Oh, to be free of this dreaded disease,
Our friends will be hugged and our minds at ease!

- January 31, 2021

NO, THANK YOU

David Rafferty

A national COVID day of remembrance? No, thank you. If you have to do something, honor the scientists who worked (are working) for a vaccine and a cure. And don't give them a "Day" that'll only be co-opted by marketers, give them funding and a commitment to science-based education.

Yes, I know we'll all feel better if we have another cute colored ribbon to wear but what day do we pick anyway? The date of the first recognized case? The day our first celebrity (Tom Hanks) got it so we started taking it seriously? And while we do mourn the dead and want to console the survivors, I find it hard to put grandma who got sick hugging her granddaughter, the meathead who took up a precious ventilator because "only pussies wear masks", and the denier who threw a super spreader party all in the same category. Two of those I have no sympathy for, and deserve nothing more than our scorn and eternal condemnation.

HAPPY VALENTINE'S DAY



