

Atheists and Other Freethinkers Newsletter

January 1998

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AOF Internet Website: Report

by Pat Kelley

Currently the AOF page counter is sitting at 1813, and according to the statistics generated, we receive at least 49 visits per day - the majority of which are on Sunday! This is good news because for the first year our website was in existence the average monthly count was maybe 10 hits! Here is a rundown of where our visitors are coming from:

- USA Commercial 160
- Network 87
- USA Educational 19
- Non-Profit Organizations 5
- USA Government 3
- Australia 4
- Canada 5
- USA Military 2
- Colombia 6
- Hungary 1
- Norway 1
- New Zealand 1
- Portugal 1
- Sweden 2

- Singapore 1
- United States 3

The [feedback](#) page holds comments that I have received from visitors over the past several months.

President's Message

by Hank Kocol

I have just completed reading a book which I recommend highly to everyone. "TWO NATIONS, Black and White, Separate, Hostile, and Unequal," by Andrew Hacker, a Professor of Political Science, Queens College, New York, is a striking study of race relations, generally white and Afro-American, in this country. I say "generally" because also included are data referring to Asian and Hispanic experiences.

The author delves, of course, into the historical aspects of race relations, stemming from the slave trade and slavery, followed by the emancipation and events since that time. He describes the differing societies in which whites and blacks find themselves, their common experiences, and their contrasting viewpoints of the U.S. culture.

Of course, America has always been a racist culture, not only vis-a-vis the blacks, but also with Asians, Hispanics, and Native Americans. The difference, of course, is that the slaves were brought here involuntarily.

The stereotypes of the races toward each other are discussed in detail, along with the responses of both races toward those stereotypical viewpoints.

The differing, and similar, experiences with raising families, education, housing, employment, the justice system, and the politics of race relations are disturbingly illuminated.

The descriptions of the differences between the races are very well documented with data from the Census Bureau, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the National Center for Health Statistics, and the Department of Health and Human Services.

The author discusses all the arguments from both races concerning the mental pictures they have of each other and explains the reasons for those mental pictures. Of great interest to me were the data which both support and refute the stereotypes we have all heard.

The book seems to me to be very objective in its study and use of data and extrapolations therefrom. The real proof of the objectivity, to me, was that, after reading the entire book, I had no idea, even a guess, as to the racial background of the author.

I recommend this book highly to anyone who has any interest and questions concerning race relations in today's American society.

January AOF Program

The January AOF program will feature Mary Walton with a panel discussing efforts of various organizations concerning violence in our community. Ms. Walton is co-chair of the Committee to Reduce Violence, an organization sponsored by the Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship and dedicated to the identification of and addressing the issue of violence of all types. The Committee works with other groups developing programs and actions to deal with violence and its results.

Groups that will be represented on the panel are WEAVE (Sheila Vollenbach), the Hispanic Community (Marian Navarro-Thoms), and the Asian Community (Carol Ching).

Special Joint AOF/HAGSA Meeting

On February 15, 1:00 till 4:00 p.m., a joint AOF/HAGSA meeting will be held at Sierra-2 Community Center, Curtis Hall, to honor the birthday of Charles Darwin (actually, February 12). Dr. Eric T. Pengelley, Emeritus Professor of Evolution and Zoology, Department of Biological Sciences, UC DAVIS, will be the speaker on Darwin's life, the voyage of the Beagle, the theory of evolution and its publication, and the controversy concerning the theory beginning with its first publication and extending to today. Dr. Pengelley will speak from about 2:00 till 3:15 p.m., followed by audience Q&A and discussion. The room is reserved until 4:00.

Tentative plans call for a catered Mexican luncheon followed by the presentation by Dr. Pengelley. A charge for the lunch and lecture should cover the entire cost of the program.

Freethought Quotes

"Religious experiences are like those induced by drugs, alcohol, mental illness, and sleep deprivation: They tell no uniform or coherent story, and there is no plausible theory to account for discrepancies among them."

Michael Martin, *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification*, 1990

"If I were going to convert to any religion I would probably choose Catholicism because it at least has female saints and the Virgin Mary."

Margaret Atwood, Canadian author

Local AU Chapter Meeting and National Convention

The next Sacramento AU (Americans United for Separation of Church and State) meeting will be held at the California Teachers Association at 1118 10th Street on Wednesday February 18th at 5:00 p.m. For more information regarding local AU meetings, contact Susan Mogull at (916) 944-3459.

The Fourth Annual [Atheist Alliance](#) National Convention will be held April 10-12, 1998 (Easter Weekend) in St. Louis, Missouri. It will be hosted by The Rationalist Society of St. Louis in celebration of the 50th anniversary of its founding.

Program highlights include Michael Martin (author of The Case Against Christianity), Annie Laurie Gaylor (Women Without Superstition), Kaz Dzimka (fired from his job for promoting Humanism), Verle Muher (Executive Director, Center for Inquiry Midwest), Valery Countryman (The History of The Rationalist Society of St. Louis), Bill Petersen, Ph.D. (The Psychology of a Believer), Pat Inniss (Boy Scout discrimination activist), and Herb Silverman (the candidate without a prayer).

For further information, contact The Rationalist Society of St. Louis, P.O. Box 2931, St. Louis, MO 63130 (314) 846-8105.

Joke From Atlanta Freethought News, December 1997

About a century or two ago, the Pope decided that all the Jews had to leave Rome. Naturally there was a big uproar from the Jewish community. So the Pope made a deal. He would have a religious debate with a member of the Jewish community. If the Jew won, the Jews could stay. If the Pope won, the Jews would leave.

The Jews realized that they had no choice. They looked around for a champion who could defend their faith, but no one wanted to volunteer. It was too risky. So they finally picked an old man named Moishe, who spent his life sweeping up after people, to represent them. Being old and poor, he had less to lose, so he agreed. He asked only for one addition to the debate. Not being used to saying very much as he cleaned up around the settlement, he asked that neither side be allowed to talk. The Pope agreed.

The day of the great debate came. Moishe and the Pope sat opposite each other for a full minute before the Pope raised his hand and showed three fingers. Moishe looked back at him and raised one finger. The Pope waved his fingers in a circle around his head. Moishe pointed to the ground where he sat. The Pope pulled out a wafer and a glass of wine. Moishe pulled out an apple. The Pope stood up and said, "I give up. This man is too good. The Jews can stay."

An hour later, the cardinals were all around the Pope asking him what happened. The Pope said, "First I held up three fingers to represent the Trinity. He responded by holding up one finger to remind me that there was still one God common to both our religions. Then I waved my finger around me to show him that God is all around us. He responded by pointing to the ground,

showing that God was also right here with us. I pulled out the wine and the wafer to show that God absolves us from our sins. He pulled out an apple to remind me of original sin. He had an answer for everything. What could I do?"

Meanwhile, the Jewish community had crowded around Moishe, amazed that this old, almost feeble-minded man had done what their scholars had insisted was impossible!

"What happened?" they asked. "Well," said Moishe, "First he said to me that the Jews had three days to get out of here. I told him that not one of us was leaving. Then he told me that this whole city would be cleared of Jews. I let him know that we were staying right here."

"And then?" asked a woman. "I don't know," said Moishe. "He took out his lunch and I took out mine."

Circulating On The Internet

A man is talking to the Lord, trying to understand his eternal nature. "Lord," he asked, "What's a million years to You?" "A million years is but a second to me," the Lord explains. "And a million dollars?" "A penny," the Lord replies. The man feels bold and now proceeds to ask, "Lord, would You give me a million dollars?" "Sure," the Lord replies, "just a second."

A woman went to the Post Office to buy stamps for her Christmas cards. "What denomination?" asked the clerk. "Oh, good heavens! Have we come to this?" said the woman. "Well, give me 30 Catholics, 10 Baptists, 20 Lutherans, and 40 Presbyterians."

Atheist Programming For Your Viewing Pleasure

Limited information was available for the national atheist programs submitted from other cities for replay on Sacramento Cable's Channel 74, so an abbreviated listing will follow.

Wednesday January 7th 8:00 pm, [Atheist Alliance](#) Presents (Minneapolis) -- Biblical Death -- Channel 74

Thursday January 8th 5:30 pm, Atheists Talk -- Atheists on Television -- Channel 74

Sunday January 11th 9:00 pm, Atheist Viewpoint (American Atheists) -- Religion/Racism -- Channel 74

Wednesday January 14th 8:00 pm, [Atheist Alliance](#) Presents (Minneapolis) -- Fighting Back -- Channel 74

Sunday January 18th 9:00 pm, Atheist Viewpoint (American Atheists) -- Infecting the Child's Mind -- Channel 74

Wednesday January 21st 8:00 pm, [Atheist Alliance](#) Presents (Minneapolis) -- Rev. Bob Edgar and Radical Right -- Channel 74

Sunday January 25th 9:00 pm, Atheist Viewpoint (American Atheists) -- Positive Atheism -- Channel 74

Wednesday January 28th 8:00 pm, [Atheist Alliance](#) Presents (Minneapolis) -- All you wanted to know about atheism -- Channel 74

Member Profile: Betty Simonsma by Cleo Kocol

A native of Nebraska, Betty Simonsma grew up on a farm. Although her parents belonged to no church and had no bible in the home, the family occasionally attended the United Brethren Church with the neighbors.

Becoming an atheist was a slow process. At 17, Betty moved to California, eventually married and had children. For several years she attended the Methodist Church. Moving away from it was gradual. After she began listening to the words of the songs, she quit singing. When asked to teach Sunday School, she balked. "I can't teach doctrine," she explained. When she finally left the church, only the preacher asked why. Her three daughters and one of her sons share her atheistic views.

At an American Atheist conference in Sacramento, Betty met people who shared her beliefs. Later, 16 people attended a meeting at her house, and AOF was off the ground. Since its inception, Betty has taken a large role in the organization. She was the third president, has been a member of the board, served on the newsletter committee, took care of the literature table, been interviewed by the media, helped with charity dinners and highway cleanups, and been a greeter at meetings. Today she still is involved in many of those activities and is responsible for the membership database as well.

When she isn't involved with AOF, she paints china, sews and quilts, watches and attends basketball games, and plays bridge four or five times a month. She's an avid reader who used to be involved in politics, but is now indifferent, although she always votes.

Winter holiday time for Betty and her family is, "a giving time without religion. Commercialism has robbed Christmas of much of its religious aspect." She recently completed a seven page letter to her grandchildren explaining her views about atheism. "The idea that the Bible is sacred is ridiculous. Atheists should point out that the old book was written for the Hebrews. I can't imagine why anyone would think Jesus is special."