

the Humanist Advocate

Issue 1, 2015

a publication of
NOSHA
NEW ORLEANS SECULAR HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

New Orleans Secular Humanist Assoc.
(a 501c3 corporation)
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Council for Secular Humanism
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GENERAL MEETING

3rd Saturday of the month, 4pm
Dominion Learning Center
Audubon Park Zoo

NOSHA TV

New Orleans Cox Cable, Channel 76
Also, on YouTube and Vimeo

"The Humanist Perspective"
Sundays: 2:30am & 2:30pm

"The Atheist Viewpoint"
Saturdays: 4am and 4pm

Common Ground Between East and West with Guest Speaker David Bernstein

April 18

The time slot at the beginning of the monthly meetings reserved for "readings", or short, inspiring or informative passages read by volunteering members, got a fresh interpretation by **Jennifer Porter**, who gave the group a cool but structured primer on canvassing—doing the footwork, knocking on doors, passing out fliers—for spreading information within and beyond one's own neighborhood. Its value as a recruiting method and the sound techniques for implementing it are skills that we could all benefit from if we are sincere about getting our humanist ideals to a wider base. Jennifer's PowerPoint-by-poster-board illustrations were just entertaining enough to be very effective for creating interest in her message. Thanks, Jennifer, for giving us a whole new take on the readings segment, and please return soon!

The "knowledge" discovered is not factual knowledge, but, as Huston Smith in The World's Religions puts it, "an intuitive discernment that transforms, turning the knower eventually into that which she knows".

NOSHA welcomed **David Bernstein** as the featured speaker, who spoke on the theme

of Eastern and Western religions and philosophies and if there are any similarities, or shared concepts that could be compared. Mr. Bernstein has been practicing meditation, or some variation on the concept of "mindfulness" for 14 years, and has been involved in promoting and leading discussion groups under the group name **New Orleans Lyceum Philo Cafe** for several years. Bernstein gave a brief overview of the ancient (5000-6000 years old) religious tradition of **Jainism**, originating in India and precursor to Hinduism.

As time passed, the complexities of Hindu thought began to jell for Western historians, theologians, and philosophers to begin to explain, in theory, the grand encompassing wealth of ideas to be found within it.

The basic quest of all humanity, every individual, is to arrive at an inner, or real self, stripped of the multi-layered facades that obfuscate the true essence of all being. Bernstein spoke about jnana yogi, where the "knowledge" discovered is not factual knowledge, but, as Huston Smith in The World's Religions puts it, "an intuitive discernment that transforms, turning the knower eventually into that which she knows".

Understandably, comprehending a topic as wide as Hinduism can get away quickly from those (including yours truly) not well-practiced in a vocabulary of spiritual concepts and ontologies of mysticism. Mr. Bernstein's presentation format and unorthodox style of delivery did little to clarify many of the complexities and nuances within the subject, which is regrettable, because a topic as rich in tradition with a good common sense approach to coping with life should be told clearly for proper appreciation.

And where, exactly, is the common ground between Hinduism and the Western tradition of rational thought? It may just lie in the ability of the reflective practice of jnana yoga, meditation, or engaging in "mindfulness" to reduce the individual to the essence of existence with every other human, and thus eliminating the mind-body dualism that has been a nagging footnote, when not being the overbearing 500-pound gorilla straddling Western philosophy since the days of Descartes. Or maybe not. In mystery religions, a "yes" is as good as a "no".



Author Sydney Pulitzer discusses his book with Harry Greenberger on "The New Orleans Humanist Perspective"

the

Humanist Advocate

“Repair Washington,” says Sidney Pulitzer

March 21

If the adage that you learn more from those with opinions differing from yours than those with similar opinions is true, then a considerable education was in the offing at the March meeting with Tulane adjunct professor and businessman Sidney Pulitzer doing the speaking honors, giving an overview of his recently published book, *Repair Washington: Practical Legislation for a Constitutional Convention*.

A convention to change our current constitution is necessary, said Pulitzer, not only to limit the terms of members of Congress and the President, but also limit how much can be donated toward political campaigns and politicians and by whom. Also, on the docket would be proposals for a balanced budget amendment, tort reform, establishment of conditions necessary to repeal, or “countermand” federal statutes, revamp the election process with a “blended” electoral college and popular vote, and create civil and criminal guidelines and penalties for ethics and “truth” violators. Changes in current drug policy is needed to reduce the number of people locked away for victimless crimes, said Pulitzer.

From this point—drug policy reform—and those succeeding, Mr. Pulitzer’s motivation for the book was becoming consistent with expressing a libertarian ethic on the personal level, functioning within a laissez-faire, lightly-regulated capitalist economic system.

During the question and answer forum following the presentation, several members of the audience expressed serious differences of opinion with Pulitzer on several fronts. He was challenged on the idea of

the “countermand” amendment, which one questioner likened to “nullification”, an issue that contributed, at least in part, to the Civil War. His comparison of socialism to totalitarianism was called out as fallacious; and another member questioned the feasibility of getting the wealthy to agree to give up their power and control in government at any level, and that vast economic inequalities created as a necessary result of unfettered capitalism would make true political equality impossible.

The mood of the gathering was still abuzz when the discussion was concluded and adjourned to the break room—the need to re-establish a little order in the gathering had become priority...

It’s all about learning, and hopefully it made the rounds and was shared equally.

Special Guest – Jason Heap, Executive Director of United Coalition of Reason

The recently appointed Executive Director of the United Coalition Reason, Dr. Jason Heap (Jase), made a surprise visit to New Orleans on March 21, and arrived at the Dominion Learning Center at the Audubon Zoo just in time to be introduced to NOSHA members at the monthly meeting.

Dr. Heap replaced Fred Edwards as director for UnitedCoR, and is now in charge of advising and supplying support for about 800 allied local atheist, agnostic, and secular organizations throughout the country. Mr. Edwards, who spoke at a NOSHA meeting last year, is now the Director of Planned Giving for

the Humanist Foundation, the endowment fund of the American Humanist Association.

New Orleans was one of the last stops Jase made on what might be described as a whistle stop tour of affiliate groups in the South and Southwest. Heap said there are 79 UCoR members between Los Angeles and Florida. Though he didn’t imply that he had visited all of them, he detailed a few of the stops he made in Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Mobile in the Coalition’s newsletter, which he also writes.

Dr. Heap has accumulated the credentials. A link on AHA’s website lists: “Masters of Divinity from Brite Divinity School (Texas Christian University), a master’s in history and religion from the University of Oxford, and post-graduate certification from Sheffield Hallam University. He taught philosophy, psychology, religious studies, personal/social/health education, and other subjects in the United Kingdom’s state-maintained schools and was a head teacher at U.K.-curriculum ‘international’ schools. He recently completed a Doctor of Education in Administrator Leadership, and his dissertation focused on empowering non-Western grassroots schools and teachers”.

But credentials alone can’t say enough about a man’s character, and Jase is a good example. In 2013, he applied to become the U. S. Navy’s first humanist chaplain. His application was rejected, and in November 2014, he (along with the Humanist Society, an independent humanist group) filed a discrimination suit against the Navy and the Department of Defense.

We can only hope for the best of decisions on this suit, but know, regardless of outcomes, the United CoR has done a tremendous job of bringing in a man of Heap’s qualifications and dedication to our cause.

The NOSHA Social Aid and Pleasure Club Gives Back

The community service activities of NOSHA are usually, if not formally, performed under the rubric of the NOSHA Social Aid and Pleasure Club (SAPC), which one organizer, Glenn Pearl, observed has been “doing mostly the former”, speaking of the group’s participation at the Second Harvest Food Bank in Elmwood Park in late May. He wasn’t exaggerating—this was but one of the two projects the club undertook in May, the other at Carrollton Cemetery in Uptown New Orleans, working with the local civic association through the non-profit Save Our Cemeteries on a weeding, trimming, and clean-up effort.

At the cemetery, the work was clipping, raking, and sweeping. Not fun stoop labor! The job at the Second Harvest was assembly line sorting and boxing of donated canned and dry food products in the packing room of the food bank—and both jobs mixed liberally with the heat and humidity that comes with this time of year. SAPC members survived with only one case of mild overheating at the cemetery, and no conveyor belt or other industrial-style accidents on the Second Harvest production line. Our food packers, with the help of a group of Boy Scouts and several young ladies, finished the day boxing two tons of canned and dry foods.

Although the myth that you can’t be good without gods wasn’t put to rest to the satisfaction of religious apologists, the reality is that non-believers working together can expose it as the myth it is. Thanks to regulars Rita, Kevin, Eve, Jim, Charlotte, Ricky, Will, Marty, and Ron and Maria. Special thanks to Glenn for getting us organized; and newcomers Jude, Doug, Alexandra and C.J.—just for being there!

“Dr. Dery-do” Humanist and Humanitarian

May 16

“The good news,” Dr. MarkAlain Dery said, pacing the stage away from the podium, “is that HIV will not be transmitted by the human host if treatment is started right away. And people infected with the virus can live normal, healthy, and long lives as long as the treatment continues.”



Dr. Dery, Assistant Professor of Clinical Medicine at Tulane was addressing the monthly meeting of NOSHA. A few of his other titles were noted in his introduction. “Dery is the medical director for the Tulane T-Cell Clinic, a community-based HIV clinic that is unique in that a majority of the clients are women and minorities. He also founded the New Orleans Society for Infectious Disease Awareness”, and in December of 2014 launched, with NOSIDA, FM radio station WHIV-102.3. He recently completed a trip to Liberia with The **World Health Organization** in the effort to combat the Ebola outbreak that was ravishing the country.

“The bad news,” he continued, after reversing his stride across the stage, “is **Baton Rouge and New Orleans lead the country in new HIV and AIDS cases.**” The reason is twofold. “Healthcare in the United States sucks!” The energetic speaker had the audience echoing the admonition in unison after a couple of repetitions: “Healthcare in the United States sucks!” In The U.K. and Europe, where two out of three patients get proper medication for the condition, only one in three in America does, resulting in the twelvefold mortality rate here. Puritanical religious custom preaches “abstinence only” as the singular guide to proper sex education, but in Europe, teaching the proven scientific elementals is considered a human right. A similar conclusion is inevitable as the other cause of high infection rates: “Sex education in the United States sucks!”

Whether it’s a case of bad education in the U.S., or a case of no education at all in under-developed parts of the world, his work with The World Health Organization in Liberia last year proves that knowledge is the key to controlling and mitigating any disease. Much of the spread of Ebola in Africa was blamed on improper, unprotected contact with both living and deceased Ebola patients. Traditional burial rituals, including the washing and touching of bodies contributed significantly to the spread of the virus. Everyone remembers the visuals of Ebola exposed Americans returning home surrounded by people in moon suits carrying 10-foot poles—resulting in no new infections here. The science, the knowledge works.

Spreading the word: that was Dr. Dery’s motivation for parlaying his relationship with NOSIDA to request a license for a low frequency radio station band the FCC had available. He hopes to expand health care programming as interest, funding, and volunteer staffing increases. Our own **Dorian-gray Alexander** is volunteering (On the Air!) several hours a week, and can relate his experiences as an HIV-positive Black man in New Orleans—with a \$2250-a-month bill for a monthly supply of 30 pills.

Dr. Dery’s measureless energy has provided him the strength not just to be involved in some of the largest health crises of the day, but to attack them, in a pitched duel, directing his fight against their humanly manageable causes—poverty, ignorance, and a government with the political will to wage war, but not to provide health and hope.

For his derring-do, MarkAlain Dery has earned two additional titles: Humanist and Humanitarian.

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