



The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

www.SBHumanists.org

AUGUST 2015

August Program

Martin Adamian: The 2015 Supreme Court Year

"Just who do we think we are?" Chief Justice John Roberts asked recently in his dissent of the Supreme Court's decision approving Same-sex Marriage. He was restating one of the most difficult questions that perennially confront the nine justices: when should they alter or overturn laws approved by voters or other elected branches of government? This issue has repeatedly divided the court, with justices landing on both sides of the question, arguing for judicial restraint in some cases and for intervention in others.



Martin Adamian, Associate Professor in the department of Political Science at Cal State, Los Angeles, will discuss this issue and others in assessing the recent Supreme Court year. He will give a general overview of cases decided during the year followed by details of the most significant cases.

Dr. Adamian, from Southeastern Michigan, received BS degrees in Political Science and Psychology from Central Michigan University, and a Juris Doctorate degree from Wayne State University Law School, after which he worked for the Free Legal Aid Clinic practicing family law for low income individuals.

He later received a Ph.D. in Political Science from Colorado State University where he focused on political theory, international relations, and environmental politics. Since 2006 he has been at Cal State, Los Angeles, where he teaches undergraduate courses in constitutional law, American government, International law, trial advocacy, and legal research and writing.

When: Saturday, August 15th, 2015

Where* Please Note* This meeting is at Valle Verde, 900 Calle De Los Amigos, Santa Barbara. Directions: From Modoc Road (heading NW, or towards Goleta), turn left onto Calle De Los Amigos (about a block past the turn to Vista del Monte). Continue on Calle De Los Amigos to the Administrative Offices and parking is on the right or on the street.

Time: Meet at 2:30pm for socializing. Program begins at 3:00 pm

Donation: \$2 members/\$5 non-members. Students with ID are free.

Optional Buffet Dinner: Dinner buffet at Valle Verde. Cost is not exactly known at this time but expected to be similar to Vista del Monte. More details to come. RSVP to

judithannfontana@yahoo.com or 967-7911.

For More Info: Call 769-HSSB (769-4772)

Activities

Judy Fontana

We will have a buffet dinner at Valle Verde, following the meeting on August 15th. At this time, no menu is available, but should be similar to the buffets we have at Vista del Monte. The cost should be similar as well (around \$25 or so). As more information about the buffet becomes available, members will be notified.

Welcome to Our New Members!

Clover Brodhead, Santa Barbara
Bea Hamlin, Santa Barbara

President's Column:

Heroes

Colin Gordon

Everyone loves a hero. The idea of putting another person or cause above our own safety stirs the soul, lifts our spirits, and tells us that maybe the world is not such a bad place after all. But it's an elusive quality. Just what makes a hero and how do we decide which honorable acts qualify?

Heroism comes in several flavors. Recently Donald Trump, our latest blowhard, told us that Senator John McCain, who had been imprisoned for many years in Viet Nam and had suffered at the hands of his captors, was not really a hero. It offended a lot of people, and yet there is a grain of truth in it. Certainly the fact that he had flown jets over enemy territory and faced hostile fire showed bravery and, yes, heroism, but whether subsequent captivity qualified him for the title is not quite so clear. Courage and endurance are certainly to be admired but survival, maybe not so much. Many years ago I experienced the air attacks on London; a few months of bombing then a pause followed by

V1 flying bombs and V2 rockets. Does that make me a hero? I don't think so; they all missed me so I only make the grade of survivor.

And then there are many that we greatly admire and call heroes although they may actually never do anything very heroic. Perhaps they should be placed in the category of potential heroes. I am referring to the many police, firefighters and servicemen who, although ready to leap into action and risk their lives for us, as so painfully demonstrated in the twin towers on 9/11, fortunately are never called upon to do so. Unless you sign on as a Marine or a Navy Seal or similar the probability is that you will live your service life in comparative luxury and then, as a hero, qualify for a generous pension and all kinds of benefits.

Real military heroism is easily recognized. Sergeant York was one of the most decorated American soldiers in World War I. He received the Medal of Honor for leading an attack on a German machine gun nest, taking 32 machine guns and inflicting heavy casualties on the defenders, during the United States-led portion of the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. Any soldier who walks forward in the face of machine-gun fire is a hero in my book. And maybe some of the defenders were heroes too.

Sometimes there is a need for instant action. On January 13, 1982, Air Florida Flight 90, a Boeing 737 on a scheduled flight from Washington National Airport, crashed into the 14th Street Bridge and then into the icy Potomac River. Flight attendant Priscilla Tirado took hold of a line from a rescue helicopter but as it pulled her and two others toward shore, she lost her grip and fell back into the water. When the helicopter returned she was too weak to grab the line. A watching bystander, Congressional Budget Office assistant Lenny Skutnik, stripped off his coat and boots, and in short sleeves, dove into the icy water, swam out and pulled her to shore. He was introduced as a hero to the joint session of the U.S. Congress

during President Ronald Reagan's State of the Union speech later that month.

There are other kinds of heroism. Malala Yousafzai is a Pakistani activist for female education and the youngest-ever Nobel Prize laureate, known mainly for human rights advocacy for education and for women in her native Swat Valley, northwest Pakistan. The local Taliban had banned girls from attending school. On the afternoon of October 9th, 2012, she boarded her school bus. A gunman asked for her by name, then pointed a pistol at her head and fired three shots. She remained unconscious and in critical condition for several days, but later improved enough for intensive rehabilitation. The Taliban reiterated its intent to kill Yousafzai and her father Ziauddin. Responding to concerns about their safety, he said, "We have an ideology that advocates peace. The Taliban cannot stop all independent voices through the force of bullets."

Perhaps the stamp of a true hero is that there was an alternative, a way out that he or she refused. Sergeant York did not have to be so aggressive; Skutnik could have stayed on the riverbank with the other onlookers, and Malala did not have to go forward with her ideology. But they did, they all took the high road, and in doing so, increased the stature of humanity.

Letter to the Editor

Even though Colin said "No Offense Intended" in his President's Column [*Secular Circular*, May, 2015], his words were full of sarcasm and disdain for members of several minority groups who he thinks are being "over-sensitive" or offended by political incorrectness.

And yes, the considerate terms for minority groups change as these groups become more assertive and ask for respect and consideration. Do you understand why Native Americans are tired of being called Indians for 400 years? That was obviously a mistake made by early explorers who were looking for India when they came to North America and saw native people with skin a little darker than their own European skin. But these were not Indians. There probably wouldn't be any tension and hard feelings still after 400 years if the Europeans (soon Americans) had not treated the Native Americans so tragically. They were killed, driven from their land, cheated with broken treaties, purposely given small pox, had their children taken away, etc. etc. etc. The Europeans colonized lands all over the earth, and it was never fair. The indigenous people were stereotyped as vicious fighters or drug users and so symbols of war-like native dress was used to represent sports teams. Can't anyone see that this is insulting? And when you stereotype people negatively, it gives society permission to discriminate and escalate the bad treatment.

I think it's a good rule to always try to address people the way they want to be called. You too probably have names you wouldn't want to be called, but you don't have a history of being lynched by the dominant culture for your ethnicity, race, or sexual orientation, so it's not nearly the insult it is if you're a victim of the dominant culture and discriminated against.

WHAT TERRIFIES
RELIGIOUS EXTREMISTS
LIKE THE TALIBAN
ARE NOT AMERICAN
TANKS or BOMBS
or BULLETS.



MALALA YOUSAFZAI

caglecartoons.com
THE STRIKE CITY
12

IT'S A
GIRL
WITH A
BOOK.

I think when someone does not understand sensitivity about terms such as Indians, N-word, fag or dyke, it shows either a lack of knowledge of the torture a group has experienced for hundreds of years or totally not caring about piling on more rejection and hatred on people who did not choose their race or who they're attracted to any more than you chose your ethnicity or to be attracted to the other gender. Science has found that we are born with whatever sexual orientation we have and don't choose it as teens. My college students know this, but for us seniors, it may be new to some of us, because it wasn't known when we were in college. And we've all had times when we used terms that are now considered offensive. But don't say that's stupid when minority groups have to educate us in the dominant culture. LGBTs are not being sensitive about nothing. Way more of them have been attacked and often killed by those who are ignorant and full of hate. Life and death is significant.

-Marian Shapiro

**July Program:
Deborah Rogers –
Prisons, Profits and a Little Bit of
Politics: Visiting Immigration
Detainees
Helen Gordon**

Humanist Deborah Rogers responded to an appeal for visitors from detainees at Adelanto, a privately-operated federal prison in San Bernardino county. Adelanto is near Victorville, three hours' drive from Santa Barbara, in the middle of nowhere.

It is the Immigration and Customs Service's newest and largest prison in California. The detainees she visited were all young men who were brought to the

United States when they were children. They have not committed any crime or been accused of a crime, but are facing possible deportation to Mexico or whatever country their parents came from.



HSSB President Colin Gordon with our July speaker, Deborah Rogers. Photo by Marian Shapiro.

Many people ask, "Why don't the immigrants just get in line?" The answer: there is no "line." Current immigration policy allots 25,000 green cards per country per year. Monaco gets that amount for its 36,000 people, whereas Mexico has 120 million people. With such a big population, Mexican immigrants have to wait 20 or 25 years just to get considered for a green card, and even then they don't know if they'll get in.

Supposedly if an immigrant has a family member who is a U.S. citizen, he can apply for a green card, but one Filipino applied in 1989; his application was just beginning to be processed in 2012.

Suppose a woman wanted to do it right – she was brought in at age 3. Now 32, with 2 kids and a husband, she doesn't speak Spanish. Yet she would have to go to Mexico and wait there for 10 years. Then if she is lucky, and applied at age 32, she could come back to the U.S. at age 67.

Our great grandparents could simply walk across the border from Canada or Mexico and settle here. There was no law against it. The hardest part of immigrating was getting the passage money. In 1927, the U.S. started setting quotas, but the laws were more generous than they are now.

Being “undocumented” is not a crime. It is a civil offense, like cutting hair without a license. Other civil offenses have a path to correction, such as a fine. But the civil offense of being “undocumented” lands you in the slammer. Many families of these men live on the edge of poverty, but they can get by until dad goes to prison for a civil offense!

Where do they go? To private prisons, although they have committed no crime. They have no right to an attorney, and no right to a phone call, but if they do make a call, they are charged \$5 per minute. They can be there for months or years, with nothing to do, no rehab, no training. They can read a library book or play dominoes. Court cases can be held remotely, using a TV monitor while the judge is in Los Angeles.

The goal of private corporations is not justice or public safety --- just to make profit for shareholders. Private prisons get paid \$150 per day per prisoner, so they want more prisoners and to keep them there longer. They contribute heavily to election campaigns and employ lobbyists to maintain their profitability.

The remote location makes it hard for visitors to get there, because the bus station is two miles away from the prison. Time for visiting is severely limited, and the waiting room has only 8 tables. If one misses an appointment for a visit, she has to wait outside for 3 hours in 110-degree heat. Keeping records on 3x5 cards and paper sheets delays the process. Clearly the prison does not want visitors to see what is going on.

What do these detainees want to talk about? First, their kids. They want to know if their kids are okay, or if they have been sent into foster care. They don't like to talk much about their pending court cases. They are curious about a stranger who visits them, because they are desperate for companionship and news of the outside.

How can we fix this deplorable situation?

1. Slow or stop detentions and incarceration of people who have committed no crime. They can be monitored as free individuals while their cases are pending.
2. Remove the profit motive from incarceration. Public facilities could be provided less expensively and closer to the families of the undocumented.
3. Keep families together. Putting some kids into foster care because the mother cannot support her whole family does irreparable harm to children and their families.

Note to HSSB members: You can listen to Deborah's talk on our website: <http://www.santabarbarahumanists.org/article/7284-audio-of-july-2015-talk-by-debra-rogers-about-prisons>



HSSB member Marty Shapiro talking with Deborah Rogers. Photo by Marian Shapiro.

The Amaz!ng Meeting, 2015

Diane Krohn

The Amaz!ng Meeting (TAM) is an annual conference that focuses on science, skepticism, and critical thinking. The conference started in 2003 and is sponsored by the James Randi Educational Foundation (which was founded by magician and skeptic, James “The Amazing” Randi).

This was the first TAM that we (Wayne Beckman and I) have attended. We have been to several other various humanist, atheist, and skeptics conferences, so we felt that it was time to try yet another flavor of freethinker meeting. We attended for 3 days and listened to 34 presentations, ranging from the search for Bigfoot, censorship in comics, studies on placebos, how to battle misinformation online, to myths about bodybuilding (!). Several sessions on Friday were devoted to Martin Gardner’s life as a skeptic. Several of the presentations are summarized here:

Natalia Reagan: Big Feat, Small Steps: Sasquatch, Science, and the Search for the Golden Turd

Natalia Reagan is a primatologist who has been involved with TV shows about searching for Sasquatch, or Bigfoot. She talked about the various biological aspects of Bigfoot as a primate, including how it would move (knuckle-walking vs. bipedalism), diet, tool industry, dentition, reproductive strategies, and communication. What is needed, ultimately, to provide actual evidence of such a creature is “the golden turd,” or DNA evidence from feces (or hair, blood, saliva, skin). Of course, nothing of the sort has yet been found from the many searches for Bigfoot.

James Alcock: When Beliefs Collide

James Alcock is a Professor of Psychology at York University (Canada) and a noted critic of parapsychology. He talked about various

beliefs and how we process information. Some beliefs are based on evidence and reason. But is it good evidence? Frequently, it is based on an authority, and if that authority changes his or her position, how does that change affect your beliefs? Beliefs are often motivated by feelings (it makes you feel good), and erroneous beliefs can be reinforced by experience, such as coincidences, precognitive dreams, and prayer.

Think about this: What would it take for you to change a deeply-held belief? In trying to convince others to change their beliefs, you must find a position that won’t be automatically rejected. “I’m right and you’re wrong” will not convince anyone to change beliefs. It is better to try to get the other person to think about what would change his or her mind.

Kathleen Dyer: How Could an Educated Person Believe That Stuff?

Kathleen Dyer is an Associate Professor in Child and Family Sciences at Cal State, Fresno. She presented results from a survey she conducted that looked at correlation of paranormal belief to educational level, political ideology, and religious beliefs. Belief in the paranormal is so common in the U.S. that it is considered normative. The more educated still believe in the paranormal, but different beliefs than the less educated; for example, ESP and PSI vs. devils and ghosts. Her survey did not show a correlation of belief in the paranormal with political beliefs or religious beliefs. She did find, however, that students majoring in natural sciences had a negative correlation to belief in the paranormal.

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 There were so many interesting presentations and not enough room in the newsletter, so a few more will be summarized in next month’s issue of *The Secular Circular*. Please feel free to ask me or Wayne Beckman about the TAM and we can tell you more than you probably want to hear!

Asking Trump, Carson, & Santorum About Atheists

Amanda Knief, American Atheists Legal & Public Policy Director

Ask any American whether they believe their vote matters to any particular elected official or person running for elected office, and many will say “no.” This is especially true of atheists who would like to have a say in conservative politics.

Now, there are strong progressive voices in the atheist community, no doubt. But there are also conservatives—and they deserve to be represented just as much as progressive atheists do. All atheists deserve much better and much more vocal recognition from our elected officials.

Unfortunately, many of our elected officials do not even know that atheist voters exist. Before you scoff—consider whether you or other atheists you know were aware of our movement before you began doubting your religious beliefs...

The religious right has done an outstanding job of making politicians pay attention to their issues and their leaders by getting their members and followers to get involved in elections and campaigns. Their work has greatly benefited the candidates they supported, and candidates took note and began catering to the religious right’s demands. After more than 30 years of marrying conservative public policy to Christian voters, it has become accepted that one must be religious to be a conservative. We are only seeing a few cracks in this symbiotic relationship with some conservative leaders and elected officials supporting marriage equality.

Using the religious right playbook, American Atheists teamed up with Iowa Atheists & Freethinkers to protest at the 4th Annual

Family Leadership Summit in Ames on July 19; the summit featured 10 conservative leaders hoping to get the Republican presidential nomination. More than 35 protesters from Iowa and South Dakota stood in the blazing sun with a heat index over 100 degrees for hours to interact amicably with attendees. Protesters’ signs advocated separation of religion and government, reason over myth, and that Christian beliefs don’t represent all Americans. A few people argued, some stopped to talk, but everyone looked.

I had a ticket to attend the summit. I wanted to hear what the candidates were going to say to a conservative religious crowd. Would their regular stump messages change when they knew the crowd favored Christians? There were more than 2,000 people there and more than 200 news outlets covering the event. So wearing my bright red #AtheistVoter t-shirt, I went inside and visited the media information table and introduced myself and handed the worker my card. I explained I was at the event for American Atheists to report on the messaging of the candidates. I asked if I could be credentialed as media. The head of the press table agreed to do so. So adorned with a MEDIA pass, I entered the auditorium and found a seat in the orchestra pit—between NBC News and the New York Daily News....

Some of the candidates talked to the press after their Q&As with the audience. With my media pass, I was able to be part of these events. The first one I went to was for Donald Trump, who made some controversial remarks about Sen. John McCain and also about running as a 3rd party candidate. The press mobbed him but eventually I was able to get in a question.

Me: “Mr. Trump, by coming to a religious-based event like this are you telling atheists that you don’t want their votes?”

Trump: “I don’t know about atheists. They may not like me.”

I didn't get the chance for a follow-up because his staff ended the presser soon after. But Mr. Trump's answer seemed honest. I don't think atheists as a voting bloc had ever occurred to him...

Read the entire article here:

<http://news.atheists.org/2015/07/28/asking-trump-carson-santorum-about-atheists/>



HSSB Movie Night

In August, HSSB movie night will be Friday, August 28th, at Marty and Marian Shapiro's home in Goleta. All HSSB members and interested friends are invited to join.

We will have a pot-luck dinner and conversation starting at 5:00 p.m., bring something ready to share. Or, you can just come for the movie starting at around 6:30 p.m. RSVP for the address and directions: Phone: 968-0478 or email: martinshapiro@cox.net or marianshapiro@cox.net.

The August movie will be *The Interview*: James Franco and Seth Rogan play the host and producer of a talk show and discover that North Korean leader Kim Jong-un is a fan of

their show. An interview is arranged, the CIA gets involved, and the plot thickens....

The IMDB description is here: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt2788710/>

On movie night, we also collect paperback books for donation to the jail's recreational library. The books should be paperback, in good condition from well-known publishers. They should have no previous owner's names or notes written inside the books. Small markings could be erased or blacked out. There should be no underlines or page notes. No pornography or anything racially provocative. Novels, westerns, murder mysteries, suspense, etc. are preferred.

Lecture Series at Karpeles Library

The Karpeles Manuscript Library Museum will be hosting a series of lectures by Joseph Atwill. All lectures will be on a Sunday, from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.

The lectures will be the following topics:

- Sunday, September 6: Caesar's Messiah.
- Sunday, September 13: Shakespeare's Secret Messiah.
- Sunday, September 20: Postflaviana: Freemason in the Rye.

For more information, call Norman Cohan at The Karpeles Manuscript Library Museum, 805-962-5322.

(Editor's Note: Joseph Atwill seems to have a view of the history of Christianity that is at odds with historians and Biblical scholars. See this discussion on Patheos:

<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/wwjtd/2013/10/joseph-atwill-has-not-proven-that-jesus-was-made-up-by-the-romans/>

Nevertheless, they may be interesting lectures if viewed as an exercise in critical thinking.)

Non-HSSB Events of Interest

Upcoming Events in California:

- August 16: Dave Zobel: *The Science of TV's "The Big Bang Theory."* Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles and Costa Mesa.
http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/science_of_tvs_big_bang_theory/
- September 6: Monica Richardson: *The 13th Step*, a documentary about Alcoholics Anonymous. Center for Inquiry West, Los Angeles.
http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/the_13th_step_documentary/
- September 20: *Merchants of Doubt*, a documentary about how political spin is played on various scientific issues.
http://www.centerforinquiry.net/la/events/merchants_of_doubt_documentary/

Upcoming Events Outside of California:

- October 9-11: Freedom From Religion Foundation 2015 Convention. Speakers include Ron Reagan, Dan Barker, Kevin Kruse, Steven Hewett, and others. Madison, WI.
<http://ffrf.org/outreach/convention>

“Let us account for all we see by the facts we know. If there are things for which we cannot account, let us wait for light. To account for anything by supernatural agencies is, in fact to say that we do not know. Theology is not what we know about God, but what we do not know about Nature.”

– Robert G. Ingersoll, *Some Mistakes of Moses*

HSSB Contact Information

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Newsletter Deadline:

Deadline for submissions to the Secular Circular is midnight, the last day of each month.

HSSB meetings are held on the 3rd Saturday of each month at 2:30 pm, usually in the Patio Room of Vista del Monte, 3775 Modoc Rd., Santa Barbara. More information is available at our web site:

www.SantaBarbaraHumanists.org. At meetings, a donation of \$2 from members and \$5 from non-members is appreciated. First-time visitors are welcome on a complimentary basis. Students are free with a Student ID.

Annual HSSB membership dues are \$36 for a single person, \$60 for a couple, and \$100 (or more) to become a Society Supporter. One may subscribe to our newsletter only for an annual fee of \$20.

To join HSSB, please send your contact information and a check for your membership dues to HSSB, PO Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130, Attn: Mary Wilk. For membership information contact Mary Wilk at 967-3045, or mwilk@cox.net.

Copies of this newsletter are posted on the HSSB website. Photos are on the website and available via the link
<http://picasaweb.google.com/Humanist.Society.of.Santa.Barbara>



See us on Facebook



Humanist Society of
Santa Barbara
PO Box 30232
Santa Barbara, CA 93130

HSSB Calendar

Tuesday August 11: Board Meeting: 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

Saturday August 15: Monthly Meeting: Martin Adamian will be talking about Supreme Court decisions. Valle Verde, 900 Calle De Los Amigos, Santa Barbara. Talk starts at 3:00 p.m. Optional buffet dinner after the talk at Valle Verde.

Friday August 28: HSSB Movie Night: We will be watching *The Interview*. Meet at 5:00 p.m. at Marty's and Marian's house. Bring a potluck dish to share and a couple of books for donations to the jail. Call Marty for information and directions: 968-0478 or email martinshapiro@cox.net or marianshapiro@cox.net

Sunday August 30: (and the last Sunday of every month), 10 a.m., **Secular Sunday Brunch** for humanists, atheists, agnostics, skeptics, freethinkers, singles, couples and families without religion. No cover charge; membership not required. Pay only for your food, drink and tips. Cody's Cafe, 4898 Hollister Ave. in the Turnpike Center, Goleta in the room to the right as you enter the restaurant. For information phone Board member, Mary Wilk at 805-967-3045.

Tuesday September 15: Board Meeting: 5:30 p.m. Home of **Mary Wilk**. Members invited to attend.

Saturday September 19: Monthly Meeting: Bill Zuersher will talk on Seeing Through Christianity; the Patio Room at Vista del Monte. Meet at 2:30 p.m. for socializing and light refreshments. Talk starts at 3:00 p.m. Optional buffet dinner after the talk at Vista del Monte.