



The Secular Circular

Newsletter of the Humanist Society of Santa Barbara

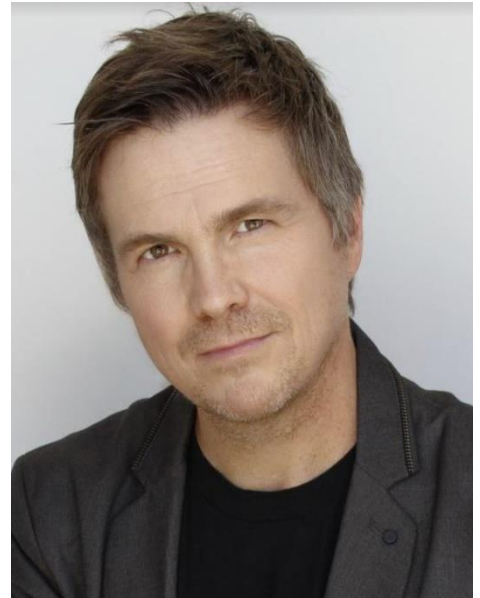
www.SBHumanists.org

FEBRUARY 2024

Please Join Us On Zoom for our monthly speaker meeting...

Atheism Goes to The Movies

Our program: In this informative and entertaining presentation, filmmaker and screenwriter (and atheist) Jeff Jackson analyzes how atheism has been depicted in the movies and television. Running at about 25-30 minutes and accompanied by a highly visual PowerPoint presentation, Jeff “flips the script” on the notion that Hollywood is an enemy of religious thought while offering his own countermeasure to address the problems he unearths. Jeff is a natural communicator who never fails to connect with his audience in a memorable and positive way.



Our Speaker: Jeff Jackson began his career in the world of advertising, where he founded his own agency and went on to write and direct award-winning commercials and video content, and has worked for nationally-known clients such as Sony, Novartis and Western Union. He wrote, directed, and starred in the acclaimed short film, *Our First Fight*, a romantic comedy which toured film festivals around the world. His feature-length screenplay, *White Collared*, a black comedy set in corporate America, won Best Screenplay at the Santa Barbara Film Festival and was acquired by Sundance-winning film producers Filbert Steps.

A playwright as well, his first work for the stage was creating the book and lyrics for a faithful musical adaptation of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, which was produced off-Broadway and starred Tony® nominee Hunter Foster. The Associated Press praised it for “bringing the classic tale thrillingly to life,” and Bloomberg Radio hailed it as “Riveting!” and “Totally exciting!” His second play, *Two Point Oh*, a dark comedy that presaged futuristic tech fare like Black Mirror, debuted in Detroit where the *Free Press* called it “compelling,” “gripping,” and “one of the most thought-provoking plays of the season.” In its NY debut, *Two Point Oh* received unanimously positive reviews and was a “Critic’s Pick” in the *New York Times*, which praised it as “smart, provocative, and funny.” Most recently, Jeff wrote, directed and produced the groundbreaking hybrid video game/live-action movie *Daemon 9*. It was universally praised by players and press alike. The Horror Network hailed it as “an astonishing achievement.” Jeff has also directed several theatrical productions in the New York area including the NYMF Festival winner *Love in the Middle Ages* and an acclaimed regional production of the musical *Ragtime*.

When: **SUNDAY** February 18, 3:00 pm - 4:30 pm PST

This program will be presented live at the Sanctuary Room, Live Oak Unitarian Universalist Church, 820 North Fairview Avenue, Goleta, CA, AND on Zoom.

Zoom Link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833>.

The HSSB Secular Circular – February 2024

January Program: Gen Z in the Hood, Presented by Sikivu Hutchinson

By Robert Bernstein

Humanist Society President Judy Flattery introduced Sikivu Hutchinson as an educator based in Los Angeles, but also an accomplished author, playwright and musician. She is one of three recipients of the 2020 Harvard Humanist of the Year Award.

Her book, *Humanists in the Hood:*



Unapologetically Black, Feminist and Heretical was the topic of her HSSB talk. Her other books include: *The Roar of Distant Engines*, *Imagining Transit*, *Moral Combat*, *Godless Americana*, *White Nights/Black Paradise* and *Rock 'n Roll Heretic*.

She is the founder of Black Skeptics Los Angeles (BSLA) and the Women's Leadership Project, which is a Black feminist mentoring program for girls of color in South Los Angeles.

Hutchinson began her talk reflecting back on her childhood era in the 1970's when you could drive on the 10 freeway and listen to Black stars like Ron Isley on the radio.

There were tight-knit communities of Black homeowners after white people had fled in terror decades earlier. Young people played tennis, made music together and swam in community pools. Unions and defined benefit plans gave Black people a bit of wealth and security. Mass incarceration and the school to prison pipeline had not happened in full force against Blacks.

She noted that all was not idyllic, but it does provide a sense of place in understanding the "hood" in "Humanists in the Hood."

She said that a series of economic setbacks in housing and wages caused "hypersegregation" for Blacks. Then she moved on to the topic of secularism and Humanism among Blacks.

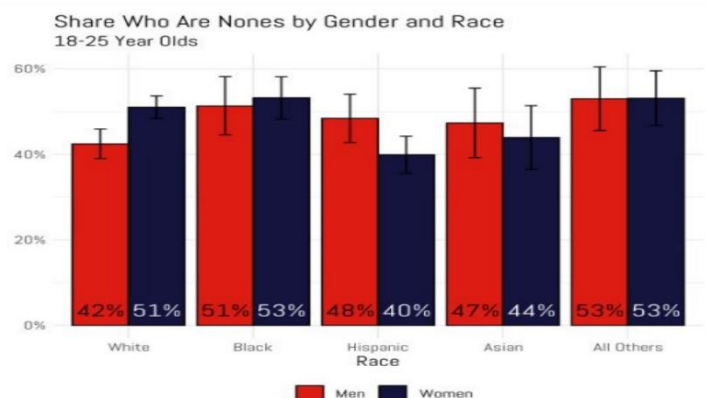
According to *Christianity Today*, "Over more than a decade, the share of Black Americans who say that they have no religious affiliation has risen more dramatically than whites, Hispanics, or Asians."

This group is called the "Nones." But the *Christianity Today* article goes on to note:

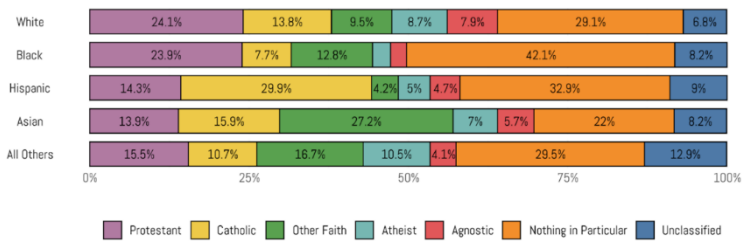
"Among Black Nones, just 6 percent of them identify as atheist and another 6 percent say that they are agnostic. That means that nearly 9 in 10 Black nones are nothing in particular. That's much higher than any other racial group.

For instance, just 61 percent of white nones are nothing in particular, 63 percent of Asians, and 73 percent of Hispanics.

Clearly, when African Americans leave religion behind, they are very reluctant to embrace the labels of atheist or agnostic. [My emphasis added]



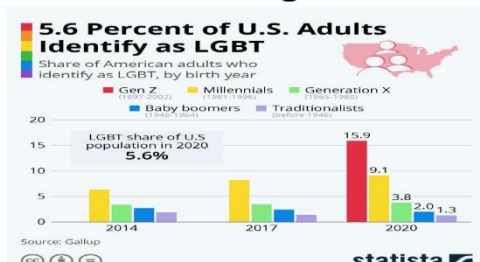
Religious Traditions Among Generation Z - By Race



@ryanburge
Data: CES 2020

Hutchinson noted that Gen Z overall is the most heretical generation in history. They also are very concerned with social and gender issues.

“Generation Z adults and youth(1997-2015) are more likely to identify as LGBT than older generations”



This has led some young Blacks to leave Church traditions and find their own paths, including exploring gender fluidity and queer identification. And lower tolerance for theocratic conservatism.

Internet access provides challenges to religious dogma, and to rejections of Republican and MAGA attitudes about abortion, the Climate Crisis and voting rights.

Hutchinson organized two Black secular youth forums. One in partnership with the American Humanist Association and one with the now defunct Black Humanist Alliance.

The forums included recipients of Black Skeptics First In the Family Humanist college scholarships. Later in the talk we got to watch videos from these forums. These scholarships helped these young people stay in college in an environment that is challenging for Black young people.

Challenges includes higher rates of suspension and expulsion among Black high school students. The disparity is most extreme for Black girls, who are six times more likely than white girls to be suspended. Black girls also have higher rates of school sexual harassment and victimization.

Black young people are also more likely to identify as queer than other young people. Hutchinson surveyed approximately 40 Black young people between the ages of 15 to 24 about their views on Black humanism and how they are portrayed in the media.

Hutchinson gave the example of a student Bev who was told by a fellow student that she was going to hell for being an atheist. Her teacher then asked if she was still moral.

Hutchinson talked of the “adultification” of Black girls: treating them as being more adult than their age.

The survey revealed a stereotype of Black atheists as being less moral and being pressured to be more religious.

Many surveyed were rejecting traditional religion for being sexist, homophobic and transphobic. But few even knew of Humanism.

Hutchinson teaches an African-American Humanism class at Pitzer College in Los Angeles. Pitzer has the only Secular Studies program in the US. Headed by Phil Zuckerman – who has spoken twice to our Humanist Society. Hutchinson described Pitzer as a “PWI” or “Predominantly White Institution.”

Gen Z can benefit from well-known secular Black writers like James Baldwin. But she said that larger than life figures are not necessary. It can be the guy at the deli.

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Humanism can reach Gen Z on the issues they already care about: Social justice, health care access, police brutality, sex education.

Young Black women face personal challenges like being written up for dress code violations from an early age and high risk of rape. They are expected to be superwomen in training as caregivers to others. These are Humanist issues that religion has not helped with.



#Standing4BlackGirls 2021 Rally, Leimert Park, L.A., Photo by BlueGreen

Unfortunately, churches currently provide some of the only safe after-school spaces for young people. We need secular/Humanist safe spaces.

At this point we watched some of the videos of interviews with some of these young people. Starting with Beverly Obed, who was told by a boy that she was going to hell.

She asked him how threatening her is going to make her want to join his faith. She suggested he approach people with kindness. He said he is doing what God tells him to do.

In discussing medical issues, the boy said he would not treat an atheist. But later he said he "forgives" her. She did not see what she did wrong that needed to be forgiven.

In another video, young Kaylin Nelson noted that we can respect religious people. They are just trying to answer big questions and that is

beautiful. But she didn't like that religions veer away from taking care of people.

Aamir Assadi was part of the Black Secularists in LA (BSLA). I was puzzled that she wore large earrings in the shape of crosses. She was part of First in the Family Humanists.

She is a Robotics Engineering student at UC Santa Cruz. She identifies as a Humanist, noting that only humans can make social change. As an engineer she claims that "every problem has a solution".

Vonni T. asked them why the decline in religion for Gen Z. Kaylin suggested that many are moving away from the Church, but not from Christianity. They may still love God. But they don't need to go with those people and those beliefs. It is more of a personal relationship with God.

After watching these videos, we had a chance to ask questions. I had many questions about her talk. But what caught my attention before the talk was her book about transportation.

Having lived in a civilized country as a child, I have always been mystified by the US transportation non-system that leaves out a third of the population who cannot drive. I was pleased that Hutchinson said that book was her PhD thesis about the destruction of public transit in the Los Angeles area.

I noted that my friend [Ashleigh Brilliant] had written his PhD thesis on the exact same topic and also published it as a book in the 1960's.

I then asked about the issue of Black secular and Humanist role models. She said you don't need luminaries. I was left wondering how this would work if young people have no way of knowing who these ordinary people are.

I noted that I had attended a memorial for a friend earlier that week who was a famed local

social justice leader, Poet Laureate and educator in Santa Barbara. She was Black and I don't ever remember her talking in religious terms. Yet the memorial was held in a church and there were endless religious references.

Hutchinson said that is Black history. It is rooted in the churches. She said that Blacks don't have secular real estate. There are challenges for lending. This surprised me, since the Humanist Society has no real estate and we were having the meeting on Zoom.

I asked how to break out of that history, noting that I come from a Jewish family and I own that history. Yet I have no trouble seeing myself primarily as a secular Humanist.

Hutchinson said that the churches are the center in the Black community for recreation, food pantries and other socializing and networking. She blamed inequity and the rise of "Christian fascist, MAGA bottom feeders and troglodytes."

Some years ago, we had a Humanist Society talk that explained that at the turn of the 20th century, Denmark was a religious, backward country. All social services were provided by churches. When the government began providing these social services in the 1930's, the country became very secular.

Judy Fontana followed up on this question, asking about the "little c" conservative obsession that social services should be provided by churches. Hutchinson called that attitude an "insidious cancer." She praised the Biden Administration's American Rescue Plan funding for social services and noted that it will go away.

Christie Blakley asked in the Chat:
"Do you find opposition to encouraging secular humanism from parents/families of the youth you work with? Or are attitudes of families shifting as well?"

Hutchinson noted that homophobia, transphobia and opposition to secularism are prevalent among some in communities of color

After the event ended, some of us stayed on for further discussion. One person noted another challenge for Black secularism: The rise of Islam in the Black community in the 1960's with the leadership of people like Malcolm X and Louis Farrakhan. As bad as Christianity was for Black women, Black Islam was worse in many ways.

This person noted that Black benefactors fund religious institutions, but not secular institutions that might benefit the Black community.

Hutchinson left us with these links for those who want to view the video clips again:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IA1mV6T0SrQ>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=db2v5PS8vm0>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXWstLzQBpY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=db2v5PS8vm0&t=1815s>

For more information about Hutchinson and her work, please go to:

<https://sivuhutchinson.com/>

Core African American Progressive Secular Humanist Principles

- ❖ Encompasses view of human beings as arbiters of moral and ethical values, rather than divine or supernatural entities and "sacred" texts (departs from Renaissance and Enlightenment-based European Humanism in focus on the following:)
- ❖ Based on the experiences of the African diaspora with enslavement, genocide, sexual violence, racial capitalism, Jim Crow, scientific racism and legacies of Black anti-racist, feminist and transnational liberation struggle and resistance against imperialism and colonialism
- ❖ Based on rejection and rebuke of European American Christian ideology/propaganda that sold "redemption in heaven" as a means of justifying slavery, rape and genocide and placating enslaved African Americans
- ❖ Based on a critique of the hypocrisy of founding myths of American democracy, individual liberty, and inalienable rights for propertied white men
- ❖ Recognition of the cultural significance of organized religion as a vehicle, platform and foundation for Black civil and human rights resistance, **as well as a mechanism for white supremacist, patriarchal, classist, heterosexist, colonial, and ableist power, authority and control**
- ❖ **Acknowledgment of the centrality of racial, gender and economic justice for progressive social change, as well as the human right to housing, health care, equitable education and food access**
- ❖ Based on a critique of racialized economic inequity and disenfranchisement
- ❖ Uplifts and amplifies the importance of everyday lived experience, cultural knowledge, cultural production, social history, and bodily autonomy among African descent peoples from all contexts and statuses

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Contemporary Issues Forum

Submitted by Judy Fontana

A Contemporary Issues Forum will be held on Wednesday, February 14 at 7:00 p.m. in Parish Hall, Unitarian Society of Santa Barbara, 1535 Santa Barbara St., Santa Barbara, CA.

Rev. Julia Hamilton will speak on *White Christian Nationalism: More Than Just Politics as Usual*, and the worldview it espouses, presents a real and urgent threat to the idea of a pluralistic democracy. We are at a turning point. How do we understand this movement, not just in the political sphere, but in all the ways it seeks to influence and control the social fabric of our nation? How do we mobilize to counteract this worldview as we face a critical election that will shape the fate of our nation for generations to come?

All are welcome to attend. There is a suggested donation of \$10.

Welcome to Gilead:

Have you noticed that many parts of America are looking very dystopian these days?

By Rob Boston

(Excerpted from The Humanist.com, January 17, 2024)

It used to be, if you wanted a glimpse of what life would be like in an America that had become a nightmarish theocracy, you had to read a book like Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*.

That's no longer necessary. Instead, you can just visit Texas.

If you doubt that, just talk to Kate Cox. The Dallas-area mother, 31, was expecting her third child when a routine screening revealed that the

fetus had full trisomy 18, a chromosomal abnormality that meant the fetus would almost certainly die in utero or shortly after birth. Carrying the fetus to term presented risks to Cox and could have made it more difficult for her to give birth in the future. Citing the threat to her life, she sought to get an abortion.

But abortions are pretty much impossible to get in Texas since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022. A state court initially approved Cox's request, but that decision was quickly overturned by the Texas Supreme Court. In the interim period, Ken Paxton, the state's attorney general, threatened to criminally prosecute any doctor who performed the procedure.

Cox left the state to have her abortion elsewhere. It's not clear where she went or how she got there, but bear in mind that her travails may not be over: Texas has a law that allows a third party—someone who doesn't even know Cox—to file charges against anyone who helps a person get an abortion. This would include whoever drove Cox to the clinic or facilitated her decision in any way.

In addition, several Texas communities have passed policies saying that their roads cannot be used to aid in "abortion trafficking"—a term religious extremists made up. Again, these measures apply to anyone who helps another get an abortion by transporting that person to a clinic.

Texas, a state where "In God We Trust" signs adorn public school classroom walls and many libraries are screening books for anything too favorable to LGBTQ+ people, is giving Atwood's Gilead a run for its money. And it's not the only one.

Under Gov. Ron DeSantis, legal abortion in Florida is hanging on by a thread. DeSantis signed a bill banning just about all abortions

after six weeks, but it's on hold pending a legal challenge.

Florida also holds the dubious distinction of banning more books than any other state. A law there allows anyone to complain about a book used in public schools. At that point, the title must be pulled from circulation and reviewed.



Rights & Wrongs by Christopher Weyant,
CagleCartoons.com

In some counties, school officials are being proactive by yanking books they believe might be targeted. Clay County public school officials banned a bunch of books with LGBTQ+ themes and, for good measure, tossed in one called *What on Earth Is a Pangolin?*

In Madison County, Alabama, public library officials were so terrorized by a group called Clean Up Alabama that they frantically compiled a list of titles that might be problematic. Most of the books had LGBTQ+ content or characters, but one of them, *Read Me a Story, Stella*, a tome for youngsters about two siblings who enjoy reading stories to each other, was flagged because—wait for it—the author's last name is "Gay." Library officials admitted a mistake was made and put the book back on the shelves. The other titles may not be so lucky...

And should anyone think I'm unduly beating on the Bible Belt, here's a tale from Pennsylvania:

Last year, a junior high school English teacher in Hollidaysburg was threatened with criminal prosecution because she had the book *Gender Queer: A Memoir* on her person in the school. She wasn't teaching it in class or reading it to students. No matter. Officials at the school, treating the book like a bubbling bucket of toxic goo, ordered her to take the volume home and never bring it back. It didn't end there: The Blair County District Attorney's Office launched an investigation. The office eventually released a statement indicating that it had found no evidence that laws were broken, but I'm guessing all this might have had a bit of a chilling effect on the teacher.

In Ohio, where voters had the temerity to add protections for legal abortion to the state constitution in November by ballot initiative—by thirteen points, no less—legislators are hard at work trying to figure out some way to undermine the vote or simply ignore it. One member of the state House of Representatives opined, "No amendment can overturn the God-given rights with which we were born."

...And don't forget, the U.S. Supreme Court keeps inching closer to ruling that religious freedom gives religious extremists the right to discriminate against people who offend their theological beliefs even in secular settings. And oh, the court is also gunning for birth control.

For too long, too many Americans have persuaded themselves that it can't happen here. It can. It is happening here.

The only question remaining is, how long are we going to allow it?

.....

The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary.

--H.L. Mencken

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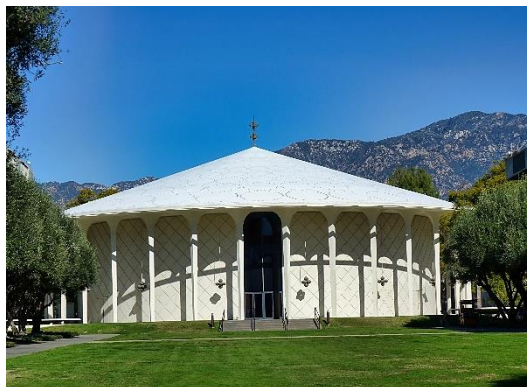
January HSSB Excursion To Caltech and JPL

HSSB Board member Gary Noreen arranged for a tour of Caltech and JPL for HSSB members and other interested community members. We headed down to Pasadena on January 29 and met with two Caltech Docents for tours of the campus. Then we had a wonderful, delicious lunch at The Athenaeum, a private membership club on the Caltech campus.

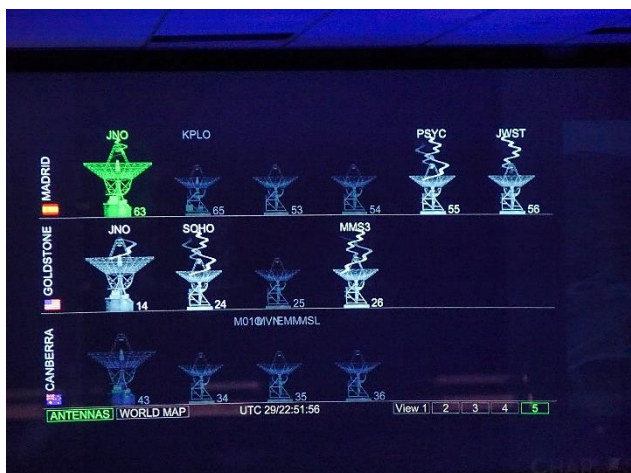
After lunch, we went to NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) for another tour of its facilities. It was a great tour! Informative and entertaining.

Thank you, Gary, for arranging and coordinating this tour!

Photos by Robert Bernstein.



Photos, clockwise starting at bottom right: Our group in front of the Athenaeum, the same place Einstein was photographed; Deep Space Network (receives data from spacecraft beyond the earth orbit) status seen in JPL Mission Control; a model of the Ingenuity helicopter; Beckman Auditorium, one of the few 60's designed buildings on Caltech campus; Spacecraft Assembly, Clean Room 1 at JPL, working on Europa Clipper orbiter, which will do flybys of Jupiter's moon Europa.



Upcoming Events of Interest to Humanists

Submitted by Diane Krohn

- February 23: Michael Mann: *Our Fragile Moment: How Lessons from Earth's Past Can Help Us Survive the Climate Crisis*. UCSB Arts & Lectures event. [Michael Mann](#)
- March 6: Rev. Kevin Jagoe: *Practicing Compassion in Community*. Zoom presentation sponsored by The American Humanist Association. [Practicing Compassion in Community](#)
- March 28-31: American Atheists 2024 National Convention, Philadelphia, PA. American Atheists [2024 National Convention](#)
- April 3: Robert B. Reich: *What Really Happened to the American Dream? (And How Can it be Restored?)*. UCSB Arts & Lectures event. [Robert B. Reich](#)
- April 13-16: Summit for Religious Freedom 2024. Washington, D.C. and virtual. Sponsored by Americans United for Separation of Church and State. [Summit for Religious Freedom 2024](#)
- April 16: Cristina Mittermeier: *Between Land and Sea: Saving Our Oceans to Save Ourselves*. UCSB Arts & Lectures event. [Cristina Mittermeier](#)
- April 24: Evan Osnos: *Two Superpowers: Navigating China and American in the New Age of Uncertainty*. UCSB Arts & Lectures event. [Evan Osnos](#)

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Wayne Beckman, Robert Bernstein, Judith Fontana, Gary Noreen, Mary Wilk

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Judy Flattery, sbhumanisteditor@gmail.com

Deadline for submissions to the Secular Circular is midnight, the last day of each month. Our web site, www.SBHumanists.org, archives current and past issues of the *Secular Circular*. Non-members may subscribe to hardcopy of this newsletter for an annual fee of \$20. E-mail copies provided to members and interested non-members at no charge.

To Join or Donate to HSSB: Annual Membership dues are \$36 for an individual, \$60 for a couple, \$100 for a Society Supporter, and \$300 (or more) for a Society Patron. Dues payments and other donations can be made via PayPal (Paypal.me/SBHumanists) or check. Include your name and contact information when submitting payments. Make checks out to *Humanist Society of Santa Barbara* and mail to Mary Wilk, P.O. Box 30232, Santa Barbara, CA 93130. mwilk@cox.net. Dues, donations, and payments can also be remitted via this PayPal QR code. Once at the site, select 'Send' then log into your PayPal account to complete the transaction.:



Watch our speaker videos on [YouTube](#). Subscribe to our [Meetup](#) page to be notified of upcoming events.





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Humanist Society of Santa Barbara
P.O. Box 30232
Santa Barbara, CA 93130

HSSB Calendar

Tuesday February 13, 5:00 pm. HSSB Board Meeting. Join as early as 4:45pm for socializing. Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667>. Members always welcome to attend.

Sunday February 18, 3:00 p.m. Jeffrey Jackson, Hollywood screen writer. *Atheists in the Movies*. Live at Live Oak Unitarian Church, Sanctuary Room, 820 N. Fairview Avenue, Goleta, AND via. Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833>.

Tuesday March 12, 5:00 pm. HSSB Board Meeting. Join as early as 4:45pm for socializing. Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667>. Members always welcome to attend.

Saturday March 23, 3:00 p.m. Marcia Hofer, *Will California's End-of-Life Law Help You if You Need It?* Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833>.

Tuesday April. 16, 5:00 pm. HSSB Board Meeting. Join as early as 4:45pm for socializing. Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83592300667>. Members always welcome to attend.

Saturday April 20, 3:00 p.m. Peter Compo *Harnessing Darwin to Get Shit Done*. Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88193881833>.