



# The Separationist

Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

October 2009

## James Yee

### "Guantanamo Bay: The Struggle for Justice and Human Rights"

Sunday, October 18, 2009, 4 p.m., Gage Hall, 4 Archdale Street, Charleston

James Yee is a third-generation Chinese American, a West Point graduate, and a convert to Islam who served as the Muslim Chaplain for the U.S. prison camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Guantanamo became controversial for its treatment of detainees designated as "enemy combatants" by the U.S. government. Captain Yee advised camp commanders on detainee religious practices and objected to the cruel and degrading abuses to which the prisoners were subjected. Despite having been officially recognized twice for outstanding performance, he was falsely accused of spying, espionage, and aiding the alleged Taliban and Al-Qaeda prisoners. He was arrested, locked in a navy prison for 76 days in solitary confinement, subject to much of the same treatment, such as sensory deprivation techniques, that had been imposed on the Guantanamo detainees he had been ministering to. After months of government investigation he was cleared and exonerated of all criminal charges. With his record wiped clean,



Chaplain Yee was reinstated to full duty at Fort Lewis, Washington. He resigned from the Army in 2005 with an honorable discharge. Since his resignation from the U.S. Army, he has publicly exposed the abuse of detainees at Guantanamo Bay and the failures of U.S.

military justice. He has detailed what really goes on at Guantanamo, and tells the world about how he struggled to prove his innocence. He authored "For God and Country: Faith and Patriotism Under Fire" in 2005.

Chaplain Yee has made presentations on Capitol Hill to congressional staff members, at Harvard University, Dartmouth, Duke, Northwestern University and other academic institutions. More recently, James Yee was elected as a National Delegate for Barack Obama to

the historic 2008 Democratic National Convention.

James Yee's talk is cosponsored by the American Civil Liberties Union and Amnesty International.

# Humanist Book Group to Discuss 'Founding Faith'

by Matt Dean

The Humanist Book Group meets on the 4th Sunday of every month, September through May, at 4 p.m. We meet at the Atlanta Bread Company in West Ashley, located at 850 Sam Rittenberg Blvd. At our October meeting, on the 25th, we'll discuss *Founding Faith: How Our Founding Fathers Forged a Radical New Approach to Religious Liberty*, by Steven Waldman.

Various American evangelicals have claimed the founding fathers were believing and practicing Protestants who intended America to be a Christian nation. Secularists, on the other hand, see in the same historical record evidence that the founders were often Deists at best.



Both views are grossly oversimplified, argues Waldman, cofounder and editor-in-chief of Beliefnet.com. In this engaging, well-researched study, Waldman focuses on the five founding fathers who had the most influence on religion's role in the state — Franklin, Jefferson, Washington, Adams and Madison — and untangles their complex legacy.

Everyone is invited to the discussion and it is not required that you have read the book to attend.

If you'd like to be added to the announcement list for the book group, or if you'd like to lead the discussion of Waldman's book, please contact Matt Dean ([bookgroup@lowcountryhumanists.org](mailto:bookgroup@lowcountryhumanists.org)).

## Atheist Group Offers to Take Care of Christians' Pets After the Rapture

A group of atheist animal lovers, guarantees that it will Earthbound Pets, is offering to take care of pets who are left behind after the rapture. For \$110 the group, which is currently active in Rapture.



“step in when you step up to Jesus” and care for your earth-bound pet if you should be called away due to the

## Myrtle Beach Humanists and Freethinkers

A new S.C. humanist group, the Myrtle Beach Humanists and Freethinkers, will meet at 5pm on Sunday, October 4th, at the Chapin Memorial Library on 14th Street North in Myrtle Beach. This month's guest speaker is Peter Soderman of the Cape Fear Humanists of Wilmington, NC. His topic of discussion will be, "Christian Nation, You Say?"

## Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

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### Officers

President: Jonathan Lamb

Vice President: Herb Silverman

Treasurer: Sharon Fratepietro

Secretary: David Brown

*Hell is other people.*

Jean-Paul Sartre

## Talking to “The Other”

by Herb Silverman

*We have entered what columnist Kathleen Parker calls "a political era of uninhibited belligerence," that is finding expression in sermons, at town hall meetings, on radio talk shows, even on the floor of Congress -- especially when we differ. Why are people so angry and belligerent, and so willing to express their anger publicly? Why has our civil discourse become so uncivil? What does this public anger say about our private faith? What should we do about it?*

Despite what Psalm 37 and Jesus say, I see little evidence of the meek inheriting the earth. However, I see much evidence for the belligerent and loud-mouthed inheriting talk shows, and the aggressive and cantankerous inheriting political careers.

This topic became noteworthy after the "You lie!" shout out by South Carolina Congressman Joe Wilson, who replaced South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford as the latest state buffoon of the week. Since I like to root for the underdog, I'll give some qualified support to Wilson. He is an undistinguished lightweight who made an impulsive and emotional outburst, quickly apologized, and the media has since blown it out of proportion.

But I don't excuse Congressman Wilson for a past, more serious racist comment. After the death of South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond, Essie Mae Washington-Williams finally revealed what many in South Carolina had known for a long time—that Strom was her biological father, having impregnated the 16 year old girl serving as the Thurmond family maid. Wilson immediately branded the story untrue, and criticized her for her "unseemly" revelation. He added that even if she were telling the truth, she should have kept the inconvenient facts to herself. Wilson certainly has a distorted view of civility.

Racism today may be subtler and less institution-

ally sanctioned, but some politicians continue to promote a glorious and racist past. As an illustration, former South Carolina U.S. Congressman and current member of the Charleston County School Board, Arthur Ravenel, Jr., is known as a proper Southern gentleman who recently had a major bridge named after him. But when the NAACP organized a boycott to protest the prominent placement of the Confederate flag on South Carolina State Capitol grounds, Ravenel referred to the NAACP as the "National Association for Retarded People." He later apologized—to the mentally handicapped for comparing them to the NAACP.

As for the relationship between private faith and civil discourse, many among the faithful find justification in their holy books for not treating "the other" with civility. For religious fundamentalists, issues can be compartmentalized as black or white and people as good or evil. Politics is the art of negotiation and compromise, which rarely works for those who claim to have the absolute truth. One finds no hint of civil discourse in II Cor. 6:14: "Believers must not commune with unbelievers. What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, light with darkness, believers with infidels?"

If the meek are to inherit something of value, we must seek ways to understand and respect those with whom we have significant disagreements. Instead of bashing each other, I suggest organizing the kind of BaSH group we formed in Charleston, South Carolina. Several Baptists and Secular Humanists decided to meet periodically for conversation and refreshments, simply to get to know one another and learn about different perspectives and worldviews. Priority was given to finding common ground, without attempting conversion. We measured success by the number of new friendships. We were successful, but none of us became talk-show hosts or politicians.

Check out Herb's other commentaries at:

[http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/herb\\_silverman/](http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/herb_silverman/)

## Volunteering Update

by Nancy Worley

Mark your calendars for our October volunteer activity. On October 17 we will be bagging oyster shells with SCORE (SC Oyster Restoration and Enhancement) at their location at SC Department of Natural Resources Office of Fisheries Management at 217 Fort Johnson Road. The oyster shells are collected from cooperating restaurants, brought to the Fort Johnson site and put into mesh tubes by volunteers. The bagged shells are then moved onto a creek bank to form a reef. We will be bagging oyster shells from 10am to noon on the 17<sup>th</sup>. If you would like to read more about this project go to <http://score.dnr.sc.gov>.

Fields To Families is an ongoing volunteer project. Several of our members have been gleaned fields. See Alex Kasman's article in the

September *Separationist* for more information. As the growing season winds down, there are additional opportunities to volunteer with this organization by staffing their information booths at the three local farmer's markets. See the SHL website discussion board under Current Events for more information on this project.

We are continuing to donate to the Teacher's Supply Closet. A donations box will be available at each SHL monthly meeting. Visit [www.teachersupplycloset.org](http://www.teachersupplycloset.org) for a list of needed supplies.

Lastly, we received a very nice thank you note from the Charleston County School District's Summer School Literacy Program for a donation from SHL.

## Fall Picnic

by Amy Monsky

Our fall picnic is scheduled for Saturday, October 10th at the West Farm Corn Maze in Moncks Corner. Everyone is welcome, so come prepared for lots of fun and friendship! With a 6-acre corn maze (this year in the shape of a deer) and small hay bale maze for the littlest ones, hay rides, children's play area and farm animal petting area, there is something for all ages! We have the shelter rented from noon to 4pm where we will provide chicken and pulled pork barbecue from Palmetto BBQ Company as well as drinks and paper goods. Please bring a side dish or dessert to share.

Admission to the farm includes the corn maze and is \$6 for ages 12 and up, \$2 for kids 3-12 and free for those 2 years and under. If you'd like to come, but don't want to do the maze, a reduced admission-only rate of \$3 is



available. These admission prices reflect a group discount, so please tell the cashier that you are with SHL to ensure you receive the discounted rate. And please note that West Farm accepts cash and checks only—no debit or credit cards. For directions and more information, you can visit their website at:

[www.westfarmcornmaze.com](http://www.westfarmcornmaze.com)

Also, though not required, it would be helpful if you could RSVP with the number of people attending and ages of your children to Amy Monsky at:

[SecularCharlestonMom@gmail.com](mailto:SecularCharlestonMom@gmail.com)

This picnic promises to be a great start to our new monthly family activities! We are currently working on next month's event, so please check the website or next month's newsletter for details.

For several years we have collected donations from members and friends to support worthwhile local non-profits in the name of secular humanism. While the vast majority of you are already very generous with your time and money, our giving campaign is aimed at helping a group that you might not otherwise support while working to improve the image of secular humanists in the greater community. At the end of each two-month period, we send a collective check from the SHL to the non-profit with a letter explaining our program and some information about our organization. Cumulatively, we have raised several thousand dollars for a wide variety of organizations.

During September and October the SHL is raising money for the Charleston Animal Society (SPCA).

The CAS continues to fight animal cruelty, find safe homes for abandoned animals and reduce pet over-population. They house over 12,000 abandoned, neglected and abused animals each year. Due to the recession, they have been overwhelmed with unwanted pets and are especially in need of our support. Write your check payable to "SHL" and write "Sep-Oct charity" in the memo line. You can mail it to our PO Box, or bring it to the October meeting. You may also donate using a credit card on our website, safely and conveniently. Go to our home page and click on Charity of the Quarter in the Top News section. Since your donation goes through the SHL, a non-profit organization, your contribution is tax-deductible.

- Jonathan Lamb

## From the President

### Atheist Icon to Talk Evolution at USC

The University of South Carolina Pastafarians and Biology Department are teaming up to bring famed atheist icon Richard Dawkins to Columbia this month in an event which will be sure to spark heated discussion and debate about the origins of life.

Dawkins' presentation is in honor of the yearly A.C. Moore Lectures in Evolutionary Biology and Society and will focus on scientifically proving the process of evolution and natural selection. The event is part of a campus tour for his latest book *The Greatest Show on Earth: The Evidence for Evolution*.

"What is the greatest show on Earth? Well, it's life, the whole diversity of life, the whole complexity of life," says Dawkins in a promotional video. "How does it come about? By evolution."

Through his work in evolutionary biology, Dawkins has been a prominent supporter of scientific rationalism as well as an outspoken promoter of atheism and secular humanism. In his most famous book, *The God Delusion*, Dawkins argues that atheism is evidence of a healthy, independent mind. He promotes education and consciousness-

raising as the primary tools in opposing religious dogma and indoctrination.

In 2006, he founded the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science, a non-profit organization currently in developmental stage to finance research on the psychology of belief and religion, scientific education programs and materials, and publicize and support secular charitable organizations.

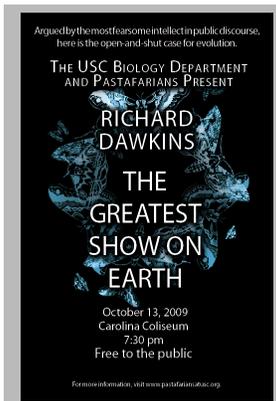
Both the Pastafarians and Dawkins are dedicated to changing the dynamic of a country in which 40% of the population believes the Earth was created in seven Biblical days.

"Science education must no longer be under siege from ideologues who aim to bolster faith at the expense of reason," says Pastafarians president Andrew Cederdahl. "Evolution is a fact we must deal with. This event will see to it that we do."

The event will take place on October 13th at 7:30 PM in the Carolina Coliseum. It is open to the public at no charge.

To find out more about this event, visit the Pastafarian's website at:

[www.pastafariansatusc.org](http://www.pastafariansatusc.org)



## *The Separationist*

Newsletter of the  
Secular Humanists of  
the Lowcountry

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## **Join the SHL**

The Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry (SHL) is a group of freethinkers who believe in the humanist philosophy. Members come primarily from the greater Charleston, SC area. The SHL is affiliated with American Atheists, American Humanist Association, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, Atheist Alliance International, Council for Secular Humanism, and the SC Progressive Network.

Annual tax-exempt membership fees are \$24 (individual) or \$36 (couple or family); additional donations are always welcome. Members receive an electronic copy of this newsletter. For more information on SHL membership and activities, consult our website at:

<http://lowcountryhumanists.org>

## **Contribute to The Separationist**

Please contact the editor with any questions or comments about this publication. Contributions of short articles, news items, letters to the editor or other information of interest to SHL members are always welcome. You can contact the editor at:

[newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org](mailto:newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org)

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