



THE SEPARATIONIST

MARCH 2012

MANDISA THOMAS

HOW RELIGION CRIPPLED THE BLACK COMMUNITY

SUNDAY, MARCH 18, 2012, 4 PM, GAGE HALL, 4 ARCHDALE ST.

Our speaker for March is Mandisa Thomas, a founder and current President of Black Nonbelievers, Inc., of Atlanta.

Although never formally indoctrinated into belief, Mandisa was heavily exposed to Christianity, Black Nationalism and a bit of Islam. As a child she loved reading, and enjoyed various tales of Gods from different cultures, including Greek and Ghanaian. “Through reading these stories and being taught about other cultures at an early age, I quickly noticed that there were similarities and differences between those deities and the God of the Christian Bible. I couldn’t help but wonder what made this God so special that he warrants such prevalence in today’s society,” she recalls.

Mandisa has been a guest on such programs as *The*

Critical Eye, *Ask an Atheist*, and the *Black Freethinkers Blogtalk Radio Show* (of which she is now a co-host). As the president of Black Nonbelievers, Inc., Mandisa works to encourage more Blacks to come out and stand strong with their nonbelief in the face of such strong religious overtones. “The more we make our presence known, the better our chances of working together to turn around some of the disparities we face. We are NOT alone.”

Mandisa founded and Benjamin Burchall founded to reach other African Americans who are either questioning their religious beliefs, or who are nonbelievers that are still in the closet. Because religion is so prevalent in the lives of many in communities of color, Mandisa and Benjamin understood how difficult it could be to express an opposing view. There are serious consequences for many who do so, including ostracism from many social circles, and as such there needed to be a support system.

Although Atlanta is heavily religious, scandals such as the one involving Bishop Eddie Long have made it more empowering for many to openly question these beliefs. Black Nonbelievers conducts General Meetings once a month, sponsors a Recovering from Religion support group, and participates in community cleanup projects.

As always, we’ll meet at 4:00 pm in Gage Hall, located at 4 Archdale Street in downtown Charleston. The meeting runs until 5:30 pm, and we’ll go out to dinner afterward.



FIND US ONLINE! WE’RE (VIRTUALLY) OMNIPRESENT!



<http://bit.ly/shlmeetup>



<http://bit.ly/shlhome>



<http://on.fb.me/shlFB> (main)
<http://on.fb.me/shlfamFB> (family)



<http://bit.ly/shlyoutube>



<http://bit.ly/shllist>



<http://yhoo.it/shlyahoo> (family)

MOVIE CLUB

**SUNDAY, MARCH 4, 2012, 2:30 PM
CHARLESTON COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY
68 CALHOUN ST, CHARLESTON**



This month movie club will meet on Sunday, March 4, to see a special presentation of *Bag It: Is Your Life Too Plastic?*, an award-winning documentary that investigates the effect of plastics on waterways, oceans, their inhabitants, and also the veritable human body.

The movie is Sunday, March 4, 2:30pm, at the Charleston County Public Library, 68 Calhoun Street in downtown Charleston. Admission is free. Following the movie we will have dinner in a nearby restaurant.

SHL HAPPY HOUR

**TUESDAY, MARCH 13, 2012, 6 PM
OUTBACK STEAKHOUSE
1890 SAM RITTENBERG, CHARLESTON**

This month SHL Happy Hour returns to the West Ashley side of town on Tuesday, March 13, 6pm at Outback Steakhouse, 1890 Sam Rittenberg Blvd. If the weather is nice, we will be on the patio; if not, they will hold a couple of large tables for us. They will also provide some great appetizers so come hungry, thirsty, and ready for a good time!

Remember, everyone is welcome, alcohol is optional, and discussions about anything and everything are fair game.

SHL HAPPY HOUR

**TUESDAY, MARCH 20, 2012, 6 PM
LOCATION TBA**

Due to the popularity of our monthly Happy Hours we are adding a North-Area Happy Hour.

The location of this event is TBA and will be announced a few days in advance by email, on our website (<http://bit.ly/shlevents>), and on our information line (843-277-0948). To add yourself to the Events email list, please visit <http://bit.ly/shllist>.

THE SEPARATIONIST, MARCH 2012

BOOK GROUP

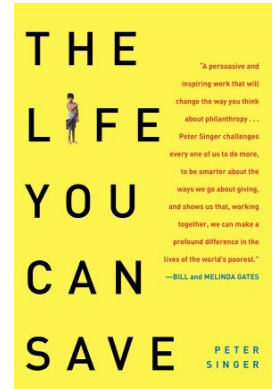
**SUNDAY, MARCH 25, 2012, 4 PM
WEST ASHLEY BARNES & NOBLE
1812 SAM RITTENBERG, CHARLESTON**

The Book Group will meet on Sunday, March 25, 2012, to discuss *The Life You Can Save: How to Do Your Part to End World Poverty*, by Peter Singer.

For the first time in history, eradicating world poverty is within our reach. Yet around the world, a billion people struggle to live each day on less than many of us pay for bottled water.

In *The Life You Can Save*, Peter Singer uses ethical arguments, illuminating examples, and case studies of charitable giving to show that our current response to world poverty is not only insufficient but morally indefensible. *The Life You Can Save* teaches us to be a part of the solution, helping others as we help ourselves.

Barnes & Noble sells this book online for \$15, with used copies available for \$6.75. Better World Books also sells new and used copies for \$11 to \$15.



FAMILY OUTING

**SUNDAY, MARCH 11, 2012, 11 AM
WATERFRONT PARK, MT. PLEASANT**

Our outing this month will be at Waterfront Park in Mount Pleasant on Sunday, March 11, at 11:00 am. In addition to a fun playground, there is a pier with a beautiful view of the Charleston Harbor and a large open field perfect for a game of frisbee and flying kites. For lunch (and in the case of inclement weather), we'll meet at Andolini's Pizza in Mount Pleasant. If you have any questions, please email SecularCharlestonMom@gmail.com.



**CHARITY OF THE QUARTER
PLANNED PARENTHOOD SC**

In light of the recent tiff between Komen and Planned Parenthood, the SHL will be raising money for Planned Parenthood SC during the months of March and April.



We'd like to collect \$600 for this great organization. Planned Parenthood provides commonsense, science-based education and services to men and women in SC, regardless of economic status. They focus on preventing unwanted pregnancy, STD prevention, and routine screening for cancer and other diseases.

Contrary to popular belief, PP spends only 3% of its budget on abortion services. Please consider supporting this cause and helping us demonstrate the positive qualities of Humanists in the Charleston area. Donating via our website or bring cash/check to a meeting.

**THE FEMININE AND FUNDAMENTALISM
SATURDAY, MARCH 3, 2012, 5 PM
GAGE HALL, 4 ARCHDALE ST, CHARLESTON**



In this lecture sponsored by the Charleston Jung Society, Sharon Martin will explore the various ways fundamentalism manifests in our inner and outer worlds. We will discuss some of the psychological roots of its power, the most primary being projection, the very thing that leads us to wage war.

How can we resolve this moral failure? Can we make a difference in the world?

Sharon Martin received her diploma in Analytical Psychology from the C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich, Switzerland, in 2005. She began her private practice in Atlanta in 1999 and relocated to the Charleston in 2009. Currently, Sharon serves as analyst and psychotherapist, and conducts workshops on Jungian theory.

**VOLUNTEER ACTIVITY
SUNDAY, MARCH 18, 2012, 9 AM
HAMPTON PARK, CHARLESTON**

We will be volunteering to help with landscaping at Hampton Park in downtown Charleston on March 18 from 9 AM to 12 PM. Please meet us at the greenhouse at 8:50. For more information, you may call Kristen Channel at 860-326-6079 or email her at kristenchanel@gmail.com. The volunteer hotline for Hampton Park is 843-958-6434.



**MEMBERS!
TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OUR STIPENDS**

If you plan to attend a regional or national secular conference or a child will be attending Camp Quest or Camp Inquiry, you are encouraged to apply in advance for a \$200 stipend to help defray the travel/event costs. In return, we ask applicants to submit a newsletter article summarizing the event.

Only one stipend per membership per year. An individual may not receive more than one stipend every two years. We award a maximum of five stipends per year.

If you're interested (or would like more information), e-mail your name, the event you're going to attend, the date of the event, and an estimate of expenses to treasurer@lowcountryhumanists.org for consideration.

WHY WE NEED COLLEGE DEGREES MORE THAN WE NEED FAITH LAWRENCE M. KRAUSS

Rick Santorum has made a number of outlandish statements recently during this presidential campaign that appear derive from his religious worldview, ranging from the claim that contraception is “harmful to women” to the claim that birth control encourages more abortions. But while his criticism of President Obama’s encouragement of Americans to attend college, calling such aspirations snobby, was also off the mark—those with a college degree, for example, have been shown to vastly greater earning potential and job opportunities than those without one—his claim that many students who enter college with a “faith commitment” leave college without one may in fact have some basis in reality. However, the conclusion he draws from this claim is precisely wrong.

Mr. Santorum views this apparent facet of higher education as a danger, and his proposed solution is simple—less higher education and more faith.

As a faculty member at an institution of higher education, and as a scientist, however, I question the basic premise that loss of faith is a bad thing. If it is true that those who are more educated have a greater tendency to question their religious faith, shouldn’t we consider that this might be telling us more about religious faith than about how harmful getting a college degree can be?

Why do we so readily accept in our society the claim that blind religious faith is a virtue, and the lack of faith as a defect? A recent study published in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* found in a survey of Canadian college students and American adults that atheists as a group are the least trusted members of society, on par only with rapists.

Surely in no other area of human activity do we place such great value on accepting claims without seeking to establish their veracity. One of the purposes of education is to teach young people how to question pre-conceived notions and to base conclusions on evidence in order to make them more capable of performing in their jobs and in their role as citizens.

It is no accident that 90 percent of the members of

the National Academy of Science, the nation’s most prestigious group of scientific researchers, claim to have no religious faith. This is not a group of “indoctrinated liberals” who have an agenda to destroy our morality. It is a group of individuals who are trained to question and explore, and in the process have helped produce the knowledge base that powers our modern society.

An educated workforce, especially in areas of science and engineering, is the key to economic health in the 21st century, and an informed populace is the basis of a healthy democracy. If it is true that education tends to reduce religious faith then we have to decide which is ultimately more valuable.

If, in order to protect religious belief, areas of study that may cause students to question their beliefs be removed from the curriculum, or even if we discourage teachers from discussing such areas in class or discourage young people from seeking higher education for fear they may be exposed to them, then we risk devolving down the slippery slope of irrationality, at the bottom of which we observe societies like those in Afghanistan under Taliban rule.

Santorum’s own choice of faith over empirical knowledge provides perhaps the best example of why blindly accepting faith as virtue is misplaced. When decrying colleges as indoctrination mills, he also described how hard he had to resist the pressures in college to question his faith. In so doing, he also resisted the opportunity to learn about how the world actually works.

As a politician on our national stage, his professed ignorance about the natural world is almost unprecedented. His statements on issues ranging from evolution to the evidence for human induced global warming, and most recently about contraception and birth control only serve to demonstrate that a worldview based on closed-minded faith rather than empirical evidence can result in nonsense as a basis of public policy.

Lawrence M. Krauss is Director of the Origins Project at Arizona State University and author of *A Universe from Nothing*.



**LOBBY DAY FOR REASON
MARCH 23, 2012, WASHINGTON, DC**

The Secular Coalition for America will host the Lobby Day for Reason on March 23, 2012, an event to allow atheists, agnostics, humanists, and secular Americans to directly lobby their members of Congress on the issues that matter to us.

By joining SCA for this exciting event, you will be trained on the basics of lobbying and on the specific topics on which the Secular Coalition for America is currently lobbying. In-person lobbying from constituents is the single-most effective method of reaching and influencing elected officials.

The Lobby Day for Reason is free to attend and will include all of the training and materials you will need.

To register, visit <http://bit.ly/reasonlobby>.

**AMERICAN ATHEISTS NATIONAL CONVENTION
MARCH 25 AND 26, 2012, BETHESDA, MD**

The Annual Convention of American Atheists will be held March 25th and 26th, 2012 (following the Reason Rally) at the Bethesda North Marriott and Convention Center in Bethesda, Maryland.

This year's theme: "Come out! Come out! Wherever you Are!" This packed-to-the gills convention will concentrate on all aspects of coming out of the atheist closet to your friends, family, and co-workers.

Last year, nearly 800 people joined in the largest American Atheists convention ever, and this year, AA hopes to break the record. The schedule features some the movement's best speakers, live entertainment, and good old-fashioned atheist socializing.

The venue is the beautiful Marriott Bethesda North, which is right next to a Metro stop and boasts beautiful updated rooms.

Richard Dawkins is the event's keynote speaker. Other speakers include Pastor M, a closeted atheist who works as a preacher at a church, ministering to believers; Brian Barnard, Lead Attorney for the Utah Highway Cross case which recently went all the way to the US Supreme Court; Larry Beinhart, an author best known for his novel *Wag the Dog*, which became the film with Dustin Hoffman and Robert DeNiro; and many more.

For more information, visit <http://bit.ly/aacomeout>.

**REASON RALLY
MARCH 24, 2012, WASHINGTON, DC**

The Reason Rally will be held March 24, 2012, in Washington, DC. The rally will be filled with music, comedy, and addresses by leaders of the secular movement. It's billed as the largest gathering of the secular movement in history.

DC Rally Bus, a service that supports our First Amendment right to peaceably assemble by providing buses for rallies in Washington, DC, may send a bus to Charleston. Availability depends on demand; we need to sign up 40 riders by January 24, 2012.

To register, visit <http://bit.ly/shl-bus>.

Note that the **Annual Convention of American Atheists** is scheduled for March 25th and 26th, 2012, in Bethesda, Maryland, and Richard Dawkins will be the keynote speaker. If you prefer to stay in DC for the conference, the DC Rally Bus isn't your best bet for transportation, but special room rates are available for DC area hotels. See below for a phone number, or visit <http://reasonrally.org/find-a-hotel/>.



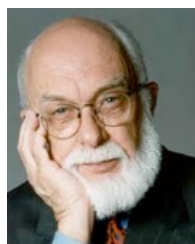
Richard Dawkins



PZ Myers



Taslima Nasrin



James Randi



Jamila Bey



Greta Christina



Fred Edwards



Sean Faircloth



Hemant Mehta

THE SEPARATIONIST

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SECULAR HUMANISTS OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

*Opinions expressed in *The Separationist* are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of SHL.*

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. Contact the editor at newsletter@lowcountryhumanists.org.

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OUR OFFICERS

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Secretary: Laura Kasman

JOIN SHL

SHL is a group of freethinkers who believe in the humanist philosophy. Members come primarily from the greater Charleston, South Carolina, area. 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 South Carolina Progressive Network. Annual tax-exempt membership fees are \$35 (individual) or \$50 (couple or family). Additional donations are always welcome. To join, visit our website at <http://bit.ly/joinshl>, and for more information about our activities, visit <http://bit.ly/shlevents>