

Tragedy in Charleston

Inside this issue:

Herb Silverman	2
How You Can Help	3
Charity of the Quarter	5
Upcoming Events	6
Find Us	10

About SHL

The *Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry* was founded in 1994 by a group of local non-theists in Charleston, South Carolina.

Our members are freethinkers of many kinds. We call ourselves agnostics, atheists, skeptics, secular humanists, rationalists and scientific naturalists. We welcome you and all who are interested in participating in our friendly community, either as members or observers.

The purpose of our non-profit, educational organization is to promote the non-theistic, human-centered viewpoint as a valid contribution to public discourse and to strive to maintain the First Amendment guarantee of separation of state and church.

SHL members are deeply saddened by the recent senseless killings of our neighbors at the Emanuel AME church in downtown Charleston. Our deepest sympathies go to the victims' families in their time of grief. We are also heartened by the overwhelming show of love and community support expressed by Charlestonians and are optimistic that one day we can not just imagine, but truly experience, all the people living life in peace.



Herb Silverman

Tragedy in South Carolina

Many of us in Charleston, South Carolina began grieving on Wednesday night

when we heard that a white gunman had murdered nine innocent black people gathered at the historic Emanuel AME Church, three blocks from where I live. This church, with a primarily black membership, once was a secret meeting place for African-Americans who wanted to end slavery at a time when laws in Charleston banned all-black church gatherings.

My grieving turned to anger on Thursday morning when I listened to national television commentary about the murders. A caller on C-SPAN blamed it on tolerance for homosexuality, which caused God's wrath. Fox News spun this racially motivated crime into an attack on Christianity, and one guest suggested that pastors arm themselves during services. I also disliked hearing people on both left and right say how much worse the crime was because it happened in a church. Killing nine people is horrendous, regardless of where it happens.0

On Thursday at noon, I attended a vigil at nearby Morris Brown AME Church, also a traditionally black church, where the entire community was invited to pray for peace, understanding, and healing. As an atheist I don't pray, but I support those goals. I thought of the anti-war song Lay Down, by Melanie, and the line "Some came to sing, some came to pray, some came to keep the dark away." I was there to help keep the dark away by

showing support for a beleaguered African-American community.

The service by a series of African-American pastors was heartfelt and moving. During prayers I stood politely, but didn't read aloud because I don't have a friend in Jesus and don't believe his blood is helping me. I only winced once, at a line from Psalm



136: "To Him that smote Egypt in their firstborn, for his mercy endureth forever."

I was amazed to watch people singing, clapping, and dancing in the aisles with broad smiles during this tragic time. I'm more than 99 percent certain that no God or Jesus was listening to their prayers, but I'm 100 percent certain that many in the audience felt transformed, if only by what I viewed as a placebo effect.

With national media on hand, I was not surprised to see South Carolina congressmen, senators, mayors, and the governor in attendance. I give them the benefit of the doubt about being in the right place at the right time, and not acting out of political self-interest. (That's different from what I wrote about Governor Nikki Haley when she promoted The Response prayer event last week.)

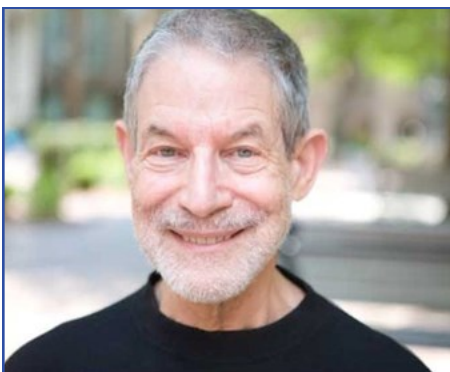
While mostly non-partisan, I took note of politicians who spoke of needed action and those who spoke only of the power of prayer.

Everyone present was keenly aware that a white man had allegedly killed nine black people out of racial hatred. I was happy to see that at least a third of the attendees at the vigil were white. Many leaders of the AME Church commented appreciatively about the diversity of the audience, but never once used the word "white." They referred to the audience as a "colorful gathering" and looking like "patches of a South Carolina quilt."

I applauded heartily when one minister told the crowd, "Pray, but also get off your knees and work to improve our community." I took as appropriate metaphors what some in the audience took literally. For instance, one minister compared the "domestic terrorist" who killed the nine black people to the terrorists who killed Jesus. He said, "Jesus rose again on the third day to make the world a better place, but it won't take us three days to rise and make this a better place."

Holding hands with our neighbors, and with a tear in my eyes, at the end of the service we sang "We Shall Overcome." I had never thought of this as a hymn, but it reminded me of when I sang it in the 1960s during civil rights marches and Vietnam War protests. We were asked to continue holding hands as we prayed to Jesus. I didn't want to withdraw my hand from the black man on my right, so we held hands as the minister prayed

Herb Silverman cont.



Herb Silverman is founder and President Emeritus of the [Secular Coalition for America](#), author of [Candidate Without a Prayer: An Autobiography of a Jewish Atheist in the Bible Belt](#), and Distinguished Professor Emeritus of

for Jesus to get rid of any hate in our heart and replace it with love.

So it turned out that I came to sing, pray, and keep the dark away.

Meanwhile, South Carolina secular humanists groups were deciding how they can help. To begin with, we have set up a fund to contribute to the Mother Emanuel Hope Fund. Everyone is invited to contribute.

Coincidentally, that evening I planned to attend a meeting called before the Wednesday tragedy occurred. SURJ (Showing Up for Racial Justice) is a national network of groups and individuals organizing

white people for racial justice. At the vigil, one pastor brought the audience spontaneously to their feet when he urged "Let your voice be heard!" I think there are times in history when silence and absence give tacit consent to evil. This is one of those times in Charleston, and maybe where you live, too.

This article originally appeared in [The Huffington Post](#), 6/19/2015

How You Can Help

Humanists condemn the unspeakable shooting deaths of 9 people at the historic Emanuel AME Church in Charleston Wednesday, 6/17. Violence motivated by hatred, intolerance, and racism has no place in our society today, and we want to extend our deepest condolences to the families of those who died.

All funds from this campaign will go directly to the Mother Emanuel Hope Fund, which helps the families of the victims involved in the shooting. This campaign was organized through SC humanist groups, but all donations are welcome!

Donate here: <https://life.indiegogo.com/fundraisers/ame-church-shooting-victims-fund>

Sponsoring groups:

Camp Quest South Carolina

CSRA Non-Theist Group (Augusta area)

Freethought Society of the Midlands

Florence Atheists and Secular Humanists

Freethinking Friends of Augusta

Myrtle Beach Humanists & Freethinkers

Piedmont Humanists

Secular Coalition for South Carolina

Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry

Upstate Atheists

Why We, as Atheists, Started a Fundraiser for Christians at Charleston

by Matthew Facciani

There is a stigma that non-religious people are selfish, immoral, and do not volunteer. This is probably due to several reasons, but one could be that non-religious people may donate individually and do not have a church associated with them. Churches provide strong social networks and those social ties greatly increase the likelihood that one will give to charity. Sequentially, larger charity efforts allow for more people to become aware of the work being done. The non-religious community is growing, but is still quite small and loosely connected. However, secular humanists have been known come together and help out during tragedies. I recently had the experience of organizing one of these successful humanist charity campaigns.

A horrific tragedy occurred in Charleston, South Carolina on Wednesday, June 17th 2015. Dylan Roof went into the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church and killed nine people. Roof is deeply racist and committed this act of domestic terrorism in hopes of starting a "race war." This gruesome act is an example of how racism and intolerance

are still major problems for our country. Humanists condemn racism and intolerance and we wanted to help out those who suffered from this tragedy.



Directly after hearing the news, people in the South Carolina Facebook groups I'm involved with were discussing how we could help. Amy Monsky and I decided that a great way to help out would be to create an online campaign to support the families of the victims involved in the attack. This campaign was organized and spread by humanist groups, but anyone could donate. In just three days this campaign was shared thousands of times and raised over \$12,000 from over 300 donations.

It might seem counterintuitive that a campaign organized by secular humanists to help religious people would be so successful. However, my response to that is simple: as humanists we aim to help out when people are in need. It doesn't mat-

ter who the people are or what their religious beliefs are. The money is being donated through the Mother Emanuel Hope Fund, which helps the families pay for funeral costs, burial costs, counseling, and other expenses as some of the people killed were providing for their families. Even if some of the money finds its way back to the church, I don't think humanists should be concerned with that. The church is part of a community that suffered a horrible event. Even if we are not religious, we should be happy to help their community heal.

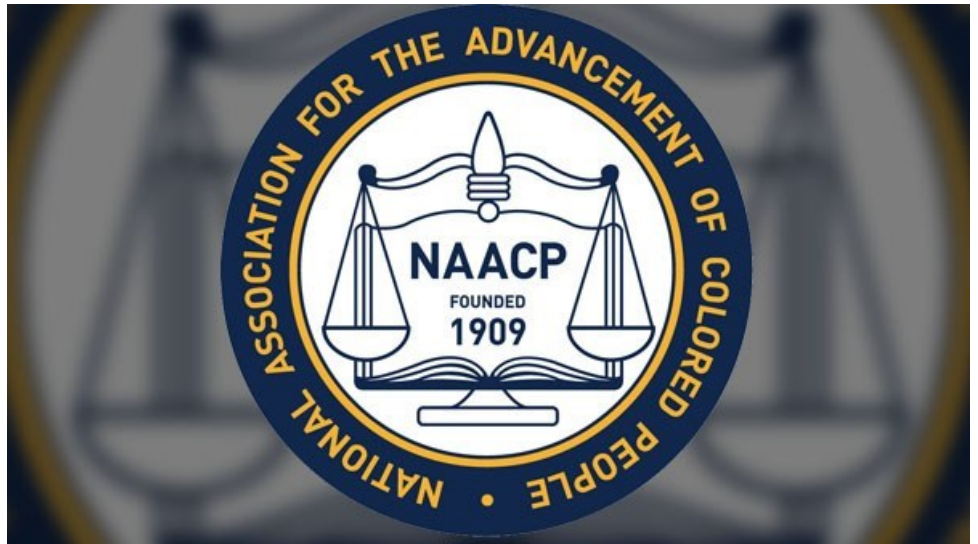
I found this experience quite encouraging as I was overwhelmed with the prompt and enthusiastic support we received. It was beautiful to see the non-religious community put their differences aside and help out those in need. It was also great to see so many non-religious people condemn these actions of racism and hatred. As the humanist community grows and becomes more connected, it will continue to help out during catastrophes. Having an established network definitely facilitates being able to help and that is something we can learn from our religious neighbors.

Charity of the Quarter

SHL collects donations for a worthy charity each quarter, and donates the full amount under the name *Secular Humanists of the Lowcountry*. Our Charity of the Quarter for Q3, 2015 is the **Charleston Chapter of National Association of Colored People (NAACP)**.

Founded Feb. 12, 1909, the NAACP is the nation's oldest, largest and most widely recognized grassroots-based civil rights organization. Its more than half-million members and supporters throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities, campaigning for equal opportunity and conducting voter mobilization.

The mission of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People is to ensure the political, educational, social, and economic equality of rights of all persons and to eliminate race-based discrimination.



Founded in 1917, the **Charleston Branch of the NAACP** is a local unit of the NAACP, the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization.

From the ballot box to the classrooms, the dedicated workers, organizers, leaders, and members who make up the Charleston Branch of the NAACP continue to fight for social justice for all people in and around the Charleston area!

Four times a year SHL collects donations on behalf of a worthy charity. You can donate by cash, credit card, or check at our monthly meeting or by mailing a check to

*SHL
PO Box 32256
Charleston SC 29417-2256*

Make checks payable to SHL and note COQ in the memo line.

Or securely [donate online!](#)

Upcoming SHL Events

Events sometimes get added after The Separationist is posted. Keep up to date with SHL events by signing up for our [email lists](#) or [meetup](#), or check postings on our [website](#) and [facebook](#) group.

July 2015

Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat

			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9 Girls Night Out	10	11 SHL movie club
12	13	14 SHL Happy Hour	15	16	17	18
19 No monthly meeting	20	21	22	23 Ferguson/Black Lives Matter discussion	24	25
26 No book club	27	28	29 SHL Team Trivia	30	31	

Upcoming SHL Events cont.

Girls Night Out

Thursday, July 9, 2015, 6:30pm

Nirlep Indian Restaurant, 908 Savannah Hwy, Charleston

A fun night for girls to socialize! Nursing infants okay, but otherwise adults only, please.



SHL Movie Club

Saturday, July 11, 7:00pm

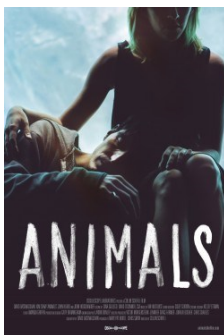
Park Circle Films, 4820 Jenkins Ave, North Charleston



Due to the July 4 Holiday, movie club will be the 2nd Saturday this month.

Join us for a viewing of [Animals](#). Following the film we will enjoy a snack/drink down the street at Madra Rua.

Bobbie and Jude are a young couple that exist somewhere between homelessness and the fantasy of their imaginations. Though they masterfully con and steal in an attempt to stay one step ahead of their addiction, they are ultimately forced to face the reality of their situation when one of them gets hospitalized.



SHL Happy Hour

Tuesday, July 14, 2015, 6:00pm

Manny's Neighborhood Grille, 1680 Old Towne Rd, Charleston

Join us for a fun and relaxing evening of stimulating conversation over drinks (alcohol is optional) and yummy food with old and new friends! Everyone is welcome. Don't be shy - come join us!



SHL Discussion Group: Ferguson/Black Lives Matter

Thursday, July 23, 2015, 6:30pm

Gene's Haufbrau, 817 Savannah Hwy

Frequently, in the past couple of months, the news has been filled with police shootings or killings of African American people. Much contention has arisen over the incidents themselves and peoples responses to the incidents.

This is an opportunity to get together and unpack the ideas surrounding the events.

It's meant to be a passionate but friendly conversation. If you get rowdy, Amy Monsky will bounce you. She might be little but she be fierce.



Upcoming SHL Events cont.

Team Trivia

Wednesday, July 29, 2015, 7:00pm

Steel City Pizza, 1440 Ben Sawyer Blvd, Mt Pleasant



Come out for a night of trivia and socializing! This is a team event and is free.

Our team **Happy Humanists** is officially registered, so our points are cumulative and will be going for season totals.

Team Trivia offers trivia nights at various places throughout the Charleston area on different days and times. Team members are welcome to play using the team name at any Team Trivia night. And if you would like to organize an SHL trivia night in your part of town (hello, West Ashley!) let us know. Organizers are responsible for checking in using our team name, welcoming players, and using any winnings from the previous week to purchase appetizers for the team. Please contact president@lowcountryhumanists.org for more info.



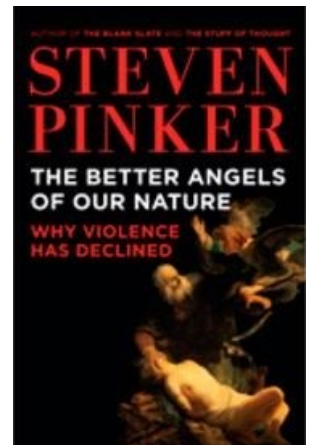
Interested in an activity but don't see it listed? Let us know! Volunteers are always welcomed to lead events such as bridge walks, bowling, billiards, biking, bocce, board games, etc.

Contact president@lowcountryhumanists.org with your ideas!

SHL Book Club

SHL book club will be taking a break until September. But that doesn't mean we don't have a book. A big book. Somewhere over 800 pages. Well, we'll have all summer to read it and it reads very smoothly. This summer's offering is one we have put off for a couple years because of its length, [The Better Angels of Our Nature](#) by Steven Pinker. Following is a brief description from the Amazon purchase site. Keep in mind that if you buy from Amazon at our SHL website link SHL gets a monetary kickback from Amazon at the end of the year.

"We've all asked, "What is the world coming to?" But we seldom ask, "How bad was the world in the past?" In this startling new book, the bestselling cognitive scientist Steven Pinker shows that the world of the past was much worse. In fact, we may be living in the most peaceable era yet.



Evidence of a bloody history has always been around us: the genocides in the Old Testament and crucifixions in the New; the gory mutilations in Shakespeare and Grimm; the British monarchs who beheaded their relatives and the American founders who dueled with their rivals.

Now the decline in these brutal practices can be quantified. Tribal warfare was nine times as deadly as war and genocide in the 20th century. The murder rate in medieval Europe was more than thirty times what it is today. Slavery, sadistic punishments, and frivolous executions were unexceptionable features of life for millennia, then were suddenly abolished. Wars between developed countries have vanished, and even in

Upcoming SHL Events cont.

the developing world, wars kill a fraction of the numbers they did a few decades ago. Rape, hate crimes, deadly riots, child abuse—all substantially down.

We look forward to seeing everyone this coming September to discuss the book. Even though we have chosen the book for the summer Yvonne will be posting details about the meeting sometime later this summer closer to our first meeting.

Again thanks for all the great discussions we've been privileged to participate in and have a great summer break.

John and Barbara Childs

SHL is affiliated with the Amazon Associates program! Our organization earns up to a 15% commission on items purchased at Amazon.com through the links on our Website. So, if you are buying the book club book (or anything else from Amazon), this is a super-easy way to contribute to SHL! Simply use the link at <http://>



"You dance divinely. And, coming from a secular humanist, that's quite a compliment."

AllPosters.com



—So MUCH FOR TODAY'S BIOLOGY LESSON ON "INTELLIGENT DESIGN." TURNING NOW TO THE SUBJECT OF "INTELLIGENT GEOGRAPHY..."



DAD, WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CREATIONISM AND INTELLIGENT DESIGN?

I'M NOT SURE... BUT TO BE FAIR AND BALANCED, SCHOOLS SHOULD TEACH BOTH.

Our Officers

President: Sharon Strong
Vice President: Herb Silverman
Treasurer: Garrett Gehlhausen
Secretary: Laura Kasman
Newsletter Editor: Sue Edward

Contact us!

SHL
Post Office Box 32256
Charleston, SC 29417-2256
843-670-0290
president@lowcountryhumanists.org

*SHL is a non-prophet
organization!*

SECULAR HUMANISTS



OF THE LOWCOUNTRY

Find us online! We're (nearly) omnipresent!



[Meetup](#)



[Facebook Page](#)



[YouTube](#)



[Facebook Group](#)



[Web](#)



[Facebook Families Group](#)



[Email Lists](#)



[Yahoo Families Group](#)

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.