

FIG LEAVES

Volume 15 Issue 9

October 2006

October FIG Meeting: Tuesday, 24 October 7:00 PM



NOT Dan Brown's Kind of Evidence -- Facts, Fashions and Fables about Freemasonry



Speaker: Conrad Goeringer

Dan Brown's next novel will reportedly focus on that much-maligned and little-understood group, the Freemasons. Will it be like his previous literary opus, *The DaVinci Code* -- short on facts and misleading in many of its claims? Conrad Goeringer sets us straight about the history of Freemasonry, the role that the fraternity played in helping to spread Enlightenment values and create what today we embrace as a secular, civil society.

Conrad Goeringer is senior staff writer for *American Atheist Magazine*, and a former reporter, free lance writer and antiquarian book dealer.

The Cincinnati Atheists Meetup

When: Tuesday, 17 October at 8:00PM

Where: Joseph-Beth Booksellers

2692 Madison Rd. Rookwood Pavillion
Cincinnati OH 45207

513-396-8966

To see who's coming and to see more event details:

http://atheists.meetup.com/90/calendar/5140742/t/cv1_ve

Quote

... the greatest threat to civility — and ultimately to civilization — is an excess of certitude. The world is much menaced just now by people who think that the world and their duties in it are clear and simple. They are certain that they know what — who — created the universe and what this creator wants them to do to make our little speck in the universe perfect, even if extreme measure — even violence — are required.

America is currently awash in an unpleasant surplus of clanging, clashing, certitudes. That is why there is a rhetorical bitterness absurdly disproportionate to our real differences. It has been well said that the spirit of liberty is the spirit of not being too sure that you are right. One way to immunize ourselves against misplaced certitude is to contemplate — even to savor — the unfathomable strangeness of everything, including ourselves.

— George F. Will, *Newsweek* (23 May 2005) p. 84

Unquote

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Events (Watch the dates!)

October Meeting

Tuesday, October 24, 2006

7:00 PM at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, OH

November Potluck

Tuesday November 14, 2006

6:30 PM at the home of

November Meeting

Tuesday, November 28, 2006

7:00 PM at the Vernon Manor
400 Oak Street, Cincinnati, OH



September Meeting...



The Real Story of the Scopes Monkey Trial

by Tim Madigan,
Philosopher at St. John Fisher College

The prominent philosopher Lewis White Beck (1913-1997) was born in Griffin, Georgia, in the heart of the so-called "Bible Belt." Like many Americans of that era, he had vivid memories of a seminal event in the mid-Nineteen Twenties: the trial of John Scopes for the crime of teaching evolution in the state of Tennessee. Beck writes:

In 1925, I was awakened from my dogmatic slumber by newspaper accounts of the Monkey Trial. John T. Scopes was found guilty of breaking a law of the state of Tennessee prohibiting the teaching of the theory of evolution. Reading accounts of both sides of the trial made me admit that Mr. Scopes was indeed guilty—there was no question about that—but made me see that the law itself was foolish. I bought and read *The Origin of Species*, which became a new dogmatism for me. . . By the age of twelve, my education as the village atheist was essentially complete.

Beck was by no means alone in finding the trial to be a legal farce, and yet ultimately a vindication for the theory of evolution as well as a defeat of Biblical Fundamentalism. It remains a milestone in United States legal history. And yet, the trial itself was to say the least, unorthodox. Much of what people think they know about it is incorrect. Tim said that he would like to point out some of the misconceptions about the trial, as well as explore the venue by which it is generally known: the dramatic work entitled *Inherit the Wind*.

Unlike Professor Beck, who had firsthand knowledge about the trial, most persons' awareness of it comes primarily from a single source, the 1955 play *Inherit the Wind* (as well as the 1960 film version of that work, as well as later television and theatrical adaptations). Tim explained how, after a previous talk to the South Place Ethical Society, he was treated to a presentation of *Inherit the Wind*. It was being performed to comment on a ruling of the State Board of Education of Kansas, which had removed evolution from the state's science teaching standards. The play continues to be relevant to the growing controversy over the teaching of so-called "Intelligent Design" in public schools. The executive director of another theater wrote in his program notes: "To think that a play written around events that took place in 1925 could be so timely, relevant and meaningful in 2006 is intoxicating."

Ironically *Inherit the Wind* was not originally written to open debate over the Scopes Trial. The playwrights, Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee were both strong libertarians. Another of their plays is entitled *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail*, and deals with civil disobedience. They conceived of writing a play inspired by the Scopes trial in 1950, during the height of the McCarthy hearings, when many Americans had their loyalties questioned and were accused of being communist sympathizers or



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figleaves@fuse.net;

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even traitors. The playwrights were appalled at the ways in which the Wisconsin Senator and other U.S. officials used the law to silence dissent. Much like Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible*, written at the same time, the two collaborators used an event from the distant past to reflect upon a present-day situation.



Lawrence and Lee carefully made clear their play was no literal depiction of the Scopes Trial. They changed the names of the main participants (John Scopes became

Bart Cates, William Jennings Bryan became Matthew Brady, Clarence Darrow became Henry Drummond, and H.L. Mencken became E. K. Hornbeck). The characters were not meant to be the descriptions of the individuals who participated in the 1925 trial. The playwrights insisted in their introduction that *Inherit the Wind* is not history. The events which took place in Dayton, during the scorching July of 1925 are clearly the genesis of this play. It has, however, a conclusion entirely its own. The authors conflated events, simplified issues and overemphasized the roles of Darrow and Bryan. Most importantly they changed the significance of the trial itself, making it seem as if the citizens of "Hillsboro" (standing in for Dayton) were universally opposed to evolution.

The best source of the facts is, Edward J. Larson's *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for History in 1997. Larson ably shows the reasons the state of Tennessee passed the so-called Butler Law, forbidding the teaching of evolution, and how the little town of Dayton, with barely 3000 citizens became the focal point of protest against it. Named after representative John W. Butler, who first proposed it, the law stated:

That it shall be unlawful for any in any of the Universities, Normals and all other public schools of the State which are supported in whole or in part by the public funds of the State, to teach any theory that denies the story of Divine Creation as taught in the

Bible, and to teach instead that man has descended from a lower form of animals.

The governor of Tennessee, who was actually in favor of teaching evolution, signed it, since he needed the legislature to pass other laws he considered more important, including one for furthering financial support for the state's growing educational system. Like other politicians at the time, he hoped that the law would never be put into effect, but this hope was quickly squashed.

There was a confluence of events in the mid-twenties that led to the Scopes Trial. First of all, the rise of the public school system made education itself a controversial topic. Home schooling had become a thing of the past, and laws were enacted which mandated compulsory schooling for children throughout the United States.



Secondly, the rise of the Fundamentalist movement in response to modernism and "higher criticism" of the Bible was another phenomenon of the period. In 1919 six thousand conservative Christians attended the World Christian Fundamentals Association (WCFA) conference. The WCFA quickly saw the public schools as the new battleground for defending the faith, with evolution as the chief enemy. Sensing the growing political clout of the newly roused fundamentalists, elected officials took the hint and started passing such laws, hoping that it would be sufficient to appease the movement.

A third strand leading to the Scopes Trial was the rise of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). At the end of the Wilson Administration, in response to the Communist Revolution in Russia and the fear of a similar uprising in the United States, political radicals were arrested or exiled. Eugene Debs was imprisoned, Emma Goldman was deported to Russia, and Attorney General Mitchell Palmer launched a national campaign along with a very young J. Edgar Hoover—to weed out Bolsheviks and other "un-Americans" throughout the





land. The ACLU was formed in this climate to defend freedom of dissent and the right of minorities. Its leaders particularly feared the way that the tyranny of the majority could dictate what could be taught in the nation's schools. They were looking for a test case to combat the criminalisation of the teaching of evolution, which they saw as the first wedge in a growing campaign to destroy educational freedom. They wanted a Supreme Court decision, which could decide whether educators or legislators determined the curriculum throughout the United States. They advertised for a test case, and finally found one—or so they thought—in Dayton.

The state of Tennessee was not a Fundamentalist hotbed. The citizens of Dayton were primarily Methodist, not Baptist, and many had opposed the Butler Law. But the town fathers saw a chance for national publicity by agreeing to make Dayton the site of the proposed ACLU test case. John Scopes was asked to be the defendant by the local prosecutors. Scopes, a native of Kentucky, was only a substitute science teacher for the summer, and he was planning to leave Dayton for good in the fall. Scopes wasn't even sure if he had actually taught the theory of evolution, but supposed that he must have done so, and good-naturedly agreed to accept the challenge.

It is the legal antagonists who are the most famous individuals in the trial, particularly the defense attorney Clarence Darrow and the prosecuting attorney William Jennings Bryan. Neither of them was initially involved in the decision to hold the trial in Dayton. In fact, their participation upset the plans of both the Dayton town fathers and the ACLU, neither of whom anticipated what a circus the trial would become. The publicity for Dayton became mostly negative, thanks in part to the vituperative writings of Baltimore newspaperman H.L. Mencken, and the ACLU's own involvement in the case was overshadowed by the towering presence of Clarence Darrow. In reality he had forced himself onto the Dayton

defense team. Most of the ACLU leaders didn't want him involved. In their view he was too controversial. Just the year before, he had successfully defended two child murderers, Leopold and Loeb, which made him a vilified figure in the eyes of many. Darrow was a vociferous agnostic, who delighted in making fun of organized religion. He saw the upcoming Dayton trial as a chance to focus attention on the ridiculousness of biblical fundamentalism. The ACLU, on the other hand, wanted to contest the state's right to dictate what could be taught in general.



In a somewhat similar fashion, William Jennings Bryan joined the prosecution by essentially inviting himself onto the team, after letting the national press know that he would be delighted to help out.

The debate continues over who really "won" the Scopes Trial. Upon appeal the Tennessee Supreme Court upheld the Butler Law, but overturned Scopes' conviction on a technicality. They further suggested to the prosecution, to not pursue the case against Scopes. The ACLU did not find another test case for sixty years. Interesting enough, the issues debated in the Scopes Trial in the early Twentieth Century remain front-page news in the Twenty First.

-- Reported by George Maurer

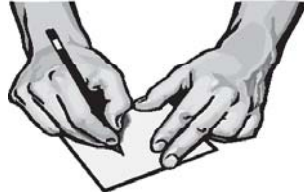


Jesus hates me this I know.
 No one had to tell me so.
 I don't believe and I rebel,
 And so he must send me to hell.
 I will burn eternally.
 While Christians watch and laugh at me.
 Gosh I'm scared, just watch me shake;
 Should I ask God my soul to take?
 No, I think I will use my head,
 Live a good life until I'm dead!

Dorothy B. Thompson



Letters To The Editor



Letter to the Press on PERA; September 15, 2006

For some years, federal law has provided that attorney fees be paid by the losers to a Plaintiff's attorney in a civil rights lawsuit. This only happens when the lawyer successfully proves that persons "acting under color of state law" have violated federal civil rights laws, and unconstitutionally and unlawfully deprived the attorney's clients of "due process of law" or "equal protection of the laws." This is to give the little person, who otherwise would have no means of access to the courts and the legal system, some measure of insulation from persons who, cloaked with the power and money of the state, engage in discrimination against citizens of our country and injure them because of such things as their race, religion, sex, age, disability, or national origin.

The Constitution of the United States prohibits state officials from attempting to "establish a religion." If state officials try to do that, a lawyer who sues them on behalf of clients is able to recover attorney fees from the state at the conclusion of the case. This has been a powerful tool to prevent religious tyranny by a majority religion. Many lawyers have worked for years without compensation to protect the freedoms of our citizens. Now, some in Congress want to change that. Thus, a law known as "PERA" has been voted out of committee. It represents a virulent form of treason by those who apparently want state officials to be able to establish a religion.

"PERA," or the "Public Expression of Religion Act," now before the Congress, is better understood as "Protecting Evangelical Repression Again."

Of all the outrages assaulting American freedoms, "Protecting Evangelical Repression Again," is perhaps the worst. Shakespeare was correct. If you would establish a tyranny, you must first kill all the lawyers. Then people will be denied skilled advocates to aid in their attempts at survival.

Why would any law abiding American object to paying attorneys who **successfully** attack unlawful behavior by public officials. **The lawyers are not paid if the case**

is dismissed or otherwise lost. How can the pending bill protect the public when it rewards scofflaws in public places and punishes those lawyers who dare to prove the violations to American juries?

There is no hint in this legislation that lawyers not be paid if they are successful in legal actions that expose public officials who endorse or practice racial discrimination, sexual harassment, or unequal treatment of citizens because of age or disabilities. Why then deny attorney fees to those lawyers who succeed in exposing officials who want to make their religious views everyone's religious views? Do those supporting PERA think the First Amendment is wrong?

Could it be that those who support this religionist bill do not like our American way of life that mandates religious fundangelicals cannot use the laws of our nation to make us all play in their sandbox?

Separation of religion and government is the American way.

Why do they hate our freedoms?

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• *Quote* • • • • •

• The Jackson, Mississippi, chapter of the adop-
 • tion agency Bethany Christian Services refused to
 • allow Catholics to adopt children. "It has been our
 • understanding that Catholicism does not agree with
 • our Statement of Faith," Jackson BCS Director Karen
 • Stewart told a Catholic couple. Other Catholic couples
 • reported similar experiences.

• The policy became a political issue when local
 • newspapers noted that BCS is partly funded by the
 • anti-abortion **Choose Life** Mississippi auto license
 • plate. "If it's OK to accept our money from license
 • plates, it should be OK to open your home to us as a
 • family," complained one Catholic woman who was
 • turned down by the agency.

• An uproar resulted. Eventually BCS voted to
 • change its policy according to the *Jackson Clarion-
 • Ledger*. We don't know if this includes Jews, Mor-
 • mons, and atheists as well.

• • • • • *Unquote*



An important humanist dies.

By Douglas Martin, 26 August 2006, *New York Times*

Vashti McCollum, whose lawsuit to stop religious instruction on school property led to a landmark ruling by the United States Supreme Court in 1948 to protect the separation of church and state in education, died Sunday in Champaign, Ill. She was 93. Her death was confirmed by her son James, whose refusal as a fifth grader to attend voluntary religious instruction led to the lawsuit.

Mrs. McCollum, who called herself an atheist in Illinois court proceedings but later preferred the word “humanist,” said her son was ostracized and embarrassed by his schoolmates because she refused to let him attend the religion classes at his public school in Champaign. The classes for Protestants were on school premises; Jews and Roman Catholics went to religious buildings elsewhere. She also contended that the classes were a misuse and waste of taxpayers’ money, discriminated against minority faiths and were an unconstitutional merger of church and state.

After losing in two Illinois courts, Mrs. McCollum won an 8-to-1 decision by the Supreme Court. Justice Hugo L. Black, who wrote the majority opinion, said the practice in Champaign was “beyond all question” using tax-established and tax-supported schools “to aid religious groups to spread their faith,” and, he added, “It falls squarely under the ban of the First Amendment.” A critical issue in the case was whether the Constitution’s ban on establishing religion meant that all sects must be treated equally, as lawyers for Champaign argued was the case in their schools -- or whether it required strict neutrality between belief and unbelief, Mrs. McCollum’s contention. She won.

“The First Amendment rests upon the premise that both religion and government can best work to achieve their lofty aims if each is left free from the other in its respective sphere,” Justice Black wrote. The case was also important because it extended the First Amendment’s protections to the states by using the due process clause of the much later 14th Amendment as justification. As such, all other cases that test Jefferson’s wall of “separation of church and state” -- including school prayer, aid to parochial schools and sectarian religious displays on public property -- descend from this case. The language used in comments immediately after the Supreme Court’s ruling would percolate in debates for decades. The Catholic bishops, for example, accused the court of making a religion of secularism.

In 1952, the Supreme Court revisited the issue of religious instruction in *Zorach v. Clauson*. The 6-to-3 ruling in that case held that a New York program allowing religious

education during the school day was permissible because it did not use public school facilities or public money.

Vashti Ruth Cromwell was born in Lyons, N.Y., on Nov. 6, 1912, and grew up in Rochester. She was named for the queen of the Persian King Xerxes depicted in Esther 1 in the Bible who refuses to obey her husband’s order and is divorced for her daring. Her father, Arthur G. Cromwell, was an architect who read the works of atheists like Spinoza and deist Thomas Paine, then read seven versions of the Bible. After letting the conflicting ideas germinate for years, he had become a vocal atheist by the time his two daughters were in college, James McCollum said. Mr. Cromwell was president of the Rochester Society of Free Thinkers and had persuaded the state education commissioner to end religious instruction in the schools of the one county in which it was permitted before his daughter filed suit to accomplish the same thing.

Vashti Cromwell received a scholarship to Cornell, but the money ran out during the Depression and she transferred to the University of Illinois, where she majored in political science and took courses at the law school. At the university, she met John Paschal McCollum, a professor of vegetable crops in the horticultural department, and they married in 1933. After her children were older, Mrs. McCollum earned a master’s degree in mass communications at the university.

She is survived by her sons James, of Emerson, Ark., Dannel, of Champaign, and Errol, of Moline, Ill.; her sister, Helen Curtis, who lives in a Rochester suburb; six grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren.

James McCollum, the oldest son, said that he at first had wanted to attend the religion classes, but that his mother objected. After a few months, he was allowed to go, but found the classes childish and “silly.” The next year, he said, he told his parents he did not wish to attend. His mother talked with the school system’s superintendent, but he said there was nothing he could do. She was careful to say that she was making no criticism of religion, *The New York Daily News* reported in 1945. She then sued with the help of a local Unitarian minister and financial support from a group of Jewish businessmen in Chicago. Her opponents, in addition to the City of Champaign, were church federations.

A dramatic moment during the initial trial of the case came when Mrs. McCollum’s father said he did not believe in God, and a gasp went up from the crowd. Later, James McCollum said the same thing. Both “affirmed” that they would tell the truth instead of swearing by God. Mrs. McCollum called herself “a rationalist or an atheist.”

Time magazine observed that the trial shared “features that made the Scopes ‘monkey trial’ a sideshow” of the 1920’s. In the three-year legal battle, Mrs. McCollum received physical threats and was fired from her job as a dance instructor at the university. At Halloween, a mob of trick-or-treaters pelted the McCollum family with rotten tomatoes and cabbages. The family cat was lynched. Mrs. McCollum wrote a book on the case, *One Woman’s Fight* (1951), became a world traveler and served two terms as president of the American Humanist Association.





Scott Seidewitz receives award from SmartMoney Community Services

When we heard that Scott Seidewitz was to receive an award from SmartMoney Community Services, Barbara and I attended the awards luncheon on 17 August. We learned a lot to admire about both Scott and SmartMoney.

You may recall that in January 2003, Scott helped organize a memorable FIG program on "Race and the Cincinnati Police Force." He moderated that meeting and told of his own experiences.

At the awards luncheon we found that the mission of SmartMoney is to provide financial services and economic education to underserved individuals in Over-the-Rhine and other Greater Cincinnati communities. To do this, it has a wide variety of programs.

These programs include banking services, financial counseling, tax advice, home ownership planning, and small business guidance. Utilizing workshops, seminars, one-on-one financial counseling, and free tax preparation services, participants receive valuable information on budgeting, effectively managing credit and pinpointing long-term savings goals. Over 1,500 individuals were helped during the last year.

Scott was given the Smart Leadership Award for his many contributions to the long-term success of SmartMoney. He joined the organization in 1993 and became Board President in 1994. During Scott's six-year tenure, he led the board and staff in the expansion of the organization's services to the broader Cincinnati community, while overseeing SmartMoney's program growth to offer Individual Development Accounts and Micro



Enterprise Business Training with technical assistance. He led the planning of the organization's name change to SmartMoney Community Services and the branding of its slogan "Smart Path to a Bright Future."

The awards luncheon was a celebration attended by over a hundred program participants and friends of SmartMoney. Among those attending were Todd Portune and Roxanne Qualls, who had suggested to Scott that he work with this organization. Awards were also given to three individuals who had successfully put into practice what they had learned through the SmartMoney programs. The acceptance remarks of all four awardees had been taped and were strikingly projected on a large screen, along with relevant images, such as houses purchased and family members.

We were impressed by the dramatic examples of the help that SmartMoney programs can provide to people with limited means and little financial background. It is an organization worthy of our financial support. More information is available at <www.smart-money.org>.

Scott Seidewitz is to be applauded for his contributions to this excellent organization, SmartMoney Community Services. ---Joe Levee

Quote

I am skeptical of the Holocaust skeptics, the HIV-AIDS skeptics, the 9/11 skeptics, and the global warming skeptics; I suppose that makes me a "believer" in the claims of which they're in doubt, but "belief" is not a good word to employ when doing science. Scientists do not "believe" in facts of nature and history; these facts just *are*. We no more "believe in evolution" than we "believe in gravity." Evolution and gravity are simple facts of nature. They exist whether we believe in them or not. — Michael Shermer

Unquote

Science Book Club - Schedule for 2006

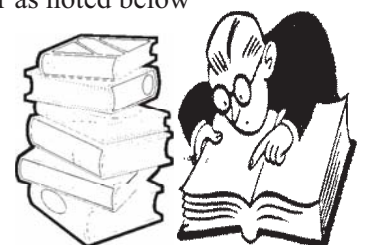
Science book club as in past years plans on meeting at the Cincinnati Downtown Library on the 4th Sunday of each month at 2:30pm in Room 3A, except on the 3rd Sunday where conflicts with holidays occur as noted below and in May in Room 3B because of a room schedule conflict.

Oct 22 - *The "God" Part of the Brain*: Matthew Alper

Nov 19 (third Sunday)- *Black Holes and Time Warps: Einstein's outrageous legacy*: Kip Thorne

Dec 17 (third Sunday) - *Science of Aliens*: Clifford Pickover

— Bryan Sellers





Evangelicals urge museum to hide man's ancestors

By Mike Pflanz in Nairobi

(Filed: 12/08/2006) *Telegraph* [UK]

Powerful evangelical churches are pressing Kenya's national museum to sideline its world-famous collection of hominid bones pointing to man's evolution from ape to human. Leaders of the country's six-million-strong Pentecostal congregation want Dr Richard Leakey's ground-breaking finds relegated to a back room instead of being given their usual prime billing.

Dr Richard Leakey's finds are housed in a museum near Nairobi.

The collection includes the most complete skeleton yet found of *Homo erectus*, the 1.7 million-year-old Turkana Boy unearthed by Dr Leakey's team in 1984 at Nariokotome, near Lake Turkana in northern Kenya. The museum also holds bones from several specimens of *Australopithecus anamensis*, believed to be the first hominid to walk upright, four million years ago. Together the artefacts amount to the clearest record yet discovered of the origins of *Homo sapiens*. They have cemented the global reputation of Kenya's Great Rift Valley as the cradle of mankind, and draw in tourists and locals to the museum's sprawling compound on a hill above Nairobi. Permanent exhibitions cover Kenya's cultural and scientific history from pre-history to independence. A snake park was added in the early 1960s. As part of an ongoing expansion funded by the EU, the National Museums of Kenya, which manages the country's cultural sites, is conducting a survey to determine what visitors to its Nairobi headquarters most want to see.

Church leaders aim to hijack that process. "The Christian community here is very uncomfortable that Leakey and his group want their theories presented as fact," said Bishop Bonifes Adoyo, the head of Christ is the Answer Ministries, the largest Pentecostal church in Kenya. "Our doctrine is not that we evolved from apes, and we have grave concerns that the museum wants to enhance the prominence of something presented as fact which is just one theory." Bishop Adoyo said all the country's churches would unite to force the museum to change its focus when it reopens after 18 months of

renovations in June next year. "We will write to them, we will call them, we will make sure our people know about this and we will see what we can do to make our voice known," he said.

Dr Leakey said the churches' plans were "the most outrageous comments I have ever heard". He told *The Daily Telegraph*: "The National Museums of Kenya should be extremely strong in presenting a very forceful case for the evolutionary theory of the origins of mankind. "The collection it holds is one of Kenya's very few global claims to fame and it must be forthright in defending its right to be at the forefront of this branch of science."

Calling the Pentecostal church fundamentalists, Dr Leakey added: "Their theories are far, far from the mainstream on this. They cannot be allowed to meddle with what is the world's leading collection of these types of fossils." The museum said it was in a "tricky situation" as it tried to redesign its exhibition space to accommodate the expectations of all its visitors. "We have a responsibility to present all our artefacts in the best way that we can so that everyone who sees them can gain a full understanding of their significance," said Ali Chege, public relations manager for the National Museums of Kenya. "But things can get tricky when you have religious beliefs on one side, and intellectuals, scientists or researchers on the other, saying the opposite."

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The Third Great Awakening?

Bush sees revival of religious devotion. He told a group of conservative journalists this week that the "confrontation between good and evil" in the struggle with international terrorism has led to a revival of religious devotion. He believes it to be the Third Great Awakening. That may be, we secular types could fail to notice a revival or two, but according to Wikipedia we've already had four Great Awakenings.

A survey released yesterday by Baylor University, however, does find Americans to be more active in religion than supposed. Baylor is a strict Baptist college in Waco, Texas. It was a frequent target of the late 19th century journalist William Cowper Brann, who published *The Iconoclast*. Brann's style was much like that of H.L. Mencken a generation later, and *the Iconoclast* had world-wide circulation. He printed frequent exposes of prominent Waco and Baylor citizens, and was shot to death on a Waco street.

— *What's New*, Robert L. Park, 15 September 2006



Governor Mike Rounds of South Dakota, the state hardest hit by the severe drought in the plains, proclaimed the last week of July to be "A week to pray for rain." Not a drop has fallen from the heavens on South Dakota since. The governor used the wrong technology. You pray to get out of Iraq, for rain you dance.

-- *What's New*, Robert L. Park, 1 September 2006



The House votes to limit the Establishment Clause by financial finagle and in payback for the Dover "Idiots Delight" decision. The nation was distracted this week: the leaked Intelligence Estimate on Iraq, a terrifying new report on global warming, continued high gas prices, a White House lobbying scandal that grew from "a few" contacts with Jack

Forming a support group for science-friendly political candidates. Organizers describe Scientists and Engineers for America as nonpartisan, but there is no denying that Bush Administration policies on science-related issues have not been popular in the science community. Two of the organizers, physicists Neal Lane and Jack Gibbons, were science advisors under Clinton. Susan Wood, who resigned from the FDA last year to protest inaction on making Plan B available over-the-counter, is another organizer. We have no word on whether Bush science adviser Jack Marburger plans to join.

-- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 29 September 2006

Abramoff to 485, not to mention the news that two men have stepped forward claiming to be the father of Anna Nicole Smith's baby. That allowed the House to quietly pass H.R. 2679, the "Public Expressions of Religion Protection Act of 2006," with scarcely a mention in the media. The bill would prevent plaintiffs from recovering legal costs in any lawsuit based on the "establishment clause" of the First Amendment, which of course only happens when the court finds the plaintiff's Constitutional rights have been denied. The Senate is expected to pass a companion bill, S. 3696. Congress cannot simply abridge the Bill of Rights. Maybe they think the Supreme Court is stacked. Or maybe it's the election.

-- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 29 September 2006

Time to head north or for higher ground. Nothing irritates global warming deniers more than a new report from James Hansen's climate research group at NASA, but warming seems to be taking place at the rate predicted twenty years ago. On Monday, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* published a new report from Hansen's group that says "the planet as a whole is approximately as warm now as at the Holocene maximum and within one-degree C (=1.8°F) of the maximum temperature of the last million years."

-- *What's New* by Robert L. Park, 29 September 2006

Quote

• After all the heat he took last year, how could Bush •
 • have blown the aftermath of Katrina? It's not as if •
 • he lacks confidence in the power of his office. He •
 • believes he can fix Iraq and transform the Middle •
 • East. He aspires to spread democracy to the far •
 • corners of the globe. But the fate of an American •
 • city and millions of his impoverished countrymen •
 • are apparently beyond his control, or perhaps just •
 • his interest. •

-- Jonathan Alter in *Newsweek*, 4 September 2006, p. 38

Unquote



Three Tickets to Pittsburgh

Three priests in a railroad station needed tickets to return home to their Parish in Pittsburgh. Behind the ticket counter was a very shapely, well endowed young lady dressed lightly and with a deep décolletage. The priests were slightly embarrassed by her appearance..

The youngest priest approached the window but couldn't take his eyes off her cleavage."Young lady," he began, "I would like three pickets to titsburg." At this point he lost his composure and fled to his companions.

The second priest approached. "Young lady, I would like three tickets to Pittsburgh," he began, "and I would like the change in nipples and dimes." He also was slightly embarrassed and gave up.

Then the most senior priest tried: "Young lady, I would like three tickets to Pittsburgh, and I would like the change in nickels and dimes. And I must say," he continued, "if you insist on dressing like that when you get to the pearly gates, St. Finger's going to shake his peter at you."



The real reasons to hate the Pope; and it's got nothing to with Islam.

by Johann Hari, from *The Independent* (London), 21 September 2006

Sigmund Freud first identified a phenomenon called “the narcissism of small differences.” He argued you are more likely to hate somebody who is very, very similar to you than somebody who is drastically different. This week, Freud’s principle has been demonstrated with cruelly plodding logic across the world: in the Bavarian lecture where God’s Rottweiler finally slipped his leash, in the bullets fired into a nun’s back in Somalia, and in a gaggle of jihadis rallying outside Westminster Abbey with banners saying “Execute the Pope.”

Both Joseph Ratzinger and the Islamists calling for his decapitation believe they have direct access to an invisible supernatural being called “God”. Both believe this God wills them to make decisions that have led to the horrific deaths of tens of thousands of people. Both believe this God finds secular democratic Europe disgusting, an atheistic bog dominated by a “culture of death.” Both hate feminism and gay rights and sexual freedom. Both believe they are infallible, and that the billions who refuse to follow them are incurring the wrath of the Creator of the Universe. The only real difference is the name they give to this creature, and a few added textual tweaks on either side.

The tragedy is that when there are so many good reasons to hate Joseph Ratzinger, this week’s rioters have chosen one of the few bogus ones. For over a decade now, he has been one of the primary defenders of priests who go to the poorest, most vulnerable people in the world and tell them condoms are the cause of AIDS. In the past year, I have sat in two Catholic churches thousands of miles apart and listened while a Catholic priest told illiterate people with no alternative sources of information that condoms come pre-infected with AIDS and are the reason people die of it. In Bukavu, a crater-city in Congo, and in the slums ringing Caracas, Venezuela, people believed it. They told me they “would not go to Heaven” if they used condoms, and that condoms contain tiny invisible holes through which the virus passes – the advice their priest had doled out.

I did not stumble across a pair of freakish exceptions. A slew of human rights groups have documented how these lethal lies have been orchestrated by the Vatican itself, with Ratzinger humming along in the background. The president of the Vatican’s Pontifical Council for the Family, Cardinal Alfonso Lopez Trujillo, said, “The AIDS virus is roughly 450 times smaller than the spermatozoon. The virus can easily pass through the ‘net’ that is formed by the condom.” These people have not been sacked by Ratzinger; many have been promoted.

Some defenders of the Catholic Church say that it is wrong to accuse Ratzinger’s Vatican of spreading AIDS because they simply recommend abstinence. How can

they be blamed if people disregard their teachings and have unprotected sex? But this ignores a crucial fact. In order to make people more likely to choose abstinence – the only Holy route – these priests are making premarital sex sound deadly as well as sinful. Millions more people hear the message about useless condoms – in El Salvador, the Vatican successfully helped get a warning onto packs of condoms saying they don’t work – than the message about abstinence. In that gap, there are many infections and many AIDS orphans.

But there is a deeper philosophical repugnance to Ratzinger lying beyond these individual decisions. His recent lecture was devoted to the premise that the free pursuit of reason will lead all people to a rational belief in the Christian God described in the Bible. (You know – the God who explicitly supports slavery, commits genocide against the Amelkites, stones prostitutes, and feeds small children to bears). The Christian God is Reason Personified, while the Muslim God is “beyond reason” – hence the fuss. But this intra-superstitious squabble is not the real outrage.

However much he swears it is not, this argument is deeply anti-Enlightenment. The central insight of the Enlightenment is that there are two fundamentally different ways to understand the world. One is divine revelation, where a being contacts you from another realm and discloses some truth. (Another word for this is “hallucination”). The second method is reason – observing the world empirically, and drawing conclusions from the things we observe.

The ultimate expression of reason is the scientific method. These approaches are fundamentally contrasting, and you cannot simply weld them together with contorted theological trickery.

By claiming that divine revelation leads to reason – indeed, is its central underpinning – Ratzinger is subtly attacking the core principles of the Enlightenment. There is nothing we can observe in the world that leads us rationally to conclude a magical being created it. But Ratzinger wants to be able to claim the fruits of the Enlightenment, like science, without following its basic principles. Whenever people do try to stretch reason to accord with faith – as he demands – they invariably produce contorted, corrupted unreason like the absurdity of ‘intelligent design theory’ (which should be dubbed Creationism 2.0).

Of course, none of Ratzinger’s lies justify threats of violence against him. For decades now, he has been saying atheists have “no morality” and are “depraved”, and that homosexuality is “an objective disorder” and “evil” – far worse insults than last week’s cagey, quickly-retracted half-slur on Muslims – and it never occurred to us to respond by attacking Catholic children or nuns working with the starving. We mocked the sex advice of an elderly virgin, gave money to aid agencies trying to correct his poisonous lies, and got on with our lives. The cool balm of reason is the way to put down God’s most rabid Rottweiler – not the furious fire of a parallel fundamentalism.





Holy War: As the Middle East burns, GOP pols, neocon pundits, and a powerful Christian right leader all sing the same (crazy) tune.

By Sarah Posner

In the June issue of the *Prospect*, I wrote about Texas televangelist John Hagee, an Armageddon prophet who insists that military confrontation with Iran is foretold in the Bible as a necessary precondition for the Second Coming.

Using his best-selling book, *Jerusalem Countdown*, his internationally broadcast television program, and the viral marketing offered by a network of mega churches whose pastors have signed on to his new lobbying effort, Christians United for Israel (CUFI), Hagee has spent the past six months mobilizing popular support for a war with Iran. Based on his end-times prophecy, a supposed love of the Jewish people and the state of Israel, and false claims that Iran is just months away from a viable nuclear weapon, Hagee maintains that confrontation with Iran is necessary to fulfill God's plan for the future of the world.

While it hardly seems like a sound basis for foreign policy, as the violence between Israel and Hezbollah escalates at the Israel-Lebanon border and beyond, Hagee's view of Iran's central role in a world-altering showdown seems to be catching on. And not just on the wingnut airwaves or among war-mongering chattering heads. It's gaining momentum among certain Republican presidential aspirants, who, like all Republican presidential aspirants, count beans and feel compelled to bow to the will of American religious extremists to win.

The *Jerusalem Post* reported this week that remarks by Newt Gingrich and John McCain that the Israel-Lebanon violence marks the beginning of World War III have their roots in Hagee's book. Knesset member Benny Elon told the *Post* that Gingrich and McCain "said this because they think it will lead to Iran getting involved, which they believe will set off World War III," adding that their "comments originated with American evangelist John Hagee." As Hagee and his minions from CUFI descend on Washington this week to lobby Congress, armed with Hagee talking points claiming that Iran will have a nuclear weapon in six months, could it be a coincidence?

Gingrich first called the escalating conflict "World

War III" on the Sunday talk shows, and followed up with a column in which he argued that the phrase "global war on terror" is insufficient to capture the epic nature of the conflict that "pits civilization and the rule of law against the dictatorships of Iran and Syria and the terrorist groups of Hezbollah and Hamas that they support." When asked about Gingrich's "World War III" comments on *Larry King Live* Sunday night, McCain singled out Iran as the provocateur in the conflict, adding that "I think that it's very clear that Iran is becoming more and more belligerent and needs to be reigned in."

Adding to the chorus was Bill Kristol, who wrote this week in his *Weekly Standard* that the "right response" for United States is "standing with Israel," the same phrase used as the title of a recent book by David Brog, former chief of staff to Arlen Specter and current executive director of CUFI. Kristol then issues the same dire threat to Iran that Hagee did (minus Hagee's fiery Armageddon imagery, according to which Kristol, as a Jew, would be converted to Christianity or condemned to die in a lake of brimstone). "For that matter," Kristol muses with the same dim lack of foresight that more than three years ago characterized his optimistic prescription for Iraq, "we might consider countering this act of Iranian aggression with a military strike against Iranian nuclear facilities. Why wait?"

Preachers like Hagee seem easy to ignore because we think their audiences, while vast, consists of rank-and-file religious extremists who have no real sway over American policy-makers. But Benny Elon's statement shows that Hagee does have such influence. Gingrich and McCain may or may not believe the Second Coming is imminent, but they do know that a GOP primary presidential campaign is coming soon enough, and they know where the votes are.

Sarah Posner is a freelance writer and contributor to *The Gadflyer*. © 2006 by The American Prospect, Inc.

• • • • • **Quote** • • • • •
• Now, I know there are some polls out there saying this •
• man has a 32 percent approval rating. But guys like us, •
• we don't pay attention to the polls. We know that polls •
• are just a collection of statistics that reflect what people •
• are thinking in "reality." And reality has a well-known •
• liberal bias. •
• — Stephen Colbert in *Funny Times* (July 2006) p. 6 •
• • • • • **Unquote** • • • • •



Interview with novelist Gore Vidal Interview By David Barsamian, August 2006

Gore Vidal is a gold mine of quips and zingers. And his vast knowledge of literature and history—particularly American—makes for an impressive figure. His razor-sharp tongue lacerates the powerful. He does it with aplomb, saying, “Style is knowing who you are, what you want to say, and not giving a damn.” He has a wry sense of noblesse oblige: “There is no human problem which could not be solved if people would simply do as I advise.”

Now eighty, he lives in the Hollywood hills in a modest mansion with immodest artwork. I felt I was entering a museum of Renaissance art. A stern painting of the Emperor Constantine was looking down upon us as we sat in his majestic living room. A Buddha statue from Thailand stood nearby. But all was not somber. He had a Bush doll with a 9/11 bill sticking out of it on a table behind us.

His aristocratic pedigree is evident not just in his artistic sophistication but also in his locution. In a war of words, few can contend with Vidal.

“I’m a lover of the old republic and I deeply resent the empire our Presidents put in its place,” he declares.

Vidal moved gingerly and was using a cane. A recent knee operation left him less mobile. He says, “The mind is still agile but the knees have grown weak.” We sat in upholstered chairs. On a nearby table I saw the galleys of his second memoir, *Point to Point Navigation*. It will be out this fall. His earlier one, *Palimpsest*, came out in 1995.

Prolific does not even begin to describe Vidal’s literary output. He’s the author of scores of novels, plays, screenplays, essays. In 1993, he won the National Book Award for his collection of essays, *United States*. His recent books (he calls them “pamphlets”)—*Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace*, *Dreaming War*, and *Imperial America* have sold in huge numbers. When I asked him what was the point of his work, he said, “I am chronicling America.” The prose, whether polemical or fictional, is elegant.

Distantly related to Jackie Kennedy, he does not romanticize JFK. “He was one of the most charming men I’ve ever known,” says Vidal. “He was also one of the very worst Presidents.”

He’s been a Democratic candidate for the House from New York and for the Senate from California. Today, he ridicules the Democrats for supineness.

He sees a certain continuity in U.S. foreign policy over the last fifty years. “The management, then and now, truly believes the United States is the master of the Earth and anyone who defies us will be napalmed or blockaded or covertly overthrown,” he says. “We are beyond law, which is not unusual for an empire; unfortunately, we are also beyond common sense.”

I talked with him on a hot afternoon in mid-April.

Q: In 2002, long before Bush’s current travails, you wrote, “Mark my words, he will leave office the most unpopular President in history.” How did you know that then?

Gore Vidal: I know these people. I don’t say that as though I know them personally. I know the types. I was brought up in Washington. When you are brought up in a zoo, you know what’s going on in the monkey house. You see a couple of monkeys loose and one is President and one is Vice President, you know it’s trouble. Monkeys make trouble.

Q: Bush’s ratings have been at personal lows. Cheney has had an 18 percent approval rating.

Vidal: Well, he deserves it.

Q: Yet the wars go on. It’s almost as if the people don’t matter.

Vidal: The people don’t matter to this gang. They pay no attention. They think in totalitarian terms. They’ve got the troops. They’ve got the army. They’ve got Congress. They’ve got the judiciary. Why should they worry? Let the chattering classes chatter. Bush is a thug. I think there is something really wrong with him.

Q: What do you think of the conspiracy theories about September 11?

Vidal: I’m willing to believe practically any mischief on the part of the Bush people. No, I don’t think they did it, as some conspiracy people think. Why? Because it was too intelligently done. This is beyond the competence of Bush and Cheney and Rumsfeld. They couldn’t pull off a caper like 9/11. They are too clumsy.

Q: Today the United States is fighting two wars, one in Afghanistan and one in Iraq, and is now threatening to launch a third one on Iran. What is it going to take to stop the Bush onslaught?

Vidal: Economic collapse. We are too deeply in debt. We can’t service the debt, or so my financial friends tell me, that’s paying the interest on the Treasury bonds, particularly to the foreign countries that have been financing us. I think the Chinese will say the hell with you and pull their money out of the United States. That’s the end of our wars.

Q: You’re a veteran of World War II, the so-called good war. Would you recommend to a young person a career in the armed forces in the United States?

Vidal: No, but I would suggest Canada or New Zealand as a possible place to go until we are rid of our warmongers. We’ve never had a government like this. The United States has done wicked things in the past to other countries but never on such a scale and never in such an existentialist way. It’s as though we are evil. We strike first. We’ll destroy you. This is an eternal war against terrorism. It’s like a war against dandruff. There’s no such thing as a war against terrorism. It’s idiotic. These are slogans. These are





lies. It's advertising, which is the only art form we ever invented and developed.

But our media have collapsed. They've questioned no one. One of the reasons Bush and Cheney are so daring is that they know there's nobody to stop them. Nobody is going to write a story that says this is not a war, only Congress can declare war. And you can only have a war with another country. You can't have a war with bad temper or a war against paranoids. Nothing makes any sense, and the people are getting very confused. The people are not stupid, but they are totally misinformed.

Q: You've called the country "The United States of Amnesia." Is this something in our genes?

Vidal: No, it's something in our rulers. They don't want us to know anything. When you've got a press like we have, you no longer have an informed citizenry. I was involved somewhat with Congressman Conyers on what happened in Ohio during the last Presidential election.

Conyers is the ranking Democrat on the Judiciary Committee, and he went up there with a bunch of researchers. They went from district to district, and they found out how the election was stolen. He wrote a report that was published by a small press in Chicago. To help out, I said I'd write a preface for him on how the election was stolen. We were thinking that might help. But The New York Times and The Washington Post were not going to review the book about how we had a second Presidential election stolen. They weren't going to admit it.

A huge number of Americans still believe that Saddam Hussein was responsible for 9/11. You have a people that don't know anything about the rest of the world, and you have leaders who lie to them, lie to them, and lie to them.

It's so stupid, everything that they say. And the media take on it is just as stupid as theirs, sometimes worse. They at least have motives. They are making money out of the republic or what's left of it. It's the stupidity that will really drive me away from this country.

Q: When were the media better?

Vidal: They've never been much good. They belong to the people who own them. But they were better, the level was higher. There used to be foreign correspondents in other countries. There's nobody abroad now. The New York Times gave up being anything except a kind of shadow of The Wall Street Journal. The Washington Post is the court circular. What has the emperor done today? And who will be the under-assistant of the secretary of agriculture? As though these things mattered.

Q: What do you think of the public advertising of one's faith among political leaders? They make a show of going to church and participating in ceremonies.

Vidal: Personally I find it sickening, and very much against what our Founders had in mind. Remember that the country was mostly founded by Brits, and England's always gotten credit for having invented hypocrisy. So we are reflecting our British heritage when we hypocritically talk about how religious we are.

Q: Is the U.S. more like Sparta than Athens?

Vidal: We're not so good as either. We certainly are not war-like. Spartans were based upon military service. We don't want that. We want to make money, which I always thought was one of the most admirable things about Americans. We didn't want to go out and conquer other countries. We wanted to corner wheat in the stock market or something sensible like that. So we are very unbelligent. We were dragged screaming into World War I. Well, we were slightly enthusiastic about that, but we were very innocent farm people in those days. In World War II, we fought to stay out of that war. And every liberal figure in the United States from Norman Thomas on was anti-war. They were isolationists in the old populist tradition. So we never had a chance of being Sparta.

Q: Talk about the role of the opposition party, the Democrats.

Vidal: It isn't an opposition party. I have been saying for the last thousand years that the United States has only one party-the property party. It's the party of big corporations, the party of money. It has two right wings; one is Democrat and the other is Republican.

Q: What can people do to energize democracy?

Vidal: The tactic would be to go after smaller offices, state by state, school board, sheriff, state legislatures. You can turn them around and that doesn't take much of anything. Take back everything at the grassroots, starting with state legislatures. That's what Madison always said. I'd like to see a revival of state legislatures, in which I am a true Jeffersonian.

Q: Do you see any developments on the horizon that might suggest an alternative?

Vidal: Newton's Third Law. I hope that law is still working. American laws don't work, but at least the laws of physics might work. And the Third Law is: There is no action without reaction. There should be a great deal of reaction to the total incompetence of this Administration. It's going to take two or three generations to recover what we had as of twenty years ago.

David Barsamian is the director of Alternative Radio in Boulder, Colorado.

His latest book is "Original Zinn: Conversations on History and Politics."

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Does Faith make any Difference?

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(Ventura, CA) – Backing up its reputation as a highly religious people, half of all American adults said that their life has been “greatly transformed” by their religious faith. This is one of the key results from a new survey by The Barna Group based on a nationwide telephone survey among a representative sample of more than 2000 adults.

Overall, 51% of the survey respondents said they have been greatly transformed by their faith, about one-fourth (28%) said their faith has been helpful but has not produced significant transformation, and nearly one out of five (17%) claimed their faith has not made much of a difference in their life.

Some population segments were more likely than others to contend that they have been transformed by their faith. Women were more likely than men to claim their faith has had a great impact (56% vs. 45%). Residents of the South were the most likely to cite such an effect (63%), while folks in the Midwest were about average (50%), and adults in the West (44%) and Northeast (39%) were much less inclined to attribute such influence to faith. Nearly two-thirds of African-Americans (62%) assigned great impact to their faith, compared to half of whites (50%) and Hispanics (49%), and barely one-quarter of Asians (27%). People who are usually conservative on political matters were almost twice as likely as those who are generally liberal to cite great personal transformation as a result of their faith (64% versus 35%).

Protestants were considerably more likely than Catholics to assert that they have realized transformation. However, there was a substantial gap between Protestants associated with different types of churches. The denominational groups most widely affected by faith were Pentecostals, among whom 80% claimed to have been transformed; 79% among non-denominational adherents; and 67% among those aligned with one of the Holiness churches (e.g. Church of the Nazarene, Wesleyan, etc.). In contrast, only half of the people associated with Presbyterian, Lutheran, Episcopal and Methodist churches said they had a transforming faith. The lowest level among the major church groups was among Baptists: just 44% said they had experienced great transformation through their faith.

Faith Makes No Difference to Some

Among the 17% who said their faith has made no difference in their life, some groups stood out as the champions of that point-of-view. The groups least likely to have seen an effect from their faith included:

Men (21%), who were 62% more likely than women to express this conviction

People under 25 (35%), which is more than twice the proportion among older adults

Asians (48%), who were three times as likely as all other ethnic groups to fall within this category

Liberals (28%), who emerged three times more likely than conservatives to say faith has made no difference for them

Lutherans (16%) and Methodists (14%) - displaying levels that were twice the proportion among other Protestants

Atheists and agnostics (64%) ⌘



Jesus sees You!

A burglar was casing some suburban homes. At one house he saw UPS unloading a big TV set with stereo and video outfits. That moon less night in a heavy fog he made sure no person was at home

by phoning and ringing the doorbell. He broke into the kitchen by the rear door and entered.

It was fully dark inside as he made his way into the living room where he expected to find the things he intended to steal. Suddenly he heard a muffled voice from above: “I see you and Jesus sees you!” The burglar froze, but nothing more happened. After waiting a long time, the burglar took out his flashlight and shone it in the direction of the voice. He saw a large grey parrot high on his perch.

“I see you and Jesus sees you.” the animal vocalized. The burglar smiled. “Just a bird,” he laughed, “I’m an atheist, little parrot. Jesus ain’t watching me.”

The burglar closed the drapes before turning on a lamp, and that’s when he saw a big Rottweiler rising beneath the parrot’s perch. “Sic him, Jesus!” screeched the parrot.



*Rum: A Social and Sociable History
of the Real Spirit of 1776*
by Ian Williams
(New York: Nation Books, 2005)

“It was not tea but rum and the molasses for making it that really incited the American colonists to rebellion. Rum has strong claim to be *The Spirit of ‘76*” (p. xiii). Rum was the lubricant and fuel of colonial commerce. The mother country’s attempts to interfere with Caribbean trade eventually became the cause of the American revolution. There are reasons why we like to overlook the role of this *kill-devil* booze in the struggle for American freedom. A century of temperance agitation and a decade of Prohibition led us forget the importance of drink to the founding fathers, and a disdain for bibulousness made us sweep the role of rum under the rug. Besides local patriotism knows it was whisky that became the national drink. And, perhaps I should add, beware of Englishmen writing American history.

This rum, the dark rum of 1776 is not made from sugar, but from molasses, the dark syrupy liquid that is left over after milling out the sugar. The first European settlers in the Caribbean who began the sugar cane industry discovered the delicious drink that could be distilled from molasses. It makes a rich, potent, hot and hellish liquor. Molasses, initially seen as a waste by-product, became a major item of commerce. The American colonies imported molasses by the million gallons to distill it into rum. And rum fueled American society, politics, and the economy.

We tend to think of the Puritans as sober and religious, but in fact they had no inhibitions about drink. It was alleged their ministers “never gave up a point of doctrine nor a pint of rum.” (p. 77) The rum flowed freely at the major turning points in life, at christenings, weddings, and funerals. Our ancestors worked hard, out of doors in a cold climate, and rum was a cure all for cold and colds, for relaxing after heavy work, and for conviviality in the evenings.

Drink played an extraordinary role in political life. Meetings were held in taverns, and politicians supported licenses and needed the support of taverners and drinkers to be elected. Every district had its pub, and licensed houses for travelers were established at many cross roads and other

important junctions. Even Washington won his seat in the Virginia House of Burgesses by bribing hundreds of voters with inordinate quantities of booze. Taverns became seed beds for sedition, where insurrection was charted, in taverns British tyranny was condemned, the militia organized, and revolution plotted. Liberty came to mean the freedom to down a glass of rum without interference.

Rum for the American colonies became an everyday tippie, disdained by neither man nor woman nor boy. As a major item of trade to the Indians it influenced foreign relations in the West. The mother country could not see it the way of the colonists, who resented taxes on such a vital item, and prohibitions on Caribbean trade from where they hauled the vital resource that made distillation possible. The British Parliament saw Americans as ungrateful colonies, who needed to pay for their own protection. The colonists were seen as scoff-laws who did not hesitate to trade with the French enemy on Haiti, which even undercut the price of molasses smuggled from the British Islands.

Perhaps it is too much to claim, the war that ended with American independence was over an assured and cheap supply of molasses to make rum. The most important right the leading colonists fought for was the ability to trade with the Caribbean and to freely import molasses. At least Williams quotes John Adams, one of the leading conspirators: (p. 166)

Wits may laugh at our fondness for molasses. General Washington, however, used to assert and proved that Virginians loved molasses as well as New Englanders. I know not why we should blush to confess that molasses was an essential ingredient in American Independence.

And it wasn’t treacle the Americans craved. Patriotism was irrigated with a steady current of rum. By the time of the revolution per capita production of rum had reached 3.7 gallons, though some of that was traded to the Indians.

The war brought about what British power could not. It interrupted the Caribbean trade so that eventually American imbibing rum went the way of quaffing tea. As the country expanded westward, the native corn, too heavy to ship overland from Kentucky, was converted to corn liquor, and whisky became the characteristic American tippie.

– Wolf Roder



November Pollock:
Tuesday, November 14, 2006
6:30 PM



October Meeting:
Tuesday, October 24, 2006
7:00 PM



FIG Leaves
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Cincinnati, OH 45219

FIG

Our Purpose

The Free Inquiry Group, Inc. (FIG) is a non-profit organization founded in 1991. FIG is allied with the Council for Secular Humanism as well as an affiliate of the American Humanist Association and of the American Atheists.

Though most of our members are secular humanists, we welcome to our meetings anyone interested in learning about or furthering our purpose.



To foster a community of secular humanists dedicated to improving the human condition through rational inquiry and creative thinking unfettered by superstition, religion, or any form of dogma.

In accordance with our purpose, we have established the following goals:

- To provide a forum for intelligent exchange of ideas for those seeking fulfillment in an ethical secular life.
- To develop through open discussion the moral basis of a secular society and encourage ethical practices within our own membership and the community at large.
- To inform the public regarding secular alternatives to supernatural interpretations of the human condition.
- To support and defend the principles of democracy, free speech, and separation of church and state as expressed in the Constitution of the United States and the Bill of Rights.

For more information, write the Free Inquiry Group at the address above, e-mail figinfo@gofigger.org, or leave a message at (513) 557-3836. Visit our web site at gofigger.org.