



# WASHline

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## Gratitude

The entire WASH community conveys our gratitude to those who renewed their membership, signed up as a new member or just made a contribution because you appreciate the service our community is providing. Thank you.

Please go to <https://wash.org/donate/>  
If you have not already joined.

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The views expressed should in all cases be considered those of the author unless explicitly endorsed by the WASH Board of Directors.

## President's Message

by Heatherly Hodges

I voted last week. Lines were long at early voting, which hopefully indicates higher voter turnout. I would like that to be true, because I believe, regardless of party or political values, Americans have a duty to participate in the democratic process. Democracy is not one of the Humanist Ten Commitments of the American Humanist Association. But service and participation, peace and social justice, global awareness, and responsibility are, which leads to my belief that participating in democracy is a humanist value.

Regardless of who is elected in November, the world is constantly changing. We have signs to indicate America is moving in a more secular direction, but at the same time there are many indications that younger men and women in particular are moving back to more traditional conservative values. WASH hosted a meeting recently with Fish Stark, the new American Humanist Association executive director. Stark brought up a concerning point for those with secular values: the rise of “tradcaths” (traditional Catholics) and “tradwives” (traditional wives). Tradwives are women that eschew feminist values and instead aspire to be strictly wives, mothers and homemakers. Tradcaths are men who are moving away from progressive ideas and embracing traditional catholic values. There are even some non-religious individuals that are moving toward the conservative values of tradcaths and then slowly losing their secular values along the way.

So what happens next? And how do we respond? If the country begins moving away from the current secular trend, what can we do? One way, obviously, is engaging with and revitalizing organizations such as WASH. Become more involved in your chapters, and become more involved in your local community. One of the Ten Commitments is global awareness. We can adjust

that value to local awareness. Are there violations of separation of church and state happening in your town, county or state? Are there opportunities in your local area to spread awareness of secular values?

Service and participation is another humanist commitment, and we can enact this value by expanding community service opportunities and participating in events in your community. If you have the ability, perhaps being an election judge is a way to participate in the democratic process in your community. The League of Women Voters and voter registration drives are two other ways to participate in local democracy regardless of party.

By no means all, but many young people are committed to the principles of peace and social justice. They are taking responsibility, another humanist value, for their communities and for the world. Can you embrace those values in your community?

I've spoken in previous messages about the importance of maintaining hope in the future of our country and the world. I've spoken about the stress that living in "interesting times" brings, and how even doing small things to create positive change can help alleviate some of that stress. It is also true that participating in larger acts of service, responsibility, compassion and democracy can help one cope with our sometimes terrifying world.

As former WASH president and current National Field Director of American Atheists, Samantha McGuire frequently says: "Do the things." I echo that today. Participate, engage, take responsibility. Do the things!

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## Women's March in DC

On November 2<sup>nd</sup>, members of secularist organizations such as WASH, the American Humanist Association (AHA), and American Atheists will join Women's March D.C. in their rally and march from Freedom Plaza to the White House. The AHA will have a table at the rally at which WASH will participate. The day will begin with a vibrant rally and community festival, where activists can listen to inspiring speakers, enjoy live music, and connect with partner organizations

committed to this fight to be followed by the march. We'll have signs, buttons, and stickers for you to proudly display your humanism. RSVP [here](#).



Women's March logo for Nov 2, 2024 3-6pm.

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## Editor's Corner

By Don Wharton

I am so happy to bring you an edition of our newsletter focused on voting. We have a President's Message appropriately centered on voting. AHA and WASH are participating in the Women's March, Saturday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>. AHA says of this march, "This year's election isn't just about choosing between candidates; it's about choosing between freedom and fascism. Now, we have the opportunity to center feminist values essential for preserving our freedoms."

Obviously, women's humanity is being revoked as their roles are being stripped down to being reproductive livestock in a Christian nationalist dystopia. To all men out there, if we allow this travesty to happen to women, they will be coming for your rights also. No one is safe unless all of us are safe. Please RSVP [here](#) or [here](#).

The AHA is headquartered in DC and quite wonderfully for us, they have actively embraced our local community. They have dramatically revamped their senior leadership and held an excellent on-line convention. I have review articles of the new leadership and many of the sessions at the convention. I am very pleased to have the single most superstar freethinking representative, Jamie Raskin, as my representative in congress. He, Jared Huffmann and Amy Goodman were among the awardees at the AHA conference. I have an article highlighting the views these wonderful people shared at their presentations.

As usual, I am both honored and extremely pleased with the outpouring of creative writing talent that people are bringing to WASHline. Bill Creasy has a very philosophical essay of optimism about the future. Mr. Heffron has another of his analysis pieces on religious trauma. Both of them are disclosing books that they have published.

Elm Lessah has a very humorous piece on Biblical storytelling, titled Book of Zombies. Steve Lowe has been our tour guide highlighting Robert G. Ingersoll, the “Great Agnostic.” He has a piece highlighting these tours and offering to train someone to retain this as a WASH tradition. Martha Heisel has been fabulous in organizing our Shenandoah chapter, SASH. She has a note talking about her book club and promising to start providing reviews of some of the many books read by her chapter.

WASH is so fortunate to have some of our Virginia members organizing visible and effective political action. Virginia has some of the most regressive legislation considered in our region. I love sharing the articles for this wonderful group in Virginia.

One of my personal pleasures since our last newsletter is meeting WASH members who are volunteering for [Atheists Helping the Homeless, DC](#). I am happy that my DC Atheists chapter has been able to support this charity over recent years. For others who might like to help, email to [atheistshelping@gmail.com](mailto:atheistshelping@gmail.com).

Another pleasure that I have as Editor here is meeting new secular people and being able to offer them a forum to introduce themselves. Celia San Felipe is a multi-talented artist, who recently moved here from Bueno Aires, Argentina. She has published poetry in Spanish, but does not feel herself limited to that art form. We have one of her poems, translated into English, with this issue.

Normally I will be providing updates on both artificial intelligence and climate change. Those will be deferred to a later issue, due to lack of time. There are also significant changes in the evolution of the NONES, those with no religious affiliation. I expect to have an update on major changes in that area.

Appropriately for this issue, I do have an update on the attack on women’s rights in other states. The increasing cases of death, injury and plainly needless horror is quite astonishing. Do not forget to RSVP for the [Women’s March in DC](#), this Saturday, November 2, 3-6pm.

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## Celebrating New AHA Leadership

by Don Wharton

AHA recently elected Candace Gorman as the President of its Board of Directors. She and her board recently hired Fish Stark as the AHA Executive Director. I am quite fortunate to have met Fish Stark in local DC meetings and viewed his many contributions to the recent AHA zoom conference. He is an extremely energetic and intelligent new national leader for humanism. He is the son of Pete Stark, the first out humanist in Congress. He was with his father when he received the AHA Humanist of the year award in 2008.

His academic credentials are excellent with his BA from Yale and a Master’s in Education from Harvard. He served on the secular student group leadership teams while getting those degrees.

He worked as the Director of Programs at Peace First, a global nonprofit training and funding youth social activism in many countries. With his expertise in child psychology, he headed teams developing curriculum for an educational technology startup. When that startup was acquired, he declined to accept the big paycheck because he saw toxic Silicon Valley bro values in the acquiring entity. This says a lot about the integrity that Fish sees as central to who he is.

He is richly informed about the history of secular thought with many heroes that he looks up to including John Dewey, A. Philip Randolph, Bill Nye, Barney Frank, Neil deGrass Tyson, James Frey Croft, Jamie Raskin, and Jared Huffman. He put his personal stamp on the AHA’s current push against Christian nationalism. He approaches that fight with joyful relish. He highly values the fact that humanists arrive at 90% agreement across a wide range progressive values. He sees those values as supported by the evidence.

He also seems to be astonishingly informed about the nature of secularism in the wider society.

For example, Fish knew that Gen Z women are now leaving religion more than men. This is a very recent change that few in our secular community would know about. I have not yet written about this for WASHline and historically all varieties of atheism more reflected men leaving religion.

I asked Fish about why men are going to be wildly divergent from women in the upcoming election? He cited JD Vance and his “tradecath” views as a template for what is happening with men. Our pluralistic society is moving on from white male leadership. Tradecath is short for traditional Catholic. Too many men are now seeing this traditional religious role as preserving their privilege. Young women are not impressed and are moving away from religion in greater numbers because they no longer appreciate the traditional male role as in the past. They now see traditional patriarchy as confining and unacceptable. I respect Fish’s analysis of the Catholic contribution to this phenomenon. But my information is that Protestant religions deserve equal blame for this surprising new spin in evolving secularism.

I would very much hate for AHA to lose his skills to the world of politics, but his skills would be awesome in that arena. He is connected to Maryland political leaders and I see zero chance that they will not actively approach him to run for office. Fish can own a stage in a way that reminds me of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama.

Will AHA be able to retain Fish Stark as its Executive Director? Obviously, he wants to make a mark on this world. It is not by accident that the AHA announcement of his appointment included the words “‘[Game On’ to Christian Nationalists.](#)” Mr. Stark is a man of courage and he wants to fight this fight. He sees community as needed for this fight. He wants to invest in that fight. WASH has supported many national efforts, including national secular conventions and nationally led rallies on the Mall. We now have a very capable national leader. Washington DC is the political power center for our nation. That means we need to come together as THE local community that is most there to support the fight against Christian nationalists. Fish Stark correctly says that we need to lose our fears and find joy in the fight ahead of us. He is extremely articulate about how and why we should expect to win that fight. Let us form the vibrant community that both serves our needs and is passionately committed to preserving our freedoms to think and act on secular principles. I

am so glad that AHA, under Candace Gorman’s leadership, has found such a talented leader to help make that happen.

## AHACON24 - Christian Nationalism

By Don Wharton

There were many sessions in the recent AHA Convention, *AHACON24*, September 14-15, that spoke on humanist values and the fight with Christian Nationalist on those values.

There was a session early on Saturday that highlighted humanist values and how they might be supported or attacked by AI systems. Some in WASH do not fully understand how important AI will be going forward. I hope to use WASHline to continue our attention on this issue.

I was quite amused by the session on *Reimagining Relationships and Destigmatizing Non-Monogamy*. Humanists have much empathy and understanding for our LGBTQ+ friends. They break with the archaic demands of theocrats to stay with heteronormative relationships. We are less informed about the vast possibilities for non-monogamy. One of the best attended sessions I ever organized was on polyamory. I am so glad to see it included with this conference. Obviously, all such non-traditional relationships will be at risk if Christian theocracy achieves its desired dominance.

There was an excellent session on *Conservative Threats to Public Education: Safeguarding the Future of Our Schools*, by Kevin Bolling, Executive Director, Secular Student Alliance. We know that Christian nationalists want to suppress many varieties of compassion, teaching, bathroom usage and availability of books in our public schools. In addition, in many cases they want to voucherize public school education so that people can force their children to endure a hyper-religious upbringing in religious schools at the expense of taxpayers. Thank you, Kevin, for highlighting these many risks.

There were excellent sessions on progressive parenting, elected officials fighting

Christian nationalism in government, the work of humanist professionals, and humanist values in science. Unfortunately, I did not take enough notes to more thoroughly convey what was said in these sessions.

I did take more notes from the session titled, *Unmasking Christian Nationalism's Ties to the Anti-Abortion Movement*. Isabella Russian of AHA led the session with three regional activists.

Aubrey Sparks is the Legal Director of ACLU West Virginia. Obviously, she has her work cut out for her. She called the WV legislature a "bad idea factory." The state has a near total ban on abortion. She reported on the abusive hoops that people must jump through if there is rape, incest, the victim is a minor or a not viable fetus. She decried the global gag rule and the astonishing effort required just to work in the universe of facts. She asserts that WV activists against abortion lie about nearly everything. For those in West Virginia who need high end expertise with a problem pregnancy, you are out of luck. There is only one such expert in the state and he is a well known anti-abortion activist. Thus, for certain care, the state is a complete health care desert.

Crisis pregnancy centers trick people by promising free pregnancy tests or free ultrasounds and then lying about state law or the state of your pregnancy. They are not bound by HIPPA. They can forward your information in any way they might want. They are often connected to well-funded but shady adoption organizations.

Jakeya Johnson is the very impressive Executive Director of Reproductive Justice Maryland and Program manager for American Society for Emergency Contraception. She got House bill 477 passed. It expanded contraceptive options on college campuses, including comprehensive abortion referral services. A prior problem was that if a Texan visited Maryland and had any medical service it would be visible back in Texas. She got a law passed to prevent certain reproductive medical services in Maryland from being reported to another state. She noted that the protection of the most vulnerable means protecting real people who are at risk. She elegantly conveyed her message that the economic health

and mental health of the mother is more important than the vulnerability of the fetus. To all women, "pro-life" does not mean your life.

Dr. Layla Houshmand is a Medical Device Commercial Strategist. Her Ph.D. is in the engineering of medical devices. She notes that fundamentalists might feel very positive about bringing a pregnancy to term but that does not protect them if they need an abortion to save their lives. She noted how the positive motivation of such Christian nationalist women was assumed by them to be sufficient to allow them to get the medical care they need while pregnant. They were sadly mistaken in far too many cases.

Dr. Houshmand had a problem pregnancy because being pregnant reduces the body's immune system. She got a viral eye infection and needed an abortion to recover her immune system functioning. When she tried to talk to a doctor about the problem the front office of her OB doctor refused to put her call through. She then ran into another problem. 1 in 5 hospitals are managed by religious groups. They define policy that is not consistent with standard medical practice. Given the increasing geography without any OBGYN facilities at all, there may be little choice for someone living in an area only served by a religious institution. The nearest hospital would not provide the needed care and she lost much time finding another place to meet her needs. As a result she lost most of her vision in one eye. This occurred in Maryland, nominally a very progressive state.

There is a Question 1 amendment to the state constitution on the Maryland ballot this year. It will protect reproductive rights from possible rogue legislation in Maryland's future. Some anti-abortion groups have been spewing outrageous lies about what is included in this amendment. It says nothing about gender affirming care, sterilization, or parental notification in regard to minors or taxes. So even in Maryland we have a significant fight with anti-abortion extremists.

Many thanks to AHA for organizing these wonderful AHACON24 conference sessions.

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## Book of Zombies

by Eym Lessah

To many Christians, one of the most fascinating and miraculous accounts within the bible is the resurrection narrative of Jesus the Christ. Surely, the purpose of Jesus' life was to make a blood atonement for the lives of believers. In a nutshell, God had a child with a young girl - Almah-young woman of childbearing age, not a Virgin as is commonly believed. The child lived for 30-plus years, was murdered and after a couple of days, he came back to life. Upon his return, he would usher the believers into the heavenly streets of gold. As amazing as this mythological tale may seem, a little-known and even more bizarre tale that occurred during Jesus' death has been largely overlooked.

For those who believe that one man can return to life after death, what would be said if two men were resurrected? How about multiple resurrections? Would those be even more miraculous? According to the bible, three individuals were resurrected in the Old Testament, and five were resurrected in the New Testament. It seems as if resurrections were a dime a dozen in biblical times. What if you were told dozens, maybe hundreds of people were instantaneously resurrected within the New Testament?

The story of Jesus' death is very detailed, and some truly bizarre things happened in a very short period of time. According to the Bible, Jesus was placed on the cross at 9 a.m. "It was nine in the morning when they crucified him" (Mark 15:25 NIV). In the book of Matthew, the exact time was different. "From noon until three in the afternoon darkness came over all the land" (Matthew 27:45 NIV). The text goes on to say, "At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split..." (Matthew 27:51-52). The text below only appears in Matthew and nowhere else within the bible.

"...and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people" (Matthew 27:52-53 NIV).

If this scripture is to be believed, dozens, maybe hundreds (the true number is not given) of

the undead walked the earth and appeared to many people, after Jesus' resurrection. This is the amazing story of the resurrection that most people have never heard during Easter Service. This story literally speaks of groups of zombies roaming Golgotha and Jerusalem and even entering the city. You would think this event would be emphasized throughout churches. Jesus' death brought on zombies! The term Zombie is not used as a pejorative here. Truly, it epitomizes what was occurring within the text. The word Zombie originates from Haitian folklore, in which a dead body is reanimated through magic.

What is even more amazing about this tale is that not once is it mentioned that these walking undead spoke to anyone. It is assumed that they were awakened from the dead for a reason. Can we also assume that not one person dared to speak to any of these people? Are we to believe not one of these reanimated people sought out their grandchildren, or great-grandchildren, to share with them their tales of the grave? Did they go to their original homes to live with their long-lost families? Did they reintegrate into society as patriarchal leaders? Were they eternal and lived forever? There should have been numerous historians throughout the centuries from near and far longing to catalog these undead people concerning their tales from the other side. Truthfully, there is no doubt this act should have been the greatest miracle of all, throughout the Old or New Testament. Just think, this event itself requires a chapter of its own – The Book of Zombies.

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*"The result of a consistent and total substitution of lies for factual truth is not that the lies will now be accepted as truth, and the truth be defamed as lies, but that the sense by which we take our bearings in the real world—and the category of truth vs. falsehood is among the mental means to this end—is being destroyed."*  
— Hanna Arendt

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**AHA AHACON24 Sunday Awardees**

by Don Wharton

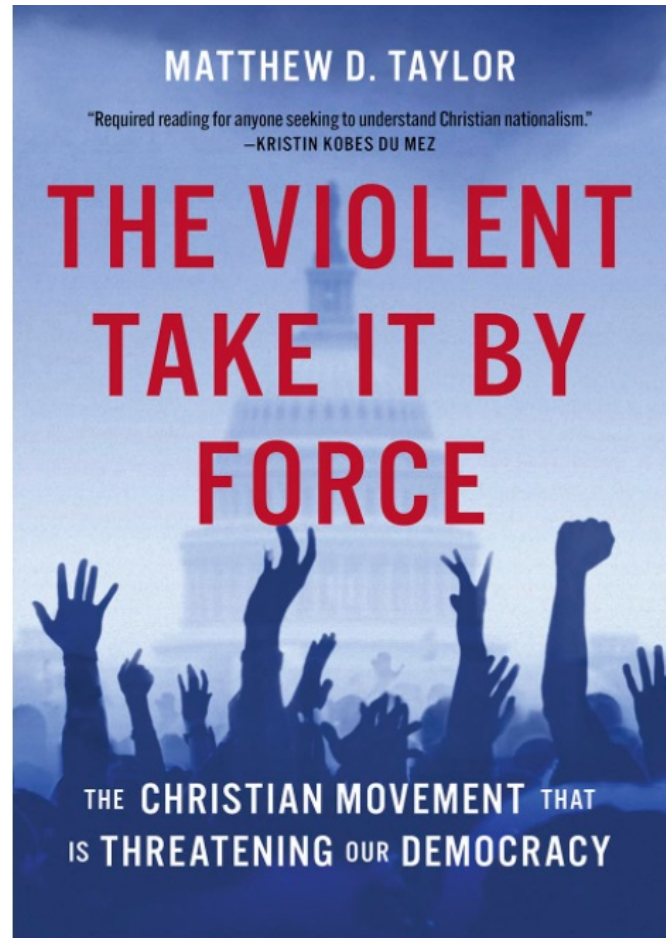
The House of Representatives Freethought Caucus was co-founded by Jamie Raskin and Jared Huffmann. They were co-recipients of this year's Religious Liberty Award. These freethought leaders in Congress will be critical in preserving and possibly advancing freedom, with any of the outcomes that might occur with the elections. Their very warm appreciation with this award shows that AHA is recognized for its national leadership and support for intelligent and thoughtful policies. I am pleased to share some quotes from each of these important supporters of secular thinking.

Jamie Raskin: "Your free exercise of religion does not depend on your ability to impose your religion on others. It limits exercise of religion only when you want to lead a prayer with your students in your classroom and compel them to participate, or take government money and give it to churches. The First Amendment is there to prevent one church or cult religion from seizing power and preventing all other religions from exercising their religious freedom. The first Amendment is critical to a free society. Founders were rebelling against millennia of established churches, warfare between Catholics and protestants, Holy crusades, inquisitions, witchcraft trials, you name it. They wanted to break from the nightmare of theocratic rule and the imposition of religious orthodoxy on free citizens."

Jared Huffmann: "I am proud to be the only out humanist. Jamie is not exaggerating when he says this is the modern equivalent of the Salem witch trials. In fact, some preachers are calling Taylor Swift a Satanic witch for not endorsing Donald Trump. This stuff is crazy enough when it is just madness swirling around on the Internet, but this has traction at the highest levels of the government. Christian nationalists have been seeding leaders in state legislatures, in the courts and even the Supreme Court, and in Congress as many as 100 members of Congress are Christian Dominionists, led by this New Apostolic Reformation. This is not compatible with democracy. I am in a district that will probably give me 77% of the vote. There is a political

upside. That is something that people do notice. Social media makes money by increasing hate."

Rep. Huffmann also held up a book he was reading. *The Violent Take It by Force* by Mathew D. Taylor. Its subtitle is *The Christian Movement That is Threatening Our Democracy*.



Rep. Huffmann formed a Project 2025 Taskforce in Congress. He shared that he was comfortable using secular humor with other congressmen. He would ask them if they are wearing clothes of multiple fibers. There is a Deuteronomy passage saying do not wear such clothing.

A later very interesting quote by Huffmann, "If you think that everything you do is a play fighting between God and Satan, why would you ever stand down. It is exhilarating. You are a frontline warrior against demons all around us."

Candance Miller Gorham presented the Humanist of the Year award to Amy Goodman. What follows is my somewhat crude attempt to capture some of her comments: She is the host of

Democracy Now on 1,400 stations. To receive the award she came from a synagogue on the lower East Side, 900 people signed up for a Jewish Currents event. The meeting was thrown out of Brooklyn College. Her great grandfather was a Jewish rabbi who fled pogroms. When he died a 1,000 people followed a horse drawn carriage over a closed Brooklyn Bridge. Our country is a sanctuary of dissent. The KKK blew up the Houston station. It was rebuilt and they blew it up again with 15 times as much dynamite. Ralph Nader claims that the Gaza death toll could go to 100s of thousands. Why are the standard media not interviewing people in Gaza? The person who gives a weapon can also be charged with murder. We are providing the weapons that are killing people in Gaza. 1000 black ministers wrote to the Biden administration saying they have never seen as much concern about an issue since the Civil Rights era than their concern and identification with the people of Gaza. We need to stand up when people are demonized like the Haitians of Springfield, Ohio. We are all immigrants. What we do affects people all over the world. There is a debate about showing the images of horror. Emmitt Till was murdered in 1955. His mother had an open casket because she wanted people to see. Show the pictures. Go to where the silence is. People are good. When they see what is done in our name they will speak out.

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## Far Future Optimism?

by Bill Creasy

Another way to ask the question in the title is, Can we make a future happen that we think is a good one, or are we going to be stuck with whatever happens, even if it is bad?

Some religions, including Christianity, expect that the world and human civilization will end in an apocalypse, and there isn't anything we can do about it. In fact, some Christians think they should help make it happen as soon as possible.

Of course, there are also natural causes of a potential apocalypse: nuclear war, epidemic, asteroid impact, alien invasion, obliteration by a malevolent artificial intelligence, etc. Science

fiction is full of apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic stories and movies. A few could happen in a way that we can't do anything to prevent. But several of them are directly caused by people, and others could be avoided when we see that they are coming.

So should we accept that the future will ultimately lead to an extinction-level disaster? Alex Shenderov says no, we shouldn't, in his book *Homo Exploratoris* (SacraSage Press, 2022, <https://a.co/d/esxvw3d>). He writes that we can try to choose the best future and work toward it. In his book, he wrote that we can't predict what will happen in a complex society, because it's complicated. It's possible our actions could lead to a bad outcome. But he said we can have faith that a good future is possible. But in order to make it more likely, we have to try to make it happen.

For example, we can talk about adapting to climate change. It will take time and money for a society to change the energy-generation system, but it can be done. Into the further future, we often talk about the optimism in the *Star Trek* or *The Orville* science-fiction universes. In those stories, bad things can happen, but the human race can recover to become even better. A close call with a disaster leads to progress to fix the problem or prevent it in the future.

To quote Shenderov's book: "Are we humans going forth to the stars or back to the caves? No oracle can tell you the answer to the ultimate question. It's a matter of faith. It's a matter of choosing what to believe about ourselves and the rest of the world—choosing today, before you know how it's going to turn out. We can't get to the stars without relying on a system of unprovable beliefs. A system of unprovable beliefs is a religion."

This quote raises an issue about his definitions. Shenderov redefines humanism as a kind of religion because it involves an unprovable, irrational optimism that a good future is possible. This is faith in the future. When most people talk about humanism or religion, that isn't really what they mean. He also redefines some other kinds of words that we could spend a lot of time arguing about (like God), but let's focus on the main point.

There are many different outlooks that are optimistic. There is the *Star Trek* universe, even though parts of it are poorly defined, like the



economic system, and some kinds of technology seem impossible today, like warp drive. As another example, the view of Ray Kurzweil's 2005 book *The Singularity Is Near* was that human minds could be incorporated into artificial computers to make us effectively immortal.

To look at science fiction, you might think it is kind of a coin flip: we might get a good future, or we might get a bad one, who knows? Shenderov thinks that's the wrong way to think about it. He thinks the best choice that we can make is to have faith that there is a good future and actively try to get it. We shouldn't cynically wait to see what happens or just expect the worst. He quoted Henry Ford: "If you think you can, you can. And if you think you can't, you're right." If we just wait and see what happens, we'll get a worse outcome.

Will the best outcome be the cheapest or most convenient for us in the present? Probably not. It will take research and development to find out how to do things the right way. We may have to make do with less today in order to be better tomorrow. We will have to use some of today's energy and resources to develop the next generation of energy sources. That's an investment in the future.

But what is the alternative? It may seem that the safe, conservative approach is to minimize costs and be comfortable now. Shenderov thinks that is the least conservative plan, because it will lead to disaster. We could continue to use fossil fuels for energy, and keep our current way of life. But eventually, the fossil fuels will run out, and then we won't have an energy source to develop the next generation of energy. Civilization will collapse, and many people will probably die.

To quote Shenderov's book again: "Like Peter Thiel once told Mark Zuckerberg, 'The biggest risk you can take is not taking any risk.' Risk-aversion (a.k.a. the refusal to make decisions until they can be rationally justified) is the cost of hubris: the delusion that our current prosperity and security can continue forever kinda on their own. This refusal to take a risk, in a world where decisions have to be made with incomplete information, itself cannot be rationally justified.... So risk-aversion is a risk even for the risk-averse individual."

He continued: "The humans alive as I write these words will be responsible—directly or

through the worldviews handed down to their children—for the choice: spread to space or let our civilization fizzle out.... And if somebody thinks otherwise, then it's up to us to prove them wrong."

But he is insistent that we have a free choice. We don't have enough information to know for sure that actions will work out for the best. We will have to make specific choices about what to invest in, and what options to take. There isn't a guarantee that we will pick the best alternative. He added: "It's your life. You decide for yourself. You also decide for the rest of us, just a little bit. Humanity is, among a lot of other things, a distributed decision-making system." So each person's decision about whether to be optimistic can have an effect on others, into the future.

There are other decisions that individuals make in order to contribute to society. For example, for society to be fair, people must protest the laws or rules that are unfair, whether it is civil rights, unfair pay, or lack of handicapped access. The maintenance of a system of justice has similar problems. There are institutions that are set up to enforce justice, like the police and legal systems. But ultimately, the members of society are responsible for acting to punish rule breakers to maintain a just society. (For more information about how this arises from group selection, see my book, *Making a Happy Society*, <https://a.co/d/bsFlc78>).

Although the title of this article is about the far future, it really starts now. What we do now has repercussions from now on into the futures that will be possible. For example, the next presidential election could determine the direction of the country for years. One candidate is thinking about the future and how to make people's lives better, and one wants to go back to the past, to stop working on climate change, and to continue to rely on fossil fuels. As I said before, this is a choice, and we'll have to see how America decides. But your vote matters, especially if you live in PA or a battleground state.

A version of this article was presented at the Human Values Network meetup group on 9/22/24. (HVN is not a WASH chapter, and it can be found at <https://www.meetup.com/the-human-values-network-hvn/>).

## Christian Nationalism Re Abortion

by Don Wharton

There are ten states with referendums on abortion rights on the ballot this year. For New York, Colorado, and Maryland, these are to preserve or expand existing rights. For the other seven states, they represent a very hotly contested fight to restore women's rights.

In Nebraska there are two dueling referendums, one of which is placed there by anti-abortion forces pretending to protect women's rights. This one will place the existing abortion ban in the state constitution so legislation would not be able to remove it. Polls suggest that both might win with over the 50% required to pass. Hopefully, this will not create a problem for the legitimate initiative. That one is designed to protect abortion rights until fetal viability or to protect the life of the mother.

In all of the rest of the states there is a blizzard of legal challenges and misinformation from anti-abortion forces. Florida is arguably the worst of these. Supporters of Amendment 4 had to dispense with lies about "viability" and the implementation costs just to get the ballot measure properly in front of voters. Florida state law says that the government may not act to influence anything on the ballot. The governor, Ron DeSantis, has declared that he and his government is immune from this law, even though it is explicitly there to prevent things such as his actions against this referendum. Over \$20 million of government money has been documented for anti-choice ads.

The Florida Department of Health has sent letters threatening criminal action for airing television ads in support of Amendment 4. These were drafted in the governor's office but ordered to be sent out by the Department of Health. The actual law cited was totally irrelevant and inappropriate for this. The law cited was intended to prevent noxious smells from slaughter houses, sewage processing and similar health issues. They are investigating the petitioners who signed in support of getting this amendment on the ballot and publicly threatening legal action against them for exercising their democratic rights. This is after the elections office fully certified all signatures as valid. This is a full blown terror campaign against

those working to reclaim the rights of women to protect their health, lives, and economic security. There is an outrageous claim that they have found enough questionable signatures that the amendment should never have been placed on the ballot.

Gov. Ron DeSantis has conducted a press tour of Florida outrageously claiming that the Florida 6-week abortion ban is safe. The Florida Department of Health has issued an 'alert' to the state medical community warning of 'misinformation' from people who actually report on the many medical atrocities that are coming from their ban. This type of lying is replicated in other states, like Nebraska. What will they do when the inevitable increases in maternal and infant mortality becomes documented? A Tennessee doctor has asked how probable is the death of the woman for an abortion to be legal? He asks if it is 30%, or 50%. Obviously that number should include any probability of death whatsoever. But when there are prison sentences ranging from five years to life in prison, doctors become extremely fearful. They need to be able to prove that they are not a felon.

Some women in states with abortion bans are choosing to not have children. They realize that their lives would be at risk because of bad state law.

For a good number of other states, abortion is on the ballot because state supreme court seats are on the ballot. Anti-choice activists want to seat justices who will nullify prior legal efforts to restore women's rights. All they need is "conservative" judges who are willing to say that the letter of the new law is not what it really means. So the fight is on in many more states than what those cited above.

Texas has seen a 56% increase in maternal mortality. States with bans are now seeing up to 13% increase in infant mortality. Women are being forced to give birth where doctors have told them that there is no chance for a baby to actually live. Women have known that they will go through the intense pain of childbirth, only to have it followed by the intense anguish of a baby as it goes through its death pangs. Women have been screaming with the horror of it all as they are forced to go through this travesty. The doctors and nurses that assist in this nonsense know that there is no way that horror of this form should have to be. The Christian

nationalists in state legislatures have to be removed from all areas of medical practice.

*“If your wife is shivering and bleeding on the operating room table during a routine delivery gone bad, her pressure dropping as she loses more and more blood or some unforeseen infection spreads and her doctors aren’t sure if they can act, you will be the one praying that it’s not too late.*

*You will be the one pleading for somebody, anybody, to do something. Then there is the tragic but very real possibility that in the worst-case scenario, you just might be the one holding flowers at the funeral. You might be the one left to raise your children alone.”*

*- Michelle Obama, October 2024*

## Virginia Call to Action

by Aiden Barnes

American Atheists' VA State Director's call to action:

Join the VA Secular Advocacy Team and/or volunteer as an Assistant State Director for American Atheists in VA!

We are living in tumultuous times, making it even more important for Americans to unite behind the foundational secular principles of the U.S. Constitution. Project 2025 is a serious threat to those principles and advances the ultimate goal of Christian Nationalists: overthrowing American democracy and installing a theocracy that robs us of our cherished freedoms. However, we know that many people in the US still don’t know about the dire threat that this 900-page Christian Nationalist playbook poses. This is why secular volunteers are crucial in pushing back against this theocratic agenda!

There are 2 main ways I'm asking for folks to volunteer. First, you can join our VA Secular Advocacy Team, organized via American Atheists, chaired by Matthew DeGrave. The VA-SAT is mostly active during Virginia's legislative session — tracking bills, contacting legislators, submitting testimony, etc. If you're interested in joining our VA SAT, please email [matthew.degrave@atheists.org](mailto:matthew.degrave@atheists.org) for more info. Second, we're always looking for more volunteers for the American Atheists' State Director program.

Here in VA, we currently have Assistant State Directors assigned to Chesapeake, Manassas, Newport News, Norfolk, Portsmouth, Reston, Richmond, Virginia Beach, and York County. If you're interested in joining our team of Assistant State Directors to represent a city/county not already covered in that list, please email me at [abarnes@atheists.org](mailto:abarnes@atheists.org) to learn more.

ED – If you live in Maryland and want to get involved, you can email Mike Reid at [mike.reid@atheists.org](mailto:mike.reid@atheists.org).



Facebook meme lifted from August Berkshire.

## Robert G Ingersoll Tours

For over twenty years, WASH has sponsored and supported a guided walking tour about the time and places Robert G. Ingersoll lived and worked in Washington, DC. We need some volunteers to become guides for this tour. The tour takes about 1.5 hours to deliver and is about one mile long. To prepare, one will need to become familiar with the tour script (memorizing it is not required) and read at least one of the biographies of Ingersoll. Training and coaching is available with practice tours. The tour has a web site at [www.Ingersoll.wash.org](http://www.Ingersoll.wash.org).

Questions: Call Steve LOWE at 202-957-1781, or e-mail at [slowe11@yahoo.com](mailto:slowe11@yahoo.com). It’s great fun telling people about our humanist hero Robert Ingersoll, The Great Agnostic.

Editor’s Note – People willing to lead such tours can have their tours highlighted within WASHline and the WASH Meetup and Facebook resources.

## Religious Trauma – Part V

by P. Michael Heffron

Last time we looked at how filicide can be interpreted as both good and evil, just by changing the names from Jack and Danny Torrance to Abraham and Isaac. In contrast to religion, science sees Jack and Abraham to be as insane as David Berkowitz, the serial killer dubbed the “Son of Sam” after claiming his killing spree was in obedience to commands from his neighbor’s dog, Sam. And to transform Berkowitz from Jack into Abraham like water into wine, all we need is the right story, a will to “believe,” and another 4000 years.

Thanks to a man with memory problems, we now know how turning a serial killing psychopath into a religious saint reflects the dualistic nature of memory. Since memorizing scriptures is one way to prove oneself worthy of salvation, religion would have colored that man more as a witch or pawn of the devil. Yet, by enlightening us about how memory really works, he shed some light on how great sins can become holy sacraments of obedience with enough time.

The unfortunate victim of a botched lobotomy, he was only known by the initials H. M. during his lifetime. Lucky for us, that botch revealed how the brain divides up responsibility for memories into two distinctive types: implicit and explicit. Information we remember unconsciously and effortlessly (like how to ride a bike) is our procedural/implicit memory (IM), while information we consciously work to remember (such as recalling items on your to-do list) is our declarative/explicit memory (EM).

Both EM and IM play important roles in how we recall information and interact in our environment, but an important difference between the two relates directly to how they are affected by religious practices. EM comes in two forms: episodic, like events from our life, and semantic, like memories of facts, concepts, names, and other general knowledge. IM is unconscious and, with repetition, becomes automatic. Learning a skill and mastering a task uses IM to prime us to respond the same way to similar stimuli, which are often dependent upon context clues.

But here’s the difference. EM relies on

language and conscious recall, while IM is nonverbal unconscious. Language is part of our prefrontal cortex, or PFC, while IM lives more in our nervous system and amygdala. Part of our executive function, the PFC helps with planning, decision making, working memory, personality expression, moderating social behavior. It enables us to differentiate among conflicting thoughts, determine good and bad, better and best, same and different, future consequences of current activities, and social “control.”

Unlike EM, IM has a tendency to focus on negative memories. Patients with major depressive disorder (MDD) often have an IM bias, leading them to unconsciously retrieve negative memories more than healthy controls. This bias can be explained by the fact that MDD patients have negative-biased representations of themselves, such as feelings of failure, loss, and worthlessness. Teaching a child they are a born sinner who must demonstrate they are worthy of salvation through their devotion to a brand of religious “faith” has the same effect, and dwells in our IM like an invisible hand.

### Dual Memory

Like a computer system, our two memory systems operate in the form of narrative recall, which we sometimes ritualize into time honored traditions, and the other we re-experience, sometimes in the form of trauma. The former are the stories we tell ourselves that color our perception and seed our subconscious with confirmation bias. The latter lives in the neural circuits that allow our bodies to register whether an environment is safe or dangerous, otherwise known as neuroception. Unlike perception, which delivers cognitive insights in the form of thoughts and sensory data, neuroception occurs outside of conscious thought. One is stored in conscious EM, the other in IM, in our body, and expressed as changes in our biological stress response.

Like waterways within ecosystems, our nervous systems work in close relationship to other systems in our bodies, to other people’s bodies, and to our environments. Like the gas pedal and brake, we normally flow between nervous system states of sympathetic agitation and parasympathetic rest. Most of what our nervous systems do operates beyond conscious will, like gravity. But trauma causes us to experience the world with “a different nervous system,” one

where our two memory systems end up at odds with each other.

In 1890, William James explained how trauma divides our memory systems, resulting in two forms of consciousness running simultaneously, like a computer program running on top of an operating system. “It must be admitted.” James said, that “the total possible consciousness may be split into parts which coexist, but mutually ignore each other, and share the knowledge between them.” This “split” results in dissociation that Bessel Van der Kolk said “prevents the trauma from becoming integrated within the conglomerated, ever shifted stores of autobiographical memory, in essence creating a dual memory.” In the normal memory system, elements of each experience are integrated into a continuous flow of experience. In the trauma memory system, thoughts, emotions, and sensations are stored as fragments.

Although ordinarily an active and constructive process, in those with PTSD, failure of narrative memory may lead to organization of the trauma on a somatosensory level (as visual images or physical sensations) that is relatively impervious to change. The difference is like Alfred Hitchcock’s film, *Psycho*. The parts of the film that develop the story line are like narrative memory, while the camera jumping rapidly at various angles during the violence of the shower scene are like the fragmented nature of trauma memory. The inability of people with PTSD to integrate traumatic experiences and their tendency, instead, to continuously relive the past, are mirrored physiologically and hormonally in the misinterpretation of innocuous stimuli (non-Christians) as potential threats (to salvation). This occurs in the form of embodied flashbacks.

Embodied flashback is an example of IM. Among other things, IM conditions us to associate one thing with another through simultaneous pairing, like a bell and food in the case of Pavlov’s dog and a shower with a butcher knife in the case of Hitchcock’s film. And in the case of infants and small toddlers, it is the only type of memory that exists before we have words. Being pre-verbal is why childhood trauma, which operates within us like an invisible hand, is different from adult trauma.

It is not that our rational mind is absent, but that it is like the police who show up after the

crime has been committed, and are left to piece together a story of what happened in the aftermath.

Dueling Memories: The Hatfield Hippo vs the Army Ant McCoys. Think of your two modes of memory as the hippo and the army ants.

The hippo is for hippocampus, a horseshoe-shaped structure located roughly in the middle of our heads. It encodes and transmits long-term memories. Because it only develops its full connections around the age of seven, we can’t (explicitly) remember anything about infancy. From birth to two or three, however, it is already stockpiling long-term memories, but lacks the pathways needed to move them out of emotional storage. What makes it a hippo is how those memories make us hungry for a good story.

Our amygdala (and nervous system) operates like army ants. Under our skin, we feel them all over our body. An almond-shaped structure located next to the hippocampus, it comes fully wired at birth and plays a key role in detecting and responding to threats.

In adults, the hippo regulates the army ants like a sluice controls the impacts of a flood. When we encounter a possible threat, the former gives us access to long-term memories that can modulate the latter’s response. For example, to our amygdala, a dog barking triggers a startle response and a desire to flee. But our hippocampus recalls dogs we like, perhaps from childhood. This context allows you to override our startled response. Instead of running away, we reach out to pet the dog instead.

Psychologist Louis Cozolino explains that because the amygdala is fully “online” at birth, but the hippocampus is not, we are essentially wired to embody negative experiences in very early childhood. In other words, we are born wired to fight because we can’t yet flee, let alone rationalize or recall found memories, because fleeing helps us survive

An important study concerning IMs revealed a startling finding about how religious practices affect our brains. Conducted in 2015 by Dr. Andrew B. Newberg, the study dealt with altered states of mind during intense Islamic prayer. Such practices, Newberg discovered, accompanied decreased cerebral blood flow to the prefrontal cortex and related frontal lobe structures

of the brain. The prefrontal cortex is traditionally thought to be involved in executive control, or willful behavior, as well as decision-making. So, the researchers hypothesize, it would make sense that a practice that centers on relinquishing control would result in decreased activity in this brain area.

Because IM tends to focus on the negative while EM focuses on story, teaching a child to believe they are a born sinner trains their EM to look at a crucifix through a story of love and forgiveness, while their IM registers the terror of far worse tortures to come if they fail to obey the brand of "God" placed before them like David Berkowitz obeyed his neighbor's dog. The story version of our EM is Abraham, while the emotional version of our IM is Jack Torrance. And as love grows for the former, the anxiety generated by the latter is then transferred onto one "witch" and "infidel" or another.

Next time, we'll look more closely at this process, and at how religion uses this traumatizing process to inflict a moral injury on a defenseless child's mind, in order to addict them to a dopamine attachment to a particular brand of the word "God," Pavlovian style.

Mr. Heffron is the author of:

[Cracking Kubrick's Code: The Shining UnMasked](#)

He brings his analytical talent to Stanley Kubrick's movie *The Shining*.

## SASH Book Club

by Martha Heisel

In addition to our monthly discussion meetings, friends of Shenandoah Area Secular Humanists (SASH) have enjoyed a book club for more than four years. We meet by Zoom on the last Sunday morning of each month. Anyone interested in deep, wandering and often fun discussions about books is welcome to attend, even if you haven't read the book. (Contact us at [sash@wash.org](mailto:sash@wash.org).) Our first book was Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*. Since then, we've discussed books ranging from a few novels to deep explorations of secular beliefs and their influence on our lives today. For our recent meeting, we read *Myth America: Historians Take On the Biggest Legends and Lies About Our Past*, edited by Kevin Kruse and Julian Zelizer.

Here's a brief list of books we've read and

enjoyed discussing. In upcoming issues of WASHline, we'll provide reviews of books we've read.

- Joe Bageant: *Deer Hunting with Jesus*
- Jonathan Haidt: *The Righteous Mind*
- Colin Woodard: *American Nations*
- Yuval Noah Harari: *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*
- Steven Novella: *The Skeptics' Guide to the Universe*
- Michael Shermer: *The Science of Good and Evil*
- George Saunders: *Lincoln in the Bardo*

## Seculares

by Celia Karina San Felipe Cerezo.  
Poem Minimalist Of 2022,

They are grown at  
start these new  
diversities.

..  
Between friends  
L.G.B.T., yes they have  
these roads.

..  
Every Secular  
today, yesterday and tomorrow  
it will be functional.

..  
Unify us,  
coalesce and  
evolve.

..  
Freedom to the  
civil rights and  
free consciences!

..  
America to  
think with equality  
of leaderships!

..  
Reason for the  
generations and the  
good to inherit

..  
Is to get vaccinated  
of mental diversity  
and honesty.

..  
It will be defender  
Legislator. Condition  
Secular triumphant!

## Chapter Reports

### Baltimore Secular Humanists (BSH)

We have meetings at various times and places around Baltimore, Baltimore County, and Harford County. Watch the meetup site for the latest events: <https://www.meetup.com/bsh-wash/>

There are also several other non-WASH meetup groups in the Baltimore area, including Human Values Network Meetup (<https://www.meetup.com/the-human-values-network-hvn/>) and Baltimore Atheists, that hold monthly discussion groups. BSH also posts notices of university lectures that are held in person or on Zoom.

We have posted events that are sponsored by Profs & Pints (<https://www.meetup.com/profs-and-pints-baltimore/>) with lectures from university professors. They charge an admission fee. Some of their past lectures can be found online: <https://www.profsandpints.com/online-talks>. We also posted an event sponsored by the Secular Student Alliance, entitled "Why is Project 2025 So Bad and How to Talk with Others," by Anne Nelson and Nancy MacLean. The talk is available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgktaw030Fg>.

### DC American Humanists (DC-AHA)

DC-Atheists, Humanists, and Agnostics group (DC-AHA) currently meets for monthly happy hour the first Wednesday (6-8pm) of the month at Across the Pond in Dupont Circle (location to change in 2025). Our Zoom programs are hosted by the American Humanist Association.

In October, the group was busy with a postcarding party for AHA's Democracy Not Theocracy campaign, opening weekend of a play on grieving for loved ones with and without religion, and a meet-and-greet with new AHA Executive Director Fish Stark at the AHA office. On December 17, we'll have a webinar with Fish Stark and author Greg Epstein on the new "Tech Agnostic" book.

A very important Women's March in DC

will be held this Saturday, November 2, 3-6pm.

Ed – See articles in the body of this issue on AHA leadership and reviews of the excellent AHACON24, annual conference held virtually September 14-15. Its theme was The Future is Humanist: Shaping Tomorrow Together.



### DC Region Atheists (DCRA)

We host a Secular Zoom Community meeting on the second Thursday of each month at 7pm. We nourish our connections with like-minded secular people and discuss a broad range of topics on religion, science and secularism. Please RSVP for a monthly meeting at: <https://www.meetup.com/dc-atheists>

Our chapter is active in supporting Atheists Helping the Homeless, DC. They distribute the second Saturday of every month in Silver Spring at Progress Place (8106 Georgia Ave. Silver Spring MD). Typically they serve about 80 clients each month.

### Frederick Secular Humanists (FRESH)

FRESH is excited to welcome former WASH president and American Atheists National Field Director, Samantha McGuire, to speak at our monthly meeting on November 17th at the C. Burr Artz Public Library in Frederick, MD! We continue to meet twice monthly with one social event and one speaker event. FRESH is currently looking to add another community service project and is beginning preparations for our main event, the Clothesline Project in April.

FRESH meets twice monthly in Frederick,

MD. Our regular meetings are held on either the third or fourth Sunday of each month (based upon library availability) at the C. Burr Artz Public Library at 110 E. Patrick St., Frederick, MD 21701. Occasionally, if that venue is not available, we will meet at the Urbana Regional Library at 9020 Amelung St., Frederick, MD 21704.

Additionally, we meet for an informal social hour at the Brewer's Alley restaurant at 124 N. Market St., Frederick, MD 21701. Our events are announced on our Meetup Page.

For more information, please visit our webpage at <http://wash.org/fresh>. For event details please visit our Meetup Page: <https://www.meetup.com/fresh-wash/>. All are welcome to attend our events, but an RSVP on Meetup is appreciated.

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### **Maryland-DC (MDC)**

MDC hosted an in-person Summer Book Club meeting on the topic: From Bacteria to Bach and Back - Part 2 on August 13. Events will be posted at: <https://www.meetup.com/wash-202>

All are welcomed. We appreciate secular and scout-minded people who like to discuss a broad range of topics including science, religion, democracy, psychology and secular philosophy.

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### **Shenandoah Area Secular Humanists (SASH)**

SASH is continuing our monthly meetings on various topics. Our September topic will be on "Teleology". We're also planning future topics such as Addressing the Different Stages of Life and How to Pick Our Battles. We will continue to hold our meeting on Zoom, since we always have several attendees from far-flung places.

Our SASH book club also meets monthly. Our book club is reading "Myth America: Historians Take On the Biggest Legends and Lies About Our Past" edited by Kevin Kruse and Julian Zelizer.

If any WASH members want to join our

discussions, they are certainly welcome. Contact me, and I'll put you on our distribution list: [sash@wash.org](mailto:sash@wash.org).

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### **Southeast Virginia Atheists, Skeptics & Humanists (SEVASH)**

Aside from our regular schedule of social gatherings, we hosted a couple of public events.

The first was a "Death Over Drafts" event in Hampton, VA at the St. George Brewing Company, which featured guest speaker Betsy DeVille, author of "Grief for Atheists: A Compassionate Guide with Evidence-Based Strategies to Navigate Your Loss." She discussed science-based, compassionate grief resources from a secular point of view. Judy Welp — a volunteer activist from Compassion & Choices VA — also joined us to discuss C&CVA's efforts to authorize, implement, and defend Medical Aid In Dying legislation so all terminally ill people who are eligible will have access to the full range of end-of-life care options. The final speaker for our "Death Over Drafts" event was Christina Nolen, a member of SEVASH who has worked as a death industry professional with mortuary experience, and she discussed the importance of open conversations about end-of-life planning, resources for do-it-yourself paperwork, disposition options including green/eco-friendly ideas, and the importance of ensuring wishes are honored for LGBTQIA folks, including references to get started. The goal of this event was to discuss and destigmatize topics surrounding end-of-life, including but not limited to Medical Aid In Dying, how we grieve as non-believers, and advanced planning directives. We had approximately 25 people attend, and caught the attention of several St. George Brewing patrons. We received overwhelmingly positive feedback from attendees, and look forward to doing similar events in the future, especially as we continue to support the passage of Medical Aid In Dying legislation here in Virginia. For any WASH chapters interested in hosting a similar event, Betsy DeVille has expressed interest in doing this workshop with other groups. She's based out of Raleigh, NC, so her travel needs are typically minimal for groups as close to her as WASH chapters would be.



SEVASH (-continued)

The second event was called "Democracy Not Theocracy: Say No to Project 2025!" We hosted Fish Stark, the new Executive Director of the American Humanist Association, for a talk on how local groups like SEVASH can help stop Project 2025 from being implemented and other actions to defend against Christian Nationalism. During this event, we also screened the 30-minute documentary "Suppressed and Sabotaged: The Fight to Vote," after which we channeled the outrage and anger we were all feeling into a postcard-writing party to help raise awareness about Project 2025. We were able to partner with Coastal Virginia Unitarian Universalists in Virginia Beach, not just as a venue but as an active participant with several members of their congregation in attendance. We had a total of 24 people attend this event and remain engaged all the way through our postcard writing effort.

We are still in the process of securing locations for our 2 Free Little Humanist Libraries, and we're still collecting book contributions from our local members. SEVASH volunteers have sustained elevated efforts stocking and maintaining our Free Food Pantries in Norfolk and Newport News.

<https://www.meetup.com/sevash/>

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/sevash/>

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## Chapter Contact Information

### 1. Humanist Chaplaincy at American University

Washington, DC  
hcau@wash.org  
[wash.org/hcau](http://wash.org/hcau)

### 2. Baltimore Secular Humanists (BSH)

Baltimore, MD  
bsh@wash.org  
[wash.org/bsh](http://wash.org/bsh)

### 3. Charlottesville Atheists and Secular Humanists (CASH)

Charlottesville, VA  
[inquire@wash.org](mailto:inquire@wash.org)  
[wash.org/cash](http://wash.org/cash)

### 4. DC American Humanists (DC-AHA)

Washington, DC  
[dcaha@wash.org](mailto:dcaha@wash.org)  
[wash.org/dcaha](http://wash.org/dcaha)

### 5. DC Region Atheists (DCRA)

Washington, DC and Montgomery County, MD  
[don@wash.org](mailto:don@wash.org)  
[wash.org/dca](http://wash.org/dca)

### 6. Frederick Secular Humanists (FRESH)

Frederick, MD  
[fresh@wash.org](mailto:fresh@wash.org)  
[wash.org/fresh](http://wash.org/fresh)

### 7. Fredericksburg Secular Humanists (FSH)

Fredericksburg, VA  
[fs@wash.org](mailto:fs@wash.org)  
[wash.org/fs](http://wash.org/fs)

### 8. Greater Richmond Humanists (GRH)

Richmond, VA  
[grh@wash.org](mailto:grh@wash.org)  
[wash.org/grh](http://wash.org/grh)

### 9. Lynchburg Area Secular Humanists (LASH)

Lynchburg, VA  
[inquire@wash.org](mailto:inquire@wash.org)

### 10. Maryland-DC (MDC)

Montgomery County, MD  
[mdc@wash.org](mailto:mdc@wash.org)  
[wash.org/mdc](http://wash.org/mdc)

### 11. Shenandoah Area Secular Humanists (SASH)

Front Royal, VA  
[sash@wash.org](mailto:sash@wash.org)  
[wash.org/sash](http://wash.org/sash)

### 12. Southeastern Virginia Atheists, Skeptics & Humanists (SEVASH)

Virginia Beach, VA  
[sevash@wash.org](mailto:sevash@wash.org)  
[wash.org/sevash](http://wash.org/sevash)

### 13. Secular Humanists of Roanoke (SHOR)

Roanoke, VA  
[shor@wash.org](mailto:shor@wash.org)  
[wash.org/shor](http://wash.org/shor)

### 14. Southern Maryland Secular Humanists (SMASH)

St. Mary's County, Maryland  
[smash@wash.org](mailto:smash@wash.org)  
[wash.org/smash](http://wash.org/smash)

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## WASH Contact Information

Web: [www.wash.org](http://www.wash.org)

US Mail:

**Washington Area Secular Humanists**  
**P.O. Box 352**  
**Frederick, MD 21705**

email address: [inquire@wash.org](mailto:inquire@wash.org)

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[washline@wash.org](mailto:washline@wash.org).

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