



WASHline

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President's Message

by Heatherly Hodges

1
2 As a social worker, I continually despair
3 that no one ever gives the whole Hemingway
4 quote: "The world breaks everyone and afterward
5 many are strong at the broken places. *But those
6 that will not break it kills.* It kills the very good
7 and the very gentle and the very brave impartially."

8
9
10 Our society over glorifies resilience, and
11 ignores that some are broken by trauma or the
12 weight of societal stigma. But the reality is that
13 sometimes we don't get better. And we certainly
14 don't get better if we are shamed for seeking help
15 (or if the help doesn't exist.) In the Lord of the
16 Rings, Frodo's story shows that reality: he doesn't
17 get better. Throughout his struggle to destroy the
18 One Ring, he becomes more and more beaten down
19 by his experiences, to the point where he almost
20 succumbs to the darkness of the One Ring. And
21 when he finally succeeds, with his companion
22 Sam's help, he cannot cope and takes a ship to
23 Valinor, the resting place of the elves. He is broken
24 by his trauma and has to leave everything behind to
25 recover.

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.

The views expressed here are in all cases solely those of the author unless explicitly endorsed by the WASH Board of Directors.

I'm reminded of my kids from foster care, where so very often the best we could give them was "safe enough" or "healed enough"-- enough meaning they were able to be functional. The resources simply are not available and society simply is not forgiving enough to heal them completely.

The 90's Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study, which studied the effect of childhood trauma on adults, showed the adults with histories of trauma were more likely to develop cancer and other diseases, were more likely to become addicts, and were more likely to commit suicide or die from other causes. MRI research has shown us the children exposed to trauma are left with literal brain damage. Trauma leaves long lasting scars on the body and the brain. We know that sometimes

the best we can do with those scars is treat the symptoms, because the damage will never fully go away.

That's where resilience comes in, the ability to survive and even thrive despite damage (though we will never know the life a survivor would have had without the damage). And that leads us to the only possible solution: we cannot fully heal the damage of trauma. Therefore, we must do everything we can to prevent trauma. Create villages to raise children, treat teachers like celebrities, provide safe housing and food, normalize treatment and getting help, reduce poverty and violence. We must create a world where trauma is an outlier, not the norm. We must create a world where generational cycles of abuse and neglect, racism, patriarchy and other 'isms are stopped before they infect another generation. Frodo never healed from his trauma. Sam did. We don't need more Frodos, we need more Sams.

Currently, many of us are traumatized from the state of our country. Trans people's very existence is being denied, harsh abortion laws are increasing pregnancy deaths, free speech is under attack and the very foundation of our democracy isn't simply being chipped away, it's being attacked by a chainsaw. I've taken to reading the news each night while watching West Wing or Madam Secretary simply to cope with the negativity. I urge each of you to protect yourselves. Prevent trauma in your life by setting firm boundaries of how much and how frequently you protest. Be gentle with yourself if you feel despair that you will not make a difference. Be kind to others who are struggling more than you. Try new coping strategies or hobbies that allow you to stay calm. Drink tea, sleep soundly and keep yourself healthy.

The first thing I learned in lifeguard training was that if a swimmer was pulling you down, you must push them away, catch your breath and regroup before trying to help again. We know that the changes we need to see in society to prevent trauma is unlikely to occur during this administration. So, regroup. Catch your breath and choose your battles, because the war is far from over.

Editor's Corner

by Don Wharton

As usual our President has provided us with a timely and thoughtful message. I was delighted to discover that our President is the person to talk to if you wish to make a contribution to WASH from your investment account. My need to discover that says something very positive about our secular community. We will not go silently into that good night of Christian nationalism and totalitarianism. And thank you, Heatherly, for all you do.

Gary Berg-Cross had a marvelous presentation on Humanist Heroes. It was a wide review of secular thought from the ancient Greeks to modern times. His overview of that presentation and his slides are highly recommended.

Bill Creasy brought his analysis of the new elites and his recommendations about how to push back against what is happening with the new social media and political landscape. When I look at the religious and anti-scientific nonsense that my Facebook feed is now including, I despair a bit that this is a forum in which we can fight. However, Bill's recommendations are excellent and we do need to share our thoughts about how to fight for our values. Thank you, Bill

I had a Note on Black Nones in our last issue. In it I wrote, "our black friends still deal with more religious intensity in that community than white Americans." and "Far fewer black Americans are willing to go all the way to identifying as atheists, agnostics or secular humanists." Walter Hill decided that these differences deserved a deeper analysis. Thank you Walter. Your article, with excellent graphs, underscores the sometimes stark differences our black friends must endure.

One of the delights of secular community is welcoming new members. Ben O'Brien is a young secular activist who made a presentation on developments in forensic science at an international conference. It is a joy to welcome new members who not only appreciate science but do the hard work to advance science in ways that advance the common good. Please, check out him and his presentation.

In the wide region covered by WASH, Virginia is clearly the state which will have more of the hard fought battles over values and the separation of church and state. Aiden Barnes is our

Virginia leader spearheading our battles in that state. If you live in that state or just care about what happens there, please check out Aiden's Call to Action.

Last issue had Robert Ahrens' analysis of the problem and costs of dealing with undocumented aliens. This issue has his thoughtful suggestion about how best to respond. Obviously, his preferences are likely to be much more humane and lower in cost than what we are likely to actually see from this administration.

Mr. Heffron has a submission that starts with: "Everybody has a plan," Mike Tyson once said, "until you get punched in the face." For a lot of us, that punch is Donald Trump. -- His intense analysis is brilliantly combined with scholarship illuminating the wider situation and our struggles to deal with it. I am sure that many of you will appreciate this piece as much as I did.

Clyde, our new MDC Chapter Coordinator sent in a letter to the Editor on racism. I continued that discussion with some thoughts of my own on DEI abolition efforts.

I regret that I had to do a deeper dive into the racism around voting rights. I advance the claim that efforts to suppress black voting rights has resulted in the last Presidential election actually being stolen from Kamala Harris. This is a serious charge that is not being adequately examined in the mainstream media. I hope we can reverse how this continuing influence of the old Confederacy is damaging the quality of life for this entire nation.

I also do a deeper dive into the Constitutional meaning of treason and how it might apply to current events. The reader may not like my analysis but the issues are about as important as they could possibly be for the existing world order.

I also have a modest piece on women's reproductive rights. The unrelenting efforts to force women into the role of reproductive livestock will not end. DC, Maryland and Virginia are not immune from projected changes in Federal law or regulations.

Please check out the many opportunities to engage with the secular community in our various chapters.

Humanist Heroes

by Gary Berg-Cross

When I was first invited to present a talk to WASH on the psychology of beliefs I drafted some slides on humanist heroes to show as context for my talk. As I recall one initial source of the listing was from the book *Humanism An Introduction* By Jim Herrick from 2005. I used only a portion of what was found there but even so came up with 45 [slides on humanist heroes](#). For a farewell presentation in 2025 as I stepped down from the role of Wash MDC chapter coordinator, I re-showed this list of heroes and the audience was interested enough to suggest that I write something up and include them in a subsequent *WASHline*.

While many cite the historical development of Humanism as the Middle Ages, specially Italy, the origination is better located during the Axial Age with its broad changes in religious and philosophical thought that occurred in a variety of locations from about the 8th to the 3rd century BCE. My list of heroes starts with a person, often called the first known scientist – Thales. But in Greece, we also saw the likes of Socrates, Archimedes, Hippocrates, Plato, and Aristotle. In Persia, we got Zoroaster. In India, we got the Buddha and whoever wrote the Hindu Upanishads. And in China, we had a secular Confucianism and the writings of Sun Tzu.

My hero list quickly jumped from Greco-Roman times to the Renaissance and freethinkers like Galileo. Renaissance humanism was a broad and important historical movement that began initially in the fourteenth century, attaining its full development in the fifteenth. During this period humanism rediscovered Greco-Roman thinking and a movement emerged as a philosophical, scientific and cultural movement in response to the dehumanization that had occurred for centuries and the poverty of current life. Humanism pioneers asserted that humans have immense potential to lead independent and successful lives in this world. People like Erasmus developed a dynamic set of educated interests and methods employing rhetoric and literature that imitated classical eloquence and noted works. A non-trivial residue of Renaissance humanism is our understanding of the disciplines that make up the humanities and that we view as essential to educated culture. But we have scant remnants of this as part of current education.

My list of heroes quickly moves to the Enlightenment and its impact in America particularly the Scottish Enlightenment and the development of two branches of humanism in the 19th century. Women start to get included. Scientific humanism, increasingly atheistic, is closely associated with Darwinism and Enlightenment rationalism. The second is a more liberal arts oriented humanism such as from Twain and Ingersoll. This is also more aligned with the rise of the social sciences. Some of the contemporary heroes I cite, such as Carl Sagan, are primarily rooted in the scientific tradition but others such as Kurt Vonnegut are very much from the literary side. We need both. I hope people enjoy the list and some of the quotes and I can say that I often return to them as a source of both inspiration and as a topic of conversation.

link to [Humanist Heroes Slides](#).

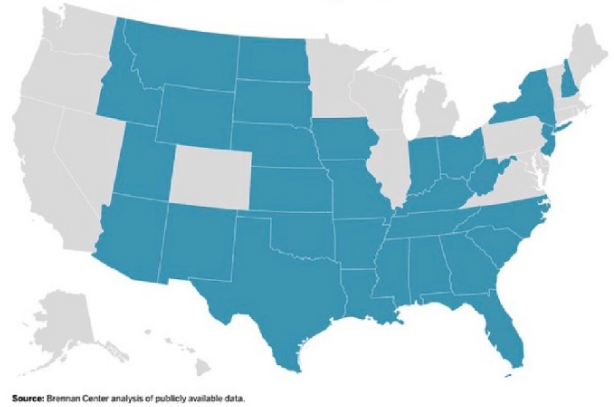
Racism and The 2024 Election

by Don Wharton

It may not be obvious but our country has never recovered from the Civil War. The extreme racism that allowed humans to be bought and sold as commodities was never eradicated. There was a brief period of reconstruction that created much liberty and freedom to participate in commerce and politics. That was swiftly and forcefully shut down with Jim Crow policies, lynchings and the mass murders of many race riots. There was a migration out of the south to escape the terrorism of white supremacy.

There was another period during which racism was suppressed with the Freedom Rides, mass protests and civil rights legislation of the 1960s. As I have been saying for some time, the Supreme Court has become a major engine of societal repression. With its *Shelby County v. Holder* decision and subsequent decisions, they have incrementally dismantled most of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. [The Brennan Center](#) has documented that “In the 11 years since the *Shelby County v. Holder* decision removed a key check against voting restrictions, at least 31 states have enacted 114 restrictive voting laws.”

States That Have Enacted Restrictive Voting Laws, 2021–24



Source: Brennan Center analysis of publicly available data.

New York actually had more laws enabling new voters and I suspect New Jersey was likewise on balance not suppressing anyone's vote. The ACLU of Pennsylvania had reason to [protest voter suppression](#) based on laws prior to this map. Excluding those states, this map of new voter suppression laws (after 2020) is very close to the Republican victory map.

Efforts to disenfranchise blacks and otherwise liberal voters has become a central policy effort of “conservatives” who are unacquainted with the overwhelming evidence that more equal societies function better and are substantially more productive by explicit measures. Much of the deep south remains more uneducated and impoverished than the rest of the country. They will also have roughly half the probability of moving up from the lowest economic quintile in a given generation. Many people are living in the delusional notion that keeping black folks down will somehow enhance their own prospects. That is not how economics works.

I think many whites imagined that a vote by them for Kamala Harris would be properly counted and contribute to the possibility of her becoming President. What such white voters do not realize is that if similar black votes are systematically suppressed by laws designed for that purpose, there is little chance that the nation-wide total will reflect your preference. Voting rights for blacks thus are implicitly voting rights for everyone.

Greg Palast documents the incredibly many ways in which votes were suppressed, [Trump Lost. Vote Suppression Won](#). His first paragraph says, “...if all legal ballots were counted, Trump would have lost the states of Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Georgia. Vice-President Kamala Harris would have won the Presidency with 286

electoral votes.” This is an extremely cautious “forensic” estimate that Mr. Palast declares he would testify to in a court of law. However, if you read the actual details the reality strikes me as far, far worse.

The “Big Lie” was started in 2020 with the claim that an election victory by Trump was stolen by Biden. Many of the subsequent suppression laws were passed by “conservative” state legislators who professed belief in this lie. The Big Lie was propagated egregiously by an alternative media system such that nearly 80% of Republicans actually believe this falsehood. Astonishingly in this last election, that is now arguably stolen by the evidence, there are absolute crickets in mainstream media. Reality is created largely by the shared media resources that convey the facts of our existence.

A major new wrinkle in these laws are the ones creating “vigilantes” who can “report” fraudulent voters. Mr. Palast has a movie documenting this extremist voter suppression effort, [Vigilantes Inc.](#) From the movie blurb, “40,000 self-proclaimed vigilante vote-fraud hunters had already challenged the rights of 852,381 voters — with a target of 2 million before the election.”

This allows a single racist to demolish the voting rights of many blacks just because racist lawmakers see no reason to limit or vet cases where vigilantes use this law, “...in Savannah, Georgia, this October, where 900 Savannah voters, most of them Black, were challenged by one single vigilante”.

A major target of many suppression laws are mail-in ballots. Reviews differentially not liking signatures from black areas are free to deem them not to be a match. “...157,477 ballots were rejected for supposedly “mis-matched” signatures.”

Some additional quotes from the Palast article:

- 4,776,706 voters were wrongly purged from voter rolls according to US Elections Assistance Commission data.
- No fewer than 2,121,000 mail-in ballots were disqualified for minor clerical errors (e.g. postage due).

- 1,216,000 “provisional” ballots were rejected, not counted.
- One study done for the United States Civil Rights Commission found that a Black person, such as Maj. Turner, will be 900% more likely to have their mail-in or in-person ballot disqualified than a white voter.
- Texas’ requirement to add ID numbers to an absentee ballot caused the rejection rate to jump from 1% to 12%.

There is the egregious poisoned post-card gambit. **The following 4 paragraphs are from Mr. Palast. Consider supporting his journalism.**

I’m talking about a trick that has been perfected by politicians of both parties to eliminate voters of the wrong persuasion: the Poison Postcard. Here’s how it works: Targeted voters are mailed postcards by state elections officials. (Let’s remember, state voting chiefs, “Secretaries of State,” are almost to a one partisan hacks.) Voters who don’t sign and return the cards, which look like junk mail, will be purged.

The Poison Postcard response rate is close to nothing. In Arizona, according to the EAC, just one in ten postcards are returned. And in Georgia, the vote-saving response is barely above 1%. And that’s the way our partisan voting officials like it.

Our experts, going name by name through Georgia’s purge list, working from special data provided us by the US Postal Service, identified 198,351 Georgians who had been purged for moving had, in fact, not moved an inch from their legal voting address. The state’s only evidence these 198,351 voters had moved? They failed to return the Poison Postcard.

Unfortunately, before the 2024 election, the Poison Postcard Purge accelerated. This time, a new Elections Board in Wisconsin (10 electoral votes) decided to use the same discredited purge list to knock off 166,433 voters which, this time, we could not stop. Kamala Harris lost that state by just 29,397 votes. In Pennsylvania (19 electoral votes), the Poison Postcards wiped out 360,132 voters, three times Trump’s victory margin.

End of Palast quotes.

According to [The Emancipator](#), since 2013, “the voting gap between White and non-White Americans, a key measure of equity in voting access, increased across the country by 5%.” And, “Between 2012 and 2018, thirteen states closed more than 1,688 polling places. Communities of color have seen a disproportionate number of these closures, and voters in predominantly Black neighborhoods spend, on average, 29% longer to cast their ballots.”

This is hardly a complete list of the suppression tactics used to diminish black turnout and ability to vote. However, it is all that reasonably fits into a normal sized *WASHline* article and frankly, all of the egregious misconduct that I could stomach in this writing session. National action to reform this system is required.

The New Elite and What to Do About It

by Bill Creasy

The current political situation is hard to understand and quite confusing, perhaps intentionally so. It isn't clear what the current administration is trying to accomplish, aside from being chaotic and breaking established rules. Perhaps it will help to take a step back and get some perspective.

The situation seems to be a transition from an old elite group to a new elite. Peter Turchin, a scientist who studies cultural transitions, has written that elites are groups of political or economic leaders. They don't have a conspiracy to hold power in society, but the group has a similar culture, training, and background, so they think that their common goals for society are the right ones. (See Turchin's books *Ages of Discord* and *End Times* for more of his ideas about U.S. history.)

The old elite was based on a situation of scarcity based on the Great Depression, World War II, and the 1950's. The emphasis was to provide plentiful food and goods for purchase by consumers. In terms of providing information and entertainment, even if there was a small number of media companies in some communication media, they competed to find news stories and try to make them as accurate as possible. The different kinds of media also competed for news stories, for example TV stations competed with newspapers. The

practice provided a free flow of information that seemed like the basis of the First Amendment freedom of the press.

The new elite that is taking over has a different perspective. They take plentiful goods for granted as a benefit for living in a capitalist society. Information is important if it can be monetized, meaning that attention of the audience can be turned into sales of products or advertising revenue. The truth is secondary to the ability to keep an audience interested.

Of course, advertising became big business even in the 1960's. Most of the mass media were supported by advertising money. In a way, this was a democratic approach, since the media were paid for by businesses that had money, and not paid for by viewers who may not have been able to pay but who benefitted from being informed.

But now, social media companies have developed new methods to keep the audience's attention by adjusting the information feed that they see. Then they adjust ads to be specific to the viewer. The companies collect as much information as possible about viewers, and so they can easily manipulate them as part of the business model. There doesn't seem to be any real competition for accuracy. If the “stories” on social media don't get covered by major media, it's called a conspiracy to keep it silent, rather than a judgment by professional journalists that the story isn't worth talking about. The goal of the new elite is to be unconcerned about factual accuracy and focused on exaggeration for advertising purposes. Advantages are hyped while problems are minimized or ignored. The first rule of the new elite seems to be that everything is an advertisement.

President Donald Trump is the leader of the new elite. His career has been a forebearer of the new information trends. Trump developed methods to hype his brand as representing high class, expensive living, and exclusivity. He did it in a way that was creative and tireless. He found ways to minimize his mistakes or his intentional fraud, constantly repeating that his bankruptcies, lost legal cases, and controversies were not his fault but were caused by people out to get him. His TV career on the TV show “Celebrity Apprentice” allowed him to take credit for being a business expert while uncredited people worked behind the scenes to make him look good. As president, he works to hype his accomplishments and goals, while using

presidential power to make lawsuits, convictions, and mistakes disappear.

This attitude that information is advertising makes science seem to be the political opposition, since science strives to find the truth. Scientific information isn't what they want to hear, or what they can spin in their favor. If material is specifically written to be objective data, and the content supports it as objective, it may be objective reality. Otherwise, information has to be seen as biased or as a sales pitch. Most news is directed to support one side or the other. Every medium is trying to get an audience to pay attention and will play to the preferences of the audience. Big media companies are directed by businessmen and accountants to target a demographic. This may be in spite of the efforts of old guard journalists or writers to show both sides.

Some people argue that they should withdraw from the major platforms like X/Twitter and Facebook to protest the methods of the new elite. They advocate withdrawing to smaller platforms. But there isn't a sign that the big platforms are going away.

A better approach might be to learn the new rules and try to take advantage of them. There isn't any way to force a change back to the old ways. Social media is a tool, and the benefit of the tool depends on how it is used. So here is my attempt to give a sales pitch.

We should insist that social media is given safeguards that are good for users by insisting on rules of behavior. We should occupy the social media platforms and use them as they are designed: to meet, organize, and protest those actions that are unacceptable. "Like" and "Follow" the people who are making good, convincing posts that will get others to agree with us. The best use of social media is to convince people that we are right about humanist goals. Any repressive government will have trouble silencing everyone who speaks out.

But don't be limited to interacting with people you agree with. Get on distribution lists of groups who don't agree. When they post something ridiculously wrong, tell them why it's wrong in a few words. You might get some angry replies, but so what? This can be tiring, so pace yourself, but let people know if they are wrong. If they are on a public feed, you don't have to "respect their space." I am following "atlassociety" on Instagram. These

followers of Ayn Rand claim to be rational, so they should accept rational arguments. But they are surprisingly strong Trump supporters. By engaging with them and others, you should find ways to improve your arguments.

For political topics, use the internet to affect the government. A Google search will get to your representative's congressional site. Don't just complain, also tell them what you want them to do. That's their job.

If you don't live in the district of a particular Congressperson, congressional sites probably won't accept your address as one of their constituents. But if you have a friend or relative with an address in their district, you can try to "borrow" the address to comment to their representatives.

Many people may worry about getting negative reactions. It's more likely that you will get no reaction. The representative may ignore comments, and you won't get them to agree. But it could still make a difference. If they think there is support for opposition, they may be less afraid to stand up to the president or the majority.

It can help to show up at in-person protests in D.C. or other big cities if they get publicity.

There is one lesson that we can take from the January 6 assault on the Capitol. What made this event important is not that it was a protest against election results, or even that it was a violent riot that killed people and destroyed public property. It was important because it was an event that was specifically targeted for one particular day on which the election was certified, and if the election wasn't certified, another winner might have been declared.

There are particular specific times and places where actions can make a huge difference. We need to be aware and ready to act if one of those key decision points happens. We shouldn't try to have a riot. But we need to act when the action counts. It is important to sign up with the nonprofit organizations who are monitoring legislation or Supreme Court cases to hear when key events are happening. [American Atheists](#) and [Americans United for Separation of Church and State](#), among other groups, have people who monitor the progress of legislation. Sign up and keep up with events as they develop.

However, it is important to be realistic about the amount of effort that it will take to change people's minds. Lee McIntyre gave a talk to the National Capital Area Skeptics about his book, [How to Talk to a Science Denier](#). He talks about how to convince people who don't believe science, especially flat-earth believers. They are not easy to persuade, and it is more effective to talk to them to get them to think about what points they are trying to support.

In general, have fun with it!

Bill Creasy is a former WASH president, a current member of the Board of Directors and coordinator of the Baltimore Chapter.

“What DOGE did do last week was present a list of claimed savings from canceled contracts. The total savings claimed didn't come anywhere near \$55 billion, but never mind. Several news organizations, including Bloomberg, the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal have gone through that DOGE list, and found that it's a steaming pile of, um, DOGEshit.”

Paul Krugman – from his essay:
[DOGE is the Theranos of Cost-Cutting](#)

Is This Treason?

by Don Wharton

The Constitution, in Article III, Section 3, Clause 1: says, “Treason against the United States, shall consist only in levying War against them, or in adhering to their Enemies, giving them Aid and Comfort.”

Russia is a mafia state, meaning that it is ruled by oligarchs with an absurd pretense of democracy and the absence of any real rule of law. Those oligarchs often finance personal militias. They achieve their power by alliances with Putin, which certainly includes payments to him for whatever fraction of their ill gotten loot that Putin demands. This is governance by kleptocracy, rule by those who just take what they desire to steal. Putin culls the ranks of those oligarchs by tossing them from high balconies. The personal militias can be some momentary defense for such oligarchs,

but Putin can and will have anyone killed if he wants them to be killed.

These properties of the Russian system are antithetical to everything our nation historically stands for. For that reason, our nation has heavily armed and otherwise supported Ukraine in their fight against the Russian invasion. [ABS News says](#), “Government resources place the amount of aid appropriated by Congress for Ukraine since the war began in 2022 at \$174 billion.” There were substantial intelligence resources and other efforts in support of Ukraine beyond this explicit budget funding. The Russian aggression against Ukraine had been forcefully condemned by Biden and our State Department in the UN and elsewhere across the world.

Our European allies have invested even more, because NATO countries are at risk. Putin has explicitly asserted that Russia deserves to reestablish the hegemony that it had at the peak of its prior sphere of influence and control. Poland has increased its budget for defense to 5% of its GDP for that reason. The Baltic nations in NATO feel very threatened by the Russian aggression and its stated longer term goals. Biden had an aggressive policy of sanctions to reduce the Russian ability to fight this war.

Russia has used its state power to [assassinate many people](#), anywhere in the world that they might be. They will kill as they please in the US, Britain, the European Union and elsewhere. They might prefer that some of these cases not be linked to an official state sanctioned killing. However, as with any Mafia type operation, the fear that is propagated by these killings are seen as a positive that they intend to create.

On February 24, the US voted against a resolution in the UN General Assembly condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine and demanding an immediate withdrawal of their troops. We were joined in that by Russia, China, North Korea, Belarus and similar countries. We attempted to advance a competing resolution that did not condemn Russia for the invasion. However, when it was amended to cite Russian aggression we abstained from voting for our own resolution. We did get a watered down statement out of the UN Security Council. However, five European countries abstained (Britain, France, Denmark, Greece and Slovenia.) We have created an increasingly stark divide with our European allies.

We are negotiating peace with Russia, while not even talking with Ukraine or NATO countries about how to do that. We start by declaring that Ukraine cannot get all of its territory back and will never be part of NATO and that the US military will not engage in that country. The US has voiced extreme Russia propaganda positions. Trump declared that Volodymyr Zelenskyy was a dictator, that he should not have started the war, and that he should have negotiated an end to the war years ago. This is hardly the type of opening stance a competent negotiator would be making. The US has conceded so much while Russia has conceded nothing.

The New York Post, a usually reliable supporter of “conservative” thought, had a headline piece correcting who was a dictator.



New York Post
@nypost

Today's cover: Mr. President: Putin is THE dictator and 9 other Ukraine-Russia war truths we ignore at our peril trib.al/Y2JXuuq



6:23 AM - Feb 21, 2025 - 910.5K Views

Trump has declared that the US financed \$350 billion in support of Ukraine while Europe financed only \$100 billion and most of that was loans that they would get back. Europe actually contributed about 60% of the support for Ukraine and took in millions of refugees, costing billions more. Trump’s outrageous ignorance of the facts caused Emmanuel Macron, President of France, to [correct Trump](#) in the middle of a shared press conference. Trump does not make the slightest pretense of knowing the facts or even caring about them.

Europe is in general stunned by the possibility of NATO becoming unraveled in the near future because our President rejects our world leadership role that has been in place since World War II. The strength of our nation was in large part due to a leadership role that could mobilize support for a given position or action across most developed democracies. If all such countries come to view us as an unreliable partner, that category of strength will cease to exist.

The slash and burn attack on the entirety of the Federal bureaucracy will have the effect of destroying our nation’s ability to support science, education, disease tracking, air travel safety, medical care, parks and forest management, diplomatic and soft power around the world, among many other functions. The command to reduce the defense budget by 8% in each of the next five years will dramatically degrade our military readiness. Each of these would make Russia and other authoritarian countries look better in comparison.

Sources within Russia are suggesting that Russia is [offering Trump a major deal](#) to exploit Russian resources. Trump is trying to have a deal with Ukraine which is imagined to generate \$500 billion in possible profit from Ukrainian mineral resources. The stated goal is to repay the prior US costs of the Ukraine war.

For much of the post WWII history the Republican Party viewed Russia as THE enemy. Remember when Ronald Reagan said, “Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!” This reached an extreme in the 1950’s when there was a red scare highlighted by Sen. Joe McCarthy. There were almost no court cases with a treason charge, but many lost their jobs or were black listed because it was imputed. Trump has reversed this prior assumption of Russia as our national enemy. Russian observers have declared Tulsi Gabbard, our new Director of National Intelligence, to be [“our girlfriend.”](#) Her trip to Syria was financed by a Russian oligarch.

Kash Patel, the new head of the FBI, has declared that he will go after all the media sources that did not support the Big Lie that the 2020 election was stolen. His published works firmly declare him to be a Christian nationalist. He promised that his second in command would be a professional from the ranks of the FBI. Instead, Dan Bongino was nominated for that role. Bongino is among the most twisted and extreme of

right-wing fear, hate and conspiracy mongering media hosts. These two define a motivation to radically weaponize the FBI to prosecute Trump enemies and other activities that Trump might want stopped. Of course, there is also the motivation to not deal with illegal behavior of Trump and his friends.

Trump owns nearly a billion Trump meme coins of very questionable legal standing and precisely zero real value. There is often [a \\$billion per 24 hours](#) in trading of these instruments. There are no restrictions on foreign investors buying them. At one point this phony instrument added \$72 billion to Trump's nominal net worth. Since there is no real value there, that is now less than \$3 billion. Presumably Trump is actually selling some fraction of his holdings to convert this market value into cash holdings. This can be regarded as a way for foreign agents to bribe Trump since any purchases contribute to Trump's net worth. There might be nearly zero chance for this corruption to be caught and prosecuted.

So what is the answer to my title question? I think the answer is no. There is much that would give aid and comfort to an enemy if there were a declaration of war against Russia. We have no such declaration. Various corrupt transactions benefiting Trump but against the interest of America are unlikely to be caught and prosecuted. As it stands the prospect of peace and perhaps financial reward for our country could be raised as appropriate motivations. A court case or impeachment proceeding based on a charge of treason would likely fail. I see near zero inclination or ability for those who are opposed to the above anti-democratic actions to advance a socially relevant charge of treason. It could be that vociferous charges of treason might result in some diminishing support for the on-going destruction of our government and the existing world order. However, we would need to see some evidence for that to be our reality. So this is not likely to be treason in either a legal or socially meaningful sense.

Humanist values of democracy, equal rights and separation of church and state are at stake. The friendly relations with Russia cited in this article may serve as steps toward a society which would not have our values. Hungary, is a cautionary tale illustrating this transition to authoritarianism.

Women's Reproductive Rights

by Don Wharton

This will be a very modest report on some of the critical news over the last two months. The Justice Department has announced that they will no longer enforce the FACE Act. This is the law that prevents religious extremists from blocking the entrances of abortion clinics and otherwise limits their ability to harass staff and women requiring their medical services. President Donald Trump pardoned two dozen people who were imprisoned under this act. He made the absurd claim that they were prosecuted for praying. These were all violent attacks, assaults, and physical blockages. Trump promised the March for Life that they will not be prosecuted again under this law. Yes, he ordered the Justice Department to announce that the FACE Act would no longer be enforced. But, the FACE Act is still on the books and thus Trump is assuming that he can remove the effect of this law beyond the four years of his term. It is more than a bit concerning that January 6 criminals have been pardoned and militia members among them are rearming now that it is again legal for them to buy guns.

Health and Human Services Secretary, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. (a.k.a., RFK Jr.) has stated that he will support whatever position on abortion that Trump decides on. He went further and acknowledged that Trump has instructed him to investigate the safety of mifepristone. The safety of this drug for medical abortions is well established. Unfortunately, it does create a substantial amount of bleeding and women will all too often make unneeded trips to an emergency room because of their concerns. Anti-abortion forces are attempting to use these trips as proof that the drug is not safe. This is just false, but it is typical of the unrestricted lying of theocrats as they destroy all the rights that now allow us to be free of their control.

Indiana has settled a lawsuit from an anti-abortion group by agreeing that abortion reports will not be considered "confidential medical records." Patient names are not included in these reports but there are so few of them in this anti-abortion state that it could be easy to deduce who the person is. The anti-abortion forces in this state are quite out front in their desire to use this data to further diminish all categories of abortion.

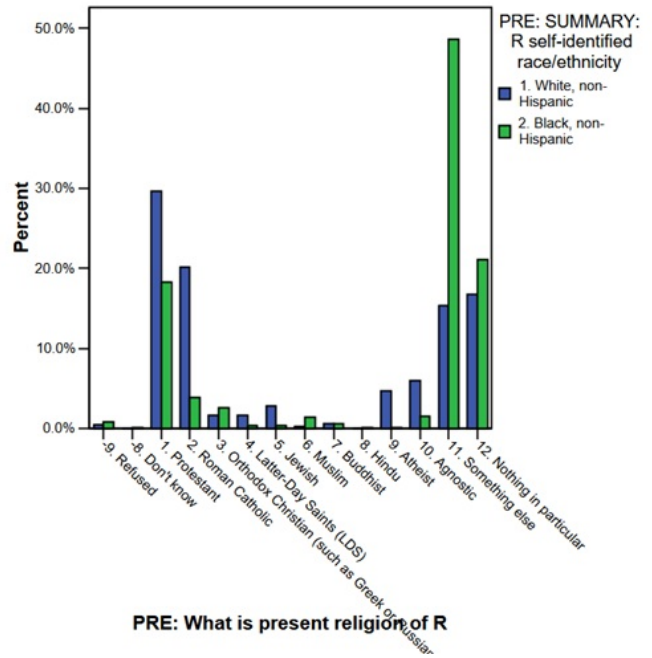
Anti-abortion groups are appalled that

people can use telemedicine to have abortion medications mailed into red states. Louisiana district attorney Tony Clayton recently indicted a New York abortion provider for shipping pills into the state. He wants the ability to extradite for this Louisiana crime even though New York has a shield law against any such action. So anti-abortion extremists want any travel of such indicted persons to any red state without a shield law to result in an arrest and extradition.

Project 2025 is absolutely laced with extremist anti-abortion rhetoric. The tactics cited in this article highlight major categories of desired assaults on the rights of women to their reproductive choices and autonomy. We can expect each of these categories to manifest with much greater effective harm in the next four years.

atheists. Pew reports summary data. (footnote 2)

Figure 1



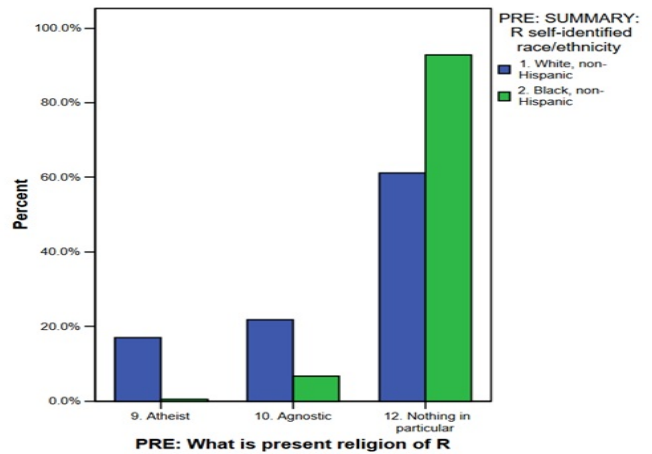
More on Black Nones

By Walter Hill

In the January/February 2024 Newsletter, Don Wharton observed the increase in the number of Black Nones. Historically, the proportion of whites who are non-theists has been much greater than the analogous number for Black non-theists. He concludes, because of the rate of increase, the proportion of Black Nones will soon be on par with white Nones. I posit the increase in Blacks Nones may not represent the same change in outlook as the increase among whites. The experience of the groups is different. Some of this was briefly observed in a fairly recent American Humanist Association publication (footnote 1).

The relatively large percent of Blacks in the “Something Else” category suggests to me that the groups approach religion differently. Here and throughout the differences I report are statistically significant. There is a follow-up question for those who describe their religion as Nothing in Particular. Those results appear in Figure 2. The difference in the groups is easily visible. There are much fewer Black atheists and agnostics. With data not shown here, I suspect many Blacks identify as theists, but do not identify with any of the traditional groups.

Figure 2

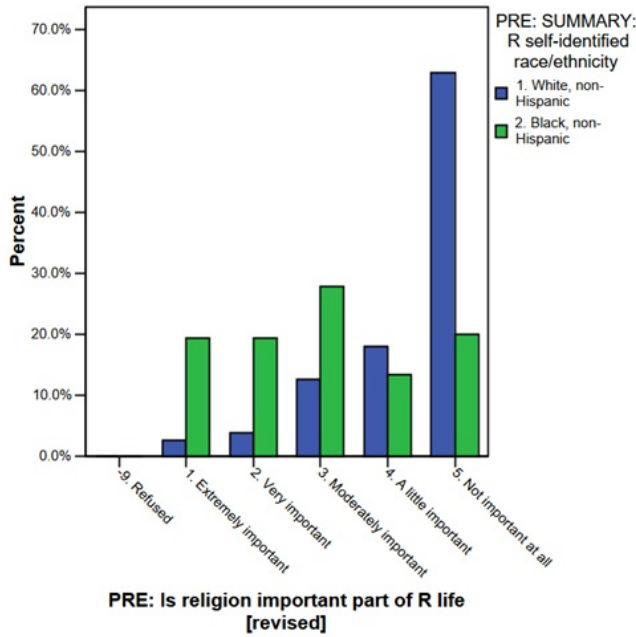


Consider the publically available American National Elections Studies (ANES) data set. The study of the 2020 election is a large survey with 8,280 respondents. The 2024 data should be available early this year. With this one data set I cannot check the claim that Black non-theists are increasing, but that would be consistent with the national trend. Nones are generally taken as those responding to the religion question as atheist or agnostic or “nothing in particular.” ANES has 27% of whites as Nones and 23% of blacks as Nones. However, the profiles of the two groups are different. See Figure 1. For example, only 1 of the 726 blacks identifies as atheist as opposed to 4.6% of whites. The small number of Black atheists in ANES is consistent with the Pew Landscape Religion Study which also has very few Black

An obvious follow-up item is the religiosity of the groups. The survey does have an inquiry on the importance of religion. How do Black Nones compare to their white counterparts? Again, in Figure 3, there is a noticeable difference with religion being more important to Blacks Nones

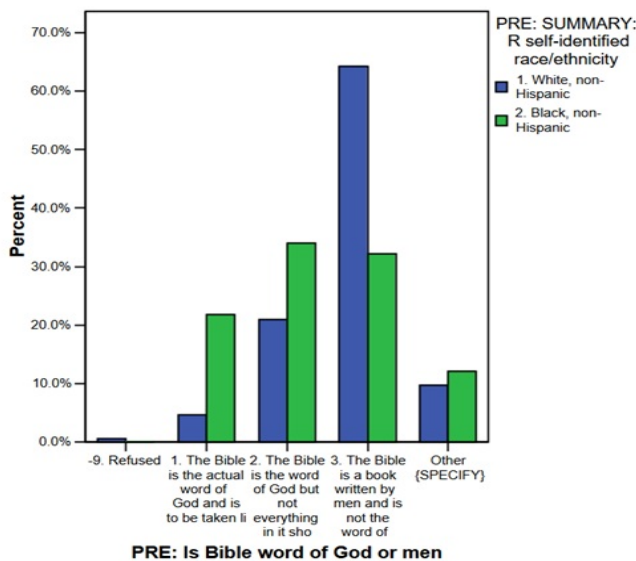
when compared to white Nones. The difference is striking in those saying religion is not important.

Figure 3



A second item that gives us some insight is the interpretation of the Bible. I would expect atheists, agnostics and non-theistic Nones not to believe that a deity was involved in the writing of the Bible. Over half of the Black Nones believe god was involved in writing the Bible. Again this is different from the response from white Nones. In Figure 4 we see a difference in views about the Bible.

Figure 4



In summary, Black Nones are in general different from their white counterparts. The former are, as a rule, more religious and more god-fearing.

It is easy to imagine first that the increase in the number of Black Nones means something different than the increase among whites. This also suggests that there are likely greater pressures on Black non-theists than their white counterparts both within group and outside of group.

In the original January/February article there was a hint that the increase in the number of Black Nones will mean more support for secular humanist positions. In terms of policy, I suspect Black Nones and the new Black Nones, will have a different level of support for policy issues than whites on issues such as abortion, LGBTQ rights, First Amendment issues and so on.

FOOTNOTES

- (1) Hill, W. (2022) ‘[An Examination of Policy Views By Race and Religion](#)’ “The Humanist.” January 2022.
- (2) Pew [Religious Landscape Study \(2014\)](#)

The Washington Area Secular Humanist Facebook Page highlighted this Guardian article: [Black, atheist and unapologetic](#)

Secular Charities

Please consider supporting secular charities in our region. [Atheists Helping the Homeless](#) does excellent work with the homeless.



Our SEVASH chapter does excellent work with food distribution. Please contact them if you live in their region and want to support their activities.

Editor – One of the pleasures of organizing a WASH chapter is meeting wonderful people who are new to our community. Ben O'Brien shared that he went to England to make a presentation at a well attended conference. He shared a link to it during our meeting. After viewing it I felt that this mixture of intelligence, respect for science and clear communication is exactly the set of skills that WASH would like to highlight and warmly invite to be active in our community. Actually that was obvious with his participation in our meeting. But his video also meant that he was making needed scientific contributions to forensic science. With some modest arm twisting he agreed to share a couple of paragraphs about himself and his presentation. Thank you Ben.

Introducing Ben O'Brien

Despite being in WASH's backyard for 5 years now, I've neglected to introduce myself to the local Secular Humanist community. To be fair, I moved up here for work in the middle of 2020, a rather inauspicious time to go out and meet new people. That said, I'm an ardent follower of skeptical, atheist, and secular humanist activism. Back in college, I was a member of the local Secular Student Alliance, an organization dedicated to community for non-religious students. I've not since had the pleasure to consider myself a member of any other such organizations, but interest has never waned. Back in September of 2023, I had the pleasure of flying out to attend the Question, Explore, Discover (QED) convention in Manchester England, the largest annual gathering of skeptics in the world. It was a convention I had wanted to attend for quite some time, but never had the capital it takes to fly internationally. I arrived the Friday before and followed signs for an event called "Skepticamp", not run by the organizers, but rather the local Skeptics in the Pub organizations, who had largely rebranded as an Online community during the pandemic. As a side event to the main convention, they set up a conference room where absolutely anybody could volunteer a talk about anything that might catch their fancy. I walked into the room during a talk on illusionism that was followed by a talk about misogyny in the medical field, and then a talk on the origins of the letter "F" through ancient civilizations.

As a forensic scientist, I myself had the pleasure of giving a talk at an academic conference back in February of 2020. It was at the American Academy of Forensic Sciences annual conference

and discussed my research. As such, it was full of technical jargon that my audience understood, but a lay person would struggle to follow. By contrast, Skepticamp (and QED) were set up to encourage the exact opposite. Fascinating intellectuals and scientists would get up to the microphone and talk to the average person. Given that an important part of my job is science communication within the courtroom, I decided I might try my hand by shining a light on issues within my field. The issues weren't novel, in fact I cite the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) Report from 2009 and the Presidential Council of Advisors on Science and Technology Report (PCAST) from 2016 laying out my issues with how evidence had historically been examined. You can find a link [to my talk here](#).

I gave it after having been awake for roughly 36 hours and having just ran off the train to the venue, so you'll forgive me some shakiness. That said, the question session was my favorite bit of the experience. I was talking to people who had no idea about what I was going to discuss going in and were trying to further understand the ideas I was trying to communicate. The exact kind of exchange that is impossible for a jury to perform within a courtroom, but can be incredibly useful for any individual who might be called for jury duty and asked to weigh the examination of evidence by experts. If possible, I intend to go further and discuss my particular area of expertise, DNA, if I have the chance at this venue later this year. Once again, fielding the questions lay people have in a situation with far lower stakes that might make a difference for someone else down the road.

American Atheists' Virginia State Director's Call to Action

by Aiden Barnes

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

Comrades! The 2025 legislative session in Virginia has officially ended, bringing both hard-fought victories and ongoing challenges. One of the biggest wins? For the first time, both chambers passed the Constitutional Amendment to enshrine reproductive freedom here in Virginia (HJ1 and SJ247). This is a historic step forward — but we're not done yet. Since constitutional

amendments bypass the Governor, we'll need to see it pass again in the 2026 legislative session before it reaches the ballot for voters to have the final say.

Most of our legislative priorities passed, including two other Constitutional Amendment resolutions on Marriage Equality (HJ9 and SJ249) and the Right to Vote (HJ2 and SJ248). These also do not require the Governor's signature, but they do need to pass again next year after we go through another election cycle for the Virginia legislature in November.

Meanwhile, two critical bills — the Contraceptive Equity Act (HB2371/SB780) and the Consumer Protection Act (SB754) — are now on Governor Glenn Youngkin's desk, and he has until March 24 to sign, veto, or amend. The Contraceptive Equity Act is in its third year and has faced repeated opposition. Last year, the Governor attempted to add exemptions that would allow employers to deny coverage based on religious or ethical beliefs. Contraception is healthcare — full stop. We cannot allow personal or political agendas to override evidence-based policy-making.

The Consumer Protection Act is crucial to safeguarding personal health data. New research from OPEN and Guttmacher found that nearly half of women now use period and fertility tracking apps — a sharp increase since Dobbs. We need to ensure this data is protected from misuse.

Unfortunately, two of our priority bills were left in committee: the Extradition Prohibition bill and the Reproductive & Gender-Affirming Care Protection Act. We're disappointed, but we're not discouraged. Attacks on reproductive freedom and gender-affirming care are escalating across the country — and Virginia is no exception. Anti-abortion politicians and extremist groups are doubling down on their efforts to control our bodies, restrict access to care, and target providers, patients, and trans communities. But we are NOT backing down! Our VA Secular Advocacy Team and our reproductive justice comrades will be back next session, more determined than ever, to ensure these protections become law. If these issues are important to you, please consider joining our Secular Advocacy Team, or volunteer as an Assistant State Director for American Atheists. Our movement is built on resilience — and with your advocacy, we will keep pushing forward until Virginia is a state where everyone can access the care they need, free from barriers, fear, or

discrimination. Feel free to reach out to me directly via email at abarnes@atheists.org for more info.

Editor's Note: If you are a Maryland resident and would like information on the MD Secular Advocacy Team or other activities in that state, please contact American Atheists' Maryland State Director, Mike Reid (Mike.Reid@atheists.org).

Undocumented Alien Solution

by Robert Ahrens

So, what's the actual solution, considering that deportations are, at this point, too expensive, resource intensive, and just impractical? Well, what's wrong with a guest worker program?

In its simplest form, people get a visa to come work here for a limited time. Since work is the point, that time might not count towards future citizenship. It could be renewed, or the length of time dependent on the fee for that visa.

But the reality is that something a bit more complex may be necessary. One reason is that some folks, especially in Mexico, work at places near the border, but stay at home in Mexico at night. Currently, there's no possible kind of visa that works for that.

So, the idea is this. A two tier program - a daily work visa, good for, say, five years. It allows a foreign citizen of Mexico or Canada to work within a certain standard commuting distance of the border during the day (or for some eight hour period like overnight) then goes home at night (or during daytime if their job is overnight). Simple, easy. Renewable by application at the border for another five years, but that time does not count towards future citizenship, because they aren't here full time.

The second tier is the full time visa. Working anywhere in the US, for a standard period of, say, three to five years. Renewable inside the US before that last year expires, and the applicant doesn't need to return home.

Or, another thought for the illegals now here. In the Obama years, they had programs to do this. We could go back to those. Instead of deporting 20 million people, allow them to apply for a three year visa while in the country, which would require them to apply at an ICE office. Upon

application, it could require a fine for the illegal entry, which, after all, is a misdemeanor. Or, in lieu of a fine, shorten that visa by a year, and require them to go back home to reapply for a regular visa of that three to five year time period when that first visa expires.

That alone would not only save us the deportation cash for such a huge program, but the fines and application fees would bring in cash!

Another benefit is that we could reduce the patrols at our borders or work harder to catch terrorists and criminal drug gangs.

Obviously, the way we work now, which avoids completely fining or prosecuting employers of illegals, isn't working as well as we'd like. It isn't working as badly as the GOP wants you to think it is, but it would certainly be nice to eliminate the real purpose of why those illegals come here illegally now, which is to work in a country that offers a better salary than they'd get at home. It would also help us to maintain our economy without tanking it by spending trillions of tax dollars to deport the very people at the lower tiers of the economy who do the most difficult and lowest paid work that keeps our economy running.

The point is, President Donald Trump's promise of deporting twenty million illegals not only isn't truly doable, but it would be both horribly expensive in your taxes, but would disrupt our economy to a terrible degree.

Editor's note - Homeland Security will be asking for about \$100 billion to cover deportation of the undocumented. This is radically inadequate for deporting 14 million or so as promised.

Letter to the Editor on Racism

Hi Don,

I don't have the bandwidth to write an article, but I'd like you to consider including one on scientific racism.

RFK Jr. recently claimed that Black people may need a different vaccination schedule than white people. He cited studies suggesting that individuals with Black ancestry had a stronger immune response to measles and rubella vaccines than white individuals. I think these studies were flawed.

There is no scientific evidence supporting the need for a race-based vaccination schedule. As Dr. Amesh Adalja of the Johns Hopkins Center for Health Security stated, "There's no evidence that there needs to be a different vaccine schedule based on race."

You're likely already familiar with the most common pseudoscientific claims used to attempt to justify racism:

1. Black people feel less pain than white people.
2. Black people are naturally better athletes than white people.
3. Black people, as a group, are genetically less intelligent than white people, as supposedly evidenced by lower IQ scores.

In reality, "race" is a social and political construct, not a biological or genetic one.

Thanks,

Clyde

Editor's comment - Thank you Clyde. Clyde Donovan is our impressive new MDC Chapter coordinator. He is a prolific Facebook poster with values that I deeply appreciate.

I did have time to do my article on racist actions around the 2024 voting process. However, we really need to also note that racism is massively present on the policy level with the global federal efforts against all DEI programs.

White Christian nationalism slanders DEI by calling it "divisive." Diversity, Equity and Inclusion by definition is inclusive. Organizations with DEI programs have notably more smoothly functioning working relations because they do the hard work to make that happen.

I just read Malcolm Gladwell's book, *Blink*. He is half black because his mother is Jamaican. In this book he talked about the implicit bias test which demonstrated explicitly his own bias against blacks. Gladwell makes the point that much of our emotions and thinking is in a lockbox about which we have little if any control. And our culture is so saturated with implicit bias against blacks that just about everyone, including blacks, will have some part of that deeply embedded cultural bias.

The recent firing of Gen C. Q. Brown as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff shows how very high end black expertise will be replaced with less accomplished whites to appease the racist base of the Republican Party. Gen. Brown designed the very effective military campaign to take down the ISIS Islamic state. This is the type of competence that we need. However, Brown made the mistake of posting his unhappiness with his prior struggles dealing with racism. Racists do not like anyone to be in a position to note that racism still occurs.

By law the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff must have served as the leader of one of the services or served in a combat command. The person selected to replace Gen. Brown does not meet that legal requirement and thus would need a Congressional waiver to replace him.

Pete Hegseth, who never led anything more than a platoon, has been appointed as Secretary of Defense over the entire military. He defames Brown by suggesting that he might never have achieved his position if his skin color were not as it is. The military has been relatively successful in attracting and promoting black excellence. However, the upper reaches of the military remain increasingly white at the upper levels. The relatively few in the upper ranks are likely to be extraordinarily hard working and talented.

The DEI programs were marvelous efforts to make diversity seen as the cultural positives that the evidence proves that they were. We can be outraged by the explicit racism of those deciding to end those programs. Replacing it with a nonchalant acceptance of white privilege will not build the high functioning society that lifts all lives.

Don Wharton - Editor WASHline

The Trinity of Our Discontent

by P. Michael Heffron

"Everybody has a plan," Mike Tyson once said, "until you get punched in the face." For a lot of us, that punch is Donald Trump. Like all demagoguery, the DNA of that punch is woven together from three threads: religious conditioning, crowd psychology or "group-think," and an ever growing level of change that fuels our uncertainties.

Change can be good, but we often hate the uncertainty that comes with it. "To the human mind, uncertainty equals danger," Bryan E. Robinson wrote in 2020, when uncertainty was particularly rampant. "If your brain doesn't know what's around the corner, it can't keep you out of harm's way. So it always assumes the worst, over personalizes threats, and jumps to conclusions." A critical driver of stress, studies show uncertainty is even more stressful than situations with predictable negative outcomes. We prefer pain, in other words, to the fear of pain.

On a deep level, our prime directive is safety. Feeling danger can, as a result, lead us to seek safety in our herd and cause us to lash out to protect against threats; either to our physical body or to our ego. Like an invisible exoskeleton, the ego is a many-colored coat of "beliefs" that shields our emotional vulnerabilities. Like a car's airbag, it inflates to protect our most childlike beliefs from harm whenever they crash into facts or evidence that conflict with them. Even if merely imagined, the ego responds to threats as if they are real, and seeks safety among other airbags. Within that herd, we can tune-out and let our ego operate on the autopilot of subconscious beliefs.

In "The Crowd," Gustave Le Bon explains that the most striking peculiarity presented by a psychological crowd (that is, a group that shares the same unquestioned 'beliefs') is the following: Whoever be the individuals that compose it, however like or unlike be their mode of life, their occupations, their character, or their intelligence, the fact that they have been transformed into a crowd puts them in possession of a sort of collective mind which makes them feel, think, and act in a manner quite different from that in which each individual of them would feel, think, and act were each person in a state of isolation.

"There are certain ideas and feelings which do not come into being, or do not transform themselves into acts except in the case of individuals forming a crowd. The psychological crowd is a provisional being formed of heterogeneous elements, which for a moment are combined, exactly as the cells which constitute a living body form by their reunion a new being which displays characteristics very different from those possessed by each of the cells singly."

Social psychologist Johnathan Haidt called this kind of "crowd" a hive, and the "living body"

of "believers" is what evangelical Christians call "the Church," the "family" of God, and "the body of Christ." As pack animals by nature, each of us has a "hive switch" that, when triggered, makes us prioritize our group over ourselves. But this comes as a mixed message. It brings a sense of belonging, which can improve our well-being and drive us to act altruistically. That leads to better lives for all of us (or at least our group). But it can also lead to hostility or lack of concern, empathy, or respect, for those outside of "our group."

There are special characteristics of crowds, Le Bon explains, "such as impulsiveness, irritability, incapacity to reason, the absence of judgment and of the critical spirit, the exaggeration of the sentiments, and others besides — which are almost always observed in beings belonging to inferior forms of evolution." For Le Bon, crowds operate with the mentality of "savages," and children. And for savages and children alike, irrational "beliefs" are often worshiped as magical stories which are presented as divine revelation.

Beliefs operate on a subconscious level, in the more emotional parts of our brain, often without our awareness they even exist. They also operate as filters that color our perception. If you "believe" the world is a wonderful place filled with awesome opportunities, then that is exactly what you'll see. But if you believe the world is filled with trouble, danger, and treachery, that's also what you'll see. Religions tend to foster a dependence upon a brand of "God" by always proclaiming the "wisdom" to see both ourselves and the world as the latter, from which only our herd or "hive" can "save" us through conformity.

Seeing the world as a dangerous place transforms intolerance and fanaticism from vices into virtues, as both become seen as survival skills in this life and the next. "These two characteristics, which are inevitably displayed by those who believe themselves in the possession of the secret of earthly or eternal happiness, are to be found in all men grouped together when they are inspired by a conviction of any kind. The Jacobins of the Reign of Terror were at bottom as religious as the Catholics of the Inquisition, and their cruel ardor proceeded from the same source." Religious freedom in such a situation is the freedom to practice hatred of any "them" as a form of love of "us," and the latter is measured by the zeal one exhibits in practicing the former.

In this way, convictions of crowds assume those characteristics of blind submission, fierce intolerance (to show one's hatred of "them"), and the need of violent propaganda (to show one's "love" of "us") which are inherent in the religious sentiment. For this reason, it may be said that all their beliefs have a religious form. The hero acclaimed by a crowd is a veritable god for that crowd. Napoleon was such a god for fifteen years, and a divinity never had more fervent worshipers or sent men to their death with greater ease. The Christian and Pagan Gods never exercised a more absolute empire over the minds that had fallen under their sway.

"In less than fifty years, the legend of Napoleon, one of the greatest heroes of history at the time, was modified several times. Under the Bourbons, he became a sort of idyllic and liberal philanthropist, a friend of the humble who, according to the poets, was destined to be long remembered. Thirty years later, he had become a sanguinary despot, who, after having usurped power and destroyed liberty, caused the slaughter of three million men solely to satisfy his ambition. It was the proudest and most intractable of the Jacobins who acclaimed Bonaparte with greatest energy when he suppressed all liberty and made his hand of iron severely felt.

A crowd's complete lack of the critical spirit does not allow for its perceiving these contradictions. Like Napoleon, so throngs of people wrote and sang songs professing their undying love for Joseph Stalin as well, even after his surveillance, repression, imprisonment, and arbitrary executions led to the death of twenty million people.

"Moreover, all the great statesmen of every age and every country, including the most absolute despots, have regarded the popular imagination as the basis of their power, and they have never attempted to govern in opposition to it "It was by becoming a Catholic," said Napoleon to the Council of State, "that I terminated the Vendéen war. By becoming a Muslim that I obtained a footing in Egypt. By becoming an Ultramontane that I won over the Italian priests, and had I to govern a nation of Jews I would rebuild Solomon's temple." Never perhaps since Alexander and Caesar has any great man better understood how the imagination of the crowd should be impressed."

Now, consider the interplay between crowd

psychology, religious conditioning, and uncertainty. get hit and keep moving forward.”

Whenever we interact with the world, in any way, to get our needs met, and it results in getting our needs met, we will repeat the process. Humans are hard-wired to repeat any process that works. Our lives are an endless feedback loop where our experiences either validates our beliefs or reshapes them. Because the world, as perceived through our conscious mind, has much more information and data than we could possibly see, our beliefs act as a filter and a short-hand. And as our “beliefs” filter information to find only what verifies our beliefs, our beliefs become stronger, in a feedback loop.

As uncertainty increases with age and technological advancement, and screens splinter nuclear families like light through a prism, our desire for safety increases as well. America is so religious, as such, because the insecurity that comes with change creates an emotional undertow for safety and stability. And as capitalism speeds up the former in reality, religion sells us the myth of the latter.

Being raised to need and seek a savior from the uncertainties of life, and reinforcing that need every week, makes it easy to use that need to color our perceptions when we feel unsafe. The emperor’s “new clothes” are invisible precisely because, like Napoleon proclaiming himself to be a Catholic and a Muslim, he wraps himself in the fog of whatever magical language his constituents “believe” will save them from their uncertainties. This is why the various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world, as Edward Gibbons pointed out, “were all considered by the magistrate as equally useful,” because they were considered “by the people as equally true,” even though the authors of those fables knew they were all equally false.

As Meredith Marple explained, “you cannot make someone see clarity when they find comfort within their fog.” Human political history is a ten-thousand-year war of brains between the rich and the poor,” as Aravind Adiga wrote in *The White Tiger*, and sacred words are often the fog that the former uses to gaslight the latter into obedience. As such, every generation must fight the same battles again and again. There’s no final victory,” as Tony Benn explained, “just as there is no final defeat, just the same battle to be fought over and over again. So toughen up, bloody toughen up.” Because it’s not about how hard you can hit,” as Rocky Balboa said, “It’s about how hard you can

If there are three ideas to remember about this time through which we now pass, they are these: First, that desperate grabs for power is actually evidence of how powerless some people feel, for fanaticism rises in tandem to one’s subconscious doubt. Second, that it’s not whether you get knocked down from a punch, as Vince Lombardi said, “it’s whether you get up.” Lastly, “When everything seems to be going against you, as Henry Ford explained, “remember that the airplane takes off against the wind, not with it.” And the wind that rises now is the collective breath of every generation who breathed, from their first to their last, longing to be free.

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>.

DC American Humanists (DC-AHA)

DC-Atheists, Humanists, and Agnostics group (DC-AHA) meets at Madhatter (1319 Connecticut Ave NW, DuPont Circle) for happy hour the first Wednesday 6-8pm of the month.

Big appreciation for those who braved the cold to join the February 12 rally to protect the Department of Education. We'll be discussing what other actions to take and events to join at upcoming happy hours.

AHA NEWS

The American Humanist Association has hired our new Communications Director, Organizing Director, and Legal Director! We look forward to introducing them and getting to work.

AHA Conference is June 27-29 in Chicago, see conference.americanhumanist.org for registration, speakers, awardees, and more.

In January we announced three new opportunities to connect:

Humanist Discord Community - We created

an online hub for humanists to talk about anything and everything from philosophy, to science, to politics, to what makes you smile. Share your journey to humanism, learn from meaningful convos, and maybe make some IRL friends in the regional channels. Get access to this space with your regular AHA membership or for just \$1 a year with our online-only membership. Become a member today to get your invitation link and join over a hundred members already on Discord.

Dose of Humanism - Start your day with a little humanist inspiration delivered to your phone so you can feel empowered to live your values and crush your goals. Sign up here to get your dose!

Humanist Parenting - As a parent, how many times did someone ask you if you'll baptize your kid? Raise them with the Church? Go to Sunday school? How many times has someone "prayed for you" or your children because they don't have a god in their lives? Don't worry we got you. In partnership with Camp Quest, we've created an online space for anyone who's ever wondered, "How do I raise kids who aren't assholes - without religion?" Parents and caregivers can swap tips, share stories, maybe rant a little, and get their questions answered by humanist parenting experts. This Discord space is free and open to anyone involved in raising kids who are good without a god. Click this invitation link to join.

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 update: FRESH is moving into Clothesline Project season, our major community service event of the year. We are hosting at least twelve t-shirt making sessions through the months of March and 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.

Maryland-DC (MDC)

Clyde Donovan has accepted the role of MDC Organizer. Further 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.

Shenandoah Area Secular Humanists (SASH)

SASH (Shenandoah Area Secular Humanists) has invited the five public high schools in Warren and Shenandoah Counties to participate in SASH's seventh annual essay contest. This year, due to a very generous donor, we are able to offer sizable awards. These are cash awards that the winners may use in any way they determine. They are: two first places at \$2,500 each, two second places at \$1,500 each and two third places at \$1,000 each. We are hoping for a good number of high school seniors to accept the challenge of

answering this year's question:

Using your critical thinking skills, identify at least two opposing viewpoints on immigration and critically evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each perspective.

Within the contest invitation, we have provided information about humanism as well as the elements of critical thinking. Several SASH members will judge the submissions against a judging rubric. We'll submit the top winning entries to WASHline.

If any WASH members want to join our discussions, they are certainly welcome. Contact our coordinator, and I'll put you on our distribution list: sash@wash.org.

Southeast Virginia Atheists, Skeptics & Humanists (SEVASH)

Our first Free Little Humanist Library is nearly complete, as the support structure has been built, painted, and attached to the library. The last step is completing the signage that will be mounted on each side, featuring our chapter name and detailing the library's purpose. We're still working to secure a location on the peninsula for the installation of our second library, but we have a couple of leads to follow up on. In late March, we will be hosting a benefit concert featuring Lori Creek and The Rough & Tumble, which we will use as a platform to promote both of our Free Food Pantry and our Free Little Humanist Library projects.

The SEVASH book club finished "Contact" by Carl Sagan, and we're planning a screening of the film adaptation as well as a screening of the film based on the previous book we read, "The Fault in Our Stars" by John Green.

SEVASH volunteers have continued to sustain elevated efforts stocking and maintaining our Free Food Pantries in both Norfolk and Newport News.

All of this of course is in addition to our regular schedule of dinners, brunches, team trivia and other social gaming events.

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

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

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