

# the Humanist Advocate

Issue 3, 2016

a publication of  
**NOSHA**  
NEW ORLEANS SECULAR HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

New Orleans Secular Humanist Assoc.  
(a 501c3 corporation)  
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## NATIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Council for Secular Humanism  
American Humanist Association  
Atheist Alliance of America  
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## GENERAL MEETING

3rd Saturday of the month, 4pm  
Jefferson Parish East Bank Regional Library  
Metairie, La

## NOSHA TV

New Orleans Cox Cable, Channel 76  
Also, on YouTube and Vimeo

"The Humanist Perspective"  
Sundays: 2:30am & 2:30pm

## It's Your Turn to Talk

May 21

Once a year, usually in the spring or summer, the podium at the monthly NOSHA meeting is turned over to the members in attendance, with all given the chance to offer their thoughts and questions about topics relevant to humanist and non-believer issues--either on current hot button issues or the broader ideological foundations of secularism, or personal experiences related to one's conversion or dealings with family, friends, and associates in the workplace.

This year, May was the month the speaker's floor was yielded to the forty or so in the audience who came to our "Annual Discussion Meeting". The suggestion was made and agreed upon to overhaul the "physical" format this year. Our previous venue, the Dominion Learning Center at the Audubon Zoo, was a small theater with fixed, auditorium seating. This allowed for only one speaker at a time to address the

whole group with comments. That setup had the potential effect of possibly limiting the discussion to those who were naturally more talkative and discouraging the more timid from speaking. The meeting room at East Bank branch of the Jefferson Parish Library offers a modular arrangement of stack chairs and folding tables. A more "small-group feeling" was arranged by setting up four tables and randomly assigning the attendees a table. To keep the discussion on track, each table had a moderator to present the pre-selected topics. Chairing the tables were members Rita Premo, Chris Baudot, Marty Bankson, and Jennifer Porter.

Two of three of this year's topics inclined more toward the personal aspects of involvement in secularism:

Openness and Self-Identification--did you come out as a non-believer? What labels

do you apply to your self when discussion religion and non-belief with others?

How did you get here? If you were ever a believer, what may have caused the conversion? Did you have any emotional or practical problems or benefits during the change?

The third topic concerned the "advancement and participation" in the secular movement. Are there other ways you are involved other than being a part of NOSHA? Are there other things our group could be involved in to promote our outlook?

Needless to say, with four discussions going on at once, many opinions, much advice, and interesting personal anecdotes were shared; and, quite possibly, a more inclusive sense of community participation was achieved with the "small-group" arrangement.



small group talk



Rita Primo (center, facing) and Connie Schultz (right, facing) listen to a point being made

# Summer Solstice

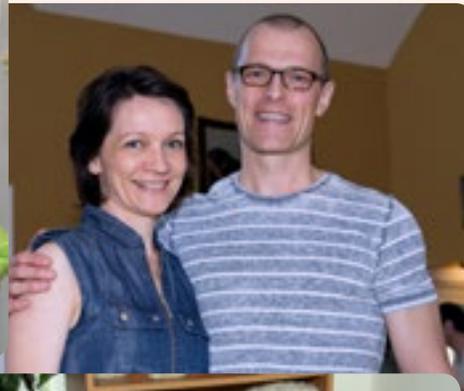
June 18

**Beth Deitch** volunteered to host the annual Summer Solstice potluck party at her Uptown home during the time of year when the sun is on high and usually falls very close to the third Saturday of the month meeting date. She has opened her home for this party several times before, but extensive street construction in her area had made getting there not something usually associated with being particularly festive, so she sat out as hostess until most of the traffic problems were solved.

The hiatus didn't seem to affect her ability to prepare and put on a very well done get-together for about 50 guests. The large living area offered room enough for

a half-dozen small tables for enjoying the food and beverages. The swimming pool in the side yard, ever-visible from the glass patio doors brought (as the real estate people like to say) a little bit of the outdoors inside. No one was venturing out, though, as the best bet for staying cool was staying put inside!

**Marshall Harris** is usually good for a surprise or performance at solstice festivities, and this day was no exception. His roommate **Harry Greenberger** was soon to reach his 89th birthday. Marshall showed up a little late (surprise!) with a big birthday cake and temporarily turned the solstice tribute into a celebration of another year to look forward to for the group's founder.



Clockwise from top left: Beth Deitch, Rita Premo, Eve Ortiz; Stanley Goldberg, Manny Alessandra, Harry Greenberger, Tatiana and Alexander Matvienko; Thomas Klasson, Will Hunn and Rose Mortillaro; Tommy Centanni and Marshall Harris; Maria Hicks, Patrick Lestrade;

# Through The Lens: Chris Johnson's Naturalism

July 16

In times of unsettling developments in world events and the increasing anxiety that comes with it, even the most reasonable can begin to have doubts: is increasing human progress and well-being really best served by a naturalistic worldview, without gods or other supernatural forces? Wouldn't things be more comforting if we believed in the possibility of a second chance, an after-life? Wouldn't people just get along better if we believed there was some higher power looking over us? Sometimes all of us could use some little sign, some encouraging words reaffirming that staying the course of a secular, rational mindset is the better approach to understanding and interacting at all levels of human relations.

To the rescue comes **Chris Johnson**--photographer, filmmaker, writer, editor--whose first projects include the book **A Better Life: 100 Atheists Speak Out on Joy and Meaning in a World without God** and a follow-up 90-minute film further developing the theme of the title. The photography and film scenes run the spectrum from snapshots of the subtle and mundane to awe-inspiring land-, sea-,

and skyscapes--all intermixed with portraits and in-person interviews with some of the best known academic, celebrity, and everyday atheists, each offering their words of reassurance and reason that, indeed, the pursuit of worldly-based explanations and solutions was not a better choice, but the only choice.

Johnson, who is from Seattle, educated in Canada, and now based in New York, got his idea for this project perceiving the need to project a positive, uplifting expression to advance a naturalistic worldview. He found much of the message of the burgeoning atheist movement in the mid- to late 00's off-putting, dogmatic, and often cruelly disrespectful. He set out to change this image.

His initial inspiration came during a trip with his brother. Visiting the White Sands National Monument in New Mexico and captivated with the enchanting spectacle of the expansive white crystalline quartz desert, his brother suggested putting together a book of his photography, a coffee table-style, big book.

*Story continued on next page*



Chris Johnson and Beth Deitch

# Full House Learns About the Slave Trade in New Orleans

August 20

Chances are few would know that New Orleans was not, for the most part, involved in the international slave trade that operated between Africa and the Americas from the 16th to the 19th Centuries. Most of the 10-12 million Africans transported on the the Americas were destined for the British Caribbean islands, South America, and the Atlantic coast states. New Orleans became infamous in the trading of human lives during the “great forced migration” of about two million slaves and freemen of color from the the upper parts of the United States to the south beginning in the early 19th Century until the Civil War.

**Erin Greenwald**, a curator and historian with **The Historic New Orleans Collection** (THNOC) for the past nine years, spent two years with her associates putting together an exhibition and lecture series titled *Purchased Lives: The Americas Slave Trade from 1808-1865*. She brought her presentation to the August NOSHA meeting which drew a full house of 110 members and guests. The exhibit initially ran from March through July in 2015 at THNOC, but since has received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and has been able to take it to Memphis, Austin, and the National Civil Rights Museum in Washington, D. C.

The agricultural economy of the South began to expand dramatically with the cultivation of cotton and sugarcane at about the time the tobacco fields of the upper south were becoming less productive from overuse, and slavery was being outlawed in more northern states. International slave trading was prohibited by federal law after 1808 as a provision of the Constitution’s 20th anniversary. These conditions factored into the need to move labor from the north to the south; and the migration, trade, and sale of about two million humans was underway. Some were shipped down the Atlantic coast and through the Gulf destined for port cities of Mobile, New Orleans, and Galveston. Others were loaded aboard vessels southbound on the Mississippi--giving rise to the expression “been sold down

the river”. Many others were forced into a brutal overland trek, on foot. The highway route known today as the Natchez Trace was literally a “superhighway” for herding human chattel southward. Greenwald went through all of the surviving manifests of shipping and forced marches from 1819 to 1860, discovering, among many other details, the traders’ tricks of changing slaves names and ages.

“Slave trade was omnipresent in New Orleans in the 1840’s and 1850’s,” she said, “there were some 52 sites where slaves were sold,” with what might be considered ground zero in the blocks around the one bounded by St. Louis, Chartres, Royal, and Toulouse Streets, with perhaps the most notorious being in the rotunda of the luxurious St. Louis Hotel.

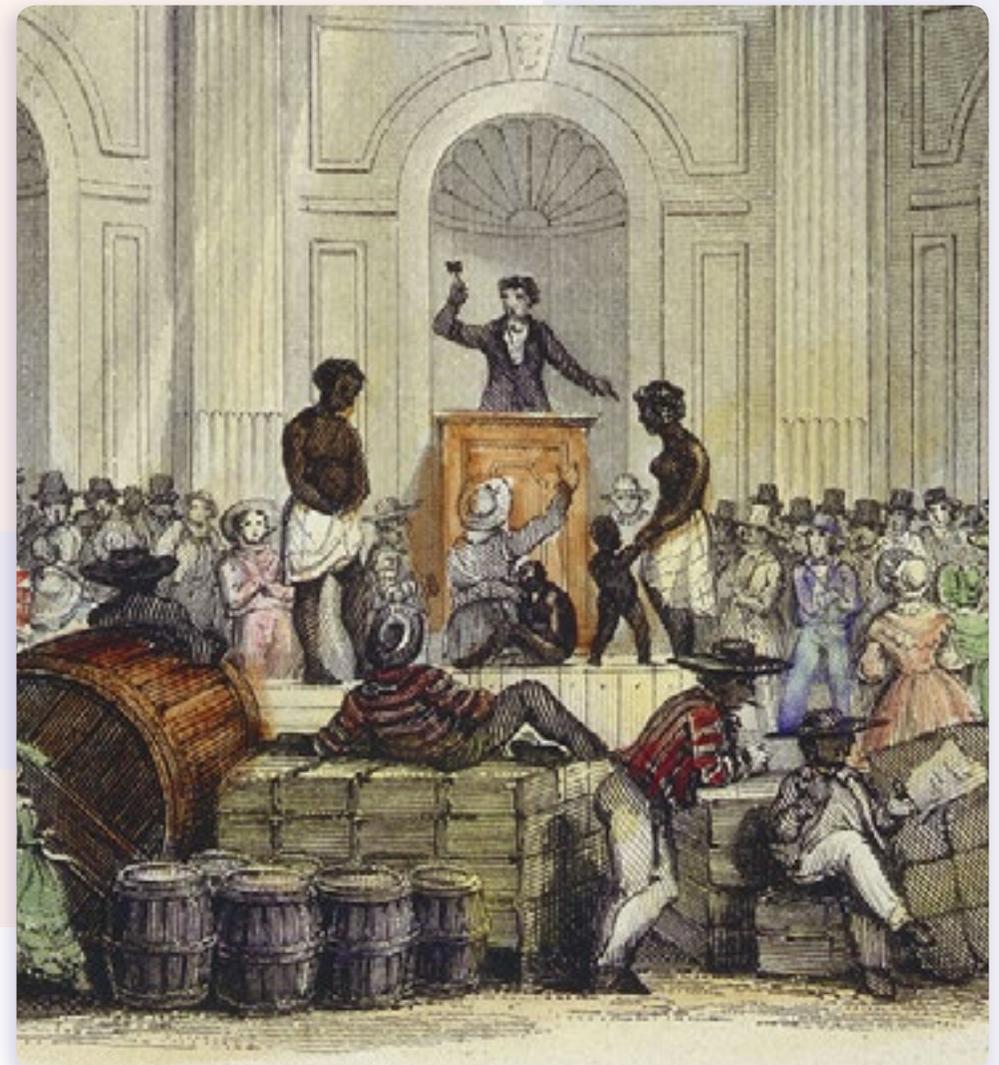
Greenwald went on to describing the business of a heinous trader named Isaac Franklin; recounted how lost and sold-away family members were sought through a column called “Lost Friends” that was published in the journal *Southwestern Christian Advocate* from 1877-1910; and how the trade played an ancillary role in the local banking business providing loans for the relatively expensive human merchandise.

It was a just a short period in the long history of New Orleans, but a part that most officials have chosen, for the most part, to keep in the background. In an article on WWNO’s website, including a description by Greenwald of the site of the St. Louis Hotel, she points out that out of 52 slave-selling sites, only one is marked by a plaque noting its history--and it is at the wrong building, across the street.

Chris thought no, there are too many of those; then, the idea came to him-- he could do this book of photography and link it with the theme of the power and beauty of the natural world as a guiding principle for life, showing through his work non-believers can have purpose in life and find inspiration within it. This would be a positive force to reckon against the negative image he sought to reverse. With a sophistication of craft and a sensitivity to the human condition belying his thirty-something years, the result was a first class example of the effective power of melding word and image, juxtaposing interview with panorama, and augmenting short, rich quotes with all-too-human unretouched photographic portraiture.

Chris’ introduction and presentation of the full-length film at the July NOSHA meeting was, on his accounting, the 71st time he has had the opportunity to show off his skills--traveling to “over 60 cities on four continents.” He has honed the presentation itself to a delightful history of the project interspersed with light-hearted anecdotes and reflection, all delivered with a professional rhetorical speaking style that nearly matched the level of his visual artistry. Arranging conversations, interviews, and photoshoots with the likes of Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett, Penn and Teller, and Julia Sweeney, among many more, was a whole ‘nother experience--getting through the “layers” of their representatives was slow going at times, and the project ended up taking nearly three years to complete.

The film and Johnson’s presentation doubtlessly recharged the “spiritual” batteries of many in attendance--the meeting room was literally abuzz after. The limited number of books he was able to bring aboard his flight to New Orleans, as well as a number of DVD’s of the film sold out quickly after the presentation.

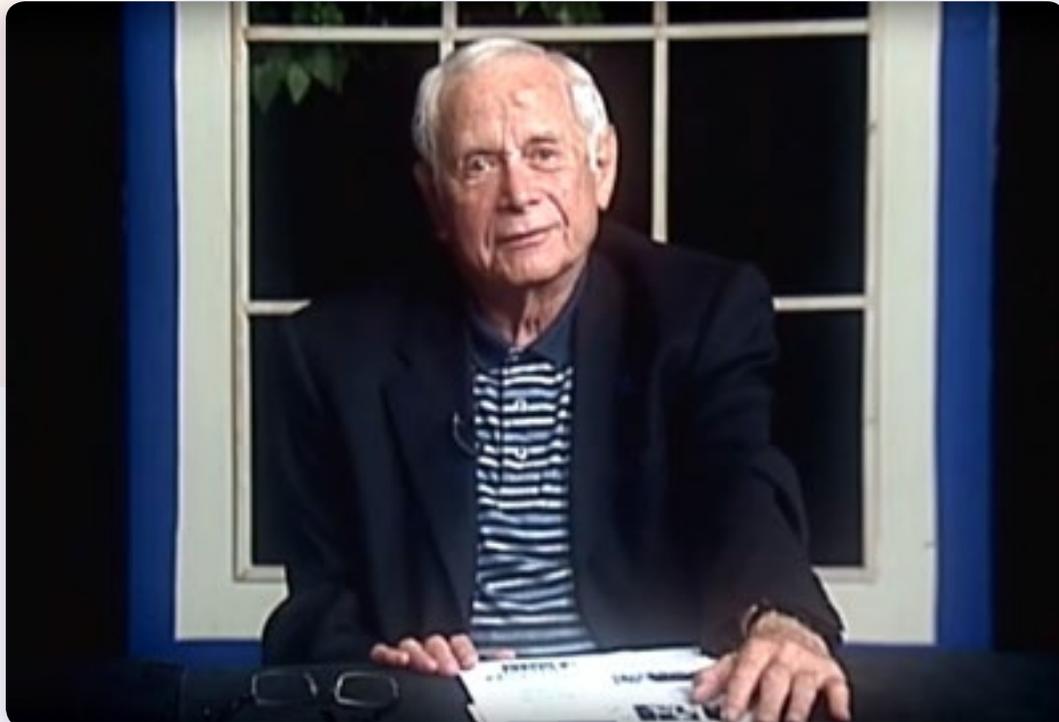


artist's rendition of the rotunda of the St. Louis Hotel

# Greenberger Steps Down as Host of “The Humanist Perspective”

June 4

Founder and **President Emeritus Harry Greenberger** decided it was time to turn over the operation of *The Humanist Perspective*, NOSHA’s public access television program. He said he had been thinking about it for some time because the grind of finding and scheduling interesting guests, and then taping the shows was beginning to wear on him. “I’m getting very old,” he said (he recently celebrated his 89th birthday). He had been the sole mainstay, shouldering all phases of it for about fifteen years; and taping, he estimates, about 360 programs. “The tapes we did prior to Katrina were lost in the flood, so I don’t remember how many shows we did. Now I’m doing two shows a month. Before I did more than two a month.”



*Harry, closing out his last show*

Starting in June, selecting topics, guests, and the interview taping will be done by NOSHA President **Charlotte Klasson**, Vice-President **Jim Dugan**, and Membership Coordinator **Beth Deitch**—all qualified to carry on interesting conversations and promote the humanist message. This will be an opportunity for the new group to explore other possibilities in the power of the broadcast media.

**Turn on! Tune in!** You can catch *The Humanist Perspective* on Cox Cable in New Orleans on Channel 76 at 2:30am and 2:30pm Sundays; also on YouTube (search “New Orleans Humanists”), and Vimeo.

For the Record: The [last program](#) Greenberger taped was #208-- an [interview](#) with NOSHA President Charlotte Klasson.

(And many thanks to Harry for getting the program up and running and the hundreds of hours of quality interviews! Quotations from Harry are from an interview published on the NOSHA blog in April 2016)

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