

the Humanist Advocate

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a publication of
NOSHA
NEW ORLEANS SECULAR HUMANIST ASSOCIATION

New Orleans Secular Humanist Assoc.
(a 501c3 corporation)
P.O. Box 58536
New Orleans, LA 70158-8536
www.nosha.info

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NATIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Council for Secular Humanism
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GENERAL MEETING

3rd Saturday of the month, 4pm
Dominion Learning Center
Audubon Park Zoo

NOSHA TV

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

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

"The Atheist Viewpoint"
Saturdays: 4am and 4pm

"Yada Yada" – One of our favorite meetings!

August 15

In the lead-in to the annual discussion event, President **Charlotte Klasson** introduced **Carter Hooper** to the group. Mr. Hooper was back visiting this day after having moved to California and having, literally, left his mark on NOSHA as the designer of the flamed logo NOSHA still uses. **Michael Anders** followed with a short talk showing the paradoxical position the U. S. has as an outlier in studies done finding correlations between a country's overall prosperity index and the relative religious commitment of its citizens—the more "prosperous," the less religious the general population tended to be, with America being the notable exception.

The group discussion topics were 1) pseudoscience, paranormal experiences, and alternative medical practices and homeopathy, all usually placed in a category more affectionately called "woo-woo"; and 2) the concept of altruism in ethical theory, more specifically how wide and deep our commitment and practice of helping our fellow humans is or should be. **Beth Deitch**, NOSHA board member and Membership Coordinator emceed the discussion and did a masterful job of keeping the discussion moving along and on topic, while giving the floor to all with an opinion.

Evolutionary-biological and reciprocal-social altruism origins were mentioned as motivations for helping, as well as the belief that we have certain moral commitments to our fellow humans. One questioner was concerned about what the limits of one's responsibility are—a reasonable point, and one not easily resolved.

On the subject of woo, a member mentioned his father's "psychic channeling" and out-of-body experiences. The effects of prayer and religion were brought into the discussion, with one guest from Jamaica relating his observation of the power of both affecting his heavily religious countrymen. A commenter related an experience she had while traveling the backwoods of Tennessee pursuing an interview. Her subject demonstrated various colored waters she used for changing and analyzing someone's "aura." Also mentioned was "colonics," or colon irrigation—something akin to cleaning the sewer pipes—a procedure viewed as unnecessary and usually not recommended in legitimate health care literature.

The question of public funding and insurance for unproven medical practices was posed, examples being the National Health Freedom Coalition and Alcoholics Anonymous.

The Humanist Advocate Needs You!

(Your Story—What's Your Deal?)

The editors here are busybodies—they are trying to get everyone's "story" (at least those parts that are willingly shared). In order that we keep our member readership informed about anything that you would like it to know (fit to print) about yourself, your family, friends, or missing (or found) NOSHA members, please email or otherwise communicate your interesting life details to Charlotte. Any milestone or everyday anecdote could be of interest, including births and birthdays, school enrollments and graduations, anniversaries, weddings (no messy divorces, please), exaggerations of your death, or pictures that you think could be a good addition to the paper.

Seriously, this is a newsletter for you—let us know what is going on with you—we'd love to hear!



Zack's Back!

September 19

In April 2013, a post on a Facebook page created for the “Reason on the Bayou” event in Baton Rouge advised “Remember this name: Zack Kopplin”.

In hindsight, it would be hard to forget it: as a speaker at the event, then 19 year-old Kopplin, a Rice University student from Baton Rouge, was about to become the most visible and youthful advocate for keeping public schools free of religious “alternative” theories to biological evolution and other church and state separation issues. Since his address at the Reason on the Bayou rally, he has appeared on national TV programs with Bill Maher and the highly regarded Bill Moyers, and has been the subject covered in the print and digital publications of The Washington Post and The New York Times and others, as well as writing a column for *The Guardian*.

Kopplin was the featured speaker at the September NOSHA meeting, and shared some of his thoughts about his struggle over the past few years trying to convince Louisiana legislators to repeal the Louisiana Science and Education Act (LSEA). He began his crusade against the religiously-inspired LSEA at its inception and enactment into law in 2008, and has made appearances at the Senate Education Committee hearing in each of the past sessions since 2012, each time seeing the bill to repeal defeated by one or more votes. He said the biggest problem recently in getting the law reversed was overcoming the excuse of denial some lawmakers use.

Senator Conrad Appel, for example, who claims that the law is not being used to advance creation science or its gussied-up brainchild, Intelligent Design, in classrooms; this despite evidence given him from a case in Bossier Parish, and more from a teacher from Caddo Parish explaining in a letter to the editor of the local newspaper that she taught both evolution and creation science because “God made science.”

Visitors in attendance at the meeting who had heard Zack’s message in previous years were seeing the evolution of the boyish idealist-activist into a mature and seasoned veteran of the cultural war with a more polished speaking style. Discouraged with the lack of results after several years of trying to convince lawmakers with reason and academic testimony—including a petition with the signatures of 78 Nobel laureate scientists—he has changed his tactic: play hardball—document first-hand reports of abuse, take names, get dates, and use public records access to ferret out incriminating emails. When enough information coalesces into probable evidence of infringement on church/state separation guidelines, take them to court and let the law listen to excuses.

As Kopplin approaches graduation day at college, he remains unsure of his future plans; but secularists who have witnessed his determination and evolution should be confident he will be a prominent advocate for reason in education for the long term.



Zack Kopplin speaks

Bob Marshall on “Louisiana’s Dance with Coastal Death”

October 17

It would be easy to have high expectations from Bob Marshall, the esteemed environmental journalist, who was the featured speaker at the October monthly meeting for NOSHA. Anyone who was familiar with his decades of experience covering everything “coastal,” from fishing rodeos to duck hunting, to the major environmental catastrophe that threatens Louisiana’s coast and marshlands.

He did not disappoint. His credentialed past, starting on the staff of the States-Item and the New Orleans Times-Picayune in 1972, and now with *The Lens* since 2013, recipient of two Pulitzer Prizes and numerous other awards of recognition, hasn’t resulted in him resting on past achievements. He remains dedicated to the purpose of telling the story to audiences nationwide, and he has crafted a presentation that is professionally polished while being disturbingly frank about the dire prospects we face.

He began by showing an animated geography tutorial titled “The Rise and Disappearance of Southeast Louisiana,” which outlined the development of the Louisiana delta over the past 7,000 years, and how the shifting course of the Mississippi River played into the formations of the St. Bernard, Lafourche, and Plaquemine deltas with the river’s generous sediment flows and deposits. Most maps of Louisiana picture the state with a large land mass south of New Orleans and Thibodeaux, extending well into the Gulf, terminating with the “toe of the boot” shape of the state. Most of those maps are stock copies from before the 1960s. Today’s satellite photos show just a skeletal remnant of the previous landmass, with the communities of Pilot-town, Venice, Buras, Galliano, and Cut Off connected only by thin, web-like tendrils of sand bars.

Mr. Marshall then transitioned into the whys, whereofs, and what’s next part of the talk. The degradation and eventual loss of the wetlands began with the “leveeing” of the Mississippi River shortly after the Great

Flood of 1927. Building the levees served to protect life and property from future flooding, but also prevented the land-building silt from being deposited throughout the marshes, and sent it instead into the Gulf of Mexico at the mouth of the river.

Then came oil and gas exploration. Once a mother lode of the petroleum and natural gas reserves were discovered in the delta marshland, The Texas Company (Texaco) and other energy companies moved in and began criss-crossing the area with what would end up being 10,000 miles of canals (which alone displaced about 11% of the land) and 50,000 miles of pipelines.

The canal digging was a double whammy, as the mud and dirt removed was piled along each side of the channel and prevented “over-bank flooding,” blocking new silt and plant detritus from adding solid material to the marsh. Concurrently, the new canals provided a route for sea water to enter and poison vegetation and eliminate the root structure that helps hold the soil together.

Now, add to that the global phenomenon of rising sea levels: the existing soil subsidence and wetlands erosion, combined with higher sea levels, and it becomes a self-perpetuating, exponential formula for complete ruin of what is left of Louisiana below New Orleans.

Mr. Marshall’s presentation also covered the economic impact of the loss of fishing estuaries, and the importance of the region as a hub for all types of trade and transportation.

State officials have developed a Master Plan to mitigate the losses—a minimum of \$50 billion will need to be invested over the next five years (another estimate is \$100 billion to begin reversing the loss, and start creating new land. The hat is still making the rounds.

Rollin' on the River

August 23

Was it a PR agency? Or it could it have been a creative receptionist at the Chamber of Commerce office in Anytown, U.S.A. who coined the catchphrase "Be a Tourist in Your Own Hometown"?

The idea sounded good enough for 46 NOSHA members—including several newcomers—who did just that, if only for a few hours, taking the Riverboat Natchez for a lovely brunch cruise down and back up the Mississippi. A members-only social get-together has replaced an annual banquet to give some variety to our activities. The popular tourist attraction package includes a live traditional jazz band (Duke Heitger and the Steamboat Stompers), a brunch smorgasbord (which offered more breakfast than lunch selections), and a cash bar.



A really fun experience... brunch on the river!

After dining and friendly conversation, it was an interesting experience to explore the ship—guests are free to walk around the deck, go to the top level, or check out the vintage and pristine 1926 steam engines below deck that power the big red sternwheeler. The weather was warm enough that a cooling mist splashed up from the wheel was one of those unadvertised bonuses, even if it was a slightly muddy mist.

This was a good way to while away a Sunday summer afternoon. More tours of the hometown could become a new group tradition for casual socializing!



From L to R: (back) Marie Taylor, Harry Greenberger, Thomas Klasson, William Gautreaux, (front) Beth Deitch, Marty Bankson, Charlotte Klasson, Rose Mortillaro and Chad Matise

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