

THE ATHEIST

Newsletter of the Atheist Community of Austin, a Nonprophet Organization

P.O. Box 3798, Austin, Texas 78764

512-371-2911

www.atheist-community.org

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Boy Scout Discrimination

For more than fifteen years, nontheists and gays have challenged the biased membership policies of Boy Scouts of America (BSA). Since BSA has traditionally recruited in the public schools, accepted public funds from United Way, maintained special and exclusive relationships with state and federal agencies through special charters, received government gratuities, and held a Congressional charter empowering it to teach "scoutcraft," it has always been presumed that BSA was a public organization. But a recent U. S. Supreme Court decision now holds that BSA is a private "expressive" organization, entitled to advocate its odd, retrograde viewpoint.

The BSA viewpoint is that nontheists and gays are morally corrupt and could subvert BSA's value system. Consequently, Atheists and gays are not welcome in the BSA. The Supreme Court sanctioned BSA's discriminatory policy under the rubric of "freedom of association" even though there is no evidence whatsoever to justify BSA's claim that nontheists and gays are immoral. That supposition is based on unsubstantiated stereotyping and pure prejudice.

The BSA is now happily marching along the low road of prejudice. Every BSA executive, National and Honorary Officer, Advisory Board member, troop leader, scout, and volunteer must walk in a "straight" line behind BSA leadership, or else.

When Unitarian Scouts declared their disapproval of BSA's biased membership rules, BSA stripped them of their religious merit badges. It would come as no surprise were BSA to decide that Unitarians should "take a hike" altogether.

So here we are at a fork in the road. The low road looks dark and dangerous. It is darkened with prejudice and hatred. There are "big-o-trees" lowering above all those who walk this trail. BSA leaders are not frightened — they like this atmosphere of separatism, prejudgment, and stereotyping.

Then there is the high road. How many BSA executives, National and Honorary Officers, Advisory Council members, troop leaders, scouts, and volunteers will take that road? Not many, I'm afraid.

For over seven years, I have tried to convince influential BSA affiliates to walk away from BSA prejudice. I reached out to people such as U. S. Presidents Jimmy Carter, Gerald Ford, and Bill Clinton. I also contacted movie producer Steven Spielberg and many famous businessmen. I asked them to show their disapproval of BSA membership policies by announcing they would disaffiliate themselves and cease financially supporting the BSA. Not one of these men agreed to do so.

I was not surprised when U. S. presidents ignored my letters and phone calls. It was also not surprising to get the cold shoulder from big-shot businessmen. It was a shock, however, that a man I respected for his anti-discrimination movie messages and reputation for tolerance continued to financially support the BSA, maintain his position on the BSA Advisory Council, and allow BSA to use his name in their literature.

Several years after I contacted Spielberg he said that he had cut his yearly BSA contribution in half. I have no evidence that this is true. But in 1995 Spielberg released a somewhat supportive anti-discrimination statement. He said:

"I have spoken out publicly and privately against intolerance and discrimination based on ethnic, religious, racial, and sexual orientation. While I support the principles of scouting, that does not imply that I support every current policy. Although I have no direct active role in the Boy Scouts, I encourage efforts to end intolerance and discrimination once and for all."

In 1995 Spielberg was in the middle of a huge business deal with a gay producer. Was the motivation to finally speak out against BSA discrimination business, or was Spielberg sincerely concerned? Spielberg released that statement only after I had asked the gay community to help me put

pressure on him — a full three years after I began communicating with his personal assistant, Marvin Levy.

Five years ago, Levy told me that Spielberg could possibly make a difference by working on the inside through his BSA Advisory Council position. To date Levy admits that Spielberg has never made an attempt to change any BSA policy. He has remained a mute Advisory Council member throughout this entire controversy.

Levy contends that Spielberg is a BSA Council member in name only and that BSA never consults with him. There is no excuse, however, for Spielberg to ignore the issue and not offer his opinion as a so-called "Advisor." BSA gladly uses Spielberg's name and accepts his money. What does that say about BSA board ethics?

The time has come for Spielberg to choose the road he will travel. If he continues to donate to the BSA, stay on the BSA Advisory Council, and allows the BSA to use his name in their literature he will be traveling down the bigotry trail.

Spielberg could become a leader against discrimination if he chooses to take the high road of tolerance. Many other BSA supporters, board members, and affiliates would be inspired to pressure BSA into doing what is morally correct — show respect, acceptance, and tolerance for nontheists and gays.

As a last resort, I am asking readers of this article to write directly to Spielberg. Express your disappointment that Spielberg continues to affiliate with a bigoted private group. His BSA affiliation is comparable to someone who maintains a membership in a private country club that will not allow Jewish or Black members. Would Spielberg do such a thing? Of course not. So why doesn't he stop funding the BSA, resign from the BSA Advisory Board, and prevent the BSA from using his good name on advertisements and its literature?

Spielberg has been sitting on a fence post for over seven years. A letter writing campaign is needed to push him off the post. The question will be, "Which road will Spielberg travel once he is off the fence post?" It might depend on what business deal is in the making or it might depend on how many people he hears from. Make your feelings heard by writing a polite yet strong letter to Spielberg today. Send your neatly typed or handwritten correspondence to:

Steven Spielberg
c/o Dreamworks
100 Universal Plaza, Bungalow 477
Universal City, CA 91608

The Anti-Discrimination Support Network would appreciate receiving a copy of your correspondence. Please send copies to:

Anti-Discrimination Support Network
c/o Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia
P.O. Box 242
Pocopson, Pa 19366

If you have any questions, please call Margaret Downey at (610) 793-2737 or
E-mail to: downey1@cris.com

Ed note: This letter was on the Atheist Alliance Board of Directors e-mail. As far as I'm concerned, the Brown Shirts can go ahead and discriminate all they want - so long as schools, military bases, and government officials pull their support. I would also like to point out that there are more inclusive organizations to belong to. The Girl Scouts and Camp Fire Boys and Girls come to mind. Camp Fire even has an atheist/agnostic option for their 'spirituality' program.

Guest Speakers

Our September 3, 2000 speaker will be Dr. William R. Coker of the Department of Physics, The University of Texas at Austin. This is what he said he'd speak about:

"I'd like to discuss the general status of science in US society, if I can scare up enough hard statistics on public attitudes. The title might be something like FAKE SCIENCE, ANTISCIENCE AND IGNORED SCIENCE."

Dr. Coker has taught (among other things) "Pseudoscience," a course for non-science majors.

Our October speaker (as previously announced) will be Dr. Ray Mooney of the Department of Computer Science, The University of Texas at Austin. His topic is tentatively titled: "Artificial Intelligence: Minds without Mysticism."

I have an anthropologist who is checking his schedule, but so far I have no one lined up for August.

~Susan Brown

And The Survey Says:

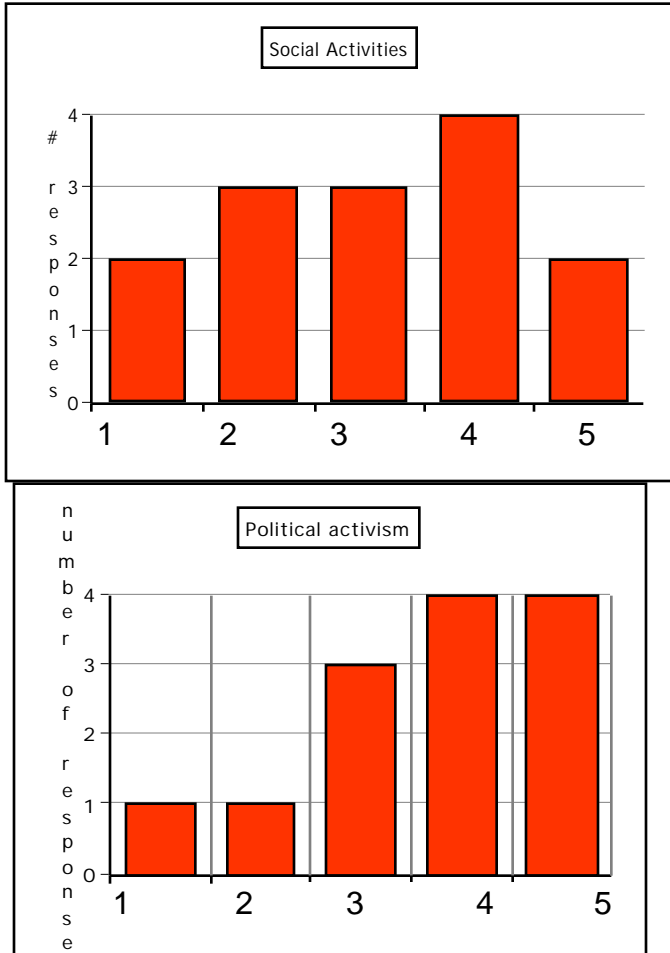
Q. What would you like to tell middle school kids about atheism?

A. I would love to encourage them to think for themselves, to feel free to question the logic of a magical being who lives in the sky, and to try to understand how religion came to be, in the early millennia of human history, when mysticism was the only available explanation for life's calamities. We can easily recognize Zeus and Hercules as myths; why do we insist that Jesus is real? Because we're taught to, and for no other reason.

Survey Results

Twenty three people responded to this years survey in time to have their responses included in my report. The full version of this is available on the ACA website, but the following should give some idea of what members think about the direction ACA should be taking:

6. What direction would you like to see ACA take?



9. What projects would you like to see ACA involved in during the next year?

1. More outdoor activities on weekends (picnics/hikes)
2. Support ROC
3. Work on getting our own place.
4. Media response, letter writing/lobbying
5. Continue blood and organ donor card drives.
6. some social action that more members are capable of participating in
7. Find other ways to be more visible in the community.
8. Develop a Critical Thinking course or a "what is atheism" course for UT's Informal Course program.
9. More community outreach and public education (appearances in comparative religion classes/ community college classes)

10. Public radio talk show
11. Reruns of TV shows on air

10. Please include any suggestions you may have that would make ACA an even better organization:

1. More variety of social and 'activist' activities.
2. Do more at Furrs such as poetry/personal stories
3. Get a building and have "real" membership meetings twice a month as well as Bagel shop
4. encourage agnostics to join
5. On show let a members briefly say why they became atheists
6. Phone tree to keep members informed about events.
7. Use this survey to pick new projects.
8. Get more involvement by members
9. Be more polite to viewers on show

12. How can ACA best promote positive atheism?

1. Newspaper at least once a week
2. Hone our arguments vs theism and promote them
3. By showing that we can be as united and purposeful as theists
4. Be visible at marches, community activities /food drives/clothing drives etc.
5. Keep doing what we are doing
6. Through educating people on how to make successful predictions
7. Remain active in positive activities in the community.
8. Public speaker before group
9. Keeping up the show.
10. Be more visible/ community service.

14. What topics should be discussed on the new Freethinkers Forum show?

1. History of different religious movements
2. How people can live in a positive way w/o gods
3. Buddhism
4. Atheist families
5. gay and lesbian atheists
6. Public schools and education
7. Political concerns
8. Meaning and importance of free speech
9. Church/state separation
10. Flaws in thinking faith is a good thing
11. Morality/sexuality/myth of sin
12. Non-theist artists
13. Atheists in foxholes
14. Kids causes
15. Genesis and Exodus
16. why it is important to come out of atheist closet
17. Critical thinking
18. Geology and paleontology

Removal Policy

The following policy was adopted at the July board meeting. The purpose of this policy is to protect ACA as we begin to expand our membership.

A. A motion to remove a person from membership, or to admit a new applicant must be approved by at least a 75% majority of the board. The membership of a new applicant will be considered 'pending' until this meeting. This meeting will be part of the regularly scheduled board meetings. If membership is rejected or rescinded, membership dues will be refunded on a prorated basis.

B. The person removed may appeal to the membership by filing a written notice of appeal with a co-chair, who shall call a special meeting of the membership to be held not more than 45 days after the filing of the notice. At the special meeting, the members of the Board who voted for the removal shall state their reasons for removal. The remaining Board members and the person removed shall be permitted to reply. A vote shall then be taken on the question of whether the removal is approved. If a majority of those members in attendance vote to approve the removal, then the removal is final. If not, the person is reinstated.

Ed note: Just because you're paranoid, doesn't mean they're not out to get you!

Notes From the Board

ACA Board Meeting, July 9,2000:
Old Business:

Treasurer's report:

Our new bank is Wells Fargo.

- Checking account balance, \$695.76
- Building Fund Balance, \$7,618.78
- Permanent Fund balance, \$5050 (This has been invested in a 6 month CD at 5.75%.)
- The donated ring has been placed in a safe deposit box for safe keeping.
- It was decided to start the building fund at \$6814.54, and to start the checking account at \$1500.

Blood Drive:

- The next Blood Drive will be September 23rd, 10 am, at the Regional Blood and Tissue Center on N. Lamar.

Signs:

- Jeff is still working on the new sign.

Products:

- Susan Loehner has volunteered to help Michelle order new products for a few months. Please see Michelle (gadush@mail.utexas.edu) if you would like to volunteer to take Susans place when she moves. Michelle reports that she made over \$100 on products at the last Furr's meeting.

TV:

- The need for a new producer was discussed. The decision as to who will be paid for the necessary training was left in the capable hands of the TV committee. Jeff Dee is responsible for booking the guests on *The Atheist Experience*.

Website:

- Russell now has maintenance access to the website. He will put the membership form on-line, and continue the 'singles service'.

Library:

- The owner of the Hot Jumbo Bagelry has given us permission to set up a locked cabinet in the hallway. Keith was authorized to spend up to \$150 to purchase a cabinet for our library.

Membership Drive:

- Arval donated \$1000 to help with the membership drive committee's goal of reaching 100 members by the end of October. The board had approved \$500 to cover initial costs. This committee will report back to the board in November. If you have any suggestions for increasing membership, see one of the committee members.

New Business:

Ex bagelification policy:

- A policy for the removal of members was adopted
See else ware in this newsletter for full text.

Survey Results were distributed and discussed.

A Quote to put on your refrigerator

"I am prejudiced against religion because I know the history of religion, and it is the history of human misery and of black crimes."

Isaac Asimov

Membership Drive

ACA will be having a membership drive this fall. Our goal is to have at least 100 members by the end of October. This will allow new members time to get involved with ACA activities, and time to qualify to be voted onto the board of directors at next year's election.

Arval has generously donated \$1000 to help cover membership drive expenses. Thank you, Arval!

If you know of anyone interested in joining, please invite them down to the bagel shop. If you have any ideas for the membership drive committee, please see John Koonz (koonz@geoblox.com), Jeff Dee (antix@io.com), or Keith Berka (aafab@hotmail.com).

If you have not renewed your membership, please do so. Don't make us send Howard out to find you!

Announcements

- **Weekly Meetings** Sunday Mornings at Hot Jumbo Bagelry, 307 West 5th Street at 10:30 a.m. on Sunday mornings when lectures are not scheduled at Furr's Cafeteria.
- **ACA Board meetings** are on the second Sunday of the month at 12:00. Board meetings are open to all members.
- **Guest Speakers**
 - Our September 3, 2000 speaker is Dr. William R. Coker of the Department of Physics, The University of Texas at Austin. He will speak about: **FAKE SCIENCE, ANTISCIENCE AND IGNORED SCIENCE.**
 - Our October speaker will be Dr. Ray Mooney of the Department of Computer Science, The University of Texas at Austin. His topic is tentatively titled: "Artificial Intelligence: Minds without Mysticism."
 - Lectures are held at Furr's Cafeteria in Northcross Mall, 11:00 am on the first Sunday of the month. Susan Brown (liatris@mail.utexas.edu) is in charge of scheduling our lectures.
- The **TV committee** is always looking for volunteers on Sunday mornings. They also need donations to pay for tapes and training. ACA TV Tapes are now available for \$20.00 each and will be offered over the web soon.
- **Products** New t-shirts have arrived. We still have our original ACA t-shirts which list a number of famous atheists. We also have 'top ten reasons beer is better than Jesus' beer mugs. See Michelle Gadush (gadush@mail.utexas.edu) for more information on these and other exciting atheist products.

Your ACA board of directors:

Co-chairs:

Susan Brown
John Koonz

Treasurer:

Don Rhoades

Secretary:

Earle Beach

Board members:

Keith Berka
Paul Wilson
Michelle Gadush
Russell Glasser
Arval Bohn
Vic Farrow
Jeff Dee
Howard King
Manda Dee

- **Library** If you want to check out a book, contact Earle Beach (earleb@jumpnet.com) so he can be sure to bring it to the bagelry. If you would like to donate a book, please be sure to put your name in it so we know who to thank. See Rodney if you would like to check out the newsletters from other atheist groups.
- The next **blood drive** will be September 23rd. Meet at the blood bank at 10:00AM at the Regional Blood and Tissue Center on N. Lamar.. Vic Farrow has taken over the role of blood drive coordinator. After you donate, be sure to give him your coupon so that our account can be credited.
- Annual Freethought and Thought-Free Awards Ray is heading up this effort. These awards will be given on January 4th, 2001, the anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Tripoli. Send nominations to John Koonz (jknz@hotmail.com).
- **Randalls Donations** Randalls will donate a percentage of the money you spend there to the Atheist Community of Austin. To take advantage of this offer, contact the customer service department of your nearest Randalls. The ACA number is 5158.

For more information about any of these coming events, call (512) 371-2911 or e-mail liatris@mail.utexas.edu
The Atheist is printed on somewhat recycled paper!

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FOR THE ATHEIST COMMUNITY OF AUSTIN, INC.

Last name: _____ First name: _____

Companion's name (if family or couple membership)

Last name: _____ First name: _____

Address: _____ City/State/Zip: _____

Telephone : (____) _____ e-mail address: _____

This is to certify that I am a non-theist, that I have read the "Purpose" of the Atheist Community of Austin, Inc. as stated in the Constitution (below), and that I am in agreement with the principles stated herein. I understand that membership is open only to non-theists.

Purpose

The Atheist Community of Austin is organized as a nonprofit educational corporation to develop and support atheist community; to provide opportunities for socializing and friendship, to promote atheist viewpoints, to encourage positive atheist culture, to defend the First Amendment principle of state/church separation, to oppose discrimination against atheists, and to work with other organizations in pursuit of common goals.

This organization shall operate in an open, democratic manner, without discrimination as to gender, race, age, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, nationality, or disability.

The Bylaws to this Constitution are intended to further define and explain the operating procedure of this organization. Changes may be made to the Bylaws when necessary to improve the operation of this organization. Changes to the Bylaws shall not alter the purpose of this organization as set forth in its Constitution.

Check all that apply

I wish to become a member of the Atheist Community of Austin, Inc. Membership fees are \$24.00 per year, but our membership year does not begin until the 1st of March. My prorated membership fee, at \$2.00 per month u n t i l next March, is enclosed.

I wish to make a tax exempt donation to ACA .Please direct my donation to the following fund:

General Fund Building Fund Permanent Fund

I only wish to participate in the e-mail group. My e-mail address is above. No fee is required.

I wish to help ACA save money by receiving The Atheist by e-mail. No fee is required.

I wish to receive a hard copy of The Atheist in the mail. \$10 is enclosed.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Please return this form to: Atheist Community of Austin, Inc., P.O. Box 3798, Austin, Texas 78764

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