Howdy! Happy Women’s History Month. There’s a ton of information about the accomplishments and historical firsts for women in history, here: www.infoplease.com/spot/womenshistory1.html

Now remember in our last issue, I talked about how over 300 Muslims just got done ending their lives at this year’s Hajj ritual in Saudi Arabia? Well Muslim hijinks are back in the international news again.

CNN.com recently did an online poll: What is more important?

- Respect for religious beliefs 30% with 15431 votes
- Or Freedom of expression 70% with 35381 votes

Total: 50812 votes

With that being said and reported, some free expression from Denmark in the form of a series of cartoons about Islam, specifically it’s very violent and morally defunct prophet, Muhammad, has enraged millions of members of that supposedly peaceful religion. (It’s ok, we’re in America, and that’s just what the historians say about him.)

For the sake of free speech, we’d like to talk about this more, and perhaps include a reproduction of the cartoons in question.

Submissions? Send ‘em! joezamecki@hotmail.com

Thanks and enjoy! :o)
The Atheist Community of Austin is a local non-profit educational 501(c)3 organization founded in 1996, and is affiliated with American Atheists Inc., the American Humanist Association, and the Council for Secular Humanism, and is a member group of the Atheist Alliance International.

The ACA is a democratically run organization. Board Meetings are held every second Sunday of the month, and all members are welcome to attend, but only board members may vote. Board elections are held every year in May.

Regular membership in the ACA costs just $24. per year, and the membership year begins in March. You can join anytime though. We also offer student, family, senior and life memberships.

The ACA hosts a monthly lecture at the Austin History Center at the corner of 9th St. and Guadalupe St. This is a community service, and a means of disseminating information and ideas of interest to Atheists and the greater Austin community. Lecture topics usually focus on core areas of Atheist interest such as science, skepticism, the impact of religion, philosophy, church-state separation and community activism. Lectures are scheduled on the 3rd Sunday of every month starting at 12:30 pm in the “Reception Room.” Admission is always free.

atheist-community.org  (512)371-2911
Editorial...

Well what a warm Winter we’re having, and how soon it will be Spring again! I love Texas...:o)

We have a special day coming up, so here are a few things I have researched lately about the Solstices and Equinoxes:

On March 20, 2006, at precisely 2:26 P.M. CST (18:26 Universal Time), the Sun will cross directly over the Earth's equator. This moment is known as the Vernal Equinox in the Northern Hemisphere. For the Southern Hemisphere, this is the moment of the Autumnal Equinox.

Translated literally, Equinox means "equal night."

The word Solstice comes from the Latin (sol, sun; sistit, stands) “Sun Stands Still.”

Summer Solstice June 21, at 8:26 A.M. CST (12:26 UT)

Fall Eqinox September 22, at 7:23 p.m. CST (23:23 UT)

Winter Solstice December 21, at 2:35 P.M. CST (18:35 UT)

The Spring Equinox is the beginning of Spring, and I can’t wait. These very REAL and natural events are worth celebrating, as they affect us all, all around the world.

And hey, I got a letter to the editor printed by the Austin Chronicle. I just have to chime in once in a while. Here it is, with THEIR title, not mine.

How Can We Not Think (Like Me)?

Dear Editor,

Some political cartoons from Norway have enraged Muslims around the world because of the perception by those Muslims that their religion is above reproach, and ironically that their mighty Allah can have his feelings hurt quite easily.

We American non-Muslims keep hearing about how Islam is really a peaceful and beneficial religion. Then we hear about the occasional flood of hate and anger from Muslims, because someone had the guts to criticize their prophet – not even their god, but the human they revere, who happened to be fallible too.

So they burn effigies, surround government agencies, and threaten violence if the critics of Islam aren't silenced. Seeing this behavior in the news again and again, how can we not think that Islam is a hate-filled and dangerous religion that should be investigated, and systematically shut down – for the benefit of humanity? Or should the sensitive nature of religion trump the basic right to free speech? I sure am glad we don't have to cope with Allah in our faces like this. Just lots of passionate people.

Now don't get me started on Christianity.

Joe Zamecki, editor

Atheist Community News

Atheist Community of Austin

Not bad, eh? Well we need to speak out more, and I predict that someday, the majority of theists will eventually say “Gee I wish I had listened more to the rationalists who tried to prevent the religious holocaust we’re now stuck in.”

In our last issue, the February 2006 issue, we did something for the first time in ACA history. We outsourced the work of reproducing our newsletter. That was Thomas Graphics on IH-35 North. Well needless to say, they made several errors. I did too, so I’m to blame for the two blank pages. But they also had trouble with their equipment, which delayed things for a full week past deadline. We’re going to make sure that these errors don’t occur again.

Correction: Also in our last issue, I mistakenly gave an incorrect url for a website about black Atheists. It should have been this url instead:

http://www.infidelguy.com/modules.php?name=Black_Freethinkers

And the website is about black freethinkers. I apologize for this error.

Happy Spring Equinox! JZ

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday Mar 2</td>
<td>7:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Happy Hour at Antonio's Tex Mex</td>
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<td>Sunday Mar 5</td>
<td>11:30 a.m.</td>
<td>Romeo's Italian Restaurant A weekly social gathering</td>
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<td>4:30 - 6:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Atheist Experience Host: Matt Dillahunty Co-host: Russell Glasser</td>
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<td>Monday Mar 6</td>
<td>7:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Godless Gamers</td>
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<td>Tuesday Mar 7</td>
<td>7:00 - 10:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Unholy Rollers Skate Event Meet other atheists and atheist-friendly people at Playland Skate Center, 8822 McCann Road Near 183 &amp; Burnet.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thursday Mar 9</td>
<td>7:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Happy Hour at Antonio's Tex Mex</td>
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<td>Sunday Mar 12</td>
<td>10:00 - 11:30 a.m.</td>
<td>Board Meeting Begin at 10am. Check weekly meetings for place.</td>
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<td>Romeo's Italian Restaurant A weekly social gathering</td>
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<td>Atheist Experience Host: Matt Dillahunty Co-host: Jeff Dee</td>
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<td>Monday Mar 13</td>
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<td>Godless Gamers</td>
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<td>Tuesday Mar 14</td>
<td>7:00 - 10:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Unholy Rollers Skate Event Meet other atheists and atheist-friendly people at Playland Skate Center, 8822 McCann Road Near 183 &amp; Burnet.</td>
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<td>Atheist Experience Host: Matt Dillahunty Co-host: Keryn Glasser</td>
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<td>Monday Mar 20</td>
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<td>Happy Hour at Antonio's Tex Mex</td>
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<td>Sunday Mar 26</td>
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<td>Romeo's Italian Restaurant A weekly social gathering</td>
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<td>4:30 - 6:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Atheist Experience Host: Matt Dillahunty Co-host: Don Baker</td>
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<td>Monday Mar 27</td>
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<td>Godless Gamers</td>
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<td>Tuesday Mar 28</td>
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<td>Unholy Rollers Skate Event</td>
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<td>Thursday Mar 30</td>
<td>7:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Happy Hour at Antonio's Tex Mex</td>
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“Bart! You’re not in Sunday School anymore! Stop cursing!.” – Marge Simpson
Press Release For Immediate Release and Distribution February 10, 2006

Scouting for All

Contact: Scott Cozza, Pres info@scoutingforall.org Tel: 707-778-0564

Eric Marx, Northeastern Regional Director northeastern@scoutingforall.org Tel: 301-656-1163

Congress Sneaks Unique Protections for Boy Scouts of America’s Discrimination into Defense Authorization Bill

Last month, President Bush signed the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006 (H.R.1815), which was passed by Congress in the final hours before its Christmas recess. Before the final passage of this bill, however, supporters of the policies of the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) that discriminate against gay and atheist youth and adults slipped into the bill the so-called “Support Our Scouts Act of 2005” (Section 1073). This eleven-hour amendment, entirely beyond the ordinary scope of a Defense Authorization bill, is intended to give special treatment to BSA in three ways. First, subject to the availability of appropriations, it purports to immunize BSA from any law that might limit the Federal Government's support of it, thus undercutting our Nation's anti-discrimination laws (as well as its fiscal responsibility in government expenditures). Second, this amendment requires the U.S. Department of Defense to provide at least the same level of support for BSA's national or world Jamborees as in past years. This is a direct affront to the Federal Court injunction currently in place enjoining such support as an unconstitutional establishment of religion in violation of the First Amendment. Finally, this amendment requires any state or local government entity that receives Community Development Block Grant money from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to allow BSA to have meetings in their facilities or on their property, regardless of these entities' own laudable anti-discrimination laws or regulations that forbid such access to discriminatory groups. While some of these provisions purport to apply to a number of youth organizations, their special focus on BSA is clear, not only from the bill's title, but also as the protections are only needed to immunize BSA's exceptional discrimination.

Scouting for All,* an anti-discrimination organization inspired by Eagle Scout Steven Cozza, asks why Congress would go to such extraordinary lengths to shield an organization that:

- Discriminates against gay and atheist youth and adults.
- Is under investigation by the FBI for fraud, inflating membership numbers to increase funding.
- Who has a national executive arrested for receiving and distributing child pornography.
- Who may be using its Learning for Life program to secure funding legitimately denied to its traditional scouting program.
- Who allows its Scout Councils to mislead funding sources such as the United Way by telling them they don't discriminate, yet continue to adhere to the BSA's national mandated policy of discrimination against gay and atheist youth and adults.
- Gives the youth under its charge the message that discrimination is ok, and that gay and atheist people are morally inferior and not good citizens.
- Gives the youth under its charge who have gay and/or atheist parents the message that their parents don't have family values and are morally inferior to heterosexual parents who profess religious faith.

As recognized in the statements of Congresswoman Barbara Lee (D-CA):

“The Boy Scouts of America policy of discriminating against homosexuals and atheists is contradictory to the Federal Government's support for diversity and tolerance and should not be condoned as patriotic, charitable, or educational. An organization that claims that its mission is to "instill in young people lifetime values and develop them in their ethical character," and to "train young people in citizenship, service, and leadership" does a disservice to our nation when it teaches young people that it is okay to discriminate against someone based on their sexual orientation or their religious convictions.”

and Congressman Pete Stark (D-CA):

“I stand with Scouting for All in calling for the Boy Scouts of America return to their roots of instilling the values of good citizenship and teaching life skills to all Americans who wish to join. If, instead, the organization continues to sanction discrimination on behalf of its right-wing financial backers, then the federal government has a moral and Constitutional duty to sever all financial and symbolic ties to the organization. That would be a shame, because there are plenty of exclusive organizations in this country dedicated to intolerance, but far too few that bring kids of all backgrounds together to share in meaningful life experiences,”

the Federal Government has no place putting itself out as the protector of invidious discrimination. While these sentiments have been echoed by other elected officials -- most especially Congressman Barney Frank (D-MA), who has repeatedly expressed his deep disappointment that BSA "betrays its own professed mission of bringing out the best in young people by perpetuating this unfair and unjustified discrimination based on sexual orientation and religious belief" -- all too few of our Representatives and Senators stood up to the backroom dealings that led to the last-minute insertion of this amendment in the "must-pass" Defense Authorization bill.

Scouting for All calls for the prompt repeal of this pernicious legislative sneak attack on the civil rights of all Americans, and for an end to the special protections given to BSA's discrimination. We hope to soon see the day when all Americans are equally treated with the respect and dignity they so rightly deserve. As the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "An injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

*Scouting for All is a 501(c) (3) charitable, nonprofit organization that undertakes educational activities and outreach programs opposing BSA’s intolerance and discrimination. These include maintaining our Internet web site, http://www.scoutingforall.org/; providing consultations to BSA members, religious groups, governmental bodies, schools, businesses and the United Way; providing support to Gay-Straight Alliance Clubs in high schools; organizing protests at BSA events, including its annual BSA National Council meeting; participating in gay-pride events; providing support to gay and atheist or nontheistic scouts and leaders; creating and distributing literature from Scouting for All; speaking at national and regional conferences, including PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) and the NGLTF (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force); organizing our Annual National Recognition of GLBT Youth and Gay and Atheist Scout Month in October, which includes rallies, fund-raisers and celebrations for GLBT youth; and coordinating Scouting for All's Alliance for Human Rights. Tax-deductible financial contributions can be made on our web site, http://www.scoutingforall.org/, or sent to Scouting for All, POB 2832, Petaluma, CA 94953-2832.
ACA Event Details

-----Lecture Series We hold our monthly lectures at the Austin History Center, at the corner of 9th St. and Guadalupe St. We hold them on the third Sunday of each month and they start at 12:30pm in the “Reception Room.” Admission is always free, and it’s open to the public.

-----Board Meetings We hold our board meetings on the second Sunday of the month, and lately we’ve held them at the very large Schlotzky’s at the corner of South Lamar and Toomey St., just South of Town Lake. That starts at 10:00am and usually lasts till 11:30am. All members are welcome, but only board members may vote at those board meetings.

-----Happy Hour! We meet for Happy Hour at Antonio’s Tex Mex on Thursdays, at 7:30pm. That’s on I-35 Southbound side, just South of Research/183 and just North of St. Johns.

-----Regular Weekly Meetings Sundays at 11:30am at Romeo’s Italian Restaurant on Barton Springs Rd. just West of South Lamar. We meet in the front room, that’s separated a bit from the rest of the place.

-----TV Show The Atheist Experience is our tv show. It airs on Time-Warner Cable, public access channel 10, from 4:30pm - 6:00pm every Sunday. It’s a live call-in talkshow, so feel free to call in with comments and questions for the show and their audience. Members of the ACA are also invited to visit the tv studio during the show, as live studio audience members. This show is also repeated, taped, on Tuesdays at 4:30pm on Channel 10. We also need volunteer help on the show from time to time, so if you’re interested in helping out, or if you think you’d like to be a guest on the show, please e-mail: tv@atheist-community.org

-----Online Radio Show “The Non-Prophets” is a regular live internet radio show on the Freethought Radio Network. It airs on alternate Saturdays from 2 PM to 3:30 PM (3-4:30 PM Eastern time) at www.freethoughtradio.com. Just click on "Listen". The show is hosted by Jeff Dee, co-hosted by Denis Loubet and produced by Russell Glasser.

-----Public Demonstrations Once in a while, we grab picket signs and cameras and hit the pavement in public on issues of importance to us. Usually these can’t be scheduled far in advance, so announcements about demonstrations will likely only be heard at regular membership meetings. The last demonstration we held was at the Texas State Capitol Building on 11th at Congress Ave. We picketed the National Day of Prayer ritual/rally/bad concert held on the steps of the Capitol Building. Around 20 Atheists picketed. It was fun!

-----Godless Gamers is held at Russell Glasser’s house, email rglasser@apollowebworks.com for address and directions. We play all sorts of games. Strategy games, board games, card games, role playing games, party games. It just depends on what people bring. Some recent favorites: Siege of Avalon: a board game where all the players work together to fight back the forces of darkness, find the holy grail, and fill the round table with good knights. The interesting part is that there is sometimes a traitor who works against the others. Apples to Apples: A subjective word association game, where players vote on each other's use of random objects to match a description. For instance, "scary" is matched with "Michael Jackson"; "enormous" with "black holes", and so on.

“"I think that religion is a crutch for weak-minded people.”

Jesse “The Body” Ventura, former Governor of Minnesota
Some national Freethought groups’ upcoming events

The 2006 national convention for the Atheist Alliance will be at the Airport Marriott in Kansas City, where their special room rate for one to four people is $65 a night. Julia Sweeney will be there to accept the Richard Dawkins award. The first freethought lobbyist in Washington, DC, Lori Lipman Brown will speak, and author-activist Fred Whitehead will talk. Atheist Alliance 1-866-HERETIC or try this: http://atheistalliance.org/conventions/2006/index.html

The 2006 American Atheists national convention will be held in San Antonio, Texas at the Marriott Rivercenter in the heart of the Riverwalk District. Among their speakers will be Michael Shermer. Further into this newsletter, we feature more info on that, and for more info from American Atheists: (908)276-7300 and www.atheists.org

The American Humanist Association’s next national event will be the, 2006 AHA CONFERENCE: “The Wave of Reason.” It’ll be the 65th annual Conference of the AHA, and will be held May 11-14, 2006 at the lovely Tampa Airport Marriott in Tampa, Florida at the Tampa International Airport Phone: 1-813-879-5151, Toll-Free: 1-800-564-3440. Make sure to mention the American Humanist Association to take advantage of the $99 special guest room rate (single/double.) Reservations must be made before April 18 for this rate to apply. Speakers will include Lori Lipman Brown, Margaret Downey, and Michael Newdow. The American Humanist Association’s Washington DC office has more info: (800) 837-3792 or: Conference@AmericanHumanist.org

The Council for Secular Humanism will have it’s national convention this year in Tampa, Florida, and the Center for Inquiry of Florida will host.

WHEN: March 24-26, 2006
WHERE: The Clarion Hotel Tampa Westshore 5303 West Kennedy Blvd., Tampa, FL 33609
Tel: 1-800-353-9536
Featured speakers include Eddie Tabash, Norm Allen, and of course, Paul Kurtz.
There are lots of national Freethought groups, and we like to feature them from time to time, and well, this one is making some news. The Secular Coalition for America has been on national tv news talk shows and other places in the national media lately because they’ve now got a lobbyist working in Washington DC full-time, for our movement. So we have reprinted this from their website— with permission, of course. And we’ll bring this up more in future newsletters.

The Secular Coalition for America is the new Washington-based lobbying organization for atheists, humanists, freethinkers, and other nontheistic Americans. Our mission is to increase the visibility and respectability of nontheistic viewpoints in the United States and to protect and strengthen the secular character of our government as the best guarantee of freedom for all.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Secular Coalition for America is to increase the visibility and respectability of nontheistic viewpoints in the United States and to protect and strengthen the secular character of our government as the best guarantee of freedom for all.

Position Statement

The Secular Coalition for America is committed to promoting reason and science as the most reliable methods for understanding the universe and improving the human condition. Informed by experience and inspired by compassion, we encourage the pursuit of knowledge, meaning, and responsible ethical codes without reference to supernatural forces. We affirm the secular form of government as a necessary condition for the interdependent rights of religious freedom and religious dissent. We come together as national freethought organizations to cooperate in areas of mutual interest and to support each other in our efforts to uphold separation between government and religion for the benefit of all within the nontheistic community. As resources allow, we will actively cooperate in projects that support our position, with priority given to political action initiatives and public relations opportunities.

Sponsoring member organizations:

American Humanist Association, the nation's largest and oldest association serving individual humanists and local humanist societies

Atheist Alliance International, a democratic alliance of local and regional freethought groups and publisher of Secular Nation.

Institute for Humanist Studies, using cooperation and innovation to seed and fertilize humanist activism with grants, and more.

Internet Infidels, creators of the Secular Web, the Internet's largest and most comprehensive freethought community

Secular Student Alliance, the only democratic umbrella organization for campus freethought groups, mobilizing students for a new enlightenment

Society for Humanistic Judaism, a nontheistic alternative that embraces a human-centered philosophy combining the celebration of Jewish culture and identity with an adherence to humanistic values and ideas

Honorary member organizations

Anti-Discrimination Support Network (ADSN), educating the public about fairness and inclusion for nontheists

Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers, fighting to enjoy the very freedoms they defend

www.secular.org
The Atheist Community of Austin hosts a monthly lecture at the Austin History Center at the corner of 9th St. and Guadalupe St. In Beautiful downtown Austin. The upper map on the right shows that.

And below that is a map of the locations of our board meetings at the Schlotzky’s at Toomey St. and South Lamar, and our regular meetings at Romeo’s Italian Restaurant on Barton Springs Rd. and Jessie St., just west of South Lamar.

And below THAT is yet another map, this time of our weekly happy hour get-togethers. We meet for that at Antonio’s Tex-Mex Restaurant on IH-35 just South of 183 on the Southbound side of IH-35.

Also our public access TV show is on the air in Austin, and has been for several years now. We’re very proud of that. It airs on channel 10 on Sundays at 4:30pm, on Time Warner Cable.

The TV show is a great way that we recommend for debating with us Atheists in Austin. If you disagree with anything you’ve read or seen in this newsletter, or anything else that the ACA has said or done, please feel free to call in to our TV show. It’s a live call-in show, and it’s lots of fun!

Again, if you would like to pick up your copy of Atheist Community News at meetings instead of the ACA mailing them to you, to save us some postage money, please e-mail me, and we’ll remove your name from the mailing list. We’ll make sure that CAN is available Sundays.

joezamecki@hotmail.com

In our next issue...

----National Convention Time!
----More Newsletter Improvements
----More Wacky Theist News
----& So Much More! :o)
Last year, a few hundred military Atheists and their supporters marched down the National Mall in Washington DC, to show pride and recognition for “Foxhole Atheists.” Those are Atheists who have served our nation in the military with distinction and honor, without the use of religions or god-ideas.

I wasn’t able to attend this march, though I sure wanted to. I served three years in the Texas National Guard. But we just wanted our readers to know that video of a lot of that march and rally is now available online for the viewing, for free, at American Atheists’ website for their TV show, The Atheist Viewpoint. You can find that here: http://atheistviewpoint.tv or you can go directly to their new show Viewpoint site:

http://www.viewpoint.illdill.net:81/

Also, in April of this year, American Atheists will have its national convention in San Antonio, Texas. Here is some more information about some of their speakers:

• JOHN LOFTUS is a former prosecutor for the U.S. Department of Justice’s Nazi War Crimes Unit, and has authored several books and articles on current history. His books include The Belarus Secret, Nazi Gold, The Roots of Anti-Semitism, and The Secret World of Terrorism.

His 1991 blockbuster expose UNHOLY TRINITY: The Vatican, The Nazis and the Swiss Banks (co-authored with Mark Aarons) details how the Papacy ferreted Nazi criminals out of post-World War II Europe via the infamous “ratline,” and exposed the ties between the Vatican, Swiss bankers and hidden Western investors.

Commentary from publisher, UNHOLY TRINITY:

“Among other things, the authors demonstrate that U.S. and British code breakers were fully aware of the Holocaust as early as 1941 but lied to the Western press; that the code breakers bugged the Swiss banks and then buried secrets of Nazi gold transfers to protect U.S. intelligence chief Allen Dulles; and that the Australian, British and Canadian governments are still waging a campaign to keep their citizens ignorant about the Nazi war criminals living among them.”

Mr. Loftus is also an expert on the history of international terrorism and Islamic attempts to obtain atomic, biologic and chemical weapons. Unlike many political observers, however, he believes we may be witnessing the death throes of fundamentalist faith-based terror states, and be on the verge of a renaissance of modernity and enlightenment in the Middle East. Loftus combines his encyclopedic knowledge of contemporary history with current political developments -- it all makes for an informative presentation and a unique perspective!

• EDMOND J. (ED) MARTIN was lead investigator and instrumental in solving the mystery of what happened to Madalyn Murray O’Hair and her two adult children (1997-2000). After the trial of one of the criminals convicted in the murder, the Austin Chronicle newspaper noted: “If not for the methodical investigation of Special Agent Ed Martin and the FBI, they (Gary Karr and David Waters) would have gotten away with murder.”

A native of Louisiana, Mr. Martin grew up in New Orleans and earned his degree in accounting from Southeastern Louisiana College. He worked for the Intelligence Division of the Internal Revenue Service, and was part of the Department of Justice Strike Force that investigated New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison and corruption in the local police department.

Ed Martin received an award for his “Dedication to the Cause of Law Enforcement” from the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Austin, TX, and was nominated for the FBI's Director’s Award. In 2002, he received the Law Enforcement Circle of Excellence Award from the Central Texas 100 Club. He is active in numerous public service organizations. After nearly twenty-six years, Mr. Martin retired from the IRD Criminal Investigation Division and established the private investigative firm of Sage Investigations, LLC.

Ed Martin will speak on “The Last Month of Madalyn, John and Robin.”
Book Review
By Russell Glasser

I recently read the seminal work of the Intelligent Design (ID) movement, Darwin's Black Box by Michael J. Behe. Behe is probably the smartest person in the Intelligent Design (ID) movement. He is a real, actual biochemist who has published peer-reviewed scientific papers. He also, not coincidentally, differs hugely from self-professed creationists in the sense that he accepts evolution almost in its entirety. He believes, or at least doesn't contradict, that macro-evolution occurs and that the earth is billions of years old.

As far as Behe's concerned, it's fine to think that everything is descended from a common ancestor; so humans do indeed share genes with chimpanzees, with apes, with all mammals, with all vertebrates, and so on. He even repeats Darwin's explanation of how the eye evolved. However, Behe then goes on to claim that the existence of the chemical parts that make up complex systems like the eye are a mystery beyond the reach of blind natural processes.

Behe disagrees with mainstream biologists in the sense that he denies that evolutionary processes alone -- random mutation combined with natural selection -- are enough to account for all the diversity of life on earth. He believes that certain biochemical systems exhibit what he refers to as "irreducible complexity". Irreducibly complex things cannot have evolved, proposes Behe, and that leaves the alternative that they were "designed". Behe picks several systems as examples of irreducible complexity, which should be well-known by most who have followed the ID political movement: blood clotting, the cilium, etc.

In math and computer programming lingo, a "black box" is a routine that does a certain job reliably. You stick something in, and you get something out. You don't necessarily know HOW the routine does its job, because it's hidden inside the box. But as long as it gives you the right results, you don't care.

By titling the book "Darwin's Black Box," Behe means to say that microscopic machinery, such as the cell, the flagellum, and the immune system, might as well be magic as far as macrobiologists are concerned. In fact, in a very real sense, Behe's point is that they ARE magic. You look inside the cell, you see all this intricate machinery that couldn't have evolved, so you marvel at the brilliance and foresight of an "intelligent designer" who must have planned the thing.

Undecipherable Complexity

The style of the book is a little strange. Much of the book is written in a highly patronizing manner. Behe illustrates his points with analogies to Calvin and Hobbes cartoons, Foghorn Leghorn predicaments, Rube Goldberg machines, and hugely tedious detailed descriptions of everyday activities. For example, in chapter 3, he takes three pages to explain the process of swimming, weaving a little story about how "on a summer day, you find yourself taking a trip to the neighborhood pool for a bit of exercise," and then "Slowly, painfully, you lower the rest of your body into the surprisingly cold water," and so on. Then he takes another two pages to explain that what he meant to say was, "You may think that the act of swimming is simple, but it's not."

Between this sort of thing, there are plenty of passages stuffed full of dense, unreadable technical language like this:

"Enzyme I requires an ATP energy pellet to transform ribose-5-phosphate (the foundation) into Intermediate II. The enzyme has an area on its surface that can bind either ADP or GDP when there is an excess of those chemicals in the cell. The binding of ADP or GDP requires a valve, decreasing the activity of the enzyme and slowing the synthesis of AMP."

Reading this, I wondered: who is Behe's intended audience? If this were a biochemical treatise meant for biochemists, then he could have submitted it to a scientific journal, but he didn't. This is clearly a book for laymen. But if that's the case, then he can't expect his readers to follow the scientific lingo. In fact, it looks to me like he actually wants us to skip over the technical stuff. Whenever he slips into technical mode, he sets off the entire section with little boxes at both ends. Then he makes patronizing remarks like "Don't be put off by the strange names of the components," and "I assume I've lost most readers in the labyrinth by now..." (pg 149) And at one point he actually ridicules Richard Dawkins, a very readable author who has a knack for giving understandable explanations to a lay audience. "Richard Dawkins can simplify to his heart's content," says Behe, "because he wants to convince his readers that Darwinian evolution is 'a breeze.' In order to understand the barriers to evolution, however, we have to bite the bullet of complexity."

I agree that biochemistry is a complex subject, but I don't believe that means that it's impossible for a competent author to make it accessible. Rather, I think Behe worked to make his explanations as obscure as possible. And I suspect that he expected most of us to gloss over the parts in boxes, pausing to be duly impressed by the big words. Most of the main thrust of his arguments are by analogy, and the boxed passages are just meant to convey the impression that the analogies are valid because they were made by someone smart.

Are biochemical parts really irreducible?

To make the case that "black boxes" (cells and other small parts) require a designer, Behe fleshes out his notion of "Irreducible Complexity", with one example in each of chapters 3-6. Many excellent authors have written at length to debunk Behe's examples, so I'll just offer some links to their explanations.

Chapter 3: The cilium

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CONTACT: Zoe Lee, Beyond Belief Media (323) 874-1517, publicity@thegodmovie.com

Los Angeles, CA, June 24, 2005 -- THE GOD WHO WASN'T THERE won the Best Feature-Length Documentary prize at the Grassroots Cinema Film Festival, festival organizer Adam White announced today.

THE GOD WHO WASN'T THERE is a feature-length documentary exploring the theory that Jesus Christ never existed. Directed by former Christian fundamentalist Brian Flemming (Nothing So Strange), it includes interviews with some of the top religion experts in the world.

"Provocative -- to put it mildly," said the Los Angeles Times about THE GOD WHO WASN'T THERE. Newsweek said the film “irreverently lays out the case that Jesus Christ never existed.”

Review copies are available now by contacting Zoe Lee at (323) 874-1517 or publicity@thegodmovie.com.

THE GOD WHO WASN'T THERE CAST (PARTIAL LIST)

• Richard Carrier is a philosopher and historian. His latest book is Sense and Goodness Without God.

• Alan Dundes was an anthropologist and folklorist. Until his death shortly after being interviewed for this documentary, he was Professor of Folklore and Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley.

• Sam Harris won the 2005 PEN Award for his uncompromising book The End of Faith, which argues that religious faith poses the greatest danger to the human race.

• Barbara and David P. Mikkelson are the founders of the Urban Legends Reference Pages at snopes.com.

• Robert M. Price is Professor of Biblical Criticism at the Center for Inquiry Institute and a fellow of the Jesus Seminar.

• Richard Dawkins, possibly the world’s most famous atheist, is an evolutionary biologist and author of several best-selling books.

ABOUT BRIAN FLEMMING  Brian Flemming works in both fiction and non-fiction. His previous nonfiction work, including many segments for the magazine-style show “Split Screen,” has aired on Bravo, the Independent Film Channel, ABC.com and Beliefnet.com. His fictional work has been called “a parallel universe” by the BBC, “jaggedly imaginative” by the New York Times, and “immensely satisfying” by USA Today. The Fox News Channel dubbed him “a young Oliver Stone.” A playwright as well as a filmmaker, Flemming is the co-author of the hit play Bat Boy: The Musical, which played eight months in New York in 2001 (Lucille Lortel Award for Best Musical). John Landis (Blues Brothers) will direct the film version of Bat Boy, expected in 2007. Brian Flemming's Internet Movie Database listing is at: http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0281830/

For more information, high-resolution images: and if you would like to write a review of this movie, please do, and we’ll reprint that review here.

www.thegodmovie.com
ATHEIST COMMUNITY OF AUSTIN, Inc.
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

(Please print) Last Name ____________________ First Name ____________________ Initial ______

Street Address ____________________

City ____________________ State ______ ZIP__________

Phone (_______)__________________
e-mail ______________________________________

ACA PURPOSES (ACA Constitution, April 6, 1997)

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.

I affirm that I am without belief in god(s), and, that I have read and agree with the "Purposes" of the Atheist Community of Austin.

Affirmation Signature ________________________ Date ___________

ACA membership begins on March 1 of every year.

MEMBERSHIP DUES

$________ Individual $24 per year. Prorated at $2 per month for remainder of current membership year, through next February.

$________ Student/Retired $12 per year. Prorated at $1 per month for remainder of current membership year, through next February.

$________ Family $36 per year. Prorated at $3 per month for remainder of current membership year, through next February.

$________ Lifetime membership. $1,000.

And lastly, how did you first hear of the Atheist Community of Austin?

________________________________________________________________________
Chapter 4: Blood clotting

http://www.talkorigins.org/origins/postmonth/feb97.html

Chapter 5: Vesicular transport

http://www.cbs.dtu.dk/staff/dave/Behe.html (search the page for "vesicular")

Chapter 6: The immune system

http://www.talkdesign.org/faqs/Evolving_Immunity.html

Let me take a moment to address Behe's overall concept of IC as the test for design. In its simplest form, the argument runs like this: Consider a system X that has dependent parts A and B. If you remove part A, then X will cease to function. If you remove part B, then X will also cease to function. Since either A or B must have evolved first, it stands to reason that at some point, X must have existed without one or the other. The resulting system would be useless. Therefore, it cannot have evolved in steps. It must be designed.

To really emphasize how silly the argument is, let's suppose that "X" = "The human body", "A" = "head", and "B" = "torso". Logically, the IC argument means "If the human body evolved, then at some point in history it must have been either a blundering torso with no head, or a disembodied head with no torso. How preposterous! Neither of those could survive! Since there cannot be a head with no torso or a torso with no head, God must have planned the head AND the torso to work together from the beginning!"

In this form, it should be pretty obvious where the fallacy is. The head and body coevolved, each becoming more complex over time and relying on evolutionary advances that came before. It's not enough for Behe to say "You can't remove parts A or B." To prove the case of irreducible complexity, you also have to prove that there is no simpler form of A or B that does the same job, only a bit worse.

Of course there is complexity in biology. That is exactly why the theory of evolution exists: because it explains the very complexity we observe, better and more thoroughly than any other concept proposed. Does evolution also explain complex chemical compounds such as those that make up the cell? Almost certainly, according to the theory of auto-catalytic cycles proposed by Stuart Kauffman and others. According to this principle, a large enough variety of chemicals may be almost guaranteed to produce complex systems that continue to create more copies of themselves. It also shouldn't be overlooked that prokaryotic (simple) cells had about a 2.8 billion year headstart on evolution before the first eukaryotic (complex) cells arrived on earth. That's more than twice as long as the rest of all evolutionary history.

Behe's Elephant

In one of the most famous passages in the book, Behe writes:

"Imagine a room in which a body lies crushed, flat as a pancake. A dozen detectives crawl around, examining the floor with magnifying glasses for any clue to the identity of the perpetrator. In the middle of the room next to the body stands a large, gray elephant. The detectives carefully avoid bumping into the pachyderm's legs as they crawl, and never even glance at it. Over time the detectives get frustrated with their lack of progress but resolutely press on, looking even more closely at the floor. You see, textbooks say detectives must 'get their man,' so they never consider elephants.

There is an elephant in the roomful of scientists who are trying to explain the development of life. The elephant is labeled 'intelligent design.'"

That is all well and good, except that it is a patently bogus bit of sleight-of-hand. At no point in Behe's book does he ever actually produce any elephants. Instead, he just insists "Now that I've ruled out the mainstream scientific explanation, the only alternative is elephants."

Worse, Behe never offers any reason to suspect that his elephant (the "intelligent designer") actually exists. A more appropriate analogy would be if the detectives were swarming around a 23rd story apartment in New York, with a mysterious murder but no visible signs of an elephant whatsoever. While the detectives are trying to do their job, Behe is saying "See, I told you that theory would hit a dead end. It must be elephants that did it!" And "THAT clue didn't pan out either, did it? Why don't you just admit that it's elephants?" When the detectives point out that no witnesses have seen an elephant, and that there is no clear way that an elephant could have gotten up the stairwell or elevator in the first place, he accuses them of anti-elephant bias.

In this situation, the burden of proof is clearly on Behe to give a reason why elephants should be even considered as a hypothesis. It's not that the detectives have ruled out elephants entirely; it's just that until there is compelling evidence to suggest that an elephant was there, "getting their man" is a much simpler approach to the crime.

Later on, Behe tries to argue that since we have learned how to genetically engineer existing life forms, this proves that an intelligent designer CAN create biochemical machinery. This is, however, a complete red herring. From "some genes can be designed" Behe makes the logical leap to "all genes were designed." This is like saying that because some vegetables are grown by farmers, it logically follows that ALL vegetables are grown by farmers, and none of them grown in the wild.

What is missing from Behe's argument is the fact that people can design genes, but only if there are any people around to do it. A hundred years ago, the capability to "intelligently design" genes did not exist, at least among humans. And obviously people could not have designed the genes of the first life. So the burden of proof is on Behe to show that there existed any "designer" back then who was capable of genetic engineering. He asserts that there was, but he's begging the question. Since Behe refuses to speculate on the identity of this designer, we're back to square one. Either present evidence that such a universal gene-tinkerer exists, or just acknowledge the fact that natural explanations are all we have to go on at this time.
Although Behe taunted scientists for letting the cell remain a “black box”, Behe’s solution to the matter is to propose that a particular kind of pre-human intelligence exists -- certainly not a trivial claim in any way. This intelligence is older than the oldest multi-celled life on earth, and is capable of performing genetic engineering on a scale far beyond any human ingenuity so far. How does this designer work? Where did it come from? How do we explain the inherent complexity involved in the designer’s existence? We don’t know, and it’s not our business to ask questions about it. So to get rid of these tiny black boxes, Behe just creates the biggest black box of all out of nothing.

Russell Glasser

If you did not like the writing style in this message, then you will almost certainly not enjoy my blog, which is at:

http://kazimskorner.blogspot.com

And now the article we promised a few months ago, about The Atheist Agenda, at the University of Texas at San Antonio, Texas

Smut for Smut

Submitted by Adam Flott on Mon, 12/19/2005 - 10:22pm.

During the the hours of 10:00 A.M. to 2:00 P.M. the Atheist Agenda, a student organization of The University of Texas at San Antonio, had a table on campus with the purpose of exchanging religious scripture for pornography. The concept for Smut for Smut came from a student organization at the University of Texas in Austin, The Knighthood of Buh. They did "Porno-for-Bibles" from February 28 to March 3 2000. Their idea was pure genius and we give them full credit for coming up with the idea. After reading their write up about it, we knew this would be a great idea for our group, but we wanted to expand on it with our perspective regarding religion. While The Knighthood of Buh may have intended it "as a parody of all the groups that offer bibles in exchange for pornography", we had other motives driving us. We were completely unprepared for the amount of attention we were to get.

The first day was a little slow. Our only promotion was the table banner. We thought that would be enough to bring people back the next day. The next day we had our first exchange. Later that day, the local NBC news affiliate showed up after having received some complaints. They covered our event on November 30, 2005. Direct link to the 10:00 airing of the feature. The University was notified as some students thought we were breaking some campus rules by distributing pornography. They came over to make sure we weren't utilizing the unholy power of Satan to force others to view explicitly graphic pictures. Needless to say, we weren't. We had gotten full authorization from the University as long as we checked ID's and handed out the magazines in envelopes. Two Christians almost broke out in a fight over our right of free speech.

The final day we had expected Christian fanatics to come and protest our blasphemy against their sacred writings. These fine young fundamentalists showed up ready to talk. They were the special kind that believe the Earth is 6000 years old. The San Antonio Current came down to interview us and check out what we were about. Overall we had a lot of fun doing this, talked to a lot of interesting people. I learned that there are grown adults who believe that dinosaurs and people existed on this planet at the same time. Had a professor of the women and gender studies yell at us to take a course in logic and ethics -- without giving us a chance to respond (she stormed off and proceeded to call us names in front of her class). We got plenty of smirks and thumbs up. It was a success beyond our dreams and prayers (ha!). The following day the Internet had gotten the link and began the link clicking onslaught from Fark. Our poor little web server was no match. Eventually, word got around to Tucker Carlson and our president, Thomas Jackson, did a short interview on his show "The Situation" on MSNBC.

www.atheistagenda.org  or

The Atheist Agenda, Student Activities Office, UTSA, 6900 N. Loop 1604 West, San Antonio, TX
The Atheist Alliance International calls on all governments that claim to value freedom of expression to stand up to the bullying tactics of Islamic militants, who are wreaking havoc around the world in response to the printing, in privately-run periodicals, of editorial cartoons depicting Mohammed.

Many Muslims believe Mohammed, indeed any human or animal, should not be portrayed, and the Atheist Alliance honors their right to that belief. If it ever were to happen that a government coerced members of any religion to display their icons in a manner which they find blasphemous, the Atheist Alliance would be on the side of the believers. In this case, where no one is forced to draw Mohammed or even to look at his likeness, we find it ironic that some Muslims are protesting the renditions of their prophet as an inspiration to violence by demonstrations of kidnapping and arson, while making threats of worse mayhem.

More dangerous than the uprising, the Alliance believes, is the fact that several governments, including three Western democracies, have given comfort to these terrorists by criticizing the private expression of a free press.

Ironically, Kurtis Cooper, spokesman for the US State Department, was talking not of the rioters but of the newspapers, when he said, “Inciting religious or ethnic hatreds in this manner is not acceptable.” The government of Norway sent their foreign minister to Lebanon to deliver an official apology. It was a Danish paper that originally published the cartoons and Denmark at first stood by the right to uncensored speech, but has now issued letters of regret.

With embassies burned and citizens threatened, such responses might be understandable, but they are not acceptable. It is the job of government of a free people to protect the free expression of opinion, not to criticize it.

We commend British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who took issue with a European Union Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson’s warning that newspapers should “think twice” before printing the cartoons. Blair’s statement said the decision to print is “entirely a matter for the media organizations.”

There is no doubt in the minds of most atheists that blasphemy laws have contributed to the current crisis, as they give credence to the idea that government should protect religion, and that religious people—unlike the rest of the citizenry—have a right to be shielded from anything they find offensive to their beliefs. We would suggest that strongly held beliefs do not need to be shielded from opposition or nonconformity.

To those who hold freedom of religion dear but find freedom from religion unnecessary, we point out that this incident is a clear example that one does not exist without the other.
Feelings...Muslim Feelings

We’re constantly told to be tolerant of the religious sensibilities of millions of irrational religious people all around the world, most of all lately, Muslims. Our own president, or at least the White House put out a statement immediately decrying the criticisms of Islam which angered so many Muslims recently. Let’s examine why this tactic is essentially wrong and unAmerican.

On the other side of this page is a reprint of the offending cartoons. There doesn’t seem to be anything sexual or overtly violent about any of them, except MAYBE the one that the media has portrayed the most, Muhammed’s head with a bomb for a turban. So it could’ve been much much worse than it was.

If it’s such an offense to imply that Muhammed was a violent person, and even a “terrorist,” then why has the response from the Muslim community involved so much violence and terroristic threats of more violence? So much aggression and anger have been displayed, that some Muslims have died as a result of out of control protests. Protesting things is great, but free speech? We Americans should be appalled.

We know, we know, not all religious people should be judged by the misdeeds of what seem to be the majority of the members in their religion. But why should we also close off our thinking to the idea that a person’s religion and their actions are very often linked? There’s got to be a direct connection established in the media, and that culprit must be identified: Islam, or theism in general. Whichever we can manage to get them to discuss. But as usual, it’s an uphill battle to educate modern American Christians about the folly of empowering religions, especially religions that they can’t understand. It would’ve been a more truly American thing to do, if the White House had come down on the side of this good-natured criticism of what seems like a dangerous religion, with a very necessary free speech as the foundation, like here in America!

Just imagine however, if American Christians got this upset whenever someone here in America makes a cartoon of Jesus that pointed out some utter flaw in their religious system. I believe that the instances of that happening to Jesus-ism here in America are a thousand times more harsh and frequent as those directed at Muhammed or Allah. So why are Christians so much better behaved in the last hundred years or so, than the relatively primitive Muslims around the world? I believe one strong reason is that Christianity’s biggest stronghold-Amercia, has had a separation between government and religion. At least in the overall effect. Most Muslim countries just don’t have that. So maybe they need to learn about that…and soon! JZ

And now, let’s get back to smiling! Here’s a joke:

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Once I saw this guy on a bridge about to jump.
I said, "Don't do it!"
He said, "Nobody loves me."
I said, "God loves you." Do you believe in God?"
He said, "Yes."
I said, "Are you a Christian or a Jew?"
He said, "A Christian."
I said, "Me, too!" Protestant or Catholic?"
He said, "Protestant."
I said, "Me, too!" What franchise?"
He said, "Baptist."
I said, "Me, too!" Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?"
He said, "Northern Baptist."
I said, "Me, too!" Northern Conservative Baptist or Northern Liberal Baptist?"
He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist."
I said, "Me, too!" Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region, or Northern Conservative Baptist Eastern Region?"
He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region."
I said, "Me, too!" Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1879, or Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912?"
He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912."
I said, "Die, heretic!" And I pushed him over.

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Muhammeds ansigt
For those of you on the ACA e-mail list, but not in Austin, the ACA produces both a cable access TV program called the Atheist Experience and an Internet radio program called the Non Prophets. The Atheist Experience is geared at a general audience and the Non Prophets is geared more at an atheist audience.

Audio from the Atheist Experience TV show has been available on the web for a while now. I don't know if it ever got announced. It's available in MP3 format and via the OGG format, which doesn't require proprietary software on your computer. We provide a little applet that will load via your web browser and play the episode.

Just recently, the audio from the shows have been packaged as a "Podcast", which is a simple syndication mechanism for audio channels. The Atheist Experience is now visible in many of the Podcast syndication hubs. For those not familiar with it, it helps the automatic pulling of content to you so that you can listen to it at your leisure with an MP3 player or on your computer. It makes it convenient to listen to keep up with the shows as they are produced.

If you're interested in video from the Atheist Experience, we have DVDs for sale ($5) on the products section of the ACA web site.

The ACA's Non Prophets Internet radio show has had these features for a while.

Anyway, I wanted to make people on this group aware of these developments.

The Atheist Experience web site is <http://www.atheist-experience.com/> and the Atheist Experience podcast feed is <http://www.atheist-experience.com/podcast.php>. This latter link is something you'd need to put into your iTunes program or other program for pulling content. iTunes can be downloaded for free from apple.com, regardless of whether you have an MP3 player. It works best with an iPod MP3 player, but it's not required.

The Non Prophets web site is <http://www.nonprophetsradio.com/> and their podcast feed is <http://www.nonprophetsradio.com/nonprophets.xml>.

While I'm on the subject, American Atheists also has a cable TV show which they broadcast this way. Their show is called Atheist Viewpoint. (See <http://www.atheists.org/> and scroll to the bottom of the page for the podcast feed.) Of course, there's the Infidel Guy, who puts on a good show, as well. (See <http://www.infidelguy.com/>.)

I think as far as quality, our productions are at least as good as the "national" ones.

--Don Baker

ACA members who appear on the Atheist Experience, our cable public access channel tv show. Sundays at 4pm on Channel 10, Time Warner Cable in Austin

The Non-Prophets, our online internet radio show. Season three cast, left to right: Co-host Denis Loubet; Host Jeff Dee; Producer Russell Glasser. Not pictured: Matt Dillahunty.

The Infidel Guy is Reginald Finley, Sr.. You may remember Reginald and the Finley Family on ABC's Wife Swap recently. He has a great online radio show too, called the Infidelguy Show and you can find out more about it by going to www.infidelguy.com
philosophical diversity that exists in our beautiful city, Austin, Texas.

side of things. You can think the very valuable cultural and
be heard. So now you hold in your hand an example of the atheist
that’s a large enough minority group in America, that it deserves to
religious Americans make up about 14% of the population, and
"liberty" is inclusive of a real existence of freedom FROM religion. Non-
government and religion, and a free and open level of religious
between. We advocate a rational and necessary separation between
Atheists in the Austin area, and to help the public understand us
The Atheist Community of Austin is a non-profit educational and
Atheist Community News
The Newsletter of the Atheist Community of Austin
PO Box 3798, Austin TX 78764