

THE FIRST COAST FREETHINKER

Newsletter of the First Coast Freethought Society

An organization of freethinkers and secular humanists supporting free inquiry, education, and community in the Northeast Florida area

Our Motto: "To Question is the Answer."



VOLUME 2

JULY 2004

NUMBER 7

JULY MEETING

Speaker: **Maia McGuire, Ph.D.**, University of Florida Sea Grant Extension Agent for Nassau, Duval, St. Johns and Flagler Counties.

Topic: **"There's an Estuary Living Next Door"** Dr. McGuire will cover the biology and ecology of estuaries, as well as human threats to estuaries and ways people can minimize their impact on coastal environments.

Time: **Monday, July 12, 2004**, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., in the sanctuary.

Place: **Unitarian Universalist Church**, 7405 Arlington Expressway, Jacksonville, FL

Please join us on

Saturday, September, 11, 2004 at 7:00 pm
at the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall
777 N. Tamiami Trail, Sarasota for

**"MOLLY IVINS CAN'T SAY
THAT, CAN SHE???"**

An evening with Molly Ivins
(humorist, author, columnist)
to benefit the ACLU Foundation of Florida

VIP & Premium VIP ticket holders entitled to a
One-Hour Cocktail Reception
with Ms. Ivins preceding the event
as well as priority seating.

Ticket Prices start at \$27
For reservations call 941-922-3080

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE The Leadership Gap

Marie C. Wilson, President of the Ms. Foundation and Founder of the White House Project, tells us in her recent book, *Closing the Leadership Gap, Why Women Can and Must Help Run the World*, that of the 260 million people in the United States, 51% are women and 47% of the labor force are women, but 80% of household chores are still performed by women. Only 14% of congress and 12% of state governors and mayors of large cities are women. Since 1776, only 1.8% of all people elected to congress have been women, only 24 women have been state governors, and only 5% of cabi-

net level positions have been women, with the first woman cabinet member not serving until the administration of FDR (it only took about 160 years). Two-thirds of these women in cabinet positions have served within the last decade.

In order to be elected to national congressional positions, for the most part, one must serve an internship with the state governments and then go on to national government. From these ranks and the state governors come the presidents, vice presidents, and cabinet members. Looking at the status of women in these positions and at the present rate, it will take 200 more years for women to gain parity in running our country on a national level according to Ms. Wilson. Is this acceptable?

The picture painted by Ms. Wilson of the status of women in leadership roles is not nearly

as rosy as one may think. According to Ms. Wilson, the United States “ranks sixteenth in the world on women’s political leadership, behind such third world countries as Sierra Leone.” The recommendation for women in the new Iraqi government is a minimum of 25% women in their national governing body. That is 11 percentage points higher than that in our own government. Many Scandinavian and European countries are way ahead of the United States in the number of women Heads of State, as well as in the main governing body. Of interest is the fact that seven of these countries--Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway, Iceland, the Netherlands, and Germany-- have achieved “critical mass of about one-third of their parliaments and a pay scale that is roughly equal to that of men.”

Leaders from around the world have acknowledged instances of negotiating that would have turned out far more successfully had women made up a sizeable part of the negotiators. According to Ms. Wilson, “women bring to leadership a tendency toward greater inclusiveness, empathy, communication up and down hierarchies, focus on broader issues--this makes for stronger government and richer business.” Women have more of an inclination to compromise; but after all, isn’t that what negotiation is all about?

There is a new horizon for women as peace negotiators around the world. In places such as Pakistan and India, Northern Ireland and other hot spots, women have contributed to successful outcomes in negotiations. Ms. Wilson tells of President Clinton’s comments on failed peace negotiations in 2000 between Israel and Palestine. “If women had been negotiating at

Camp David, we’d have an agreement,” said Clinton. Kofi Annan says of women, “For generations women have served as peace educators in their families and societies. They have proved instrumental in building bridges rather than walls.”

Women have been the glue that has held families--and yes, even the country--together since the beginning. In her book, *Founding Mothers*, Cokie Roberts describes the roles brave women have played in the history of our country, even though women had no say in government at all. A bill to give women the right to vote was introduced into congress 72 times before it was finally passed in 1920. The role of women is largely ignored in our history books. But, without the efforts of women (and the productivity of slaves), the United States may very well not have succeeded as a democracy.

Where women have equal representation, noted improvements are seen in the areas of quality of life issues, i.e., health care, preserving natural resources, nutrition, education, equality for ALL people, reproductive rights--in other words, **all issues that affect families and everyday life**. Even after 227 years, women are still seeking equality. The role of men has been to control, but the world is no longer a place where that is advantageous to our survival.

Unless we learn to live together globally in a mutually beneficial way, we will perish together in destruction. Ms. Wilson states, “I firmly believe we will not have a peaceful world until women play an equal part in the governing of countries.” If I believed prayer worked, I would try it. But I believe raising our voices together will work better. --W.W.

ATHEISTS ON SUPREME COURT?

Conservative *Human Events* (7-15-02) asked eleven senators on the run if they would confirm an atheist to sit on the Supreme Court. Their responses:

- **YES:** Robert Bennett (R-UT, Mormon).
- **DEPENDS** on circumstances: Orrin Hatch (R-UT, Mormon); Jon Kyl (R-AZ, Presbyter-

rian); John McCain (R-AZ, Episcopalian); Ben Nelson (D-NE, Methodist).

- **NO:** Paul Sarbanes (D-MD, Greek Orthodox); James Inhofe (R-OK, Presbyterian); Zell Miller (D-GA, Methodist); Don Nickles, (R-OK, Christian).
- **NO REPLY:** Max Cleland (D-GA, Methodist); Tim Johnson (D-SD, Lutheran); Paul Sarbanes (D-MD, Greek Orthodox). --H.B.

THE FORGOTTEN REAGAN “The Teflon President”

Ronald Reagan, 40th president in 1981-89, received the homage of the nation as his remains lay in state and were buried with pomp and ceremony. President Reagan is renowned for helping end the Cold War in Europe, ending the arms race, freeing east European nations, bringing down the Soviet Union, strengthening our military, urging missile defense (Star Wars), reducing taxes, downsizing government, balancing the budget, and stimulating the economy.

He is remembered for his witticism, on-line comments, optimism, love of family, condemning the “evil empire,” good nature, even temper, decisions based on good principles, honesty, support of military strength, humanity, patriotism. He rescued the nation from the economic debacles of the Jimmy Carter Democratic administration. Or so it seemed. Reagan’s administration was topsy-turvy.

His response to the Carter program was to reduce taxes, which benefited primarily the rich. The number of millionaires increased to 1.3 million and the number of billionaires to 51. Taxes on corporations declined, and subsidies increased. Capitals gains taxes were reduced, and the corporate tax rate was halved. Large corporations made enormous profits and paid little or nothing in taxes. Revenue dropped \$750 billion from 1982 to 1987. Interest on the national debt soared, and the national debt nearly tripled. The result was the worst recession in forty years and increased foreign borrowing at high rates.

Funding for the military increased every year during that time period, totaling \$2 trillion. Reagan increased the size of the military and created a 600-ship navy. Waste and cost overruns ran into billions of dollars, with items such as expensive wrenches, coffee pots, and toilet seats resulting in \$100 worth of parts costing as much as \$100,000, for example. Forty-five weapons systems had cost overruns. Testing of weapons was sometimes fraudulent.

A battleship shelled Lebanon; Marines were sent in and then were withdrawn when 241

Marines were killed in one terrorist attack. Grenada was invaded to rid it of well-armed Cuban troops who turned out to be ordinary workers. Libya was bombed in a retribution to try to kill Muammar Gaddafi. The CIA funded and armed Contras in return for drugs, mined harbors in Nicaragua, provided a manual on how to kill public officials, and helped cover up the El Mazote massacre and the murder of four nuns in El Salvador. The U.S. helped the right wing in Angola, Mozambique, and Guatemala.

In the Iran-Contra scandal, Reagan secretly sold weapons to Iran in an attempt to free American hostages. The \$10 million profit was diverted to the Contras who fought the legally elected Sandanistas in Nicaragua. Congress cut funds and passed the Boland Amendment which forbade the CIA from giving aid, but this was ignored. Reagan lied, claiming he did not know of these events, and Congress suppressed a bill to impeach him.

Reagan spent only 81 minutes one year with his national security adviser, did not discuss these foreign policy problems with his staff, and did not wonder how Contras could continue when their funds were cut off. Ninety percent of the public did not believe he had no knowledge of these events. When his public approval rating dropped to 35 %, he stated that polls were not important.

Scores of domestic programs were cut or abolished: Medicare and Medicaid, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, food stamps, school lunches, Head Start, Women-Infant-Children (WIC) aid, family planning, low cost and other housing, legal aid, job training, health care, Native American education, employment services, energy assistance, and so on. The result was an increase in poverty and homelessness, family debts, bankruptcies, cost of housing; and decrease in real wages, business investment, family income, aid for the unemployed, and savings. Rising costs meant less production than in the Carter administration. Over time, more money was spent on the military than on these human resources.

Many agencies were weakened: Food and Drug Administration, Securities and Exchange Commission, Federal Communications

Commission, Federal Trade Commission, Internal Revenue, Highway Safety, Department of Energy, Equal Employment Opportunity, Library of Congress, Department of Education, and so on. He let the environment deteriorate.

Reagan was a born-again who received much religious training from his mother. He attended religious Eureka College, where he concentrated his attention on football and acting. He made about fifty films and became head of the screen Actors Guild. He also became intensely anti-Communist and lectured and announced for General Electric where he encountered many working people. He was twice elected governor of California with his claim that the solution to problems is not the government because the government is the problem.

His appeal to the public got 27% of the eligible votes in the first term and 32% in the second, including one-fifth of born-again. He wanted prayer and Bible reading in the public schools but rarely attended church himself. He thought God had a plan for him, especially after the attempted assassination. He talked about the Bible, and expected Armageddon at any time.

Elected president, he exerted himself during his first term but leveled off in the second to work mostly normal working hours: 9 to 5 on Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday, 9 to 1 on Wednesday; 9 to 1 or 3 on Friday, when he went to Camp David. In his free time, he answered fan mail and watched films. His staff produced cards in different sizes and colors for him to study to prepare for the next day when he met people. He had an excellent memory, but when questioned by Congress about the Iran-Contra scandal, he answered with, "I do not remember" about 150 times.

The press was quite sympathetic to Reagan because it had been hard on President Jimmy Carter and because he was nearly assassinated 69 days after he took office. He held only 26 press conferences, a fraction of the

number held by other presidents. That number decreased after the Iran-Contra scandal; his staff discouraged press conferences because the staff had to explain away his frequent misunderstanding of the world: Reagan thought plants polluted the air and volcanoes polluted more than automobiles. He was deluded that he had been in military service four years, that fascism was the basis of the New Deal, and that the amount of nuclear plant waste could be stored underneath a desk. Reagan had a direct telephone line to an astrologer who helped decide times to schedule his actions. Over 225 persons in his administration had questionable ethics, some even going to jail. Reagan never demanded high morality in his administration.

He made broad decisions based on general principles and let subordinates carry them

out. He was indecisive, inconsistent, out of touch with reality, often indifferent to people in need, lacked curiosity, and did not normally take responsibility for mistakes but instead blamed others for scandals and failures.

When reporters wanted answers, they drew lots

with the loser assigned to ask because answers were difficult to get. He lowered taxes for the rich, never balanced a budget or reduced government, and caused a recession.

But he was charming, calm, optimistic, amusing, witty, often thoughtful of others, cheerful, and rarely angry. The Great Communicator used well his talents as an actor: outward appearance, good memory, timing, following a script, reaching ordinary people. England's Margaret Thatcher said, "Poor thing, there is nothing between his ears." Pat Schroeder called him the Teflon president because problems did not stick to him. Clark Clifford was at least partially right in calling him "an amiable dunce." Two-thirds of the public approved of his policies when he left office. (*Sleepwalking Through History: America in the Reagan Years* by Haynes Johnson. Many web sites available for more information.)

--H.B.

Reagan thought plants polluted the air and volcanoes polluted more than automobiles . . . and that the amount of nuclear plant waste could be stored underneath a desk.

HUMANIST BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP



When: 2:00 p.m. the 3rd Sunday of each month.

Where: Borders Books, 8801 Southside Blvd.
Phone 519-6500. Books for the group
may be purchased at Borders.

What: Books planned for discussion are:

- July 18, 2004 - *Freethinkers*, by Susan Jacoby (Yes, this is the book whose author was recently interviewed on public radio.)
- August 15, 2004 - *Writings on an Ethical Life*, by Peter Singer.

For further information about the discussion group, leave a message at 996-1553, or write jewellkross@yahoo.com.

CHRISTIANITY IS CHANGING

Fundamentalism, intolerance, prejudice, superstition, and conservatism appear to be on the rise.

Christianity has started to change and will be even more conservative in the future. Many people think the Reformation is a model for future changes. It started in 1517 when Martin Luther posted 95 theses on a church door in Wittenberg for discussion and resulted in the birth of Protestantism. The Reformation increased the role of laity and suggested such changes as women might enter the clergy and priests might be permitted to marry.

Tradition and institutions were weakened while the Bible and private religion were strengthened by Protestantism. The influence of

Islam was small compared to the change taking place in the Third World (or Third Church, or Southern Christianity below the equator). This change includes 480 million in Latin America, 360 million in Africa, and 313 million in Asia (well over a billion people) compared to 260 million in Europe. The clash of Catholics and Protestants in European nations led to tolerance of minorities and justifying political authority without invoking God and religion.

The Catholic Church developed the conservative Counter Reformation and through its missionaries became the first institution to operate around the globe. Protestants developed their own religion and commercial enterprise in Europe. But the liberal west has been shrinking while the conservative southern half of the globe has been growing.

In Africa, 46% of the population is Christian and keeps growing. Worldwide a quarter century from now, Christians will be the largest religion with 2.6 billion members. Half of them will be in Africa and Latin America, with 17% in Asia. In half a century, non-Latino whites will comprise one-fifth of all Christians. African Catholics will nearly double in a quarter century, with three-fourths of them in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, where today three-fourths of all baptisms take place. These groups are more conservative than are advanced nations. They respect priests and bishops and their authority, and they follow older devotions.

Meanwhile, four hundred million Pentecostal Christians located in these three large areas have similar beliefs and are also conservative and growing. They believe in orthodoxy, spiritualism, prophecy, puritanism, demons, and exorcism. Migrants who move to big cities seeking help will be attracted to churches which provide health, welfare, and education, bringing superstition with them. They seek the spiritual healing and divine intervention learned from the Bible. Religious groups have already formed in Uganda, the Congo, and Zambia to carry out the "will of God" with much violence.

Nearly half of the 135 Cardinals who will vote for the next pope come from the conservative southern nations. But lay people are concerned about the shortage of priests, clergy

celibacy, and having their opinions heard. The northern half in Europe is concerned with preaching, hymns, and Bible reading while the southern half with statues, rituals, and processions, and need to catch up on their book learning. The northern half will decentralize and privatize faith while the southern half will maintain community and traditional authority. The first will tolerate homosexuality and abortion far more than the second will. The first would like to continue Vatican II changes to liberalize the church more than the second would. But if a council were called now, the conservatives might want even more conservatism and split the Church, as has already happened in the Anglican (Episcopal) church over homosexuality.

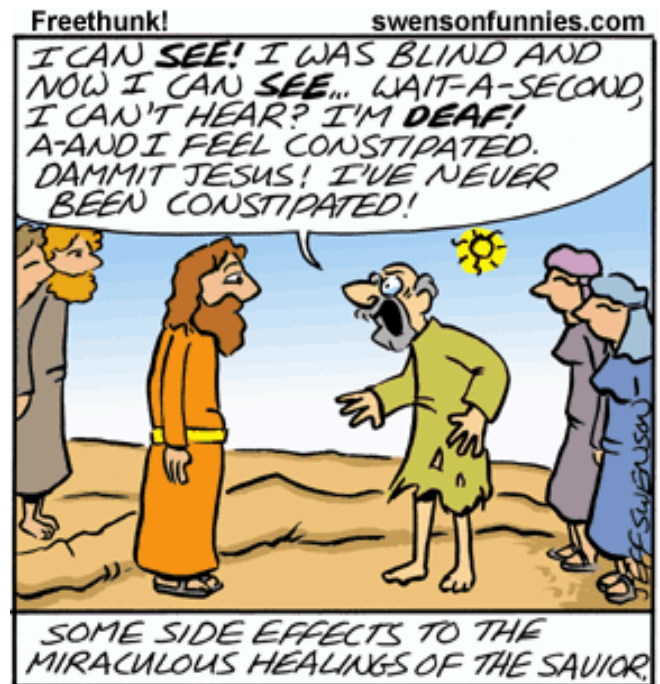
The Church was a politico-religious organization that dominated Europe from the sixth to the sixteenth centuries. But it fell apart due to gunpowder, printing, and Protestantism. Today, nation-states dominate. Governments will have less control over information, technology, diseases, migrants, arms, and financial transactions across their borders. The concept of belonging to a state may fade, as in the Middle Ages. Members of the southern churches have become moral leaders. Those in Africa opposed apartheid, and some have become martyrs.

Christian states may arise, as in Zambia in 1991. We can expect debates about church and state and between rival churches, about tolerance and diversity, majorities and minorities, and private morality and behavior.

Christians and Muslims conflict in Nigeria, the Philippines, Sudan, and other nations. Bloody conflicts have taken place in Liberia, Uganda, and Sierra Leone. The conflict between Iraq and Iran cost thousands of lives, and Christians are threatened in Indonesia. Some of the victors may be driven by righteousness to use weapons of mass destruction, such as Indonesia, Nigeria, the Congo, Uganda, and South Africa. Religion and sectarian frontiers may play a role. Islam seems to be the growing faith in Africa and Asia, but Christianity is in a big revival. The growth is in the conservative south, not the liberal north, and the two may separate. (Source: Philip Jenkins, *Atlantic Monthly*, October 2002 - greatly condensed.)

Comment: The author omits data on the growth of Islam, apparently the fastest increasing denomination today. He also omits mention of internal conflicts (i.e. Hutus versus Tutsis), enormous backwardness, and primitive technology in the nation states, which hamper development. Bertrand Russell suggested that when the experts disagree, the rest of us should suspend judgment. --H.B.

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WORLD EVANGELIZATION DECLINES

Evangelism is not the success it appears to be. The World Evangelization Research Center (WERC) reports 4000 missionary agencies have 434,000 foreign missionaries with an income of \$18 billion. They spend \$359,000 for each convert. Expenses exceeded income by \$1 billion in 2002 and grows six percent annually. Most plans for evangelizing fall short of goals. Also, embezzlement exceeds global income by \$1 billion. (gem-werc.org/resources.htm)

The annual 50,000-plus missionary baptisms are one per 1600 births. Furthermore, the

increase in world population is faster than the increase for Christians, so Christians who were a third of world population a century ago are now a fourth. (*Free Inquiry*, Feb-Mar 2004) --H.B.

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JULY SOCIAL

To: All **Freethinkers**, FCFTS Members, Friends, and Guests.

What: **DINNER and SOCIALIZING** at the **STEAK AND ALE** Restaurant, corner of BAYMEADOWS & I-95 South.

When: **TUESDAY, July 27, 2004**, (4th Tue.) Gather at 6:00 p.m. for cocktails in the LOUNGE; 7:00 p.m. for dinner.

RSVP to **Carrie Renwick**, at 268-8826, or e-mail CarrieRen@att.net . **The deadline to RSVP is SUN., July 25, 2004!**

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THE "J-WORD"

In a more perfect world this little tale by Curtis Wolf would be true. Can freethinkers prevail and help bring about a scene like this one? Wouldn't it be wonderful?? --C.R.

The pastor sat quietly in his chair as Florida Senate President Jim King introduced him as the guest chaplain of the day. He stood up, walked over to the podium and hastily cleared his throat in preparation for his fifteen minutes of fame as prayer intermediary to God.

His prayer was eloquent and forceful. He spoke about the greatness of God, religious freedom, public servants, and the sacredness of human life. Naturally, it subtly covered all of his pet peeves - abortion, homosexuality, and other anti-family ideas.

One thing was missing so far. The J-word. So here we go. "...the freedom for people

to believe in Jesus Christ."

His voice thundered these words as if he wanted the whole of heaven to hear them. There were a few furrowed brows but no rebellion, yet. That felt good! Let's do it again!

"We pray these things in the wonderful, matchless name, the great name of our God and Savior. I pray them in the name of Jesus."

He looked up from his prepared text to see if he was going to get away with his violation of the Senate rules on opening prayers. No such luck.

"I must object. He said Jesus not just once, but twice. I am a Jew who believes in one God and his name is not Jesus. Actually, I am not sure what God's name is since someone lost the vowels of His name a long time ago, but I am sure that it is not Jesus." said Senator Wasserman Schultz.

President King rose to answer the senator's objection, but never got the chance.

"One God? I am a Wiccan and I believe in two Gods!" said another senator.

"Wait a minute, can someone tell me again why we pray to God? I am a Buddhist and I do not believe in a Supreme God." said another incensed senator.

The Senate chamber erupted into pandemonium. Jews argued with Christians. Hindus yelled at Pagans. Everyone looked suspiciously at the Unitarians because they could not figure out what the hell the Unitarians believed! President King was about to gavel the chamber quiet when a loud shriek behind him rose several decibels above the din.

"Jesus! Give me strength!" bellowed the pastor.

Arguments broke off in mid sentence as everyone turned and watched the pastor storm out of the chamber. They tried to remember if any other guest chaplain had ever done anything like this. No one could think of even one similar incident. The chamber stood quietly for a moment until a senator known for his freethinking tendencies rose up and spoke.

"It seems to me that public prayer leads to one of two possibilities. One possibility is that we pray to a generic God who is supposed to satisfy all religions. However, on the con-

trary, this vanilla God is not worshipped in any religion of which I know. The other possibility is that someone like our guest chaplain today imposes his God on the rest of us whether we worship this God or not. Maybe we should try something different. Maybe, prior to the start of the daily session, each of us should pray to the God of one's choice in the privacy of one's office. This way, each of us can choose how to pray to God or not pray to God at all if one so chooses."

President King recognized the free-thinker's wisdom and requested an immediate vote on the proposal. The ayes won in a landslide. The God of the First Amendment looked upon this decision and was well pleased. --C.W.

* * * * *

PROGRESSIVE MEDIA AVAILABLE!

Mass-market media are generally quite conservative. General Electric owns NBC, Disney owns ABC, Viacom owns CBS, News Corporation owns Fox, TimeWarner owns CNN - with a lock on TV news. "We paid \$3 billion for these television stations. We decide what the news is. The news is what we tell you it is," said a Fox executive in Tampa.

Only 281 of 1500 daily newspapers are independently owned; three companies control a quarter of daily news circulation in the entire world.

Clear Channel owns over 1200 radio stations, one-third of the total. "We are not in the business of providing news and information... We're simply in the business of selling our customers' products."

Two-thirds of people polled said special interests infect news coverage. But when "laissez-faire nutball" Michael Powell, head of the Federal Communications Commission, tried to permit increased concentration in the media, public outrage sent 170,000 e-mails to Washington. Even Congress is now opposed. The public does have more influence than assumed. In fact, many good media with progressive ideas do exist and can be found if you know where to look.

In radio, Jim Hightower's two-minute commentaries are heard on 130 commercial and community stations. Other programs include *Democracy Now* with Amy Goodman, Working Assets Radio with Laura Flanders, New Dimensions, *Latino USA*, *Counterspin*, *RadioNation*, ACORN Radio, *Alternative Radio* with David Barsamian, *Media Matters* with Bob McChesney, and *The World*. Denver, Madison, and Detroit have good commercial radio. Air America is now heard in Berkeley, New York City, Los Angeles, Houston, and Washington, DC.

The Web has grown to 68 billion e-mails daily and 10 million sites. The latter include MoveOn.org, TrueMajority.org, Altnet.org, TomPaine.com, Commondreams.org, and Buzzflash.com. Vermont has *iBrattleboro*, an online newspaper for its 12,000 population who contribute information and which gets 260,000 viewers a year.

Alternative magazines include *The Nation*, *Mother Jones*, *The Progressive*, *In These Times*, *American Prospect*, *Ms.*, *Harper's*, *The Progressive Populist*, *Utne*; and *Indypress.org* and *Altpress.org* as well provide access to other publications.

Independent weekly newspapers number 120 with 17 million readers.

Free Speech TV and WorldLink TV reach 20 million homes. Cable Access Television has 600 channels.

Face-to-face networks include 2200 independent bookstores and other local locations like libraries which have meeting rooms and bulletin boards. (*The Hightower Lowdown*, May 2004)

These highlights only suggest some of the media to which we have access. *Alternative Radio* can be heard on Gainesville station WUFT every Monday starting at 12:10. The free *Folio Weekly* of Jacksonville is delivered each Tuesday to local libraries, with well-written contents filling in gaps left by the local monopoly newspaper. The magazines named are the source of many articles in this newsletter. Above, Jim Hightower calls Michael Powell a "laissez-fair nutball" without stating that he is the son of Secretary of State Colin Powell, an Episcopalian. --H.B.

AMERICA'S PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Fundamentalists want a moment of silence to begin the day in public schools. Or a bit of Bible reading. A display of the Ten Commandments would be nice. The Pledge should keep "under God." Teaching creationism should replace evolution. Sex education should emphasize abstinence only. All these would supposedly make the pupils think of higher things and maybe study harder.

But that is wishful thinking. Public schools are an enormous, complex, and highly political enterprise. Tinkering with the fringes has little effect. Public schools have 53 million pupils, three million teachers, 92,000 schools, and 15,000 districts. One-third of schools are among the best in the world, one-third are a disgrace to a civilized nation, and one-third are in between. School buildings average 42 years old; half should be repaired or replaced, but legislators are indifferent.

Property taxes support them with a little help from the states and the federal government. Using income taxes would be better. In most states the richest district has twice as much money to spend as does the poorest, but both are supposed to teach well.

One-fourth of children who enter school are not ready to learn. They have poor health, just moved, are hungry, are frightened, or have other handicaps. One-fifth live in poverty; many have no health insurance. One-fifth come from homes where English is not the primary language; children in big cities like New York and Los Angeles speak some fifty languages.

One-third get free or reduced cost lunches. Twelve percent are disabled and cost twice as much to teach as normal children. Some do not belong in school but legislators determined otherwise. Some have no interest in learning and poor self control. Expelling them is very difficult or impossible.

Half of Americans do not speak correct English. Half of adults do not read a book after leaving high school; those who do read often choose fluff like romance, Westerns, mysteries, self-help, and spiritual uplifting.

A Jacksonville secondary teacher learned this about her 120 pupils' families: 10% receive a daily newspaper, 15% have books in the house, 15% have suitable magazines to read. Yet teachers have to teach them to read and like reading.

Teachers with inadequate training, shortage of supplies, poor working conditions, uncertain administration, and uncooperative parents, struggle. They work an average of 48 hours a week. But they manage to help a little over 70% graduate from high school, compared to 10% a century ago. Duval teachers are prohibited from touching children, despite pictures in the local newspaper. The youngest pupils might benefit from a few hugs to show someone cares.

Most teachers join unions to provide some protection, insurance, and camaraderie. Unions are lambasted by many print media for holding up progress, but the unions are so powerless they cannot increase salaries much beyond the rate of inflation. (Source: Special Report on Educating America, *The American Prospect*, February 2004)

Note: Public schools are condemned for failing to teach much. But consider the Third International Mathematical and Science Survey (TIMSS) which tested pupils in some thirty nations. American students scored near the top in reading, with only homogeneous Finland better, slightly above average in science, and slightly below average in mathematics. This is spectacular achievement despite the obstacles. --H.B.

WHERE WILL WE BE IN 2005?

Where would you like to see the FCFTS meet next year? In a few short months, it will be time to reapply to the Southside Branch if we want to return there when renovation is complete. Or, we may continue to meet at the Unitarian Church if we prefer. Perhaps you have other ideas for us to consider? Would you like to meet another night? The decision to relocate last February had to be made in haste due to library renovation. However, we now have some time to consider our options. Let the Board know your thoughts! --C.R.

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NEWSLETTER

The First Coast Freethinker is published for members of the First Coast Freethought Society, other freethinkers, and potential freethinkers. We exchange newsletters with other freethought groups and get information from many other sources. Readers are invited and encouraged to reprint our original materials if they give credit to this publication.

Submit contributions by e-mail to Hugo or Carrie, or mail to Hugo at 8831 Taurus Circle, South, Jacksonville, FL 32222. See monthly deadlines on back cover of every newsletter.

NOTE: The officials of this organization do not take responsibility for opinions and other statements expressed by anyone in this newsletter. It is intended to convey ideas to stimulate thinking and for discussion about a wide variety of subjects.

For web site postings, contact Carrie.

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 (See application in newsletter or on web site)

PURPOSE

The purpose of the First Coast Freethought Society is to serve the needs of the non-religious population of Northeast Florida; to promote freethought and secular humanism; to provide a place for agnostics, rationalists, atheists, skeptics, and other freethinkers, to hear speakers and discuss philosophy, science, ethics, and other topics of interest, and to enjoy fellowship with like-minded people.

MEETINGS

We meet the second Monday of every month at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Jacksonville, 7405 Arlington Expressway, in Jacksonville, FL 32211 (Phone 904-725-8133)
 Time: 6:30 - 8:30 p.m.

FREETHINKER

A freethinker is a person who forms opinions about religion or any other subject on the basis of reason, **independent** of tradition, authority, or established belief.

BRIEF CALENDAR - 2004

July 12, 2004 - Monthly Meeting
 July 18, 2004 - Book Discussion Group
 July 27, 2004 - **STEAK & ALE**
 August 9, 2004 - Monthly Meeting
 August 15, 2004 - Book Discussion Group
 August 24, 2004 - **STEAK & ALE**
 September 13, 2004 - Monthly Meeting
 September 19, 2004 - Book Discussion Group
 September 28, 2004 - **STEAK & ALE**

FIRST COAST FREETHOUGHT SOCIETY

An organization of freethinkers and secular humanists supporting free inquiry, education, and community in the Northeast Florida area

Post Office Box 550591 • Jacksonville, Florida 32255-0591 • 904-288-6291



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION – 2004

We are an organization of freethinkers and secular humanists supporting free inquiry, education, and community in the Northeast Florida area. We do not believe in the supernatural. The First Coast Freethought Society welcomes you as a member. For further information, visit our web site, address below.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Home Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Home Phone: _____ Business Phone: _____ Fax: _____

E-mail address (legibly!): _____

Occupation: _____

Areas of interest and/or expertise: _____

How did you hear about us? _____

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES:

Regular (\$30.00) _____ Senior (15.00) _____ Student (\$15.00) _____

I am interested in being involved in the FCFTS as a:

General Member: _____ Committee Member: _____ Officer: _____

Financial Supporter: _____ Other: _____

TO MEMBERS: Do you object to your name appearing on the Membership List which would be distributed only to other members? YES _____ NO _____

Other Comments: _____

Make check payable to: **FIRST COAST FREETHOUGHT SOCIETY**

Mail to: Post Office Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591

Visit our web site at: <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>

President: **Wilhelmina Walton**

Wilwalt@Juno.com



THE FIRST COAST FREETHINKER
Newsletter of the First Coast Freethought Society
8831 Taurus Circle South
Jacksonville, Florida 32222

FREETHOUGHT HEROES **Born in July**

MEETING DATES

**Usually the Second
Monday of every
month:**

May 10, 2004
June 14, 2004
July 12, 2004
August 9, 2004
September 13, 2004
October 11, 2004
November 8, 2004
December 13, 2004

Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) writer, feminist who advocated rights for women and labor

Henry David Thoreau (1817-62) writer, naturalist living at Walden Pond

R. Buckminster Fuller (1895-1983) designer, inventor, builder of geodesic dome, philosopher

Ida B. Wells (1862-1931) African-American journalist who supported votes for women and opposed lynching

Francis Petrarch (1304-74) Italian poet, Morning Star of the Renaissance

Aldous Huxley (1884-1963) critic, novelist, wrote *Brave New World*, etc.

Robert Heinlein (1907-88) writer, especially science fiction

Emily Bronte (1818-48) English novelist, wrote *Wuthering Heights*

FREETHINKER DEADLINES

**Kindly submit items
to Hugo or Carrie by
Friday:**

May 21, 2004
June 18, 2004
July 16, 2004
August 20, 2004
September 17, 2004
October 15, 2004
November 19, 2004
December 17, 2004