

# FIRST COAST FREETHOUGHT SOCIETY, INC.

*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."**

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### **The First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.**

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## Your Support Promotes Freethought on the First Coast



February 2009

Happy Valentines Day!

Volume 7, Issue 2

## Inside this issue: **February 2009 President's Message**

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### Earl Coggins

**O**ur new President, Barack Obama, asserted in his

Inaugural Address a commitment of inclusion, reiterating an age-old truism that "we are all in this together."

I've heard this before, but something was different. He spoke with dignity and said some remarkable things, most interesting of all (for me)

were his references to unity of purpose over conflict and discord, an end to worn-out dogmas, restoring science to its rightful place, and including "nonbelievers" when describing the

makeup of our nation.

Another thing that caught my ear was his reference to our "patchwork heritage" as a "strength, not a weakness." This immediately reminded me of our original motto, *E Pluribus Unum*, which means "From many, one."

***I believe the national organizations will need help from the grassroots groups like us.***

Some of you may not like the label nonbeliever as a way to describe a person who has no religion or religious beliefs. It's not my favorite. The various free-

thought, secular, and other nonreligious groups can't

agree on a term—so how do we expect Obama to do much better? The terms available are argued by all. I

knew what he was attempting to convey.

What counts for now (from a President of the

United States) is the inclusion of any term that respectfully denotes a group of people as having no religion and being a part of the

*(Continued on page 5)*

For more information on Darwin Day, visit: <http://www.darwinday.org/>.

## February 2009 Meeting

Anthony M. Rossi, Ph.D., Department of Biology, University of North Florida

### "Happy 200th Birthday, Charles Darwin: A Retrospective"

Monday, February 16, 2009, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

(In the Sanctuary, upper parking lot level • Doors open at 6:00)

Unitarian Universalist Church • 7405 Arlington Expressway • Jacksonville, FL

## HUMANIST BOOK DISCUSSION GROUP

- When:** 2:00 p.m., the first Sunday of each month.
- Where:** Borders Books, 8801 Southside Blvd., 519-6500, books are usually in stock.
- What:** Books/magazines planned for discussion:



- February 1, 2009 - *Sleeping With Extra-Terrestrials*, by Wendy Kaminer (Please note: Borders will not stock this book for us)
- March 1, 2009 - *Doubt: A History - The Great Doubters and Their Legacy of Innovation from Socrates and Jesus to Thomas Jefferson and Emily Dickinson*, by Jennifer Michael Hecht

In this grand sweeping history, Hecht celebrates doubt as an engine of creativity and as an alternative to the political and intellectual dangers of certainty. Just as belief has its own history featuring people whose unique expressions of faith have forever changed the world, doubt has a vibrant story and tradition, with its own saints, martyrs, and sages. Hecht blends her wide-ranging historical expertise, passionate admiration of the great doubters, and poet's sensibility to tell a stimulating story that is part intellectual history and part showcase of ordinary people asking themselves the difficult questions that confront us all. To see an interview of Jennifer Hecht, click on <http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/doubt/>.

For more information, contact moderator Jewell Kross at [JKross@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org](mailto:JKross@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org) or call 904-996-1553. (NOTE: If you purchase books from Amazon, please go to our website first, <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/index.html> and then click the link to Amazon.com. Thank you!)

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### First Coast FreeThinker

The *First Coast FreeThinker* is published for FCFS members, other freethinkers, and potential freethinkers. Nonmembers may receive three issues free of charge, after which they must join the FCFS to continue to receive hard copy.

Readers are invited and encouraged to reprint our original materials provided they give credit to this publication. The officials of the FCFS are not responsible for opinions or other statements expressed in this newsletter. The *FreeThinker* is intended to convey ideas intended to stimulate thought and discussion on a variety of subjects.

We welcome submissions. The deadline is the **FOURTH SATURDAY** of each month for the

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following month's issue. Submit contributions to the newsletter by e-mail to Hugo (see above), or by U. S. mail to Hugo Borresen, 8831 Taurus Circle South, Jacksonville, FL 32222.

The following are two tales about how two FCFS members became involved in the democratic process. Freethinkers support democracy as “the best guarantee of protecting human rights from authoritarian elites and repressive majorities.” (The Affirmations of Humanism: A Statement of Principles) See [http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/statement\\_of\\_principles.htm](http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/statement_of_principles.htm)

## I Saw Democracy in Action

Hugo Borresen

**V**olunteers in the presidential election showed their pride in democracy. They helped turn out the largest number of voters in a national election in American history. They did this with enthusiasm.

The Democratic National Committee called to ask if I would help getting people to vote. So I went to the office on the Westside of Jacksonville, situated in an empty store front leased for a few weeks. The orientation in the parking lot had about 70 people, most of them African Americans. Randy, the director, introduced himself and explained our tasks. Reached by telephone or at their homes, Democrats were encouraged to cast ballots.

When we arrived at the appointed time, we were given lists of Democrats from the county elections office. They contained information such as name, telephone, age, gender, preferred candidate, vote by mail, vote early, ride to poll needed, and several other items. For telephoning, one of four responses could be circled: no one home, wrong number, leave message, and refused to respond.

I made about three hundred calls in three sessions of two hours each. The most common responses were wrong number and nobody home. Some volunteers called for several hours in the busy and noisy room. Several responders were annoyed at being contacted a second, third, or fourth time. When children answered, they probably had been asked to do so by their parents annoyed by the repeat calls.

Then we had a parade! Our Westside group had found an-

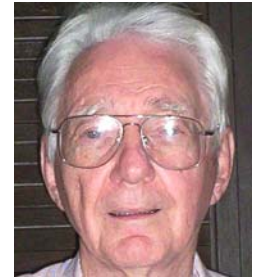
making a change, and “Get out and vote!”

The canvassing consisted of going door to door urging people to vote. Few people were home on a Saturday, but if they were, we wanted to know if they supported Obama, were ready to vote, had sent in absentee ballots, etc. Responses to these questions were then recorded.

On election day we just hung a placard on the front door knob stating “VOTE” and displayed the location of the nearest voting precinct.

The planning was awesome. Names and addresses of potential voters were in print. Canvassed houses were grouped by blocks on a street with a map showing how to reach them. But most awesome was the number of people who volunteered their time and talents to urge people to participate in the most important part of a successful democracy, voting for public officials. They did this with enthusiasm. One gathering of volunteers was so large that they could not all be accommodated and some were turned away.

These volunteers, mostly Af-



***Blacks could not vote for centuries. Those who tried to register and vote were turned away by white officials in the South, often with violence and sometimes murder...***

other empty store to borrow free of charge for a couple of weeks. So we all gathered there on an afternoon to walk a half-mile to the local library and back. Only a dozen of us out of 150 were white. But first an African American preacher said a prayer, then led the group in a series of chants before we left. Three times, he shouted “Fired up?” and the people responded “Ready to go!” We also heard “Yes, we can!” in reference to

rican American, did not mention the enormous change in American history where I could hear, but they—and more likely their parents—must have remembered the past. Blacks could not

vote for centuries. Those who tried to register and vote were turned away by white officials in the South, often with violence and sometimes murder, even though the Fifteenth Amend-

ment (1870) to the Constitution guaranteed them the right to vote. Furthermore, blacks and whites worked together in harmony this election year. Democracy also was a winner.



## Oh, My Aching Feet! Who Would Have Thought that Democracy Was Such Hard Work?!

Curtis Wolf

**W**hen the political season was upon us last fall, I decided not to sit on the sidelines, so I volunteered to help a local political candidate get elected. It was not just my commitment to democracy that led me to do this. The political candidate, Sarah Lovett, was a friend of mine, too. I had met her when we drove over to Tallahassee to speak in favor of the Taxpayer Protection Act before the Taxation & Budget Reform Commission. The Taxpayer Protection Act would have restricted tax increases to no more than the inflation rate plus population growth unless voters approved an in-

crease in excess of that, if it had passed the commission. We remained friends from then on and when she decided to run for the Florida Legislature, I jumped at the chance to help her get elected.

So, how could I help her with her campaign? I could have called likely voters trying to

you want to impart to the people on your list. You repeat it over and over every time someone answers the door. Every so

often the conversation takes a different tack. But you aren't there to have a pleasant conversation with anyone. You are there to try and steer the person towards voting for your candidate as quickly as possible, so that you can move on to the next house. With a limited number of canvassers, and election day closing in on us, we had to do our task efficiently. But who said that democracy is supposed to be easy?

I also did other things like put flyers on cars on the last few days of the campaign. At one point, I had a little fun when distributing flyers at a strip mall in the Northside. Sarah's opponent, Mia Jones, got on stage at a nearby political rally. Of course, she had no idea what I was doing, so I chuckled at my opportunity to work against her campaign right under her nose.

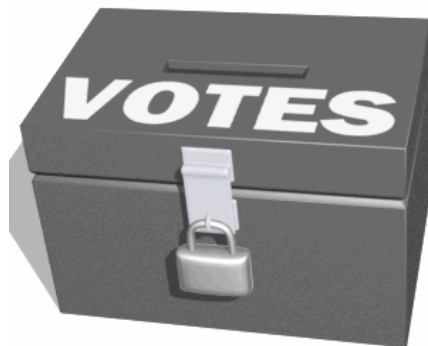
Well, I guess that Mia had

*The fact that our elected officials have to ask our permission in order to get or stay in office makes a powerful statement concerning the power of the people to control their own destiny.*

convince them to vote for Sarah. However, I remember doing phone sales many, many years ago, and how much I hated it. No thanks.

So I opted to canvass neighborhoods in her district. It sounded good at the time. Get a little exercise. Talk to some nice people. Sounds like fun, huh?

Well, it is not the non-stop fun fest that you think it is. You basically have a message that



the last laugh, since she trounced Sarah. The odds were against Sarah from the start. She was a Republican seeking to be elected in a traditionally Democrat district. Also, the fact that Mia was black helped her out in the year of Obama. Sarah also had limited funds since she did not have the connections that a sitting City Councilwoman had, and the Republican

Party was not very supportive of her run for office.

Despite the disappointment of the loss, it was a good experience. The fact that our elected officials have to ask our permission in order to get into or stay in office makes a powerful statement concerning the power of the people to control their own destiny. It does not always work well, but it is much better than

the autocratic, supposedly divinely chosen, governments that ruled Europe prior to the American Revolution. No matter what our personal opinions of the Founding Fathers are, they took us on a road that led to the betterment of mankind, and we as freethinkers should continue to support democracy and freedom in this country and throughout the world.



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### **February 2009 President's Message**

*(Continued from page 1)*

American landscape. It's never been done (to my knowledge) until now.

Who or what was the catalyst for this reference in his speech? Did he realize the significance of his choice of words—that it has never been done by another president? This new president seems to radiate a sense of inclusion—so having said that, I believe he did indeed grasp the significance of including a word that represents people without any religious belief. I sense that he has as much respect for us as he has for anyone else.

Did I get upset because our president didn't use my favorite term to describe nonreligious people? No. I was okay with it. I was busy being nearly in tears and trying to pick myself up off of the floor after having fallen out of my chair. I kept asking myself, "Did he just say what I thought he said?"

I think our new president

wanted to make it clear that he realizes there are a great many people who admit to having no religion or religious beliefs. The most recent statistics show non-religious people in the U. S. at 16.1%, which is roughly 48 million citizens. That's within the realm of 1 out of every 6 individuals! That is a HUGE constituency if you can convince them to register and vote for you. It's also a huge force—if it gets organized—to push social change.

We have a golden opportunity in the next four to eight years (with Obama's "inclusion theme") to raise the level of respect for secularism by orders of magnitude. I feel that the level of respect we eventually garner will rest entirely on a positive approach that does not attempt to eliminate religion from anyone's life, or even appear to do so. If religion goes away, it won't be because of the secularists. It will be because in the marketplace of ideas, it was a

bad one.

If our goal is to gain equality and respect for secular world views, and a government that sincerely abides by its (secular) Constitution, we will make great strides in the next decade. If we want to fight the same old, tired war of "us against them"—we're right and you're wrong—we will squander a once in a century opportunity.

I hope the First Coast Freethought Society has the people and resources ready to staff and fund the initiatives that will be necessary to help make it all happen. I believe the national organizations will need help from the grassroots groups like us. They can't do it alone. There will be a need for marches, demonstrations, lots of letters, articles, debates, and conversations on local levels everywhere in order to get it accomplished. I'm ready to help—are you?



### **Erratum**

The *First Coast FreeThinker* take errors seriously. On page 8 of the January 2009 issue, the word "Duh" should have been "Doh."

## Valentine's Day and the Atheist

**John Ruskuski**

**W**hy shouldn't we atheists participate in Valentine's Day? After all, when you cut us, do we not bleed? We nonbelievers have romantic feelings and compassionate feelings and feelings of charity. We can be touchy-feely kinds of people at times.

And this Valentine's Day thing is only quasi-religious anyway. The Catholic Church still

### First Coast Freethought Society Financials at the end of 2008.

Balances at 12/31/2008	
Cash	\$4,083
Debt (VISA)	(624)
Net worth	\$3,459
2008 Revenue & Expense	
Revenue	
Dues and donations	\$10,364
Other	242
Total revenue	10,606
Expense	
Advertising	9,505
Newsletter	1,338
Equipment	559
Rent	540
Telephone	463
PayPal charges	169
Other	735
Total expense	13,309
Net surplus/(deficit)	(\$2,703)
Number of Members at 12/31/2008	158

has St. Valentine on its calendar of saints, but it's not an official feast day. And if you do a little research, you find the curious fact that the 14th of February is the same time of year that Romans and pre-Romans celebrated the pagan holiday of Lupercalia. Not only was fertility of nature and the earth celebrated, but public displays of young people coupling were encouraged.

And if you're interested, there is a Canadian group that celebrates Lupercalia to this day. I don't know what exactly goes on in their convention hall, but if the organizers feel the need to tell their participants that jock straps and G-strings are not proper attire to wear to and from their rooms and the convention hall, and that modest dress is required, then I do not think my wife would let me attend their festival. But so much for the history of this romantic holiday. There is another reason this subject had come to mind.

The other day, I was reading an article by Wendy Kaminer, a known nonbeliever and contributor to *Free Inquiry Magazine*. I got to the part about that old touchy area where the question came up about how could atheists know good from bad without a belief in god? Just then, I get a

call from my recently out-of-college daughter. She hit a bump on that road to a career and needed someone to talk to. And after all these years, I've finally gotten it through my thick skull that it is a precious gift we can give those we love when we just listen.



Now, as a teenager, my daughter did not have the best of relationships with me. A little combative you might say, but where I come from that is preferable to indifference.

Now as an adult, we get along just fine as this phone call shows. At the end of a phone call we can say, "I love


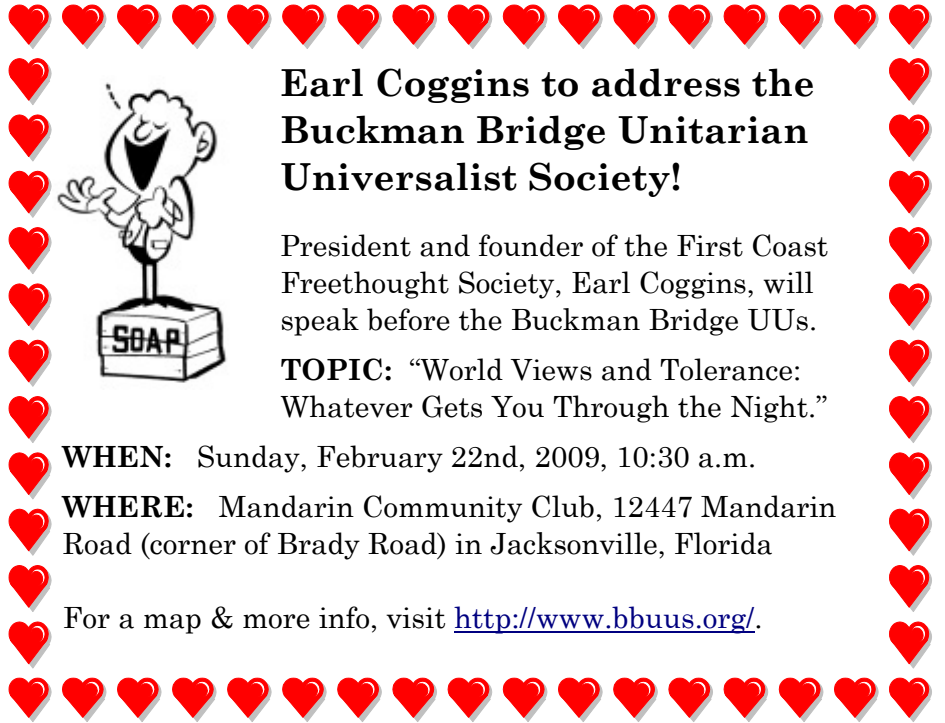
***But even without a ruling god, we feel good when we do good and feel bad when we do bad.***

you" to each other. It is not infrequently that I feel like a proud father. After all, she went through high school and college with good grades and without being arrested, doing illegal drugs, or getting pregnant.

Growing up in a nonreligious house, how did she know right from wrong? Good from bad? We, my wife and I, are happy at the thought that our daughter is an honest, loving, compassionate and charitable person. And a thinking person, too! We are not deep questioners, or highly moti-

vated academics looking for the answers to the "big" questions in life. Just working schmoes trying to make a living and enjoy life. But even without a ruling god, we feel good when we do good and feel bad when we do bad. Love, compassion, charity, understanding, and tolerance always gives us feelings that feel good. Even as nonbelievers.

So if it works, why fix it? Let's go out and enjoy Valentine's Day. But don't go around in public with only a jock strap or a G-string, eh?



**Earl Coggins to address the Buckman Bridge Unitarian Universalist Society!**

President and founder of the First Coast Freethought Society, Earl Coggins, will speak before the Buckman Bridge UUs.

**TOPIC:** "World Views and Tolerance: Whatever Gets You Through the Night."

**WHEN:** Sunday, February 22nd, 2009, 10:30 a.m.

**WHERE:** Mandarin Community Club, 12447 Mandarin Road (corner of Brady Road) in Jacksonville, Florida

For a map & more info, visit <http://www.bbuus.org/>.



## Ongoing FCFS Activities

### Dinners for Doubters

Sign up to attend or to host a dinner yourself. Sign-up sheets will be at the back table at the monthly meetings. For details on how this works, see **page 7 of the August 2008 *FreeThinker*** (available on website) or ask a greeter at the back table.

### Secular Sunday Morning in the Park (or Atheist Sunday Morning)

Freethinkers... let's get acquainted and enjoy intelligent conversation **every 4th Sunday of the month** (unless inclement weather prevails) at 10 a.m. until ? at the pavilion at Losco Park, 10851 Hood Rd., S., Jacksonville 32257, between Shad and Losco Roads. Need directions? Call Beth Perry at 733-5489 or Google the address to get a map and directions. We generally provide coffee. Bring a breakfast snack and a **chair**. Mark your calendar. We hope to see you there!

### No Atheist Left Behind (or Are You Going My Way?)

If you are seeking a ride to an FCFS event, contact **Hugo Borresen** at [HBorresen@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org](mailto:HBorresen@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org) or call 904-779-6883.

### Caring Tree

If a telephone call to a member is in order, or if a sympathy card, flowers, or some form of support is needed, please contact **Nita Pitts** at 904-996-0879 or e-mail her at [pitrymnd@comcast.net](mailto:pitrymnd@comcast.net). If you prefer, leave a notation on the sign-in sheet at the back table at one of our monthly meetings.



## The Promise and Dangers of Cloning (Part Two)

Richard T. Hull

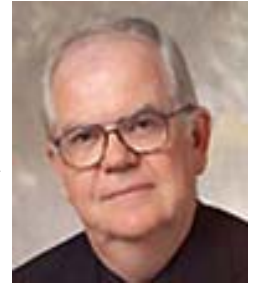
Cloning has already been used as a way of “recovering” beloved pets. For individuals with extraordinary disposable income, the cloning of a pet from the cells of a deceased animal offers the illusion of a numerically identical replacement. Apart from such expensive sentimentality, cloning of valuable animal stock, such as a prize bull or racehorse, may be attractive to those who view such animals as utilitarian investments.

Those who have lost children may find the possibility of cloning “replacements” to be powerfully attractive. A parent who has lavished love and nurture on the developing child, only to see him or her struck down by an accident or assailant, might well find the possibility of “starting over” on “that child” to be deeply compelling. One individual who struggled with this possibility is Thomas Murray, President of the Hastings Center for Society, Ethics, and the Life Sciences, whose daughter was murdered in college. In a moving essay, Murray reviews the temptation to seek a replacement through cloning his daughter and rejects it as providing a false hope: the illusion of a replica where, because of the unique nature of the lost person and her relationship

with others, no replica is possible. He concludes of his lost daughter that it would be preferable to keep the memory of his daughter alive than attempt to produce a genetic facsimile.

Another philosopher, James Lindemann Nelson, has observed that the life of a clone would be inescapably linked to the set of expectations and potentials of the one who has been cloned, so that his or her life would lack the joyous spontaneity that comes with forging one’s own identity. While serving as a replacement for one tragically lost

Apart from the psychological problems, replacement cloning is likely destined to disappoint. Not only are there problems associating with aging DNA, the influences and conditions that surrounded the cloned individual will differ from those that obtain for the clone. In addition to this immutable fact, present and envisioned technology cannot overcome the dismal morbidity rate of cloned offspring that plagues virtually all cloning efforts for animals.



*The benefits of cloning we are likely to see in our lifetime are modest, but important.*

The benefits of cloning we are likely to see in our lifetime are modest, but important.

might console those grieving that loss, the expectations placed on such a clone would constitute a burden that is both unfair and tinged with pretense.

A straightforward utilitarian reason for cloning individuals would be to recover the talents that particularly gifted persons may have. Many assume Albert Einstein was unique in his genius. Luciano Pavarotti thrilled millions with his stunning arias. Salvador Dali astounds with his inventive genius expressed in depictions of the familiar rendered unfamiliar. Some think these geniuses should be recaptured for posterity.

We will come to integrate into medicine’s practice the cloning and transplantation of specific tissues and structures as replacements for diseased or damaged ones, enabling lives of normalcy to be realized for those who today struggle with chronic diseases such as diabetes. But regeneration of entire individuals is both improbable and quite possibly a nightmare masquerading as a dream. Cloning, like other life extending measures, may enable the living to enjoy better lives: for those who have lost loved ones tragically, they will continue to live with their sorrow.



## Evolution 101: Only the Basics of Evolution

Shane Christian

Today there are thousands of evolutionary specialists in many different fields of science. Charles Darwin laid down only the foundations of evolutionary knowledge which science continues to build upon, adding new insights and information every day. While science continues to gather new data, old theories are being revised. This is the scientific method which is constantly improving our knowledge of the world around us.

In every society of living organisms, there will always be diversity. One great leap in the evolution of complex life was sexual reproduction which results in genetic drift. Genetic drift is the gradual accumulation of genetic change due to the fact that there are no two eggs or sperm that are identical to the parent. Earth is the perfect planet for the rise and evolution of complex life. (See the book, *Rare Earth*, by Peter Ward and Donald Brownlee.)

Earth's dynamic geology and changing seasons are constantly putting pressure on life. Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins said, "Evolution is an arms race between predator and prey, parasite and host. Arms races are run in evolutionary time, rather than on the time scale of individual lifetimes." (*The Blind Watchmaker*)

There are natural control mechanisms at work at all times. If there are too many predators, then the prey population dwindles down to a point where it can no longer support the predators. When the predator population is low, then the prey numbers climb. There is an entire food chain that is part of the circle of life, from micro-organisms in the soil, lakes, rivers and oceans, to the largest animals. From algae to the largest trees and forests, all life is dependent on other living things. The food chain can be upset by global catastrophe and changes in geology, like volcanism and mountain building,

***Gradual changes in climate, food, and water sources put pressure on the survivability of a population of animals.***

or mountain erosion. Geological changes can affect the weather patterns, causing desertification or flooding. Biologists see these balancing acts in nature everywhere.

Dawkins also said that evolution is the accumulation of genetic change over vast periods of time. Species can evolve in different directions when one group of animals gets separated or isolated from its parent group. They could be separated by distance, glaciers, mountains, rivers, deserts, or seas due to continental drift. The main thing is that their gene pools are no

longer mixing. Over vast amounts of time and isolation, natural selection will mold an individual group to its environment.



Gradual changes in climate, food, and water sources put pressure on the survivability of a population of animals. Food being the raw materials, vitamins and minerals, are digested or absorbed by the plants and animals. As the pressure is put on them during harsh conditions, populations may drop drastically. Individuals with characteristics that aid their survivability will pass these characteristics to the next generation.

Survivability does not mean the strongest survives. We know that within any population, there is variation from one individual to another. Some are taller and some are shorter. Some are more tolerant to heat, while some are more tolerant to cold.

Variations don't stop with outward appearance. There could be variations in any part of an animal's physiology, the majority of which would not be detected by appearance or captured in the fossil record. Variations in a population allow species to adapt and survive in a con-

(Continued on page 14)

## Bi-Centennials of Charles Darwin and Abraham Lincoln

Fred W. Hill

Two hundred years ago, slavery was still an accepted part of life in the United States, and nearly everyone believed that all species were specially created by God only a few thousand years ago and were entirely unrelated to one another. Two men born on February 12, 1809, helped change that during their lifetimes. They were, of course, Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin, who have both been much lauded and loathed for what they wrought.

Particularly after his assassination on Good Friday in 1865, Lincoln became revered as a martyr, for both the union he helped save and human liberty, as the Great Emancipator who freed the slaves. Naturally, there has been much myth-making and distorting of Lincoln, both by those who would make an unblemished saint of him and those who would make a warmongering, greedy demon of him, ignoring the genuine human being who had faults and prejudices but strove to rise above them, to learn and grow, and try to improve conditions for all people.

Contrary to the allegations of those who insist that Lincoln cared nothing about slaves or any black people, Lincoln's presidency came about largely due to his concern about attempts to extend and entrench slavery during the 1850s by such means as the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, which would allow slavery to be legalized or banned by

“popular sovereignty” in any of the territories without regard for previous geographic limitations previously set by the Missouri Compromise of 1820; and by the Dred Scott decision of 1857, wherein Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger B. Taney opined that based on a strict interpretation of the U. S. Constitution and the framers' intent, no blacks anywhere in the country, free or slave, had any “rights the white man was bound to respect.” Despite apparently believing that blacks were inferior to whites, as often noted by modern detractors, Lincoln described slavery as a “monstrous injus-

***So, a toast to the bi-centennial of the births of Lincoln and Darwin, who did so much to break the shackles of ancient practices...***

tice” and was castigated by many contemporary rivals, such as Senator Stephen Douglas of Illinois, for “promoting the dangerous idea that up and down America, blacks should uniformly be viewed as equal human beings with equal rights.” (Thomas L. Krannawitter, *Vindicating Lincoln*, p. 65)

Moreover, Lincoln was not a stone monument whose every utterance was divinely inspired. He often spoke as a politician, attempting at once to allay the fears of racist voters and appeal to their sense of liberty and justice, even in regard to people of

different skin colors. Often, Lincoln did express agreement with their irrational prejudices. Yet, he also remained open to differing points of view, willing to change his mind when convinced by reasonable arguments.

Once, Lincoln believed that the differences between blacks and whites were so profound that they could never live together in peace and equality, and that the preferred solution was to resettle all American blacks to Africa; however, after meeting and discussing the issue with several black leaders, including Frederick Douglas, Lincoln came to the conclusion that his earlier opinion was misguided, that the black people who had been born and raised in the United States were Americans, not Africans, and entitled to the same rights as any American of European ancestry. Ultimately, by issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, leading the Union to victory over the Confederacy and by pushing an initially reluctant Congress to pass the 13th Amendment and thereby propel it towards becoming part of the Constitution, Lincoln did more than any other individual to end slavery throughout the nation and begin the long and difficult struggle to expand and protect the civil rights of all the American people.

While Lincoln came to recognize that all people deserve the same basic rights, Darwin came



to recognize that all species share similar natural origins and are all related to one another, differing only due to the inherited accumulated variations between generations of organisms over vast stretches of time. Prior to his gradual intellectual breakthrough, Darwin accepted the ancient mythic perception, embodied in the biblical creation story, that the only thing linking humans and chimpanzees, either with trees or any other form of life, was a shared creation of their first and entirely separate ancestors on the same day approximately 6,000 years ago. This breakthrough occurred only because, although he once believed in the Judeo-Christian creation myth, Darwin was not blinded by religious dogma and was open to explanations of natural phenomena that disregarded supernaturalism, even those that bluntly contradicted biblical text.

By Darwin's time, the scientific community had long recognized that despite religious lore, the universe did not revolve around the Earth, and the Earth was far older than a few thousand years. Evolution itself had been proposed previously by Darwin's own grandfather, Erasmus, among others. They all depended, however, on some sort of guiding force, either God or individual organisms themselves, purposely striving to improve themselves and then passing on their improvements to their offspring, such that Arnold Schwarzenegger's children would inherit both his money and his muscles even if they never work or work out themselves; or, as illustrated by

Jean-Baptiste Lamarck's example, if giraffes obtained their long necks from successive generations stretching to reach leaves on ever higher branches.

Darwin, however, realized that evolution is not driven by any such desire, divine or otherwise, but rather by mostly blind chance, and at least some sexual desire, that resulted in differences between parents and offspring and between one offspring and its non-identical siblings. The accumulated differences become ever more distinct when subgroups of a species are isolated from one another, so that breeding no longer occurs between members of the separate groups, and eventually one species divides into different types or races and finally into distinct species incapable of producing viable, fertile offspring with members of the parent species.

Since Darwin's *Origin of Species* was first published 150 years ago, his theory of natural selection to explain the reality of evolution has been much maligned and misunderstood, but its essence has withstood intense scientific scrutiny and has been vindicated by genetics and other fields of modern science based on interpretations of real world phenomena without resorting to explanations based on invisible, intangible, and quite likely imaginary, supernatural deities.

A college librarian in Jacksonville once told me, as I checked out a biography of Darwin in 1994, that "he repented on his deathbed, you know. He repudiated evolution before he died." I smiled as I told her that I seriously doubted her spurious allegation—but even if it were

true, it didn't matter because evolution would still be true. I've also met people who insisted that the Civil War wasn't about slavery at all and that Lincoln was as racist as anyone, contradicting leading rebels such as Alexander Stephens, Vice President of the Confederate States, who in a speech delivered on March 21, 1861, asserted that "the agitating questions relating to our peculiar institution—African slavery as it exists amongst us... was the immediate cause of the late rupture and present revolution." (see <http://www.teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?documentprint=76>)

Lincoln could free the slaves but he could not break the chains of ingrained prejudices, and Darwin could point the way to the reality of evolution but could not force anyone to remove their biblical blinders. Still, while racial prejudice remains, it has eroded sufficiently that a man whose father was a black African has been popularly elected to both the Senatorial seat once held by Stephen Douglas and to the Presidential office Douglas unsuccessfully vied for against Abraham Lincoln. And despite the best efforts of creationists to return public education to the dark age of religious dogma, they cannot eliminate all the evidence that proves the fact of evolution. So, a toast to the bi-centennial of the births of Lincoln and Darwin, who each did so much to break the shackles of ancient practices and beliefs, and to those who continue the work of promoting civil liberties and freedom of thought for all.



First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.  
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### Statement of Purpose

The First Coast Freethought Society, Inc. is an educational, nonprofit, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization dedicated to supporting nonreligious persons in the Northeast Florida area and promoting a nontheistic approach to everyday life.

### Meetings

The FCFS meets the THIRD Monday of each month at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Jacksonville, upstairs in the sanctuary, 7405 Arlington Expressway, Jacksonville, Florida 32211, (904) 725-8133. Meeting time: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Meetings are free and open to the public. Doors open at 6:00 p.m.

### Committees and Chairs

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## January Social

**Where:** OLIVE GARDEN on Philips Highway, near the Avenues Mall.

**When:** **Tuesday February 24, 2009** at 6:00 p.m. Proceed directly to our room. **Drinks at 6:00. Dinner at 7:00.** (Order from the menu.)

**RSVP:** [CarrieRen@att.net](mailto:CarrieRen@att.net) (or 268-8826) by **Tues. a.m.**, if you plan to go!

First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.

P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591 • (904) 288-6291

2009 Membership Application



Name		Date	
Home address	City	State	Zip Code
E-mail address	Home phone	Business phone	
Occupation	Areas of interest and/or expertise		
How did you hear about us? Comments? _____			

Membership level (please select one):

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Regular (\$30/yr.)      | <input type="checkbox"/> Carl Sagan (\$50/yr.)       | <input type="checkbox"/> Charles Darwin (\$200/yr.)   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Student (\$15/yr.)      | <input type="checkbox"/> Bertrand Russell (\$75/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Robert Ingersoll (\$500/yr.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Senior - 65+ (\$15/yr.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Thomas Paine (\$100/yr.)    | <input type="checkbox"/> Lifetime (\$1,000)           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family (\$45/yr.)       |  |   |

Do you object to your name appearing on our membership list, distributed to other members?  Yes  No

I'm interesting in getting involved in the FCFS as a(n):

- General member     Committee member     Officer     Financial supporter

- Annual dues cover the period of **January 1 through December 31**.
- The initial dues for new members joining in **July through September** are half the regular rates. Membership extends to the end of the current calendar year.
- The initial dues for new members joining in **October through December** are the full, regular rates. Membership extends to the end of the following calendar year.

***You can make a lasting impact on the future of  
freethought and secular humanism in this community  
...if you provide for the First Coast Freethought Society in your Will.***

Your bequest will ensure that the FCFS continues to be a beacon for freethinkers on the First Coast and to remain a vital Voice of Reason in the Northeast Florida area. Several options are available for establishing a bequest (specific, percentage, residual, or contingent). We will be happy to provide the appropriate wording to you and your attorney, depending upon your wishes.

For further information, contact  
Carrie Renwick, P.O. Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591 or  
904-288-6291 • [CarrieRen@att.net](mailto:CarrieRen@att.net) • <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/>  
All inquiries are held in the strictest confidence.

# FCFS February 2009 Activities

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 Book Group	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16 Public Meeting	17	18	19	20	21 Article Deadline
22 Secular Sunday	23	24 Olive Garden	25	26	27	28

Visit our website at <http://www.firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/>.

In the Adobe version, the links are **LIVE!** One click takes you there. If the Two-line links do not work, copy and paste into your browser window.

## ***Evolution 101: (Only the Basics of Evolution)***

*(Continued from page 9)*

stantly changing world.

Most changes slowly occur over millions of years. Sudden changes in the climate or the food chain can cause mass extinctions. Sometimes, the population of a group may drop down to only a few dozen. These survivors may have had the characteristic variable which allowed them to survive, when all others in their group perished. The small numbers of the group would make it very unlikely that any transitional taxon can be captured by the fossil record.

During these population ups

and downs, peaks and valleys, slight genetic mutations can occur and will sometimes be passed on. Another factor in evolution is that the genetic replicators do not always make perfect copies of themselves. Also, mistakes are sometimes made and mutations occur. Duplicate instructions may cause an extra vertebra in the spine, or an extra set of ribs, for example..

Now take all of this into consideration. A group of animals can be isolated from its ancestor group for a million years and, for whatever reason, find themselves living side by side once again. In that million years of isolation, accumulation of slight genetic changes over all that

time would make the two groups now two distinctly different species. The parent group may not have changed much in appearance over the millions years.

How much a species evolves in a million years depends on a multitude of variable factors. A group of animals may go through a million years of stability, with little pressure to evolve. Food may be plentiful for all and the climate and geology may not change for a million years. The entire ecosystem may remain in harmony for long periods of time. Populations of all the gene pools can stay relatively high, reducing the odds of speciation.

