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June 2015

Volume 14, Issue 6

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June 2015 Meeting

- **What:** FCFS Monthly Meeting
- **Who:** Rabbi Merrill Shapiro, President, National Board of Trustees, Americans United for Separation of Church and State
- **Title:** “**The Theocracy War: Dispatches from the Front**”
- **When:** Monday, June 15, 2015, 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. (doors open at 6:00)

- **Where:** Buckman Bridge Unitarian Church, 8447 Manresa Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32244
(From the I-295 Roosevelt exit, go north to the first traffic light, Collins Rd. Turn right on Collins. Go 400 ft. The church driveway will be on your right.)

Meetings Free and Open to the Public • Plenty of Free Parking

Meeting Description

Religious nationalism, an American Taliban, has now become part of American political theater! When Fundamentalists elsewhere in the world insist on tolerance for the oppression of women, for instance, we recognize the injustice of their demands. When Fundamentalists talk about basing their laws on their sacred scriptures or making our community a Theocracy, we have no trouble seeing that their ideas are deeply incompatible with modern Democracy. Yet when Northeast Florida's Theocrats demonize gay men and lesbians and declare their intention to govern our community in the name of Christ, we imagine that, because this is 21st century America, it is somehow different! It isn't.

Meet the Speaker

Rabbi Merrill Shapiro grew up in Bloomfield, northern New Jersey, and studied electrical engineering at both Cornell University and Newark College of Engineering (now New Jersey Institute of Technology). He became a student at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and was identified as an educational leader by the Melton Research Center for Jewish Education and sent to lead its pilot school in Columbus, Ohio. Recognized as a Senior Educator in North America, Shapiro was awarded a Pincus Fellowship to study and serve as a graduate research assistant at Jerusalem's Hebrew University. While in Jerusalem, he completed his Rabbinic studies. He returned to this country where he has continued to educate and lead for many years. Rabbi Shapiro currently serves as the spiritual leader of Temple Shalom of Deltona, in Volusia County. He is also President of the National Board of Trustees of Americans United for Separation of Church and State.



It is in this capacity that nationally-known activist Rabbi Shapiro will be speaking to us tonight about "The Theocracy War: Dispatches from the Front."

President's Message - June 2015 - NPR Annual Corporate Sponsorship Fund Drive Now Underway

Earl Coggins

I ran across a folded newspaper last week while doing some needed spring cleaning in my office. The paper was the Metro section of the *Florida Times-Union* newspaper dated March 25, 2010. The large, bold headline said, "Billboards say atheists are here."

I reread it for the first time in over five years. The article concerned our 2010 billboard campaign associated with the United Coalition of Reason. The billboard message was benign and simply and succinctly stated, "Don't believe in God? You are not alone."

Several local ministers were quoted. One said he was concerned that the message on the billboards "...throws confusion out to the people...who are not solidly grounded in their faith." This was from the Reverend Armand Egnew, pastor of Crosswalk Community Church, an Assemblies of God congregation in Fleming Island. Egnew went on to say, "the church needs to step up and show these people there is a god."



I had to laugh. I sat there, newspaper in hand, wondering what was going through Egnew's mind when he gave his statement to Jeff Brumley, the *Times-Union* reporter who interviewed him. His and most other churches have been attempting to prove the existence of a god or gods throughout recorded human history. Was Egnew's statement a subconscious confession that the attempt by his and all other churches to prove the existence of a god or gods had been a failure? Was he throwing the intelligence of the masses under the bus by saying our billboard would confuse them? Was he saying people are easily swayed by billboards?



Billboard in Northeast Florida co-sponsored by the First Coast Freethought Society--prior to being damaged by a presumably Christian zealot opposed to the First Amendment and free speech.

Rereading the 2010 article immediately brought thoughts to my mind of how important freethought organizations, like the First Coast Freethought Society, are to North Florida. Getting the Jacksonville Atheist meetup (JAM) was a welcome breath of fresh air, along with the freethought groups that have sprung up in St. Augustine. We need them all screaming at the top of their lungs for the need to respect diversity and to stop the zero-sum game being played out in the arguments and wars over who's right and who's wrong about the existence of a god or gods. While people and nations are busy arguing and fighting over whose god is the one true god, people are starving, people are being murdered, people are dying from curable diseases, people's freedoms are being taken away from them, and our planet is being raped by environmental degradation.

The First Coast Freethought Society has been screaming, politely, since 1998, for respect for sound

science, reason, diversity, freedom of speech, justice, and environmental sustainability. We do it through our monthly speakers, our special events, and our NPR radio announcements.

Our NPR announcements are our strength. We have established a sustained secular presence in our community for seven years with the regular occurrence of our NPR announcements. Unfortunately, every year the NPR announcements are in danger of going away unless we raise enough money to keep them afloat. The NPR announcements do more than merely tell the community who our next monthly speaker will be. The NPR announcements tell the Reverend Egnew and his colleagues something they need to hear for the rest of their lives: we don't all think alike and that's okay.

I don't like asking for money any more than anyone else, but the NPR announcements are the most important thing we as freethinkers working together have done and continue to do. I am asking you to give to this year's fund drive so that our presence will continue to be what it always has been: a voice of reason in our community.

This year, we are striving to raise \$6,700, which, combined with membership dues, would enable us to have our full complement of 13 announcements per month, for the period of July 2015 through June 2016. If 115 folks would each buy one announcement, at \$58, we would reach our goal! But whether you give more or less, please contribute if at all possible. Every bit helps, and if we all pull together, we can succeed!

**Let's all help spread the word
about Freethought by donating
to the FCFS 2015 NPR
Corporate Sponsorship Fund
Drive**



To Donate on a Monthly Basis

1. Go to the FCFS website home page, <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>, where you will find a PayPal button to make an automatic monthly donation to our NPR fund. Automatic monthly donations via PayPal require you to have a PayPal account.
2. Set it up through your online banking system.

To Donate on a One-Time Basis

1. Visit the website, <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>, where you will find the opportunity to contribute on our homepage. You can pay via PayPal or with any major credit card (via PayPal).
2. Mail a check payable to the FCFS to PO Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255.
3. Bring your contribution to a meeting or another FCFS event and give it to a board member.

Whichever method you select, you will receive a letter from the treasurer, suitable for your IRS records, acknowledging your tax-deductible contribution. Thank you!

June 23, 2015 Olive Garden Social

- **Where:** OLIVE GARDEN on Philips Highway, across from the Avenues Mall. The hostesses will know where we are seated. Proceed directly to our room.
- **When:** Tuesday, JUNE 23, 2015, at 6:00 p.m. Social hour at 6:00. Dinner at 7:00. We order from the menu.
- **RSVP:** E-mail CarrieRen@att.net (or call 904-268-8826) by Tuesday morning, if you plan to attend!

Master Races, Genes, Sunlight and a Little Milk

Fred W. Hill

A little over 70 years ago now, the Third Reich collapsed, Hitler's imperial ambitions having brought him and his regime to ruin. With the surrender of the Japanese Empire a few months later, the last massive attempts at colonial expansion had come to an end. The Germans and the Japanese, however, had been relative latecomers to the "great game" of global imperialism, following the examples of the ancient Macedonians, Romans, Arabs, Mongols, Turks, Aztecs, Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, French, English, Belgians, Russians, Manchurians, Chinese, and U.S. Americans, just to name some of the peoples who expanded by forcefully taking territory from their neighbors or from distant strangers, often enslaving but occasionally slaughtering the conquered. And nearly always with the full blessings of whatever god(s) the conquerors happened to believe in.



God, if we accept the literal truth of the Book of Deuteronomy ("the Second Law") of the Jewish and Christian holy books, commanded the Hebrews to take the land of Canaan and slaughter everyone they found there, save for young virginal women whom the conquerors were to rape as their just spoils. As far as Hitler was concerned, he was following an ancient and holy tradition in conquering the lands of the Poles and Russians and other "races" he deemed inferior, with the ultimate plan of enslaving or exterminating all of them to allow for the greater expansion of the German peoples, just as the various peoples of western European ancestry had done in the Americas and Australia. And in Hitler's feverish imagination, the only reason the capitalist powers of the west opposed him was that they had become mongrel races, corrupted and hoodwinked by Jews, sly Asiatic invaders of Europe, and the mortal enemy

of the pure German or Nordic race, the greatest of the Aryan peoples.



Propaganda poster of der Fuhrer in white armor leading the Master Race--over a cliff, as things would turn out.

Although there was much support for Hitler's racism even within the scientific community during the 19th and early 20th centuries, modern scientific consensus holds there never was any such thing as a German or any other sort of human race at all, pure or otherwise, in any biological sense. Human races are really no more than cultural constructs to differentiate people by skin color, ethnicity, language, or any of many other ultimately superficial differences that exist in the many sub-groupings humans have created for themselves. All modern humans, however, are of one species, *Homo sapiens*, having diverged from our last ancestral species in Africa between 200,000 to 100,000 years ago, and the last other known hominid species having gone extinct perhaps 40,000 to 12,000 years ago. Certainly, there is much physiological divergence among modern humans, due to our ancestors having spread thousands of years ago to so many divergent environments across the globe, with branches being sufficiently divided from others long enough to evolve variable traits, including those that helped them better survive under local conditions. Our African ancestors, living in sun-drenched regions near the equator, had darker skin that provided protection from skin cancer and excessive exposure to ultra-violet light. At least some branches of people who lived in the far north of Eurasia, with much less sunlight, lost much of that protective pigmentation as it was less necessary, but in central and southern Europe, recent studies suggest, the vast majority of people were still dark-skinned and lactose-intolerant as adults until about 5,800 years ago, when peoples from regions surrounding the Black Sea migrated in a mass movement to central Europe, bringing both farming techniques and genes that favored light skin, previously rare in the region but quickly spreading thereafter. As reported by Ann Gibbons in *Science* magazine, "The likely explanation for the pigmentation genes is to maximize vitamin D synthesis," said paleoanthropologist Nina Jablonski of Pennsylvania State University...People living in northern latitudes often don't get enough UV to synthesize vitamin D in their skin, so natural selection has favored two genetic solutions to that problem—evolving pale skin that absorbs UV more efficiently or favoring lactose tolerance to be able to digest the sugars and vitamin D naturally found in milk."

<http://news.sciencemag.org/archaeology/2015/04/how-europeans-evolved-white-skin>

Milk: has nothing to do with white skin, but genetic mutations for lactose tolerance in adults and for lighter skin that

could absorb more UV rays from sunlight helped ancient Europeans avoid vitamin D deficiency and associated bone disorders.



Yes, based on a scientific analysis of the available evidence, one branch of Homo sapiens evolved pale skin as a means to be able to make up the vitamin D deficiency they would otherwise have from living in a habitat that received less sunlight than that of their African ancestors. It was all about levels of exposure to the sun, beneficial genetic mutations, and natural means to obtain a vitamin necessary to keep bones strong. Nothing to do, contrary to biblical interpretation, with one branch of humanity being specially blessed or cursed by a deity to have lighter or darker skin tones. Branches of Homo sapiens mutated from common ancestors just enough to have many varying skin, eye, and hair colors, heights and facial features, among the most obvious features, but no known branch for at least 10 millennia has been so isolated from the others as to evolve into an entirely different species. Ultimately, we are all kin and all descendants of Africans.

Not that knowing any of that would have mattered to Hitler or other racists. Facts never mattered to them unless they matched their pre-conceived notions. Even Japanese ultra-nationalists considered themselves a master race, meant to dominate all others, including their Chinese neighbors who had their own ideas about who was really the superior group. As did the English, among whom Rudyard Kipling poetically exhorted his brethren of European ancestry to pick up the "White Man's Burden" to rule the world and thereby civilize the darker, reputedly more savage peoples. The poem, first published in 1899, was specifically aimed at the U.S., encouraging the wayward child of the British Empire to seize the Philippine Islands rather than let them slip into independence after the defeat of their former Spanish overlords. The Americans, who had spent the previous century pushing ever further west across North America to forcibly take territory from their "red-skinned" neighbors and then crossed over half the Pacific Ocean to take over the Hawaiian Islands, hadn't needed much persuasion to cross the other half to add the Philippines to their possessions, even if it meant beating the Spanish to do it. But then the Spanish, although white, weren't part of the Nordic race and were Catholic, rather than "true" Christian. Every supposed "master race" found some way to belittle both those they would rule, as well as their rivals. Even the Germans were tagged by the British as "Huns," a throwback to the Asiatic "barbarians" who under the rule of Attila in the 5th century held much of Eurasia, from western Kazakhstan to most of what is now Germany.

Attila the Hun also believed he was pretty special and conquered a lot of territory before dying of a nose-bleed and choking after getting rip-



roaring drunk on his wedding night.

For a time, Hitler ruled an empire nearly as large, over much of the same range, and far more brutally, alienating many “inferior races” who might have otherwise joined in his campaign against the mildly less savage rule of the Soviets. But eventually those same Soviets reduced Hitler’s domain to a city block surrounded by their armies. In his last hours, he blamed the Jews for uniting the world against him, he blamed the German people for failing him, and he blamed his subordinates for betraying him. His only failure was in being too kind and trusting! In truth, of course, Hitler was blinded by his many irrational hatreds and his belief that he was divinely destined to be the master of the Master Race and would establish a global empire that would last a thousand years. He was hardly unique in his hatreds, and it was only a series of historical flukes that enabled him to use what talent he had to reach the height of power he once held and attempt to transform his dreams into reality at such horrible cost. Such beliefs that any one person or “race” is superior to all others and has a right to dominate or extinguish them has somewhat ebbed in the decades since Hitler permanently cured his own mania with a bullet. Yet there are still too many who share his mania, claiming racial, nationalist, or religious superiority over all and dismissing all scientific and historical evidence to the contrary. World War II has so far been the greatest example of how such delusions of superiority can tear us apart, destroying millions of lives. I doubt such ingrained tribal hatreds will ever entirely disappear while our species thrives, but perhaps if more people put aside such delusions of grandeur, including the pious notion that we exist to serve some mysterious purpose of a supposedly all-powerful deity, we can learn to see through superficial differences and recognize our shared humanity and treat one another as part of a larger, preferably loving, family. A dream, yes, but we have only brief lives on our cosmic speck, and to quote a famous dreamer of yore, “...there’s no time for fussing and fighting, my friend.” So I still hope we can work it out and come to “live as one.”



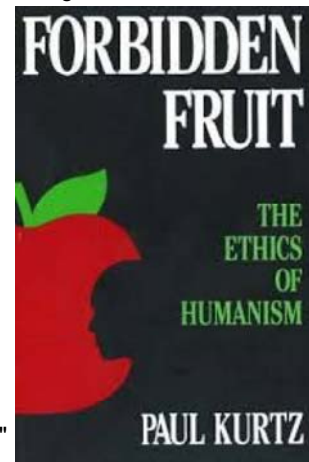
Humanist Book Discussion Group - Jacksonville

- **When:** 3:00 - 4:30 p.m., the first Sunday of each month.
- **Where:** Books-A-Million, 9400 Atlantic Boulevard, Jacksonville, FL 32225.
- **What:** Books planned for discussion:
 - July 5, 2015 - *Forbidden Fruit* by Paul Kurtz
 - August 2, 2015 - *Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism* by Susan Jacoby

Paul Kurtz, America's leading secular humanist philosopher, affirms that it is possible to live the good life and be morally responsible, without belief in religion. In this original and penetrating book, Kurtz delineates the means by which humanity can transcend the limitations of traditional religious loyalties and achieve a higher stage of ethics.

Fundamentalists deny the possibility of ethics without belief in God. Conservatives rail against secularists. Yet belief in God is no guarantee of moral virtue - as the evils committed in the name of religion have vividly shown. Are there secular ethical principles and values that are vital for a world in crisis?

In this new edition of *Forbidden Fruit*, Kurtz defends the ethics of secularism and humanism. In order to progress to a maximum level of creative development, he maintains that we must be nourished by the "forbidden fruit" of the knowledge of good and evil, grounding principles and values in autonomous reason. This is the path that leads to the discovery of significant ethical truths that can guide both self-reliant conduct and consideration for the rights of others. By breaking the bonds of theistic illusion, we can summon the courage and wisdom to develop a rational ethic based on a realistic appraisal of nature and an awareness of the centrality of the moral decencies common to all peoples.



The ultimate key to the good life, Kurtz writes, is to eat of the fruit of the second tree in the Garden of Eden - the tree of life - discovering for ourselves the manifold potentialities for a bountiful existence.

Forbidden Fruit contains important chapters on ethical excellences for individuals, moral education for children, and thoughts on privacy and human rights, in addition to presenting concrete ethical recommendations as alternatives to the reigning orthodoxies. (From product description, Prometheusbooks.com)

Link to Book Review: <http://atheism.about.com/od/bookreviews/fr/ForbiddenFruit.htm>

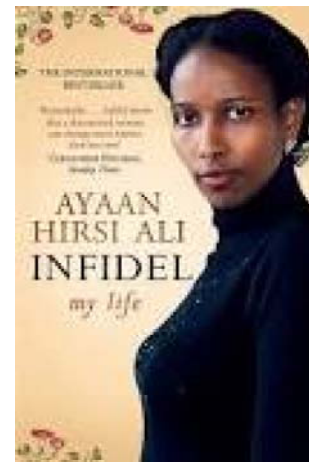
For More Info: Contact Herb Gerson at 12herbert30gerson@bellsouth.net, or call 904-363-6446.

Humanist Book Discussion Group - St. Augustine

- **When:** 7:00 - 8:30 p.m., the second Thursday of each month.
- **Where:** Clubhouse at a private condominium in St. Augustine (Anastasia Island).
- **What:** Books planned for discussion:
 - July 9, 2015 - *Infidel* by Ayaan Hirsi Ali
 - August 13, 2015 -- *The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Non-Believer*, selected and with introductions by Christopher Hitchens

One of today's most admired and controversial political figures, Ayaan Hirsi Ali burst into international headlines following the murder of Theo van Gogh by an Islamist who threatened that she would be next. She made headlines again when she was stripped of her citizenship and resigned from the Dutch Parliament.

Infidel shows the coming of age of this distinguished political superstar and champion of free speech as well as the development of her beliefs, iron will, and extraordinary determination to fight injustice. Raised in a strict Muslim family, Hirsi Ali survived civil war, female mutilation, brutal beatings, adolescence as a devout believer during the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, and life in four troubled, unstable countries ruled largely by despots. She escaped from a forced marriage and sought asylum in the Netherlands, where she earned a college degree in political science, tried to help her tragically depressed sister adjust to the West, and fought for the rights of Muslim women and the reform of Islam as a member of Parliament. Under constant threat, demonized by reactionary Islamists and politicians, disowned by her father, and expelled from family and clan, she refuses to be silenced.



Ultimately a celebration of triumph over adversity, Hirsi Ali's story tells how a bright little girl evolves out of dutiful obedience to become an outspoken, pioneering freedom fighter. As Western governments struggle to balance democratic ideals with religious pressures, no other book could be more timely or more significant. (From Simon & Schuster book description)

Link to Book Review: http://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/14/books/14grim.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

More Info: Contact Bill Stroop at bill@strooplaw.com for address, directions, and gate code.

NOTE TO ALL! Books may be found in the library, purchased from local book stores or online. The First Coast Freethought Society will receive a small remuneration from your purchase (at no additional cost to you) if you first go to <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org> and then click the link to Amazon.com for your purchase.

And Now, to our Off-Shore Correspondent in Thailand... “Most Religious Country?”

Lance Stoll

(Sociologist Lance Stoll, long-time member and friend of the First Coast Freethought Society, is currently living and teaching in Thailand. He shares his views from afar. —Editor's Note.)

I recently read a survey of the world's religiosity, and I was flabbergasted to read that Thailand came out number one! This really surprised me as I've lived in Thailand now for 7 months and I sure don't feel that I am living in a very religious country. It makes me question the methodology of the study and the definitions being employed.

In America, especially the American South, I was confronted with open religiosity and the bigotry it employs on a daily basis. Most of the hatred and intolerance in America is generated and justified by evangelical Christianity. Whether it's racism and the KKK or the Family Values group with its prejudice against LGBT Americans, Christianity and its 2000-year-old mythology drives the ideology of exclusivity, intolerance, and hatred. Theirs is a theology which argues for the issue of being exclusive; the only ones who go to heaven are Christians and the rest rot in eternal damnation (quite a loving ideology). It is actually this religious ideology that led America to destroy Native Americans with the idea of Manifest Destiny, to engage in 300 years of African slavery, and now drives this perverse notion of American Exceptionalism which allows, justifies, and drives American imperialism worldwide. On a daily, casual basis, American religiosity means you hear, "I'll pray for you," "God bless," and the constant barrage of soliciting for Jesus that one is accosted with on the streets, in the work place, and even knocking on your door. So, this is what a religious country looks and feels like to me. Thailand is nothing like this.



In Thailand, religion is implied, it is underlying, and it is simply part of Thai culture, like the monarchy. No one asks if you know Buddha! No one says they'll pray for you. No one knocks on your door to ask if you'd like to hear any "good news." We celebrate all secular and Buddhist holidays, and monks come to ceremonies and people give them food. There are Buddhist holy sites all over Thailand, "Wats," which are shrines, monasteries, and temples, some new and some dating back thousands of years. There are golden Buddha statues all over the place and people visit them as tourist sites and to burn incense and show respect.

**Buddhas inside a
Thai temple**



Much of Thai Buddhist tradition includes Hindu gods and ideas as well. There are monkey and elephant god statues in temples as well. Buddhism is a highly personal religion and one is responsible for his or her own "salvation," if you will. In fact, by western religious standards, Buddhism is more of a lifestyle than a religion. I'm not sure how the survey asked questions about religion here in Thailand, but Thai people "believe" in Buddhism as they "believe" in the monarchy: Both are a part of Thai tradition. I really don't think you can compare Thai religion to that in the west. Religion here is a deeply personal matter and not something forced on others or used to ridicule others. Thais are a deeply respectful society, respectful of their own traditions and of others. While they don't force their traditions on others, they welcome all to share in them. I'm sure if I said bad things about Buddha or the King, I'd be thrown out in a minute, but I don't have to be a Buddhist. No one would ever say I was going to rot in hell for not being Buddhist.

So as a freethinker, I do not feel as though I am living in a religious society. I know I'm living in a society that honors its traditions and will be respectful of them. This is easy in a country that does not force ideology down your throat. In my Jewish background, the theology meant nothing, but the traditions were meaningful for the family to keep. Remember *Fiddler on the Roof*? "TRADITION, TRADITION!"

About our newsletter, the *First Coast FreeThinker* Information for Readers

The First Coast FreeThinker is published for all freethinkers and potential freethinkers. Nonmembers and members may receive the e-mail version indefinitely. Nonmembers may receive three hard-copy issues free, after which they must join the FCFS to continue to receive hard copy. Members are entitled to receive hard-copy should they prefer. The e-mail version is encouraged, as the newsletter is optimized for on-screen reading.

Readers are invited and encouraged to share 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 that stimulate thought

and promote discussion on a variety of subjects.

Information for Contributors

We welcome submissions. Articles, poetry, etc. should be e-mailed to Editor@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org. Material may be submitted only ELECTRONICALLY. Submissions may be formatted in MS Word, in a text file, or cut and pasted into an e-mail.

The deadline for time-sensitive material is the THIRD SATURDAY of each month for the following month's issue, but submissions are welcome anytime.

We prefer articles no longer than 1,000 words. Longer articles will be evaluated in terms of whether their importance and degree of interest to our readers warrant publication.

Subject matter must tie in with [freethought](#) or with the [Affirmations of Humanism: A Statement of Principles](#) (found on our website). All accepted submissions are subject to editorial modification. Our style guide is *The Chicago Manual of Style*. Authors (not the First Coast Freethought Society) are responsible for the accuracy of all quotations and for supplying complete references where applicable.

Volunteer Opportunity - Dignity U Wear

Celia Abbruzzese
Community Outreach Chair

Dignity U Wear
136 North Myrtle Avenue
Jacksonville, FL 32204

Phone: (904) 636-9455
Toll-Free: (888) 364-1305
Fax: (904) 636-8649
www.DignityUWear.org



The next DUW is June 20, 2015, 9:00 a.m.

Remember, a good FCFS turn-out will enable this volunteer activity to continue. If folks do not attend, we will lose our spot! Join us as we help our fellow human beings who are less fortunate. To see how it works, read on.

The Way It Works

On the third Saturday of each month, from 9:00 a.m. until noon, FCFS members and friends gather, together with the Jacksonville Atheist Meetup group (JAM), to volunteer at the Dignity U Wear (DUW) environmentally-controlled warehouse. Come to 136 North Myrtle Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32204. Sign in at the door with your name and group. In air-conditioned comfort, sort and fold new clothing to assist those in need. (Closed-toed shoes are required, as this is a working warehouse. Children under 16 are not allowed; children 16 and over are welcome, attended or unattended.) For dates and further details, visit the website: <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/component/content/article/50/150>

Religious Freedom?

Merrill Shapiro

[Editor's note: The following is a letter to the editor of the Tampa Tribune published on January 7, 2015, and reprinted here with the kind permission of the author, who is also this month's FCFS guest speaker!]

In your [*Tampa Tribune*] Jan. 3 editorial "Encouraging voucher victory," you mention that you fail to see how Florida's Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship scheme violates the separation of church and state. I became a plaintiff in this case on behalf of Americans United for Separation of Church and State because this program thumbs its nose at some core values of our country's democracy as expressed in the First Amendment to the *U.S. Constitution* and Article I of the *Florida Constitution*.



Four dollars out of every five spent by this program sends children to religious schools. Florida's Corporate Tax Credit Scholarship forces *Tampa Tribune* readers and some 5 million of our state's Catholics to pay for the religious education of thousands of Seventh Day Adventist students, while Florida's 1.8 million Baptists are paying for the religious education of scores of Muslim students. More than half-a-million Evangelicals in our Sunshine State are paying for the religious education of Episcopalians, while the state's 600,000 Jews are supporting curricula that teach that "God does not hear the prayers of Jews."

The *Tribune* itself is paying taxes to make up the loss the state treasury incurs when other corporations walk away with fat credits. Thus, the cost of educating some of these children that Allah is the only God and Muhammad is the Prophet of Allah is borne by your company. You help pay to educate some of the children in this program that the Earth is but 10,000 years old. You are making it possible for some students to learn that the slavery in the U.S. was a good thing, bringing pagan blacks from Africa to these shores, where they could be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Is this the kind of religious freedom you feel Floridians should have?

Rabbi Merrill Shapiro
Palm Coast, FL

(The writer is president of Americans United for Separation of Church and State National Board of Trustees.)



Just another one of the things our tax dollars may support, teaching through vouchers for private religious indoctrination masquerading as education.

About the First Coast Freethought Society



First Coast Freethought Society, Inc.
 P.O. Box 550591
 Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591
 904-419-8826
<http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>

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.

Membership

If you share our world view and would like to be a part of the FCFS, we encourage you to join. If you are new, or if you are renewing and your contact info has changed, you can pick up an application or a brochure at a meeting, or you can download and print an application on our website: <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/app> and mail it in.

- You can join online: <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/support>
- You can join by mail: Send your application and check, payable to the FCFS, to PO Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591.

Meetings

The FCFS meets the THIRD Monday of each month at the Buckman Bridge Unitarian Universalist Church, 8447 Manresa Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32244.

Directions: From the I-295 Roosevelt exit, go north to the first traffic light, Collins Rd. Turn right. Go 400 feet. The church driveway will be on your right.

Meeting time: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Doors open at 6:00 p.m. Meetings are free and open to the public.

Other Activities

- Two monthly **humanist book discussion groups**, one in Jacksonville and one in St. Augustine. Current books are listed in each newsletter. For further details, visit <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/bdg>.
- A monthly **social and dinner at the Olive Garden**. See details in each newsletter.
- **Secular Sunday in the Park** - Coffee and conversation in the fresh air on a monthly basis. We meet the fourth Sunday of each month, 10:00 a.m. to noon, at [Losco Regional Park](#), 10851 Hood Road South, Jax, 32257. See Activities section of the FCFS home page: <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/>.
- **Dinners for Doubters** (when scheduled).
- **Dignity U Wear** - a volunteer opportunity on a monthly basis at the Dignity U Wear warehouse in Jacksonville. Visit <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/component/content/article/50/150> for details. Currently scheduled for the third Saturday morning of each month, from 9:00 a.m. - noon, through December 2015.
- A **Yahoo! Group** for freethinkers. To subscribe, send a blank message to jaxfreethought-subscribe@yahoogleroups.com).

For information on all these activities, please visit <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>, or see the calendar of events at the end of each newsletter and on the website. You need not be a member to attend these activities!

FCFS 2015 Board Members

President - Earl Coggins: 904-521-5039

Vice President - Carrie Renwick: 904-268-8826

Secretary - Liz DuClose: 352-260-2880

Treasurer - Stephen Peek: 904-742-5390

At-Large - Herb Gerson: 904-363-6446

At-Large - Fred Hill: 904-358-3610

At Large - John Ruskuski: 904-419-8826

Other Appointments

Parliamentarian - Mark Renwick: 904-616-2896

E-mail Secretary - Carrie Renwick: 904-268-8826

Committees and Chairs

Community Outreach - Celia Abbruzzese: 904-982-8431

Editorial - Fred Hill: 904-358-3610

Finance - Stephen Peek: 904-742-5390

Fundraising - Carrie Renwick: 904-268-8826

Membership - Judy Hankins: 904-724-8188

Publicity - Carrie Renwick: 904-268-8826

Website - Mark Renwick: 904-616-2896

All FCFS personnel may be reached via e-mail at

info@firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org

July 20, 2015 Meeting

Carrie Renwick, Program Chair

In July, our speaker will be David Jaffee, Ph.D., Professor of Sociology, Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Social Work, University of North Florida. The title of his talk is, "The Politics of Neoliberalism." Dr. Jaffee explains, neoliberalism has been the dominant political economic paradigm in the United States since the 1980s. It is an ideology, with significant policy implications, that has transformed both our economy and our political institutions. We shall consider how neoliberalism has shaped electoral politics, the two party system, and the prospects for democracy.

Bequests

*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 remains a vital Voice of Reason in Northeast Florida.

Several options are available for establishing a bequest (specific, percentage, residual, or contingent). We can provide the appropriate wording to you and your attorney, depending upon your wishes. Or, just talk to your attorney. Our EIN is 20-1462737.

For further information, contact

Carrie Renwick, PO Box 550591, Jacksonville, FL 32255-0591 or
904-419-8826 • CarrieRen@att.net • <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>

All inquiries are held in the strictest confidence.

Northeast Florida Coalition of Reason

- First Coast Freethought Society: <http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org>
- Jacksonville Atheist, Agnostic, Secular Meetup Group (JAM): <http://jaxatheists.com>
- Secular Saint Augustine (SSA): <http://meetup.com/Secular-Saint-Augustine>

The FCFS is a proud member of the [Florida Humanist Association](#) (formerly the Humanists of Florida Association).

Freethought Events on the First Coast

- Monday, June 15 - FCFS Monthly Meeting at Buckman Bridge Unitarian Church, 6:30 p.m.
- Friday, June 19 - [Secular St. Augustine Meetup](#) - St. Augustine, 7:00 p.m. (Meetups are generally the third Friday, but you need to visit the website to RSVP and for meeting details.)
- Saturday, June 20 - Dignity U Wear, 9:00 a.m.
- Sunday, June 21 - JAM Session, 1:00 p.m. (See <http://www.meetup.com/jaxatheists/> for details.)
- Tuesday, June 23 - FCFS Monthly Social at Olive Garden, Jacksonville, 6:00 p.m.
- Saturday, June 27 - FCFS July 2015 Newsletter Deadline
- Sunday, June 28 - FCFS Secular Sunday in the Park, Jacksonville, 10:00 a.m.
- Sunday, July 5 - Humanist Book Discussion Group - Jacksonville, 3:00 p.m.
- Thursday, July 9 - Humanist Book Discussion Group - St. Augustine, Anastasia Island, 7:00 p.m.
- Monday, July 13- JAM Session, 6:30 p.m. (See <http://www.meetup.com/jaxatheists/> for details.)
- Monday, July 20 - FCFS Monthly Meeting at Buckman Bridge Unitarian Church - 6:30 p.m.

Directions to Monthly Meeting at BBUUC

Our monthly meetings are held at the **Buckman Bridge Unitarian Universalist Church (BBUUC)**, 8447 Manresa Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32244. The address is Manresa, but the main entrance to the church is located on Collins Rd.

- From I-295, take the Roosevelt exit. Go north on Roosevelt Blvd. to the first traffic light which is Collins Rd. Turn right onto Collins. Go 400 feet. The main entrance to the church is located on Collins Rd., on the right.
- Going south on Roosevelt, look for Atlantic Self-Storage on the left. This is the Collins Rd. intersection. Turn left onto Collins. Go 400 feet. The main entrance to the church is on Collins Rd.,

on the right. (If you come to I-295, you've gone too far, turn around, and you will turn right onto Collins Rd.)

MAP ON FCFS WEBSITE

See accurate map at this link: http://firstcoastfreethoughtsociety.org/cms/lib/fcfs_bbuuc_map.gif (Please note, Google Maps, as well as other maps, may not be consistent with the actual street signs.)

Membership Application



Use this PDF form
[website](#).

to print the application and mail it in with your check, or join on our

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