



The Humanist Society of the Suncoast

A Socratic society dedicated to the proposition that the fully examined life is well worth living.
Member organization of the [Humanists of Florida](#), the [AHA](#), and [ASHS](#). Find us at www.metrodirect.net/humanist

Our Program for Saturday, November 1st Economic security in hard Times

As Wall Street tries its best to give us a repeat performance of its fabulous 1929 show, many of us are left to wonder how we will be able to survive the rapidly diminishing value of our various assets. While this presentation is meant mainly to consider the single aspect of the reverse mortgage solution, this is not the only option we can discuss.

Many of us are living in rental housing without benefit of mortgage. We must depend on uncertain savings and/or rely solely on social security and other fixed income sources. In many ways, the crises that seems to be overtaking us is going to demand a concerted political effort to ensure the humane survival of a large number of people who are vulnerable to dramatic cuts in their standard of living.

Unfortunately, times like these often bring forth an assortment of fraudulent or predatory schemes. But with so little legal protections, it is up to us to remain vigilant and use our intelligence and experience to sift through the various claims. The presentation we will hear this time affords us another opportunity to ask sharp questions, use logic, and use our skeptical sense to compare our various personal experiences. We can use this session to plumb the depth of our guest's knowledge to help us. JP

What is the Better Living for Seniors Consortium?

The BLS Consortium is a group of professionals who work with seniors to promote continuing service excellence to seniors. BLS was created in 1988 in affiliation with the Area Agency on Aging of Pasco-Pinellas, Inc.

9887 4th Street N. Suite 100

St. Petersburg, FL 33702

www.agingcarefl.org



Janet Brooks and Donna Moore above, are specially trained and licensed Reverse Mortgage Brokers. Licensing holds them to the highest industry regulations. Both are Certified Reverse Mortgage Experts, who represent a vast array of programs. They present these products to their clients unbiased and without fine print or asterisks.

Their affiliations include the Chamber of Commerce, Better Living for Seniors Organization, Kiwanis, Toastmasters and NRMLA. Donna and Janet provide free, educational reverse mortgage presentations to groups and organizations throughout central Florida and the west coast.

In addition, Janet has 18 years of insurance licensing and specializes in Medicare analysis. Their offices can be reached at 800-540-3259.

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Cooperation

among all free-thought groups is gaining momentum with the Agreement between the Humanists of Florida and the Center for Inquiry, regionally. Locally, it means that our relationship with CFI will be enhanced with opportunities for shared activities and programs. It also means that the need for financial support for all these efforts will grow. There will be a supply of HoF newsletters available at this meeting with more details. JP

Center for Inquiry - Florida November Social Lunch

Kelly's in Dunedin is the place to be on Saturday, Nov. 8 at 11:30. \$7 up

RSVP by Thursday Nov. 6 NOON Phone 813.849.7571 or Tampa@CenterForInquiry.net
For info on our Humanist social dinner, see back .



Don't Forget...

Tampa Bay Harvest

There are Large numbers of homeless and hungry people in the Tampa bay area who are dependent on socially conscious citizens like us for life sustaining nutrients. **Bring a can, box, or two.** It's the Humanist thing to do!

Please join us for this free & open discussion.

**Saturday, November 1st
2:00 PM**

**Clearwater East Library
2251 Drew St.
Clearwater**

Following our meeting, we will dine together at the

Farmer Boy Restaurant
at 2129 Drew St. just 2 blks west of Library.



Humanists work to build a world in which happiness is the enduring criterion of social policy.

What do Humanists Want?

1. To extend a human centered approach to the critical problems of life and society.
2. To encourage attitudes of kindness, compassion, tolerance and a loving generosity in human relationships, and in our treatment of all life. These attitudes help us to see ourselves in the lives of others and encourage appreciation for the remarkable diversity of human culture and experience.
3. To develop and popularize the skills of creative and critical thinking that empower people to challenge prejudice, superstition and irrationality in every area of life. Such empowerment enables the individual to reach the highest levels of achievement.
4. To exalt those artistic and imaginative expressions of life which have been the source of the greatest pleasure and enlightenment, and which reflect compelling human truths. Through music, literature, art, dance, and other expressions, we embrace the essence of the human spirit.
5. To explore the grounds of ethics and morality within the unfolding history of our evolving culture. Such knowledge will enable us to become effective protagonists for the happiness of the individual person. JP

The Moveable Feast...

Our November social dinner will be held at the

TooJay's Gourmet Deli Restaurant

on **November 16th at 5:00PM.**

This restaurant is located at 27001 U S Hwy 19 in the Countryside Mall.

A wide variety of food is available at reasonable prices. Please reply with you reservations by Nov 15.

Please reserve with Glenn Paul at 727-595-3347 or glennkayp@juno.com by Saturday October 20th.

Sick Bay

Mitch and Katherine Modisett are going through some difficult times with health problems, but would love to hear from you. Give them a call at **(813) 788-5516** or E-mail mmodis@3oaks.com

Call **(813) 531-8138** for changes to this list.

JP

Laugh Lines Tales from the Help Desk

Samsung Electronics

Caller: 'Can you give me the telephone number for Jack?'

Operator: 'I'm sorry, sir, I don't understand who you are talking about.'

Caller: 'On page 1, section 5, of the user guide it clearly states that I need to unplug the fax machine from the AC wall socket and telephone Jack before cleaning. Now, can you give me the number for Jack?'

Operator: 'I think it means the telephone plug on the wall.'

RAC Motoring Services

Caller: 'Does your European Breakdown Policy cover me when I am traveling in Australia?'

Operator: 'Does the product name give you a clue?'

Caller (enquiring about legal requirements while traveling in Europe): 'If I register my car in France, and then take it to England, do I have to change the steering wheel to the other side of the car?'

Directory Enquiries

Caller: 'I'd like the number of the Argo Fish Bar, please'

Operator: 'I'm sorry, there's no listing. Are you sure that the spelling is correct?'

Caller: 'Well, it used to be called the Bargo Fish Bar but the 'B' fell off.'

.Thanks to *Connie Purdum*

Our Humanist Society is actively looking for interesting speakers with novel and well thought out ideas on just about any subject of interest to a general audience. Let me know if you would like to recommend a person or organization. Call Jim at (813) 531-8138

HUMANIST SOCIETY OF THE SUNCOAST

A chapter of the American Humanist Assoc. the Association of Secular Humanist Societies

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Join us in our effort to ignite critical thinking, and embrace reason, & compassion in life.

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33785-3010

Published on Tuesday, October 28, 2008 by The Guardian/UK

The degradation of intelligence and learning in American politics

By *Georges Monbiot*

How was it allowed to happen? How did politics in the US come to be dominated by people who make a virtue out of ignorance? Was it charity that has permitted mankind's closest living relative to spend two terms as president? How did Sarah Palin, Dan Quayle and other such gibbering numbskulls get to where they are? How could Republican rallies in 2008 be drowned out by screaming ignoramuses insisting that Barack Obama was a Muslim and a terrorist?

Like most people on my side of the Atlantic, I have for many years been mystified by American politics. The US has the world's best universities and attracts the world's finest minds. It dominates discoveries in science and medicine. Its wealth and power depend on the application of knowledge. Yet, uniquely among the developed nations (with the possible exception of Australia), learning is a grave political disadvantage.

There have been exceptions over the past century - Franklin Roosevelt, JF Kennedy and Bill Clinton tempered their intellectualism with the common touch and survived - but Adlai Stevenson, Al Gore and John Kerry were successfully tarred by their opponents as members of a cerebral elite (as if this were not a qualification for the presidency). Perhaps the defining moment in the collapse of intelligent politics was Ronald Reagan's response to Jimmy Carter during the 1980 presidential debate. Carter - stumbling a little, using long words - carefully enumerated the benefits of national health insurance. Reagan smiled and said: "There you go again." His own health program would have appalled most Americans, had he explained it as carefully as Carter had done, but he had found a formula for avoiding tough political issues and making his opponents look like wonks.

It wasn't always like this. The founding fathers of the republic - Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, John Adams, Alexander Hamilton and others - were among the greatest thinkers of their age. They felt no need to make a secret of it. How did the project they launched degenerate into George W Bush and Sarah Palin?

On one level, this is easy to answer. Ignorant politicians are elected by ignorant people. US education, like the US health system, is notorious for its failures. In the most powerful nation on earth, one adult in five believes the sun revolves round the earth; only 26% accept that evolution takes place by means of natural selection; two-thirds of young adults are unable to find Iraq on a map; two-thirds of US voters cannot name the three branches of government; the math skills of 15-year-olds in the US are ranked 24th out of the 29 countries of the OECD. But this merely extends the mystery: how did so many US citizens become so stupid, and so suspicious of intelligence? Susan Jacoby's book *The Age of American Unreason* provides the fullest explanation I have read so far. She shows that the degradation of US politics results from a series of interlocking tragedies.

One theme is both familiar and clear: religion - in particular fundamentalist religion - makes you stupid. The US is the only rich country in which Christian fundamentalism is vast and growing.

Jacoby shows that there was once a certain logic to its anti-rationalism. During the first few decades after the publication of *The Origin of Species*, for instance, Americans had good reason to reject the theory of natural selection and to treat public intellectuals with suspicion. From the beginning, Darwin's theory was mixed up in the US with the brutal philosophy - now known as social Darwinism - of the British writer Herbert Spencer. Spencer's doctrine, promoted in the popular press with the help of funding from Andrew Carnegie, John D Rockefeller and Thomas Edison, suggested that millionaires stood at the top of a scala natura established by evolution. By preventing unfit people being weeded out, government intervention weakened the nation. Gross economic inequalities were both justifiable and necessary.

Darwinism, in other words, became indistinguishable from the most bestial form of laissez-faire economics. Many Christians responded with revulsion. It is profoundly ironic that the doctrine rejected a century ago by such prominent fundamentalists as William Jennings Bryan is now central to the economic thinking of the Christian right. Modern fundamentalists reject the science of Darwinian evolution and accept the pseudoscience of social Darwinism.

But there were other, more powerful, reasons for the intellectual isolation of the fundamentalists. The US is peculiar in devolving the control of education to local authorities. Teaching in the southern states was dominated by the views of an ignorant aristocracy of planters, and a great educational gulf opened up. "In the south", Jacoby writes, "what can only be described as an intellectual blockade was imposed in order to keep out any ideas that might threaten the social order."

The Southern Baptist Convention, now the biggest denomination in the US, was to slavery and segregation what the Dutch Reformed Church was to apartheid in South Africa. It has done more than any other force to keep the south stupid. In the 1960s it tried to stave off desegregation by establishing a system of private Christian schools and universities. A student can now progress from kindergarten to a higher degree without any exposure to secular teaching. Southern Baptist beliefs pass intact through the public school system as well. A survey by researchers at the University of Texas in 1998 found that one in four of the state's state school biology teachers believed humans and dinosaurs lived on earth at the same time.

This tragedy has been assisted by the American fetishisation of self-education. Though he greatly regretted his lack of formal teaching, Abraham Lincoln's career is repeatedly cited as evidence that good education, provided by the state, is unnecessary: all that is required to succeed is determination and rugged individualism. This might have served people well when genuine self-education movements, like the one built around the Little Blue Books in the first half of the 20th century, were in vogue. In the age of infotainment, it is a recipe for confusion.

Besides fundamentalist religion, perhaps the most potent reason intellectuals struggle in elections is that intellectualism has been equated with subversion. The brief flirtation of some thinkers with communism a long time ago has been used to create an impression in the public mind that all intellectuals are communists. Almost every day men such as Rush Limbaugh and Bill O'Reilly rage against the "liberal elites" destroying America.

The specter of pointy-headed alien subversives was crucial to the election of Reagan and Bush. A genuine intellectual elite - like the neocons (some of them former communists) surrounding Bush - has managed to pitch the political conflict as a battle between ordinary Americans and an over-educated pinko establishment. Any attempt to challenge the ideas of the rightwing elite has been successfully branded as elitism.

Obama has a lot to offer the US, but none of this will stop if he wins. Until the great failures of the US education system are reversed or religious fundamentalism withers, there will be political opportunities for people, like Bush and Palin, who flaunt their ignorance.