Boy Scout Assemblies in Public Schools Protested
by Margaret Downey

At the beginning of every school year, the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) kick off their yearly recruitment drive. In many public school districts across the nation, BSA recruiters are welcomed with open arms. Ever since BSA declared itself a “private” organization (Boy Scouts of America et al. v. Dale, 530 U.S. 640, 2000), the Freethought Society (FS) has objected to BSA using public school grounds to post recruitment signs and/or to conduct recruitment assemblies during school hours. FS also objects to school officials and teachers assisting in any way with recruitment efforts.

As a private organization, BSA has every right to rent space from the school system. BSA, in fact, made sure to protect that equal access right by convincing Congress to pass the “Support Our Scouts” Act in late December of 2005. The Act was passed as a last-minute amendment to the Department of Defense Appropriations Act, (Public Law 109-148, Division A, Title VIII, Sec. 8126). The Act was written to prevent local, state and federal government agencies from reducing support for BSA. The Act was a way to insist that BSA’s access to the use of public schools would remain equal with all other private groups, even though the organization specifically excludes atheists and anyone (Scouts, volunteers, parents, and employees) over the age of 18 who is gay. Equal access is one thing, but accommodation, support, and endorsement are much different!

FS relies on supporters and readers of this newsletter to monitor what happens at public schools — especially in regards to BSA recruitment efforts. FS was contacted by a parent whose child attended a public elementary school in the Octorara School District. The parent complained that the school had allowed BSA assemblies for boys to take place on school grounds during the school day (Monday, September 15, 2014). The parent, who has requested to remain anonymous, provided a copy of the school’s weekly agenda showing the day and time that the assembly took place and also sent a copy of the Octorara School District’s non-discrimination policy.

Interestingly, the parent who contacted FS had discussed the situation with concerned parents of another student. That meant at least two families were upset about the BSA recruitment drive. FS is needed to voice their concerns. Each family was concerned about possible repercussions should they be identified.

I immediately contacted the Octorara School Superintendent and scheduled a face-to-face meeting. The meeting took place on September 25, 2014 at Dr. Thomas Newcome’s office in Altglen, Pennsylvania. Joining me to add their voices of concern were FS Board member Sally Flynn and FS Supporter Tom Schottmiller.

Flynn has had a keen interest in stopping BSA discriminatory membership policies and often writes letters to the editor, Steven Spielberg, President Jimmy Carter, and several school boards regarding the issue. Flynn also conducts many conversations with friends and family about the harm caused by prejudice against nontheists and gays. Over the 20 years she has served as an FS officer and board member, she has attended many meetings with school superintendents as an advocate for equality and diversity appreciation.

As my spouse for 40 years, Schottmiller has first-hand experience with combating discrimination. Our son, Matthew Schottmiller, was ousted from BSA after a seven-year
affiliation. We were both highly offended when we received the letter from BSA stating that BSA contends “...no boy can grow into the best kind of citizen without recognizing an obligation to God.” As a family we sought to change the biased membership rules beginning in 1991. Coincidentally, BSA’s National Executive Board reaffirmed its position by passing a resolution on June 12, 1991. With that resolution BSA reaffirmed a religious requirement for membership.

The resolution states, "While not intending to define what constitutes belief in God, the BSA is proud to reaffirm the Scout Oath and its declaration of duty to God.” A Scout that does not believe in a God cannot substitute the word for anything else. Our family had proposed using the word “Good” so that we could maintain the BSA principle of “honesty.” Requesting the substitute word was non-confrontational and modified the Scout oath with the simple addition of one more “o.” Our request was denied and a nine-year legal battle through the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission ensued (See: Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission DOCKET NO. P-3986).

Some parents read the David and Goliath Bible story to their children to teach them that people can overcome gigantic problems; we lived a similar real-life battle. BSA had millions of dollars to devote to their position. Their legal department was relentless and at times unethical. We discovered that they had tampered with at least one witness, and they used every method they could to stall hearings and negotiations.

We soon learned of many other cases involving BSA discrimination and were appalled to see BSA using its “private” organization status to avoid compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Most recently, BSA is preventing overweight Scouts from participating fully in certain programs, such as Jamboree activities, boating and hiking.

The above-mentioned information was verbally conveyed during the meeting with Dr. Newcome, along with written proof and evidence. We gave Dr. Newcome a package of BSA camp standards, an American Humanist Association magazine featuring an article about BSA discrimination, and several newspaper articles concerning BSA’s position about overweight Scouts.

Schottmiller expressed his concern that gay parents are not allowed to become BSA volunteers. It is disconcerting to him that a child with gay parents would be exposed to that type of unfair and prejudicial treatment.

Flynn reiterated that and said the same holds true for parents who are nontheists.

I pointed out the fact that BSA’s noncompliance with ADA regulations places Scouts and parents with disabilities in a precarious situation.

Newcome continued to stress that the local BSA headquarters in Chester County had reassured him that troops in the Octorara area do not discriminate.

We took the opportunity to tell Newcome that many troops who disobeyed the national membership policies have lost their charters. We encouraged Newcome to learn more about the fact that BSA’s executive decisions are implemented “down-the-line” and no BSA troop is allowed to vary from national policies.

We left the hour long meeting hopeful that Dr. Newcome would read the information and we also requested that he provide us with additional information. We wanted to know what the BSA flyer looked like and we requested evidence that the Girl Scouts of America (GSA) had been given equal recruitment opportunities within the public school system.

Dr. Newcome sent copies of the BSA and GSA flyers that were distributed and answered several other questions we had asked. He said, in part:

...This is the Girl Scout Flyer sent home with girls that attended assembly at OPLC (Grades 1-2). Please note: Upon investigating this further, I found there was no Girl Scout assembly at the Octorara Elementary School (Grades 3-4). The Girl Scouts did not request an assembly. If they had, they would have been welcomed...

Please be so kind to answer the following for me. When I speak with my Board Directors they will ask how many parents raised concerns with you about this issue prior to your contacting my office for an appointment. How many total have contacted you? How many families are represented by those that complained to you? In other words — if a mother and father from the same family complained please clarify whether they are counted as one in your count or two. When we spoke yesterday you used the term “some” and I will need to define “some” for my Board. I personally do not care if some means 1 or 21. Either way I will treat your concern with the same high degree of seriousness — but I know what I will be asked and I need to be prepared to respond.

When I complete my review and have had the opportunity to discuss your concerns with the Board Directors, I will be in touch.

Respectfully,

Tom Newcome

The below follow-up email to Dr. Newcome may be of interest to readers of The Freethought News:

Dear Dr. Newcome,

Thank you for meeting with us on Thursday, September 25, 2014 and for following up so promptly with copies of the items we expressed interest in seeing.

Thanks, also, for the answer to our questions regarding the Girl Scouts of America (GSA). Please note that we have absolutely no concern about GSA, because they are a public organization that does not discriminate.
You asked about the parents who expressed concern about the BSA assemblies that took place during school hours on the grounds of the public school. Two families were represented in our presentation to you about the harm that the assemblies caused. Thank you for reassuring us that even one concern would be met with equal attention.

In regards to BSA’s Declaration of Religious Principles, it appears, in part, on the BSA application for membership. Please see the application that must be completed for membership at the following link:


On the second page, on the right-hand side, in the third paragraph down of the BSA application, you will see a section entitled “Excerpt from the Declaration of Religious Principles.” Agreement to this Declaration is mandatory for completion of the application and acceptance into the Boy Scouts/Cub Scouts/Varsity Scouting/Venturing/Sea Scouting. The signature of a parent is required on the final page of the package and includes the following:

“I have read the attached information for parents and approve the application. I affirm that I have or will review "How to Protect Your Children From Child Abuse: A Parent’s Guide.”

The full BSA Declaration of Religious Principles can be found at:


The Reaffirmation of the Declaration of Religious Principles can be found here:


You will see that the first sentence of the Declaration states:

“The Boy Scouts of America maintains that no member can grow into the best kind of citizenship without recognizing an obligation to God.”

We contend that if BSA, as a private organization, only desires religious applicants and participants, they should not be able to conduct assemblies on public school grounds.

As a private and restricted membership organization, BSA should not be able to recruit via an assembly or in any other way during a public school day, nor should BSA use public school teachers and staff members to assist them in finding new members, exalting the organization, and/or promoting participation.

We can prove that BSA’s national office has determined nontheist applicants are not welcome. Even if a local troop would say that they are NOT involved with this type of discrimination, they are obligated, by their BSA charter, to follow all national directives. If they do not, their charter will be revoked.

BSA is a down-the-line private organization. As we informed you on Thursday, many troops across the country have been disbanded because they were accepting of nontheists and others.

We know that the newest policy of BSA allows the participation of a child who “thinks” he is gay, but if he still “thinks” he is gay at age 18, he will be ousted. This is a very dangerous social message to give to children. By example, the message is that adult gays are undesirable as parents, friends, associates and fellow Scouts. The pressure to comply to a no-gays mandate is harmful to the mental stability of a child.

There are many examples of gay parents who are not allowed to participate in Scouting programs as well as become volunteers and leaders. This divides families and creates an atmosphere of unjust treatment of caring parents who only want to be with their children. This has not gone unnoticed by public school districts.

On July 14, 2014, Seattle Public Schools ended their affiliation with BSA. See:

http://www.glaad.org/blog/seattle-public-schools-end-affiliation-boy-scouts-america

I hope you have had time to see the camp standards literature and how the wording changed year after year. In the examples left with you, the words “must comply with ADA standards” devolved into “should,” and finally concluded that BSA, as a private organization, does not need to comply with ADA regulations. Thus, a disabled child will, if not at first, eventually be in a situation that will find him excluded.

The new BSA weight regulations speak for themselves. The very children who need to be involved with activities are not only now told they are not welcome but are not offered an alternative program (see literature left at your office during our meeting).

We are hopeful that the Octorara School District will join with other public school districts that abide by non-discrimination policies. Octorara can help send a message to BSA that intolerance and bigotry is unacceptable and will not be supported, endorsed or condoned.

Sincerely,

Margaret Downey
Founder and President of The Freethought Society

As of the publication date of this newsletter, FS has not heard back from Dr. Newcome. The status of future BSA assemblies has not been made clear, but FS is determined to put an end to public schools allowing a private discriminatory organization from getting recruitment assistance through the aid of public school teachers and/or administrators.

If you find a public school endorsing or promoting BSA, please contact FS. A complaint will be filed to stop future BSA recruitment aid.
Skeptics in History Highlighted in DragonCon Parade
by Margaret Downey

There is only one place in the world where a group of Skeptics can get together to dress in costumes and parade in front of 80,000 people! DragonCon (the world’s largest science fiction and fantasy convention) provides that opportunity every Labor Day Weekend. I have participated in the event for five years as an invited guest. I cherish my status and look forward to participating as a panelist, speaker and the organizer of the Skeptic parade entry.

Over the years our standard costumes and placards for the parade entry have been:

- The Educated Monkey
  *(Don’t monkey around. Get educated.)*
- Ghost
  *(YOLO! You only live once.)*
- Yeti
  *(Yeti ‘nother myth.)*
- Doctor with a Duck Bill
  *(Quack Doctor)*
- Bunny
  *(Vernal Equinox Bunny)*
- Geologist
  *(Geology rocks!)*
- Beekeeper and Spelling Bee
  *(Save the Spelling Bee!)*
- Doctor of Science
  *(Question everything!)*
- Archeologist
  *(I really dig archeology!)*

The Skeptic entry is also proud to have other characters depicted without signs. Some of those characters are:

- Steampunk Skeptics
- NASA Scientist
- Lab Technicians
- Velma from Scooby Doo
- Avatar Home Tree
- Monarch Butterfly and Butterfly Catcher
- Science Cheerleaders
- Skeptic Fairy God Mother
- Sherlock Holmes
- Marvin the Martian
- Houdini
- Friggatriskaidekaphobia Nurses and Doctors

In 2011, we featured “The Amazing Randi” (James Randi) as our special parade guest. He rode in a chauffeur-driven Porsche convertible on loan to the Skeptics by Dr. Angie Mattke.

2014 marked the third time that the Skeptics, as a group, marched in the parade. We were so pleased to add a Pegasus character designed, created, and worn by Barbara Drescher, Robin McCarthy (AKA Swoopy), and Ani Aharonian. The crowd loved the entire 2014 entry, but the most yells and cheers came for the newest Skeptic sub-group parade entry entitled, “Skeptics in History.”

Following are photos of the Skeptics in History participants.

Pictured left is Steven Ball dressed as Galileo. Ball’s costume was created by combining some store bought items and some clever hand-made items. Many children wanted to interact with Galileo, and Ball was pleased to oblige. He stopped many times along the parade route to let children look through his telescope.

Pictured right is Steve Hill dressed as one of his Free-thought heroes, Frederick Douglas. Hill was quite an amazing lookalike and many people wanted their pictures taken with him, some actually asking him to stop during the parade for the photo opportunity.
Photos of the 2014 Skeptic DragonCon Parade Entry

Pictured left is **Kathy Miller** dressed as Madame Marie Curie. Miller is a teacher so she stopped and chatted with young parade observers.

Pictured right is **Tessa Eftimiads** portraying the great Women’s Suffrage heroine **Elizabeth Cady Stanton**. The 2014 parade was Eftimiads’s first experience at DragonCon. We hope to see her again.

Below left is **Chong Ren Chien** dressed as the Chinese philosopher **Mo Tzu**, who was highlighted in the 2014 *Cosmos* television series. The Chinese letters on the sign means “Skeptic.” Ren Chien made his costume.

Below right is **Margaret Downey** portraying Greek mathematician, philosopher, and astronomer **Hypatia**. Some children along the parade route yelled out that they had studied Hypatia in school.

To view the full 2014 Skeptrack program, please see the “Video Archives” section at: [skeptrack.org](http://skeptrack.org)

Downey and many other parade participants are featured at the above link under the title of “Skeptical Outreach Update.” Below is the Skeptic logo.
According to a “Born-Again” Christian fundamentalist group, God hates costumes! Worse yet, God hates costumes worn by those who indulge in activities at the world’s largest science fiction and fantasy convention — DragonCon. The event takes place every Labor Day weekend in Atlanta, Georgia.

The vociferous group shows up every year in their own form of crossplay. But this group of Christians wears their “We are representatives of God” costumes all year round. They don’t join in the parade. The “Fundies” would rather stand on the sidewalk with huge banners and megaphones to rail against the “pagan activity.”

Group members take turns yelling at the passersby and hurling threats of damnation and hell-fire punishment if the costume wearing, parading, and partying behavior continues. They claim that the convention is “evil” and that “God is unhappy.” “Repent now,” they shout.

As the Skeptics gathered in their assigned parade position, we realized that our group included three historical people who had been mistreated by the church and so-called “Holy” doctrines! Galileo (Steve Ball), Frederick Douglas (Steve Hill), and Hypatia (me). It immediately occurred to us that we had the rare opportunity to confront the fundamentalist believers as the actual people who had suffered at the hands of religious doctrine and church suppression of ideas. We had, in our own way, brought Galileo, Douglas and Hypatia “back to life.” They were, in essence, “born again.”

I gave Dr. Angie Mattke my camera and we all headed over to the Christian protesters. Below is a recap of the encounter.

**Fundie:**
Repent! Jesus loves you.

**Douglas:**
Your God loves slavery more! Have you read the passages in that book you’re holding telling people how they should treat their slaves?

**Fundie:**
We don’t believe in killing.

**Hypatia:**
Then why was she killed by a Christian mob in 415 CE? Do you even know who Hypatia was?

**Fundie:**
No, but I see by your sign that you think she was special.

**Hypatia:**
Well, look her up and you’ll see how the Christians pulled her off her chariot, took her to the public square, stripped her naked, and skinned her alive with broken sea shells. Her sin was being a female intellectual and encouraging people to learn more about the natural world.

**Galileo:**
Religious belief was the reason Galileo was imprisoned. His science was too much information for the church!

**Fundie:**
God loves you. Repent. Here, take some literature and be saved.

We all rejected their literature, of course. Later that day I saw the Christians again preaching on a sidewalk. I reminded the preachers that their precious Jesus would be appalled at THEM. I called them “hypocrites” and said that they needed to read their Bible. I referred them to Matthew 6:5-6. Should they actually read the passages, they would learn that, “...when you pray, you shall not be like hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men...But you, when you pray, go into your room and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father...”
The Pocopson Home (PH) is Chester County, Pennsylvania’s long-term healthcare facility. PH is licensed by the Pennsylvania Department of Health and provides services for 275 residents. PH is also my voting venue for Election Days. On voting day this government complex provides citizens a large gymnasium-like room, which PH labels “Chapel-Auditorium.”

As voters enter the room, we see on the far wall, an enormous wooden cross. On the opposite wall; on each side of the door, hang large, framed prints of the Ten Commandments and “The Lord’s Prayer.” These two items appear to be permanently affixed, but the cross is sometimes replaced with an imposing, rectangular portrait of The Last Supper. On the right side of that portrait, a plain cross hangs. On the left side of The Last Supper portrait hangs a crucifix.

Election Day has always been very important to me, even when I’m not very well informed. Voting causes me to remember with deep gratitude the many women who were imprisoned, force-fed, and died so that I can now do what they were denied: Cast a vote! But in the United States voting is a secular, government-sponsored activity and citizens should not be surrounded and potentially aggravated by religious icons and messages as they exercise their right to vote.

On August 28, 2014, I sent an email to Mr. James L. Forsythe, the director of Chester County Board of Elections, explaining the situation. I requested that these symbols be put out of sight of voters on Election Day.

After waiting 4 weeks for a response, and not getting one, I telephoned the director of the Pocopson Home, Ms. Jacqueline McKenna. Our conversation took place on Monday morning, September 29 and was semi-cordial. When I referred to the voting area as a community room she said, “It’s not a community room! It’s a chapel!” She then said she would get back to me.

After that conversation, I discovered that PH has the room listed as the “chapel/auditorium.”

Initially, I had doubts about taking any action. I wondered if my concern was insignificant. How important is the issue of displaying religious symbols in a voting venue?

I called the Freethought Society (FS) and spoke with the founder and president, Margaret Downey. She assured me that this voting venue issue is quite important. “Give them a brick and they will tear down the entire wall of separation,” she said. The next day we arrived at PH to take photographs and document the interior of the voting venue. Downey was making sure that an evidence file was started and she asked me to send her copies of all my correspondence.

On Thursday, October 2, I received a terse email from Director Forsythe. He did not include any niceties or formal opening, such as “Dear Ms. Flynn,” and there was no considerate salutation at the end of his message either such as “Sincerely Yours.” He bluntly stated:

“After meeting with the Director of Pocopson Home the matter will be resolved for Election Day.”

That was it. I suppose Forsyth’s brief response was better than no response at all. I also noticed that his email indicated a copy was sent to Thomas C. Abrahamsen, Esquire, who is the assistant solicitor for Chester County. No doubt Forsythe had consulted with Abrahamsen before sending me his response.

The day before the November 4, 2014 election, I called McKenna to thank her for her prompt action in getting Forsythe to finally respond to me. I also called her to volunteer to be of help at the Pocopson Home should they be planning to do any secular decorating adjustments in the auditorium for Election Day. She never replied to my telephone message.

On Election Day I entered the short corridor that leads to the voting area. The auditorium’s far wall was completely covered by a gigantic, bright white movie screen! The other two icons on either side of the door entrance were now fairly obscured by plastic coat racks. We had made a difference!

I wonder if there are others being forced to vote among religious symbols? If so, my story proves that a religious voting venue can be changed. Speak up and/or contact FS for assistance. We must keep our Election Day settings neutral and secular.

Let me finish with a quote from one of my favorite heroes, Jessica Mitford:

“We may not be able to change the world, but at least we can embarrass the guilty.”

The crucifix that hangs at the Pocopson Home is pictured above. It includes the word “INRI” above the naked and tortured body of the so-called “Son of God.”

INRI represents the Latin acronym meaning “Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews.” According to the Bible verse John 19:19, Pontius Pilate wrote those words over the head of Jesus Christ as he died on the cross.
“Moving Social Justice” Conference Report
by Jennifer Taylor

During the weekend of October 11-12, 2014, I attended the Moving Social Justice Conference, sponsored by People of Color Beyond Faith, Black Skeptics Group, Secular Student Alliance, the Center for Inquiry (CFI), and African Americans for Humanism. This socially-relevant event took place at CFI-West. The event included several panels that emphasized the correlation of social justice, secular humanism and fostering coalitions between secularists and members of the religious community. This extraordinary conference was the first of its kind. Henceforth, the conference will be promoted as an annual event.

After rousing and inspiring welcome remarks from the dynamic Dr. Sikivu Hutchinson of Black Skeptics Group, Debbie Goddard of African Americans for Humanism, and Jim Underdown of CFI-West, the first-day panel discussions commenced. Panel subjects included:

“Confronting Homophobia and Transphobia in the Black Church”
Moderated by:
Teka-Lark Fleming (Morningside Park Chronicle)
Panelists:
Raina Rhodes (Chocolate City Skeptics), Reverend Meredith Moise
Jennifer Taylor (Black Atheists of Philadelphia)

“Beyond #solidarityisforwhitewomen: Feminists of Color Organizing”
Moderated by:
Andrea Plaid from The Feminist Wire
Panelists:
Yolanda Alaniz (Radical Women)
Heina Dadabhoy (Freethought Blogs)
Nourbese Flint (Black Women For Wellness)
Marlene Montanez (Undocumented youth activism)

“Humanist Youth Leadership and Busting the School-to-Prison Pipeline”
Moderated by:
Thandisizwe Chimurenga (Ida B. Wells Institute)
Panelists:
Mark-Anthony Johnson (Coalition to End Sheriff Violence in Los Angeles Jails)
Tanisha Denard (Youth Justice Coalition)
Ashley Franklin (Labor Community Strategy)

“What’s Race Got to Do With It?”
Moderated by:
Daniel Myatt (Black Skeptics Los Angeles)
Panelists:
Frank Anderson (Black Skeptics Chicago)
Georgina Capetillo (Secular Common Ground)
Dr. Anthony Pinn (Rice University)
Raina Rhodes (Chocolate City Skeptics)
Sergio Ortega-Rodriguez (Hispanic Atheists)
Donald Wright (Houston Black Non-Believers)

The second day of the conference opened with great enthusiasm stemming from the energy that carried over from the first day of events and a wonderful evening of socializing. Second day panels included:

“LGBTQueer Atheists of Color and Social Justice”
Moderated by:
Kim Veal (Black Freethinkers Network)
Panelists:
Debbie Goddard (African Americans for Humanism)
AJ Johnson (Be Secular)
Reverend Meredith Moise

The end of the conference featured a performance by the talented secular music artist MC Brooks.

I felt privileged to have been invited to participate in the first-day panel discussion. As panelists we responded to questions related to Black culture within the church, civil rights, and sexism. We also discussed the millions of dollars that were spent on the California anti-same-gender marriage effort (Proposition 8) which was promoted and funded primarily by the Mormon Church. We also explored the concept of separation of religion and government when so many rely on the church for basic needs such, as food, childcare and other services. In my opinion, the secular community should provide more resources as well.

Throughout the conference, diversity in thought and expression left the audience clamoring for more. The spirited panel discussion, “What’s Race Got to Do with It?” could have gone on for hours.

I was particularly impressed by the bravery of the young adults that addressed the school-to-prison pipeline. Speaking out, they risk their freedom and their very lives. I observed the many reactions of the audience that ranged from strong emotion to outrage against the injustice that was expressed during the discussions. There were also moments of laughter and a sense of belonging.

Attendees strived for and gained knowledge, not just from the speakers, but also from others during the breaks and meals. Many of us left the conference with newly-forged bonds and a strong desire to encourage more voices of color to join in the causes highlighted throughout the conference. We also strive for allies in these efforts. People of color are underrepresented and often ignored within the predominately white secular community.

Increasingly, over the last few years, I have had intense discussions related to social justice issues and the scarcity of people of color within the secular community. Our voices matter!

Humanism embraces people of every race, color, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity and socioeconomic background. I welcome and encourage coalition building with groups that embrace diversity and intentionally reach out to groups of color with the purpose of addressing social justice concerns.
I hope to see more conversations on topics such as white privilege, sexism and racism within the secular community, HIV/AIDS awareness and treatment being underfunded, intersectionality, our children being funneled into the school-to-prison pipeline (mass incarceration), activities that promote the greater good, transphobia, homophobia, discrimination, violence, lack of employment opportunities, and homelessness.

So often secularists point the finger at religious organizations for a lack of progress. I commonly hear non-theists put down religious people and promote superiority over theists. However, I challenge us all to create more secular alternatives, safe places and services that benefit the entire community. My resolve to focus more energy towards addressing these serious concerns from a secular standpoint grows stronger with each passing day.

I was so happy to meet the people I have interacted with online at the conference. Face-to-face interactions made the conference so very special. Several attendees stated that this was the first secular event that they had ever attended. I was thrilled to see many of my friends and allies from the secular community and was left with a lasting sense of familial rapport that many people of color rarely, if ever, experience within the secular community.

Conference attendees traveled from Minnesota, Arizona, Texas, New York, Florida, New Jersey and other states within this nation. They represented every ethnicity and socioeconomic background. Countless expressions of sheer joy and appreciation permeated this landmark event. A few, including myself, were at times, overcome with emotion because of subject matter that is not often discussed or tackled within the secular community at large. We are indeed “moving social justice” forward by sharing information, building community and facilitating important yet long overdue conversations. We take pride in being atheists, humanists, freethinkers, skeptics and coalition builders who promote community activism and provide a much needed platform for voices that are rarely heard and undervalued.

I would love for us to keep the momentum going in a positive direction, check our privilege at the door and glean more knowledge from the perspectives of others that vary in background.

Please check out the #MovingSocialJustice hashtag on Twitter and Facebook for additional comments, pictures articles and links related to this groundbreaking summit that merged many viewpoints.

In addition, videos of the conference will be available for purchase. People of Color Beyond Faith, a 501(c)3 organization that was founded by Black Skeptics Group, is already planning and accepting donations for the next conference which will take place in Houston, Texas, during the fall of 2015. I look forward to participating. The People of Color Beyond Faith contact information is:

www.facebook.com/PeopleOfColorBeyondFaith
peopleofcolorbeyond@gmail.com

Top Photo:
Photographed at the Center For Inquiry-West building are (right to left) Kim Veal, Darrin Johnson, MC Brooks, Jennifer Taylor and Dr. Sikivu Hutchinson.

Middle Photo:
Photo taken during the “Confronting Homophobia & Transphobia in the Black Church” panel discussion. Right to left are Jennifer Taylor, Raina Rhoades, Reverend Meredith Moise and Teka-Lark Fleming.

Bottom Photo:
Pictured, right to left, are Dr. Anthony Pinn, Jenn Taylor, Laurie James, Omar Hunter, Donald Wright and Frank Anderson enjoying lunch at the Bamboo House restaurant in Hollywood, California.
Tree of Knowledge Project Gets Boost from UnitedCoR

Ever since the first Tree of Knowledge was placed on the grounds of the Chester County Courthouse in 2007, the Freethought Society (FS) had hopes that it would become a national nontheist winter holiday symbol. While many nontheists have adopted The Tree of Knowledge for use in their homes, it has been difficult for local nontheist groups to "plant a Tree of Knowledge" in free speech zones. Many national groups have advocated for its use and have published written endorsements of the symbol, but the biggest endorsement to date was distributed by the United Coalition of Reason (UnitedCoR) via their newsletter "Hard CoR News." The publication is distributed to nearly 900 organizers in the nontheist community. UnitedCoR is backing up its endorsement with an offer of financial and legal assistance — important elements to encourage participation in winter holiday display efforts. Below is the article written by Jason Heap, UnitedCoR’s National Coordinator.

A Season for Reason
by Jason Heap

We are approaching the 2014 winter holiday season when many of us will celebrate HumanLight, Winter Solstice, Festivus, or just acknowledge the changing of the seasons. This is also the time of the year when people of good cheer in the general population tend to become protective of public land around local courthouses, municipal buildings and public parks.

Religious citizens have long assumed that those tax-supported areas are reserved for displaying only their traditional religious symbols. They ignore, and at times passionately avoid, including any other minority winter symbols — excluding the diversity of their community.

Many local United Coalition of Reason affiliates have expressed a desire to have the nontheistic community included in public winter holiday displays. They seek to emphasize the diversity within the community as well as to make their presence known.

The UnitedCoR national office encourages local CoRs to consider using a unique and lovely winter nontheistic symbol, the Tree of Knowledge. The Tree of Knowledge is a perfect opportunity to unify your local CoR at this time of year and will provide a visual reminder that the secular community is growing.

The Tree of Knowledge was designed in 2007 by Margaret Downey, founder and president of the Freethought Society (FS). In 2008, the FS became one of the first co-founders and members of PhillyCoR.

Tree of Knowledge ornaments are laminated color copies of popular books that are meaningful to the nontheist, skeptic and rationalist community. When fully decorated, this tree stands as a visual symbol of communal relationships between theists and nontheists alike. Knowledge, after all, is what is responsible for humanity’s greatest accomplishments.

Winter is the perfect time to celebrate science, history, real-life heroes, philosophy, social advancement and art. On the FS website you can view photographs, a YouTube film and even print out a step-by-step manual on how to make a local Tree of Knowledge a great success.

UnitedCoR is ready to financially help support a CoR Tree of Knowledge project. Should a local CoR want to purchase ornaments and signage, UnitedCoR will help defray some of the costs. This is a first-come-first-serve offer!

Local CoRs have the option of purchasing fully-laminated ornaments direct from FS. The cost of ornaments are $1 to $5. A large tree would require 50 to 80 ornaments.

Downey recommends that local CoRs purchase a laminator (found at many stores for about $20) and make a party out of creating ornaments. Individual group members can provide two color copies of their favorite books (unfolded) which will then be used to create ornaments for The Tree of Knowledge. Samples are available upon request through FS. “The Tree of Knowledge project helped unify the Freethought Society,” Downey stated.

Downey went on to say, “As we created the ornaments, our resolve became stronger and stronger to demand equal representation in the community during the winter season. The Tree of Knowledge gave us all a sense of pride and belonging. The project bonded our members more than any other endeavor.”

UnitedCoR highly recommends this project and the FS website provides a great resource for interested groups. The legal department of the American Humanist Association is available for consultation should any public area placement difficulties arise.
The Backyard Skeptics, the Freethought Alliance and the Freethought Society invite you to a

Friday the 13th Anti-Superstition Bash and the opening of the West Coast Friggatriskaidekaphobia* Treatment Center

*Frigga-tris-kai-deka-phobia is the fear of Friday the 13th

Get rid of your secret superstitions! Anti-superstition “nurses” and “doctors” will be available to cure you.

SPECIAL GUESTS include:
Buck Bowen, Entertainer
Dave DeLuca, Singer
Ian Harris, Comedian
Christine Jones, Singer
Celestia Ward, Caricature Artist
The Heathens will play live music
More special guests to be announced

LOTS OF ENTERTAINMENT!
DJ Dance Party, featuring:
Ladder Limbo
Horoscope Trashing
Open-Your-Umbrellas to fast and slow dances
Mirror Breaking Ceremony
Piñata, and other Anti-Superstition games.

Dessert Table and Cash Bar

$13.13 Early Registration; $15 At the Door
RSVP & Pay $13.13 now: http://tinyurl.com/frigga13
Payment collected by the Freethought Alliance

7 pm, Friday, February 13, 2015
Howard Johnson Fullerton Hotel And Conference Center
222 W. Houston Ave, Fullerton, CA 92832 (714) 992-1700
Discounted Rooms are $70, while they last. Mention “Friday the 13th party.”

Visit Friggatriskaidekaphobia.com, FtSociety.org, FreethoughtAlliance.org
End of the Year Gifts for Donors

The Freethought Society (FS) is pleased to announce that for the first time in 23 years, gifts will be given to anyone who becomes a Lifetime Supportive Member or donates before the end of 2014.

Pictured above is artist extraordinaire Lorne Corley holding his painting entitled “HMS Beagle in the Waters of Tierra del Fuego.” Corley donated the painting to FS for the purpose of fundraising. The lovely painting will be given to the first FS supporter who donates $1,000 to become a Life Member.

The 13” X 10” acrylic painting is framed in light oak. The main colors are shades of blue, sea foam green, tan, white and browns. The painting will be carefully wrapped and boxed should it need to be mailed, but the painting can be delivered to the donor at an FS event. Delivery arrangements will be made accordingly.

FS is also giving supporters who donate $500 or more their choice of inscribed hotel Bibles. Over the years, FS president, Margaret Downey has built a rather large collection of hotel Bibles signed by superstars in the nontheist community. At times, Downey was able to take a photograph of the person as they signed the Bible. Available Bibles will be distributed as requested on a first-come, first-served basis. So, if you want a Bible signed by your favorite Freethought leader, speaker, or author, donate right away and request the Bible of your choice!

Inscribed Hotel Bible List

Brown Gideon Bible
Annie Laurie Gaylor
Read the Bible -- Know thine enemy! Ecassez l’enfame!
Red Gideon Bible
Sam Harris
Just read Leviticus.
Brown Contemporary English Version
Christopher Hitchens (signature only)
Gold Gideon Bible
Penn Jillette
What a piece of shit! Fuck God.
Teller
Deus non est. Hallelujah!
Gold Gideon Bible
Paul Kurtz
Read this with care. May be dangerous to your health.
Red Gideon Bible
Julia Sweeney
Read this! Seriously. Just try you’ll see. It’s hogwash. Some good stories. STORIES!!! Fiction!
Red Gideon Bible
Sam Harris (pictured below)
I have underlined the true parts!
The Freethought Society’s 2014/2015 Four-Month Activities Calendar

December 7
The Freethought Society (FS) and the Ethical Humanist Society of Philadelphia (EHSP) invite you to the installation of the 2014 Philadelphia Tree of Knowledge (ToK).

The ToK will be decorated as a group effort immediately following the EHSP platform on Sunday, December 7, 2014. Hugh Taft-Morales will be the platform speaker.

The 11:00 AM EHSP platform takes place at 1906 Rittenhouse Square Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19103.

Attendees are encouraged to bring two color copies of their favorite book so that an ornament can be made for use on the tree. FS president Margaret Downey and FS board members Jennifer Taylor and Patti Butcheck will be making the ornaments at 1:00 PM in the upstairs meeting room. Volunteers are welcome.

December 8
FS joins with the EHSP to host the president and CEO of the Center for Inquiry, Ron Lindsay.

Lindsay is the author of The Necessity of Secularism: Why God Can’t Tell Us What To Do.

The Monday, December 8, 2014 Lindsay speech “The Necessity of Secularism” will take place at 7:00 PM at the EHSP Building located at 1906 Rittenhouse Square Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19103. The speech is free and open-to-the-public.

At 8:30 PM, visitors are invited to attend a birthday party for Lindsay in the upstairs EHSP community room. Birthday cake and beverages (wine, coffee, tea, water) will be served. Cash donations would be appreciated.

January 31
FS recommends attending an event celebrating the birth of Thomas Paine hosted by The Thomas Paine Society. The event takes place at the Castle Green, located at 99 South Raymond Ave., Pasadena, California 91105.

“The Headstrong Evening Club” and birthday party takes place on Saturday, January 31, 2015 at 7:00 PM. Special guests are Ian Ruskin (portraying Thomas Paine), Dale Reynolds (portraying Thomas Jefferson), and actress Ellen Snortland. There will be light fare, cake, and a cash bar. Tickets are $35 and are available for purchase at: http://www.thomaspainesociety.org/

February 13
FS, The Backyard Skeptics, and The Freethought Alliance are pleased to present an Anti-Superstition Bash and the opening of the first West Coast Friggatriskaidekaphobia Treatment Center on Friday, February 13, 2015. The party and Treatment Center activities takes place at the Howard Johnsons Hotel and Conference Center (222 West Houston Avenue, Fullerton, California 92832). Break superstitions, dance, and enjoy a dessert table beginning at 7:00 PM.

Discount hotel rooms are available through the hotel. Mention “Friday the 13th” for a rate of $70 per night. Call (714) 992-1700.

Entertainers include a live band (The Heathens), singers Christine Jones and Dave DeLuca, and comedian Ian Harris.

Games are Ladder Limbo, Horoscope Trashing, Piñata Smashing, Leprechaun Bowling and much more. Bring an umbrella to dance under! One person will be selected to smash the ceremonial mirror.

World-renowned caricature artist Celestia Ward will capture your image for only $13 per person. Friggatriskaidekaphobia treatment nurses and doctors will be awarding a “Clean Bill of Mental Health” to those who complete a fun obstacle course.

Register online before February 13, 2015 for $13.13 per ticket. Tickets will be $15 at the door.
The Freethought Society (FS) promotes freedom of thought, expression and choice. FS also advocates separation of religion and government. FS publishes The Freethought Society News every other month. The newsletter is delivered as an ezine via email and is complimentary to supporters, donors, like-minded individuals and those who are interested in learning more about freedom of thought.

Monthly events take place in many locations across the United States, with emphasis in the tri-state area of Pennsylvania, Delaware and New Jersey. FS activities and services depend on the financial contributions of supporters. Funds may be sent using this form or via the FS website (www.FtSociety.org/donate/). All contributions to FS are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law (Tax ID Number: 23-2738574). Please donate generously.

Yes! I want to:

( ) become a supporter / renew support of FS (Please enclose checks payable to the Freethought Society):

$30 Individual Supporter  $35 Family Supporter  $20 Student  $1,000 Supporter for a Lifetime

( ) become a “Freethought Star” by setting up an automatic monthly donation to FS from my bank or through PayPal in the amount of (circle one): $5  $10  $15  $20  $25  $30  $35  $40  $45  $_____ (other per month)

( ) earmark a donation to (insert project, event or committee name):

Name: ______________________________________________________________________________________________
Street Address: _______________________________________________________________________________________
City, State and Zip: _______________________________________________________________________________________
Email Address: _______________________________________________________________________________________
Phone: ___________________________________________Cell: _______________________________________________

( ) Check here if you prefer your sponsorship to remain anonymous.

FS will email a complimentary newsletter to potential supporters. Please provide contact information for anyone who might be interested in receiving an FS newsletter.

Name: ______________________________________________________________________________________________
Email: ______________________________________________________________________________________________

Volunteer Opportunities Through the Freethought Society

Supporters of the Freethought Society (FS) often want to do more than just donate. Listed below are various committees organized by FS. The committees were designed to fulfill the mission, goals and vision of FS. We seek to be of assistance to nontheists, educate the public about nontheism, and provide social opportunities where like-minded individuals can meet, socialize and share ideas. Please see the FS website or contact FS to volunteer at: volunteers@FtSociety.org.

- Anti-Discrimination Educational Committee  (nontheism explained in classroom settings)
- Anti-Discrimination Support Network  (assist Openly Secular gathering reports)
- Community Outreach  (locate tabling opportunities)
- Diversity Outreach Committee  (brainstorming about and developing programs to appeal to minorities)
- Free Speech Zone Committee  (research and implement displays in public venues)
- Helping Hands  (provides helpers to seniors and in emergency situations)
- Media Outreach Committee  (press coordination and writing press releases)
- Membership Committee  (watching for and connecting with possible supporters)
- Monthly Meeting Coordinators  (schedule and manage speakers and venues)
- Secular Celebrations  (develop and implement new nontheist celebrations)
- Speakers Bureau  (provide FS a CV, photo and list of subjects to participate)
- Special Events  (coordinate interesting and unique nontheist events)
- Thomas Paine Memorial Committee  (assist with assemblies and work on themed events)
- Tree of Knowledge/Winter Display Committee  (make ornaments, find venues, write articles, and support the winter symbol concept nationwide)