

# THE ATHEIST

Newsletter of the Atheist Community of Austin, a Nonprophet Organization  
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## New Freethinker Cenotaph dedicated in Comfort

by Michelle Gadush

On Saturday, November 2, approximately 100 people from across Texas braved stormy weather to attend the dedication of the new Freethinker Cenotaph in Comfort, Texas. Don Rhoades, Susan Brown, Scott Ingram and myself were there to represent ACA.

The new monument, erected next to the historic Ingenhuett General Store, replaces the first cenotaph, which was stolen from the city park and dumped at a local ranch. Funds for the new cenotaph were raised by the Freethinker Association of Central Texas, which is based in San Antonio. The stonemasonry and artwork were done by Karl Kuhn and sons, Kevin and Mark, of Boerne.

Don Lawrence, ACA Board member and past President of FACT, was Master of Ceremonies. Speakers included Eddie John Vogt, Boerne Justice of the Peace and newly elected Kendall County judge, Russell Busby, former president of the Comfort Chamber of Commerce and newly elected Comfort Precinct Commissioner, Irene Meyer Scharf, Green Party Candidate for the State Board of Education, Bebe Fenstermaker and John Karger, local residents whose ancestors were members of the Freethinker community, and Gregory Krauter, the current store owner who donated the space for the cenotaph and who

is also a descendant of the original Comfort settlers. The speakers recounted the history of the Freethinking German emigrants who came to Central Texas during the mid 1800's. Intellectual freedom was of paramount importance to these people. They believed in education for all and rejected religious dogma.

During his presentation, Mr. Karger, a licensed raptor rescuer, brought out a live, regal Golden Eagle. "Freedom is important for all creatures," he said. Mr. Vogt summed up the mood of the event by quoting Thoreau: "Many people are willing to die for an idea, but few are willing to live for one." In Comfort, at least, the spirit of the Freethinkers lives on.



Michelle Gadush, Scott Ingram and Susan Brown next to the new Freethinker Cenotaph

### Cenotaph Inscription:

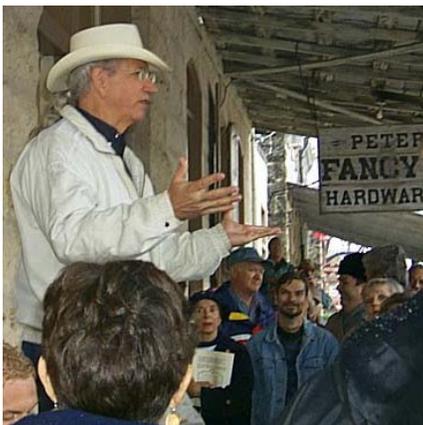
The Founding Freethinkers

(Deutsche Freidenker)

From 1849 to 1861, large numbers of German Freethinkers emigrated to the Texas Hill Country. Freethinkers were predominantly German intellectuals who advocated reason and democracy over religious and political autocracy. Many had been active in the 1848 German Revolution and sought freedom in America. The Freethinkers established numerous Central Texas colonies including Bettina, Castell, Cypress Creek, Luckenbach, Sisterdale, and Tusculum(Boerne). Settlements which conducted intellectual forums in Latin became known as "Latin Colonies." Within a few years of the founding of Comfort in 1854, half of the Hill Country Freethinker population was living in the area.

Freethinkers valued their newfound freedom of speech, assembly and separation of religion and government. Instead of religious dogma, Freethinkers believed in individual philosophy. They advocated equal rights for all persons, and their moral values were dominated by respect for life and nature. Many were active in political issues of the day including the rejection of secession and abolition of slavery. Intellectual pursuits were shared with agriculture and other crafts of physical labor. Secular education and organizations (Vereins) provided social and cultural fulfillment. Existence was peaceful and their influence rapidly expanded.

Loyalty to the Union during the Civil War had cost many their freedoms and lives. Some Freethinkers relocated to nearby urban area or other states, and a few returned to Europe. Arrival of the railroad in Comfort in 1887 and other outside factors largely influenced the construction of the first church in 1892. Freethinker origins continue to influence the spirit of the community and surrounding areas.



Master of Ceremonies Don Lawrence



John Karger with Golden Eagle

## AAI News:

*Balmy Breezes Forecast for AAI Convention, 2003*

by Mynga Futrell

The next Atheist Alliance International annual convention takes place **April 18-20** at the **Hilton Hotel** in balmy **Tampa, Florida**. At that time of year, Tampa will be at its most colorful, flowery best, with mild Gulf breezes to soothe the fevered brows of our ardent atheists. In fact, it should be “just right” for a superb gathering of thoughtful and dedicated religion-free folks of all stripes.

Nan Owens, who along with her colleagues at host member society, Atheists of Florida, is coordinating planning for the upcoming convention, is finalizing the details of the hotel rates and booking information, which she reports are not *quite* ready for publication at this time. In the meanwhile, she has sent the above reminder of the place and date, along with our first peek into the planned program of outstanding speakers who will gather in Tampa.

One presenter to be featured is a Floridian from the Gulf Coast, a welcome speaker to many of the freethought groups in Florida. **Jim Strayer** is a biologist and scientist, who always has fascinating as well as motivating information to impart. His impressive bio includes 34 years of teaching experience; 12 at the high school level and 22 at the community college level. Not any boring pedagogue, Jim—he received the “Outstanding Teacher Award” at Washtenaw Community College in 1985, and the Florida Humanist Lecturer of the Year Award in 1993. He has been a speaker at the American Atheists’ conventions, American Humanists’ conventions, and at many Darwin Days and freethought gatherings.

Jim’s presentations are much in demand due to his extensive knowledge of biology and science education, including his occasional droll descriptions of the fantastic foibles of many of this world’s creatures. His talk should be important to our members because they can take home with them some good tools to combat the escalating campaign to install “intelligent design” and/or “creation science” in our public schools.

**THE ATHEIST**

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Atheist Community of Austin.

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Opinions expressed in *The Atheist* are those of  
the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect  
the views of the Atheist Community of Austin.

## Upcoming Events of Interest

Two atheist comedians, Paula Poundstone and George Carlin, will be performing in Austin in November and December. Several ACA members plan to attend and may meet up for coffee before or after the performances. Keep an eye on the e-mail list for updates. Don’t wait too long to get tickets - they’ll probably sell out fast, if they haven’t already.

**Paula Poundstone**

Paramount Theatre

Friday, November 8, 2002, 8:00 PM.

Contact Star Tickets for tickets.

**George Carlin**

Paramount Theatre

Friday, December 6, 2002, 7:00 and 9:45 PM.

Contact Star Tickets for tickets.

**Regularly Scheduled ACA Events:**

**Bagel Shop Meetings:** Every Sunday except the first Sunday of the month at 10:30 AM at the Hot Jumbo Bagelry, (307 W. Fifth Street)

**Monthly Lecture Meetings:** The first Sunday of every month at 11:00 AM, in the Furr’s Cafeteria in Northcross Mall.

**“The Atheist Experience” Live Call-in TV Show:** Sundays 4:30 - 6:00 PM, on Austin Access Channel 10. Now replayed Tuesdays 4:30 - 6:00 PM, also on Austin Access Channel 10.

**Godless Gamers:** Monday evenings at 7:00 at the home of Russell and Ginny Glasser. Contact Russell for details.

**Atheist Happy Hour:** Thursday evenings at 7:30 at Antonio’s Tex-Mex restaurant near the intersection of IH 35 and 183.

**“The Non-Prophets” Internet Radio Show:** Saturday afternoons from 2:00-3:30 on [www.atheistnetwork.com](http://www.atheistnetwork.com).

**E-Mail Lists:** <http://www.atheist-community.org/email.htm>

For more details on all of these events, see [www.atheist-community.org](http://www.atheist-community.org).

There has been a lot of debate with callers on “The Atheist Experience” lately about the doctrine of hell: whether or not it is a constructive belief and why religions find it necessary to threaten eternal damnation for those who don’t believe. Also, Halloween tends to bring up issues of death, the afterlife, and the occult. As a semi-lighthearted look at some of the propaganda currently being used to intimidate people into believing, we bring you The Hell Page. This stuff is pretty funny until you think about the fact that the target audience is kids who haven’t necessarily developed critical thinking skills.

### Austin atheists go straight to hell (Virtual Hell, that is)

On November 1, several ACA members and friends visited the local “Hell House” at PromiseLand Church in Austin. For those not familiar with the Hell House concept, they are set up like Halloween haunted houses, but instead of featuring vampires and chainsaw-wielding maniacs, they depict the absolute worst social problems affecting teenagers from a fundamentalist Christian perspective. Martin Wagner refers to it as “a Grand Guignol charnel house of modern-day atrocities”. As the name implies, Virtual Hell also depicts the horrors of hell and offers participants a chance to be “saved” at the end.

The ACA group went out of curiosity and not to be disrespectful or attack anyone’s beliefs. At the same time, they didn’t hide the fact that they were atheists. Ashley Perrien writes that the group was, “...led through their depictions of all the nasty things that can happen in this world (drunk driving accident, Columbine-style shooting, abusive husbands, suicide, etc.) ... Towards the end we were led up a ramp to a small platform with bars all around it and the devil himself bent through them to give us (Martin mostly, the one with the ACA t-shirt) a lecture that basically amounted to “if you’re living like there’s no God, you better be right.” Being led away from there we were led through the pits of hell with flashing red lights and kids grabbing at us through sheets with Pascal’s Wager being blasted through the speakers.”

“Last was a room with a small podium at the front and about a half dozen plants (people, not vegetables)... [A Virtual Hell organizer] then gave a five-minute lecture on the glorious love that god/Jesus has for us and how we should accept his free (that free part was stressed several times) gift of eternal life. If we want his gift, there was a prayer at the end, which all the plants stood for (we respectfully sat that part out).”

Upon leaving, the ACA group was approached by Virtual Hell organizers with a video camera who said they were interviewing people about their impressions of the event. This discussion turned into a debate on whether morality can exist without god. Ashley writes, “All in all it was a mediocre scare, the most fun was the impromptu debate outside that drew a crowd of probably 15 people before the pastor of the church asked us to break it up.”

Another participant, Michael S., writes that the hell house experience and ensuing debate only strengthened his convictions as an atheist.

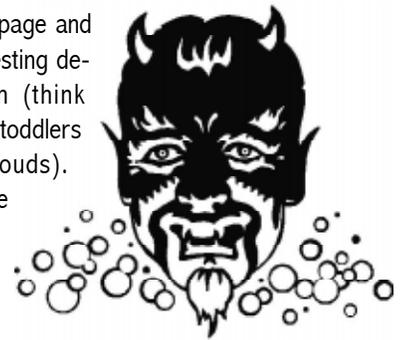
### Loony Theist Website of the Month: The Pit of Hell at *Just 4 Kids* magazine!

<http://www.just4kidsmagazine.com/hell/main.html>

If you don’t think you can stomach a real-life Hell House, visit this virtual Hell House on the web at, scarily enough, *Just 4 Kids* magazine. It comes complete with swarms of bats, burning skulls, and all the other scenarios of a typical Hell House. The introductory text reads, in part:

*“It is Halloween night, and you discover Hell is real! Your name is written in the Book of Death... You start falling down the pit. Now you are face to face with SATAN... Your mind recalls the games you played, the movies you watched, toying with the occult, and thinking it was fun. Now you know it was no game!! The demons of sorcery are screaming for their next prey. Harry Potter does not seem so sweet and innocent ANYMORE. The demon of Halloween looks straight at you. His stare sends chills up your spine. You remember your Christian friends. They tried to warn you. Halloween is a night for demons. “Why, didn’t I listen!” you cry with fright. “Jesus,” you plead, “Please Save me.”*

Click on the “Heaven” link at the bottom of the page and you’ll find an interesting depiction of heaven (think Greek columns and toddlers on puffy white clouds). Show this to anyone who thinks there’s nothing coercive about the doctrine of hell.



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**“There’s a way to stay out of hell, but no way to get out of hell.”**

*- Current sign at the New Harvest Assembly of God Church, Bouldin Ave.*

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*Free For All: Defending Liberty in America Today*  
Wendy Kaminer. Boston: Beacon Press, 2002.

Reviewed by Janet Swisher

Threats to civil liberties are greater than ever since September 11, 2001. While atheists tend to unite most around church-state separation issues, we should also be concerned that privacy, due process, and other civil rights are being eroded, particularly for groups outside the mainstream.

Wendy Kaminer's latest book, *Free For All: Defending Liberty in America Today*, is therefore extremely timely and relevant. Kaminer is a lawyer, author, and social critic, whose previous books include *Sleeping With Extraterrestrials: The Rise of Irrationalism and the Perils of Piety*, and *I'm Dysfunctional, You're Dysfunctional: The Recovery Movement and Other Self-Help Fashions*. *Free For All* is a collection of her essays on civil liberties from the past several years, both before and after 9/11. Most of the pieces appeared in *The American Prospect*, though a few are included from other publications such as *Free Inquiry* and *Dissent*.

The topics she addresses include freedom of speech, freedom of religion, the right to privacy, defendants' rights, women's rights, and many related issues. A number of themes crop up repeatedly, including the following: When people favor giving up rights, they usually have in mind *other people's* rights. Civil libertarianism requires applying the Golden Rule to people you dislike. Civil liberties (freedom to X) often conflict with civil rights (freedom from X). Threats to civil liberties tend to come from those who want people to "be good," whether according to Christian morality on the right, or political correctness on the left. We should be especially wary of expansions of government power, especially prosecutorial power, which are likely to lead to erosion of individual freedom. And sadly, Americans tend to pay only lip service to liberties that are supposedly inalienable.

Kaminer is politically liberal, but she does not shy away from positions that make liberals queasy, because they are required by a strict civil libertarian interpretation of the Constitution. Some of her possibly controversial positions include:

- Free speech rights of abortion protesters must be protected. Furthermore, trying to shield abortion patients from protest undermines the feminist po-

sition that women can and should make autonomous decisions about abortion.

- Groups such as the Boy Scouts do have the right to discriminate against gays and atheists (and face the social consequences of doing so). Their rights to free speech and free association trump the desire to enforce equal treatment by non-government groups.
- Evangelism in schools (that is not endorsed by the school) should not be prohibited in the name of protecting children. "Sectarian religious groups that seek access to public schools are unlikely to compare themselves to pornographers, but they do rely on First Amendment rights." (p. 101) In both situations, it is the job of parents, not the state, to protect children.

These essays are necessarily snapshots in time. Most of the pre-9/11 pieces have been rewritten in the past tense, to reflect the changing face of civil liberties since that date. Two pre-9/11 essays are left in the present tense, to underscore the fact that civil libertarians were already alarmed well before the terrorist attacks. Many of the restrictions currently being used by the Bush/Ashcroft regime were enabled by the Counter-Terrorism Act of 1996. The attacks of 9/11 simply provided the first opportunity to apply them on a wide and well-publicized scale.

Most pieces that mention ongoing court cases have been updated to reflect the outcome of the case, where there is one. But one piece is frustratingly out of date. This October 2000 essay describes a suit to hold the North American Man-Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) civilly liable for the rape-murder of a young boy by one of its members. Kaminer speculates that a similar suit against the Catholic church would be quickly thrown out. Events of recent months have proven that that is *not* true, and that in fact the Catholic church is more culpable than NAMBLA (which never conspired to protect child molesters). But the essay has not been updated to reflect those facts.

*Free For All* is well worth reading if you are interested in civil liberties in general, not simply church-state separation. It provides a wide-ranging, thorough, and entertaining exploration of current issues. If, as Wendell Phillips asserted, eternal vigilance is the price of liberty, then Wendy Kaminer is standing guard, and letting us know that all is not well.

## Boy Scouts of America will expel 19 year-old Eagle Scout for being an atheist

(Sources: *The New York Times* and *Scouting for All* Press Release)

Darrell Lambert, Eagle Scout, faces expulsion from the Boy Scouts of America by the Chief Seattle Council of because he is an avowed atheist. He has been given one week to declare belief in a supreme being or be kicked out of the organization. "They say that I should think about what I really believe and get back to them," Lambert said. "I have thought about this for years. Can they expect me to change my beliefs in seven days?"

The controversy started last month at a Scout Master training course where the discussion turned to religion. Glen Schmidt, District Committee Chair was quoted as saying, "I ask scouts during the training if they believe in God and if they don't I boot them out. In order for scouts to become good citizens they must believe in God."

Darrell responded to the comment by saying, "I am an atheist and no one in this room can rightfully say that I'm not a good citizen. Mr. Schmidt, you are discriminating against the 6% of Americans who don't believe. I got my Eagle award with my board knowing that I didn't believe in God. They don't discriminate."

According to *Scouting for All*, Schmidt went on to say that anybody who doesn't believe in God isn't a good citizen, and that if an atheist found a wallet on the ground, he would "pick it up, plunder the money and throw the wallet back on the ground." Lambert then left the room in disgust.

In a phone conversation, Brad Farmer, Council Executive, told Darrell that the BSA couldn't take his Eagle Award away because he already received it. He also told Darrell that because he didn't believe in God he would not be welcomed in scouts. In a conversation with Toby Estes, District Executive the following day, Mr. Estes is quoted as saying, "Darrell, scouting will be less without you, but it was the right thing to kick you out." He also said, "It's not discrimination – it's policy. Scouts have been kicking atheists out for years and we are a private organization. Darrell, it was also a mistake you received your Eagle Award."

Lambert joined the Boy Scouts of America as a first year Webelo. Since then he had been a patrol leader, quartermaster, librarian, assistant senior patrol leader, den chief, senior patrol leader and patrol leader. He received his Eagle award in April of 2001. He joined Explorer Search and Rescue in March of 1999 and earned a team leader certification a year and a half later. He had been actively involved in leadership competitions through the FFA for his sophomore and junior years in high school. He also raised pigs to show at fairs. He was an agriculture student his

sophomore year. His senior year he had 777 hours of community service time spent in athletic medicine class. Darrell tied for state champion that year, and was the top senior. Darrell was also a staff person at various weekend camps for Trail of the Eagle and Fall Camporee, teaching scout skills, and merit badges. This Last June through September he went to fight Wildfires.

A coalition of parents from Lambert's troop rallied behind him and protested the Seattle Council's actions, but to no avail. Steven Cozza, Eagle Scout, says, "I think it is horrible the Boy Scouts of America would kick out Darrell Lambert. He is more of an Eagle Scout than many Eagle Scouts who believe in god. Believing in God is not a measure of the quality of person. In fact, one the two murderers of Matthew Shepard was an Eagle Scout and a Mormon. The character of a person is seen by how a person lives his life. Apparently Mr. Farmer, Mr. Schmidt, and Mr. Estes lack the strength of character that Darrell has if they don't stand by him as the person they truly know he is. Sometimes rules that people follow are wrong. It would take the character of an Eagle Scout like Darrell Lambert to point that out. When will the Boy Scouts of America ever learn that their policy of discrimination is a violation of their own scout oath and law and hurts kids? Businesses, individuals, and The United Way should stop funding an organization that discriminates against nontheists, gays, and girls."

*The New York Times* points out that god-belief is one of the 12 points of Boy Scout law. The paper also points out that scouting officials "could not say whether anyone had been ejected for being untrustworthy, disloyal, unhelpful, unfriendly, discourteous, unkind, disobedient, cheerless, unthrifty, cowardly or sloppy."

If you are interested in contacting the BSA Chief Seattle Council or any of the people involved in this story, their contact information is below:

Darrell Lambert, Eagle Scout 360-895-6057

Chief Seattle Council  
PO Box 440408, Seattle, WA 98114-4408  
Phone (206) 725-5200, FAX (206)723-4330  
Brad Farmer, Council Scout Executive  
Glen Schmidt, District Committee Chair  
Toby Estes, District Scout Executive

## Report from the road: Godless Americans March on Washington

The Godless Americans March on Washington took place yesterday - Saturday, November 2. Seven ACA members and friends attended the march.

The initial report from Jeff Jones was that the march went very well. They enjoyed the speakers, met lots of like-minded people, and felt energized to work for the causes atheists care about. They also felt quite exhausted from all the walking and talking!

We hope to include some firsthand accounts from the march in our December issue.

*The Washington Post* reports that about 2,000 people were present at the march, and that about 60 religious protesters followed the marchers with signs reading "Trust Jesus" and "Turn to Jesus or Burn in Hell". There was some heated debate but no serious incidents.

More than 20 people spoke at the rally including Michael Newdow (plaintiff in the California Pledge of Allegiance case), American Atheists president Ellen Johnson, Chris Harper of the Landover Baptist Church parody website, and Shelly Hattan of Dallas' Metroplex Atheists.

Johnson is quoted as saying, "Ladies and gentlemen, I see a sleeping giant that is waking up and is ready to assert its political and cultural influence." She also announced the formation of a "godless" Political Action Committee.

Media coverage of the march was scant on Saturday, but marchers were told that the event would appear on C-SPAN and after-the-fact coverage may pick up in the coming days.

### The ACA Files: Member Profile of the Month

**Name:** Martin Wagner

**ACA Member Since:** September 1999

**ACA Activities:** Host of "The Atheist Experience" TV show

**Where From Originally:** Born in Henderson, Nevada. Has lived in England, the Middle East and Singapore.

**Occupation:** Cartoonist/Writer/Filmmaker

**Hobbies:** Sci-fi, collecting DVDs, working out, hanging with Midnight (his dog).

**Little-Known Facts:** Used to be a staff cartoonist at *The Daily Texan* where he met fellow student and future film director Robert Rodriguez. Martin later created the concept art for Rodriguez' film *Spy Kids*.



## Editorial Cartoon

By Phil Amador

