

The April AFS Meeting Miriam Austin speaks about the Jehovah's Witnesses



Miriam Austin

Our program for April 12th will be by **Miriam Austin**. Miriam grew up in a family of Jehovah's Witnesses, and she will relate what it was like, what some of their beliefs are, and also what it is like to be a JW apostate and to be estranged from her family due to church teachings.

Miriam was raised as a Jehovah's Witness and baptized at the age of 13. She left the church at the age of 17, then went back for a short period of time at the age of 21, and left for good at 22. Her father was an elder in the congregation and her mother was a pioneer, and in fact they both are now pioneering (what they call missionary work) in Ecuador.

She is now disfellowshipped, and is a skeptic and an agnostic. In part, the way she was raised helped her learn about the dangers of "group think," and to value critical thinking.

From the editor: Miriam gave this lecture at Atlanta Skeptics at Manuel's Tavern back in May 2014, and we found it to be informative and fascinating, as we are always being visited by members of that cult



who come to our door asking for us to join them and handing out their literature. We are glad that she agreed to share her experiences with us here.

The April Potluck

Before the April 12th meeting we will have a Potluck Lunch, starting at noon. Join AFS members and guests for some good food and great socializing. Please bring food according to the first letter of your last name:

- A-G: Bring a side dish**
- H-P: Bring a main dish**
- Q-Z: Bring a dessert**

AFS will provide drinks, plates and silverware.



Calendar

- 4/12 Potluck Lunch Noon
- 4/12 AFS General Meeting 1:00 p.m.
- 4/25 Inman Park Festival 11-7
- 4/26 Inman Park Festival 11-6

All events are at AF Hall unless noted and are subject to change.

Be sure to like AFS's Facebook page for updates: www.facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought

Inman Park Festival!

During the last full weekend in April each year, Inman Park proudly presents a neighborhood festival widely regarded as Atlanta's most spirited and eclectic. inmanparkfestival.org/

AFS, along with metro Atlanta's Freedom From Religion Foundation, is continuing its tradition of running a booth at Inman Park Festival on Sat 4/25 from 11-7 and Sun 4/26 from 11-6, with setup times on 4/25 being 6:30-10:30 am (I doubt we'll be there at 6:30!). We need volunteers to sit at the booths and get a free teeshirt for just three hours of being there! Pets should be left at home.

The address is 242 Elizabeth Street, Atlanta. Take the Connector to exit 248C Carter Center/Freedom Pkwy, cross Boulevard (1st traffic light). Go 7/10 mile then keep right onto Connector 42 East/Freedom Pkwy. Turn right onto to N. Highland. Go 1/2 mi then left on Elizabeth St. just after Sotto Sotto and Pizza Fritti.

Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at AF Hall, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Atlanta, GA, unless otherwise noted. Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:00 for socializing. Visitors are always welcome.

The views and opinions expressed by speakers at AFS do not necessarily reflect those of AFS members or its policy.



Apr 12: Miriam Austin - "Jehovah's Witnesses"

May 10: Dennis Martin - "Valuing Human Life"

Jun 14: TBA

AFS Email List

The AFS Announcements email list provides subscribers with reminders and updates on AFS activities. Send an email to AFS-Announce-subscribe@yahoo.com to subscribe. The AFS Forum email list is a place for discussions of freethought, atheism, agnosticism, church-state separation and religion. To subscribe to this list, send an email to AFSForum-subscribe@yahoo.com. The AFS Facebook page is at www.facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought. For information on other AFS email groups, visit the AFS website at www.atlantafreethought.org.

The Atlanta Freethought Society is a member-run organization dedicated to advancing freethought and protecting the rights and reputation of freethinkers, agnostics, atheists and humanists.

We welcome anyone who is interested in learning about living a good life free from religion through attending AFS speeches, debates, and discussions. We employ protests, letters to the editor, broadcast appearances, and any other reasonable and civil means available to achieve our mission.

We define freethought as "the forming of opinions about life in general and religion in particular on the basis of reason and the evidence of our senses, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief."

We actively support a strict separation of church and state as the best means to guarantee liberty for all, regardless of religious belief or lack of belief.

We seek to educate ourselves on many topics but especially on religion and non-religion. We do this through a series of thought-provoking speakers and programs, and by maintaining a web forum and an extensive library of freethought, religious, and related books, pamphlets, videotapes, and audiotapes.

We provide an organization where freethinkers and non-theists can develop friendships, talk freely, socialize and enjoy each other's company. We do not discriminate against anyone on such irrelevant grounds as race, sexual orientation, age, gender, class, or physical disability. We welcome members and leaders of all political parties and preferences.

Because we are designated by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) educational organization, contributions to AFS are tax deductible.

Any who are like-minded are welcome to join us.

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\$20 for low income.

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Sunday Assembly's Annual Conference in Atlanta May 29-31

<http://www.aconferencecalledwonder.com/>



CELEBRATE LIFE. BUILD COMMUNITY. HAVE FUN.

Join the Sunday Assembly's annual conference from May 29th-May 31st 2015 which is entirely dedicated to celebrating life, building secular communities and having a lot of fun. Atlanta will rock with inspirational speakers, deep thinkers and great doers providing you with tools to improve your life, grow your community and change the world. A get together for Sunday Assembly organisers, Sunday Assembly participants, community builders and anyone who wants to make a difference in this one life we know we have.

Speakers include:

HEMANT MEHTA - THE NEED FOR SECULAR COMMUNITY
CASPER KELLY - CREATIVITY
MAYA HUTCHINSON - DIGITAL COMMUNITY BUILDING
SANDERSON JONES - MC
MIKE AUS - FRUIT FROM THE OASIS
MANDISA THOMAS - DIVERSITY NOW! BUT HOW?
PIPPA EVANS - IMPROV CLASS
AMY BOYLE - CREATING LEADERS
BOB FAW - USER FRIENDLY BRAIN TOOLS
BRETT WHEELER - POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY
BART CAMPOLO - LOVE NOT LABELS
DALE MCGOWAN - PARENTING, KIDS AND COMMUNITY

Venues:

DRUID HILLS PRESBYTERIAN - The conference takes place in the heart of Atlanta within walking distance of the Poncey-Highland and Virginia-Highland areas. On Friday and Saturday we'll be hosting the conference and General Assembly in this building. Our venue: a very obliging church!

PLAZA THEATRE - The Plaza Theatre is Atlanta's longest running movie theatre, and an architectural landmark of the city. On Sunday the Plaza will host a Sunday Assembly Of All The Talents, packed with the best speakers and performers from across the Sunday Assembly.

HOTELS - There is a block booking at the Highland Inn Hotel which is very close to the conference. As Atlanta is not that public transport friendly it'll be very useful to walk from the hotel.

Schedule:

THURSDAY

Welcome Drinks

FRIDAY

Yummy Yoga
The Mindfulness Adventure Begins
Welcome Talk
Talks
Workshops
Cabaret Evening

SATURDAY

Early Morning Rave
General Assembly
Talks
Open Space
Workshops
Community Dinner

SUNDAY

Sunday Assembly Of All The Talents
The Organic Orchestra
Atlanta BBQ
Volunteering Opportunities

Get your tickets here:

www.aconferencecalledwonder.com/tickets/

FFRF's Letter to Dr. Cole Pugh of Troup Co School System, GA on Unconstitutional Religious Instruction at Troup County Comprehensive High School

(Reprinted by permission)

April 1, 2015

Dear Dr. Pugh:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding unconstitutional religious instruction that recently took place at Troup County Comprehensive High School (TCCHS). FFRF is a nonprofit organization with 22,000 members nationwide including many members in Georgia and a state chapter in Atlanta. Our purpose is to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

It is our understanding that on March 23, 2015, TCCHS hosted speaker Eric Hovind, who gave a presentation to students during the school day. This presentation was purportedly about "critical thinking" and may have been given during a debate class. Eric Hovind is a young earth creationist and evangelist who attempts to cast doubt on evolution while promoting biblical creationist views. Hovind is the founder and president of Creation Today, which describes itself as a "Christian-apologetics ministry desiring to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the entire world." (creationtoday.org/about/at-a-glance)



Eric Hovind

March 23 at 9:23am · 🌐

Just got done speaking at a public school in LaGrange Georgia. We talked about critical thinking. The students loved it!



Like · Comment · Share · 👍 438 💬 28 ➦ 4

From Eric Hovind's Facebook page

Hovind's Creation Today website clearly states that it is a fundamentalist Christian organization that promotes the literal truth of the Bible as it relates to science. Creation Today professes believe in bible infallibility on scientific and historical matters. Its "statement of faith" says:

The Bible is divinely inspired and inerrant throughout, in that holy men of God were moved by the Holy Spirit to write the very words of Scripture. It is without error)2 Timothy 3:16, 2 Peter 1:21)...No apparent, perceived or claimed evidence in any field, including history and science, can be valid if it contradicts Scripture.

Creation Today's website, www.creationtoday.org, explains that Eric

Hovind has been engaged in "full-time ministry" since graduating college in 1999, and that he "lead[s] an apologetics ministry in the war against evolution and humanism." Nothing in Hovind's background indicates any expertise or experience in teaching "critical thinking" skills or any other topic relevant to secular education.

It is unconstitutional and completely inappropriate for TCCHS to host a fundamentalist Christian speaker whose sole purpose and goal is the promotion of biblical creationism. We are not aware of any protections the school took to ensure that students were not exposed to the fundamentalist slides, many of which appear to contain arguments undermining evolution, supporting the idea of a biblical flood, and advancing biblical creationism.

It is well settled that public schools may not advance or promote religion. See generally, *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577 (1992); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38 (1985); *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97 (1967); *Sch. Dist. Or Abington Twshp. V. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963); *Engle v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962). Moreover, "the preservation and transmission of religious beliefs and worship is a responsibility and a choice committed to the private sphere." *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 310 (2001) (quoting *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. at 589).

Promotion of creationism in public schools violates the Establishment Clause. Teachings that undermine evolution or teach "alternative theories" are equally unlawful, whether styled as "intelligent design" or "critical thinking." Courts routinely reject the promotion of creationism in the public schools:

- *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97 (1968) (School officials may not prohibit the teaching of evolution)
- *Freiler v. Tangipahoa Parish Bd. Of Educ.*, 201 F.3d 602 (5th Cir 2000) (disclaimer read before teaching evolution violated Establishment Clause)
- *Peloza v. Capistrano Unified School District*, 37 F.3d 517 (9th Cir. 1994) (School could prohibit teacher from teaching creationism, finding that "to permit him to discuss his religious beliefs with students during school time on school grounds would violate the Establishment Clause.")

Continued next page

Secular Coalition for America Key Issues

<https://www.secular.org/content/key-issues>

The fundamentally secular nature of the United States government is one of its defining characteristics. It is the mission of the Secular Coalition for America to increase the visibility and respect for nontheist viewpoints and to protect and strengthen the secular character of our government as the best guarantee of freedom for all. To ensure the core freedom of and from religion are upheld, the Secular Coalition for America stands for the following:

- **Health and Safety:** The health and safety of an individual should not be compromised by the religious beliefs of another person or group.
- **Education:** Children should not be

subjected to religious education or exercises in our public schools.

- **Tax Policy:** Religious organizations and individuals should not be exempt from the requirements and restrictions of tax policy.
- **Discrimination:** Personal religious beliefs do not justify prejudicial actions that violate discrimination laws.
- **Government Actions:** The government and officials acting in their government capacity, should not endorse religious beliefs, one religion over another or religion over non-religion.
- **Military:** The taxpayer funded U.S. military must serve the beliefs of all service members without privileging one belief over another.
- **Global:** Even abroad, U.S. government funds, policies, or actions should not endorse religion.

- *Webster v. New Lenox Sch. Dist. No. 122*, 917 F.2d 1004 (7th Cir 1990) (School board could limit teacher's comments on creationism because the board had the responsibility to ensure that the teacher was not "injecting religious advocacy into the classroom.")
- *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area Sch. Dist.* 400 F.Supp. 2d 707 (M.D. Pa 2005) (policy requiring students to hear statement that intelligent design is alternative to Darwin's theory of evolution violates Establishment Clause.)
- *McLean v. Arkansas Bd of Ed.*, 529 F.Supp 1255 (D.C.Ark., 1982) (Arkansas Board of Education was permanently enjoined from taking actions that would allow instruction on creationism pursuant to a state statute because to do so violated Establishment Clause.)

The Supreme Court struck down a requirement that teachers educate students on "scientific creationism." *Edwards v. Aguillard*, 482 U.S. 578, (1987). The Court said, "Families entrust public schools with the education of their children, but condition their trust on the understanding that the classroom will not purposely be used to advance religious views that may conflict with the private beliefs of the student and his or her family." *Id* at 584. Time and again courts have exposed creationism instruction as an attempt to foist religious beliefs onto vulnerable schoolchildren, often after a costly legal battle. In the most recent case of creationism in the public schools, a Pennsylvania school board had to pay out more than one million dollars in legal fees and damages. www.yorkdispatch.com/searchresults/ci_3535139

It is incumbent that school officials do due diligence when approached by outside groups with vested interests in pitching their messages to a captive audience of public school students. However, in this case, it would have taken only a cursory glance at Creation Today's website to verify its evangelical religious agenda. It is difficult for us to understand how this

presentation could have been approved. Your community undoubtedly includes many people who have professional experience, training, and/or degrees and would be delighted, usually at no cost to the District, to discuss "critical thinking" with students interested in debate, and whose presence would not violate clear constitutional dictates. FFRF takes religious promotion in public schools seriously; we recently filed suit against the Emanuel County Schools in Georgia. www.inquisitr.com/1836034/georgia-school-being-sued-for-humiliating-children-who-did-not-participate-in-prayer/

Parents trust that public schools will act in accordance with the Constitution and refrain from promoting religious views. On behalf of concerned District residents, FFRF respectfully requests that you commence an immediate investigation into these allegations and take appropriate action to avoid First Amendment violations from occurring in your District. We would appreciate a response in writing regarding your actions, so we may notify our complainants.

Sincerely
Elizabeth Cavell
Staff Attorney

Other Meetings of Interest in Metro Atlanta

The SOS (Secular Organizations for Sobriety) meets on Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m. in Roswell. For more information, send an email to donnaigore@yahoo.com.

The Fayette Freethought Society hosts lunches, dinners, book discussions, civic activities and more. (www.meetup.com/Fayette-Freethought-Society/)

The Peachtree City Humanists meet often for discussions at Starbucks, lunch, dinner at She's Bistro, and more. Several upcoming events each month. (www.meetup.com/Peachtree-City-Humanists-PTCH/)

Fellowship of Reason meets on the first Sunday of every month at 10:30 AM at AF Hall. There are meetings for book discussion, philosophy, a classic film course, and other events. (www.fellowshipofreason.com)

Black Nonbelievers do not have a scheduled meetup for April on their Meetup page yet, so check back. (www.meetup.com/Black-Nonbelievers/)

There will be a **meetup for Atlanta atheists** on Sunday, April 12, at 6:00 p.m. at Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists/)

GUST (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths) has their monthly meeting at UUGC, 12 Bethesda Church Road, Lawrenceville, GA on Monday, Apr 13 at 7 p.m. Topic not given at press time. (www.meetup.com/brights-295/)

Atlanta Astronomy Club will meet at Atlanta Freethought Hall for their April 11th meeting at 3-5 pm, due to Fernbank Science Center being closed for DeKalb County Schools spring break. The topic is The Herschels, the First Family of Astronomy. For more information, check out the website (www.atlantaastronomy.org)

IIG Atlanta will have its monthly meetup on Sat. Apr 18 at 4:30 at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N Highland Avenue Northeast, in the Crows Nest. Check the meetup group or contact Shaune Beattie at shaune.beattie@gmail.com for more information: www.meetup.com/IIG-Atlanta/.

Atlanta Skeptics is will have its Sat. Apr 18 regular meeting at Manuel's Tavern in the North Avenue room (come in the front door, turn right and head all the way back). The topic will be announced. Social and dinner starts at 6 pm. Be sure to check with the Meetup page. (www.meetup.com/AtlantaSkeptics/)

Sunday Assembly Atlanta will meet at First Existentialist Congregation of Atlanta, 470 Candler Park, Atlanta, GA 6:00 p.m. Sun, Mar. 18. The topic has not been posted yet.

Please ask one of their volunteer helpers if you need assistance in any way. Their venue is wheelchair accessible and there is always a potluck supper afterwards.

Besides their Sunday meeting, this month, SA also has a range of other events, such as *Mindfulness Meditation*, *First Sunday Small Group & Potluck*, *Artist's Meetup*, *hikes and camping*, *book clubs*, and *Help Often projects*.

For more about the global movement, check out: sundayassembly.com/about/ (www.meetup.com/Sunday-Assembly/)

Freedom From Religion Foundation will meet on Sunday, Apr 26th at 2:00 at Atlanta Freethought Hall. The topic will be on population control & family planning and how the big-

gest obstacle for common sense practices is religious doctrine. The speaker will be Todd Daniels. www.meetup.com/Freedom-From-Religion-Foundation-of-Georgia/

Another **meetup for Atlanta Atheists** is scheduled for Sun., April 19 at 2:00 p.m. at Kaleidoscope Bistro & Pub in Brookhaven. This is a change from their usual gathering place of Five Seasons in Sandy Springs, so make a note of it. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists/)

The Atlanta Science Tavern is having

a meeting at Manuel's Tavern, 602 N. Highland Ave NE, Atlanta, GA from 7-10 p.m. Sat. Apr 25 but at press time, the topic has not yet been announced. The cost is \$3.00 per non-student. See the meetup page for more info. Note that Science Tavern also has quite a few other listed events. (www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern)

Atlanta Atheists has first Sunday meetups each month: the place varies. Check Meetup for info on the May get-together. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists/)

Recovery from Religion - Morrow Chapter meets on Sat. May 9 at 1 p.m. at Barnes & Noble Booksellers Southlake, 1939 Mount Zion Road, Morrow, GA.

There is no proselytizing of any kind allowed at these meetings. For more information and resources, please visit www.recoveringfromreligion.org. (www.meetup.com/Recovering-From-Religion-Morrow-Chapter/)



Become a Member!

(Or renew your membership with this form or online at www.AtlantaFreethought.org!)

If you've enjoyed what you've read, we enthusiastically invite you to join the Atlanta Freethought Society. Every month you will get our acclaimed monthly newsletter, the *Atlanta Freethought News*, voting rights in the organization—and enjoyment of the superb speakers we have coming up, as well as the social and activist events that we sponsor!

Individual memberships: One person can become a member for \$50 per year.

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Paper newsletter: We encourage members to receive the newsletter by email. This avoids the printing and mailing expenses. But if you really want the paper version of the newsletter, just let us know and we will send it to you at no additional charge. (You can also pick up a paper newsletter at any AFS meeting.)

Thank you for your support! We look forward to your being with us in the coming months!

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www.atlantafreethought.org afs@atlantafreethought.org

"Religious bondage shackles and debilitates the mind and unfits it for every noble enterprise, every expanded prospect."

—James Madison, 1774

We still have these great books for sale:

Why I Am Not A Christian—\$8

Lucid, comprehensive, engaging answer to Christian apologists by Keith Parsons. Respectful but devastating to all Christian claims. A wonderful follow-up to Bertrand Russell's great essay with the same title.

An Uppity Old Atheist

Woman's Dictionary—\$8

By the late, great Carol Faulkenberry (illustrated by Amanda Faulken-berry); like Ambrose Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary*—but better: more biting, funnier. Guaranteed to make you laugh out loud and to challenge at least one idea you hold.

Quotations That Support the

Separation of State and Church

(2nd edition)—\$11

Compiled by Edward M. Buckner and Michael E. Buckner; ammunition against Christian-nation mythologists. Quotes from America's revolutionaries, constitution framers, Presidents, court decisions. Sources carefully documented; extensive index. Comb-bound—lies flat for easy copying.

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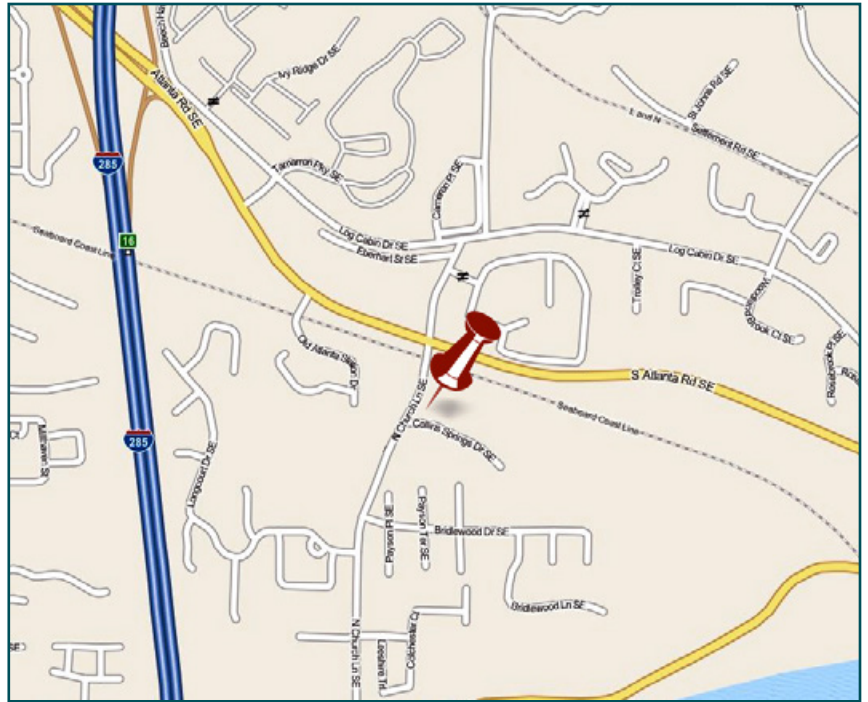
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Dare To Think
For Yourself!



**The April 12th
Meeting:
1:00 at AF Hall,
4775 N. Church Lane SE
Atlanta, GA**

**This Month's Speaker:
Miriam Austin**



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