

# anuary 2016 Number 22 - Volume Publication AFS D D

# The January AFS Meeting Mark Banks, AFS Board Member: "Creating a Sense of **Community for the Non-Believer**"

Mark Banks was born into a very exciting and dangerous time. With the cold war, the McCarthy communist witch hunts and the space race it was best to quietly observe all the insanity going on.



Mark Banks

He also had a front row seat during the early days of the civil rights movement. He observed all the religiously inspired hypocrisy and blind raging hate directed at the "colored" community. The adults around him were paranoid about nuclear war, Communism, the space race

and a possible race war. Needless to say, he was concerned about the survival of humanity.

During this time, he became a science nerd. One of his earliest memories was of the launch of Sputnik in 1957. He has had a lifelong interest in Astronomy, Cosmology, space exploration and all of the related fields of science. He has been a member of the Atlanta Astronomy Club for 25+ years and President of the club for the past 5 years. You just can't beat the scientific method for finding out what is real and what is myth, superstition, nonsense, theology, pseudoscience and other forms of B.S.

After high school he went into the Air Force. In the Air Force he was able to use his knowledge of science and technology to get involved working with electronic warfare equipment. After leaving the Air Force he acquired degrees in Electrical Engineering and Industrial Management.

After college he spent 20+ years in the aerospace industry primarily involved with avionics, electronic warfare and encryption systems. During this time he had a front row seat watching great advancements in science and technology over the years.

After retiring from the aerospace industry he became involved in a number of other related business ventures. He has stayed in touch with the aerospace industry through Consulting/

# Calendar

1/10 Potluck Lunch

I/10 AFS General Meeting 1:00 p.m. I/29 Game night at AF Hall! 7:30 p.m. 2/14 AFS Board meeting 11:00 a.m. 2/14 AFS General Meeting 1:00 p.m. 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** 

contracting work with various entities within the military industrial community. He has been involved in other business ventures. He became a Real Estate broker, Mortgage broker, Securities Dealer, and Real Estate investor.

The idea of "retirement" is an alien concept to him. He is now involved with the Freethought movement, the environmental movement, the Astronomy Club, and numerous other activities. His goal is to leave this world a better place for future generations. He has been described as a hyperactive senior citizen and he says that he resembles that remark!

#### ъſ The January Potluck

Before the January 10th 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 dessert H-P: Bring a side dish Q-Z: Bring a main dish

AFS will provide drinks, plates and silverware.

For the latest in upcoming AFS events, join our Meetup group! meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society

# **Programs and Speakers**

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at AF Hall, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Atlanta, GA, 30339 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.

Jan 10: Mark Banks "Creating a Sense of Community for the Non-Believer"

Feb 14: TBD

Mar 13: TBD

#### Apr 10: TBD

We are always interested in finding new speakers. If you have an idea for a speaker, let a board member know. AFS pays an honorarium.

## **AFS Email List**

The AFS Announcements email list provides subscribers with reminders and updates on AFS activities. Send an email to <u>AFS-Announce-subscribe@</u> <u>yahoogroups.com</u> 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 <u>AFSForum-subscribe@</u> <u>yahoogroups.com</u>. The AFS Facebook page is at <u>facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought</u>. For calender information on AFS activities, please join the <u>Meetup group</u>. The AFS website is <u>www.atlantafreethought.org</u>.

To keep up to date on the Atlanta Freethought Society calendar of upcoming events, please join our Meetup group: <u>meetup.com/</u><u>Atlanta-Freethought-Society</u>.

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.

#### Atlanta Freethought News An AFS Publication

Editor: Laura Ross Assistant Editor: Steve Yothment

#### How to Contact the Editor

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#### **Atlanta Freethought News**

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Membership in AFS is \$50/year per person, \$20 for low income.

Membership includes AFNews by email or mail. (Tell us which one you want.)

> Sustaining Membership is \$100. Life Membership is \$1000. Subscriptions only are \$30 for 12 issues.

Please make checks and money orders payable to Atlanta Freethought Society

(or Paypal to afs@atlantafreethought.org)

Visit our Meetup page at meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society/

See AFS events and member views at: facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought.

Send E-mail to afs@atlantafreethought.org.

AFS Wordpress specialist: Dwight Lyman AFS Facebook page: Laura Ross

#### **Atlanta Freethought News**

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# **BN** Black Nonbelievers, Inc. walking by sight, not by faith **Fifth Anniversary Celebration and Conference**!

Since January of 2011, Black Nonbelievers has grown from a local group in the Atlanta area to a national phenomenon. In 2016 on MLK weekend (January 16 and 17), BN will celebrate its 5 year anniversary, complete with presentations, interactive workshops and just overall FUN! Learn how much this organization has contributed to the secular comunity, meet the folks who have supported BN since its inception. as well as celebrate this milestone achievement. It's MORE than a conference!

Featured guests will include:

- Alix Jules
- Amy Monsky
- Bridgett Crutchfield
- Candace Gorham
- Lorenzo Neal
- Darrel Ray
- Jeremiah Camara
- Sarah Morehead
- Dave Silverman
- Todd Stiefel
- And many MORE!
- Music by Victor Harris

Full registration, including dinner is \$75. This price is for advanced registration only. Student registration is \$20 (dinner not included, and must present valid ID). Buy your tickets here:

blacknonbelievers.wufoo.com/forms/bns-5th-anniversary-celebration

Register for this event, and book your hotel reservation at the Holiday Inn Atlanta Airport-North, 1380 Virginia Avenue, Atlanta at the special rate of \$99 per night on the form linked above. Interested vendors, exhibitors, and sponsors are welcome at very reasonable rates—information is on the same form.

Keep following the meetup page listed on page 7 for further information as the time comes nearer. BN really appreciate the support, and will be around for many years in the future!



**Black Nonbelievers (BN)** is a 501(c)(3) non-profit fellowship of nonbelievers headquartered in the Atlanta area that is dedicated to providing an informative, caring, festive and friendly environment. It strives to connect with other Blacks (and their allies) who are living free of religion and irrational beliefs, and might

otherwise be shunned by family and friends. Instead of accepting dogma, BN seeks to determine truth and morality through reason and evidence.

BN welcomes all regardless of sex, sexuality, gender identity, age, national origin or race. BN extends a caring embrace to all who wish to participate in exploring a meaningful rational life.

#### Mission

The mission of Black Nonbelievers is to...

- Provide secular fellowship.
- Nurture and support nonbelievers in coming out.
- Promote atheist pride.
- · Organize nonbelievers for charitable causes.

#### Meetings

BN members meet to discuss topics relevant to secular living as well as to socialize and offer support. We also offer workshops, and other gatherings to educate the public on the views of nonbelievers. Unless otherwise noted, all meetings and events are open to the general public. (See our Calendar for details on specific meetings and activities.)

#### Why is this a fellowship of 'nonbelievers'?

The word 'nonbeliever' speaks to the kind of mindset BN encourages. BN encourages people to move from a mindset of faith and belief to reason and rationality. BN is not just nonbelievers in religion, but are nonbelievers in any claim, religious or otherwise, that is not supported by good evidence. Each of us may be at different stages on the journey of rational enlightenment. As freethinkers (rational nonbelievers) we evaluate beliefs and claims, then reconsider our position when the evidence calls for a different conclusion.

Black Nonbelievers now has affiliate groups in the following cities:

Charlotte Chicago Dallas Detroit DC Louisville Milwaukee Memphis Orlando

For more information, visit www.blacknonbelievers.org

## January 2016

# **Freedom Of Conscience: The Greatest Gift Of All**

#### by Rob Boston in Wall of Separation

https://www.au.org/blogs/wall-of-separation/freedom-of-conscience-the-greatest-gift-of-all

People sometimes ask me why I got so interested in defending separation of church and state. The answer is simple: As a kid, I was sent to a Catholic school for eight years.

Don't get me wrong. I had a lot of good teachers there and learned many things. But I found the school's tendency to micro-manage prayer troubling. Three times a day, like clockwork, a nun, priest or lay teacher would order everyone to stand up and pray. In unison, we would chant one of two prayers – the "Our Father" or the "Hail Mary" – before sitting down for the lesson.

Even as a kid, I was struck by this. Something wasn't right. If prayer is an attempt to connect with the divine, the eternal or with God, how can it be so regimented? Most of the time, I didn't even think about the words I was mumbling. It was all by rote. We prayed because someone ordered us to, not because we felt the need to connect with a Supreme Being.

A private Catholic school had the right to make us pray like this, and I'm sure the nuns and priests thought it would increase our piety. Maybe it did for some kids, but in my case it backfired. As I got older, I became less and less interested in formalized and ritualized prayer, which felt spiritually empty to me. I started to chafe against the idea that individuals in authority could make me do it.

In ninth grade, I switched to a public school. Pennsylvania law at that time allowed for a moment of silence at the beginning of the day. It was a neutral moment. We weren't urged to pray or do anything else. It was just there. After the Pledge of Allegiance and the morning announcements, the voice wafting over the public address system announced that we would observe a moment of silence.

I found this liberating. I could pray if I wanted – or not. The choice was mine. My teacher certainly didn't care, and as I looked around, I had no idea what my peers were doing. Perhaps some were praying, perhaps not.

Thinking back on it now, I realize that was a decisive moment. I could make my own decision. As guided by my individual conscience, I - not some school official or religious leader – was in control of my spiritual life.

Once you get a taste of that, there's really no going back.

That seems like a basic thing, something all

people would want. And it is. Yet we know there are people in America today who have a problem with that concept. After all, too much freedom might lead you to pick the "wrong" religion or to reject them all.

So these people promote official, mandated, compelled prayer in public schools. They demand that government erect and support the symbols of their faith (but not others or non-belief). They labor to subject us all to the rigid moral rules of their own faith.

What they don't understand is that we in the United States have been given a great gift: the absolute right of conscience resting on a wall of separation between church and state. As much as the Religious Right tries to decouple those two concepts, they remain closely linked. The wall provides essential support to the right of conscience. If the wall collapses, freedom of conscience falls with it.

It is difficult, if not impossible, for true freedom of conscience to exist when the government has a favored faith. If you are constantly reminded by state officials that your religious (or non-religious) beliefs are second class, that they are merely tolerated by the benevolence of those who have accessed real religious truth, you are not free.

At this time of year, when many people are celebrating holidays that involve gift-giving, we should be thankful for the gift of complete freedom of conscience bequeathed to us by our founders. Yes, in some ways it was not theirs to give because it is an inherent human right – but the hard truth is that it's one that not all nations recognize.

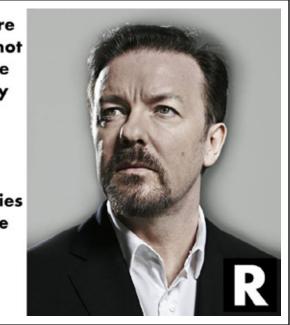
Ours does. And unlike a sweater or an electronic gadget, the fundamental right of conscience never goes out of style or breaks, although it certainly can be eroded.

Enjoy that gift. Treasure it. Use it regularly. Most importantly, vow to defend it.

"When you are dead, you do not know you are dead. It's only painful and difficult for others.

The same applies when you are stupid." -Ricky Gervais

www.facebook.com /Rasjonalitet



#### **Atlanta Freethought News**



# 'Religious' hospitals not exempt from retirement regulations

http://ffrf.org/news/news-releases/item/25261-religious-hospitals-not-exempt-from-retirement-regulations

The Third Circuit Court of Appeals ruled yesterday that large healthcare companies are not exempt from retirement plan regulations, even if they operate "religious" hospitals.

The Employee Retirement Income Security Act (ERISA) regulates retirement plans, but exempts church plans from requirements such as paying insurance premiums, meeting minimum funding standards and disclosing funding levels to plan participants.

FFRF filed an amicus brief earlier this year in the lawsuit contending that hospitals are not entitled to church privileges.

New Jersey's Saint Peter's Healthcare System employees filed class-action suits against their employers for claiming the church plan exemption. These large non-profit hospital systems have been able to contravene ERISA and underfund employees' retirement plans by claiming the church exemption. The plaintiffs argued the employers are not churches, and are not operated or funded by religious organizations, so their employers should not be able to claim the church plan exemption. The district court ruled that Saint Peter's could not use the exemption and the Third Circuit has agreed: "The plain terms of ERISA only make these exemptions available to plans established in the first instance by churches. Because St. Peter's is not a church, the exemption is unavailable."

FFRF submitted amicus briefs in similar cases before the Seventh and Ninth Circuits as well. FFRF briefs called the "church plan exemption" itself to be unconstitutional under the First Amendment because it treats churches preferentially.

FFRF thanks former FFRF Legal Extern Jarvis Idowu for researching and drafting FFRF's amicus briefs with staff attorneys Patrick Elliott and Andrew L. Seidel.

## January 2016

# **Other Meetings of Interest in Metro Atlanta**

**The Atlanta Science Tavern** at press time does not have anything listed for January as Atlanta's favorite meeting place Manuel's Tavern has closed for renovations for the next few months (and as it is cutting out the "new" large bar and the North Avenue room, don't expect to be meeting there anymore). Be sure to check the meetup page. (www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern)

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

We Agnostics Atlanta meets on Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Galano Club, 585 Dutch Valley Rd NE,

Atlanta, GA 30324. Clubhouse phone number: (404) 881-9188. This is an Alcoholics Anonymous group.

#### Alpharetta Freethinkers Human-

**ists & Atheists Meetup** is a brand-new group meeting on the north side. Be sure to check out their meetup page for upcoming events. (www.meetup.com/Alpharetta-Freethinkers-Humanists-Atheists-Meetup/.)

#### Marietta Skeptic/Humanist Meet-

**up** has various get-togethers and discussion groups. Several upcoming events. (http://www.meetup.com/ Marietta-Atheists-Meetup/)

**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/.)

The Southern Crescent Freethinkers sponsor Navigators, Owl & Ibis: A Confluence of Minds, and meet for dinner, etc. Several upcoming events each month. (www.meetup.

com/Southern-Crescent-Freethinkers)

**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.)

The Georgia chapter of **Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF)** meets on the first Sunday of each month at AF Hall from 2:00 to 4:00. You can learn more about their topics at www.meetup.com/ Freedom-From-Religion-Foundation-of-Georgia.

Atlanta Skeptics - At press time, the only meetup for Atlanta Skeptics is Drinking Skeptically at 5 Seasons Brewing, Jan. 8 at 7 pm. Check their meetup page for more info. (www. meetup.com/AtlantaSkeptics)

#### **Recovery from Religion - Morrow**

**Chapter** meets on the second Saturday of each month 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/)

Atlanta Astronomy Club will have their general meeting on Jan. 16 3-5 pm at Fernbank Science Center, 156 Heaton Park Drive, Atlanta, GA. Lots more events are available so check out the website (www.atlantaastronomy.org)



**Sunday Assembly Atlanta** is going to have their 2016 Congregational meeting starting January 10 at First Existentialist Congregation, 470 Candler Park Dr NE, Atlanta. It's time to get everyone together and work on what we want Sunday Assembly to be going forward. Find out what's happening at the board and organizer levels, share ideas for what you think we can accomplish in the next year or so, and see what you might want to do to make it happen!

- 4:45 Introduction and report from the board and organizers
- 5:00 General congregational meeting

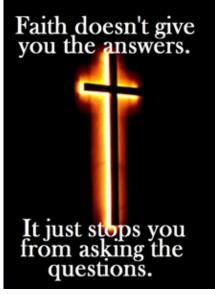
6:30 - Potluck

Bring a favorite dish, a dessert to indulge in, drinks of various natures, or just joyous intentions. There should be enough to go around. Please check out the meetup page for more information. (www.meetup.com/ Sunday-Assembly()

There will be a **meetup for Atlanta Atheists** on Sunday, Jan. 10, 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 annual holiday party on Monday, Jan II, 7:00 p.m. at UUCG, 12 Bethesda Church Road, Lawrenceville. (www.meetup.com/ brights-295/.)

**Black Nonbelievers** will have their 5th anniversary celebration on Saturday, Jan. 16 starting at 8 a.m. at the Holiday Inn Atlanta Airport-North, 1380 Virginia Avenue, Atlanta. The cost for full registration and dinner is \$75. See page 3 for more information. (www.meetup. com/Black-Nonbelievers/)



#### Atlanta Atheists Parents Meetup will have a play date at Medlock Park, 874 Gaylemont Cir, Decatur near the North Decatur/Embry Hills area Jan 17 from 11-2. If the weather is

Hills area Jan 17 from 11-2. If the weather is too cold or rainy it will be at Leapin Lizards, 185 Sams St, Decatur, GA 30030. (www.meetup. com/Atlanta-Atheist-Parents-Meetup.)

The Third Sunday meetup for **Atlanta Athe**ists is on Sunday, Jan. 17, at 2:00 p.m. at Dantanna's, 3400 Around Lenox Drive, Atlanta, GA. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists/)

Atlanta Atheists Parents Meetup will have a play date at East Cobb Park, 3322 Roswell Rd, Marietta, near Marietta and Sandy Springs, Jan. 24 at 11-2. If the weather is too cold or rainy it will be at Catch Air at Town Center Market, 2505 Chastain Meadows Parkway Northwest, Suite #103, Marietta, GA 30066. (www. meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheist-Parents-Meetup.)

Another meetup for Atlanta Atheists is

scheduled for Sun., Jan. 24 at 4:00 p.m. at Five Seasons Brewing, 5600 Roswell Rd, Sandy Springs. (www.meetup.com/ Atlanta-Atheists)

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



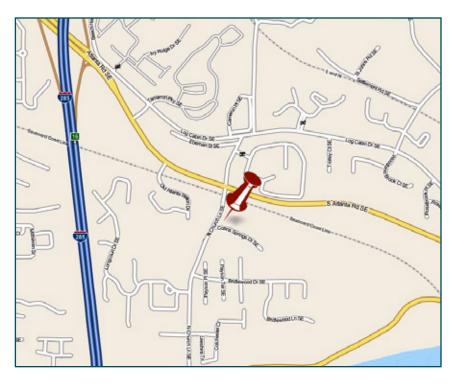
	Receive newsletter by email (No charge for members) Receive paper newsletter by mail (No charge for members)	Shipping and handling for Books \$_ Extra donation (Thank you!) \$_ Total: \$_		on only	Individual         \$50         \$           Low Income         \$20         \$           Sustaining         \$100         \$	Annual dues are: Membership Dues# of mems	Sustaining memberships: Or Life memberships: Avoid the H Paper newsletter: We encourd and mailing expenses. But if you red send it to you at no additional charg Thank you for your support! We	<b>Become a Membe</b> (or renew your membership with this form If you've enjoyed what you've read, we enthusiast Society. Every month you will get our acclaimed in voting rights in the organization—and enjoyment as the social and activist events that we sponsor!
Save time and postage by making a payment via <b>Paypal</b> to: <u>afs@atlantafreethought.org</u>			Any other things you'd like to tell us?	Phone: HW	Address:	Total	<ul> <li>Sustaining memberships: One person can become a member for \$50 per year.</li> <li>Sustaining memberships: One person can become a sustaining member for \$100 per year.</li> <li>Life memberships: Avoid the hassle of renewing every year. A life membership lasts a lifetime.</li> <li>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.)</li> <li>Thank you for your support! We look forward to your being with us in the coming months!</li> </ul>	<b>Become a Members</b> (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!
or loss while artwork is in our posession. Owner agrees to terms: Signature/date AFS Art Committee approval: Signature/date	Freethought Society art committee for approval (afs@atlantaf- reethought.org). Installation & removal will be done by artist/ owner overseen by AFS art committee. Damage to building will be repaired by artist/owner. The owner assumes all risk for	Is artwork for sale? Yes / No \$ Upon sale owner agrees to pay AFS a 33.3% fee. Terms: All artwork disblays will be submitted to Atlanta	Phone(s):	Address:	Display dates: from to Owner if other than above:		Phone(s): Email: Description of artwork (subject, color, dimensions, weight, frame, price, materials, other info — list on separate page if necessary):	AFS Art Display Program 4775 N. Church Lane SE Atlanta, GA 30339 www.atlantafreethought.org afs@atlantafreethought.org Person or entity displaying art: Address:





# January 10 meeting I:00 at AF Hall, 4775 N. Church Lane SE Atlanta, GA 30339





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