

# **February AFS Meeting**

## Christina Gibson, Canopy Conservation Coordinator, Trees Atlanta

The speaker for the February 11th program for AFS will be **Christina Gibson**, the Canopy Conservation Coordinator of **Trees Atlanta**. She is an incredible resource for environmental and



Christina Gibson

tree-specific advocacy here within the city. She has given numerous presentations on the topics of conservation and community tree advocacy.

Many Atlantans are alarmed by the rapid loss of trees in town

these days. Buzzwords like 'good urbanism,' 'high density,' and 'sustainability' pepper many conversations and marketing materials about new development in Atlanta, but our urban forest and our corresponding civic identity as the 'City in the Forest'—suffers from rampant tree loss. This current reality begs the old adage: are we literally missing the forest for the trees?

The question is simple: how is Atlanta going to grow WITH its trees? We have the chance to write that narrative now, while we have remnant greenspace to work with from the side effects of urban sprawl. Solutions must be sought through more innovative design and holistic development on the site scale, as well as progressive environmental policies and land use planning at the regional scale. Trees Atlanta will continue planting trees everywhere they can, but they simply cannot keep pace to mitigate our dwindling tree canopy without working together to actively protect our existing forest, too. We simply must do both.

Development and conservation need not be mutually exclusive, and in fact, we cannot afford to take that polarizing approach any longer. Until our policies can be updated, let's collaborate across stakeholder levels to maintain 48% tree canopy coverage in the City in the Forest.

## The February Potluck

Before the February 11th 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 desert H-P: Bring a side dish Q-Z: Bring a main dish

AFS will provide drinks, plates and silverware.

## Calendar

2/11	Potluck	12:00 p.m.
2/11	AFS General Meeting	I:00 p.m.
3/11	AFS Board Meeting	11:00 a.m.
3/11	AFS General Meeting	I:00 p.m.

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

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



## Harriett Harris 1922-2018

Ms. Harris, one of our stalwarts, came though financially and otherwise for AFS more than once, and she was a feisty and strong woman. She earned a law degree, was certified as a financial advisor, and had membership in the American Arbitration Association. She had a love for freethought, opera, the Cherokee Club, and "all things French." She was a supporter of Atlanta Freethought Society and will be strongly missed.

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.

### Feb II: Christina Gibson Mar II: Dennis Martin Apr 8: TBD May I3: TBD

### **AFS Email List**

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

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

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

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

Views, opinions, positions or strategies expressed by authors are theirs alone and do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, positions or strategies of the Atlanta Freethought Society or any member thereof. The editors of *Atlanta Freethought News* reserve the right to edit or alter in any manner it sees fit any articles deemed to be obscene, offensive, defamatory, threatening, in violation of trademark, copyright or other laws, or is otherwise unacceptable; and also to correct grammar and to conserve space.

#### Atlanta Freethought News An AFS Publication

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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 voting privileges and AFNews by email/USPS (indicate preferences).

Sustaining Membership is \$100.

Life Membership is \$1000.

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(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.

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### **Atlanta Freethought News**

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## Fallacy of the Month: Begging the Question

#### By Dennis Martin, PhD (AFS Secretary)

This is the first in a monthly series discussing the kinds of faulty reasoning that you are likely to run across in everyday discussions and debates. Atlanta Freethought Society's mission includes teaching how to avoid faulty reasoning so that your thoughts are free from mistaken reasoning and unsupported authoritative claims.

**Begging the question**, in a nutshell, is assuming (explicitly or implicitly) what you are trying to prove. If someone said "It is raining; therefore, it is raining," this would be an example of begging the question. Because this argument is valid (if the premise is true, then the conclusion must be), begging the question is considered an informal fallacy, i.e. a mistake in reasoning not due to formal structure. Most people would see the obvious circularity and redundancy of the suggested argument. The idea is that even though X proves X, you want your evidence and reasons to be different from the conclusion. You don't just want someone repeating themselves.

Begging the question is also called 'begging the issue', 'question-begging', '*petitio principii*' and 'petitioning the principle.' It gets its name from an ancient debating technique where the instructor throws out a topic/question/principle, say "Does God exist?", and instructs student A to debate for

it and student B to debate against it. The interlocutors cannot just spout off their opposing views (like today's political debates). They had to first find some common ground, some common premises they could both agree on. So, student A 'petitions' or 'begs' B to accept premises that are needed. Once common premises are granted, the reasoning begins. Begging the question occurs when one of those premises actually already contains the conclusion.

For example, A says "Will you grant that Jesus existed?" B says, "Granted." A says, "Will you grant that Jesus was the son of God?" B says, "OK." A says, "Therefore, God exists." A hasn't

proven anything. Student A has simply petitioned (begged for) and received the very question or principle that was to be proven in the first place.

That is simply how the fallacy got its name. But begging the question comes in much more subtle forms which the critical thinker should be aware of. These include: Repeated assertion, Equivalent expressions, Circular argument, Questionbegging expressions, and Complex/loaded question. Briefly, **Repeated assertion** is when the premise and conclusion are the exact same statement (as the rain example above), whereas 'equivalent expressions' is when they say the same thing in different words. **Circular argument** is where A proves B, B proves C, and C proves A (so in order to prove A, you really just assumed A in the beginning.)

**Question-begging expressions** are terms like "obviously" and "clearly" used to preface statements which are not obvious or clear. You should always suspicious when you hear someone use these words. They are a form of begging the question because they assume that what is about to be stated is already proven. They also have the effect of silencing objectors: "Well, I guess if it's obvious to everyone else in the room, I won't say anything."

Finally, the **Complex question** or **Loaded question** is when someone asks a question that is really more than one question, with the assumption that one of those has already been answered. The word 'complex' here doesn't mean a difficult question; it means a compound question. The first question in the Roman Catholic catechism is "Who made us?" and all the little children answer in unison, "God made us." (Been there, done that.) But the question is a loaded question, really asking three questions – Were we made? If so, was it by a who? If so, who was it? The original question assumes that the first two questions have already been answered. And a little 5 year old is not about to say, "Excuse me, Father Jones, that's a *petitio principii.*" So, I have

adopted a critical thinking habit of looking at every question and asking – does this very question assume something that I am not willing to agree to yet?

In sympathetic audiences, the conclusion has already been accepted, so they aren't usually aware of the circularity. In longer arguments, the conclusion may be chapters away from the original discussion of the premises, and the circularity may go unnoticed. I've read books where several chapters laid the basis for an argument, but no argument was ever made. Then in the remainder of the book, the author simply assumes that they have proven their point.

A problem raised by Sextus Empiricus

and John Stuart Mill is whether or not all valid arguments beg the question, since the premises implicitly "contain" the conclusion. Or, if you have ever chased down the meaning of a word, then the meaning of the words in the definition, and so on, it seems that eventually you arrive back at the word you were trying to define at first. Thus, even if all knowledge is eventually interdependent and circular, begging the question is meant to eliminate viciously circular reasoning.

Finally, when I hear news reporters saying, "Here's a question that begs to be answered," I chuckle to myself. I think – that journalist probably had to take a logic course way back in college and remembers some big fancy term "begging the question." Now, they are going to embarrass themselves on TV and misuse it. The problem is that the more this happens, the more the term itself begins to change and lose its original import.



## Freedom From Religion Foundation corrects Eric Trump's mistaken beliefs

#### ffrf.org

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has written to **Eric Trump** to correct some of his misconceptions about the role of religion in the United States.

Eric Trump said, "I mean, they [congressional Democrats] didn't stand for anything. When he said "In God We Trust" — when my father mentioned "In God We Trust," the guiding principle of this country — no one stood.... I think it's sad. There are things as Americans we should be united on and if we can't be united on God...."

Trump didn't complete this thought, which is perhaps just as well. Americans are not now, nor have we even been, "united on God." Religion is divisive. It may unite believers of the same stripe, but it deliberately excludes all others — and often calls for worse. An early Wisconsin Supreme Court justice put it eloquently: "There is no such source and cause of strife, quarrel, fights, malignant opposition, persecution, and war, and all evil in the state, as religion. Let it once enter our civil affairs, our government would soon be destroyed."

When "under God" was added to our Pledge of Allegiance in 1954, religion literally divided "one nation, indivisible." The idea that we "trust" in a god is not a founding principle, rather, like "under God," it is an unfortunate recent addition to the national vernacular. It was affixed to coins in 1863 and paper currency in 1956, both times of national peril when people were more concerned with the country tearing itself apart and less focused on a few zealots putting their god on our money.

The U.S. Constitution is far more instructive than the trite motto Eric Trump and his father revere. Our godless Constitution only mentions religion three times — all exclusionary. In other words, the Constitution keeps gods out of the business of government and government out of the business of worshipping gods.

"The founders chose to keep state and church separate precisely because religion is divisive and they were seeking to build a pluralistic nation," FFRF Director of Strategic Response **Andrew Seidel** writes to Trump. "They didn't build that nation or secure our freedom with theology or cheap religious slogans, but with a document that puts all power in us, in We the People. Anything less would have been un-American."

And it worked. America is becoming more religiously diverse with each passing year. Currently, nearly one-quarter of Americans are religiously unaffiliated and nearly 30 percent are non-Christians, either practicing a minority religion or no religion at all. Younger Americans are even more estranged from religion. A recent survey found that 21 percent of Americans born after 1999 are atheist or agnostic. These Americans are not "united by God." Quite the opposite.

Trump père et fils would do well, FFRF advises, to remember the words of **James Madison**, the Father of our Constitution: "Religion and government will both exist in greater purity, the less they are mixed together."

If **Trump Sr.** wants to unite this nation, he should work on being a president to all Americans, including atheists, agnostics and the nonreligious — nonbelievers and non-Christians of every stripe and of every color. Then only will "We the People" acquire real meaning.

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is a national nonprofit with more than 32,000 members across the country. It protects the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and educates the public on matters relating to nontheism.

## FFRF expels religion from Georgia schools

ffrf.org

The Freedom From Religion Foundation stepped in to mend constitutional violations in three Georgia school districts that were promoting religion.

FFRF sent letters to Towns County Schools, Hancock County Schools and Carroll County Schools after receiving reports that employees in these three districts had been endorsing Christianity.

A concerned parent reported to FFRF that a kindergarten teacher at Towns County Elementary School in Hiawassee, GA, had been reading bible stories to students. The school was also regularly sending religious fliers home with students and requiring them to participate in a tree lighting event that opened with a prayer.

FFRF Legal Fellow **Christopher Line** wrote to the district, informing the superintendent that public school teachers may not lead their students in prayer or encourage students to pray. Line also warned the district against requiring students to participate in an event that opens with prayer and distributing religious materials. All of these actions equate to a public school endorsement of religion, which is unconstitutional.

FFRF was informed by an area resident that the softball coach at Hancock County Middle School in Sparta, GA, had been praying with her team.

"The coach's conduct is unconstitutional because she endorses and promotes her religion when acting in her official capacity as a school district employee," wrote Line to the Hancock County Schools superintendent. "When a public school employee acting in an official capacity organizes and advocates for team prayer, she effectively endorses religion on the district's behalf."

Two violations in Carroll County Schools were brought to FFRF's attention. FFRF was notified that Glanton-Hindsman Elementary School in Villa Rica, GA, was promoting a local church on its official Facebook page. A post from August indicated that the school was "adopted" by the Villa Rica First Baptist Church and is a "prayer partner" of the church. A second violation by another school in the district was reported by a concerned parent who informed FFRF that Whitesburg Elementary School in Whitesburg, GA, had allowed members of a local church to hand out bags with Christian materials to students inside the school cafeteria before lunch.

Line wrote to a legal representative of Carroll

#### Continued on bottom of page 5

### **Atlanta Freethought News**

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## Black History Month Spotlight: U.S. Rep. John Lewis, A Civil Rights Icon

by Rokia Hassanein, Wall of Separation

#### www.au.org



#### February marks Black History Month a

month to appreciate the accomplishments that African-Americans have made throughout American history. This Black History Month, we are highlighting the important role African-American figures have played, and continue to play, in promoting true

religious freedom and church-state separation.

Among those figures is legendary civil rights icon John Lewis, who was one of the "Big Six" civil rights leaders in the 1960s. Lewis continues to build on his legacy of promoting equality and fairness through his activism and career.

Lewis was elected to Congress as a Democrat from Georgia in 1986, and his record as a public servant continues to be marked by his support for important legislation. That includes his support for the Johnson Amendment, a 63-year-old provision in federal law that protects the integrity of elections and tax-exempt nonprofits – including houses of worship. Lewis, an ally of Americans United, has been a longtime champion of the law. **President Donald J. Trump vowed to "totally destroy**" the law in year one of his presidency, and House Republicans attempted to gut the provision in their tax bill (formally known as the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act).

Lewis was quick to act. He offered an amendment to strip the harmful language from the bill, and although his amendment failed, language that repealed the Johnson Amendment was never added to the Senate version or the final version that was signed into law. His passionate defense of the Johnson Amendment drew national attention. During the House Ways and Means Committee markup of the bill, Lewis said political endorsements in sacred spaces "pit neighbors against neighbors, worshippers against worshippers, and volunteers against volunteers."

In previous years, Lewis has reminded people that during the civil rights movement, the emphasis was on issues, not candidates: "I knew [the Rev.] **Martin Luther King**; he was a friend of mine. He never, to my knowledge, endorsed a political candidate.

"During the civil rights movement, we fought to end legal segregation and break down barriers to political participation," he said. "The church was the heart and soul of our efforts because ministers had the moral authority and respect to stand against immoral and indefensible laws, bad laws, bad customs, bad tradition."

Lewis has also been fighting back against using religion-based discrimination. He was critical of government funding religious organizations through the **faith-based initiative** that discriminates against others or tramples on the religious freedom rights of religious minorities. "I think there has to be a strong wall, a solid wall between church and state," Lewis **said**. "I don't want to see religious groups out trying to convert or proselytize with federal dollars."

Standing in solidarity with marginalized religious minorities has been a consistent theme throughout Lewis' career. More than a year ago, when Trump issued his first Muslim ban, Lewis was **among the lawmakers who went to airports** to protest the ban and demand answers to why people were being detained.

Using his voice as a faith leader to combat discrimination, Lewis has strongly opposed efforts to use religion as an excuse to discriminate against women, LGBTQ people and more.

"I will never understand what is so attractive about discrimination that people really want to be free to do it... As an ordained minister and a student of philosophy, I can say that none of the 'great religions' can rightfully serve as a license to hate," Lewis **said when** Trump issued his "religious freedom" executive order targeting LGBTQ people, women, the Johnson Amendment and more. "Somewhere I read that all of the law and the prophets boil down to one guiding principle for human society: Love your neighbor as yourself."

Lewis' significance in American history can't be overstated. He has cemented his legacy as an intersectional civil rights icon who has worked tirelessly to ensure that every American is treated equally regardless of race, sex, gender, religion and the like. We thank him for including church-state separation and religious freedom among the important issues he champions.

#### FFRF expels religion from GA Schools continued from page 4

County Schools informing the district that it advanced and promoted religion when its employees posted messages in support of religious groups on official social media pages — which violates the Constitution. Line also wrote that it is unconstitutional for public school districts to permit churches to distribute proselytizing materials as part of the school day.

Each of the three school districts recently responded, informing FFRF that they would ensure that their school officials abide by the parameters of the First Amendment and comply with their constitutional obligation to remain neutral in matters involving religion. FFRF is pleased that the districts have taken action to foster a more inclusive environment for public school students.

"Young students of varied beliefs — and no belief — should not be bombarded with Christianity by their public schools," says FFRF Co-President **Annie Laurie Gaylor**. "It's commendable that the districts are remedying these violations."

### February 2018

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

**The Atlanta Science Tavern** has several meetings planned. Please check meetup page for more information. (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 similar to Alcoholics Anonymous group.

Marietta Skeptic/Humanist Meetup has various gettogethers and discussion groups. Several upcoming events. (www.meetup.com/Marietta-Atheists-Meetup)

The Peachtree City Humanists participate in social and educational activities such as dinners, lunches, coffees,

outdoor recreation, discussion groups, and book clubs with topics that include science, psychology, philosophy. (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)

## Recovery from Religion

- Morrow Chapter meets monthly at Barnes & Noble Booksellers Southlake, 1939 Mount Zion Road, Morrow, GA. Join the Meetup group for more information. 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)

**Black Nonbelievers** On Wed, Feb 7 6 pm at GSU Student Center East, 55 Gilmer St, Atlanta, GA State Secular Panthers will present BN President Mandisa Thomas for a discussion about religion and its effect on sexuality in the black community. (www.meetup.com/Black-Nonbelievers)

There will be a **meetup for Decatur Atheists** Sun, Feb II, 6 pm, Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists)

#### **GUST (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths)**

will have their holiday party Mon., Feb 12, 7 pm at UUCG, 12 Bethesda Church Rd, Lawrenceville. The topic is Godlessness in the age of Trump. We have had one year of Trump as president. How has Trump's presidency affected the lives of nonbelievers? Is it worse than we expected, or better? How bad can it get? Let's get together and discuss how the country is changing. (www.meetup.com/brights-295) Atlanta Astronomy Club will meet on the third Friday at 7:30 pm each month at Fernbank Science Center, 156 Heaton Park Dr, Atlanta, GA 30307 unless otherwise noted. This month's meeting will be Feb 16. Check website for more info. (www.atlantaastronomy.org)

Freedom From Religion Foundation of Georgia and Americans United for Separation of Church and State will have a joint meeting Feb 18 at 5 pm at Keegan's Public House, 4687 S. Atlanta Rd, Smyrna. (www.meetup.com/ Freedom-From-Religion-Foundation-of-Georgia)

**Sunday Assembly Atlanta** will have a general assembly Sun Feb 18, 5:30 pm at First Existentialist Congregation, 470 Candler Park Dr NE, Atlanta. The topic is Inside/Outside, discussing inclusion and exclusion, featuring speaker Nick Hess of the Mad Housers. Please bring keychain flashlights to donate to the MH clients as it's a big day when formerly homeless

> people get keys to their new hut! This is also a potluck supper. All are welcome. SAA is an extremely active community with a large number of upcoming events including rock chorus, secular support, mindfulness meditation, wonder club, urban wonder, book club, makers night out, volunteering, queer beyond belief group, public speaking series, trivia nights, etc. (www.meetup. com/Sunday-Assembly)

#### **Ethical Humanists of At-**

lanta will meet Sun, Feb 25, 12:30 pm at Manuel's Tavern, 603 N Highland Ave Atlanta. The topic is A Conscious Perspective. (www.meetup.com/ Ethical-Humanists-of-Atlanta)

There will be a meetup for At-

**Ianta Atheists** Sun, Feb 25, 4 pm, 5 Seasons Brewing, 5600 Roswell Rd, Prado Shopping Center, Sandy Springs. (www. meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists)

Atlanta Skeptics has "Drinking Skeptically" on the first Friday of each month. 5 Seasons Brewing, Prado Shopping Center, 5600 Roswell Rd, Sandy Springs. (www.meetup.com/ AtlantaSkeptics)

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

**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)

Gainesville Atheists does not have a meetup scheduled at presstime. (www.meetup.com/ Secular-Atheist-Study-the-Scriptures-SASS-Gainesville)



DEAR GOD, I'M VERY

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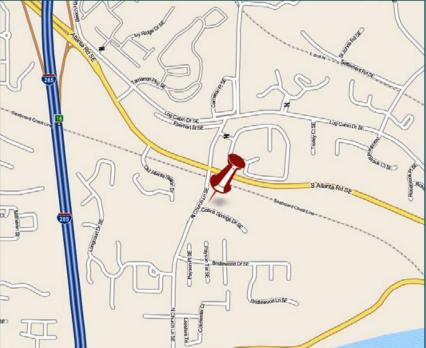


4775 N. Church Lane SE Atlanta, GA 30339

Dare To Think

For Yourself!

POTLUCK THIS SUNDAY!



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