

Ben Burgis - “Canceling Comedians While the Word Burns” (via Zoom)

AFS will happily again host Dr. Ben Burgis, a nationally acclaimed philosopher (and professor at Georgia State Perimeter College) to provide our program on July 11th (Sunday) via Zoom.

Burgis is famous for stimulating, thoughtful writing and talks, and will this time give us a talk based



Ben Burgis

on his latest book: *Canceling Comedians While the World Burns: A Critique of the Contemporary Left*.

There is no shortage of pundits criticizing the modern left, a few of them even reasonably coherent and thoughtful. But we're honored and delighted to have a critique from a well known stalwart of the left address things like canceling politically incorrect comedians and, more generally, urging a funnier, strategically smarter approach to real issues instead of circular firing squads. Ben Burgis is a great speaker—we've heard him speak.

Besides being a philosophy instructor at Georgia State University Perimeter College, Burgis is the author of *Give Them An Argument: Logic for the Left*, as well as *Canceling Comedians*. He's also one of the authors of the recent book *Myth and Mayhem: A Leftist Response to Jordan Peterson*. Ben is a regular weekly contributor to *Jacobin Magazine* and a twice-a-month columnist at *Arc Digital Media*. He also does a weekly segment on *The Michael Brooks Show* called "The Debunk."

Please click on the link below to participate. Socializing starts at 12:30 pm.

AFS July Meeting
July 11, 2021 1:00-2:30 PM (EDT)

To join Zoom meeting go to this link:
us02web.zoom.us/j/89006560911

Calendar

July 11	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm
Aug 8	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm
Sep 12	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm

All events are via Zoom unless noted and are subject to change.



“If I were to suggest that between the Earth and Mars there is a china teapot revolving about the sun in an elliptical orbit, nobody would be able to disprove my assertion provided I were careful to add that the teapot is too small to be revealed even by our most powerful telescopes. But if I were to go on to say that, since my assertion cannot be disproved, it is an intolerable presumption on the part of human reason to doubt it, I should rightly be thought to be talking nonsense. If, however, the existence of such a teapot were affirmed in ancient books, taught as the sacred truth every Sunday, and instilled into the minds of children at school, hesitation to believe in its existence would become a mark of eccentricity and entitle the doubter to the attentions of the psychiatrist in an enlightened age or of the Inquisitor in an earlier time.”

— **Bertrand Russell**



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 presented online due to global pandemic (see link on page 1). Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:30 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.

July 11: Ben Burgis

August 8: Kenneth Copp

September 12: Charles Shapiro

October 10: Jonathan Pearce

November 14: Alison Gill

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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 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. 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.

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Guest commentary: Democrats and Republicans should do a history check

by Ed Buckner

Galveston County The Daily News • July 6, 2021

Democrat or Republican? If as a Galvestonian you're a proud member of either of the two "major" parties, you should study U.S. history before you get too carried away attacking the other party's preferences. The political ideals we celebrate every year in July haven't always been, we all admit, ideas we agree on or ideals that we've reached.

Blind arrogance, fear, anger and changing or distorted views have never allowed things to settle down.

Examples: Democrats, be careful about what you say about Republicans, since it was past prominent Democrats who said:

- *"Our slaves are Black, of another and inferior race. The status in which we've placed them is an elevation. They're elevated from the condition in which God first created them, by being made our slaves."* — James Henry Hammond, Governor and U.S. Senator, South Carolina, in 1858 on the floor of the Senate.
- *"White Supremacy, Honest Elections and the New Constitution, One and Inseparable"* — the slogan on mail distributed by the Alabama Democratic State Campaign Committee, fall 1901.
- *"I hope not. I don't believe in it. The Lord created it that way. You read your Bible and you'll find out."* — Harry Truman, when asked in 1963 if he thought integration would lead to interracial marriage.
- *"... the mingling of Asiatic blood with European or American blood produces, in nine cases out of ten, the most unfortunate results."* — Franklin Delano Roosevelt, newspaper column, 1925.



Republicans, your turn — past major Republican leaders said:

- *"Labor is the superior of capital, and deserves much the higher consideration."* — Abraham Lincoln, as president, 1861.
- *"The divorce between church and state should be absolute."* — James Garfield, 1874.
- *"I would suggest the taxation of all property equally, whether church or corporation."* — Ulysses Grant, as president, 1875.
- *"The real difficulty is with the vast wealth and power in the hands of the few and the unscrupulous who represent or control capital."* — No, no, not Bernie Sanders, but President Rutherford B. Hayes, 1888.

And, before we even had political parties, **George Washington** declared something any Democrat or Republican should — but maybe wouldn't — be proud to say. In 1784, he told his foreman about hiring workers, "If they are good workmen, they may be of Asia, Africa, or Europe. They may be Muslims, Jews, or Christians of any sect, or they may be atheists."

Party affiliation isn't meaningless nor always atypical and hypocritical, but, as with other political labels, the situation and history matters. And it's not just that we all need to be aware of oversimplification regarding parties. Historical and political complexity requires thoughtful, careful, nuanced consideration of ideas more generally, too.

Happy Fourth of July.

Ed Buckner is a native of League City who now lives in Atlanta, Georgia.

July 2021 CE

The death of Zambian leader Kaunda

By Keith Nalumango

One of our members, **Dr. Keith Nalumango**, grew up in Zambia, where he became VP/Director of Programming for the Zambia National Broadcasting Corporation before fleeing the country. Recently the **New York Times** published a long and overall pretty positive obituary of Kenneth David Kaunda, the longtime Zambian leader and its first president. Here is Keith Nalumango's response to that. - Ed Buckner

The NYTimes obituary misses one important issue: while Mr. Kaunda - who insisted he was "Dr. Kaunda" - was a big name on the international front, he was a dictator at home.... So, Mr. Kenneth Kaunda, the son of David the pastor, the humanist, Christian socialist revolutionary, is dead, and the African nation mourns him as a hero. How many of those mourners remember how Mr. Kaunda:

- Was so temperamental that at nearly all his press conferences, he justified everything he did by quoting the Bible, he barked at his imaginary enemies, stuttered and called his fellow citizens "stupid idiots," "warped thinkers," "political hyenas," "malcontents," "agents of racist South Africa," and often broke down, live on TV, like a child?
- Without a high school diploma, and coming straight out of a primary school teaching job, took over the leadership of a country whose GDP was the highest in Africa (NYT) and brought the economy to its knees due to mismanagement?
- Towards the end of his second term in office, banned all political parties, save for his own, and ushered in the rule of terror through his "one-party participatory democracy and humanist-socialist revolution" that made him the only presidential candidate, but was later to allow the frog (with its picture on the ballot box) as his only opponent?
- Detained without trial anyone who held opposing views, including journalists, former political colleagues, and students? (I was one of the thousands of his victims).
- Reduced the powers of the legislature through public threats and by creating a central committee of sycophants picked from, among other places, the military, and a mass movement known as "the national party conference" comprising thousands of cadres, a cult of hero-worshippers who chanted "god in heaven, Kaunda on earth forever" while they made laws, and reduced the backbench to a minority by

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“Nalumango” continued from page 3

creating executive positions for the majority of legislators?

- Publicly and vehemently defended some of his children who were allegedly involved in crime?
- Made his citizens wait for hours in long queues to buy essentials like cooking oil, sugar, detergents, toilet paper, bread, etc., only to be told that the items had run out, and at times, one had to know a party insider to buy these – hence the term “it pays to belong to the party”?
- Ensured that nearly every adult in the nation was a party member by allowing his party thugs to bar anyone from entering vegetable and fish markets unless they showed proof of party membership?
- Created a reign of terror, where not even persons closest to him (I knew all his prime ministers personally) could tell him the truth?
- While publicly declaring that he was “a true democrat through and through,” saw the news media as one his many enemies? (I recall him telling a female BBC reporter, “What a stupid question! You look beautiful on the outside, but inside, you’re rotten, rotten!”)
- Made friends with the likes of **Saddam Hussein** and Yugoslavia’s **Tito**, who often visited Zambia to see his “friend” and hunt game, because, I suspect, he admired their ironhandedness?
- Had no choice but, after twenty-seven years of misrule and repression, had to reintroduce multiparty politics because people took to the streets to protest violently against his regime?

I shed no tears.

DISCLOSURE: First, I was a victim of Kaunda’s regime, having being imprisoned without trial for six months on charges of “subversive political activities” before Amnesty International secured my release and those of another sixteen colleagues. Second, I’m sympathetic to the Barotse cause that arose from Kaunda’s abrogation of a treaty signed between Barotseland, then a British protectorate that joined

Northern Rhodesia to form the new independent state of Zambia. The abrogation led to public resentment which, in turn, led to the imprisonment of many people who were close to me. Clearly, I had an axe to grind with the late president. I do not cite scholarly sources to back up my claims; rather, I draw on my personal experiences – what I saw, heard, read, did – to show the side of the president that the *New York Times* may not be aware of, or chose to ignore.

Kenneth Kaunda came to power at a time of national crisis. In the north, a Christian religious cult was refusing to recognize the government because its members believed the world was coming to an end. The answer to this crisis was military intervention and imprisonment. In the west, the Barotse Kingdom was resisting integration into the newly-independent state of Zambia. Kaunda entered into an agreement with the kingdom to create one nation, but he soon abrogated the agreement, and many persons were imprisoned without trial.

With no experience of governance, coupled with lack of education (Kaunda did not have a high school diploma), Kaunda found himself leading a potentially wealthy (the highest GDP, according to the NYT) but divided nation. Like all African countries, Zambia’s borders were created by the Europeans in Berlin, leading to families finding themselves in several countries. The sense of nationhood lacked in many pockets of the population. Kaunda, whose Christian missionary parents came from neighboring Malawi, saw himself as a messiah who had been ordained to create a nation.

The following is a list of Kanuda’s transgressions that should see his name on the walls of the Hall of Fame for African dictators:

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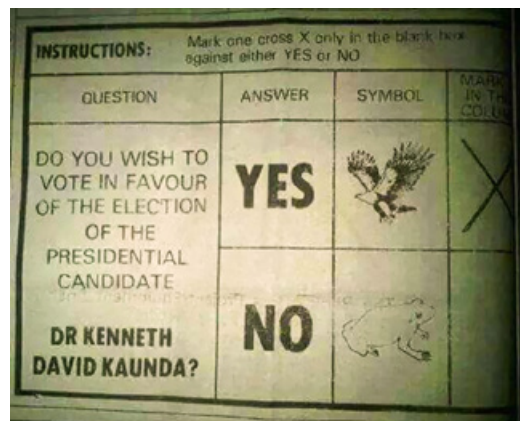
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1. **His temperament** Fondly known as “KK,” Kaunda had a short fuse that made him bark at his own people, calling those whom he saw as enemies “stupid idiots,” “political hyenas,” “malcontents,” “agents of racist South Africa,” “warped thinkers,” etc. Every press conference, which was carried live on radio and television, was a farce where Kaunda talked about his great achievements and his enemies who wanted his socialist revolution to fail. Often, he broke down and lied about everything from political stability to the great economy the nation enjoyed.

2. **The Frog and the One-Party Participatory Democracy Model** Recognizing the possibility of losing the election, Kaunda banned all opposition parties and declared single-party rule. As usual, parliament ushered in a new constitution that made him the sole candidate in presidential elections, and without term limitation. Towards the end of his second term in office, Kaunda declared a one-party state that made him the only presidential candidate. In later years, he provided a solution to what his opponents saw as a dictatorship: he was gracious enough to allow “the frog” to contest the presidential election. People could, from then on, either vote for KK or vote for the frog, whose picture appeared on the ballot box. Of course, since the poor frog was never given a chance to campaign, KK always won the elections by a landslide. Entering the voting booth was a scary experience for me. Should I follow my conscience or vote for my friend the frog? Because I had a family to look after, I voted for KK. But once, I closed my eyes and said, “KK never gets a hundred percent votes.” So, I closed my eyes and voted for the frog. I lived a horrible life of nightmares thereafter, for I couldn’t even tell my wife that I had voted for the frog. What sane person would do that? I feared the state was soon going to find out who had constituted the 3% that had voted for the frog. I was never caught.

3. **Party membership** Under the “one-party participatory democracy” model, the slogan “it pays to belong to UNIP (Kaunda’s political party)” meant that if you were not a member of the only political in the nation, you could lose out on many opportunities to live a bearable life. While some people chose not to become members of the party, it was impractical to live a life without the sacred membership. I remember going to the market (usually a collection of stalls in an enclosed space that sold groceries, especially fish and fresh vegetables) and seeing people who had no party membership cards being barred by party hooligans from going in. Often, people went back home to collect their cards or bought one on the spot. Often, party hooligans would knock on my door and ask me to show them my party card. Many times, I bought one because, often, I tore the card soon after buying it. The positive thing was that the card cost as little as a quarter – maybe.

- 4. **The economy** Apples, sodas were not allowed. While these were considered to be luxuries, Kaunda served these to his selected visitors.
- 5. **Cult building** As a son of a pastor, Kaunda constantly quoted Biblical verses. He was the prophet who was not recognized in his village. Not long into his rule, his followers started to chant: “God in heaven, Kaunda on earth,” “Kaunda forever,” “life president,” “speak, speak, the nation is listening.”
- 6. **Imprisonment of citizens without due process** I stated in my disclosure that I was a victim, a prisoner of conscience. While in prison, I met many victims like myself who had been behind bars without setting a foot in any court of law, and that was lawful because his parliament always rubberstamped his will and made laws according to the wish of the “beloved leader for life.” While I and many others were prisoners of conscience, Kaunda told the nation at a press conference that there were “no political prisoners in Zambia.”
- 7. **Public Fear** As a senior staffer at the Zambian Parliament, I knew every prime minister who served under Kaunda. The prime minister was the leader of the House, and I knew that none of them could tell Kaunda the truth about the state of the nation. No one could tell Kaunda that he was wrong.
- 8. **Reducing the role of Parliament to nothing** Recognizing the changing political mood in the nation, partly characterized by opposition from his own and only party in parliament, Kaunda silenced many backbench legislators by appointing them to executive positions. This development reduced the backbench to small numbers, hence making it possible for Kaunda to pass legislation without hindrance.



Zambian Frog Ballot

9. **Humanism** Accompanying his philosophical and religious rhetoric was his reinvention of humanism. According to him, Zambian humanism was unique. It was about a socialist revolution that made all men equal under his god. Students all over the nation studied humanism, and civil servants could not get a promotion until they passed an exam in humanism. I sat through that exam, and like everyone else I knew, passed with flying colors because it was intellectually hollow. While he constantly proclaimed he was (I remember his exact words because they were repeatedly repeated) “I’m a democrat through and through, comrades, and this is a socialist revolution.”

- 10. **The Messiah** The choice for socialism fitted in well with KK’s agenda. After banning all political parties except his own, and imprisoning anyone who was opposed to him, he started to make the nation believe that without him, the nation would crumble. He was the son of a reverend, so god must have ordained him to lead the country. Before long, thousands of his followers were heard chanting: “God in heaven, KK forever on earth!” To show his endorsement of those chants, he clapped his hands and said, “Thank you, comrades.” Before long, it was obvious that the man wanted to be president for life, in the same way his neighbor in Malawi, Dr. Hastings Banda, had been declared Life President.
- 11. **Love for dictators** While he constantly proclaimed his nation’s commitment to the Non-aligned Movement, he openly admired Castro, Chairman Mao, Tito, and Saddam, among many other leaders. I saw Tito on the many occasions he visited Zambia to hunt game and see his friend, KK. But he also admired Gandhi and MLK, Jr., the latter whom he visited in Atlanta, and many years later, Coretta Scott King visited Zambia to receive the nation’s highest honor on behalf of her late husband. But his love for dictators could be excused. The West had given him the cold shoulder when they openly supported Ian Smith’s unilateral declaration for independence from the British in the neighboring country then called Rhodesia. Smith’s introduction of apartheid in a country that was once part of a federal state with Zambia was anathema to KK. I agreed with him that apartheid was an anathema (but not ungodly, as he always proclaimed) and anyone who supported it was his enemy. The west was also doing trade with apartheid South Africa.

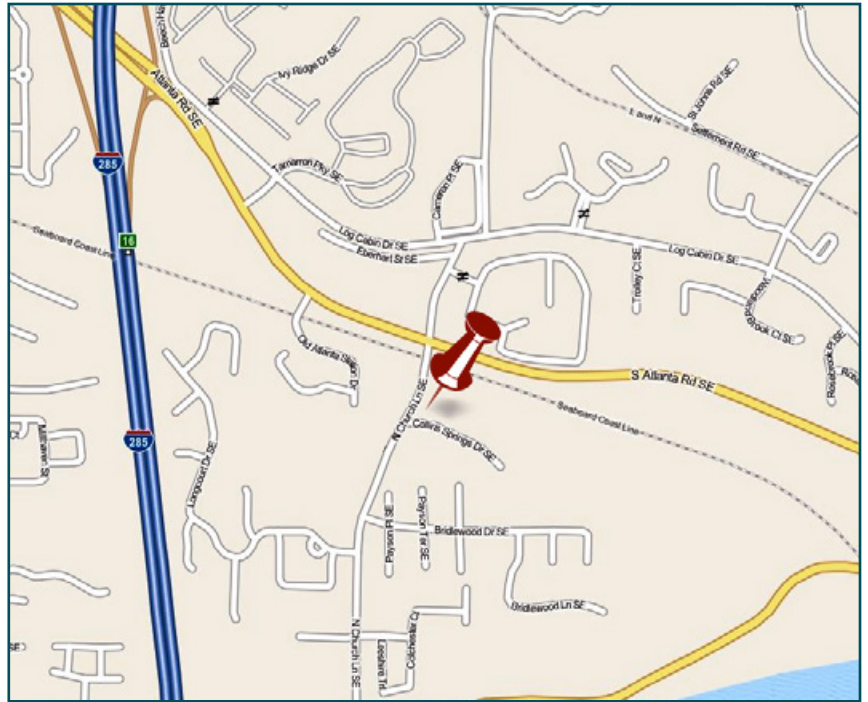
The rule of Kenneth Kaunda caused considerable harm to the country of Zambia. We hope that his death will issue in a new era of democracy in the country.

*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



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**Ben Burgis
7/11/21 1:00 pm EDT
(via Zoom)**



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