

Steve Lowe: “Should a Man Who Was One of the Most Famous Americans of the 19th Century Be Forgotten? Robert Green Ingersoll 1833-1899 CE” (via Zoom)

On Sunday, August 9th, AFS will again host one of our favorite speakers who will speak about one of our favorite non-believers. **Steven Lowe** is a gay atheist/humanist activist based in Washington,



Steven C. Lowe

D.C. He grew up in rural Virginia and attended the University of Virginia. After earning a BA in mathematics, Steve joined the Peace Corps where he served for two years in Zaire teaching secondary school mathematics in French. He earned an MBA from George Washington University in Washington, DC. In 2001 he retired from a twenty-

year career in sales and operations with various U.S. telephone companies.

He has been active in the Freethought, Humanist, and Atheist movement since 2001, when he discovered the illuminating works of the Four Horsemen (Dawkins, Hitchens, Harris, and Dennett). He has researched and published articles about **Robert G. Ingersoll**, gives walking tours about Ingersoll’s life in Washington, D.C., and founded the Robert G. Ingersoll Oratory Contest, which has been held three times.

He is a longtime member of the board of directors of the **Washington Area Secular Humanists**, and since 2015, a member of the Board of Directors of **American Atheists, Inc.**

From **Encyclopedia Britannica**: Robert G. Ingersoll was an American politician and orator known as “the great agnostic” who popularized the higher criticism of the Bible, as well as humanistic philosophy and scientific rationalism.

Although he had little formal education, Ingersoll was admitted to the Illinois bar in 1854, and he subsequently enjoyed a lucrative law practice in Peoria, Ill., New York City, and Washington, D.C. After service in the American Civil War (1861–65), he became a staunch Republican, serving as Illinois attorney general (1867–69) and as a party spokesman in presidential campaigns. In

spite of his outstanding contribution to his political party, his unorthodox religious views deterred Republican administrations from appointing him to the Cabinet or to the diplomatic posts that he desired. Nationally known as a lecturer, Ingersoll was in great demand and received as much as \$3,500 for a single evening’s performance, in which with brilliant oratory and wit he sought to expose the orthodox superstitions of the times.

Ingersoll’s principal lectures and speeches, published as *Some Mistakes of Moses* (1879) and *Why I Am Agnostic* (1896), are found in *The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll*, 12 vol. (1902), edited by Clinton P. Farrell.



Robert Green Ingersoll

Steve Yothment again has set up a free Zoom session for Sunday, August 8 from 1:00-2:30 p.m. Log in at 12:30 to socialize and everyone is welcome to hang out and chat afterwards. Below is the meeting invitation as generated by Zoom. Log in with a computer, tablet, or smart phone.

AFS August Meeting August 9, 2020 1:00-2:30 PM (EST)

To join Zoom meeting go to link below:
us02web.zoom.us/j/86843137944

Meeting ID: 868 4313 7944

Calendar

- | | | |
|--------|-------------------------|------|
| Aug 9 | General Meeting on Zoom | 1 pm |
| Sep 13 | General Meeting on Zoom | 1 pm |

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

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.



August 9: Steven Lowe on Robert Green Ingersoll

September 13: Cecil Bothwell

October 11: TBA

November 8: TBA

December 13: TBA

AFS Email List

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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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Atlanta Freethought News An AFS Publication

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Atlanta Freethought News

Vol. 26, Number 8, August 2020 CE
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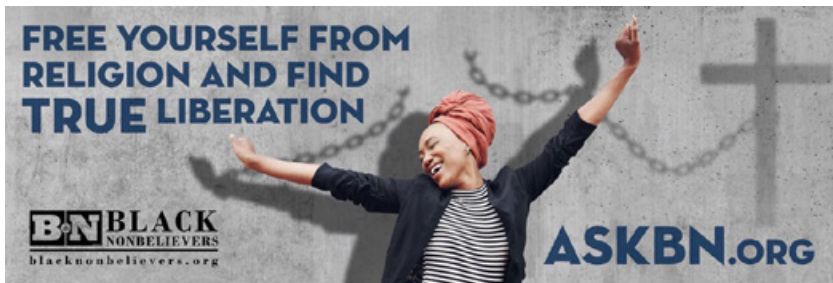
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Religion or Liberation: Black Atheists Say “Choose One!”

by Black Nonbelievers

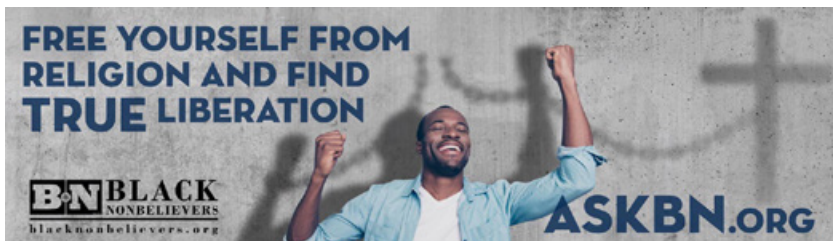
ATLANTA - July 27, 2020 - Following a powerful “Black Family Discussion”, Black Nonbelievers has launched a billboard campaign aimed at encouraging the Black community to evaluate their religious beliefs as aiding and abetting White supremacy.

The organization also charges that said beliefs are a hindrance to liberation from oppressive systems, which can derail progress for our communities.



“Christianity was definitely a useful tool for enslavers,” says Black Nonbelievers Founder and President, **Mandisa Thomas**. “It conditioned us to accept harsh treatment and oppression and even gave us a way to view that acceptance as godly behavior. We were trained to ‘serve our earthly masters’ as a proxy of how earnestly we would serve our ‘heavenly master’—all while we waited for justice and our reward in the next life.”

Co-sponsored by the Stiefel Freethought Foundation, the new billboards are displayed near I-75/85 at Langford Parkway, and Peachtree Road, near Piedmont Hospital.



“One major concern to many of us is how much the Black community still tightly holds on to Christianity in particular,” says Thomas. “While the general nonreligious demographic is on the rise in the U.S., the numbers in our communities are significantly lower in comparison. And as anti-racism work becomes a focal point, it is clear that something as foundational as faith could be predisposing us to more oppression, and for longer periods of time.

“We understand that this is a tough request. It may be difficult to accept the complicity. But given the history of Christianity—especially as it relates to Black community—we must address it. We are ready.”

Black Nonbelievers is a 501c3 nonprofit organization. Headquartered in the Atlanta area, they connect with other Blacks (and allies) who are living free of religion and might otherwise be shunned by family and friends, in a caring, festive, and informative environment. Instead of accepting dogma, Black Nonbelievers determines truth and morality through reason and evidence.

Contact

Mandisa Thomas

mandisa@blacknonbelievers.org

Department of Education Could Put Atheist Students in Harm’s Way

atheists.org

On August 3rd, American Atheists warned the U.S. Department of Education that its proposal to collect religious bullying data could result in anti-atheist bullying.

According to the proposal, the **Trump Administration** would force school staff to collect data on the victim’s apparent religion. With this data collection method, schools would inappropriately investigate and consider students’ religion—endangering student privacy and safety. Instead of this staff-driven data collection method, American Atheists recommends anonymous student self-reporting to improve reliability and ensure privacy.

“When students’ religion or lack thereof is disclosed to other youth and school staff, students may be bullied, harassed, or face discrimination for their worldview,” said **Alison Gill**, American Atheists’ Vice President for Legal and Policy, **who submitted the comments**. “Teachers may discriminate by grading students differently, offering them less help, or excluding them from opportunities and activities.”

According to a 2016 study, 18% of students reported verbal harassment based on actual or perceived religion.

“Religious bullying in schools is all too common, and faculty inquiries into students’ religious beliefs will necessarily also become common if this new proposal is added,” said Gill. “Many students do not want their religious beliefs revealed to school staff or other students.”



For example, American Atheists’ recent survey of nonreligious Americans found that more than two in five (42.8%) always or mostly conceal their nonreligious beliefs at schools.

“American Atheists urges the [Department of Education’s] Office for Civil Rights to reconsider the proposed method for collecting this data,” said Gill. “The currently proposed method would endanger students’ safety and privacy, obscure the reality of religious bullying, and risk misuse of information.”

Tell your reps: Murder of American citizen in Pakistan for blasphemy shows need to repeal barbaric laws

ffrf.org

Pakistan's horrific anti-blasphemy law has claimed another victim — this time an American citizen from Illinois. **Please take a moment to urge your federal representatives to take a stand against blasphemy laws around the globe.**

In late July, **Tahir Ahmed Naseem** was shot dead during a hearing regarding accusations that Naseem violated the country's law prohibiting blasphemy. The killer reportedly confessed that he targeted Naseem because of his alleged blasphemy.

Pakistani's blasphemy law carries the possibility of a death sentence, and Naseem's murder is only the latest in a long line of deaths connected to this law. Blasphemy is a hugely sensitive issue in conservative Muslim Pakistan, with unproven allegations leading to dozens of attacks since 1990.

In 2017, the Pakistani government sent text messages to millions of Pakistanis warning them against sharing "blasphemous" content online, with instructions on how to report

blasphemous messages to the government. Instead of repealing its horrific blasphemy law, or at least condemning vigilante attacks connected to it, the government has encouraged civilians to take action to enforce the law.

Pakistan's blasphemy law is not unique. Ireland only repealed its blasphemy ban in 2018, and many other countries still have similar bans on the books. Pakistan is merely one example showing why these laws have no place in a modern, free society.

Blasphemy is a victimless crime and, as **Bertrand Russell** said, "Every great idea starts out as blasphemy."

For several years, Congress has failed to pass proposed bipartisan resolutions calling for the global repeal of blasphemy laws. Contact your elected representatives and ask them

to protect the rights of freethinkers worldwide by condemning blasphemy, heresy and apostasy laws.



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Right-Wing Evangelical Men's Group Tries For A Comeback

By Rob Boston / Wall of Separation Blog

au.org

Back in the 1990s, some observers speculated that the Promise Keepers (PK), an evangelical Christian men's group, would spearhead a new wave of Religious Right activism.

It didn't happen. The organization, founded by former University of Colorado football coach **Bill McCartney**, was known for holding mass rallies in sports stadiums that attracted hundreds of thousands of men. For a time, it looked as if the group really might sweep the nation.

But that peak was impossible to sustain. For various reasons, Promise Keepers went into decline. The organization, based in Colorado Springs, once had 345 people on its staff. It now has 28. Its budget, which reached \$30 million

time, there was a lot of talk about the Promise Keepers "going political." After attending the two-day rally, I concluded that they didn't really need to do this because they already were. (I later wrote about the event in my 2000 book *Close Encounters with the Religious Right*.)

During the rally, I heard the same messages I'd been hearing at Religious Right events since 1988: LGBTQ rights must be curbed. Because it is God's plan for women to submit to men, husbands should run households. The Bible, which is to be read literally, provides answers to every issue we face. Contemporary culture mocks Christianity.

Twenty-three years have passed, but things don't appear to have changed for PK. Banks reported that the schedule for the weekend Promise Keepers event included a session featuring My Faith Votes, a group whose honorary co-chairmen include U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary **Ben Carson** and **Mike Huckabee**, the former Republican governor of Arkansas and unsuccessful presidential candidate – yet Harrison denied that the

group is wading into politics. (Several speakers, however, are **affiliated with far-right politics**, among them **David Barton**, a notorious Christian nationalist pseudo-historian who's one of the backers of **Project Blitz**, which seeks to pass right-wing legislation in the states.)

"We are not going to take on politics in any way, shape or form," Harrison said. "But some of the things we do, talking about justice, standing up for justice, people will come to their own political conclusion."

To me, it's 1997 all over again. When PK men spend two days hearing a constant bombardment of right-wing culture war messages, they really don't need to be told explicitly how to vote. Chances are, they can figure that out for themselves.

Will this work? Can Promise Keepers rise again? Call me skeptical. PK

is offering a product that fewer and fewer Americans want. At a time when racial justice is a growing concern, PK has little to say about this issue. (Indeed, some observers believe Promise Keepers went into decline in the late 1990s because its leaders began talking about the need for racial reconciliation. The conservative, white, evangelical men who formed the group's base weren't interested and drifted away.) At a time when increasing numbers of Americans support LGBTQ rights, PK remains homophobic. At a time when women's rights are on the upswing, Promise Keepers tells women to stay home and follow the guidance of "godly" husbands. At a time when America is more diverse than ever (including growing numbers of Americans leaving religion altogether), PK remains wedded to a vision of the nation mired in the 1950s.

While the brand of far-right, "he-man" evangelism offered by PK still has adherents, it doesn't represent our nation's future. That's a significant challenge to any sort of comeback the group wants to mount.



20 years ago, now stands at \$2 million. Promise Keepers' current CEO, **Ken Harrison**, is an unpaid volunteer.

Veteran religion reporter **Adelle Banks** of Religion News Service **wrote an interesting story** July 31 about Promise Keepers' hopes for a comeback. The group held a virtual rally Friday and Saturday that a reported 500 U.S. churches agreed to simulcast. The event was translated into Spanish and a few other languages.

In the late '90s, many of us who monitor Christian nationalist groups were curious as to what Promise Keepers were all about. Seeking to get a better understanding of this movement and its goals, I attended a June 1997 PK event at Robert F. Kennedy Stadium in Washington, D.C. At the

August 2020 CE

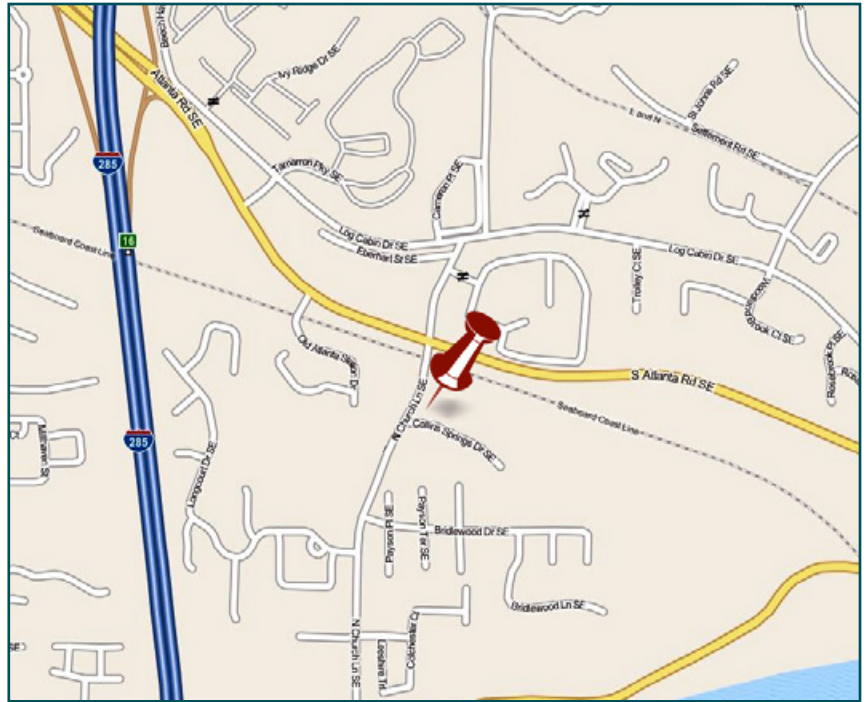
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*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



**AF Hall
4775 N. Church Lane SE
Atlanta, GA 30339**

**Steven Lowe
(via Zoom)**



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