

Charles Shapiro - "Politics and Surveillance: a Web Survey" (via Zoom)

On Sunday, September 12, at 1:00 pm via Zoom, AFS will host Charles Shapiro (one of our own—not Leonardo DaVinci, but as close as we can get), a flaneur, a first-rate boulevardier, a Linux fanatic, a juggler, a renaissance man, a fencer, a classical scholar, a linguistic master with Carletonian roots



Charles Shapiro

and Minnesota-esque branches to provide our September program.

Shapiro is famous for his heirloom tomatoes, his micro-brewed beer, and in every sense of both halves of the word, a freethinker.

Charles said his talk will be, "A disquisition upon the ubiquitous surveillance of your every whim and gesture recorded upon the Mighty Internet and the nature and methods thereof. I shall present some original research on this evil, and possibly touch upon some methods to mitigate its effects. With further hints on the motives and methods of those engaged in this endeavor, and possibly the nature of Late-Stage Capitalism in general. Or, "If You Are Not the Customer, You Are the Product."

We proudly welcome speakers from everywhere—geographically and intellectually—but it is also a delight to hear from one of our own, from a member of decades-long standing. Shapiro will give his talk, lead a discussion, and constantly add to the Zoom chat simultaneously, just to show he can, on Sunday.

The Shapiro AFS program, free and open to the public, will be preceded by a

Calendar

Sep 12	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm
Oct 10	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm
Nov 14	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm

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

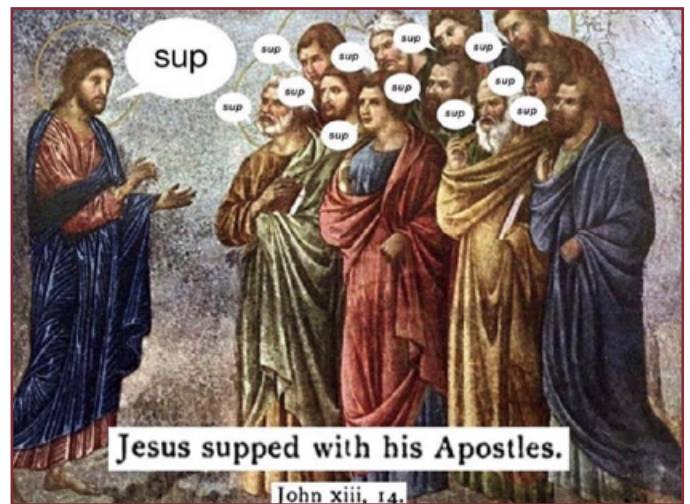
few minutes of social distanced (seriously distanced!) socializing starting about 12:30 P.M. EDT for those interested.

We welcome those who are not freethinkers but who just want to know more about YE ALL-KNOWING INTERNET from a prominent thinker and leader (and freethinker). All freethinkers are of course welcome—and we hope that they will decide to join as members in due course.

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

AFS September Meeting Sept 12, 2021 1:00-2:30 PM (EDT)

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



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 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.



September 12: Charles Shapiro

October 10: Jonathan Pearce

November 14: Alison Gill

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 calendar 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 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.

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.

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Editor: Laura Ross
Assistant Editor: Steve Yothment

How to Contact the Editor

Send correspondence to AFS at:
4775 N. Church Lane SE,
Atlanta, GA 30339,
phone Laura at 404-634-1005, or send
e-mail to Laura@LauraRossDesign.com
or luara.mom@gmail.com

2021 Board of Directors

Mark Banks – 770-354-1546
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Steve Yothment – 678-364-8703

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AFS Wordpress specialist: Dwight Lyman
AFS Facebook page: Laura Ross, Ed Buckner,
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Understanding the World and Enjoying a Good Laugh

Democratic Left • August 6, 2021 • by Ed Buckner

Canceling Comedians While the World Burns: A Critique of the Contemporary Left

Ben Burgis

Zer0 Books, 2021, \$16.95 paperback

Life is nuanced, complex, contradictory, and hard to understand. A decent living wage, socialized healthcare for everyone, racial and gender equality, and workplace democracy matter—and so does having a good laugh. Moreover, getting people to care about and understand what democratic socialism is, and working for it, means keeping a sharp focus; it means “staying on message.”

In his new book, *Canceling Comedians While the World Burns: A Critique of the Contemporary Left*, Ben Burgis wants the Left to stay on message. He’s not saying that personal choice of pronouns or avoiding “triggering” words don’t matter. He does not argue for being politically correct or for ignoring political correctness. He argues, quite cogently, for focusing on what matters most, for paying serious attention to priorities. And, as his previous book (*Give Them an Argument: Logic for the Left*, 2019) demonstrated, he knows how to argue.

Much of what Burgis presses in *Canceling...* can be summed up in one memorable sentence: “[P]oring through a standup special or any other work of art for moral and political flaws is usually a silly exercise that only serves to re-enforce the worst image of the left in the minds of the undecided.”

Burgis likes Dave Chappelle, and he uses Chappelle’s work to illustrate his theme. In one riff, Chappelle tells the audience that they’ll have to guess who it is:

“Duh...hey...der...if you do anything wrong in your life and I find out about it, I’m going to try to take everything away from you. And I don’t care when I find out. It could be today, tomorrow, 15, 20 years from now, if I find out, you’re fucking finished.”

After the crowd shouts out a few guesses, he tells them, “That’s right. That’s you! That’s what the audience sounds like to me.”

Writer Barbara Ehrenreich came under fire for a now-infamous [tweet](#) about decluttering expert Marie Kondo. Burgis defends Ehrenreich eloquently, pointing out that she has been “an anti-empire activist since the presidency of Richard Nixon, who “served for a long time as an Honorary Co-Chair of the DSA.” He explains that anyone familiar with her work would understand her intent. Most tellingly he demonstrates that piling on about Ehrenreich’s tweet, even if it had been narrowly accurate to do so, would have been misguided, foolish, and dangerous.

As this book makes clear, much too often, we on the Left sound like people determined to take everything away from what we really ought to care about, to make some ephemeral moral or political point. Or just to ruin a joke.

Because he has broad and deep knowledge of socialism, history, humor, and logic, Burgis manages to educate us about Joseph Stalin, Jeff Bezos, the French Revolution, Nathan Robinson, “tankies,” Natalie Wynn, Mark Fisher, and much more—all without his readers having to break a metaphorical sweat. His writing is that lucid, and he makes reading his words that much of a joy.

Ben Burgis is, in this book and in life, a happy warrior (not at all pro-war—but a cheerful, upbeat, ardent socialist activist)—what the late Christopher Hitchens considered, positively, a “knee-jerk” leftist—meaning a consistent or predictable leftist. Burgis is a scholar, a philosopher, a professor, and a writer—a frequent contributor to *Jacobin* and other socialist publications and podcasts.

My wife and I had the pleasure recently of hearing Burgis give a talk based on his book to the Atlanta Freethought Society. We had been members and supporters of the Democratic Socialists of America but had let our membership lapse because we perceived a loss of focus by DSA. Hearing Burgis and reading *Canceling* has persuaded us that we should rejoin. And not merely because DSA is the only strong organizational alternative available (though it is); or because criticism that makes it better can only come from the inside (though that’s true, too), but because humor and human decency are necessary but not sufficient.

Collective, effective, organized work is necessary. Ben Burgis is the coach we need, and reading *Canceling Comedians While the World Burns* is a great start for anyone who wants DSA and the movement not just to be admirable and virtuous but to change the world.



Secular Organizations Call on Biden to Grant Refugee Status to Nonreligious and Religious Minority Afghans

American Atheists

The national human and civil rights organization, American Atheists, in a letter signed by all American members of the international humanist community, Humanists International, has called on the Biden Administration to protect the lives of Afghans, particularly atheists, humanists, and ex-Muslims, as the United States withdraws military forces from Afghanistan.

“Afghans who are atheists, secular humanists, or ex-Muslims, and those who campaign for humanist values, are in imminent danger under Taliban rule,” said **Nick Fish**, president of American Atheists. “**President Biden** must take every possible step to protect these vulnerable people. That means expanding eligibility for Special Immigrant Visas, expediting approvals, and getting people on planes immediately.”

“Nonreligious Afghans can’t afford to wait on paperwork and red tape, while the Taliban is literally going door-to-door searching for them,” added Fish.

American Atheists, the American Humanist Association, the American Ethical Union, and Humanists International **sent a letter to President Biden** on Thursday calling on his administration to extend Refugee Admissions Program Priority 2 designation to Afghan nationals who are likely to face persecution on the basis of religion.

So that the United States can meet the needs of this humanitarian crisis, the organizations have also called on President Biden to issue an Emergency Presidential Determination on Refugee Admissions that raises the number of refugee admissions permissible for FY 2021, and to further increase his administration’s commitment for FY 2022 above the previously stated admissions level of 125,000.

On August 15, during Humanists International’s 69th General Assembly, the president of the organization, **Andrew Copson**, **called on all national humanist organizations**, including American Atheists, to “urg[e] the government of their countries to take whatever action they can—unilaterally and multilaterally—to secure the human rights and equitable treatment of everyone within Afghanistan.”

“The things most valued by our humanist movement—freedom of thought, speech, and choice; human rights including of women, LGBTI+ people, and children; knowledge, rationality; human empathy—are the things most hated by the Taliban and those who have allied or will ally with them,” added Copson.

“As atheists and humanists, we welcome refugees fleeing persecution into our communities,” said Fish, referencing a survey that found that **atheists are among the religious demographics most supportive of refugees**. “Accepting refugees who are most at risk with open arms is our moral and ethical obligation. And it’s what we owe the Afghan people after decades of conflict.”

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

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

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Statement from the AHA on the Texas Abortion Ban

AmericanHumanist.org

On September 1st, Texas S.B. 8, a law effectively banning abortion as early as six weeks of pregnancy, went into effect, since the Supreme Court failed to act on an **emergency request** from the Center for Reproductive Rights, Planned Parenthood, and the ACLU. Using a shadow docket and a 5-4 ruling 23 hours later, the Supreme Court refused to block that law. The American Humanist Association is deeply disappointed by this news and outraged by the devastating loss of access to abortions for the 29 million people who call Texas home.

“We’re disappointed in the Supreme Court’s failure to intervene on Texas Senate Bill 8,” comments AHA Deputy Director **Nicole Carr**, “This nearly outright ban on abortions completely violates the constitutional rights protected by *Roe v. Wade* and will adversely affect countless people across the state, especially already vulnerable populations.”

Under the law, abortions would still be permitted within approximately the first six weeks, however, many providers and abortion rights advocacy groups have said that at least 85% of people seeking abortions don’t even know they’re pregnant before six weeks. Additionally, even if one knew that early, it would still be difficult to get an appointment within the restrictive time frame. This ban will disproportionately affect lower-income and vulnerable populations, especially those who would be unable to travel to other states for abortion access.

Texas S.B. 8 was intentionally drafted to make it difficult to challenge in court. The state isn’t technically enforcing the law as it, instead, deputizes private citizens to sue anyone who “aids and abets” an abortion procedure. This nefarious framing was intentional, as lawmakers behind the policy believe that it enables S.B. 8 to sidestep the rights affirmed by *Roe*.

“As humanists, we strongly oppose Texas S.B. 8 and urge Congress to protect access to abortion by passing the Women’s Health Protection Act (WHPA),” concludes Carr. “Abortion is a human rights issue, as well as a Church-State separation issue. Everyone is entitled to bodily autonomy, and to make the personal decisions that would impact their lives and futures, unrestrained by the religious beliefs of elected officials.”

WHPA would put an end to laws like S.B. 8 and protect abortion care across the United States. Learn more about WHPA and contact your representatives here: <https://actforwomen.org/take-action/>

September 2021 CE

Freedom From Religion Foundation condemns outrageous Supreme Court blow to Roe

FFRF.org

In a shocking action, the U.S. Supreme Court issued an **order** just before midnight September 1st officially declining to block Texas’s draconian abortion ban.

In a 5-4 ruling, the high court rejected a request to bar enforcement of the law, contending that applicants failed to meet their burden to stay the law. The one-paragraph opinion was unsigned. Gratifyingly, Chief Justice **John Roberts** joined the court’s liberal bloc — Justices **Sonia Sotomayor**, **Stephen Breyer** and **Elena Kagan** — in dissenting.

The Texas law that went into effect Sept. 1 is the most restrictive abortion law in the country, banning abortion procedures after six weeks of gestation — which is two weeks after a missed period and before most women even know that they are pregnant. Outrageously, the law deputizes private citizens to file civil suits against abortion providers or anyone who assists someone in obtaining an abortion, offering a “bounty” reward of \$10,000 and attorneys’ fees for a successful lawsuit.

Roberts, joined in his dissent by Kagan and Breyer, noted that the Texas law is “not only unusual, but unprecedented” and “appears to insulate the state from responsibility.” Given the novelty of the law and the questions still before the court, he stated he would have blocked implementation of the law “to preserve the status quo.”

Sotomayor, who has become the new voice of dissent on the high court, wrote her own passionate dissent, also joined by Breyer and Kagan, appropriately calling the order “stunning.” She termed the law “a breathtaking act of defiance — of the Constitution, of this court’s precedents, and of the rights of women seeking abortions throughout Texas.” She castigated the majority for “bury[ing] their heads in the sand.” Her footnote noted the immediate and devastating impact of the court’s failure upon pregnant people in Texas.

Kagan issued her own dissent, also joined by Sotomayor and Breyer, highlighting concerns that the shadow docket ruling departed “from the usual principles of appellate process.” She added, “the majority’s decision is emblematic of too much of this Court’s shadow-docket decision-making — which every day becomes more unreasoned, inconsistent, and impossible to defend.”

The unsigned majority opinion acknowledged that the fight is not over, contending “this order is not based on any conclusion about the constitutionality of Texas’s law, and in no way limits other procedurally proper challenges to the Texas law, including in Texas state courts.”

The case will continue in the lower courts. Later this year, the Supreme Court is expected to hear arguments in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, involving the constitutionality of a Mississippi law banning abortions after the 15th week of pregnancy.

“The court’s action over the last 24 hours has stripped millions of Texans of their fundamental rights under our Constitution and has effectively overruled *Roe v. Wade* and *Casey v. Planned Parenthood*,” says FFRF Legal Director **Rebecca Markert**. “This decision makes clear that we cannot rely on the current Supreme Court — packed with ultraconservative Christian nationalist justices during **President Trump’s** term in office — from abiding by the rule of law. The only path forward is to fix our broken federal judiciary through legislation.”

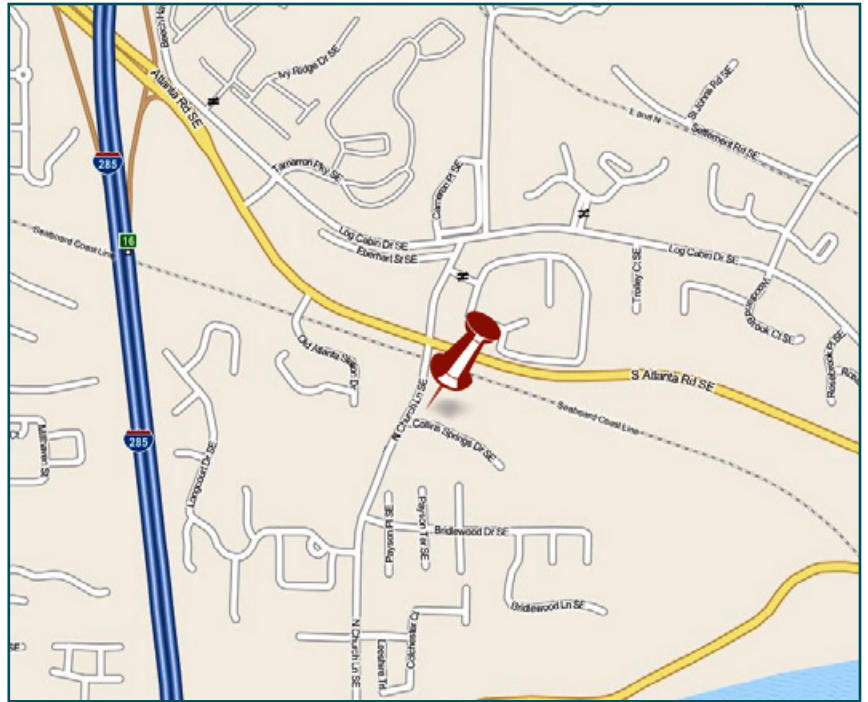
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*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



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

**Charles Shapiro
9/12/21 1:00 pm EDT
(via Zoom)**



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