

## John W. Loftus: “Miracle Claims Asserted Without Objective Evidence Can Be Dismissed. Period!” (via Zoom)

John W. Loftus is a former Christian minister of fifteen years. He was an aspiring apologist with M.A., M.Div., and Th.M. degrees in Philosophy,



John W. Loftus

Theology, and the Philosophy of Religion, the last of which was earned under William Lane Craig at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, in 1985. He also spent a year and a half in a PhD

program at Marquette University, but dropped out to be by his father’s side as he was dying of cancer, by taking a Senior Minister position back home. He had hoped to finish it but didn’t.

Loftus is the author of *Why I Became an Atheist: A Former Preacher Rejects Christianity* (2008, revised 2012), *The Outsider Test for Faith: How to Know Which Religion is True* (2013), *How to Defend the Christian Faith: Advice from an Atheist* (2015), and *Unapologetic: Why Philosophy of Religion Must End* (2016). He has also co-authored a book with Dr. Randal Rauser titled, *God or Godless? One Atheist. One Christian. Twenty Controversial Questions* (2013). He has edited several anthologies: *The Christian Delusion* (2010) *The End of Christianity* (2011), *Christianity is not Great* (2014), *Christianity in the Light of Science* (2016) and *The Case against Miracles* (2019). Two additional anthologies have been accepted for publication, *Varieties of Jesus Mythicism* and *God and Horrendous Suffering*.

In John’s talk he’ll do what it says, by showing why almost all, or all miracle claims, lack objective evidence, why they should be dismissed, and what it means to dismiss them.

Steve Yothment again has set up a free Zoom

session for Sunday, November 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 November Meeting

November 8, 2020 1:00-2:30 PM (EST)

To join Zoom meeting go to link below:  
[us02web.zoom.us/j/86843137944](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86843137944)

### Calendar

Dec 13	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm
Jan 10	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm

All events are via Zoom unless noted and are subject to change. Stupid Covid-19!

Buy a Bible, don't read it, and you'll be a Catholic.

Buy a Bible, read only what suits you and you will be an Evangelical.

Buy a Bible, read it fully, analyze it, reason it, and you will be an Atheist.

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



**November 8: John W. Loftis**

**December 13: John Pearce of the United Kingdom will be joining us with a talk on the Nativity**

**January 10: TBA**

### AFS Email List

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*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

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## Warning About Biased Federal Judiciary

ffrf.org

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is set to release a report exposing the growing imbalance, Christian Nationalism and religious favoritism of the federal judiciary.

The massive shift in the judicial makeup highlighted in the report is having a profound impact on issues that are fundamental to every American, such as protecting religious minorities, upholding anti-discrimination laws and protecting public school students from religious pressure.

The rushed confirmation of **Amy Coney Barrett** to the Supreme Court is the culmination of the Religious Right's capture of the federal courts — a crusade more than a decade in the making.

Our godless Constitution separates state and church, and federal courts have long defended that founding American principle. From the time our framers wrote that Constitution, certain basic principles were understood, including the idea that religious freedom is a protection, not a weapon. The conservative Christian Nationalists who've captured the courts have turned these and other hallowed principles on their head. In 2016, 81 percent of white evangelical Christians voted for **Donald Trump**, and in return they've gotten a federal judiciary willing to codify religious privilege while stripping the rights of minorities.

FFRF's report will illustrate this alarming shift with data and evidence pulled from the opinions these judges have written. Sadly, there is a lot of fodder for the report. The high court has been recently packed with three more darlings of the Religious Right, adding to the three that were already there. And in less than four years, President Trump has appointed 53 circuit court judges and 162 district court judges. By the end of this congressional term, Trump-appointed judges could account for more than one-third of all federal circuit court judges and a quarter of all district court judges. FFRF has been working to mobilize its members to oppose the many recent judicial nominees that are both unqualified and radically theocratic.

One such judge is **Justin Walker**, who was rated as unqualified for judicial office by the nonpartisan American Bar Association and was yet appointed and confirmed last year to the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Kentucky. In a hastily issued opinion allowing large Christian congregations to gather for Easter services in violation of a neutral statewide pandemic public health order, Walker issued an inflammatory, now infamous opinion that began: "On Holy Thursday, an American mayor criminalized the communal celebration of Easter." Walker's opinion reads like the first draft of a Christian Nationalist manifesto. "It was not long ago, for example, that the government told the Supreme Court it can prohibit a church from choosing its own minister; force religious business owners to buy pharmaceuticals they consider abortion-inducing; and conscript nuns to provide birth control," wrote Walker. A few months later, Walker was nominated and confirmed to the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals, often regarded as the second-highest court in the land.

Federal judges have complete power to determine whether government action that favors religion is unconstitutional, what legal test will be used to analyze such government action, and whether or not citizens can even get their day in court to challenge such government action. Often, it is lower court and appellate court judges that are doing the damage on behalf of Christian Nationalism.

It has become undeniable that the struggle to protect and defend the all-American principle of separation between religion and government must encompass a campaign to reclaim our courts from theocrats.

## COVID-19 Vaccines

Edwin Ewing

After HIV was discovered as the cause of AIDS, HHS Secretary **Margaret Heckler** was quoted as suggesting that a vaccine would be developed within two years. That was 1984. More than 35 years later, despite enormous effort, there is still no effective HIV vaccine. (Now there are very effective HIV drugs, however.)

Vaccines aren't created by magic or boasting. They require science, well designed and executed trials, and patience. As a group, viruses employ a variety of tricks, some viruses such as HIV being much harder than others to outwit.

Even if a safe, effective, FDA-approved COVID-19 vaccine appeared tomorrow, it would take many months for it to affect the pandemic because of challenges in manufacture, distribution, —and trust. As long as some people refuse to social distance and refuse to wear a mask, the virus will continue to spread out of control, likely killing ANOTHER 200,000 people just by the end of this year. Premature reopening of schools and businesses, not to mention holding crowded maskless rallies, guarantees more infections and more deaths as some leaders try to manage by calendar instead of by data.

At this time, despite enormous ongoing effort and political hype, defeat of the pandemic by vaccines is little more than a fantasy. But as Emory's **Dr. Carlos Del Rio** recently exclaimed, "We have a vaccine already—it's called a mask!"

Ed

Edwin P. Ewing, Jr., M.D.  
CDC Retiree

### Apology

Laura Ross

My deepest apologies for not getting the newsletter out last month. **Dwight Lyman** and I had gone to get flu shots as an anniversary present to ourselves, were warned that immunity would not kick in for two weeks, and even so we then unwisely wandered around in Walgreen's picking up items and putting them down and where we obviously picked up the flu. It was wretched. I was passed out and missed the deadline to get the newsletter out and for that I am regretful. The moral of the story is *get your flu shots and don't hang out picking up stuff in drug stores where people who have the flu go for remedies!*



## Free—and Engaging, Gutsy, Appealing, Witty—Thinker

### An Appreciation of Two Women (One of Them Named Alice Chenoweth and Also Helen Hamilton Gardener and the Other Named Kimberly Hamlin) by Ed Buckner

The Atlanta Freethought Society had a great program for October 2020—Dr. Kimberly Hamlin talked about Helen Hamilton Gardener (born Alice Chenoweth, of the Virginia Chenoweths) and Hamlin’s book on Gardner, *Free Thinker* (W. W. Norton & Company, 2020).



Dr. Kimberly Hamlin

I now have a copy of the book (signed, first printing, I’ll have you know) and it is scholarly, detailed, and lively. But I’ve just started reading it, so I’ll save my review for a later *AF-News*. This is about Hamlin’s talk and about Gardener from that talk and another source.

Hamlin is a first-class speaker—cheerful, engaging, deeply knowledgeable about her

subject but easygoing enough to leave all kinds of rich details for question answering or later reading. I’d travel—if travel is ever again open to us—some ways to hear her again, on Gardener or any other topic. I had no memory of ever hearing of Gardener before, but Hamlin brought her to life and persuaded us that she belongs beside Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Woodrow Wilson, Susan B. Anthony, Robert Green Ingersoll, and Harriet Beecher Stowe as an important and interesting American historical figure. Gardener was, kind of like Ingersoll, deservedly quite prominent and famous in her own time even if not widely known now.

Among much else interesting about Gardener, we learned that she was famously witty and I wanted to follow up on that. Another woman I admire deeply, Annie Laurie Gaylor, edited a fine collection, *Women Without Superstition: “No Gods—No Masters”—The Collected Writings of Women*

*Freethinkers of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (FFRF, 1997). It included—as I would have expected—Gardener writing an excerpt from “Vicarious Atonement” that demonstrated Hamlin’s description. Two examples:

*...they...condemned the whole lot of us to the eternal wrath of God on account of that little indiscretion attributed to Eve. It seems a very little thing for anybody to get so mad at us all about, and stay mad so long! It doesn’t seem to me that if one of you were to eat every apple I had in my orchard, I should want to murder and eternally condemn all the folks that live [in] Asia Minor. Do you think you would?* (p. 304)

and

Awhile ago a man stayed some time at a hotel in New York, and when the time came for him to pay his bill he hadn’t the money. Well, the proprietor felt sorry for him and said, “I tell you what I’ll do about that bill, I’ll

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# New Poll Gauges Americans' Belief In The 'Christian Nation' Myth

By Rob Boston / Wall of Separation Blog

au.org

On October 19, Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) issued its **2020 survey of American values**. There's a lot to chew on, but three questions especially leap out at readers who have an interest in church-state issues.

PRRI asked respondents about their views on religious diversity. People taking part in the survey were asked to put themselves on a 10-point scale. At one end was the statement, "I would prefer the U.S. to be made up of people belonging to a wide variety of religions" and at the other end was the statement, "I would prefer the U.S. to be a nation primarily made up of people who follow the Christian faith."

Most Americans backed pluralism, but the numbers are not as high as you might think. PRRI reports that 38% mostly agree with the statement backing diversity, while 25% would prefer that the nation be mostly Christian. The rest, 36%, fall somewhere in the middle.

PRRI also asked respondents if they believe the United States is a Christian nation. This is an interesting question because that term can be defined in different ways. Some people really do believe (incorrectly) that our Constitution singles out Christianity for special preference. Others just believe the nation is culturally Christian.

PRRI found that 36% say the country is a Christian nation. An additional 40% say America was once Christian but no longer is. Only 22% agree with the statement that

the United States has never been a Christian nation. (The good news is that belief in America as a Christian nation is declining; in 2016, it stood at 41%.)

Finally, PRRI asked people if they believe God has granted America a special role in human history. This can be a dangerous belief because if one accepts that we are God's favorite nation with a divine destiny, it becomes difficult to face up to our wrong-doings.

Nevertheless, 40% of Americans believe that God has granted our nation a special role in history, while 58% disagree. PRRI reports that this is the first time since it asked this question in 2011 that a majority has rejected the idea of a God-ordained special role for America. And the number of people who strongly disagree with that notion has doubled.

Polls like this are interesting, but public opinion can't hold back the tide of change that is washing over the country. The nation is becoming more diverse, with growing numbers of Americans declaring that they have no formal religion. Nor can a belief, no matter how strongly held, rewrite our nation's history.

The United States was never intended to be an officially Christian nation; rather, it was designed as a haven for people of all faiths and none. That is our proud heritage, and we should not hesitate to embrace it.



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## Continued from Page 4

throw off half." His guest was overwhelmed by this liberality, and with tears of gratitude said, "I cannot permit you to outdo me in generosity; I'll throw off the other half and we'll call it square." (p. 305)

Don't let me mislead you: Gardener was not just going for laughs. She was quite effectively making serious freethought and feminist points, but she knew her readers and listeners would stay with her better if there were some lighter moments.

Hamlin engaged us all equally well with a mix of interesting details, some

of them weighty in historical terms and some of them inducing laughs—all of them a delight to hear (or see—she used great slide illustrations, too, including a picture—really—of Gardener's brain in a jar).

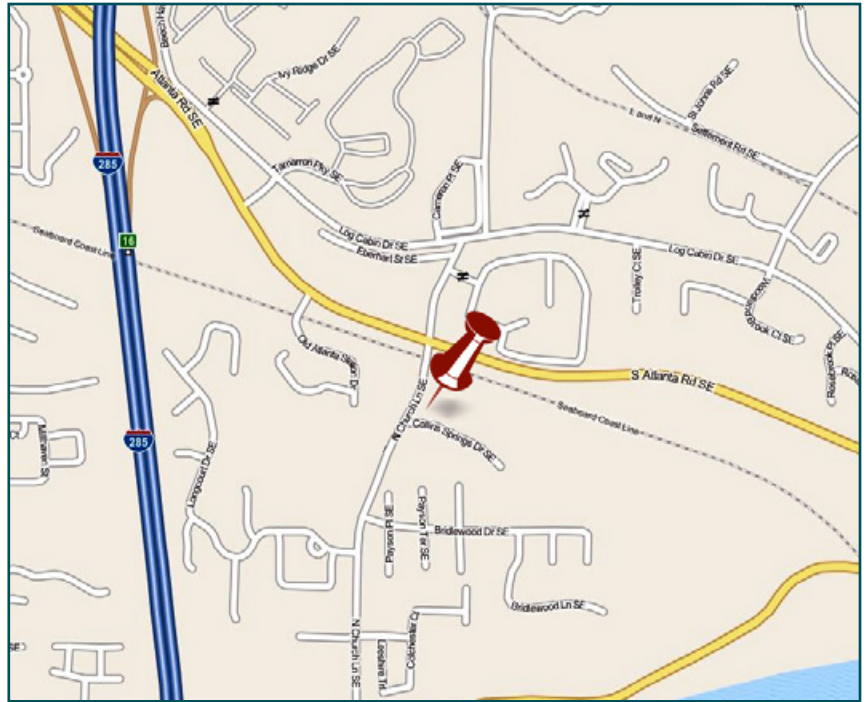
I cannot wait to read *Free Thinker: Sex, Suffrage, and the Extraordinary Life of Helen Hamilton Gardener*. For more on Hamlin, see—<http://www.kimberlyhamlin.com/author/>

*Dare To Think  
For Yourself!*



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**John W. Loftus  
(via Zoom)**



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