HUMANIST Monthly

Vol. XXXIX No. 4 April 2025 A Publication of the Capital District Humanist Society Connecting the Secular Humanist Community of Upstate New York, Western Massachusetts, and Southern Vermont

Sunday, April 13th, 2025 In Person at 12:30 PM and Online at 1:00 PM READING THE ROCK RECORD: UNDERSTANDING OUR FUTURE



It's difficult to understand how one or two degrees of global temperature rise can even be observed, much less have any impact on climate and ecosystems. It's especially difficult to accept as we struggle through another cold and snowy winter. The effects of global

Penny Higgins

warming are hardly noticeable on the timescale of a person's life. However, on a geologic time scale, abrupt climate change and its catastrophic effects are readily discerned. We'll discuss how we use 19th, 20th, and 21st century techniques to tease information about climate and environment from rocks and how we can correlate this with events in the fossil record. We'll put special focus on an event called the Middle Eocene Climatic Optimum (MECO), a period of global warming that occurred around 40 million years ago and is recorded in rocks of western Utah.

Penny Higgins is a consulting geochemist and paleontologist with her business, EPOCH Isotopes. Her specialty is using chemical studies of rocks and fossils to infer patterns of temperature, precipitation, vegetation, and dietary preferences. She applies her technical and instrumental knowledge as the Laboratory Operations Supervisor at Eastman Kodak Company in Rochester, NY. Though she loves science, she loves her cats more and founded Mew-Mew House, a 501(c)3 retirement and hospice home for cats, which she runs out of her house. The program will take place both in person (at 12:30 PM) and online (at 1:00 PM) via Zoom. The in-person event will be held at Pinnacle Living at 45 Forts Ferry Road in Latham, NY. It is free and open to the public. Light refreshments will be available at the in-person meeting before the speaker's presentation, but <u>please bring your own beverage</u>. Current paid CDHS members will automatically receive an invite to the on-line meeting via email. If you are not a current paid CDHS member, please see the instructions below to request an email invitation to attend.

This event is free and open to the public. It will be held at Pinnacle Living at 45 Forts Ferry Road in Latham, New York and via Zoom. If you are not a current paid CDHS member, please follow the instructions below to request an email invitation to attend. **ANYONE WHO IS NOT A CURRENT PAID MEMBER of CDHS can attend.** Send an email request to: <u>CDHS.Albany@gmail.com</u>. Please send the request several days prior to the meeting.

The Capital District Humanist Society provides a supportive community for exchanging ideas, heightening our knowledge of the world and ourselves, fostering moral and ethical growth, and promoting the principles of secular humanism. CDHS is a member organization for people with humanist values. Our values include commitment to free inquiry, rational thought, lifelong education, democracy, social concern, and fellowship.

Capital District Humanist Society, Inc.

Established 1986

Find us on Facebook at http:/www.facebook.com/ CapitalDistrictHumanistSociety



CDHS is affiliated with: The American Humanist Association (AHA) Center for Inquiry (CSI) Humanists International (HI) The Secular Coalition for America (SCA) On Sunday, May 4th, 2025, 12:30 PM (In Person) and 1:00 PM (Online) The Capital District Humanist Society Presents: Forgotten American Icons

Matilda Joslyn Gage and Grover Cleveland: Who They Are and What They Can Teach Us

Upstate New York in the mid-19th century was a cauldron bubbling with the lure of fast fortunes, religious zealotry, and battles for civil liberties. This fervor centered on the Erie Canal, which successfully supported scores of villages brimming with opportunity.

One village, Fayetteville, NY, was home to two future American leaders – Matilda Joslyn Gage and Grover Cleveland. Gage was an only child of freethinking parents, an ardent supporter of universal rights, who Gloria Steinem described as, "the woman who was ahead

of the women who were ahead of their times." In contrast, Cleveland was the fifth of nine children of an austere Presbyterian minister. He rose from mayor of Buffalo, to governor of NY, to US president over four years through his honesty and support of individual rights.

How did Upstate New York shape these people and how have they affected who we are?

The AMERICAN PURSUIT

VITALITY

CAMP MEETING

WALL STREET

JACKSON LEARS

Michael Miller was born in a New Jersey village similar to Fayetteville. Through small town life, he learned to respect people regardless of their backgrounds and to appreciate the gifts each person brings to the world. Miller developed a love of research during his schooling (Tufts University, B.A.; City College of NY, M.S.; Mt. Sinai, Ph.D.) and academic career (Tulane, Rutgers, Univ. Iowa, and SUNY). He applied these skills when he wrote his debut novel, *High Bridge, Matilda and Grover Battle Learned Ignorance*.

This program will take place both in person (at 12:30 PM) and online (at 1:00 PM) via Zoom. The in-person event will be held at Pinnacle Living at 45 Forts Ferry Road in Latham, NY. It is free and open to the public. Light refreshments will be available at the in-person meeting before the speaker's presentation. Current paid CDHS members will automatically receive an invite to the on-line meeting via email. If you are not a current paid CDHS member, please see page 1 to request an email invitation to attend.

CDHS Book Group is reading Animal Spirits: The American Pursuit of Vitality from Camp Meeting to Wall Street by Jackson Lears. The group meets on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays.

Contact Frank Robinson if you would like to join the spirited and informative discussion.

CDHS Executive Council

Executive Director Secretary Treasurer Programs, Publicity Publications

Social Activities Membership, Telephone Meetup Coordinator Compliance Member at Large Don Porterfield Vacant Roland Tozer Fred Levine Carol Quantock

Candace Fuller Judith Herbert Fred Levine Vacant Vacant

Appointed Positions

Hospitality Room Arrangements Caring Network Sue Parry Frank Robinson Rosina Ansaldo



Michael Miller

RECAP OF OUR MARCH SPEAKER'S TALK

(prepared by Don Porterfield with the assistance of Zoom's AI Companion)

Frank S. Robinson is a long-time member of CDHS, a professional coin dealer, and author. His topic, "AI and Our Future," provided a summary of Yuval Noah Harari's 2024 book, *Nexus: A Brief History of Information Networks from the Stone Age to* AI, along with Frank's own comments about this subject.

Frank noted that Harari's book focuses on how artificial intelligence will shape the future. Harari's book also explores the implications of AI for the future of democratic societies, contrasting it with more authoritarian modes of social organization.

The book uses the metaphor of The Sorcerer's Apprentice as a cautionary tale about AI's power. The book posited that our first information technology was the story, which can manipulate us regardless of truth or falsity. The danger of false information can be associated with the rise of populist political movements. Because humans have a tendency to summon powerful forces with unintended consequences, a potential concern is that the use of AI-based systems might lead to the rise of new totalitarian regimes.

Frank noted that Harari does have issues with AI systems, particularly their non-correction and lack of self-correcting capabilities. In addition, AI may be harder for humans to control and may lead to pervasive control. There is also a concem about political radicalization and the potential for spreading misinformation due to the influence of AI and algorithms.

Frank also noted Harari's concerns about AI's impact on social trust and society. Harari fears that AI-generated disinformation could erode people's ability to trust anyone or anything, potentially leading to intrusive totalitarian regimes. Harari also noted the "alignment problem," where AI's decision-making may not align with human intentions due to its different way of thinking and an AI system not knowing what it doesn't know. However, one of the potential benefits of AI is the convergence of biological and mechanistic components, leading to the evolution of future beings beyond their biological limitations, while still retaining human-like minds. Frank recognized that Harari's pessimistic views on the future of AI are based on potential misuse and weaponization of AI technologies.

Frank stated that he believes that AI does offer potential benefits, especially in assisting differently-abled individuals. In order to conduct a personal assessment of the capabilities of AI systems that are currently available, Frank related that he had used Chat GPT to generate a Valentine's Day poem for his wife, who is poet. Frank shared the poem during his presentation and his wife indicated that she enjoyed the poem.

A recording of this presentation can be found on the CDHS YouTube channel: <u>https://youtu.be/op6hpyETwpo</u>.

A Passing of Note

We have recently become aware of the sudden passing of Robert Bemis, the husband of former CDHS member Keenya Oliver Bemis.

CDHS offers sincere condolences to Keenya and the Bemis family. As of this writing, arrangements have not been made public.

National Day of Action—Saturday, April 5, 2025

Donald Trump and Elon Musk think this country belongs to them. They're taking everything they can get their hands on, and daring the world to stop them. On Saturday, April 5th, we're taking to the streets nationwide to fight back with a clear message: Hands off! To find an event near you, go to: <u>https://www.mobilize.us/</u> handsoff/?utm_source=indivisible, and get involved.



Join the bunch for lunch! We will gather at the Halfmoon Diner, 231 Grooms Road, Clifton Park, on April 17 at 12:00 Noon (please note new time!). The date for the May Lunch Bunch gettogether is May 15th. Please let Rosina Ansaldo know by Wednesday evening if you'll be joining them.

NOTE: If you know of a great local eatery, please don't be shy; recommend it! We'd like to give our local eateries a chance by rotating them every few months and returning to the ones that get enthusiastic thumbs up. Please send ideas to Rosina Ansaldo. Thanks!



CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS!

Do you want to get involved, but not sure how, or who, to contact? Please see below for some excellent opportunities to serve on the Executive Committee or be a part of the Pride Team's plans for upcoming Pride events, especially for the Albany Pride Festival on Sunday, June 8. The articles below will guide you to what's involved and the contact information you'll need to sign up.

<u>EC Positions Available</u>

CDHS' continuing existence is highly dependent on members stepping forward in various ways to ensure it remains a viable, thriving organization. All members are welcome to attend EC meetings to see how things work and whether you might be able help out. If you would like to make a positive difference for CDHS, reach out to a member of the EC about how to attend an EC meeting. You might be pleasantly surprised to find a good opportunity for you that may enhance the benefit you will get from our unique organization. Members with ideas, who are willing to help bring them to fruition, would be would be most welcome.

At present, there are three vacant positions on the EC: Secretary, Compliance Officer, and Member-at-Large. Two of these positions, Secretary and Compliance Officer, require work done on a monthly basis. None of the positions are difficult, but all are necessary for records and reporting purposes.

Please consider volunteering a bit of time each month to be an active part of a progressive secular organization in a safe environment with like-minded members of varied backgrounds.

If interested, send an email to Don Porterfield at <u>CDHS.Albany@gmail.com</u> to ask abut the open positions on the Executive Council. Don will fill you in on the duties of each position and approximately how much time you can expect to spend per month on either one.

CDHS Sponsors Pride Center of the Capital Region's 2025 Parade

The CDHS Executive Council voted at its February 12th meeting to become a sponsor of the 2025 Capital PRIDE Parade & Festival. Mark your calendars for Sunday, June 8th if you would like to attend this annual event in downtown Albany!

You can read more about the Pride Center, the oldest, continuously operating LGBTQ+ community center in the country, on their website: https://capitalpridecenter.org/. In addition to public outreach and throwing one heck of an annual celebration, the Pride Center provides counseling and other services for the LGBTQ+ community.

A group of CDHS members has been working to plan for our presence at the event held in and around Washington Park. If you can join us in working at our table to inform visitors about CDHS, our mission, and values, please contact Heather at hdrinkwater@outlook.com to let her know your interest and availability. We need your participation to make this a successful event for the Pride Center of the Capital Region and CDHS! The Committee is planning to set up shifts of volunteers to handle the table: shifts of two hours' duration with two people per shift is the goal, but it won't hurt to have more CDHS members on hand!

The Pride Committee is working on updating print materials as well as planning the "swag" that will attract visitors to our table to ask questions and perhaps become members. We are also looking for someone with a pickup truck or van who is willing to transport our table, tent canopy, banner, chairs, and other equipment both to and from the park (setup time is from 7:00 AM-10:00 AM, and breakdown/removal is 6:00 PM at the latest). The Committee also welcomes your ideas and participation for future Pride events.

Is America ready for atheist politicians? New findings reveal the surprising reality

by Eric W. Dolan, March 14, 2025 in Political Psychology, Psychology of Religion

A new study challenges the long-held notion that American voters categorically reject candidates who identify as atheists. Across several survey experiments, the researchers found no sweeping penalty for atheist candidates once results were averaged across the full sample. Although Republicans tended to respond negatively and Democrats showed more support, those opposing and favoring attitudes often balanced one another in ways that did not doom the candidate overall. The findings have been published in the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion.

People assume that voters in the United States will never vote for a candidate who openly identifies as an atheist. This belief has deep historical roots, from accusations against Thomas Jefferson at the dawn of the Republic to whispers during modern presidential campaigns Yet the nation's religious landscape is shifting, with fewer people belonging to organized religions and more describing themselves in secularor nonreligious terms.

"Geoff Layman and I (along with John Green) have published the bookSecular Surge: A New Fault Line in American Politics, in which we examine both the causes and consequences of growing secularization in America," explained David E. Campbell, the Packey J. Dee Professor of American Democracy at the University of Notre Dame.

"In that book, we report on experiments testing Americans' reactions to candidates of varying degrees of secularity (e.g. cardidates who describe themselves as 'not particularly religious' vs. 'an atheist.' In our book, we report that there is more support for secular candidates than suggested by conventional wisdom. In this paper, we joined with our then-graduate student (now an assistant professor at the University of Tennessee) to further explore how American voters react to atheist candidates."

The researchers conducted four separate survey experiments between 2020 and 2023. These experiments involved a total of 8,869participants recruited through online platforms from three different survey firms: YouGov, Prolific, and Lucid Theorem. These samples were designed to be representative of the United States population in terms of key demographics like gender, age, race, and education level.

In each experiment, participants were asked to read what appeared to be a news article about a hypothetical candidate runningfor political office. The researchers randomly assigned participants to different versions of these news stories. In some versions, the candidate was identified as an atheist, while in others, there was no mention of the candidate's religious beliefs.

In some variations, the candidate's patriotism was emphasized by describing them as a decorated war veteran. The researchersvaried the office the hypothetical candidate was running for in one of the studies to see if the office type affected voter preference. After reading the news story, participants were asked to rate how likely they would be to vote for the candidate on a scale from zero to 100. This setup allowed the reæarchers to measure how the information about the candidate's atheism, and other factors, influenced voters' stated likelihood of support.

The study's findings revealed a nuanced picture of voter reactions to atheist candidates. Overall, when considering all participants together, identifying a candidate as atheist had little to no negative impact on their perceived electability in most of the experiments.

This overall finding, however, masked significant differences based on political party affiliation. The researchers discovered a clear partisan divide in reactions to atheist candidates. Democrats showed a tendency to be more supportive of a candidate described as atheist, whileRepublicans tended to be less supportive. This partisan split resulted in the overall effect appearing minimal when looking at the entire sample.

"Contrary to the common belief that identifying as an atheist spells political doom for a candidate, we find that the label of atheist is a political wash overall-because the negative reaction among Republicans is counterbalanced by a positive one among Democrats," Campbell told PsyPost. "From our previous research, we had reason to believe that atheists face less stigma today than in the past, but we were nonetheless surprised that the 'atheist penalty' is so minimal."

When examining reactions to different political offices, the researchers found that the type of office the candidate was seeking did not significantly change voter reactions. "Whether it is the school board, mayor, governor, senator, or president, voters respond the same wayto an atheist. In other words, it is not that voters are especially concerned about an atheist governing their schools, or in the executive vs. legislative branch, or that the presidency is treated differently than other offices."

Both partisanship and personal religiosity independently influenced voter reactions. Within both Democrats and Republicans, wrying levels of personal religious commitment played a role in how they viewed an atheist candidate. Specifically, among Republicans, those with higher levels of religiosity reacted more negatively to an atheist candidate. However, even when considering religiosity, the partisan divideremained evident, suggesting that both religious beliefs and party loyalty independently shape voter attitudes.

Finally, the researchers found that framing an atheist candidate as a patriotic war hero did somewhat lessen negative reactions, particularly among highly religious Republicans. However, this patriotic framing did not entirely eliminate the negative impact of atheism for this group, and the effect was not consistently observed across all groups or when combined with partisan cues.

"Voters' negative perception of an atheist candidate can be partially assuaged by describing him as patriotic," Campbell said "One reason for some Americans' concern about atheists is a perception that they are not 'true Americans.' When we counter that image by describing an atheist as a military veteran, it partially-but, importantly, does not fully-temper anti-atheist sentiment."

While these experiments suggest that atheists may have more electoral potential than once assumed, the researchers note that their work has some limitations. Survey participants were reacting to short news-style descriptions in a controlled setting. Real campaigns play out over weeks or months, involve multiple debates, and feature many sources of information.

"Our paper is based on a series of experiments, in which subjects read descriptions of candidates," Campbell noted. "This cantell us how people respond in the moment to information about someone running for office, but it cannot fully replicate a political campaign."

"Our hope is that our paper illuminates the political implications of the secular population, which has grown dramatically over the last 30 years. While there are few candidates who describe themselves in secular terms, and fewer still who are atheists (or at least admitto being an atheist), it is likely that we will see more such candidates in future."

"If readers are interested in knowing more about the political characteristics of the secular population-including how secularism's growth is largely a backlash to the Religious Right-we would encourage them to read our book Secular Surge: A New Fault Line in American Politics."

The study, "Will Americans Vote for an Atheist?" was authored by David E. Campbell, Geoffrey C. Layman, and Wayde Z. C. Marsh

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Urge Congress to Oppose the Educational Choice for Children Act!

(via email received from the American Humanist Association on March 26, 2025)

Humanists,

They're at it again: the religious right has unveiled a bill that would completely overhaul the US tax system to send billions of taxpayer dollars to religious schools. We need to speak up now because we're hearing from friends in Congress that there's a good chance the majority will try to sneak this proposal into a larger bill.

As humanists, we know that school vouchers do a world of harm. The religious right says they promote "educational freedom," but private school vouchers do not provide real freedom or choice to students and parents. The "choice" in voucher programs is given entirely toprivate schools, which can choose to legally discriminate against students for reasons including disability, sexual orientation and gender identity, religion, academic achievement, and economic status.

Urge Congress to strongly oppose this legislation.

Private school voucher programs undermine our nation's public schools by diverting desperately needed resources away from thepublic school system to fund the education of a few, select students in private, often religious, schools.

The Educational Choice for Children Act would incentivize charitable support for school choice options, like private schools, by providing \$10 billion in annual tax credits for individuals who donate to nonprofit organizations that give students education scholarships. You can read the bill here. If parents want to send their kids to religious private school, fine. But our tax dollars shouldn't fund it. Your elected officials should be committed to strongly opposing private school voucher programs, including those structured as tuition tax credits. Take just one moment now to urge Congress to oppose the Educational Choice for Children Act.

With single-party control of Congress and the White House, we have every reason to believe that they will try to sneak this proposal into reconciliation, so every member of Congress needs to hear from us today.

Sincerely, Isabella Russian

Policy Manager

Mark Your Calendars — A Celebration of STEM Friday, May 9, 2025

Beverly Schwartz will be receiving a Congressional Commendation from the Congress of the United States presented by Congressman Paul Tonko of New York for the creation of the Science, Technology, Engineering, & Mathematics program - STEM.

New York State Assemblyman Phillip Steck will also present a New York Assembly Citation to Beverly Schwartz for the creation and contributions to STEM and education as a whole.

This event will also celebrate all students, mentors, teachers, students, administrators, parents, and area businesses that participated in the first STEM program in the Capital District of New York. Current students and any other friends of STEM are all welcome! Please RSVP to: students@gmail.com.

Date: Friday, May 9, 2025

Time: 3:00 PM - 5:00 PM

Location: The Well, Legislative Office Building, 198 State Street, Albany, NY 12210

Underground parking is available under the Egg. Take the elevator up to the LOB building. Parking also available on State Street. Light refreshments will be served.

For more information, go to <u>https://schwartzstemcommun.wixsite.com/schwartz-stem-histor</u>.



OTHE PORCE ART COLLECTIVE

Secular Week of Action—April 25—May 4, 2025

Secular Week of Action (SWoA) unites compassionate communities to organize service events based on shared values, connect volunteers to impactful projects in their neighborhoods and online, and celebrate what we can achieve together. Support each other in building a more empathetic and just society for all.

SWoA 2025 is Friday, April 25 to Sunday, May 4! For ten days each year—encompassing the National Day of Reason on May 4th and the National Day of Prayer on the first Thursday of May—the secular movement rallies together to organize and join inclusive responses that address social problems and promote the welfare of humankind.

Suggestions for action: plant trees or a community garden, donate blood, assist at food pantries or shelters, volunteer at a library or school.

March Social Recap—Museum of Prints and Printmaking It Really <u>Is</u> Schenectady's Best Kept Secret!

Approximately 15 people attended the tour of the Museum of Prints and Printmaking, marveling at the diversity of beautiful prints of all kinds, many dating back to the 1500s. It's a small place but holds an amazing amount of collector prints. Many of the prints were created by well-known artists, one of

the most famous being Peter Max, whose colorful works were very popular in the psychedelic days of the 1960s. There were several prints available for purchase as well. Afterward, we enjoyed a very nice dinner at the 151 Bar and Restaurant, located nearby on Lafayette Street.





April Social—National Bottle Museum

Join our adventurous group on April 26th at 10:15 a.m. when we will explore the collection at the National Bottle Museum! Who knew?!

This display features pre-machine-made bottles from each state, as well as Puerto Rico. Bottles were chosen by collectors across the United States, who voted on which bottle they



would like to represent their state. There is a \$5 admission charge, \$4 for seniors. Our lunch spot is undetermined at this time, and suggestions are welcome. The Ugly Rooster in Malta is being considered.

Location: National Bottle Museum, 76 Milton Avenue, Ballston Spa, NY; 518-885-7589.

Website: https://nationalbottlemuseum.org/

RSVP to Dee Fuller - <u>candacelf13@gmail.com</u> by Wednesday, April 23rd.

apital District Humanist Society, Inc. PO Box 11209, Loudonville, NY 12211-0209

(518) 533-2666 E-mail us at cdhs.albany@gmail.com

Visit us on the web at <u>humanistsociety.net</u>

The Capital District Humanist Society (CDHS) is an independent, non-profit (and non-prophet), non-partisan and strictly non-religious educational and social organization for those who share humanist values: commitment to education, rational and free inquiry, democracy, social concerns and fellowship. CDHS is affiliated with the four major humanist organizations - the American Humanist Association (AHA), the Council for Secular Humanism (CSH), the Secular Coalition for America (SCA) and the Humanists International (HI).

There are five types of CDHS member support: Individual, \$50/yr.; Family, \$80/yr.; Sustaining, \$100/yr.; Patron, \$150/yr.; and Lifetime Member, one contribution of \$1000 or more.

Members receive our publication, *The Humanist Monthly*, and vote each September on the make-up of the governing Executive Council. Members are eligible for election to the Executive Council and may also serve as appointed officials. Members are welcome to attend Executive Council meetings.

The IRS recognizes CDHS as a tax-exempt organization under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. Therefore, all donations, both cash and materials with established "fair market value", qualify as charitable contributions for income tax purposes.

Donations are gratefully accepted to help speed our growth. CDHS is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization under the IRS Code. Financial disclosure information and our annual report are available upon request.

If you know of someone who may be interested in CDHS, please pass this newsletter along or give us the name; we will send a sample copy or two with no obligation.

We value your input. In the best humanist tradition, CDHS has no rigid picture of itself. We ask you to join us, not follow us. What activities and services would you like CDHS to provide its members? Send us your suggestions, questions, and comments.





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