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HUMANIST

Monthly

A Publication of the Capital District Humanist Society
Connecting the Secular Humanist Community of Upstate New York, Western Massachusetts, and Southern Vermont

Sunday, March 8th, 2026

In Person at 12:30 PM and Online at 1:00 PM

“Particulars that I have Been eye & ear witness to”: How Nathaniel Bacheller Changed History



Eric Schnitzer

Benedict Arnold, although relieved of command, rode out to take charge of the faltering American attack against the British on October 7, 1777, thus bringing our troops to victory! Or did he? This program explores an epic example of Revolutionary War evidence-driven revisionist history!

Eric Schnitzer has worked at Saratoga National Historical Park since 1997, becoming Park Ranger/Historian in 2000. He has dedicated his life’s study to the organization, personnel, and material culture of the British, German, and American armed forces of the American War for independence, particularly as relates to the Northern Campaign of 1777. He lectures and writes extensively on the subjects and has written articles for journals such as The Hessians, The Brigade Dispatch, and The Fort Ticonderoga Bulletin. He’s also created illustrations for books such as *Philadelphia 1777; Wives, Slaves and Servant Girls: Advertisements for Female Runaways in American Newspapers, 1770–1783; British Soldiers, American War: Voices of the American Revolution*; and *The Revolution’s Last Men: The Soldiers Behind The Photographs*. He and his wife, Jenna, live in an 18th-century house in the White Creek Historic District near Bennington Battlefield, NY, where they spend much of their time sewing reproduction 18th-century garments for living history and museum applications.

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 **PLEASE BRING YOUR OWN BEVERAGE**. Current paid CDHS members will automatically receive an invitation to the online meeting via email. If you are not a current paid CDHS member, please see the paragraph 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: CDHS.Albany@gmail.com. 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)

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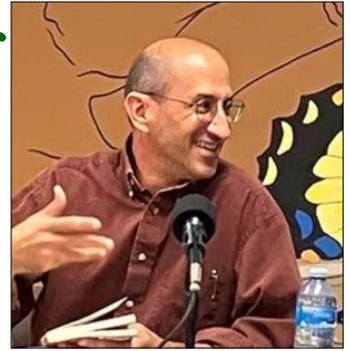
Humanists International (HI)

The Secular Coalition for America (SCA)

On Sunday, April 12th, 2026, 12:30 PM (In Person) and 1:00 PM (Online)
 The Capital District Humanist Society Presents:

Sacred Bliss: A Spiritual History of Cannabis

One of the most important relationships that human beings have with plants is changing our consciousness--consider the plants that give us coffee, tea, chocolate, and nicotine. *Sacred Bliss* challenges traditional attitudes about cannabis by tracing its essential role in the spiritual and curative traditions of Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Europe, and the Americas from prehistory to the present day. In highlighting the continued use of cannabis around the globe, *Sacred Bliss* offers compelling evidence of cannabis as an entheogen used for thousands of years to evoke peak-experiences, or moments of expanded perception or spiritual awareness.



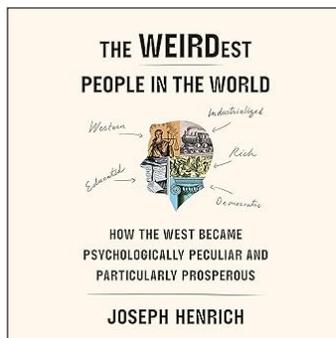
Mark S. Ferrara

Mark S. Ferrara is a professor of English at SUNY Oneonta; he earned his Ph.D. at the University of Denver in 2004. He is author of six additional books, including *Palace of Ashes*, *American Community*, and *The Raging Erie*. His recent work of creative nonfiction, *Living the Food Allergic Life*, chronicles the everyday challenges of living with life-threatening allergies to food. Ferrara has also published fourteen peer-reviewed articles on literary and cultural studies and was appointed Visiting Scholar in the Department of English at University of California, Berkeley during the spring 2015 semester. In addition, he has taught for universities in South Korea, China, and on a Fulbright scholarship in Turkey. His courses are internationally focused, interdisciplinary, and aim to raise critical insight of other cultures through their literature.

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 invitation 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.

Reminder: May Meeting — Sunday, May 3, 2026

CDHS Book Group is reading *The WEIRDest People In The World: How The West Became Psychologically Peculiar And Particularly Prosperous* by Joseph Henrich. 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	Don Porterfield
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Caring Network	Rosina Ansaldo

Immigration Bills Brought Before NYS Legislature

by Sue Parry

Several bills before the NYS legislature would give the state more control of how law enforcement and other agencies interact with ICE. Here are summaries of each bill (mostly taken directly from the text of the bills):

S08462/A8908 prohibits local, state, and federal law enforcement officers from wearing any mask or personal disguise while interacting with the public in the performance of their duties (excluding certain protective masks).

The RADAR Act (S8858/A3976) requires that arrests, detentions, actions, and removals by immigration enforcement be reported on a publicly available dashboard.

The most extensive act is the S02235B/A3506, the “New York For All Act” (not its official name), which:

- prohibits police officers, peace officers, school resource officers, probation agencies, state entities, state employees, and municipal corporations from questioning individuals regarding their citizenship or immigration status;
- regulates the disclosure of information relating to immigration status;
- prohibits an educational agency, higher education agency, school employee, school safety personnel, or third-party contractor from collecting information about a person's citizenship, immigration status, nationality, or country of origin, unless required by law or necessary to administer a public program or benefit sought by such person.”

Recently, Governor Hochul proposed the “Local Crimes, Local Cops” Act, which incorporates some features of the NY For All Act, but is not as extensive, as it focuses only on law enforcement and not on other state agencies. (I could not find bill numbers, so I think this may not yet have been introduced in the legislature.) According to CBS6News, this bill would:

- prohibit state and local police departments from being deputized by ICE to perform immigration enforcement;
- ban “287(g) agreements,” which allow counties and municipalities to act as federal immigration agents, including those agreements already in existence;
- bar the use of local detention facilities for immigration enforcement, mass raids, or detainee transportation.

If you are interested in more details, you can search for these bills by number on nysenate.gov or nyassembly.gov. You can also learn whether your Senator or Assemblymember is a co-sponsor of any of these bills – and talk to them about why or why not.

NOTE! Here is a link to the official NYS Anti-ICE reporting forum to report and upload suspicious aka unconstitutional ICE/Border Patrol/DHS activity under the Attorney General state website: https://ag.ny.gov/federal-actions-form?fbclid=IwY2xjawQJqsFleHRuA2FlbQlxMQBzcnRjBmFwcF9pZBAyMjIwMzIxMzIzNzI0MjAwODkyAAEmJQqXtP89jLYx5E20-Cnkmr0xw0dWeK3diEVwmYBgt3lukE0q8U6ofNtsBg_aem_KwWIFhkXaZmxDwMskpf07g

Changes to the Humanist Monthly In Progress

Be on the lookout for cosmetic changes in this newsletter, now beginning with the **April** issue. I stated that the changes would appear in this issue, but I need a little more time to learn the technique of the new software.

I have chosen an application called CANVA, which is widely used by non-profit organizations in addition to individuals and for-profit companies. It is much easier to use than the Adobe suite of products, and will decrease the length of time required to learn it and use it efficiently. I feel confident that using CANVA will result in a more aesthetically pleasing newsletter, and I’m still getting used to working with it.

As I continue to learn to use the new program, I welcome feedback from readers. Remember, the changes will be cosmetic. Content will remain at its usual standard, but feedback is always appreciated regarding articles, artwork, etc.

-Carol Quantock, Ed.

Join the bunch for lunch! We'll be dining again at the Olive Garden, 178 Wolf Rd, Colonie, NY 12205 (<https://www.olivegarden.com/>) on March 19th at 12:00 Noon. In April, we'll meet on Thursday the 16th. 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 restaurants 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!

RECAP OF OUR FEBRUARY SPEAKER'S TALK

(by Frank Robinson)

Blair Horner has been a leading legendary figure in the New York Public Interest Research Group since 1979, recently as Executive Director. His topic was the workings of New York State government budgeting, which really encompasses mostly all public issues in the state. (Please do not yawn and turn the page.)

The state's fiscal year begins April 1, and a budget is supposed to be in place by that date. It has typically been late in modern times.

The process starts with the governor submitting a budget proposal to the legislature, by the third Tuesday in January. The Assembly then prepares a "Yellow Book," and the Senate a "Blue Book," with their analyses on the governor's submission. These provide templates for public debate. Then they hold hearings in which, Horner said, legislators pretend to be interested in the issues. These hearings are the only opportunities for the public to provide input. Meantime, based upon this process, the governor has 30 days in which to amend the submitted budget proposal.

The final version is subject to negotiation between the governor and the Assembly and Senate leaders — the "three men in a room" system — though currently two of the three are non-men.

In those negotiations, the governor has the upper hand, able to hold up the whole thing in order to force approval of non-budget legislation. Meantime, the governor already had the ability to get, into the budget, various policy initiatives (which typically do entail expenditure of money). And then, in the end, the legislature does not actually have any ability to amend the package; instead, it must approve or reject the whole budget in toto. Not much of an option.

This is the system we have, embedded in New York's constitution, making the governor practically all-powerful. The two legislative leaders do have a little power. All the other 200+ legislators are really just window-dressing.

A big controversial issue lately has been Medical Aid in Dying (or assisted suicide). The legislation had passed, and the governor said she would sign it — with some changes, making the system more restrictive (and hard for people to actually utilize). She finally did sign it on February 6 — the last possible day under the state's rules — and with so little fanfare it was not even noted in the Albany Times-Union's Saturday print version.

Other big issues coming up include utility rate affordability (an old mainstay); auto insurance (the system rife with fraud); and rollback of the state's climate targets. A 2019 law aimed for net zero emissions by 2050. We're not biting that bullet or even licking it. Horner noted that while Germany's power supply is 50% solar, in New York it is not even 5%. He saw no political will to get serious on the issue — with proposals for rollback representing capitulation.

A recording of this presentation can be found on the CDHS YouTube channel: <https://youtu.be/fXQppHWCu9U>.

[Last Call to Renew Your CDHS Membership](#)

If you haven't yet renewed your CDHS membership, you will have probably received at least one reminder email in your inbox (check your "junk" or "spam" folders if not). If you took a new membership between 1 August and 31 December you will not be asked to renew until January 2027. Members will have 60 days from the date of the email notice to renew their memberships for 2026, allowing them to have voting privileges, access to our annual report, and receive email announcements and notifications of upcoming meetings and social events.

Please complete your renewal on our website at <https://www.humanistsociety.net/join-us/> by either:

✓ **Using the "Sign Up Online" option and making your online payment;** or

✓ **Using the "Download Printable Application" option:** print the application, fill it out, and mail it to CDHS, P. O. Box 11209, Loudonville, NY 12211 with your payment if you are unable to make an online payment.

Thank you for your continued support of CDHS. We value your participation and hope you choose to renew your membership.

Action Items/Get Involved

- ✓ Ongoing: Indivisible, Take Action Now: This website provides several current issues and contact information to take action. Indivisible is a grassroots movement of thousands of local Indivisible groups with a mission to elect progressive leaders, rebuild our democracy, and defeat the Trump agenda. (<https://indivisible.org/take-action-now?emci=b8f0ca40-1e97-f011-b484-6045bdeb7413&emdi=029c456a-f597-f011-b484-6045bdeb7413&ceid=2453808>)
- ✓ Ongoing: Card Campaign: The Card Campaign researches and then writes cards based on the information retrieved from verified sources. Sources can include articles from unbiased legacy media and independent media that are factual and impartial. Also, journalists who are producing work independently, and articles from independent writers who are following the administration's implementation of a dictatorial government. (<https://cc4democracy.com/>)
- ✓ Ongoing: The Capital Region Sanctuary Coalition (<https://www.facebook.com/p/Capital-Region-Sanctuary-Coalition-61578132641018/>) is a group whose purpose is to instantly alert people in our neighborhoods when ICE is active in the community. Its posts are almost all bilingual (Spanish and English). There are also other groups that post to this page that might be located closer to your home.
- ✓ **Contact your representatives:** This week, the Senate will be voting on House-passed SAVE Act, which would make it harder for eligible voters to register AND cast a ballot. This would make it harder to vote and have no calculable benefit to the election process. Millions of Americans lack the identification that would be required to prove their citizenship or obtain a photo ID. Without those things, their voices would be silenced, their votes left uncast. Go to this website (League of Women Voters) to voice your opinion and send a solid message to the Senate: https://www.lwv.org/save-act?utm_source=Advocacy&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=SenateFebruary&utm_content=02222026
- ✓ Livestream the Peoples' State of the Union: Register with MoveOn at https://www.mobilize.us/moveon/event/903012/?utm_source=indivisible?source=email_20260223&utm_source=email to join MeidasTouch and MoveOn as they present the People's State of the Union alongside elected officials, partners, allies and directly impacted Americans.

Editor's note: Each month, this column will highlight events, action items, or other items regarding activism of interest to CDHS members. If you are aware of any other volunteer opportunities that would be a good fit for CDHS, please contact Don Porterfield at CDHS.Albany@gmail.com, and type in **Community Events** in the subject line.

DEFIANCE.org, Portland Frog Brigade & COURIER Present:

STATE OF THE SWAMP

The Rebuttal to the State of the Union



FEBRUARY 24 | 7PM ET
THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB, WASHINGTON, D.C.

ROBERT DE MIRO • SEN. RON WYDEN • STACEY ABRAMS • JIM ACOSTA • MARK RUFFALO •
REP. ERIC SWALWELL • MARIANNE WILLIAMSON • GEORGE CONWAY • JOYCE VANCE •
GLENN KIRSCHNER • MENDI HASAN • FMR SEN. JON TESTER

REP. JASON CROW • FMR GOV. STEVE BULLOCK • LATOSHA BROWN • REP. SETH MOULTON •
REP. DAN GOLDMAN • STEPHANIE GRISHAM • MILES TAYLOR • JOANNE CAROCCI •
FMR REP. JOE WALSH • BARATUNDE THURSTON

SUE GORDON • REP. EUGENE VINDMAN • WAJAHAT ALI • NORM EISEN • STEVE SCHMIDT •
CHARLIE SYKES • RASHAD ROBINSON • OLIVIA TROYE • ASHA RANGAPPA •
ROBBY ROADSTEAMER • BRIAN KAREM • LISANDRA VAZQUEZ • AND MORE SURPRISE GUESTS...

JOIN US: DEFIANCE.ORG/SOTU

Alternate State of The Union Programs

by Carol Quantock

Below, and illustrated in the graphic on the left, are links to live stream or view State of the Union messages from alternate sources. There will be enough people who will watch the actual State of the Union speech because their jobs require it. Those of us who are not as strong of stomach can tune in to either of these presentations and then play back the inevitable sound bites on Wednesday morning.

- People's State of the Union: https://www.mobilize.us/moveon/event/903012/?utm_source=indivisible?source=email_20260223&utm_source=email

MTN MOVEON PRESENT

MOVEON.ORG/LIVE

the PEOPLE'S STATE of the UNION

FEB 24
8:00 PM
est

SEN. RUBEN GALLEGO • SEN. ED MARKEY • SEN. JEFF MERKLEY • SEN. CHRIS MURPHY • SEN. ADAM SCHIFF • SEN. TINA SMITH • SEN. CHRIS VAN HOLLEN • REP. YASSAMIN ANSARI • REP. BECCA DALINT • REP. GREG CASAR • REP. TERESA LEGER FERNANDEZ • REP. MAXWELL FROST • REP. ROBERT GARCIA • REP. JIM HIMES • REP. SARA JACOBS • REP. PRAMILA JAYAPAL • REP. JOHN D. LARSON • REP. SYDNEY KAMLAGER-DOVE • REP. SUMMER LEE • REP. CHELLIE PINGREE • REP. AYANNA PRESSLEY • REP. EMILY RANDALL • REP. MARY GAY SCANLON • REP. DELIA RAMIREZ • REP. BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN • & MORE • HOSTED BY KATIE PHANG & JOY REID • FEAT. AARON PARNAS

The Republican Party Has a Nazi Problem

How did the GOP become a haven for slogans and ideas straight out of the Third Reich?

by Tom Nichols, *The Atlantic* (Gift Article), February 23, 2026

Over the past few months, during his agency's chaotic crackdowns in Chicago and Minneapolis, the U.S. Border Patrol chief Greg Bovino has worn an unusual uniform: a wide-lapel greatcoat with brass buttons and stars along one sleeve. It looks like it was taken right off the shoulders of a Wehrmacht officer in the 1930s. Bovino's choice of garment is more than tough-guy cosplay (German media noted the aesthetic immediately). The coat symbolizes a trend: The Republicans, it seems, have a bit of a Nazi problem.

By this, I mean that some Republicans are deploying Nazi imagery and rhetoric, and espouse ideas associated with the Nazi Party during its rise to power in the early 1930s. A few recent examples: An ICE lawyer linked to a white-supremacist social-media account that praised Hitler was apparently allowed to return to federal court. Members of the national Young Republicans organization were caught in a group chat laughing about their love for Hitler. Vice President J. D. Vance shrugged off that controversy, instead of condemning the growing influence of anti-Semites in his party. (In December, at Turning Point USA's conference, Vance said, "I didn't bring a list of conservatives to denounce or to deplatform.")

Even federal agencies are modeling Nazi phrasing. The Department of Homeland Security used an anthem beloved by neo-Nazi groups, "By God We'll Have Our Home Again," in a recruitment ad. The Labor Department hung a giant banner of Donald Trump's face from its headquarters, as if Washington were Berlin in 1936, and posted expressions on social media such as "America is for Americans"—an obvious riff on the Nazi slogan "Germany for the Germans"—and "Americanism Will Prevail," in a font reminiscent of Third Reich documents.

Trump, of course, openly pines to be a dictator. In his first term, he reportedly told his chief of staff, General John Kelly, that he wished he had generals who were as loyal as Hitler's military leaders. (The president was perhaps unaware of how often the führer's officers tried to kill him.) More recently, the White House's official X account supported Trump's pursuit of Greenland by posting a meme with the caption "Which way, Greenland man?" That is not merely a clunky turn of phrase; it's an echo of *Which Way Western Man?*, the title of a 1978 book by the American neo-Nazi William Gayley Simpson, a former Presbyterian minister who called for America to expel its Jewish citizens.

The people pushing such trash are offended by the accusation that they are pantomiming Nazis. "Calling everything you dislike 'Nazi propaganda' is tiresome," a DHS spokesperson told Politico. But when even Laura Loomer—conspiracy theorist and ardent Trump supporter—says on social media that "the GOP has a Nazi problem," then perhaps the GOP has a Nazi problem.

As a former Republican, I'm aware that the American conservative movement has spent generations fighting off intrusions from the far right, including the John Birchers and the Ku Klux Klan. But I am still surprised and aggrieved by how quickly 21st-century Nazism has found a home in the party of Lincoln. In 1991, President George H. W. Bush repudiated the former Klan leader David Duke, who was running as a Republican to be Louisiana's governor. Today, Trump and his party haven't bothered to even pretend to be appalled by the degenerates gathering under the GOP aegis.

So how did a major American political party become a safe space for such people?

When I first joined the GOP, in 1979, the party around me did not seem hospitable to Nazis. A liberal Black Republican, Edward Brooke, had just finished two terms as our junior senator from Massachusetts; the liberal Republicans Lowell Weicker and John Chafee represented Connecticut and Rhode Island, respectively. In college, I worked in the Massachusetts state House for our hometown representative, a young and principled working-class Democrat (my GOP membership was not a disqualifier; imagine that). I got to know Republican legislators on Beacon Hill because they were close friends with my Democratic boss. Party affiliations were about political disagreements among Americans, not markers of antithetical worldviews.

I was, like many people then, a resolute ticket-splitter, voting often for local Democrats but always for Republican presidents, because I believed the national GOP was a moderate institution. Ronald Reagan, for example, disappointed the far right and his evangelical base by reducing nuclear weapons, leaving abortion rights largely untouched, and granting mass amnesty to undocumented immigrants (something I objected to at the time).

I first encountered the fringe elements of the conservative base in 1990, when I went to work in the U.S. Senate for John Heinz of Pennsylvania. I remember fielding an angry phone call from a constituent who grilled me about whether the senator was part of a globalist one-world-government conspiracy.

The country and the GOP were in the hands of Bush, the ultimate moderate, but extremists were making inroads to power. The populist demagogue Pat Buchanan, crusading against modernity and multiculturalism, challenged Bush in 1992 and garnered 23 percent of the Republican-primary vote. Bush, in turn, gave him the stage at the Republican National Convention in Houston. Buchanan's speech, which envisioned a "religious war" for the country, shocked many Americans.

A few years later, Representative Newt Gingrich of Georgia carried Buchanan's culture war into the House speakership. For Gingrich, politics was solely about winning; his scorched-earth approach treated opponents as enemies and compromise as treason. He wanted votes, and wasn't concerned about who was animated by his viciousness.

Gingrich was eventually driven from the speakership; Buchanan left the Republican Party to run under the Reform Party, and then faded from public life. But an example had been set of welcoming extremism (extreme ideology, extreme tactics) for the sake of winning.

Later Republican presidential nominees—good men such as John McCain and Mitt Romney—represented the moderate coalition that had brought people like me into the party. As they stood in the center of the GOP tent, they began to see who was now lurking in the back. In 2008, the nation saw too, when McCain had to defend Barack Obama as a "decent family man" to a delusional town-hall participant who had obviously imbibed racist right-wing propaganda.

Soon after McCain's loss to Obama, the Tea Party movement barreled into American politics. I was among those appalled by the Tea Partiers' juvenile public behavior and anti-government nihilism; others believed they represented a new grassroots movement and the future of the party. In the end, their revolt against government bailouts soured into a giant yawp of anger at the first Black president. By the time Romney was running against Obama, in 2012, Trump had launched his political career by pushing the "birther" lie, which capitalized on racial animus toward the 44th president. Rather than try to push Trump out of the tent, Romney accepted his endorsement. McCain came to be viewed as a traitor by the Republican base; Trump made that permissible by mocking his war-hero status.

In his third run for office, Trump expanded his vote share despite embracing fascist themes of xenophobia, nationalism, and glorification of violence. I didn't want to see what was happening to the Republican Party, until the durability of Donald Trump made it impossible to ignore.

Was this a radical, unpredictable metamorphosis, or was a fascist tendency latent in the DNA of the party? To better understand the GOP in the years before I joined it, I arranged a Zoom call with Stuart Stevens, a native Mississippian and former Republican operative. Stevens, several years older than I am, joined the Republicans in his youth rather than the segregationist local Democrats, then bolted from the party because of Trump. I asked Stevens to tell me when and where the GOP went wrong, and whether the devolution into a haven for Nazis was inevitable.

For Stevens, racism is the original sin of the modern Republican Party. White voters were alienated by the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the violence around the 1968 Democratic primaries. As Black voters deserted Republicans, the segregationist George Wallace proved with his '68 presidential run that white southerners were up for grabs. Richard Nixon made a cunning and cynical calculation to sweep up those disaffected white voters, using appeals to "law and order" to stoke racial anxiety. By the 1970s, the GOP was the de facto white party in the United States.

Continued on page 7

Nixon and Reagan held racist views, as did many men of their generation. (Nixon was also an anti-Semite.) But they did not govern as racists, and they certainly weren't Nazis; neither was Gingrich, Buchanan, or any national Republican over the past half century. But years of racial pandering had created a too-big tent, enlarged in the name of electoral expediency, that offered dark corners for despicable ideologies.

Political realignment also made the GOP vulnerable to extremism. Democrats became appealing to wealthy suburbanites. Republicans, whose voters were now less educated and more working-class, gained among white voters in rural areas and the Rust Belt. Gerrymandering helped turn red districts redder and blue districts bluer. Democrats' more diverse constituencies were a built-in trip wire against politicians who cozied up to extremists, while Republican-primary candidates—influenced by the rise of talk radio, Fox News, and the Tea Party—were not subjected to serious moderate challengers. Unprincipled and bizarre candidates could now thread a path to victory in ruby-red districts.

Critics of the GOP have long argued that something like the Trump movement, and the emergence of a new American Nazism, was inevitable—that conservatism, as a belief system, inevitably decays into fascism. Stevens, when he left the party, wrote a book with a bitter title: *It Was All a Lie*. When I told him how often people quote his title to argue that conservatism itself was a lie, he rolled his eyes. “We conservatives were right about everything,” Stevens told me. “Especially about the importance of character.”

I asked the writer Geoffrey Kabaservice, who has chronicled the decline of Republican moderates, whether the fall of the GOP was preordained, and why conservatism, once a moralizing movement, became so vulnerable to figures without moral character.

“I don't happen to believe that conservatism is one of those doctrines that is flawed from the get-go,” Kabaservice told me, “and certainly not in the American context, in which conservatism is a variation on core liberal principles.” In that sense, he said, Reaganism, the strongest vehicle of 20th-century American conservatism, didn't lead directly to Trumpism—not least because Trump's vulgar populism is “a repudiation of conservatism.”

But Reagan's dominance of the party may have indirectly set the stage for Trump. Kabaservice brought up the Prussian statesman Otto von Bismarck, who created a balance-of-power system that worked only because it relied on Bismarck's personal influence and political genius; it collapsed without him. Likewise, Kabaservice argued, Reagan enjoined his party to leave room in the tent for moderates and to avoid ideological litmus tests, but the GOP needed Reagan's “personal magnetism” to keep his followers from spiraling into hyper-partisanship, or even political fratricide.

Without Reagan, the Reaganite coalition began to dissolve in the face of Buchanan's angry populism and Gingrich's cold opportunism. The Republican Party, as an institution, weakened over time, until it could be hijacked by an aspiring dictator. Republican leaders who warned against Trump in 2016—senators such as Ted Cruz, Lindsey Graham, and Mike Lee—soon discarded conservative principles to protect their jobs. Their eager amorality has allowed extreme elements to use the GOP as a vehicle for bigotry and rage. Racism and hate are now structural parts of the Republican Party, replacing consensus, compassion, and compromise. Trump started his second presidency by pardoning the insurrectionists who'd wanted to unlawfully extend his first. Little wonder that fascists and other miscreants feel welcome.

Conservatives will complain that Democratic Party leaders have often tolerated their own extremists. People on the right point to radical professors lionizing Angela Davis, a Communist Party figure who was once on the FBI's most-wanted list, or a future president socializing with Bill Ayers, who co-founded a Marxist militant organization and participated in bombings of the U.S. Capitol and the New York Police Department headquarters. Ayers may have casually socialized with a 30-something Barack Obama, but he did not get an office in the West Wing 15 years later. And no one on the left has shown up to work dressed like a conquering Nazi general swanning through the streets of Smolensk, the way Bovino did in the Midwest.

Some Republicans lament these developments and still hold fast to conservative principles and policy ideas. But their party has laid out a welcome mat for an ideology that Americans once had to defeat in combat, at the cost of millions of lives. If wannabe Nazis now confidently roam the halls of power—and the streets of American cities—it is because Republican leaders have made them feel at home.

What can Americans do in the face of moral rot in a major political party? The only short-term answers are shaming, shunning, and mockery—and punishment at the polls. Decent citizens must ostracize those among them who toy with Hitlerism. Americans—especially journalists—should resist becoming inured to fascist rhetoric. No one should rely on euphemisms about “extreme” comments or “fiery” speeches. Call it what it is: Nazi-like behavior.

When a Gen Z Republican focus group has 20-somethings talking about how Hitler “was a great leader,” even if “what he was going for was terrible,” something is amiss not only in the Republican Party but also in America's homes, schools, and neighborhoods. Some of these trolls are merely pasting swastikas on their nihilism, but their ideological sincerity is irrelevant. As Kurt Vonnegut wrote in *Mother Night*, his 1961 novel about a man posing as a Nazi: “We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be.”

Whatever their intentions, some Americans are expressing or abetting ancient hatreds, smirking at the mention of Hitler, and plastering public spaces with images that Allied soldiers once tore from the walls of destroyed German cities. Political leaders who encourage or tolerate such scoundrels should be driven from office.

The Republicans have a Nazi problem, yes. But this means that the United States also has a Nazi problem. The responsibility for defeating it in the 21st century falls, as it did in the 20th, to everyone—of any party or creed—who still believes in the American idea.

Capital 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 humanistsociety.net

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.

March 21, 2026 Social: Paths to Humanism

On March 21, we will be hearing from three members of our group, June Hendricks, Alan Koslow, and Suzanna Hunter, about their paths to humanism. After each member shares their story, there will be time for a short discussion.

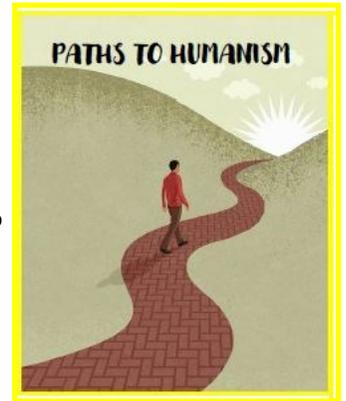
Please bring a snack to share and your own beverage.

When: Saturday, March 21, 2026, 2:00-4:00 PM

Where: Pinnacle Living, 45 Forts Ferry Road, Latham, NY 12110

RSVP: Dee Fuller by March 18 at candacelf13@gmail.com.

From the American Humanist Association website: "Humanists are committed to democracy as a way to ensure social justice. We are also committed to the application of science to understand human nature and to ethics in personal and community living. We view religious humanists as people who identify with any faith, but who share our commitment to science and reason over doctrine and dogma when they conflict about the natural world and the role of humanity within it."



"This is what you shall so: Love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to everyone that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence toward the people, take off your hat to nothing known or unknown or to any man or number of men, go freely with powerful uneducated persons and with the young and with the mothers of families, read these leaves in the open air every season of every year of your life, re-examine all you have been told at school or church or in any book, dismiss whatever insults your own soul, and your very flesh shall be a great poem and have the richest fluency not only in its words but in the silent lines of its lips and face and between the lashes of your eyes and in every motion and joint of your body..."

—Walt Whitman, in *Leaves of Grass*



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All this information will be included in our Directory, which is distributed to members only, unless you request otherwise by checking and signing here: I do not want to be listed in the CDHS Member Directory _____

Levels of Member Support	Annual Payment	Date ____/____/____
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<input type="checkbox"/> Family Membership	\$ 80	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustaining Member	\$100	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Patron	\$150	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Life Member	one-time contribution of \$1000 or more	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> Additional tax-deductible donation	\$ _____	_____

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