



The Utah Humanist

Happy Humanist

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Humanists of Utah is a Chapter of the *American Humanist Association*. We are a nonprofit corporation organized to advocate and promote ethical, rational, and democratic humanism among our membership and the larger community.



Humanism is a rational philosophy informed by science, inspired by art, and motivated by compassion. It affirms the dignity of each human being and supports individual liberty consonant with social and planetary responsibility. Humanism advocates participatory democracy, the open society, human rights and social justice. Free of supernaturalism, it recognizes human beings as part of nature and holds that values—be they religious, ethical, social, or political—have their source in human nature, experience, and culture. Humanism thus derives the goals of life from human need and interest rather than from theological or ideological abstractions, and asserts that humanity must take responsibility for its own destiny.

—*The Humanist*,
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The Honorable Governor Culbert L. Olson

HoU Board member Craig Wilkinson, M.D. is the author of a biography of Culbert L. Olson, titled: The Honorable Culbert Levy Olson, Governor of California from 1939 to 1943. He summarized the work at our May general meeting. The book is available on Amazon. com.

Culbert Olson is remembered, when he is remembered at all, as an outlier. He was the only Democrat to serve as governor of California between 1896 and 1958, and he lasted just one term—elected in 1938 and ousted in 1942. And he was that rarest of birds among American politicians elected to high office, an avowed atheist, who refused to say the words “so help me God” as he took the oath of office.

But he was much more than that, he was a progressive who was far ahead of his time, perhaps too far for his own good. I believe now would be a very good time for a reappraisal, and deeper understanding of Governor Olson. He proved prescient about the threats to American society—from economic inequality, war, racism, and the dangers of fatalism—that are all too much with us today.

“No deity will save us,” he liked to say. “We must save ourselves.”

Olson was raised in Fillmore, Utah in the Mormon faith but left the church as a young man after deciding Joseph Smith was an imposter and that his revelations didn’t make any rational sense. He eventually came to atheism after listening to lectures of a, then famous, American atheist, Robert Green Ingersoll while he was serving as Congressman William H. King’s secretary in Washington, D.C. He would argue that the Founding Fathers were deists, believing in a creator but rejecting the notion of a supernatural deity that continued to interfere in men’s lives or answered personal prayers. Olson, before and during his political career, would urge people to become “humanists,” which meant avoiding the bigotry and tribalism associated with organized religions.

Olson was a state senator in Utah from 1916 to 1920 where he supported a progressive agenda and wrote the first child

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Culbert Olson

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labor laws in Utah's history. He moved to California after losing the Democratic nomination for U.S. Senate to Milton Welling who was a Mormon Stake President. He decided to move to California and won a seat in the State Senate in 1934. In that era, Democrats had little chance at winning statewide office. But the Great Depression changed that and Olson was nominated by his party for governor in 1938. He had the good fortune to oppose a highly unpopular and corrupt incumbent, Republican Frank Merriam at a moment when the Depression was taking another turn for a worst. With support from FDR, whose campaign he had supported, Olson, an urbane, handsome, and well-dressed public presence, with thick white hair, won an enormous upset victory.

No governor has faced so many obstacles to pursuing his program called a "New Deal for California." Not only was the legislature and political establishment dominated by Republicans opposed to his progressive views, but there was an "economy bloc" of Democrats whose main focus was no new taxes, who helped stall his plans.

Olson did what he could. He was the first governor to appoint an African American, a woman and a Latino to the judiciary. He cut state subsidies to corporations, especially powerful interests, he reformed California's harsh and brutal prison system, he kept the State Relief Authority funded, but the legislature defeated most of his programs, which included: "production for use" which would have solved California's unemployment problems; compulsory universal health insurance for every Californian; stricter legislation on banks; raising taxes on banks and large corporations; and strict new regulations on lobbyists.

These defeats along with preparations for World War II, which dramatically improved employment in California, ended his plans for a New Deal in California. The governor made many enemies in the pursuit, especially Standard Oil, with his Atkinson Oil Bill which broke its monopoly on oil in California. He made enemies with owners of large corporations who were upset with his support of the "production for use" concept championed by Upton Sinclair and his strong support of labor unions. He made enemies with the Roman Catholic Church (with whom he tangled over its outsized influence in education). He sought to handle his defeats with humor. He said, "but if you want to know where hell is, try and be the governor of California."

Olson's criticism of corrupt interests was not welcome in Sacramento. He was unapologetically progressive in demanding

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Support the AHA

Humanists of Utah urges you to support the American Humanist Association.

The AHA is dedicated to preserving individual rights and promoting nationally the philosophy of humanism.

Membership brings you the *Humanist* magazine and *Free Mind* newsletter six times a year.

Annual membership is only \$45.00 (**\$35 Introductory Rate**) and can be paid with plastic. Phone (800) 743-6646 or write to:

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Washington DC 20009**

White Privilege

George Pyle, of the Salt Lake Tribune, wrote in his April 22 editorial that his father taught him, "Never attribute to evil that which can be explained to stupidity.

"Whether it's the manager of a coffee bar or a police officer with his gun drawn, we are clearly dealing with white people acting, not of a thought-through feeling of racial superiority, but out of a reptile-brain fear that the black person standing before them is a threat. A feeling they would not have if it were a white person there doing the same thing.

"A quick count of of arrests and shootings would make it clear that it is the black folks, not the white ones, who have cause to be afraid."



Culbert Olson

(Continued from page 2)

government control over industry. In 1939, he said: “To my way of thinking, it is the social responsibility of government in promoting the general welfare to exercise control and stabilization of the national economy, to plan and provide for full employment when private industry fails; to prevent business cycles which result in industrial depressions; to provide the ways and means of making available to all the people health protection, and the utmost in educational services; to protect the national resources against wasteful exploitation for private greed.”

Up for re-election in 1942, Olson at first opposed the Japanese internment, which had been supported and defended by the state Attorney General, Earl Warren. In public statements and in a letter to FDR, he pointed out many of the interred Japanese were American citizens and that Japanese students and farmers were just as American as everyone else in America. In a San Francisco speech, he warned, “Anyone who generates racial hatred and social misunderstanding is a demagogue of the most subversive type. He becomes an enemy of society, just as truly as a tax evader, an embezzler, or a murderer. In fact, he does infinitely more harm.”

But Governor Olson went along with the internment after a military order from General John DeWitt, a fervent advocate of incarcerating Japanese Americans. And in the fall, he lost his re-election badly to Warren. In an irony, Warren proved more effective than Olson had been at pushing through some progressive aspects of Olson’s program, including in corporate regulation, political reform, and investment in public infrastructure.

After he left office, Culbert Olson became President of the United Secularists of America, a body of secularists, atheists and free thinkers. This work included defending separation of church and state, promoting taxation of church property, and opposing religion in public schools. He foresaw corporations using appeals to religion, and alliances with conservative

evangelicals, to promote their self-interest.

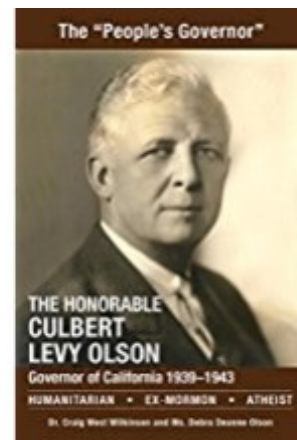
You can still hear Olson’s humanitarian views in the conversation about income inequality, which is as bad now as it was when he served as governor in the 1930s. About inequality, he warned: “Social problems are created by economic maladjustments, poverty in the midst of plenty...continued concentration of wealth control of the national economy in the hands of a small percentage of the population opposing every effort of the government to interpose controls for the economic stabilization and for the general welfare.”

In this, Culbert Olson represented an American democratic tradition of politics that original from basic human needs and not from monied interests and individual privilege, that deserves more attention today.

His support of non-belief in a supernatural God, despite its unpopularity at the time is becoming more relevant as we see organized religion losing support around the world. Even in the United States those who enter “none” when asked about their religion has increased to near 25% of the population and is projected to be the majority view by 2032 as predicted by the Pew Foundation that studies such matters.

Culbert L. Olson was truly a statesman and humanist ahead of his time.

—Craig Wilkinson, MD





AHA Conference and Chapter Direction

I want to thank HoU for mostly subsidizing my recent participation in the AHA annual convention that was held in Las Vegas May 17-20.

There were some amazing presentations and many enthusiastic hard working people there. The most enjoyable presentation to me was by the 2018 AHA Lifetime Achievement Awardee David Suzuki. David Suzuki's career as a scientist, writer, and television host/producer spans decades, during which time he has tirelessly fought for environmental literacy and policy change. The most moving presentation to me was given by Jennifer Ouellette, the 2018 Humanist of the Year. She spoke of her brother's recent death. A physical exam found an unexpected tumor that after several missteps turned out to be a life ending aggressive cancer. His last few months of life were filled with pain, he and his family did not receive complete information about his situation in a timely manner. His pain management was largely unsuccessful and he died an unexpected, poorly explained death. Ouellette made several points including patients and their families deserve and need to know their conditions, pain management is not always done well, and finally, and most importantly, death with dignity is an important concept. This final point was highlighted on my drive home when I stopped in St. George to see my friend, mentor, and second father, Flo Wineriter. He is 93, mostly deaf and blind, requires assistance to bathe and dress. He is being cared for by his daughter who a couple of years ago was in a devastating car accident and hospitalized of several months. During that time he moved in with his son who last fall suffered a massive stroke—so now Flo is back with his daughter. The three of us had a pointed conversation about Flo. He noted how difficult it is caring for him on his children. And all agreed that their spouses should not be responsible for Flo. I think that they are looking for an assisted living facility for Flo now. Mentally Flo is very sharp, he has some trouble with short term memory but his intellectual skills are still amazing. If Utah had a Death With Dignity

statute he would have ended his life at least two years ago.

Over the years Humanists of Utah has had a number of members let their memberships lapse because we did a lot of talking but very little acting. I'm reminded of a reported conversation between Henry David Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson that took place in a local jail where Thoreau was detained. Emmerson asked his friend why he was incarcerated to which Thoreau responded "why aren't you in here too?"

Our Bylaws first section reads:

The purpose of the Humanists of Utah is to offer an affirmative non-theistic educational program based on developing one's human talents in order to practice the art of living; to promote meaningful activities and compassionate services that exemplify humanism; and to be an association where humanists can have a sense of belonging to a larger community that supports a positive philosophy of reason, integrity, and dignity.

Education about humanism is important but the winds have changed; learning is no longer sufficient. Activism is where it is today. I suspect that this may be a major reason why our chapter is having so much trouble attracting new members.

We also have a Board of Directors that hasn't changed much in years. Many of us have trouble traveling at night, etc., etc. Jeff Curtis recently joined HoU and has attended a couple of our Board Meetings; he is interested in heading a Social Justice committee. He has a lot of great ideas.

Humanists of Utah was organized in 1991, nearly 30 years ago. I have high hopes to see it continue to be a positive force in our community; Promoting Joyful Living with Rational Thinking and Rational Behavior. If you can contribute please contact me.

—Wayne Wilson
wwilson@humanistsofutah.org



Humanists of Utah meetings are open to the public and free of any admission charge. A discussion and light refreshments follow the speaker's presentation. Come join us and **bring a friend!**

Disclaimer: The views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of Humanists of Utah nor the American Humanist Association. Reprinting of articles is permitted for humanist groups promoting the interests of humanism if attribution is properly stated.

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Board Members:

John Barnes
 Jeff Curtis
 Sally Jo Fuller
 Steve Hanka
 Craig Wilkinson, MD

Key Contacts:

Bob Lane-----801-839-9914
 Bob@HumanistsOfUtah.org
 Wayne Wilson-----801-561-0406
 Wayne@HumanistsOfUtah.org

Website:

<https://HumanistsOfUtah.org>

Newsletter Contributors

Craig Wilkinson, MD
 Wayne Wilson

>> **Put Your Name Here** <<
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Nonprofit

Humanists of Utah is a nonprofit organization supported in large part by dues paying members. Our other major source of funds comes from generous gifts, mostly from the same dues payers who give a little more. In February 2003, chapter member Marion Craig died and left HoU a bequest of \$20,000. We invested this money in an endowment fund. The interest is still helping to pay for banquets, special events, etc. When you create your personal will please consider leaving a gift to Humanists of Utah.

Membership/Renewal Application

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- \$50 Regular Annual Membership and subscription to the *Utah Humanist*
 - \$90 Regular 2-year Membership and subscription to the *Utah Humanist*
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 - \$20 *Student* Annual Membership and subscription to the *Utah Humanist*
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 - Please send a *FREE* trial Subscription to the *Utah Humanist*
 - \$ _____ additional contribution to help promote public awareness of humanism
- ⇒ All contributions in excess of the \$20 subscription fee tax deductible.
 ⇒ *Members* have the right to vote in Chapter elections and participate in Chapter decisions.
 ⇒ Dues provide for information packets, honoraria to speakers, expenses of newsletter publication, trial subscriptions, copies to libraries, and newsletter exchange with other chapters.

Humanists of Utah
P.O. Box 1043
West Jordan, UT 84084

Notes:

- ◆ *General Meetings* are for all members and the general public. There are no admission charges.
- ◆ *Discussion Group* meetings are open to everyone. A different book or topic is covered every month.
- ◆ *Board Meetings* are planning and business sessions. They are open to all members.
- ◆ Eliot Hall is in the First Unitarian Church located at 569 South 1300 East in Salt Lake City.
- ◆ RE 201 is upstairs in the East Educational Building at the First Unitarian Church.

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—Leona Blackbird

Upcoming Events

Meeting	Topic	Date	Time	Place
General Meeting	Science Moms Movie Night	June 14	7:30	Eliot Hall
Board Meeting	Chapter Business	June 21	7:30	Leona Blackbird
General Meeting	Summer Barbeque	Aug 9	TBA	TBA
Board Meeting	Chapter Business	Aug 16	7:30	TBA



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