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"Splitters!": Lessons from Monty Python for Secular Organizations in the US

Aside from a handful of books from secular authors like Susan Jacoby (2004, 2009) and David Niose (2012) and even fewer scholarly publications (Cady 2010; Blankholm 2014; LeDrew 2016; Turner 1986), little is known about the origins and evolution of American secularism or the factors that contributed to the proliferation of secularist organizations (though see Rectenwald, this volume, for the origins of secularism in the UK). In this chapter, we begin by recounting some of the history of organized secularism in the US, including some emphasis on the tensions and the splits that occurred.

We then turn our attention to two specific figures in the movement – Paul Kurtz (1929 – 2012) and Madalyn Murray O'Hair (1919 – 1995) – and argue that, while these individuals were obstinate, autocratic, and even over-bearing at times, they were arguably the very types of personalities that were necessary during the Cold War in the US to maintain a small, but vocal movement of stigmatized nonbelievers. We conclude by arguing that the divisions and the tensions have transformed organized secularism in the US into a de-centered, segmented, polycephalous movement (see Gerlach and Hines 1970). While the movement may be more diffuse than some think is in its best interest, we argue that there are potential advantages to such an arrangement.

1 Introduction

While we came to the study of organized secularism for different reasons – Fazzino worked for several secular social movement organizations (SMOs); Cragun was asked to speak at the conventions of some of the organizations – both of us were initially under the impression that the secular movement in the US was contentious and fractured. It was with this understanding – that there was significant conflict between the various social movement organizations (SMOs) – that the second author (Cragun) began a project to better understand the relationships between the various secular movement organizations in 2013. He teamed up with the first author (Fazzino) shortly after the project began. Cragun's initial conception – that there were tensions between the various secular movement organizations – is why this chapter derives its name from the dialogue in a scene from Monty Python's *The Life of Brian*. In the scene, the members of a

revolutionary Jewish organization that opposed the Roman occupation of Israel, the People's Front of Judea (PFJ), are seated in an arena watching a gladiator battle while they discuss the aims of their social movement organization. During the conversation, the following ensues:

> *PFJ Leader: Listen, the only people we hate more than the Romans are the fucking Judean People's Front!*
> *PFJ Members [in unison]: Yeah, yeah!*
> *PFJ Member #1: And the Judean People's Popular Front.*
> *PFJ Members [in unison]: Oh yeah, yeah!*
> *PFJ Member #2: Splitters!*
> *PFJ Member #3: And the People's Front of Judea...*
> *PFJ Member #2: Splitters!*
> *PFJ Leader: What?*
> *PFJ Member #3: People's Front of Judea...SPLITTERS!*
> *PFJ Leader: We're the People's Front of Judea!*
> *PFJ Member #3: Oh. I thought we were the Popular Front...*
> *PFJ Leader: People's Front!*
> *PFJ Member #3: Whatever happened to the Popular Front?*
> *PFJ Leader: He's over there...*
> *PFJ [in unison]: SPLITTER!*

The takeaway from this scene is that social movement organizations can be schismatic. Competing logics of action can often generate factions that lead to in-fighting; likewise, differing visions for the movement often lead to splits and divisions (Gamson 1990; McAdam 1998). There is a great deal of truth to this for American secularism.

A later scene in the same movie depicts how competing social movement organizations can end up working at cross-purposes. In this scene, the People's Front of Judea and another revolutionary Jewish movement organization, Campaign for Free Galilee, both sneak into a Roman palace in the middle of the night and encounter each other. Once they realize they are there with the same end (to kidnap Pilate's wife and demand that the Romans leave as a ransom), a physical fight ensues between the members of the two organizations. The movie's main character, Brian (who is regularly mistaken for Jesus throughout the film), makes explicit the irony of the two groups fighting each other:

> *Brian: Brothers! Brothers! We should be struggling together.*
> *Fighting Revolutionaries: We are!*
> *Brian: We mustn't fight each other. Surely we should be united against the common enemy.*
> *Fighting Revolutionaries: The Judean People's Front?*
> *Brian: No! No! No! The Romans!*

In this scene, Brian tries to stop the fight, fails, and watches as all of his revolutionary comrades collapse in their struggle with each other. The implication at this point is quite obvious: social movement organizations are sometimes ineffective because they end up fighting each other rather than working together for a common cause. This tension was confirmed in some of the interviews we conducted for this project. In what seems like it could be a direct quote from *The Life of Brian*, Frank Zindler of American Atheists (AA) described in an interview a similar degree of tension between founder, Madalyn Murray O'Hair, and Anne Nicol Gaylor, co-founder of the Freedom From Religion Foundation:

> We saw Madalyn many times, and she would always have disparaging things to say about Ann Gaylor. I later found out the same thing was happening on the other side. Ann was really, really scathing about Madalyn. It really, you know, it sounds corny, but it breaks my heart to see this or to recall all this because I so firmly am of the opinion that the enemy is religion. It shouldn't be each other. It should be other people who have, at least nominally, committed to a life of reason, an evidence-based life. To see these divisions just depresses me.

In our interviews, we found other examples of this kind of tension. But we also quickly realized that the current situation for secular SMOs in the US is more complicated than just tension and conflict. We have two quotes from our interviews we want to use to help frame our argument in this chapter. One quote illustrates just how serious the conflict and tension was at times in the secular movement. The other quote shows that the movement has changed, the tension has eased, and there is now evidence that secular SMOs are working together.

Numerous scholars have argued that American secularism is fractured and is better understood as "disorganized secularism" than "organized secularism" (Baker and Smith 2015; Cimino and Smith 2014). There is certainly reason to believe this *was* the case during the 20th century. Tom Flynn, the editor of *Free Inquiry*, the freethought and humanist magazine published by the Council for Secular Humanism or CSH (now a subsidiary of Center for Inquiry or CFI), recounted an incident during an interview that illustrated the very frosty relationship that existed between the founder of CSH, Paul Kurtz, and Madalyn Murray O'Hair, the founder of another prominent secular movement organization, American Atheists (AA):

> This is going back into the late 80s or very early 90s when we were on the east side of Buffalo. For some years we had been maintaining a membership at AA so that we would receive AA's magazine. What we ordinarily did is we would have a different staff member send in a personal check, because if you thought Paul [Kurtz] was into the zero-sum game model, Madalyn Murray O'Hair was way out ahead of him. One year our then-executive director made a mistake and forgot to arrange for someone to send in a personal

check, and sent in a Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism[1] check, which came back, scrawled on it in magic marker with as large as you could fit this many words, in Madalyn Murray O'Hair's handwriting, "Fuck you, Paul Kurtz."

There is a lot worth noting in this short quote, but we will leave most of the analysis for below. In the early stages of movement building, as Tom Flynn notes, there was a sense that secular organizing was a "zero-sum game," meaning that any gains made by one organization detracted from the success of the other organizations. There was no collective identity to mobilize action toward a common goal. As a result, there was limited communication between the various secular movement organizations and a significant amount of competition over donors, nasty frame disputes,[2] and an overarching culture of organizational and interpersonal distrust. There was not, at that time, a sense that all of the secular organizations in the US were working together for some clear purpose (e. g., normalizing nonreligion in the US).

Contrast the incident described above by Tom Flynn with this account of the 2012 Reason Rally from David Silverman, the President of American Atheists:

> The biggest part of the Reason Rally, the biggest victory of the Reason Rally was getting all of us together in one place at one time, including the Freedom From Religion Foundation, with money, a common cause, behind a common leader, which in this case was me, but next time it won't be. But it was the first time that that had actually happened and it was huge! It was a massive success and the members loved it and the members told us loud and clear that they want more. So, when you're talking about unifying big groups, don't forget about the Reason Rally Coalition.

This quote suggests cooperation between the various secular SMOs. Cooperation does not mean that the leaders of the various secular SMOs are all now friends who regularly get together just to hang out. But it does indicate that the acerbic and caustic relationships that existed in the 20th century between the various secular SMOs have given way to detentes, more amicable relations, and a growing sense of unity in the secular movement in the US. While the 2012 Reason Rally was a fairly notable success with an estimated 25,000 nonreligious individuals in attendance, it was actually the result of decades of effort by various people and organizations to try to bring a greater sense of coherence to organized

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1 This was the original name of what is now the Council for Secular Humanism.
2 "Frames" refer to the ways that social movement organizations explain their purpose and desired changes to their followers. Thus, "frame disputes" would be conflict between the various secular movement organizations in what their collective purpose was as secular movement organizations.

secularism in the US (see also the introduction in Cimino and Smith 2014 and LeDrew 2016). Towards the end of the chapter we proffer an explanation for how we got from "Splitters!" and "Fuck You, Paul Kurtz" to a co-sponsored Reason Rally and more amicable relations between the various secular SMOs.

2 Taking Organized Secularism Seriously

Colin Campbell ([1971] 2013) called for a sociology of irreligion over 40 years ago. But it was the emergence of public atheism (otherwise referred to as "New Atheism") in the early 21st century that finally put American secularism[3] on the radar of scholars across various social science and humanities disciplines. Philosophers and theologians wasted no time examining the ideological components of non-theistic worldviews. Political scientists and religious studies scholars followed suit, reevaluating the intertwining of religion, nonreligion, and politics in the public sphere. As for sociologists, our primary concern was with the implication of public atheism on broader trends of secularization. Eventually, studies of the nonreligious began diversifying as scholars from subfields like gender/sexualities (Brewster 2013; Foster et al. 2016; Linneman and Clendenen 2009; Miller 2013; Schnabel et al. 2016; Stinson and Goodman 2013), family (Manning 2015; Merino 2012; Zimmerman et al. 2015), deviance (Fazzino, Borer, and Abdel Haq 2014; Cimino and Smith 2007), and communications/media (Cimino and Smith 2011; Smith and Cimino 2012) conducted research, expanding what had been a nearly non-existent body of literature. There is still, however, much work to be done.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the lack of research on the organized American Secularism Movement by social movement scholars.[4] There are those who utilize a movements lens to examine the contours of nonreligion in the US, however, they: (1) are often not movement scholars, (2) do so narrowly, focusing on just one ideological segment, rather than being inclusive to the much larger nonreligious constituency, and/or (3) use concepts like collective identity, collective action, and framing in their analysis, but do not explicitly apply the social movement label to their findings or treat different ideological sentiments as distinct but related movements (Cimino and Smith 2007;Cimino and Smith 2007;

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3 When discussing secularism in this chapter, we are referring to intentional efforts to normalize nonreligion.

4 A handful of scholars have used a social movement lens to examine issues such as community, identity politics, collective action, organizational dynamics, and the strategies and goals of activism.

Guenther, Mulligan, and Papp 2013; Kettell 2014; McAnulla 2012; Schulzke 2013; Smith 2013).

This ambiguity – *Is it a movement? Is it not a movement?* – has been connected to characteristics, such as ideological diversity, movement infighting, competing strategies, tactics, and goals, and the lack of an agreed upon set of doctrines/ beliefs that unify all nonbelievers (Cimino and Smith 2007). Although internal dissension and conflict are very common in contemporary American movements, schisms and splits in the secular movement are often understood as a sign of movement decline/demise (Gamson 1990). Such perspectives have an overly-narrow conception of effective structural dynamics and ignore how factionalism and splitting can be beneficial to movements. The seminal work of Gerlach and Hines (1970) examined the structure of a handful of American movements in the post 1960s era, including Pentecostalism, Black Power, and "Participatory Ecology" and found that the most common type of organizational structure was not centralized, bureaucratic, or amorphous, but rather movements that had a segmented (multiple diverse groups), polycentric (decentralized authority; multiple leaders/centers of leadership), and reticulate (form a loosely integrated network) structure. In other words, social movements are rarely single organizations with a clear vision and goal; social movements are messy.

It's not often that scholars try to pinpoint the exact moment when collective efforts become a legitimate social movement. Movement origins are often contested, making them difficult to trace. Because movement scholars are rarely historians, sociological approaches to social movements can sometimes yield a structurally essentialist view of movements, creating a biased perception that sees a diffuse and decentered structure as a *symptom* of dysfunction, rather than as an *outcome* of movement growth, change, and institutionalization. Contrary to the obituarist view of some scholars, we argue that ideological and organizational diversity does not make American secularism *dis*organized – it makes it dynamic. It makes it a movement!

In what follows, we identify key events, leaders, and dynamics that facilitated the evolution of a handful of very small nontheist and freethought organizations on the verge of collapsing into the segmented, polycentric, reticulate movement it is today.

3 Methods

This chapter is based in part on data derived from interviews with 15 past and present leaders of various secular SMOs in the US (see Table 1 below). The interviews, lasting between one to three hours, were conducted either via phone or in

person by Cragun, recorded, and later transcribed by Fazzino. Because all of the individuals who participated are public individuals, the identities of our participants are not anonymous.

Table 1. Interviewees.

Participant	Organizational Affiliation	Position(s) Held	Term
Louis Altman	Society for Humanistic Judaism	President	2006 – 2012
	American Humanist Association	Board Member	2009 – 2012
Dan Barker	Freedom From Religion Foundation	PR Director	1987 – 2004
		Co-President	2004 –
August Brunsman	Secular Student Alliance	Founder & Executive Director	2000 – 2017
Bette Chambers	American Humanist Association	Board Member	1966 – 1972
		President	1973 – 1979
		Editor – *Free Mind*	1980 – 2002
Edd Doerr	American Humanist Association	President	1995 – 2002
	Americans United	Vice-President	1985 – 1991
	Council for Secular Humanism	Board Chair	1960s – 1982
		Staff	1970 – 1982
		Editor, *Church & State*	late 2000 –
		Columnist, *Free Inquiry*	
Fred Edwords	American Humanist Association	Executive Director	1984 – 1999
	Camp Quest	Editor, *The Humanist*	1994 – 2006
	United Coalition of Reason	President	2002 – 2005
		National Director	2009 – 2015
Tom Flynn	Council for Secular Humanism	Editor, *Free Inquiry*	2000 –
		Executive Director	2009 –
Mel Lipman	American Humanist Association	Board Member	2000 – 2002
		President	2003 – 2008
		Nominating Committee	2009-
Amanda Metskas	Camp Quest	Board Member	2004 – 2007
		Executive Director	2008 –
David Silverman	American Atheists	President	2010 –
	Reason Rally 2012	Executive Director	2012
Herb Silverman	Secular Coalition of America	Founder & President	2003 – 2012; 2014
	American Humanist Association	Board Member	1999 – 2006; 2009 –
Roy Speckhardt	American Humanist Association	Executive Director	2005 –

Table 1. Interviewees. *(Continued)*

Participant	Organizational Affiliation	Position(s) Held	Term
Todd Stiefel	Stiefel Freethought Foundation	Founder & President	2009 –
	Secular Coalition for America	Advisory Board	2009 –
	American Humanist Association	Vice President	2011
	Secular Student Alliance	Advisory Board	2010 – 2015
	American Atheists	Advisory Board	2009 – 2015
	Openly Secular Coalition	Develop. Committee	2009 – 2010
	Reason Rally 2	Chair	2014 –
		Advisor	2015
Michael Werner	American Humanist Association	President	1993 – 1994
Frank Zindler	American Atheists	Interim President	2008
		Editor, *American Atheist*	until 2011
		Board Member	

The chapter also draws on internal organizational records and previously published material. As we describe aspects of the history of the various groups, we have done our best to confirm what our informants shared with us by triangulating interview data with archival and textual data. We analyzed organizational materials, such as board meeting minutes, websites, news media, and biographical works. Where there are conflicting accounts of events, we have described events in a general way or noted the differing accounts. The aim of the project was not to develop a comprehensive history of the movement but rather to gain a better sense of the dynamics of organized American secularism in the 21 century.

4 A Brief History of Organized Secularism in the United States

While there are dozens of organizations that would fall under the umbrella of atheist, humanist, secularist, and freethought activism and advocacy, there are just a handful that are very large and particularly prominent in the US today: the American Humanist Association (AHA), American Atheists (AA), Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), and Council for Secular Humanism (CSH). There are other notable organizations, like the American Ethical Union, Society for Humanistic Judaism, and the Atheist Alliance of America, among many others. While each of these other organizations is important in its own right, we focus primarily on the four largest organizations in this chapter.

4.1 American Humanist Association

The origins of modern humanism[5] in the US, which is now often referred to as "secular humanism," can be traced back to Britain circa 1915, when positivist Frederick James Gould wrote an article introducing a non-theistic conception of "humanism." A couple of years later, in 1917, at the Western Unitarian Conference, two Unitarian ministers – John H. Dietrich, who read Gould's article, and Curtis W. Reese – joined forces and began discussing and advocating religious humanism, an idea that gained some popularity amongst philosophers, liberal religionists, and freethinkers alike. One of the earliest efforts to organize humanism began at the University of Chicago in 1927 when a group of scholars and Unitarian theologians with a shared interest in humanism started an organization called the Humanist Fellowship.

The fellowship began publishing *The New Humanist* in 1928, the magazine in which the first iteration of the *Humanist Manifesto* would appear. The manifesto was to be a short and simple overview of how humanists understood the world. Edwin H. Wilson, also a Unitarian minister and the editor of *The New Humanist*, was one of the manifesto's lead authors, and the final document, endorsed by 34 of the leading intellectuals of the time, was published in the magazine in 1933 (Wilson 1995). The American Humanist Association was formally established in 1941 and took over publication of *The New Humanist*, the publication of which had lapsed, renaming it *The Humanist*. *The Humanist* remains the primary publication of the AHA up to today (2017).

At roughly the same time as the American Humanist Association was being organized, (i. e., in 1939), a group of ex-Quakers formed the Humanist Society of Friends in Southern California and adopted *Humanist Manifesto I* as their official doctrine. The Humanist Society of Friends became an adjunct of the American Humanist Association (AHA) in 1991, and contributed the foundation for Humanist Celebrant training that is now run by the recently (2003) renamed group, The Humanist Society, which continues as an adjunct to the AHA.[6] Celebrants are

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5 We refer to this as "modern humanism" rather than simply "humanism" here to distinguish it from other forms of "humanism," such as the version of humanism that developed during The Renaissance that encapsulated a vision for how to educate students in universities, which now serves as the root of the term "humanities" (Kraye 1996). This is a very different conception of the word "humanism" than how it is used in the secular movement in the US today in reference to a set of naturalistic – as opposed to supernaturalistic or religious – philosophical principles used to provide guidance for making moral decisions.

6 As an interesting side note, the AHA maintained a religious tax exemption for years, in part because of the AHA's relationship with the Humanist Society of Friends and their training of Hu-

secular individuals trained to officiate during important life milestones, like marriages or funerals. They are, in a sense, a secular equivalent to clergy.

One of the first splinters that occurred out of the AHA came from one of its founders – Edwin H. Wilson. Wilson had developed a policy which was effectively an agreement between the Unitarian Church and the AHA that the AHA would not form organizations that were the functional equivalents of congregations. Wilson eventually relaxed his position on this and allowed a Los Angeles based chapter of the AHA to form, which resulted in Wilson being fired from the position of Executive Director of the AHA in 1962. He later founded an organization titled the Fellowship of Religious Humanists, which was later renamed as the HUUmanists, encapsulating the close relationship between Unitarian Universalists and Humanists. As of 2016, there are 61 local HUUmanists groups in the US.[7]

As it will become relevant shortly, it is worth noting that Paul Kurtz was hired by the AHA in 1968 to edit *The Humanist*. Kurtz was highly recommended by several well-known humanist philosophers in part because Kurtz had an important humanist pedigree, having studied philosophy under Sidney Hook (who studied under John Dewey) at Columbia University. Under Kurtz's leadership, subscriptions to *The Humanist* increased substantially, drawing greater interest in the AHA. Kurtz also founded Prometheus Press in 1969 and his first skeptical magazine, *Zetetic*, which eventually became *The Skeptical Inquirer*, during his tenure at the AHA (the first was independent of the AHA, while the second was not, but was made independent at the request of Kurtz). While the precise number of members of the AHA or subscribers to the organization's magazine are not known, according to Executive Director Roy Speckhardt, as of 2016 the AHA prints and distributes approximately 84,000 copies of *The Humanist* annually.

4.2 American Atheists

The second oldest national-level group is American Atheists, founded in 1963. Contemporary atheism in the U.S. can trace its history back before WWI to notable figures like Thomas Paine, Robert G. Ingersoll, known as "the Great Agnostic," sociologist W.E.B. DuBois, founder of the Harlem Renaissance, and Emma

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manist Celebrants. They have since dropped the religious exemption and now have an educational tax exemption.

7 http://huumanists.org/local-groups/list.

Goldman, a Jewish anarchist who would later be deported. The first explicitly anti-religious example of organized American atheism was the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism (4 A), founded in 1925 by Charles Lee Smith (see also Richter, this volume). Contrary to the idea that public atheism in 21st century America is somehow new, Charles Lee Smith was a strident anti-theist, among the earliest to publicly parody religion, and fought for removing "In God We Trust" from the currency and revoking the tax-exempt status afforded to religious institutions. Charles Lee Smith founded The American Association for the Advancement of Atheism, which took over publication of *The Truthseeker,* one of the oldest atheist magazines in the US (founded in 1878). The association outlived its founder and passed to James Hervey Johnson in the 1960s, along with *The Truthseeker.* Johnson's views and mismanagement drove membership in the organization down dramatically. It is unclear when the American Association for the Advancement of Atheism ended, but it did not outlive James Hervey Johnson. However, *The Truthseeker* has continued to be sporadically published, with a new run of the magazine beginning in 2014. There is a vestige of 4 A left, though it is indirect. James Hervey Johnson left a $14 million dollar estate when he died. His estate became the James Hervey Johnson Educational Charitable Trust, which is now used primarily to fund various secular movement activity.[8]

While 4 A was still extant when Madalyn Murray O'Hair gained prominence due to her legal battles over bible reading in public schools, O'Hair's organization quickly became more influential than 4 A. O'Hair noted in one of her biographies that she requested help from a variety of secular organizations during her lawsuit (including from 4 A), but found little support. She did join the AHA board of directors at one point, but her participation in the organization was short-lived, due largely to her brash personality and unapologetic rhetoric. She founded American Atheists in 1963 as an advocacy group for atheist civil liberties but also as a way to continue her advocacy work on behalf of atheists, providing her with the necessary funds and resources for such efforts. As noted above, O'Hair gained prominence in the US as a result of the *Abington School District v. Schempp* (a.k.a. *Murray v. Curlett*, 1963) Supreme Court case in which O'Hair and her older son, William Murray, filed suit against compulsory Bible reading and reciting prayers in public schools. The court found these religious activities to be unconstitutional, and as a result, school official led bible reading was no longer allowed in public schools (though, of course, student-led bible reading that is not compulsory is still allowed).

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8 More information can be found about the trust on its website: http://jamesherveyjohnson.com/trust.html.

American Atheists experienced a period of significant turmoil when O'Hair, along with her younger son, John Murray, and granddaughter Robin were abducted by a former employee, David Waters, and several accomplices in 1995. Robin was held separate from the other two while the abductors forced O'Hair and her son to empty various AA bank accounts. After the abductors had extracted as much money as they could, Madalyn, John, and Robin were killed and buried in a field in Texas. While they were still alive, but after they had disappeared, they were still in contact with various members of the AA board. O'Hair was unable to tell her staff why she had disappeared, but indicated they were on important business. For many AA insiders, that important business could have involved an important financial bequest that had been rumored to be coming to AA. As a result, despite concerns among AA board members, it took a significant amount of time (over a month) for the AA board to begin trying to put people into place to take on the day-to-day management of the organization as they believed Madalyn, John, and Robin would be returning from this "important business." Eventually, contact with Madalyn, John, and Robin was lost completely and rumors spread that they absconded with the money themselves. It wasn't until 2001 that their bodies were discovered, making it clear what had happened. While others have provided the details about this incident (LeBeau 2003; Seaman 2006), we note it here as it resulted in serious difficulties for AA moving forward. As Frank Zindler, an AA board member at the time and former interim President noted in an interview:

> Well, we figured we had probably lost about 60% of our membership after the disappearance. In fact, things were so horrible, I was running AA Press entirely out of my own pocket. Other members of the board who were moderately affluent were helping pay the salaries of the staff we still had working there. We had a printer still and had somebody working in the shipping and, you know, book selling...that sort of thing. But it was a gruesome road back up. I don't know if we ever fully recovered, but it's just been a very difficult time. We really took it on the chin. So you know, we have gradually come back.

Like the AHA, it is uncertain how many members the AA have nor the number of subscribers to the magazine, but from what we have been able to discern, AA is currently the smallest of the four organizations we are detailing in this chapter in terms of membership and magazine subscriptions.

4.3 Freedom From Religion Foundation

The largest national-level group in the US in terms of membership is the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), which was co-founded in 1976 by Anne Nicol

Gaylor, her daughter Annie Laurie Gaylor, and John Sontarck. Both Anne Nicol Gaylor and her daughter, Annie Laurie Gaylor, contributed to *The American Atheist* magazine, and along with John Sontarck, were on the masthead for a period of time until early 1978. Sontarck was also, at one time, the treasurer for O'Hair's trusteeship, the Society of Separationists.

Anne Nicol Gaylor was a high-profile feminist activist who focused on abortion and women's reproductive rights. Numerous accounts indicate that FFRF was founded as a response to the role of religion in hindering women's reproductive rights. FFRF was originally affiliated with O'Hair and American Atheists, but sometime between February 1978, when Annie Laurie Gaylor appeared on the cover of the *American Atheists* magazine, and April of that same year, there was a falling out between Anne Nicol Gaylor and Madalyn Murray O'Hair that resulted in a significant degree of animosity between these two women. It was after this schism that Anne Nicol Gaylor made FFRF a national secular organization in its own right. In our research we came across explanations for the split that included: accusations over mailing lists, anti-Semitic attitudes from O'Hair's youngest son, Jon Murray, Anne Nicol Gaylor's loyalty to the atheist cause, and O'Hair's misappropriation of organization donations. We have been unable to confirm any of these specific details. What we have been able to discern definitively is that a serious and contentious split occurred, and that the tension between the two organizations continued for decades.

FFRF is led today by Annie Laurie Gaylor and her husband, Dan Barker. FFRF has been very public about their membership growth, noting it in their publications and on their weekly radio show. As of 2016, they have just over 20,000 dues paying members. Membership has been spurred by a number of successful court cases the FFRF has fought on behalf of secular individuals as well as their willingness to help secular individuals when there are clear violations of the separation of church and state in the US.

4.4 Council for Secular Humanism

The Council for Secular Humanism (CSH) is another large, national-level organization that was founded in 1980 by Paul Kurtz. The CSH is part of a larger organization, Center for Inquiry (CFI), which was founded in 1991. CFI is the umbrella organization for CSH and a division devoted to skeptical inquiry, the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry (CSI, but formerly known as CSICOP, which Kurtz started while at the AHA, but spun off the AHA).

CSH is also the result of a split. Paul Kurtz worked for the AHA as the editor of the organization's magazine *The Humanist* from 1968 until 1978. While it is

possible Paul Kurtz might remember things differently (he died before we began our interviews), we think we have been able to verify sufficiently what led to Kurtz's split from the AHA. Most accounts suggest that Paul Kurtz wanted to wrest control of *The Humanist* from the AHA, both editorially (something he largely already had) and financially. The board of the AHA was unwilling to agree to this arrangement and members of the board were already upset about his financial (mis)management of the magazine.[9] According to then AHA President, Bette Chambers, Kurtz was reticent to share financial information with the board, was misrepresenting the circulation numbers which could have resulted in legal problems for the AHA, and he was unwilling to allow AHA oversight of the finances of *The Humanist*. All of this came to a climax at a board meeting in July of 1978 just after taking a sabbatical from his editorial duties, during which Lloyd Morain was appointed acting editor.

What was *not* at issue were Kurtz's editorial skills; his tenure at the helm of *The Humanist* was widely applauded by the board of the AHA. What was at issue was financial transparency, which Kurtz likened to censorship. The minutes from the meeting suggest that Kurtz was to be given complete editorial and managerial control of *The Humanist*, but financial control would be overseen by a committee (one that included Kurtz, but also others). According to Bette Chambers, this was unacceptable to Kurtz. The minutes from the meeting do not include a record of votes, but Bette Chambers, who chaired the meeting (and Fred Edwords who has listened to the audio recording of the meeting), recalled that the motion to reinstate Kurtz as the Editor-in-Chief of *The Humanist* after the end of his sabbatical failed to pass. The first two votes were tied, but the vote swung against Kurtz on the third ballot. Paul Kurtz did not take the decision well. The tension over financial oversight of *The Humanist* between Kurtz and the AHA Board was what led Paul Kurtz to leave the AHA.

Splits can sometimes lead to the formation of new organizations when people take resources and reputation with them (Zald and McCarthy 1980), as appears to have occurred when Kurtz was ousted from the AHA. As Bette Chambers recalled, Kurtz quickly contacted their largest donor, Corliss Lamont, who was giving tens of thousands of dollars every year to the AHA and to *The Humanist:*

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9 While Kurtz was on sabbatical from his editorial duties at AHA in 1977–78, internal conflict erupted when then president Bette Chambers and acting Editor-in-Chief Lloyd Morain discovered irregularities having to do with unethical business transactions between Prometheus Books and the AHA under Kurtz's leadership and his true intentions for the magazine. These issues ultimately divided the AHA board into pro-Kurtz and anti-Kurtz factions.

> So that in that instance [after the motion failed to pass] Kurtz was out. Then Kurtz sometime that day called Corliss Lamont and told him that he had been summarily dismissed as editor of *The Humanist* without a hearing. Lamont called me and asked me what in the hell went on. And of course I immediately corrected that point of view, I said Kurtz was there. He was there the entire meeting, he heard everything. He voted! ... I corrected this and told Lamont what happened and then in a matter of days within the first couple of weeks after this event, Kurtz wrote to the people that he knew as his major donors who gave money every year to support the magazine, and he told them he had been dismissed without a hearing. I think that the whole thing in terms of loss... Of course he sent out a few hundred statements like that, it got to the membership in general... I calculated – the next year I compared the membership data with one year later compared to what it had been in Oct 1978 – and I figured that the lying about what had actually had taken place had cost us about $240,000.

This event triggered extreme discontent (Kemper 2001), which Kurtz internalized and refused to let go, using these emotions as motivation to maintain rigid social boundaries (Lamont and Molnar 2002) between himself and the AHA from that point on. While there is no place that we know of where Kurtz explicitly stated his desire to "destroy the AHA" after he left the organization, numerous people told us that they had heard him indicate as much.

Following his split, Paul Kurtz built one of the largest, most well-funded secular, freethought, and skeptical organizations in organized secularism. Today, *Free Inquiry*, the magazine published by CSH, has the largest number of subscribers of the various secular magazines and the umbrella company, CFI, has one of the largest budgets of the four organizations we examine in this chapter.

5 Personality as Catalysts of Growth and Change in Social Movements

Paul Kurtz and Madalyn Murray O'Hair were two of the most notable leaders of the movement during the late 20 century. To date, we have seen no research describing their personalities, which we believe were remarkably similar. In this section of the chapter, we describe the personalities of Madalyn Murray O'Hair and Paul Kurtz and argue that their personalities: (1) were shaped by both their social context and the larger cultural context, (2) influenced their interactions with other movement actors, and (3) were not only at the core of the organizational splits discussed above, but also created an organizational culture which contributed to an attitudinal shift among a new cohort of secular activists with different political consciousness at the end of the 20 century (see Whittier 1997).

To discuss the personalities of Paul Kurtz and Madalyn Murray O'Hair, we turn to the impressions they left on others. Without the availability of direct data, such as personality test scores, we rely on how those personalities were interpreted by those who knew and worked with these people. While this method does not capture their personalities in full, it does provide pictures of their personalities, even if they are a bit fuzzy. We are interested in these personalities as we believe they inform the organizational splitting observed during that time period.

Paul Kurtz and Madalyn Murray O'Hair both possessed the authority and charisma to push boundaries and blaze new trails for organized secularism in the 20th century. This authority, however, came at the cost of harmonious interpersonal dynamics.

Paul Kurtz was something of a conundrum. Kurtz is widely recognized by many in organized secularism as the "Father of Secular Humanism."[10] He is remembered as brilliant, hardworking, and an instinctive empire-builder. His reputation as a charismatic visionary is widely recognized among those who knew him. Yet, at the same time, there was a part of Kurtz that wasn't pretty. Kurtz could be disingenuous, vengeful, petty, and manipulative. Some of our interviewees referred to this as Kurtz's "dark side."

Part of this "dark side" were Kurtz's autocratic tendencies. Paul Kurtz was rarely willing to compromise. When he found himself at odds with an executive board, he was willing to strike out anew, founding another organization that would allow him the control he demanded (as he did when he left the AHA in the 1970s and later when he left CFI). Though he claimed that his voluntary departure from CFI in 2009 was under duress, these claims along with many others are disputed. One of our interviewees, August Brunsman, had personal experience working under Kurtz, as he, along with several others, branched out of CFI's college campus initiative, CFI on Campus, to form the Secular Student Alliance. August described Kurtz's autocratic tendencies like this,

> "Paul's total approach to humanist organizing is that he wanted to own it, he wanted to be in charge and run it, and he just didn't trust anybody else to do anything worthwhile that [he] didn't control."

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10 Kurtz began to describe the Council for Secular and Democratic Humanism – later just the Council for Secular Humanism – as adhering to "secular humanism" in order to distinguish his new organization from the American Humanist Association. This was, in large part, a marketing ploy as it could then be suggested that the AHA was more favorable toward "religious humanism" (which, in fact, was true at the time), while Kurtz's new organization was not. While Kurtz did not coin the term "secular humanism" (see Richter's chapter, this volume), he did work hard to co-opt the term and embraced it as being descriptive of his organization's views.

Another illustration of Kurtz's "dark side" was his tendency to hold grudges. When Kurtz lost the vote at the AHA to be reinstated as the editor of The Humanist, he didn't forgive and forget or move on. This is not an uncommon practice among social movement leaders who seek to create symbolic hegemony in their respective movement (Zald and McCarthy 1980). Kurtz's actions also suggest that was his intention, which was confirmed by several of our interviewees. Here is what Bette Chambers recounted of the relationship between Kurtz and the AHA after the 1978 board meeting:

> Fred [Edwords] and I, at the time that Michael Werner was president of the AHA in, I think, early 1990s, Fred and I pressured him and the board to 'Get the hell out of dodge;' to move out of Amherst[11] and to someplace else. The harm that Kurtz was doing even then to the AHA never stopped. He had a coterie of sycophantic friends who were doing all sorts of peculiar things like jamming the locks on the office doors... I mean, you know childish tricks like that. Now Kurtz himself wasn't doing them, but these were... When I say sycophants they really were. You could hear them say they would follow Paul Kurtz to hell and back if they had to. And that always struck me as so strange, because if there is anything I know about Humanists they are not followers. If I run into one that's a follower of something I get very nervous because it just doesn't seem right.

From the information we have gathered, it appears that Paul Kurtz was an autocratic leader who wanted to have complete control over organized secularism. To this end, he actively worked to undermine the other secular SMOs, particularly the AHA. We also find it somewhat ironic that Kurtz, who was, professionally, an ethicist, had problems being and behaving ethically. Even so, people still maintained favorable opinions of Kurtz. He was a strategic visionary with an uncanny ability to rebound from organizational conflict with his reputation relatively unscathed. As the evidence above suggests, Kurtz had an over-bearing personality and others found it difficult to work with him. But it may be the case that precisely these types of characteristics were what was needed during that particular period in America's history, as we will discuss at greater length below.

　　Madelyn Murray O'Hair's reputation is even more contested than is Paul Kurtz's. Also considered quite difficult to work with, O'Hair was perceived as brash and vulgar. She was thought of as behaving highly inappropriate by the

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11 At the same time that Kurtz was voted out as the editor of *The Humanist*, the AHA moved its headquarters from San Francisco to a building owned by Lloyd Morain, a wealthy benefactor of the AHA. The move to Amherst was in order to bring the AHA headquarters next to the publishing headquarters of The Humanist, which were located in Amherst where Paul Kurtz worked as a college professor. Kurtz and the AHA remained in the same building for a period of time even after Kurtz was voted out of the AHA.

standards of her day. She had a deep distrust of others and a justified paranoia cultivated by abuse from a hostile public and government officials as well as from a series of betrayals in her life. Her response to most threats, perceived or otherwise, was typically the same: "excommunication". The hardline she maintained meant that the splitting that occurred around her typically took the form of others being banished, or leaving of their own accord. One of our interviewees, Bette Chambers, who hosted O'Hair in her home, offered this description:

> Madalyn O'Hair...she was Madalyn Murray at the time...I still hold the view that atheism would've become popular in this country far sooner than it has even today, which isn't very much, but we wouldn't have had quite so much trouble relating to the public and explaining our position since she called herself the spokesperson for American atheism. I think that she set the movement back a whole generation. That's my opinion. She was an extremely unpleasant person and offended people right and left, primarily at private gatherings. But she was quite kind of popular on television, and she came across as a loudmouth. There was nothing intellectual about her. Not in my opinion. She was an atheist – period – because she detested religion, the churches. You don't find Humanists today who are so anti-mainstream religion. She was anti-all religion.

This sort of impression is contrasted by others who offered a more balanced opinion of her personality. According to Frank Zindler who, along with his wife, was very close to O'Hair:

> Madalyn was very, very warm and generous with us almost all of the time. However, she was a brutal diabetic and there would be times...I never could figure out whether it was high blood sugar or low blood sugar – it was totally impossible for me to ever figure this out, but there would be moments when she would just go off like a roman candle and she would shout and scream, 'You're excommunicated,' and she would fire off the most outrageous letters to people, uh, excommunicating them....

We do believe these quotes are illustrative of O'Hair's personality. However, it is important to keep in mind that the *perception* of O'Hair as brash, vulgar, and, at times, inappropriate was generated within the cultural milieu of the time. O'Hair's rise to fame started in the 1950s, and continued through the 1980s. This period is widely recognized to have been a time of significant change in cultural values toward women's roles in society (Brown 2012). However, women's position in society throughout this period remained (and to a large degree still remains) conflicted (Hochschild 1997). The rise of women's participation in the workforce starting in the late 1960s, spurred in part by the second wave of the feminist movement but also by economic necessity (Coontz 1992), began to shift cultural expectations for women. However, women still faced expectations

about how they should behave; women were to be passive, soft, caring, and kind (Gerami and Lehnerer 2001).

It was in this cultural milieu that Madelyn Murray O'Hair's rise to prominence occurred. It is also in this cultural milieu that we must now consider how Madelyn Murray O'Hair's personality was perceived. O'Hair's persona and behaviors were, undoubtedly, counter to the normative expectations for women at the time when she gained prominence. But they were not all that different from what would be expected behavior for a man at that time. In other words, Madelyn Murray O'Hair is often judged harshly for her tough, brash, and aggressive demeanor, precisely because she was a woman. If O'Hair had been a man, it is highly unlikely that she would have received the same degree of acerbic criticism for her persona or behavior. We are not trying to challenge descriptions of Madelyn Murray O'Hair's personality. We are, however, arguing that criticisms of O'Hair's personality reflect a gendered double-standard.

From everything we've been able to gather, Paul Kurtz's personality was not all that different from Madalyn Murray O'Hair's. Kurtz was an autocrat and micro-manager who could also lose his temper and yell at his employees. Yet, we have been unable to find comparable criticisms of Kurtz's personality to those of Madalyn Murray O'Hair's. Certainly there are those who are critical of Paul Kurtz and his personality, and it was his leadership style that eventually led to his ouster at CFI.[12] Despite the similarities in personalities between Madalyn Murray O'Hair and Paul Kurtz, very few people describe Paul Kurtz as eminently disagreeable or caustic, like they do with O'Hair. This leads us to believe that a gendered double-standard has been applied to O'Hair.

In considering the personalities of these two leaders, several commonalities are apparent. First, and most glaring, both were self-aggrandizing megalomaniacs who acted as dictators over their respective organizations. Coupled with this dominance was a great strength. If creation is an act of will, then these individuals shared a strength of willpower. This appears to be the double-edged sword of the brand of leadership shared by O'Hair and Kurtz. While they possessed the authority and charisma to push boundaries and blaze new trails, this authority came at the cost of harmonious interpersonal dynamics. They demanded complete control of those with whom they worked. When these standards were not met, organizational splitting occurred.

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12 Per our conversation with Tom Flynn, Paul Kurtz was not formally removed from his position at CFI but rather was marginalized in his position and lost a substantial amount of power as a result of several votes by the CFI board. After this occurred, Kurtz resigned his position and started a new organization, the Institute for Science and Human Values.

It is likely that the personality characteristics of O'Hair and Kurtz contributed to the organizational splits in the secular movement (CSH from AHA and FFRF from AA) we described above, though there were likely other factors involved. Interestingly, even though organizational fracturing was common to both O'Hair and Kurtz, their public reputations were quite different. Kurtz's reputation was and remains largely positive. Despite the difficulties in working with him, his work and many accomplishments are generally held in high regard. In essence, his "dark side" is largely overlooked. Yet, O'Hair, who was not all that different from Kurtz personality-wise, has been and continues to be criticized for her personality, which overshadows her organizational leadership. This is yet more evidence for a gendered double-standard being applied to these monumental figures in organized secularism.

Perhaps more important than why these splits occurred is that they occurred at all. Organizational schisms and the resulting fragmentation are rarely thought of as a positive for social movements. As intra-organizational schisms become inter-organizational schisms, communication among like-minded SMOs is limited. These sorts of factors might generally be thought of as impediments to movement success, as power becomes more diffuse and alliances and coalitions that might strengthen the movement are torn apart.

Historically, then, it might appear as though interpersonal dysfunction was a hallmark of secular organizing during this time and the splitting we have documented certainly seems to support this. However, it is our argument here that, while this may be the case, social movement theory reminds us that nearly anything can be a resource. In the case of Kurtz and O'Hair, it appears that perhaps difficult personalities and the resulting organizational splits which resulted from them were ultimately a resource of sorts for the movement, both at that time and later.

Finally, while these personality characteristics are not necessarily those we would associate with ideal leaders, we would be remiss not to consider the context in which these individuals developed. The trajectories of our lived experiences as well as the turning points to those trajectories are informed by the social structure we encounter, which is relative to time and place. In the case of these leaders, both physically went to war (i.e., they served in the military). Both faced power struggles from within their organizations as well as external threats. Both lived in a time when being openly secular was highly stigmatized, more so than today. O'Hair and Kurtz were at the helm of secular SMOs during a very difficult time in America's history: the Cold War. As others have documented (Cragun 2017), there were intentional efforts in the US during the Cold War to create a religious American identity that differed from the "godless communists" of the Soviet Union. As a result, being secular, humanist, atheist, or a freethinker during

this time period was highly stigmatized. While we cannot say that O'Hair and Kurtz's personalities were "necessary" to maintain secular SMOs during this time period, it is likely the case that their strong personalities and their unwillingness to compromise helped them cope with the widespread stigma against nonreligion and irreligion that existed during their tenures. Thus, while their personalities were difficult and alienating to many, it is also arguably the case that O'Hair's and Kurtz's personalities were a resource for the secular movement in the US during one of its more challenging periods.

6 Unifying the Secular Movement

In this section we address the following question: *how did organized secularism get to where it is today – diffuse, de-centered, and somewhat unified?* The tensions with AHA/CSH and AA/FFRF mentioned above are where we begin to explore this question. Three splits, two of which (in 1978) were extremely contentious, instigated organizational growth but led to nearly three decades of animosity and minimal inter-movement contact. The result of these tensions was that there was limited coordination among the secular SMOs during this time period. Despite several decades of limited coordination, bitter and hurt feelings, and incivility between the various secular SMOs, organized secularism in the US today is far more collaborative and unified, even if there remain several national level organizations and thousands of local grassroots groups. How the movement transformed from significant internal turmoil to relative calm and cooperation will be the focus for the rest of this chapter.

As various informants told us, there has historically been more tension between the groups that split than between the others. After Paul Kurtz left the AHA, there was a significant amount of tension between Paul Kurtz's organization, CSH, and the AHA, with Kurtz even offering to co-opt the AHA at one point. Likewise, after Anne Nicole Gaylor left the AA, there was significant tension between those two organizations that has continued until just recently. Part of the tension has resulted from the original splits. But another part of the tension stems from the fact that the organizations that split remain the most similar in mission, membership, and motivation.

For instance, both the AHA and the CSH identify as "Humanist" organizations. The label "humanist" provides them a broader label that encapsulates the many ways of being secular or nonreligious, or potentially even religious.[13]

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13 One of Paul Kurtz's early criticisms of the AHA was that it was too religious in the sense that

Atheists, agnostics, freethinkers, brights, nonbelievers, antitheists, and others can all identify as humanist, but not all of them are, obviously, atheists. As a result, both AHA and CSH have broad appeal. Both have engaged in similar activities, working toward the advancement of science and for some progressive issues (like women's and sexual and gender minorities' rights). However, there is a bit more of a libertarian sentiment at CSH, perhaps stemming from Paul Kurtz's personal political views[14] than there is at the more progressive AHA.

Similarly, AA and FFRF have many things in common. While FFRF bills itself as a "freethought" organization, a term that has fairly old origins that suggest independence from organized religion, in much of its promotional material the organization identifies itself as an advocacy group for nonbelievers or atheists. AA, of course, is specifically geared toward advocacy for atheists. While FFRF has focused very heavily in recent years on litigation, AA has its own litigation division. Both, also, have run billboard and advertising campaigns and arguably have had greater appeal to atheists and nonbelievers who are a bit more strident in their views or more "eliminationist" in their approach toward religion (see Langston et al. chapter, this volume). Thus, some of the continued tension between these organizations stems from their similarity to each other. David Silverman commented about the similarities:

> Now, in a market segmentation issue, FFRF and AA are most closely competitive. Um, they, they're harder than AHA and CFI. They're not as hard as us, but they're closer than the others. So, we have a competitive aspect going on between us, um but at the same time, while Madalyn and Ellen Johnson were not very good at membership cultivation, they [FFRF] were, so they have far more members than we do, which is just great for them, but it also makes them care less about working with us. So, it's a tough thing because I'm just trying to do right for the movement and she's [Annie Laurie] still angry. I think she's getting

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members of the AHA could be "religious humanists" or both religious and a humanist. It was Paul Kurtz's efforts in trying to differentiate his new organization from the AHA that resulted in the heightened use of the phrase "secular humanism." Prior to that point in the 1980s, humanism was not exclusively secular (and still, technically, is not). However, to simultaneously criticize the AHA, which still catered to and included religious humanists, and to distinguish his new organization from the AHA, Kurtz called his organization The Council for Democratic and Secular Humanism (or CODESH). "Democratic" was originally included in the label to distinguish Kurtz's new organization from the AHA as well, as the AHA was heavily influenced by very left-leaning individuals, some of whom identified as socialists (like Corliss Lamont). Given the degree of competition that existed between these groups, it is important to recognize just how influential branding was for the organizations.

14 One of our informants, Michael Werner, informed us that Paul Kurtz identified as a Republican.

past it. We just had a big, a legal symposium. And they went. They came. Annie Laurie came. Cold to me, but there.

As far as AA's relationship with the AHA and CSH, again we quote David Silverman:

Oh, I like them very much. I have very good relationships with Ron [Lindsay from CFI] and Roy [Speckhardt from the AHA]. Um, I think we respect each other and like each other. I think we see each other as allies. I think we see each other as different market segments. I think there are people at AHA that don't like AA. There are some people on the board of AHA that don't like AA. And some see us as competitors because that's just where their mind goes. But for the most part, I think the relationship with us is as good as it can be or should be. I mean, if I have a question for Roy, I can just call him or email him and he'll come right back and give me an honest answer. Same with Ron. And if we disagree with each other, we can say it and we can do well. So I think the relationship between the three of us is positive and looks positive moving forward.

The market competition between groups was recognized in several interviews, with some informants going so far as to suggest that AHA and CSH really could and maybe even should merge, as should FFRF and AA. However, other informants disagreed and believed that the various organizations were different enough that they appealed to slightly different niches of the secular public. When asked about this, Roy Speckhardt said:

I had talks with Ron Lindsey at CFI as recently as a couple of years ago about ways we could potentially bring the two organizations together and it didn't go that far [merging] as there were you know some things didn't work out for that. But we did come up with a couple of projects we can work on together. Who knows, down the road it might happen. I think the philosophical differences between our groups are pretty minor at this point. Still the memberships are a little different. You know a little more anti religious on one side, a little less on the other; a little more libertarian on their side, a little more socialist leaning on our side.

And when Roy Speckhardt was asked about the possibility of FFRF and AA combining into a single organization, Roy noted that such a unification is probably not in the movement's best interest:

Well, it's tricky. Financially speaking it's not necessarily an advantage to merge organizations because most people in their annual giving... If you look at the 20,000 people who support us, they're people who say I'm going to give each of my member organizations my membership dues. That might be $50 a year and if there's one organization they give it $50. If there's ten, they give each of them $50 and that's $500 that goes out.

Roy Speckhardt, like many of our informants, no longer believed the various secular organizational movements were involved in a zero-sum game. To the contrary, there is variation among the constituents – they have different interests and different desires (as various chapters in this volume suggest; see chapters by Schutz, Smith, Frost, and Langston et al.). Additionally, while there is some competition among the organizations for donations, there is also evidence that the competition is both: (a) quite limited as big donors tend to have their preferred organizations as well, and (b) minimal because donors will often give more if they are giving to multiple organizations than if they are giving to just a single organization.

What the above suggests is that the dynamics of the secular movement in the US have changed. While there was, for decades, competition, fracturing, and even hatred among the various organization, today there is a growing sense of unity and common purpose. While there is still competition between the organizations, it is probably more accurate to characterize that competition as "friendly." Likewise, the implication of calling the movement "disorganized" misses the mark. A diffuse organization can be just as useful for a social movement or potentially even more effective than a centrally organized social movement. Polycephalous movements are also more likely to withstand controversies within the movement; problems within one of the constituent organizations will not destroy the entire movement. Thus, when scandals occur in the secular movement – and they certainly have occurred – the entire movement is not destroyed, as might be the case if there was just a single secular social movement organization.

The closer degree of coordination in organized secularism, as noted at the beginning of this chapter, is relatively recent. We believe a combination of factors coalesced in the early 2000s to change the dynamics of the movement. To begin with, a transition in leadership – from Kurtz and O'Hair to the current crop of leaders – took place. Many of the new leaders had observed the caustic personalities of prior leaders and intentionally chose not to follow that lead. The change in leadership was coupled with the rise of a common enemy – fundamentalist and conservative religion. Fundamentalism in the US has its origins in the early 20th century, and conservative religion has gained prominence in American politics prior to this point with the rise of the Religious Right and the Moral Majority in the late 20th century. However, the perceived threat of religious fundamentalism became particularly prominent as a result of the September 11th, 2001 attacks. The clear and present danger of fundamentalism to secularism combined with new leadership changed the environment of the secular movement. In what follows we attempt to describe this change in greater detail.

In 2000, Mel Lipman, an attorney and activist from Las Vegas, was nominated and elected to the national board of the American Humanist Association (AHA). In 2002, at the urging of a fellow board member, Lipman ran for the AHA presidency on a platform of bringing together all of the varied organizations who believed in doing good without a belief in a supernatural entity. His agenda was not to merge the organizations, but rather to work together towards common goals.

In 2003, Mel Lipman succeeded Edd Doer, who served 14 years as president of the AHA. On January 15, 2005, Mel Lipman convened the "Inauguration Summit" – an unprecedented meeting of secular elites with a history of frosty relationships from over 22 freethought groups to discuss how their respective organizations could work together for common interests, namely tackling the religious right in the upcoming November election. There was, however, one organization that missed the summit, the Council for Secular Humanism (CSH), allegedly due to scheduling conflicts.[15]

At the conclusion of the weekend the most promising impact was the commitment among those in attendance to remain in communication and to look for ways to collaborate. To this end, attendees were extended an invitation to join the Secular Coalition for America (SCA). Founded by Herb Silverman, a math professor who became a secular activist in the early 1990s, the SCA provided an opportunity for its member organizations to come together to cooperate in areas of mutual interest and to support the other organizations in their efforts to uphold separation between government and religion. SCA is a lobbying organization, but for Silverman, this was secondary to decreasing in-fighting and fostering a sense of community. He believed that through cooperation the nonreligious would be able to amplify their voice, increase visibility, change public opinion, and be as effective as possible in their lobbying efforts.

True to their skeptical nature, the largest national secular, humanist, atheist, and freethought organizations were hesitant to join SCA, until the AHA signed on in 2005. Between 2006 and 2008, American Atheists (AA), Society for Humanistic Judaism (SHJ), Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers (MAAF), American Ethical Union (AEU), and Camp Quest (CQ) became members. As of 2016, SCA is comprised of 18 voting member organizations. According to AHA's current Executive Director, Roy Speckhardt, "The secular coalition, as it became more prominent, helped established groups get along better and get to know each other better." Prior to these efforts in the early 2000s, when leaders from different organizations came to-

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15 http://americanhumanist.org/hnn/archives/?id=177&article=10.

gether, it was almost a given that fights would ensue. The 2005 Summit catalyzed a significant transformation in how the various organizations interacted with one another.

7 Conclusion

Today, there are several national, member-based secularist movement organizations and thousands of local grassroots organizations in existence. Contemporary social movements, especially in the Western world, are heterogeneous, ideologically diverse, and loosely integrated (Gerlach and Hines 1970). It's not uncommon for movements to have a decentralized, or "leaderless" authority structure, the very characteristic that Baker and Smith (2015) problematize for secular groups.

When looking historically at the development of secular organizing in the United States, it appears that difficult personalities and interpersonal conflict were a bit of a hallmark. The many splits that occurred imply a contentiousness within the movement. As discussed, these personalities did not develop within a vacuum. Some of the roughness of these personalities seems well-adapted for the trying times and numerous threats these leaders encountered. Still, for those who have joined the movement since this period of fragmentation, the splits and the personalities driving them may not be the fairy tale story of a unified effort towards a common goal one might hope to find. Even so, in the case of nonreligious organizing, it appears that dysfunctional personalities had functional outcomes. Oddly, the difficulty of working with O'Hair and Kurtz ultimately served as a resource for movement mobilization, as organizational splintering diversified and strengthened the movement.

When we view these events through a social movements lens, these contentious inter-movement politics lead to an important conclusion. Drawing on Gerlach and Hines's (1970) work, we see how the diversity of secular organizations creates a more diverse, or polycephalous, movement landscape, which is a strength of the movement, not a weakness. In a variety of ways, the fragmentation that occurred during the contentious 1970s and 1980s led to a variety of secular SMOs, which has allowed them to develop specialized niches with greater appeal to different segments of the secular public. This diversified the landscape of the movement, with various groups taking on different issues and developing along unique trajectories. This ultimately set the stage for the unification that did occur. As of 2016, it's unlikely you'll hear members of one secular SMO calling members of another, "Splitters!" Perhaps we can finally say that the various sec-

ular SMOs are, as Brian begged his Jewish brothers to do in *The Life of Brian*, "struggling together" against a common enemy.

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