



August 2003  
Volume 6, Issue 7  
Publication of the  
**Sacramento  
Organization for  
Rational Thinking  
(SORT)**

### Inside This Issue

- 1** August 27, 2003 Meeting:  
HAS ENVIRONMENTALISM  
BECOME A BASKET FILLED  
WITH TOO MANY ILL-  
SORTED GOODS?  
  
THE INCREDIBLE INVASION  
OF THE WORD POLICE

---

- 2** MORE DANGEROUS WORD  
GAMES

---

- 3** AND NOW, FOR SOMETHING  
COMPLETELY DIFFERENT  
(AND POLITICALLY  
INCORRECT)  
  
PICNIC NEWS!

---

- 4** THE RATIONAL COMMUNITY  
CALENDAR

For past issues, bibliography, links to other skeptics, and more, check out the SORT Website:

[www.quiknet.com/~kitray/index1.html](http://www.quiknet.com/~kitray/index1.html)

For more about the co-founders of SORT, see

[www.spangenburgandmoser.com](http://www.spangenburgandmoser.com)

**August  
SORT Meeting  
Wednesday,  
August 27, 2003  
7:00 P.M.**

Room 1, Library  
Kinney High School  
2710 Kilgore Rd., Rancho Cordova

# The **SORTified NEWS**

**“Doubt is the beginning of wisdom.”**

—Clarence Darrow

## August 27<sup>th</sup> Meeting

### **HAS ENVIRONMENTALISM BECOME A BASKET FILLED WITH TOO MANY ILL-SORTED GOODS?**

During the turbulent '60s in San Francisco, thousands of people found themselves protesting the war in Viet Nam by participating in anti-war marches. Often your editors were among them. Often, too, it was an uncomfortable and compromising experience, not only for us but also for many others. The problem was that while many in the throng were legitimately protesting the war, many others used the opportunity to promote other, unrelated, political causes. Thus you often found yourself marching in, and being counted among, the company and under the banner of groups whose ideology you were uncomfortable with or even strongly opposed to. It's an old tactic and an old problem.



This month at SORT we'll take a look at the environmentalist movement and ask ourselves: Has environmentalism, too, been hijacked by the promoters of other political causes? Since the public's consciousness has rightly been raised to environmental issues and even young school children today learn to express

their concern by participating in environmental programs, the question is an important one. Join us and add your thoughts this month at SORT as we examine the question, “Has environmentalism become a basket containing too many ill-sorted goods?” It should make for a lively and controversial conversation around our open round table. As usual, free coffee, soft drinks, cookies and other goodies will be available to beat back the munchies.

SORT meetings take place on the last Wednesday of the month (July 30 this month) at 7:00 p.m. at the library at Kinney High School, 2710 Kilgore Road, Rancho Cordova. (See driving directions on page 3.)

### **THE INCREDIBLE INVASION OF THE WORD POLICE**

Since we have already drifted back in space and time remembering the anti-war marches of the '60s, we found the jingle of an old satirical song by the Chad Mitchell Trio (remember that energetic folk group?) has been running through our heads. The song was called, “What Did You Learn in School Today?” and it nicely satirized the social and political brainwashing perpetrated upon children by their schools. The song doesn't seem entirely out of date, either—although the specifics have changed. Today, in our much

more “socially conscious” time we have become much more sensitive to the thoughts, words, and ideas our children are exposed to. But have we become so sensitive that we have crossed the line into knee-jerk (and often absurd) censorship as to what thoughts, words, and ideas go into modern textbooks? Did you know that according to Diane Ravitch, a professor of education at New York University, some textbook publishers forbid the use of the word “owls,” because as Ravitch explains, they are a symbol of death in certain cultures? Or that the word “peanuts” is also a no-no for some textbook publishers, since some children are allergic to peanuts? Other textbooks, according to Ravitch, are forbidden the use of not only certain words but “biased” phrases or topics, including “boys expressing anger,” “Caucasians living in the suburbs,” “rap music,” “junk food,” African Americans “being depicted as musicians or athletes,” and “mothers being shown in their kitchens.” More forbidden words that may provoke biased images and should thus be avoided, “victim,” “snowman,” and “guy.” Ravitch’s new book on the subject, “The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Our Students Learn” (published by Knopf, \$24) takes a hard look at the problem and finds plenty of blame distributed to both the politically left and the politically right. If you want to find out more about the book you can follow the following URLs for a couple of short reviews.

[http://www.motherjones.com/arts/books/2003/28/ma\\_463\\_01.html](http://www.motherjones.com/arts/books/2003/28/ma_463_01.html).  
[http://www.educationupdate.com/archives/2003/june03/issue/spot\\_ravitch.html](http://www.educationupdate.com/archives/2003/june03/issue/spot_ravitch.html).

## MORE DANGEROUS WORD GAMES

Censorship by the right or the left, no matter for what reason, isn’t the only danger facing language and free speech as much today as it has in the past. Equally frightening is the twisting and manipulation of language so common today by politicians, military leaders, and just about anyone who thinks that the righteousness of their cause justifies any action. Thus the “politically correct” often find themselves using the same tactics as the tyrant or the propagandist. And, while we may laugh at the more obvious absurdities such as “vertically disadvantaged” (to describe the exceptionally short or unusually tall) or, as was once suggested by the residents of Santa Cruz, California, “people hole covers,” (to describe a sewer access covering), we can only cringe when “collateral damage” disguises “dead civilians,” the “Patriot Act” camouflages an assault on civil liberties, and “scientific creationism” boggles the mind with its obvious obfuscation.

All of which bring us to the fact that June 25<sup>th</sup> of this year marked the centenary of George Orwell’s birth. So perhaps now is a good time to remind ourselves once again of the power and importance of his messages. With new paperback editions of his work—including reprints of his correspondence—on the bookshelves of your favorite bookstore, you might just want to reread his classics, *Animal Farm* and *1984*. Like Albert Camus, Orwell was a conscience for his time as well as our own, and his words remain as important and relevant today as when first penned.

## The Sacramento Organization for Rational Thinking (SORT). . .

- Is dedicated to the promotion of rational thinking in all areas of life.
- Upholds the superiority of science over the mystical.
- Promotes and supports all efforts of intelligent communication that provide a counterpoint to the strong waves of anti-rationalism, irrationalism, and mysticism sweeping the world today.

### Toward these ends we . . .

- Host a monthly discussion group.
- Publish a monthly newsletter.
- Host special events, talks, and presentations.
- Host a web page.

While SORT began with and still continues to be concerned with the promotion of critical thinking in areas dealing with the pseudo-scientific, the paranormal, the mystical, and the fraudulent, we strongly promote critical thinking in *all* areas of human thought and endeavor.

The core of SORT activities is our discussion group. The art of intelligent conversation is not dead. We at SORT believe that rational conversation--the meeting of minds, the free exchange of ideas and the provocative stimulation of critical questions-- is one of the most civilized and enlightening of all human activities.

SORT discussion topics have ranged from UFOs to the Holocaust, from “alternative medicine” to the problems in communicating science to the public, from classic and recent cons and scams to the teaching of critical thinking. Our discussions are hosted by one of the SORT founders, and participants are by no means limited to experts (although they may include experts) but are made up of intelligent and questioning people concerned with the topic of the evening.

## AND NOW, IN THE WORDS OF THE INIMITABLE MONTY PYTHON, "FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT" (AND POLITICALLY INCORRECT)

Thanks to our favorite on-line tabloid (wink, wink, nudge, nudge) *The Weekly World News*, comes this important scientific story. According to *WVN*, professor of meteorology Dr. Cyril Saunders recently told a convention of environmental experts that he and his team had discovered a major cause of global warming. *WVN* quoted Dr. Saunders as explaining, "The planet is sizzling and females going through the change of life are to blame. There are more than 900 million middle-aged women world-wide in the early stages of menopause who are experiencing what is commonly known as hot flashes on a regular basis. That is why the earth is warming at an increasing rate and there is no end in sight." According to *WVN*, the Saunders team had discovered a "clear correlation" between the number of women going through menopause and Global warming over the last 25 years.

Saunders admits that over the course of a year one woman adds less than .0000000023 degrees Fahrenheit to the global temperature, but he also points out that when multiplied by over 900 million women in early menopause, the yearly increase rises to more than two degrees. Saunders noted to *WVN* that at that rate the temperate zones of the world would soon become uninhabitable by human beings.

Needless to say, continues the article, the Saunders report was met with angry skepticism by

feminists as spokeswoman Brigitta Watson told *WVN*, "This is what happens when scientific research is distorted by sexism . . . to lay the blame at the doorstep of menopausal women is an act of a knuckle-dragging Neanderthal!"

And so the world turns, at least according to *WVN*.

## PICNIC NEWS

Well it looks as if your *SORTified News* editors, bogged down by deadlines and some unsettling personal events, came up for a few seconds to breathe some hot Sacramento air, only to discover that summer is almost over and fall is on the way. To put it simply— somehow *SORT's* annual summer picnic got away from us.

Actually, though, given the uncomfortably high summer temperatures in Sacramento, a little slippage into fall may not be a bad thing (they rationalize, perhaps unreasonably). Anyway we're thinking now about scheduling the picnic for one of the weekends in October, after the heat and before the rain. We will probably be holding it at the same nice little park as we did last year, but we will be settling on a definite date during one of

### BOARD OF ADVISORS:

**Juliana Manoliu**  
Electronics Engineer

**Terry Sandbek**  
Psychologist

**Robert Sheaffer**  
UFO Specialist, Author

**Bob Steiner**  
Magician, Author, Bunco Expert

**Lauress Wise**  
Mathematical Psychologist

### About the Founding Members:

Ray Spangenburg and Kit Moser are a husband-and-wife writing team specializing in science and technology. They are co-authors of 52 books and over 100 articles, including publication in the *Skeptical Inquirer*, and they are former co-editors of the *Bay Area Skeptics Information Sheet (BASIS)*.

For more information, contact:

**SORT (Sacramento Organization for Rational Thinking)**  
Phone (916) 978-0321  
Email [kitray@quiknet.com](mailto:kitray@quiknet.com)

our upcoming meetings. Let us know what you think, and what works best for you, and stay tuned to the pages of the *SORTified News* for further information.

### GETTING TO KINNEY HIGH SCHOOL LIBRARY (SORT MEETING PLACE)

Just off Highway 50: Traveling east, Zinfandel Exit to Folsom Boulevard; traveling west, Sunrise exit to Folsom Boulevard. Then:

(1) Traveling west on Folsom Boulevard, turn left on Kilgore Rd., just past Sunrise. Or, traveling east on Folsom Blvd., turn right on Kilgore.

(2) Turn right into the Kinney High School parking lot. The library is in the building just south of the parking lot, and the entrance is on the west side of the building.

---

---

## THE RATIONAL COMMUNITY

---

---

# CALENDAR

### **August 27: SORT Meeting**

*Discussion Topic:* “Has Environmentalism Become a Basket Filled with Too Many Ill-Sorted Goods?”

*Time:* Wednesday, 7:00–9:00 p.m., Room One (Library),

*Place:* Kinney High School Library, 2710 Kilgore Road, Rancho Cordova.

*Everyone is welcome and all meetings are free.* Cookies and soft drinks.

(September meeting will be September 24; topic to be announced)

### **September 14: AOF Meeting**

*What:* “The Efficacy of Jesus Christ as a Role Model in the 21st Century”

*Speaker:* Richard Kowaleski, facilitator of the Sacramento Skeptics

*Time:* Sunday, 12:00–2:30 p.m.

*Place:* Sierra 2 Community Center, 2791 24th Street, Room 10. (South of Broadway).

Visitors welcome. *Cost:* Free

### **September 2003: Sacramento Skeptics**

*Summer break in June, July, and August, resuming in September.*

*Topic, Time, and Place:* To be announced

For further details, contact Richard Kowaleski at [kowaleski@earthlink.net](mailto:kowaleski@earthlink.net)

© 2003 by Ray Spangenburg and  
Kit Moser. All rights reserved.



*Educating Ourselves  
and Educating Others*

**Sacramento Organization  
for Rational Thinking  
P.O. Box 2215  
Carmichael, CA 95609-2215**

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED