



THE  
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OF THE  
FIRST FRIDAY  
BREAKFAST CLUB, INC.

# First Friday News & Views

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## Wherever The Flag Flies

by Jonathan Wilson

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### CALENDAR

▼ The next FFBC meeting is 7:00 A.M., Friday, June 1 at Hoyt Sherman Place.

Our guest speaker will be Jimmy Creech of Faith in America, Inc.

▼ R.S.V.P. by Tuesday, May 29 to *Jonathan.Wilson@lawiowa.com* or 288-2500 by phone.

Both sides are wrong in the controversy over closing or not closing the prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. As almost everyone in the world knows by now, the US has detained there people designated as Enemy Combatants. It is admitted that the detentions have been protracted and without specific charges being filed against them and without trial before a civil or military tribunal. There is purportedly some dispute over their treatment during the detention, but, given the proven track record of the US at the Abu Ghraib prison and the US complicity in Extraordinary Renditions in extraordinarily flagrant violation of international law, allegations of mistreatment have a certain plausibility to them.

Defining a problem accurately is the first step toward identifying an effective solution. If we misdiagnose the problem, whatever solution is fashioned almost certainly won't do the trick.

Those who want Guantanamo Bay closed seem to think there's a geography problem. As they see it, there's something unique to that particular prison that *is* the problem. Not likely. Indeterminate detention under abusive conditions without charges being filed can happen anywhere. Probably is. The CIA reportedly has secret prisons all over the world, often with the complicity of governments with solid track records for prisoner abuse. Geography is *not* the operative problem at Guantanamo Bay.

“Without judicial review of our government, it's no longer *our* government. Without judicial review of our government, the flag stands for nothing; we stand for nothing.”

Those like the president and attorney general, who want to keep Guantanamo Bay open for business as usual, seem to think that the US status as a tenant there somehow means that inmates can be denied access to US courts to test the legitimacy of their incarceration. Never mind inalienable rights. Never mind habeas corpus. The president and his chief law enforcement officer would rather stand on a pretext manufactured around sovereignty versus a long-term lease, and claim those historic and uniquely American principles are all for naught.

Either position is an embarrassment. The former is an embarrassment because it represents a cosmetic response to a matter of principle. It pretends that closing one site of illegal, unconstitutional conduct does anything to solve the problem of the conduct itself. With countless and undisclosed additional sites around the world, closing one site is meaningless except to lull the public into thinking there's been a solution.

The latter is an embarrassment because it ignores the fundamental human rights upon which our nation was founded, and the human rights quest for which our nation has been a beacon and advocate for more than two centuries. The Declaration of Independence recognized inalienable rights with no qualifier based on whether the government was a landlord or tenant. Our revolutionary underpinnings were then, and remain, revolutionary. In that revolution was born a new nation and a new flag was raised to symbolize the principles upon which that new nation was founded.

We would perhaps do well to be reminded of the last sentence of the Star Spangled Banner. "Oh say does that star spangled banner yet wave o'er the land of the free and the

home of the brave." Whatever the reach of that flag should find defenders of the fundamental human rights that it symbolizes. Wherever it flies, whether over sovereign ground, or a leasehold, the rule of law and accountability of government to an impartial judiciary should go also. No qualifications, no apologies, and no excuses. There must be no imprisonment without habeas corpus, period. There must be no habeas corpus without access to counsel, period. Judicial review of our government must reach Guantanamo Bay and every other known or secret prison around the world. Without judicial review of our government, it's no longer *our* government. Without judicial review of our government, the flag stands for nothing; we stand for nothing.

—Jonathan Wilson

## About Jimmy Creech

**J**immy Creech is the Executive Director of Faith In America, Inc.

([www.faithinamerica.com](http://www.faithinamerica.com)), an organization whose mission is to end bigotry disguised as religious truth and in doing so, ensure full and equal civil rights for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community in America.



A native of Goldsboro, North Carolina, he was an ordained elder in The United Methodist Church from 1970 to 1999. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Biblical Studies from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a Master of Divinity from The Divinity School of Duke University.

In 1965 and 1967, he studied with The Institute for Mediterranean Studies at Hebrew University and Hebrew Union Theological Seminary in Jerusalem, Israel, and at museums and archaeological sites in Israel, Greece, Cyprus, Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. He served as a pastor in churches of The North Carolina Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church from 1970 to 1990.

While at Fairmont United Methodist Church in Raleigh, North Carolina, (1987-1990) he helped to create the Raleigh Religious Network for Gay and Lesbian Equality, an ecumenical group whose pur-

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*You don't stop laughing because you grow old; you grow old because you stop laughing.*

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pose was to publicly counter antigay religious rhetoric with a faithful message of God's love for and inclusion of all persons, regardless of sexual orientation.

Mr. Creech served as the Program Associate with the North Carolina Council of Churches from 1991 to 1996. He was the Council's Legislative Liaison with the North Carolina General Assembly, representing the Council on a broad range of issues including gun control, criminal justice, abolition of the death penalty, health care, AIDS/HIV funding, campaign finance reform, farm workers, children, and the repeal of the Crimes Against Nature (Sodomy) Law. He helped to create and was the first chairperson of The Covenant with North Carolina's Children, a coalition of nonprofit agencies providing services to children. The Covenant represented the interests of children at the North Carolina General Assembly. He also helped to create People of Faith Against the Death Penalty, and served as the chairperson of its Board of Directors. While he was with the North Carolina Council of Churches, the Council voted approval of the membership application of the Gulf Coast District of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, the first state Council of Churches in the United States to do so.

In July of 1996, Mr. Creech was appointed Senior Pastor of First United Methodist Church in Omaha, Nebraska. In March of 1998, he was acquitted in a church trial of a charge of violating the Order and Discipline of the United Methodist



**O**ur May speaker was Richard Leopold, appointed by Gov. Culver at the beginning of this year to be the new Director of Iowa's Department of Natural Resources. The DNR is responsible for maintaining our state parks and forests, protecting the environment, and managing energy, fish, and wildlife, as well as land and water resources in the state.

"I look forward to addressing our state's water quality concerns, working on sustainable expansion of clean, renewable energy for the 21st century, and fighting to secure adequate funding for the protection and enhancement of our natural resources," Rich Leopold remarked on his appointment in January—and he emphasized these three points to his FFBC audience. Although Leopold got a late start at Hoyt Sherman, his presentation was energetic, informed, ambitious, and mutually educational.

The spirit of our times is suddenly environment-friendly again, he said just like the last "green" time 30-40 years ago. He called it a window of opportunity, and he means to make the most of that. On water quality he noted that we've been working since 1985 on the same master plan, and it's time for a new one. There are officially 366 "impaired" water bodies in the state—but the real total is much closer to 1000, when we use realistic criteria for measurement. The keys to energy policy must, of course, be rational transportation, lowering carbon emissions, and rationalizing our transit needs and methods. The means of energy production (extraction methods at the source) are notoriously inefficient and must be improved urgently. As for sustainable funding for natural resources, Leopold's working goal is \$150 million per year for the next 10 years. At question-time, Rich Leopold got an eye-opening experience of our community, and he marveled audibly at the depth and seriousness of members' questions and comments. He also responded smartly and knowledgeably to them all.

Richard Leopold is the executive director of the Iowa Environmental Council, the nonprofit coalition made up of 76 organizations and over 600 individual members working to improve Iowa's natural environment. He has held a variety of

biologist, naturalist, and administrative positions within the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, and the Minnesota and Iowa Departments of Natural Resources. From 1999 to 2002, Leopold served as the coordinator for IOWATER, Iowa's statewide volunteer water-quality monitoring program. He holds degrees in biology from Minnesota State University and Central Lakes College in Brainerd, and a Master's Degree in natural resources ecology and management from Iowa State University. He is active in many conservation organizations, the past chairperson of the Iowa Conservation Education Council and a recipient of the Izaak Walton League of America's National Honor Roll Award.

—Bruce Carr

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*Which God would you kill for?*

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## BRIEFS & SHORTS

Be sure to RSVP for the June 1 meeting no later than May 29 to [JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com](mailto:JonathanWilson@davisbrownlaw.com). He can also be reached by phone at 288-2500. This is the scholarship meeting. The featured speaker will be Jimmy Creech of Faith in America, Inc. Des Moines Mayor Frank Cownie will also be on hand to assist in handing out the scholarship awards. You and your guest(s) won't want to miss this meeting.



Thanks to John Tompkins for introducing our May speaker, Richard Leopold of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.



Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus, Friday, June 8, 2007, 7:30 p.m. at Drake's Sheslow Auditorium. Tickets available from Rick Miller.

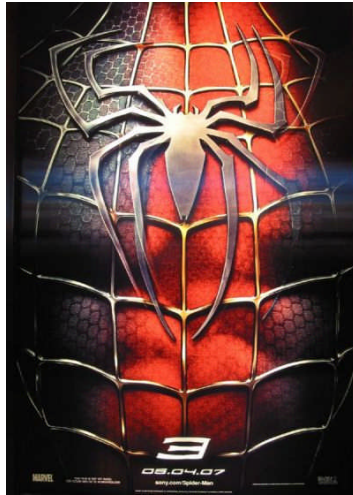


Please consider making a tax-deductible contribution to the FFBC Scholarship Fund. Send your checks to Jonathan Wilson, 666 Walnut Street, Suite 2500, Des Moines, IA 50309. Make the check out to FFBC and write "Scholarship" on the memo line.

## Spiderman 3

Starring Tobey Maguire,  
Kirsten Dunst, Thomas  
Haden Church, Topher  
Grace, and James Franco

Directed by Steve Raimi



The opening credits of **Spiderman 3** cleverly show scenes from the original **Spiderman** and **Spiderman 2** to help bring the viewer to the current time. Peter Parker (Tobey Maguire) is in love. He wants to pop the question, but his Spiderman heroics and his sometimes self-absorption get in the way. Peter really enjoys the idolization of Spiderman by kids and the community.

The object of his love, Mary Jane (Kirsten Dunst), is having her Broadway debut in a musical singing the lyrics, “They say that falling in love is wonderful. Wonderful, so they say.” Peter melts. The Broadway critics, however, aren’t quite as enthused.

And, of course, there’s villainy afoot. It wouldn’t be much of a Spiderman movie if there weren’t. The action sequences are absolutely amazing. The special effects people have now developed a three-dimensional aspect to the animation that is really incredible. For instance, there is a scene where Spiderman is holding on to a wall as it tumbles 30 stories to the ground. As it is tumbling Spiderman continues to crawl over it. The movement of the bodies of the characters, coupled with the animation, is a wonder of modern film achievement. Breathtaking.

Some of the reviewers have criticized the movie for having too many villains. My God, there are only three! I didn’t find it confusing at all. One of them is a real doozy. Flint Marko (Thomas Haden Church), whom some may remember as the irresponsible buddy in **Sideways**, is an escaped convict who is accidentally caught in a scientific experiment demolecularizing material. There is a great scene where we see Flint Marko’s body slowly dissolve away, i.e. demolecularize. But then he is able to reconstitute his shape from the sand and he becomes the Sandman. His size can vary depending on how much sand is available, and he can also just fly off, dissolved in a sandstorm. Sandman presents

difficulty for a hero to dispatch. If the hero slugs Sandman, the hero’s hand just goes through Sandman’s body, unaffected him. Sandman also has a complicated background. He had been incarcerated because he robbed someone, but it was in order to get money for his ailing daughter. Things went bad; someone was killed. At one point Sandman explains, “I am not a bad person, I just had bad luck!”

The one uniqueness of Spiderman films is that the hero and the villains all have both good and bad sides. This aspect is emphasized in this film when a black substance crawls out of a meteor onto Peter’s bicycle. Peter takes the substance to one of his professors for analysis. It turns out to be some kind of symbiont, and in order for it to survive, it needs to latch onto a host. The professor explains that if the symbiont attaches itself to a host, “It amplifies the characteristics of the host—especially aggression!” When it attaches to Spiderman, he is transformed into black Spiderman.

One of the central themes of the film is that extreme forms of revenge, when undertaken based on inaccurate beliefs, lead to extremely negative consequences. And what could be more apropos for today?!

Enjoy the adventure. Remember the message.

—Gary Kaufman

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*If you want a nation ruled by religion, move to Iran.*

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## A Thought on Hate Crimes

The US Senate is considering the addition of sexual orientation to federal hate crimes legislation. Again can be heard the hollow claim that the harm of the crime (homicide, assault, beating, etc.) is done regardless, so the legislation shouldn’t be passed. Problem is that culpability for injury to others has always turned on the perpetrator’s motive. That’s why there are degrees of murder and, in some cases, like self-defense and insanity, a homicide is not a crime at all.

Just as beauty is in the beholder’s eye, criminal culpability is fixed more by what the perpetrator was thinking than the immediate victim’s injury. When a crime is committed against a person because of some characteristic of the victim, all who share that characteristic are victimized. ▼

Church because he celebrated a covenant ceremony for two women in September of 1997.

When the Nebraska bishop would not allow him to continue as the Senior Pastor at First United Methodist Church, Omaha, Mr. Creech took a voluntary leave of absence from pastoral ministry within The United Methodist Church and returned to his home in Raleigh, North Carolina, in June of 1998.

In April of 1999, Mr. Creech celebrated the holy union of two men in Chapel Hill, NC. Charges were brought against him and a church trial was held in Grand Island, Nebraska, on November 17, 1999. The jury declared Mr. Creech guilty of “disobedience to the Order and Discipline of The United Methodist Church” and withdrew his credentials of ordination.

Since the summer of 1998, Mr. Creech has been traveling around the country preaching in churches and speaking on college and university campuses, as well as to various community and national Gay Rights organizations. He recently completed writing a book, entitled Adam’s Gift, about his experience with the Church’s struggle to welcome and accept lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons. His book has been submitted for publication.

Mr. Creech has been active in the following organizations: **Raleigh HIV/AIDS Support Group** (co-leader, 1990-96 and 1998 to present); **The Methodist Federation for Social Action**; **The Raleigh Religious Network for Gay and Lesbian Equality** (a founder and former convener); **AIDS Service Agency for Wake County (NC)** (former vice-chairperson and chairperson of the board); **The North Carolina Pride Political Action Committee** (charter board member); **The Reconciling Congregation Program**, a program related to United Methodist Church that works with local churches to help them become open to and accepting of gay, lesbian, transsexual and bisexual persons, now called The Reconciling Ministries Network (former national board member); **North Carolinians Against the Death Penalty** (former chairperson and board member); **People of Faith Against the Death Penalty (NC)** (a founder, former chairperson and board member); **North Carolina Low Income Housing Coalition** (former board member); **The Covenant with North Carolinas Children** (a founder, former board member and chairperson; a coalition of organizations advocating for the interest of children in the North Carolina General Assembly); **The Omaha Faith Committee of Nebraskans Against the Death Penalty** (former board member);

**Soulforce, Inc.** (an interreligious movement using the principles of nonviolent resistance, taught and practiced by Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., to confront the spiritual violence perpetrated against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons by religious institutions; former board chairperson.) and, **North Carolina Religious Coalition for Marriage Equality** (founding member).

Mr. Creech has received the following awards and recognition: **The 1990 Lee and Mae Ball Award** presented by The Methodist Federation for Social Action for outstanding Christian social witness; **The 1990 North Carolinians Against Racist and Religious Violence Award** for outstanding leadership in the struggle against hate activity in North Carolina; **The 1997 Paul Green Award** presented by the **North Carolina American Civil Liberties Union** for his work to abolish the death penalty in North Carolina; **The Triangle (NC) Business and Professional Guild Award** (1997) for advocacy on behalf of gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender persons; **The Heart of Freedom Award** (1998) presented by ANGLE/Omaha (Achieving New Gay, Lesbian, Bi and Transgender Endeavors); **The 1998 North Carolina Pride Inc. Award**; **1998 Saint Award** presented by Metropolitan Community Church, San Francisco; selected as one of OUT Magazine’s 100 in 1998 and 1999; **The Human Rights Campaign Equality Award**, 1999; **The American People Award** (1999) presented by People for the American Way “for challenging bigotry and promoting tolerance within the church”; **1999 Dignity Award presented by the Council of Churches**, Santa Clara County, California; **1999 Pride Interfaith Coalition Award**, Boston, Massachusetts; **The Year 2000 Flagbearer Award presented by PFLAG National**; **Triangle Community Service Award 2000: Straight Ally of the Year** presented by the Triangle (NC) Business and Professional Guild; and, Honored by The Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry and Pacific School for Religion as “**A Leading Voice**” for **Commitment to the Struggle of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People for Honor and Dignity**, presented on April 19, 2001. ▼

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*Of course it hurts; you’ve given yourself over to an elephant.*

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# FFBC

## First Friday News & Views

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## JUNE 2007

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## From the Editor

# It

happens to all of us regularly. Someone will say or do something that we find annoying, but we pass it off and go on about our business. The offender may be someone we know or don't know. It doesn't really matter who. I would guess that we all have our favorite annoyances. Here are some of mine:

WHO TV News is one of the biggest offenders. After the recent, deplorable shootings at Virginia Tech, Erin Kiernan just couldn't wait to tell us it was the worst mass killing in U.S. history. Well, it wasn't. Obviously, no one at that news station bothered to look at the sickening events perpetrated by our own government in the nineteenth century against Native Americans or the wholesale slaughter of 120 peaceful immigrants at Mountain Meadows, Utah, committed by none other than members of the Mormon religion. Even after articles appeared in the newspaper pointing out that the terrible murders at Virginia Tech were not the worst ever, Ms. Kiernan and her cohorts persisted. Also, they tout themselves as the best local newscast in the country. Says who?

And that brings me to the sad situation of the media in this country. Unfortunately, it is not enough to report events. So-called "reporters" are sent to discover related stories, inventing "news" as they go along. We have nothing in this country that compares with the accuracy of the BBC. Even public radio and television are driven by the Almighty Dollar. I long for the likes of Walter Cronkite.

Another annoyance—and this is strictly personal—is people who wear American flag pins in their lapels. It has been my experience that those who flaunt their "patriotism" in such a flagrant manner are usually the most close-minded and illogical people. If you doubt me, just take a look at George W. Bush or Dick Cheney the next time you see them on television. That should be enough to convince you. The irony is that these people would be the first to support a law that "protects" the flag, yet by wearing these flag pins, they desecrate by caricature the very flag they propose to "protect."

People who talk or otherwise fidget during concerts, movies, or theatrical performances are extremely annoying. On the stage, Katharine Hepburn once stopped a performance of her musical, *Coco*, when an audience member snapped a flash photograph. The star walked to the footlights, called the offender a "pig" and said her concentration was broken. She then instructed the orchestra conductor to start the show all over. Good for Kate!

Loud, smoky bars are annoying. I like to go to Buddy's in the afternoon and play the game shows with a group of regulars who enjoy pitting their knowledge against those on television. If we're lucky, the bar at that time of day will be fairly empty, but occasionally people show up who smoke prodigiously and scream over the loud music they insist on playing at four o'clock in the afternoon. As a former smoker, I have less trouble with that than with the din caused by loud music and harsh voices.

Noel Coward once said, "I like long walks, especially when they are taken by people who annoy me." I couldn't agree more.

—Steve Person