NOVEMBER 1, 2009 THESKEPTICARENA.COM

AMERICANS WHO DON'T IDENTIFY WITH A RELIGION NO LONGER A FRINGE GROUP

AMERICAN NONBELIEVERS: THE PROFILE OF THE NO RELIGION POPULATION

"NONBELIEVERS" NOW LARGELY MIRROR MAINSTREAM AMERICA

THE 34 MILLION AMERICAN ADULTS WHO DON'T IDENTIFY WITH ANY PARTICULAR RELIGIOUS GROUP REFLECT THE GENERAL POPULATION IN TERMS OF MARITAL STATUS, EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT, RACIAL AND ETHNIC MAKEUP, AND INCOME, ACCORDING TO A NEW STUDY BY TRINITY COLLEGE RESEARCHERS, AMERICAN NONBELIEVERS: THE PROFILE OF THE NO RELIGION POPULATION.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

•THE 1990S WAS THE DECADE WHEN THE "SECULAR BOOM" OCCURRED - EACH YEAR 1.3 MILLION MORE ADULT AMERICANS JOINED THE RANKS OF THE NONBELIEVERS. SINCE 2001 THE ANNUAL INCREASE HAS HALVED TO 660,000 A YEAR.

•WHEREAS NONBELIEVERS ARE PRESENTLY 15% OF THE TOTAL ADULT U.S. POPULATION, 22% OF AMERICANS AGED 18-29 YEARS SELF-IDENTIFY AS NONBELIEVERS.

•IN TERMS OF BELONGING (SELF-IDENTIFICATION) 1 IN 6 AMERICANS IS PRESENTLY OF NO RELIGION, WHILE IN TERMS OF BELIEF AND BEHAVIOR THE RATIO IS HIGHER AROUND 1 IN 4.

•REGARDING BELIEF IN THE DIVINE, MOST NONBELIEVERS ARE NEITHER ATHEISTS NOR THEISTS BUT RATHER AGNOSTICS AND DEISTS (59%) AND PERHAPS BEST DESCRIBED AS SKEPTICS.

•THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE RELIGIOUS AND NON-RELIGIOUS POPULATIONS IS A GENDER GAP.

•WHEREAS 19% OF AMERICAN MEN ARE NONBELIEVERS ONLY 12% OF AMERICAN WOMEN ARE NONBELIEVERS.

•THE GENDER RATIO AMONG NONBELIEVERS IS 60 MALES FOR EVERY 40 FEMALES.

•WOMEN ARE LESS LIKELY TO SWITCH OUT OF RELIGION THAN MEN.

•WOMEN ARE ALSO LESS LIKELY TO STAY NON-RELIGIOUS WHEN THEY ARE BORN AND RAISED IN A NON-RELIGIOUS FAMILY.

•MOST NONBELIEVERS ARE 1ST GENERATION - ONLY 32% OF "CURRENT" NONBELIEVERS REPORT THEY WERE NONE AT AGE 12.

•24% OF CURRENT NONBELIEVERS (AND 35% OF 1ST GENERATION OR "NEW" NONBELIEVERS) ARE FORMER CATHOLICS.

•GEOGRAPHY REMAINS A FACTOR - MORE THAN 1 IN 5 PEOPLE IN CERTAIN REGIONS (THE WEST, NEW ENGLAND) ARE NONBELIEVERS.

•CLASS IS NOT A DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTIC: NONBELIEVERS ARE NOT DIFFERENT FROM THE GENERAL POPULATION BY EDUCATION OR INCOME.

•RACE IS A DECLINING FACTOR IN DIFFERENTIATING NONBELIEVERS. LATINOS HAVE TRIPLED THEIR PROPORTION AMONG NONBELIEVERS FROM 1990-2008 FROM 4% TO 12%.

•THE ETHNIC/RACIAL PROFILE OF NONBELIEVERS SHOWS ASIANS, IRISH AND JEWS ARE THE MOST SECULARIZED ETHNIC ORIGIN GROUPS. ONE-THIRD OF THE NONBELIEVERS CLAIM IRISH ANCESTRY.

•NONBELIEVERS ARE MUCH MORE LIKELY TO BELIEVE IN HUMAN EVOLUTION (61%) THAN THE GENERAL AMERICAN PUBLIC (38%).

•POLITICALLY, 21% OF THE NATION'S INDEPENDENTS ARE NONBELIEVERS, AS ARE 16% OF DEMOCRATS AND 8% OF REPUBLICANS. IN 1990, 12% OF INDEPENDENTS WERE NONBELIEVERS, AS WERE 6% OF DEMOCRATS AND 6% OF REPUBLICANS.

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THE SCIENCE SEGMENT

(NOTE: THIS STORY WAS PRINTED BEFORE AMERICA CRASHED A FUEL MODULE AND A SATELLITE ON THE MOON, WHICH ARE EXPECTED TO PROVIDE CONFIRMATION OF THE EXHUBERANCE EXPRESSED IN THIS ARTICLE).

HAS WATER BEEN FOUND ON THE MOON?

SINCE MAN FIRST TOUCHED THE MOON AND BROUGHT PIECES OF IT BACK TO EARTH, SCIENTISTS HAVE THOUGHT THAT THE LUNAR SURFACE WAS BONE DRY. BUT NEW OBSERVATIONS FROM THREE DIFFERENT SPACECRAFT HAVE PUT THIS NOTION TO REST WITH WHAT HAS BEEN CALLED "UNAMBIGUOUS EVIDENCE" OF WATER ACROSS THE SURFACE OF THE MOON.

THE NEW FINDINGS, DETAILED IN THE SEPT. 25 ISSUE OF THE JOURNAL SCIENCE, COME IN THE WAKE OF FURTHER EVIDENCE OF LUNAR POLAR WATER ICE BY NASA'S LUNAR RECONNAISSANCE ORBITER AND JUST WEEKS BEFORE THE PLANNED LUNAR IMPACT OF NASA'S LCROSS SATELLITE, WHICH WILL HIT ONE OF THE PERMANENTLY SHADOWED CRATERS AT THE MOON'S SOUTH POLE IN HOPE OF CHURNING UP EVIDENCE OF WATER ICE DEPOSITS IN THE DEBRIS FIELD.

THE MOON REMAINS DRIER THAN ANY DESERT ON EARTH, BUT THE WATER IS SAID TO EXIST ON THE MOON IN VERY SMALL QUANTITIES. FINDING WATER ON THE MOON WOULD BE A BOON TO POSSIBLE FUTURE LUNAR BASES, ACTING AS A POTENTIAL SOURCE OF DRINKING WATER AND FUEL.

APOLLO TURNS UP DRY

WHEN APOLLO ASTRONAUTS RETURNED FROM THE MOON 40 YEARS AGO, THEY BROUGHT BACK SEVERAL SAMPLES OF LUNAR ROCKS.

THE MOON ROCKS WERE ANALYZED FOR SIGNS OF WATER BOUND TO MINERALS PRESENT IN THE ROCKS; WHILE TRACE AMOUNTS OF WATER WERE DETECTED, THESE WERE ASSUMED TO BE CONTAMINATION FROM EARTH, BECAUSE THE CONTAINERS THE ROCKS CAME BACK IN HAD LEAKED.

"THE ISOTOPES OF OXYGEN THAT EXIST ON THE MOON ARE THE SAME AS THOSE THAT EXIST ON EARTH, SO IT WAS DIFFICULT IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE TO TELL THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WATER FROM THE MOON AND WATER FROM EARTH," SAID LARRY TAYLOR OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, KNOXVILLE, WHO IS A MEMBER OF ONE OF THE NASA-BUILT INSTRUMENT TEAMS FOR INDIA'S CHANDRAYAAN-1 SATELLITE AND HAS STUDIED THE MOON SINCE THE APOLLO MISSIONS.

WHILE SCIENTISTS CONTINUED TO SUSPECT THAT WATER ICE DEPOSITS COULD BE FOUND IN THE COLDEST SPOTS OF SOUTH POLE CRATERS THAT NEVER SAW SUNLIGHT, THE CONSENSUS BECAME THAT THE REST OF THE MOON WAS BONE DRY.

BUT NEW OBSERVATIONS OF THE LUNAR SURFACE MADE WITH CHANDRAYAAN-1, NASA'S CASSINI SPACECRAFT, AND NASA'S DEEP IMPACT PROBE, ARE CALLING THAT CONSENSUS INTO QUESTION, WITH MULTIPLE DETECTIONS OF THE SPECTRAL SIGNAL OF EITHER WATER OR THE HYDROXYL GROUP (AN OXYGEN AND HYDROGEN CHEMICALLY BONDED).

THREE SPACECRAFT

CHANDRAYAAN-1, INDIA'S FIRST-EVER MOON PROBE, WAS AIMED AT MAPPING THE LUNAR SURFACE AND DETERMINING ITS MINERAL COMPOSITION (THE ORBITER'S MISSION ENDED 14 MONTHS PREMATURELY IN AUGUST AFTER AN ABRUPT MALFUNCTION). WHILE THE PROBE WAS STILL ACTIVE, ITS NASA-BUILT MOON MINERALOGY MAPPER (M3) DETECTED WAVELENGTHS OF LIGHT REFLECTED OFF THE SURFACE THAT INDICATED THE CHEMICAL BOND BETWEEN HYDROGEN AND OXYGEN — THE TELLTALE SIGN OF EITHER WATER OR HYDROXYL.

BECAUSE M3 CAN ONLY PENETRATE THE TOP FEW MILLIMETERS OF LUNAR REGOLITH, THE NEWLY OBSERVED WATER SEEMS TO BE AT OR NEAR THE LUNAR SURFACE. M3'S OBSERVATIONS ALSO SHOWED THAT THE WATER SIGNAL GOT STRONGER TOWARD THE POLAR REGIONS.

CASSINI, WHICH PASSED BY THE MOON IN 1999 ON ITS WAY TO SATURN, PROVIDES CONFIRMATION OF THIS SIGNAL WITH ITS OWN SLIGHTLY STRONGER DETECTION OF THE WATER/HYDROXYL SIGNAL. THE WATER WOULD HAVE TO BE ABSORBED OR TRAPPED IN THE GLASS AND MINERALS AT THE LUNAR SURFACE, WROTE ROGER CLARK OF THE U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY IN THE STUDY DETAILING CASSINI'S FINDINGS.

THE CASSINI DATA SHOWS A GLOBAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE WATER SIGNAL, THOUGH IT ALSO APPEARS STRONGER NEAR THE POLES (AND LOW IN THE LUNAR MARIA).

FINALLY, THE DEEP IMPACT SPACECRAFT, AS PART OF ITS EXTENDED EPOXI MISSION AND AT THE REQUEST OF THE M3 TEAM, MADE INFRARED DETECTIONS OF WATER AND HYDROXYL AS PART OF A CALIBRATION EXERCISE DURING SEVERAL CLOSE APPROACHES OF THE EARTH-MOON SYSTEM EN ROUTE TO ITS PLANNED FLYBY OF COMET 103P/HARTLEY 2 IN NOVEMBER 2010.

DEEP IMPACT DETECTED THE SIGNAL AT ALL LATITUDES ABOVE 10 DEGREES N, THOUGH ONCE AGAIN, THE POLES SHOWED THE STRONGEST SIGNALS. WITH ITS MULTIPLE PASSES, DEEP IMPACT WAS ABLE TO OBSERVE THE SAME REGIONS AT DIFFERENT TIMES OF THE LUNAR DAY. AT NOON, WHEN THE SUN'S RAYS WERE STRONGEST, THE WATER FEATURE WAS LOWEST, WHILE IN THE MORNING, THE FEATURE WAS STRONGER.

"THE DEEP IMPACT OBSERVATIONS OF THE MOON NOT ONLY UNEQUIVOCALLY CONFIRM THE PRESENCE OF [WATER/HYDROXYL] ON THE LUNAR SURFACE, BUT ALSO REVEAL THAT THE ENTIRE LUNAR SURFACE IS HYDRATED DURING AT LEAST SOME PORTION OF THE LUNAR DAY," THE AUTHORS WROTE IN THEIR STUDY.

THE FINDINGS OF ALL THREE SPACECRAFT "PROVIDE UNAMBIGUOUS EVIDENCE FOR THE PRESENCE OF HYDROXYL OR WATER," SAID PAUL LACEY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII IN AN OPINION ESSAY ACCOMPANYING THE THREE STUDIES. LACEY WAS NOT INVOLVED IN ANY OF THE MISSIONS.

THE NEW DATA "PROMPT A CRITICAL REEXAMINATION OF THE NOTION THAT THE MOON IS DRY. IT IS NOT," LACEY WROTE.

WHERE THE WATER COMES FROM

COMBINED, THE FINDINGS SHOW THAT NOT ONLY IS THE MOON HYDRATED, THE PROCESS THAT MAKES IT SO IS A DYNAMIC ONE THAT IS DRIVEN BY THE DAILY CHANGES IN SOLAR RADIATION HITTING ANY GIVEN SPOT ON THE SURFACE.

THE SUN MIGHT ALSO HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH HOW THE WATER GOT THERE.

THERE ARE POTENTIALLY TWO TYPES OF WATER ON THE MOON: THAT BROUGHT FROM OUTSIDE SOURCES, SUCH AS WATER-BEARING COMETS STRIKING THE SURFACE, OR THAT THAT ORIGINATES ON THE MOON.

THIS SECOND, ENDOGENIC, SOURCE IS THOUGHT TO POSSIBLY COME FROM THE INTERACTION OF THE SOLAR WIND WITH MOON ROCKS AND SOILS.

THE ROCKS AND REGOLITH THAT MAKE UP THE LUNAR SURFACE ARE ABOUT 45 PERCENT OXYGEN (COMBINED WITH OTHER ELEMENTS AS MOSTLY SILICATE MINERALS). THE SOLAR WIND — THE CONSTANT STREAM OF CHARGED PARTICLES EMITTED BY THE SUN — ARE MOSTLY PROTONS, OR POSITIVELY CHARGED HYDROGEN ATOMS.

IF THE CHARGED HYDROGENS, WHICH ARE TRAVELING AT ONE-THIRD THE SPEED OF LIGHT, HIT THE LUNAR SURFACE WITH ENOUGH FORCE, THEY BREAK APART OXYGEN BONDS IN SOIL MATERIALS, TAYLOR, THE M3 TEAM MEMBER SUSPECTS. WHERE FREE OXYGEN AND HYDROGEN EXIST, THERE IS A HIGH CHANCE THAT TRACE AMOUNTS OF WATER WILL FORM.

THE VARIOUS STUDY RESEARCHERS ALSO SUGGEST THAT THE DAILY DEHYDRATION AND REHYDRATION OF THE TRACE WATER ACROSS THE SURFACE COULD LEAD TO THE MIGRATION OF HYDROXYL AND HYDROGEN TOWARDS THE POLES WHERE IT CAN ACCUMULATE IN THE COLD TRAPS OF THE PERMANENTLY SHADOWED REGIONS.

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ABROAD

EGYPT ANGER OVER VIRGINITY FAKING

A LEADING EGYPTIAN SCHOLAR HAS DEMANDED THAT PEOPLE CAUGHT IMPORTING A FEMALE VIRGINITY-FAKING DEVICE INTO THE COUNTRY SHOULD FACE THE DEATH PENALTY.

(NEO: HOW BRAIN-DEAD DO YOU HAVE TO BE TO REQUIRE CAPITAL PUNISHMENT FOR THAT "CRIME"?).

ABDUL MOUTI BAYOUMI SAID SUPPLYING THE ITEM WAS AKIN TO SPREADING VICE IN SOCIETY, A CRIME PUNISHABLE BY DEATH IN ISLAMIC SHARIA LAW.

(NEO: WHICH IS WHY WE ALL NEED TO SHIFT OVER TO SHARIA LAW AS SOON AS POSSIBLE).

THE DEVICE IS SAID TO RELEASE LIQUID IMITATING BLOOD, ALLOWING A FEMALE TO FEIGN VIRGINITY ON HER WEDDING NIGHT.

(NEO: WHAT IS THE PUNISHMENT FOR FAKING AN ORGASM?).

THERE IS A STIGMA ABOUT PRE-MARITAL SEX IN CONSERVATIVE ARAB SOCIETIES.

(NEO: ONLY FOR WOMEN. THEIR "CONSERVATISM" DOESN'T EXTEND TO MEN).

THE CONTRAPTION IS SEEN AS A CHEAP AND SIMPLE ALTERNATIVE TO HYMEN REPAIR SURGERY, WHICH IS CARRIED OUT IN SECRET BY SOME CLINICS IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

IT IS PRODUCED IN CHINA AND HAS ALREADY BECOME AVAILABLE IN OTHER PARTS OF THE ARAB WORLD.

THE DEVICE IS REPORTED TO BE ON SALE IN SYRIA FOR $15.

PROFESSOR BAYOUMI, A SCHOLAR AT THE PRESTIGIOUS AL-AZHAR UNIVERSITY, SAID IT UNDERMINED THE MORAL DETERRENT OF FORNICATION, WHICH HE DESCRIBED AS A CRIME AND ONE OF THE CARDINAL SINS IN ISLAM.

(NEO: AGAIN - ONLY FOR WOMEN).

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT IN EGYPT HAVE ALSO CALLED FOR BANNING IMPORT OF THE ITEM.

(NEO: THOSE HAVE TO BE THE MOST IGNORANT, IMMATURE, INSECURE MEN ON THE PLANET. OKAY, WHILE I'M AT IT - LET'S THROW IN THOUSANDS OF YEARS BEHIND MODERN CIVILIZATION TOO).

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TARGET CRITICIZED FOR 'ILLEGAL ALIEN' COSTUME

TARGET CORP. APOLOGIZED FRIDAY AFTER COMING UNDER FIRE FROM CUSTOMERS AND SOME HISPANIC GROUPS FOR SELLING AN "ILLEGAL ALIEN" HALLOWEEN COSTUME ON ITS WEBSITE. THE $39.99 COSTUME COMES WITH A SPACE ALIEN MASK, AN ORANGE JAIL SUIT WITH "ILLEGAL ALIEN" STAMPED ON THE CHEST AND A LARGE "GREEN CARD." THE MINNEAPOLIS RETAILER SAID THE COSTUME WAS ADDED TO ITS WEBSITE BY MISTAKE AND SAID IT WOULD BE REMOVED.

"IT'S INSENSITIVE, IT'S OFFENSIVE," SAID VICKI ADAME, A CALIFORNIA MEDIA RELATIONS CONSULTANT WHO COMPLAINED TO TARGET AFTER LEARNING ABOUT THE COSTUME ON A FACEBOOK SITE, "WISE LATINAS LINKED," WHICH LISTS 2,200 MEMBERS. "IMMIGRATION IS SUCH A HOT-BUTTON ISSUE. WHY IS TARGET FUELING THAT FIRE?"

LIZETTE OLMOS, NATIONAL COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR FOR THE LEAGUE OF UNITED LATIN AMERICAN CITIZENS, SAID THE WASHINGTON-BASED ORGANIZATION WILL FORMALLY COMPLAIN TO TARGET.

"IT'S REALLY DISTURBING," OLMOS SAID. BESIDES THE COMPLAINT ABOUT TARGET, THE ORGANIZATION HAS RECEIVED A NUMBER OF OTHERS THIS YEAR ABOUT COSTUMES THAT SHE SAID ARE RACIST AND DEGRADING.

TARGET SPOKESMAN JOSHUA THOMAS SAID THE ITEM WAS PUT ON ITS WEBSITE BY MISTAKE WHEN AN EMPLOYEE ENTERED A WRONG NUMBER INTO THE SYSTEM. TARGET HAS A STRICT REVIEW PROCESS WITH ITS VENDORS, HE SAID. "WE APOLOGIZE. THIS WAS NEVER INTENDED TO BE PART OF OUR ASSORTMENT. WE ARE MOVING AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE TO REMOVE IT FROM OUR WEBSITE."

TARGET STARTED GETTING COMPLAINTS THURSDAY AFTERNOON, THOMAS SAID, BUT THE COSTUME WAS STILL ONLINE FRIDAY EVENING. TARGET'S WEBSITE IS MANAGED BY AMAZON.COM, AND THOMAS SAID IT COULD TAKE AS LONG AS 48 HOURS TO TAKE IT DOWN.

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FAMOUS QUOTES

TITUS LUCRETIUS CARUS (CA. 99 BC- CA. 55 BC) 44 YEARS.

HE WAS A ROMAN POET AND PHILOSOPHER. HIS ONLY KNOWN WORK IS THE EPIC PHILOSOPHICAL POEM, TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH AS "ON THE NATURE OF THINGS" OR "ON THE NATURE OF THE UNIVERSE."

"NATURE FREE AT ONCE AND RID OF HER HAUGHTY LORDS

IS SEEN TO DO ALL THINGS SPONTANEOUSLY OF HERSELF WITHOUT THE MEDDLING OF THE GODS."

(NEO: THIS WAS 2,000 YEARS AGO. THIS GUY COULDN'T EVEN PASS A MODERN THIRD-GRADE PROFICIENCY TEST ... AND EVEN HE FIGURED IT OUT).