

FREETHOUGHT TODAY



Chris Cameron:
A history of
Black secularism

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**Grad student
essay winners
announced**

PAGES 16-22



***E pluribus unum*
or survival of
the fittest?**

PAGE 23

Vol. 39 No. 1

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January-February 2022

FFRF gets legal, historian support in prayer case

The Freedom From Religion Foundation has received briefing support from Americans United for Separation of Church and State on behalf of 13 well-known historians and legal scholars in its federal lawsuit against a praying Texas judge.

On behalf of “John Roe,” the national state/church watchdog filed suit against Montgomery County Justice of the Peace Wayne Mack for opening each of his court sessions with clergy-led prayer.

FFRF welcomes the amicus brief in support of FFRF and its plaintiff, an attorney who regularly practiced in Mack’s court and objects to the courtroom-prayer practice.

Mack, a formerly ordained minister who attended Jackson College of Ministries, made the unprecedented decision to solicit chaplains to open his court sessions with prayer, a practice not replicated by any other court in the country.



Wayne Mack

Mack’s bailiff announced the prayers, saying that anyone could leave during the prayer, but then locking the courtroom doors. Mack entered, talked about his chaplaincy program, introduced a chaplain, and gave the name and location of the chaplain’s church. While everyone in the courtroom remained standing, the chaplain, who was almost always Christian, delivered a prayer, with no guidelines regarding permissible content. Attend-

See *Prayer* on page 6

SPECIAL REPORT



Photo by Win McNamee for Getty Images

Christian nationalism was on full display at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

Christian nationalism and Jan. 6

The Freedom From Religion Foundation and the Baptist Joint Committee for Religious Liberty have together published “Christian Nationalism and the January 6, 2021, Insurrection,” a comprehensive report of how Christian nationalism played an integral role in last year’s Capitol insurrection.

“Even with the voluminous coverage of the events of Jan. 6, 2021, one area that has not yet been studied enough is the role that Christian nationalism played in bolstering, justifying and intensifying the attack on the U.S. Capitol,” writes Amanda Tyler, executive director of the Baptist Joint Committee.

The full report will be available in February.

“Drawing on reporting, videos, statements and images from the attack and its precursor events, this report contains the most comprehensive account of Christian nationalism and its role in the Jan. 6 insurrection,” Tyler writes.

The contributors include Tyler; Andrew Whitehead and Sam Perry, authors of *Taking America Back for God: Christian*

Nationalism in the United States; Katherine Stewart, author of *The Power Worshipers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism*; Dr. Jemar Tisby, author of *The Color of Compromise*; and Andrew L. Seidel, director of strategic response at FFRF and author of *The Founding Myth: Why Christian Nationalism is Un-American*, which was just released in paperback with a new epilogue that’s about Jan. 6.

The report includes an overview of Christian nationalist demographics and statistics, and a look at who is behind the network of money and power that support Christian nationalism. The bulk of the report includes the evidence compiled by Seidel. It concludes with potential solutions of how to combat Christian nationalism.

“The scale and severity of the Jan. 6 attack warrant a dedicated report of this kind.”

See pages 14-15 for photos and excerpts from the report.

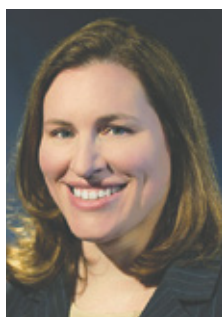
FFRF’s legal department kept busy in 2021

By Rebecca Markert

The legal department at FFRF has been working tirelessly to protect the wall of separation and to represent nonbelievers at every turn.

There’s been a lot of work this past year. It feels like it’s been nonstop: from continuing violations stemming from the Covid-19 pandemic to dealing with a new ultraconservative U.S. Supreme Court taking more and more cases with an increased interest in religious liberty.

I would like to thank our amazing legal



Rebecca Markert

department staff. Our attorneys and assistants weren’t just working remotely half of last year — they were at home during a global health crisis. They deserve kudos for rolling with the punches.

Here are some of our notable achievements from 2021.

Court victories

In the past year, FFRF filed one new lawsuit, and has five ongoing cases. Two we have won, but they’re on appeal. We also closed one case permanently, a victory for FFRF.

Cragun v. Merrill

Victory! FFRF represented four Alabama residents who filed suit in the U.S. District for the Northern District of Alabama on Oct. 1, 2020, challenging a reli-

See *Legal* on page 3

2021 top issue areas

1. Schools
2. Social media
3. Government prayer
4. Elections
5. Government funding to religion
6. Religious displays
7. Chaplains
8. (tie) National Day of Prayer
8. (tie) Faith-based organizations

IN MEMORIAM

Constance Seward protected animals

FFRF Member Constance J. Seward, 72, of Columbus, Ind., died Oct. 1, 2021, at her home.

Constance was born in Columbus on Jan. 7, 1949, the second daughter born to Tom and Frances Seward.

Constance dedicated her life to protecting animals; she fostered hundreds of pets and found forever homes for them.

FFRF is grateful to be notified that she has remembered FFRF in her estate planning with a generous gift.



Constance Seward

'Uncle Bill' Jedrzenski dies at 89



Bill Jedrzenski

FFRF Member William "Uncle Bill" J. Jedrzenski, 89, died Nov. 8, 2021.

He was born in Dudley, Mass., son of the late John C. Jedrzenski and Josephine H. (Duszlak) Jedrzenski. He was a U.S. Navy veteran. Bill worked for Jamesbury and Microtech in Worcester, Mass., as a machinist for many years. His talents were numerous — he would be the go-to person for any information one may need for repair or life in general.

Bill was a great storyteller and loved sharing his vast knowledge with friends and family. He enjoyed reading, fishing, hunting, motorcycle riding, magic, the outdoors and nature, from insects to animals. Bill was everyone's "Uncle Bill"! He was an extraordinary, brilliant and caring person.

Richard Prosser led Junior State of America

Richard Thomas Prosser, 75, died on May 26, 2021. He was born on April 6, 1946, in Fort Collins, Colo., to Helene and Carl Prosser. He received a bachelor's degree in journalism from Sacramento State and a master's degree in mass communications from San Jose State. He was executive director of Junior State of America from 1969–2007, transforming it from a little-know Northern California program into a nationwide educational institution impacting tens of thousands of students.

He was a passionate and effective advocate for nonpartisan civic education and a



Richard Prosser

steadfast believer in young people's agency and the student-run nature of JSA.

OVERHEARD

Those who have accused right-wing justices of seeking to impose one strain of Christian doctrine on the rest of the country sadly have been proved correct.

Jennifer Rubin, in her column "The Supreme Court faces an existential crisis of legitimacy" following the oral arguments regarding Mississippi's abortion law.

Washington Post, 12-3-21

We believe in the separation of church and state because it requires religions to obey laws enacted by the state instead of allowing religions to hold everyone to their own religious laws.

... Whether it leads to theocracy or balkanization, the creeping fusion of church and state is disastrous for the public good.

Attorney Marci A. Hamilton, author of *God vs. the Gavel*, and law professor Leslie C. Griffin, in their op-ed "Why we still like separation of church and state."

Verdict.com, 12-13-21



Jeff T. Green

I believe the church is actively and currently doing harm in the world. The church leadership is not honest about its history, its finances, and its advocacy. I believe the Mormon church has hindered global progress in women's rights, civil rights and racial equality, and LGBTQ+ rights.

Billionaire Jeff T. Green, the wealthiest person in Utah, in his resignation letter from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

Salt Lake Tribune, 12-20-21

I refuse to be anti-gay. I refuse to be anti-feminist. I refuse to be anti-artificial birth control.

Anne Rice, who died Dec. 11, 2021, writing in 2010 when she announced she was no longer a Christian.

Associated Press, 12-13-21

Call me one of the intolerant. That's what I am. I will not coddle willful ignorance anymore. I will not indulge the fool's errand of 'I'm still doing my own research' anymore, either. ... I am furious at the unvaccinated, and I am not ashamed of disclosing that. I am no longer trying to understand them or educate them.

Charles Blow, in his op-ed, "I'm furious at the unvaccinated."

The New York Times, 12-8-21

Even if courts were to interpret that law as being enforceable, as attorney general, I would not use the resources of the Wisconsin Department of Justice either to investigate alleged violations

of that abortion ban or to prosecute alleged violations of it.

Wisconsin Attorney General Josh Kaul, on Wisconsin's ban on abortion should *Roe v. Wade* be overturned.

Wisconsin State Journal, 12-15-21

If the unaffiliated were a religion, they'd be the largest religious group in the United States.

Elizabeth Drescher, an adjunct professor at Santa Clara University, who wrote the book, *Choosing our Religion*, about the spiritual lives of the Nones.

Associated Press, 12-14-21

There's less stigma attached to being an atheist. It's revealing of what's been there for a long time, rather than a big shift. People may not have answered honestly 20, 30 years ago.

Ryan Burge, assistant professor of political science at Eastern Illinois University, on the results of the latest Pew Research Center showing fewer people are religious than ever before.

Religion News Service, 12-14-21

[Rep. Kat] Cammack, [Rep. Madison] Cawthorn and others who believe in the beforelife seem to think of embryos with the potential to become people as beings ("eternal souls," "little girls") who should have choice and do have feelings. They — and indeed everyone who asks how abortion advocates would feel if they had been aborted, as if unborn people hover about ruing their nonexistence — remind us that religion is driving our abortion debate. Religion — not reason and not compassion for people who already exist in this earthly realm.

Kate Cohen, in her op-ed, "How would you feel if your mother had aborted you?" Easy. I'd feel nothing."

Washington Post, 12-16-21

Until now, when Americans have found themselves wrestling with questions about church-and-state matters, the Supreme Court usually, but not always, was the guardian of separation. Today's conservative justices, however, appear likely to trash that noble heritage of the court.

Editorial, "Supreme Court poised to trample the separation of church and state."

Las Vegas Sun, 12-17-21

Some of the anti-vaxxers here in this chamber remind me of what happened 400 years ago when people were clinging to the fact that the sun revolved around the Earth. They just didn't believe science. Or 500 years ago when they were sure the Earth was flat.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, castigating those in the Senate who narrowly voted for a resolution against the Biden administration's requirement that business with 100 or more workers mandate vaccinations.

Los Angeles Times, 12/8/21

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The only freethought newspaper in the United States

The Born Again Skeptic's Guide to the Bible
By Ruth Hurmence Green
A Missouri grandmother debunks the bible as no one has debunked it since Thomas Paine.
—Published by FFRF. 440 pages / PB
Buy it from FFRF online
ffrf.org/shop

Lead Us Not Into Penn Station Provocative Pieces
By Anne Gaylor
A must-have for any freethinker, this gracefully readable book contains Gaylor's classic writings.
—Published by FFRF. 80 pages / PB
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Legal

Continued from page 1

gious oath ending “so help me God” that voters were required to sign in order to register to vote. As part of a settlement, the Alabama secretary of state changed the voter registration forms and the applicable regulations. New voter registration forms allow voters to opt out of signing a religious oath.

MAZON v. HHS

FFRF joined a coalition of service and advocacy organizations in a lawsuit at the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York against eight federal agencies for undoing rules that protect those receiving social services from being discriminated against. The Trump administration adopted new rules that do not require faith-based organizations to inform recipients of their legal right to be free from discrimination, not have religious programming, and to refer recipients to an alternative provider if requested. The Biden administration has indicated it will undo these provisions and will likely propose new rules in 2022. The case is stayed pending the adoption of the new rules.

FFRF v. Gov. Greg Abbott

FFRF filed a federal lawsuit in 2016, challenging Texas Gov. Greg Abbott’s removal of its approved Bill of Rights “nativity” display from the Texas State Capitol. FFRF had a permit and a legislative sponsor for its display. Abbott, as chair of the Texas State Preservation Board, ordered the display taken down three days after it was erected on Dec. 18, 2015, lambasting it as indecent, mocking and contributing to public immorality. In 2018, the district court entered judgment against Abbott and the State Preservation Board for violating FFRF’s free speech rights. The state appealed the case to the 5th U.S. Circuit Court on the basis that the district court was not permitted to issue the remedy that it provided to FFRF. The 5th Circuit ruled in FFRF’s favor in April 2020 and remanded the case for a final remedy. The district court issued a favorable ruling in May 2021. Texas appealed that decision to the 5th Circuit, arguing that the case had become moot. An opinion is likely forthcoming this year.

FFRF v. Mercer County Bd. of Ed.

FFRF filed a civil rights lawsuit with the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of West Virginia against Mercer County Schools in early 2017 over the school system’s egregiously unconstitutional “Bi-

2021 cases by state	
1. Texas	6. Ohio
2. Florida	7. Virginia
3. Georgia	8. Wisconsin (tie)
4. Tennessee	8. Alabama (tie)
5. North Carolina	9. Missouri

ble in the Schools” classes for elementary school students. In late 2017, the district court dismissed the case on jurisdictional grounds. FFRF appealed to the 4th U.S. Circuit Court, which, in late 2018, ruled in favor of FFRF and found that the plaintiffs have standing. The school system sought an appeal to the Supreme Court, which declined to take the case. In October 2021, the parties engaged in mediation and settlement discussions, which will likely resolve the lawsuit.

Cobranchi v. Parkersburg

FFRF and two Parkersburg, W.V., residents sued the city of Parkersburg in a challenge to the City Council’s practice of reciting the “Lord’s Prayer” at each meeting. Council members and most attendees recite the Lord’s Prayer in unison to start each bi-monthly meeting. At least one member of the council has been openly hostile to people who do not participate in the prayer. FFRF is awaiting a decision on its summary judgment briefing.

Orsi v. Martin

FFRF and a coalition of plaintiffs filed a district court lawsuit on May 23, 2018, against Arkansas Secretary of State Mark Martin seeking the removal of a massive Ten Commandments structure from the grounds of the Arkansas Capitol. The plaintiffs include FFRF, the American Humanist Association, and the Arkansas Society of Freethinkers, as well as seven individual plaintiffs. The case is proceeding slowly, with summary judgment briefing expected to be filed in early 2022.

FFRF v. Judge Wayne Mack

FFRF refiled a lawsuit against Justice of the Peace Wayne Mack in 2019 for opening each of his court sessions with chaplain-led prayer. On May 21, 2021, the district court judge ruled in favor of FFRF and local attorney “John Roe,” finding that Mack’s courtroom prayer practice violated the Establishment Clause. Mack filed an immediate appeal and the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals stayed the district court’s decision. The case is being briefed on the merits and a decision is expected in 2022.

Amicus briefs

FFRF staff attorneys filed five amicus (or friend-of-the-court) briefs in 2021. Four of those were filed at the U.S. Supreme Court.

Carson v. Makin

FFRF pointed out to the Supreme Court that Maine’s refusal to fund sectarian schools is supported by a proper understanding of the First Amendment. The First Amendment ensures that taxpayers are not compelled to subsidize a religion that is not their own. Also, the “no aid” principle avoids government entanglement with religious education.

Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health

FFRF filed a brief with the Supreme Court that identified religion as the center of anti-abortion legislation. Mississippi’s total ban on abortion after 15 weeks was motivated by religious ideology. FFRF argued that judicial review of pre-viability abortion prohibitions is hampered by governments that obscure their true purpose in adopting abortion prohibitions.

Ramirez v. Collier

A person on death row brought suit over Texas’ denial of his request for a minister to “lay hands” on him and audibly pray with him in the execution chamber. FFRF argued to the Supreme Court that the death penalty, which stems in part from biblical roots, violates the First and Eighth amendments. FFRF’s brief also asserts that if executions are allowed, end-of-life accommodations must be made equally available to all, not just the religious.

Shurtleff v. Boston

An organization called Camp Constitution requested to fly the Christian flag at Boston’s City Hall. The city refused to allow the display. FFRF, joined by Center for Inquiry, argued that Boston correctly denied the request because the city’s flag poles are not open for free speech for the general public. The city’s concern in not violating the Establishment Clause is a reasonable justification for the denial.

Kluge v. Brownsburg Schools

FFRF filed a brief on behalf of the Secular Student Alliance, arguing before the 7th Circuit that public school teachers do not have the right to subject students, including transgender students, to the teacher’s religious whims. Based on his Christian beliefs, an Indiana teacher refused to call transgender students by their first names. The school system refused to grant FFRF permission to file the brief, which supported the school’s position, indicating that FFRF’s name and mission are disfavored by public school officials. The court granted permission for FFRF to file on behalf of SSA.

Nonlitigation advocacy

In 2021, our intake team processed 1,874 contacts from members of the public over state/church concerns. Our staff attorneys and legal fellows sent 592 letters of complaint to government agencies over state/church violations. We received 167 victories from these complaints, with more to come this year. FFRF also sent out “mass mailings” educating government officials on violations, including the state of religion in public schools in Florida, mask mandates in Wisconsin, and the National Prayer Breakfast.

Educating the public

In November, FFRF issued a report, “Casting Light: The Sunshine State’s Problems of Religion in its Public Schools,” calling attention to the myriad unconstitutional activities taking place in public schools all over Florida. The report documented serious, systemic Establishment Clause violations in Florida public schools, ranging from teachers imposing their personal religion on students to administrators establishing chaplaincies. Florida school districts must educate staff and adopt sound policies ensuring all school-sponsored programming, including athletics, are free from religious activity and pressure. The report has been sent to every Florida school district.

In August 2021, just before the school year started, FFRF released a short report about prayer walks in public schools, a bizarre but growing phenomenon whereby community members gather and walk through and/or around the schools praying for the upcoming school year. FFRF’s report shows why such events — typically involving religious leaders praying, sermonizing and even sprinkling “holy water” over school grounds — are constitutionally impermissible.

FFRF also made it a priority these last two years to increase legal scholarship on state/church separation, particularly after seeing the dangerous use of (often inaccurate) history as rationale in our cases. To that end, FFRF gave a grant to Roger Williams University School of Law in Rhode Island to put on a symposium titled “Is This a Christian Nation?” The virtual symposium was held in September 2020, but the important part of this scholarship was the journal published as a result. All presenters wrote articles that were printed in a special issue of the law school’s law review in the spring of 2021. FFRF then sent copies of the journal to every Supreme Court justice and appellate court judge in the country.

As we dive into 2022, FFRF’s Legal Department is poised to meet the challenges of the new Supreme Court, remains passionate about protecting the right to a government free from religion, and is dedicated to ensuring the wall of separation between state and church is protected to ensure true religious liberty for us all.


Rebecca Markert is FFRF’s legal director.

WHAT ARE YOU MISSING?

FFRF offers much more than just **Freethought Today** for news, information & lively banter about freethought & state/church separation.

Check out these other offerings!

- Ask an Atheist online weekly show
ffrf.org/ask-an-atheist
- Freethought Matters TV weekly show
ffrf.org/freethought-matters
- Freethought Now blogs
freethoughtnow.org
- Freethought Radio weekly show
ffrf.org/radio
- FFRF press releases
ffrf.org/releases
- FFRF action alerts
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Daily online calendar of famous freethinkers
ffrf.org/day



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Yip Harburg, from his book: **Rhymes for the Irreverent**



Written by “Over the Rainbow” lyricist Yip Harburg. Illustrated by Seymour Chwast, published by FFRF.

Pennies For Heaven

If you’re a church philanthropist
You’re wholly indestructible,
Although you live by fang and fist,
Your sins are tax deductible.
And when you get to heaven, you
Avoid Eternal Revenue.

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Freethought Today Cryptogram

AQ DWV LALCV AR GARDTMVP AP DVCCAPX ER
 YWVUV YV HTGV QUJG, WJY HTP YV DUERD AD DJ
 DVCC ER YWVUV YV'UV XJAPX?
 —NERDAP LUJYP

This puzzle is from *Freethinking Cryptograms* by FFRF member Brooks Rimes, available on Amazon.com for \$8.95. See bottom of page for description and hint for this puzzle. Answer is on page 25.

Freethought Today Crossword

1	2	3	4	5		6	7	8		9	10	11	12	
13						14				15				
16						17				18				
19						20			21	22				
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40						41			42		43			
44				45		46					47			
48						49		50			51		52	
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57	58	59	60					61				62	63	64
65						66	67			68				
69						70				71				
72						73				74				

Answers on page 25

Puzzle courtesy of Katya Maes for FFRF

- Across**
- Glances over
 - England's military acronym
 - Droops
 - Orange type of tea
 - United Nations labor agency, acr.
 - Boredom
 - To the left, on a boat
 - Hair stylist's goo
 - Cicero's language
 - *Blue-eyed Frank ____: "There are things about organized religion which I resent"
 - *John Lennon: "____ there's no heaven"
 - *Bruce ____ of martial arts
 - Dig like a pig
 - PC brain, acr.
 - Gaelic tongue
 - Skyping device, once
 - Barbecue fare
 - Additionally
 - Late Princess of Wales
 - Balm ingredient
 - *Brian Bolton's "The ____ Good Book"
 - Pharaoh's symbol
 - Draws nigh
 - Sport with mallets
 - One and only
 - Soldier's knapsack (2 words)
 - "Where the Wild Things Are" rollick
 - Poetic "ever"
 - Nice seats
 - Winner's take
 - *____ Student Alliance, campus group
 - *Henry David ____: "Your church is a baby-house made of blocks"
 - Run off, as in couple
 - Address abbreviation
 - Mends a sock
 - Tie with a morning coat
 - Roman road
 - Written compilations
 - Like hard times
 - Cry of horror, in comics
 - Keyboard key
 - Flying high
 - Was rebroadcasted
 - Trim grass
 - Habitat for Humanity store
 - *____mail, Freethought Today's alternative correspondence section
 - Pileus, pl.
 - German submarine destroyer
 - Trough stuff
 - Civil rights concern
 - Dugout glider
 - Jumping joint
 - *TV host Bill ____: "Religion is insanity by consensus"
 - Belgrade native
 - Capital on a fjord
 - Pizazz
 - Medieval helmet
 - India's smallest state
 - Canine on a skirt
 - Cemetery spot
 - *Orient Express, e.g.
 - Navy commando
 - Other than what is
 - Andean people's chew
 - Second word in a fairy tale, typically
 - Popular shipbuilding wood
 - Formerly, formerly
 - Poker bet
 - Brezhnev's domain
 - Strive
- Down**
- Pampering places
 - Yachting cap
 - Icon, alt. sp.
 - Like high ground
 - Boudoir sofa
 - Capital of Latvia
 - Bass or Redhook
 - Manuscript sheet
 - Tear in pantyhose
 - Hostile to
 - *Ursula K. Le ____, author and Emperor Has No Clothes Award recipient
 - Cosine's counterpart

THEY SAID WHAT?

This is a Christian nation and any policy that is contrary to the word of God, we need to remove it from mainstream America and make it illegal.
MAGA pastor Mark Burns, who is running for Congress in South Carolina.
Right Wing Watch, 11-18-21

I agonized. I'm not ashamed that to say that I actually prayed over what is the appropriate sentence in this case because there was great pain. There was great harm.
Niagara County Court Judge Matthew Murphy, after he decided a man who pleaded guilty to the rape and sexual assault of four teenage girls will avoid prison time.
CNN, 11-22-21

I want my children to know that I love them very much and that I was a good man at one time. Don't ever read anything but the King James Bible.
David Neal Cox's final words before he was executed in Mississippi.
WLBT News, 11-17-21

Organizations like the Freedom From Religion Foundation and the Military Religious Freedom Foundation have been at the forefront of a movement that has targeted the singing of Christmas carols in public schools and Nativity scenes on military bases. Nothing triggers an atheist faster than the little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.
Todd Starnes, in his column "Christmas trees are burning and I blame godless Democrats," after someone lit the huge Christmas tree outside Fox News headquarters on fire.
ToddStarnes.com, 12-8-21

This is whether or not somebody is going to have something put into their body that they do not want put into their body. That's more than freedom, that's the right to control and secure your own body.
Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, speaking about his opposition to a vaccine mandate, while ignoring his blatant hypocrisy when it comes to a woman's right to have an abortion.
Rolling Stone, 12-11-21

Note to members

For those of you who get the PDF version of Freethought Today, there have been a few changes to the content you can see. Because of privacy concerns — the PDF can be easily forwarded to non-members — FFRF has stopped including in the PDF version the Black Collar Crime report, names of new Lifetime members, and the names of the Letterbox contributors. The online version at freethoughttoday.com also follows this protocol. Only the actual print newspaper contains all of these items. If you would like to continue reading

Black Collar Crime, see the names of FFRF's newest Lifetime members, or see the names of those who contributed to our Letterbox, you will need to change your preferences in how you receive Freethought Today. In order to do that, follow these simple steps:
 Log into your FFRF.org account.
 Click on "Update your contact information."
 Go down to "Deliver Freethought Today by" and click on either "Newspaper by mail" or "Both PDF and paper copy."
 Click "Submit."

Save the dates for 2022 convention!

FFRF's 2022 national convention will be held in San Antonio, Texas, at the Hyatt Regency Riverwalk on Oct. 28-29, 2022. The theme will be: "Do Mess With Texas." While it is very early in the process, FFRF has already named its first two awardees, who will speak at the convention. John Irving, famed author of *The Cider House Rules* and *The*

World According to Garp, will receive FFRF's Emperor Has No Clothes Award. And Daniel Mach will be accepting the \$35,000 Henry Zumach Freedom From Religious Fundamentalism Award on behalf of the ACLU Program on Freedom of Religion and Belief. Mach is the director of that ACLU program. We hope to see you in San Antonio!

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Cryptogram hint

A cryptogram is a substitution puzzle in which one letter stands for another. If U equals T, it will equal T throughout the puzzle.
 Example:
 UOG RLQTM HYVBF DVP SLACN VWGY UOG KJEZ XVI.
 THE QUICK BROWN FOX JUMPS OVER THE LAZY DOG.
 This month's clue: E => U.

IN THE NEWS

Supreme Court keeps Texas abortion law in effect

The Supreme Court on Dec. 10 left in place a Texas law that bans most abortions after six weeks, but provided a path for abortion providers to challenge the law.

The court's decision allows the providers to return to a district judge who once blocked the law, saying it violated the constitutional right to abortion.

That restarts the legal process that has seen the law remain in effect since Sept. 1, when the Supreme Court refused to step in to block it.

Eight justices said the abortion providers may bring the challenge.

Nearly 3 in 10 adults religiously unaffiliated

The number of religiously unaffiliated adults in the United States is at an all-time high, with 29 percent saying they are not a member of any religion. That is 6 percentage points higher than five years ago and 10 points higher than a decade ago, according to a new survey by the Pew Research Center.

While Christians still make up a majority of the U.S. populace, their share of the population is 12 points lower from 10 years ago. Also, the share of U.S. adults who say they pray on a daily basis has been trending downward, as has the share who say religion is "very important" in their lives.

Christians still outnumber religious Nones by a ratio of about 2-to-1, but, in 2007, when the question was first asked, Christians outnumbered Nones by almost 5-to-1.

State Department takes action on Avijit Roy death

On Dec. 20, the U.S. State Department finally issued a reward of up to \$5 million for information regarding the deadly machete attack on Avijit Roy and his wife Bonya Ahmed, who was severely injured.

The State Department sent out a notice, stating:

"Rewards for Justice offers a reward of up to \$5 million for information on terrorist attack against Americans in Bangladesh. On Feb. 26, 2015, al-Qaida-linked terrorists killed Avijit Roy and wounded his wife Rafida Bonya Ahmed as the couple left a book fair in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

"Six individuals were convicted in a Bangladeshi court and sentenced for their role in the attack. Two of those defendants — Syed Ziaul Haque (aka Major Zia) and Akram Hossain — were tried in absentia and remain at large."

Man tortured, killed in Pakistan for blasphemy

A Pakistani mob tortured, killed and then set on fire a Sri Lankan man who was accused of blasphemy, according to a report in *The Guardian*.

Priyantha Diyawadana, a Sri Lankan national, was set upon by a violent crowd on Dec. 3 over some posters he had allegedly taken down.

The incident began when rumors



surfaced that Diyawadana, who had been manager of an industrial engineering factory for seven years, had taken down a poster bearing words from the Quran. By the morning, a crowd began to gather at the factory gates and by early afternoon they had charged into the factory and seized Diyawadana.

Pakistan has draconian laws against blasphemy, which carry the death sentence. The laws are often used against religious minorities and those accused are sometimes lynched before they are proven guilty in a court.

New German chancellor omits 'so help me God'

Germany's new chancellor, Olaf Scholz, took God out of his oath on Dec. 8.

Scholz omitted the final four words — "so help me God" — from the traditional oath. The oaths Scholz took as mayor of Hamburg in 2011 and as finance minister in 2018 were also nonreligious.

The chancellor was raised as a Protestant but later formally left the church. When asked by a tabloid what he believed in, Scholz said: "That we humans are responsible for one another. That we need to be just with one another. Call it solidarity of loving one's neighbor."

Report: Utah used LDS Church to 'help' the poor

An investigation by the nonprofit journalism collaborative ProPublica reveals that Utah's rules for giving cash assistance to the poor are so tight that almost no one qualifies, and instead points them to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints for assistance.

ProPublica unearthed a signed memorandum of understanding between Utah's Workforce Services and the LDS Church that calls for the church to quantify the aid it provides to the poor so that the state can count it toward fulfilling its obligation to spend money on assistance. That deal has allowed the state to count at least \$75 million in LDS Church welfare — cash and volunteered labor — toward its own assistance efforts over the last decade.

And once those people seeking assistance are sent over to the church, many of them are expected to accept proselytizing visits in their homes, to attend church services, even to be baptized in the faith, in order to qualify for food, cash or other assistance.

As the Salt Lake Tribune said in an editorial: "That is an obvious violation of the First Amendment's ban

on the establishment of religion in America."

Reality TV star guilty of child pornography

A federal jury in Fayetteville, Ark., on Dec. 9 found conservative Christian activist Josh Duggar guilty of one count each of receiving and possessing child pornography. He faces a maximum sentence of 20 years and \$250,000 in fines.

Duggar, 33, was accused of downloading images showing sexual abuse of children, some younger than 12. Prosecutors alleged he installed a password-protected partition on a computer at his used car lot in Springdale, Ark., in May 2019 to avoid software that detects explicit images of children.

From 2008-15, Duggar was a star of the TLC reality show "19 Kids and Counting" about a large family guided by conservative Christian values. It was taken off the air after a 2006 police report surfaced detailing how he had molested five teen girls. His parents told Fox News in 2015 that four of the five were his sisters.

No criminal charges were filed then due to the statute of limitations. Duggar resigned as director of the lobbying arm of the Family Research Council.

S.D. governor pushes for morning prayer in schools

South Dakota's Gov. Kristi Noem has introduced a bill that would allow students in public schools to pray every morning at school if they so choose.

In a statement, Noem shared her belief that "every student deserves the opportunity to begin their day with a calm, silent moment."

"I hope students will take this opportunity to say a quick prayer or reflect on their upcoming day," she wrote. "However they choose to take advantage of this time, it will be beneficial to students and teachers alike."

Potential uses for this moment of silence include "voluntary prayer, reflection, meditation or other quiet, respectful activity."

Majority in U.S. critical of religious exemptions

The New York Times reports that only about one in 10 Americans says that receiving the Covid-19 vaccine would violate their religious beliefs, while about 60 percent say that too many people are using religion as an excuse to avoid vaccine mandates, according to a survey from the Public

Religion Research Institute and the Interfaith Youth Core.

A majority of Americans are critical of religious exemptions and say that the vaccines do not violate their own religious beliefs or the teachings of their religion, and that there are no valid religious reasons to refuse the Covid-19 vaccine.

The survey indicates a sharp divide between vaccinated and unvaccinated Americans, according to the New York Times report. That gap widens along partisan lines. More than 80 percent of vaccinated Democrats say they are angry at those who refuse to get vaccinated, and similar numbers of unvaccinated Republicans are "angry at those who think they have the right to tell me to get vaccinated against Covid-19."

Atheists: Society fine without marriage, kids

Among self-described atheists, 91 percent say society fares just as well when people have priorities other than marriage and children. That percentage was by far the highest among all "religious" affiliations.

White evangelicals are the only religious subgroup in which a majority (56 percent) say that prioritizing marriage and having children is better for society.

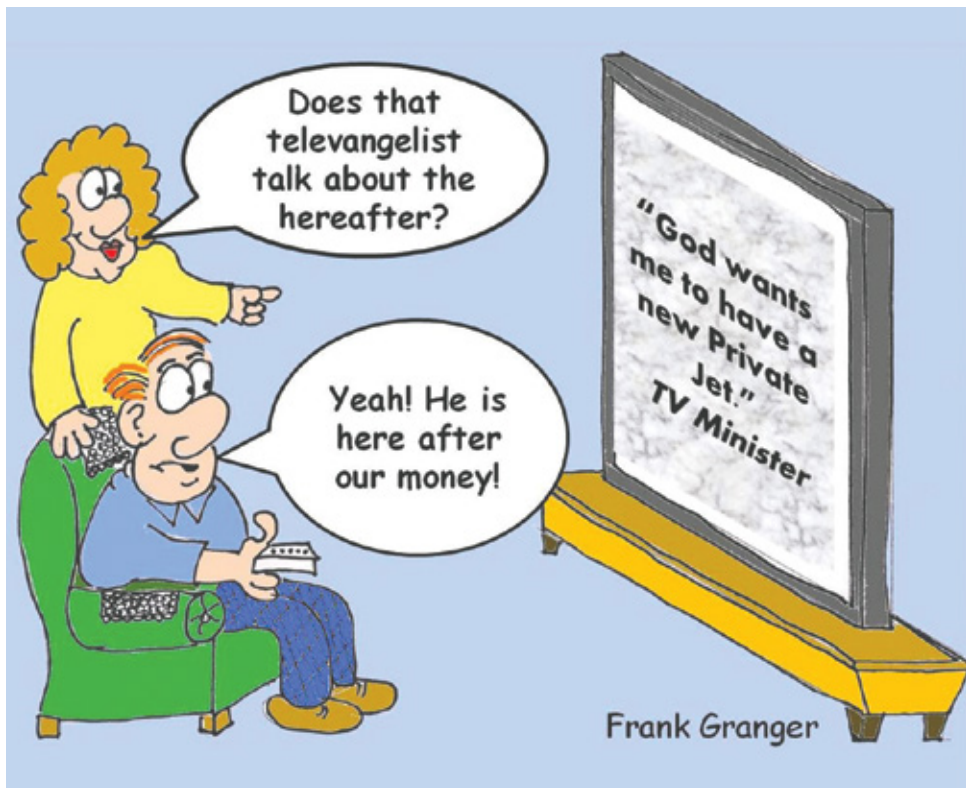
On average, evangelical Christians bear about the same number of children as other Americans, and while they tend to marry at a younger age than other U.S. adults, members of evangelical denominations are not necessarily more likely to be married than members of other Christian subgroups — and they may have higher divorce rates.

Among all Americans with a religious affiliation — whether Christian, Jewish, Muslim or something else — 56 percent believe it is OK for society if people have priorities besides marriage and children, compared with 82 percent of those with no religion.

U.S. military has granted no religious exemptions

As of late December, the U.S. military services had yet to grant any religious exemptions to the Pentagon's Covid-19 vaccine mandate, out of at least 12,000 requests from service members, the services said.

In all, 1,746 soldiers, 2,751 sailors, 4,756 airmen and 3,144 Marines have asked for religious exemption, according to the latest data released by the services. The service branches haven't reviewed all the requests, and may yet grant some.



Rep. Raskin to highlight Paine event

The New Yorker's 2021 "Person of the Year" U.S. Rep. Jamie Raskin will provide the closing remarks during an online celebration of Thomas Paine's birth.



Jamie Raskin

Please join Paine enthusiasts on Jan. 29 at 4 p.m. (EST) for a Zoom celebration. The event is presented by the newly formed Thomas Paine Memorial Association (TPMA), a non-profit organization with the purpose of educating the public and installing statues of Thomas Paine in Wash-

ington, D.C., and other places of significance to the life of Thomas Paine.

Actor Ian Ruskin will speak about his experiences portraying Thomas Paine. Freethought Society President Margaret Downey will be talking about the many Thomas Paine-themed activities she has sponsored. Sculptor Zenos Frudakis will join from his studio in Glenside, Pa., and TPMA board members will be introducing themselves. Board members speaking at the event are Robyn Blunner, John de Lancie, Ann Druyan, Gary Berton, Thomas Legg, Christopher Cameron, Julia Sweeney, Marnie Mosiman de Lancie and Annie Laurie Gaylor.

To register for the event, go to: *bit.ly/3qjCAYH*.

Prayer

Continued from page 1

ees have reported that Mack has surveyed the courtroom during prayers, causing concern that their cases would be affected if they did not participate.

Mack's main defense throughout the lawsuit has been that his prayer practice enjoys a long and unbroken history in this country, a claim he has advanced without expert support from a single historian.

The "friend of the court" brief filed by Americans United on behalf of the scholars and historians demonstrates that Mack's history claim is false. The brief first traces the history of the development of religious freedom in America, citing the views of key founders such as James Madison and Thomas Jefferson, noting that the Establishment Clause was intended in part to prevent governmental religious coercion.

The historians' brief then picks apart Mack's dubious claim of his-

torical legitimacy. "Proper historical analysis reveals that there was no long, unbroken, or established history of courtroom prayer in the United States," the brief asserts. "Instead, it shows that courtroom prayer is not consistent with the purpose of the Establishment Clause, would not have been supported by the Founders whose ideas the Establishment Clause reflects, and was rare around the time of the ratification of the First Amendment."

FFRF and Attorney Roe, the plaintiffs in the lawsuit, previously dispatched Mack's bogus history argument when they won their case in district court. In May 2021, U.S. District Judge Kenneth M. Hoyt ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, writing: "The court is of the view that the defendant violates the Establishment Clause when, before a captured audience of

litigants and their counsel, he presents himself as theopneustically inspired, enabling him to advance, through the chaplaincy program, God's 'larger purpose.' Such a magnanimous goal flies in the face of historical tradition, and makes a mockery of both religion and law."

A second amicus brief, filed in support of plaintiffs by the nonprofit Institute for Justice and the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, argues that a panel of judges on the U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals misstated the law in holding that lawsuits against state officials (such as Mack) cannot arise under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 and must instead be brought as an equitable cause of action recognized in *Ex Parte Young*. While this highly technical issue was not raised by the parties on appeal, and did not need to be resolved in order to adjudicate the

issues on appeal, Judge Andrew Oldham, a Trump appointee, nevertheless advanced this novel and unprecedented interpretation of the law in his written opinion. IJ and FIRE urge the 5th Circuit to address and overturn this incorrect holding when resolving the case on the merits.

"We're grateful for the support of these groups, historians and legal scholars in documenting the truth — that courtroom prayer cannot be excused as a historic practice," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor. "Mack's conduct is coercive, inappropriate, ill-mannered and unconstitutional."

The case is now on appeal before the 5th Circuit. FFRF and Roe are represented by FFRF Associate Counsel Sam Grover, with Attorney Ayesha Khan of Washington, D.C., serving as co-counsel.

Attention law school students

FFRF's 2022 essay competition for law school students is now open!

If you are a current law school student, you could win \$4,000 for submitting the first-place essay. (For full rules and entry information, please go to ffrf.us/essays.)

FFRF asks you to write up to 1,500 words on "Why religious exemptions from vaccine requirements are not legally required."

As the distribution of Covid-19 vaccines has become vital to the global effort to end the pandemic, both government and private employers as well as some schools around the country

have announced vaccine mandates. Historically, very few employees have claimed religious exemptions from required vaccinations. However, people who oppose Covid-19 vaccines for political or other reasons are now abusing religious exemptions in order to flout vaccine mandates.

Against this backdrop, lawsuits have surged challenging vaccine requirements on religious grounds and arguing that religious exemptions to such requirements are required by the First Amendment. Craft an argument that religious exemptions from vaccine requirements are not legally

required, addressing constitutional questions as well as other legal issues raised by such mandates.

The deadline for this competition is March 15. The contest is open to all ongoing law school students attending a North American law school. You remain eligible to enter this contest if you will graduate from law school by spring or summer of 2022. You are not eligible to enter if you will be starting law school for the first time in the fall of 2022.

Prizes include \$4,000 for first place, \$3,000 for second place, \$2,000 for third place and \$500 for honorable mentions.

FFRF ad on '60 Minutes'

CBS has finally agreed, eight years after it was first recorded, to air during "60 Minutes," FFRF's 30-second TV spot by the obliging Ron ("Unabashed atheist . . . Not afraid of burning in hell") Reagan.

The ad will run on four consecutive Sundays, beginning Jan. 9 and running through Jan. 30.

'IN SCIENCE WE TRUST' Self inking stamp



Carefully crafted to stamp out 'god' on U.S. currency. Good for up to 2000 impressions.

\$20 postpaid — Item #ST02

Buy It Online ffrf.org/shop

FFRF's classic 'Freethinker' mug

Our classic 'Freethinker' mug has been re-created. White imprint on classic blue, matte finish. 9.5 oz. American-made mug. Price includes over \$10 in shipping cost.

\$25 each, 2 for \$40
Item# MU01



Order online ffrf.org/shop

Father's death mixes my grief with nonbelief

By Eryn Johnson

About a year and a half ago, my dad went to the ER with what he believed was a kidney stone. He hadn't been feeling well for a few months, but with five out of six high risk factors, he put off going to the doctor as long as he possibly could to avoid being exposed to Covid-19.

He called me on the way home from the emergency room after being gone for several hours, and it was so much bigger than a kidney stone. It was cancer — and it was everywhere. He had just been screened in December 2019, so it was violently aggressive. He made it from his diagnosis at the end of June to Aug. 9, 2020.

Rest assured, there were no death-bed conversions. If anything, he went into that good night completely at peace with his convictions. He died at home with a small entourage. The pandemic prohibited most friends and family from getting one last visit or being there for him crossing the finish line.

Crossing the finish line may seem like an odd turn of phrase for leaving this world, but we have always considered birthdays "victory laps." It is a miracle there is one good kidney among our Scotchophile crew. When you live like you will die tomorrow, every spin around the sun is indeed a victory lap, so when the race is over, what is there to do but cross the finish line?

The morning before he died, we agreed on one last scotch. Johnny Walker Green Label. Nothing too fancy, but it was his favorite daily dram. By that night, he couldn't swallow. So, a little after midnight, I poured a double. I held his hand as I sipped and sobbed and he squeezed my hand every time he heard the ice rattle in my glass. A few hours later, he breathed his last.

I come from a fairly long line of nonbelievers. Our family has a tradition of donating our bodies to science, but we like to have something of a bodiless Irish wake after someone dies. Essentially, you throw a party where



Submitted photo

Eryn Johnson enjoyed time with her father Randy.

everyone tells the best "remember that one time" stories about the loved ones we lost, and play their favorite music and celebrate their life. We don't have a particularly large family, so these events don't happen often, but when they do, they bring laughter and tears and tremendous catharsis. With the pandemic, a get-together was out of the question. And, as most of his friends are in their 60s, 70s and 80s and not particularly tech savvy, a Zoom call may have sent a few more over the finish line prematurely. So, no tech-togethers, either.

I had to tell people, one by one, that he was gone. It was gut-wrenching. And when I had to tell believers the news, they all said the inevitable banalities. Every time I heard "thoughts and prayers" or "he's in a better place," I had to bite my tongue. I know they meant well, but those platitudes hit differently when you know that they know he was an ardent atheist. You know that they know

that you are also atheist. It comes from a good place, but it still makes your eye twitch.

At some point, you reach the end of the list of folks that need to be notified individually. Social media reaches the secondary and tertiary circles of friends, which creates another wave of support. After all the texts and calls die down, you are finally allowed to grieve.

The grief of a nonbeliever is a more permanent sort. It's not, "I'll see you later in heaven" or "maybe we'll meet again in another life." There is a finality in the loss of people you love. Death releases all their life force energy back into the universe and it becomes whatever it becomes — but the one thing you know it won't become is the person you just lost. They are gone forever.

Memories and stories, letters and writings, pictures and videos all give us some comfort, but death is the heartbreaking, inescapable consequence of life.

It is for this reason that I believe the nonbelievers live fuller, more connected lives. We know that we only have one shot at this. We know there's no posthumous paradise.

We are trying to make our paradise in the here and now because we have no idea when or where the finish line will be for us. But, we know when we cross it, this glorious race is over.

My dad donated his body to research, but asked that we get back his ashes so that he could become a tree. They have living urn kits you can buy and pick any kind of tree you'd like to be. Due to the pandemic, it took quite a while to get his ashes back, so we missed planting him on his birthday this year, but we are all set to plant him on his next birthday.

He will be an orange geiger tree in the Florida Keys. So, if ever you're in the Keys and you pass an obnoxiously orange flowering tree, the tree's name just might be Randy.

FFRF Member Eryn Johnson is a logistician who lives in Florida with her rescued Cane Corso, Amaretto.

Editorial assistant helps keep FFRF members informed

Name: Casandra Zimmerman.

Where and when I was born: Dodgeville, Wis., in 1997. My cesarian delivery was scheduled so the doctor would be able to attend the opening season of deer hunting.

Education: Associate's degree in liberal arts, a certificate in gender and women's studies from Madison College and a bachelor's degree in English from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Family: I love my parents and brothers, but I want to give a shout-out to my grandmother, Rita Zimmerman, who is part of the reason I care about FFRF's mission in the first place.

How I came to work at FFRF: I got

lucky enough to work here because of my experience with writing and editing and my belief in the separation of state and church. I was still living in Milwaukee when I got the job.

What I do here: I am the editorial assistant/content writer. I write press releases and action alerts and send them out to members and media. I do various other tasks like writing the FFRF Victories report for Freethought Today and managing the Twitter account.

What I like best about it: Working with a purpose and not making money for a greedy corporation.

What gets old about it: Moderating

Facebook comments or driving on John Nolen Drive every day. I can't decide which is worse.

I spend a lot of time thinking about: Dogs and traveling.

I spend little if any, time thinking

about: Whether there is an afterlife.

My religious upbringing was: Catholicism, loose Catholicism. While I had to attend an after-school religious ed class and have maintained a never-ending core of Catholic guilt, my dad was nonreligious and my mom wasn't extremely strict or conservative.

My doubts about religion started: When I was 5 or 6. I started to question the logistics of God and Christianity. Then, I wondered why Catholics hated so many people. Then, finally, at age 12, I made up my mind that I don't believe a god or gods exist and religion wasn't for me.

Things I like: Coffee, travel, music, cozy couches. Preferably all simultaneously.

Things I smite: Spending an extended period talking about myself. People with no empathy or compassion.

Favorite quote: "We're all going to die,

MEET A STAFFER



Submitted photo

FFRF Editorial Assistant Casandra Zimmerman, left, enjoys an evening with her friend Elizabeth at the Grateful Shed venue in the Wisconsin Dells.

all of us, what a circus! That alone should make us love each other, but it doesn't. We are terrorized and flattened by trivialities, we are eaten up by nothing." — Novelist and poet Charles Bukowski.

Future plans/goals: Spending as much time as possible doing what I love with the people that I love.

Freethought Matters 2021-22 Season

An antidote to religion on the airwaves and Sunday morning sermonizing

Watch our show every Sunday!



Photo by Chris Line

Visit FFRF's YouTube Channel to watch the shows.



Freethought Matters TV talk show airs in:

Chicago	WPWR-CW	(Ch. 50)	9 am
Denver	KWGN-CW	(Ch. 2)	7 am
Houston	KIAH-CW	(Ch. 39)	11 am
Los Angeles	KCOP-MY	(Ch. 13)	8:30 am
Madison, Wis.	WISC-TV	(Ch. 3)	11 pm
Minneapolis	KSTC-IND	(Ch. 45, Dig. Ch. 5.5)	9:30 am
New York City	WPIX-IND	(Ch. 11)	10 am
Phoenix	KASW-CW	(Ch. 61)	8:30 am
		(Ch. 61 or 6 or 1006 for HD)	
Portland, Ore.	KRCW-CW	(Ch. 32)	9 am
		(703 on Comcast for HD or Ch. 3)	
Sacramento	KQCA-MY	(Ch. 58)	8:30 am
San Francisco	KICU-IND	(Ch. 36)	10 am
Seattle	KONG-IND	(Ch. 16)	8 am
		(Ch. 16 or Ch. 106 on Comcast)	
Washington, D.C.	WDCW-CW	(Ch. 50, 23, 3)	8 am

Go to: ffrf.org/freethought-matters for more information



Make your own nontheistic cyber billboard at ffrf.org/unabashed, and you might win an "Unabashed Atheist" cap, like Raj.

VICTORIES

By Casandra Zimmerman

District won't use email to promote religion

School district employees in Socorro, Texas, are no longer able to promote their religion through emails to staff, students and families after receiving a letter from FFRF Legal Fellow Joseph McDonald.

A concerned district employee informed FFRF that several district employees have promoted religion in emails that have been sent by representatives of the HR department.

Superintendent Marta Carmona responded by saying that the district will address the employees and direct that they refrain from using district-provided email systems to promote religion.

Missouri choir director sings a different tune

A Willard (Mo.) High School choir director has stopped posting religious material on a Facebook group page he administers for Willard High School Choirs and can no longer use it.

"To avoid further Establishment Clause concerns, school employees must understand the limits of what they may post on social media when they do so in their official capacities," wrote FFRF Legal Fellow Karen Heineman.

The choir director was instructed that school messages cannot be posted on his private social media account and that it should not be an issue going forward.

Religious rituals won't be part of school events

A concerned local community member reported to FFRF that cadets from the JROTC program at Sonora High School in California participated in a religious flag-folding ceremony as part of a Veterans Day event held in La Habra. The community member reported that as the cadets folded the flag, their JROTC instructor narrated using strong religious language: "The flag-folding ceremony represents the same religious principles on which our great country was originally founded."

After FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to Superintendent Steve McLaughlin, the district agreed to inform staff members that religious rituals are not to be included as part of school activities.

Church trailers removed from school parking lot

Church trailers have been removed from a Virginia public high school after FFRF intervened.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote a letter to Loudoun County Public Schools legal counsel after a concerned community member reported that the district allows Terraforma Church, a church currently operating out of Independence High School, to store multiple trailers in the school's parking lot at all times.

In a response from the school's legal counsel, FFRF was informed that the trailers were planned to be removed from the Independence High School parking lot.



You have 239,741,865,196 unanswered messages

Principal removes bible quote from email signature

A concerned Midwood High School (N.Y.) community member reported that Principal Michael McDonnell had been using a religious email signature in his official communications. McDonnell included a bible verse that read, "The truth shall set you free, John 8:32" in his official email signature.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line asked that the school take the appropriate steps to ensure that employees, including McDonnell, are aware of their constitutional obligation to remain neutral toward religion while acting in their official capacity.

McDonnell had immediately removed the quote from his signature upon receiving FFRF's letter.

'See You at the Pole' no longer being held

A Georgia Elementary school is no longer holding any "See You at the Pole" events after receiving a letter from FFRF educating them as to why it goes against the Establishment Clause.

A concerned Walker County District parent has reported that Cherokee Ridge Elementary School hosted and promoted a "See You at the Pole" event in September 2021.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote in a letter to the district that it cannot organize, promote or endorse religious events like See You at the Pole and that any such events held at a public school must be entirely student-initiated and student-run with no participation from staff members or outside adults.

Superintendent Damon Raines said the situation was immediately addressed with the administration.

Wisconsin district addresses violation

A lunchtime proselytization has stopped after FFRF Legal Fellow Karen Heineman wrote a letter to the Racine School District in Wisconsin.

A concerned parent of a student at Starbuck Middle School contacted FFRF to report that an adult, believed to be a teacher, was recruiting for a school religious club during lunchtime in the school cafeteria.

The superintendent assured FFRF that appropriate follow-up steps will be

taken to ensure that the volunteer has a clear understanding that he cannot continue proselytizing.

Christian radio no longer being played at school

After receiving a letter from FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line, the Harrison County School District in West Virginia has stopped playing Christian worship music in its hallways.

A concerned district employee reported that Robert C. Byrd High School played Christian worship music in its main hallway at all times. The letter to Superintendent Dora Stutler reminded the district that allowing such a practice is a violation of the Establishment Clause.

In a response to FFRF's letter, Stutler reported that radio has been removed and the issue had been resolved.

Pastor no longer at school district's convocation

A Texas school district is no longer employing a Christian pastor for its annual convocation after FFRF got involved.

In a letter to Venus (Texas) ISD, FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line explained to Superintendent James Hopper that while individuals are certainly free to pray privately or to worship on their own time in their way, calling upon district employees to participate in prayer is coercive and beyond the scope of a secular employer.

In a call from Hopper, he informed FFRF that the prayers from the Christian pastor will not happen again.

University stops endorsing religion at games

Georgia Southern University has agreed to stop promoting and endorsing Christianity at its football games.

An area resident previously reported that Georgia Southern University was promoting and endorsing Christianity and that GSU appeared to be sponsoring a religious event called "Sermon on the Court," and that the university allows an outside religious leader to act as an official chaplain for its football team.

FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line wrote to Kyle Marrero, president of GSU, regarding the matter.

In a response from the university's legal counsel, FFRF was assured that "the institution has taken appropriate follow-up action . . . to ensure that this type

of unauthorized activity does not take place again."

Coach won't hold pregame devotionals

Ouachita Parish School District in Louisiana has stopped a head coach from giving a pregame devotional after a letter was sent by FFRF Staff Attorney Chris Line.

A concerned district community member informed FFRF that Richwood High School's head football coach had offered a "pregame devotional at Richwood High School," and that "an invitation to know Jesus as Lord and Savior," appeared on the Northeast Louisiana's FCA's Facebook page.

In a response from the school's legal counsel, the school board will seek to comply with its obligations under the First Amendment, while at the same time acknowledging the individual religious freedoms of its students.

Tennessee district stops Christian proselytization

A Tennessee school has stopped a Christian fellowship group from proselytizing its baseball players after receiving a letter from FFRF Legal Fellow Karen Heinema.

Upper Cumberland Fellowship of Christian Athletes was being given special access to Warren County Schools baseball team, handing out bibles and talking with the players.

In response from the legal counsel for the school district, FFRF was notified that the school had taken the necessary steps to stop all constitutional violations.

Religious info removed from school giveaways

An Ohio school district has stopped giving out religious materials after FFRF's intervention.

The school had originally sent out emails to parents at Hazelwood Junior High School that turkey dinners were provided by Graceland Baptist Church. The email listed the items to be included in the giveaway, including "religious materials."

FFRF Legal Fellow Karen Heineman wrote a letter to the district asking it to ensure that the turkey dinner giveaway is completely secular.

The school's legal representative responded by ensuring FFRF that the religious materials would be removed before getting handed out in the giveaway.

FFRF scores win over Iowa school district

FFRF has stopped an Iowa public school coach from propagating a Christian message to his football players.

FFRF Legal Fellow Karen Heineman wrote to the school district informing Pella Community School District that religious promotion by the Pella Middle School football coach violates the school's obligation to remain neutral while acting in official capacities.

In a response from the school district, FFRF was informed that the principal met with the coach to ensure that he will no longer be encouraging or promoting religion. The school district will also consider staff training, if needed, in the future.

Strategic Response Team has banner year

FFRF's Strategic Response Team (SRT) had another highly successful year in 2021.

The SRT handles FFRF's rapid response, legislation and lobbying work. The SRT is tasked with:

- Federal lobbying; tracking, analyzing and educating about pending legislation; and mobilizing FFRF's membership with action alerts.
- Responding to current events for FFRF with statements, letters and articles.
- Shaping public opinion with articles, editorials and letters to the editor.
- Stopping imminent violations and correcting the public record with letters.

The team has three full-time members: Andrew L. Seidel, Ryan D. Jayne and Mark Dann. Also attached to SRT are FFRF communications team members Amit Pal and Casandra Zimmerman, FFRF's legal team and FFRF Co-Presidents Annie Laurie Gaylor and Dan Barker.

SRT has leveraged virtual opportunities last year to work more effectively on FFRF's dual missions. It had its busiest, most productive year on record.

Federal lobbying

SRT governmental affairs elevated FFRF's profile and influence on Capitol Hill and deepened our relationship with congressional offices, especially with Reps. Jared Huffman and Jamie Raskin. We've had a huge boost from our amazing and longtime intern Charis Hoard.

One interesting trend is that offices are coming to us for help instead of the other way around. That is the best kind of progress a lobbying team can see and what we've been working toward for years.

In 2020, SRT began crafting a legislative agenda for FFRF, and, in 2021, SRT has been implementing it. A key part of the agenda was to make FFRF a vital partner in advancing the Congressional Freethought Caucus' agenda. FFRF has been recognized by the CFC as a thought leader and a primary mover in the secular movement.

Seidel moderated a Freethought Caucus panel discussion on the Jan. 6 insurrection with Amanda Tyler of the Baptist Joint Committee, political scientist Juhem Navarro-Rivera, and Robert Jones of PRRI. Rep. Raskin, who now sits on the Jan. 6 Select Committee, attended and asked questions and Seidel was able to guide and direct the conversation.

Expanded alliances

Outside of Congress, FFRF is sought for its expertise and effectiveness. We met nearly 100 times with allied organizations to advance our mission. FFRF was the only secular organization invited to a meeting with the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. We've partnered with Demand Jus-



Photo by Shutterstock

By the numbers

- 60 statements for FFRF on a variety of issues.
- 49 articles, op-eds, blogs and letters to the editor.
- 54 press releases for FFRF on legal and legislative issues.
- 49 rapid response letters written.
- Comments on 6 formal rule changes.
- 85 media appearances.
- 90 meetings with legislators on Capitol Hill or at the White House.
- 94 action alerts that connected more than 6,100 FFRF supporters and legislators 52,678 times.
- 1,513 bills analyzed and 1,117 tracked.
- More than 1,000 separate SRT projects.

tice on judicial reform bills, including for meetings on the Hill. Leadership Conference asked us to lead a group of health care organizations in writing recommendations for the Biden Administration on how best to interpret the nondiscrimination provisions of the Affordable Care Act to avoid unnecessary religious exemptions in health care. The Leadership Conference also relied on FFRF to lead meetings with seven key Senate offices on prioritizing judicial nominees.

Tracking legislation

SRT tracks and acts on federal bills and bills in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. We tracked 1,117 separate bills; opposed 70 percent, supported 28 percent, and watched the remainder with optimistic neutrality. Of the 781 bad bills, 123 (16 percent) became law. Of the 311 good bills, 46 (15 percent) became law.

Of the over 1,000 bills that SRT tracked, the most common state/church-adjacent bills were threats to reproductive health care. The next most common were bills that threatened LGBTQ rights, such as transgender athlete bans that typically

prohibited transgender girls from participating in sports at their K-12 public schools.

In Missouri, Oklahoma, and Nebraska we helped to stop bills that would have plastered "In God We Trust" on public school walls. A bill to add bible studies to Missouri public school curricula was also defeated, as well as a uniquely awful bill in North Dakota that categorized everything that wasn't conservative Christianity as "the religion of secular humanism."

After a slowdown of Project Blitz bills last year, there were renewed efforts to insert Christian nationalism into state law through this coordinated scheme, which has ceased calling itself "Project Blitz" due to bad publicity (which we gleefully fomented).

Following the confirmation of Amy Coney Barrett to the U.S. Supreme Court, the biggest push by Christian nationalists by far was for outright challenges to *Roe v. Wade*. The most notorious of these was Texas' SB 8, the constitutionality of which the Court is currently considering. However, dozens of similar bills all over the country are waiting in the wings for the Supreme Court to gut *Roe*.

In total, we tracked 497 bills aimed at curbing abortion access, spanning 47 states. We would not have been able to track all of these bills without the tremendous help of Barbara Alvarez, FFRF's first Anne Nicol Gaylor Reproductive Rights Intern.

Shaping opinion

In the past, FFRF would often hear about a violation happening imminently. SRT would work to stop these violations before they occur and without derailing the legal team. Most SRT rapid letters are sent when fast action can change the media narrative or stop the spread of disinformation. SRT's ordinary response time on these letters, from notification to mailing, is less than an hour. We averaged about one such letter each week.

A letter to the Wisconsin Attorney General asked for an investigation of the Catholic Church in the state, which we used to springboard a lobbying effort on the front. Jayne led the effort, which

was successful and was the first time FFRF registered a state lobbyist. Jayne also met with state legislative offices to revise state laws to give clergy sex abuse survivors a chance at justice with kinder statutes of limitation.

SRT published 49 op-eds, articles, blogs, and letters to the editor. We are writing less for our in-house blog and instead writing for larger, prestigious outlets with a reach beyond our choir.

Religion Dispatches has made Seidel an unpaid "senior correspondent" and all Religion Dispatches articles also go to FFRF members, who receive notifications about these pieces.

Responding to news

The frenetic pace of the media cycle makes SRT more important than ever. SRT's goal is to respond to issues that concern FFRF and its missions before our members even have a chance to report them. These are essentially self-directed complaints, and they tend to be popular or newsworthy.

We sent 58 statements for FFRF (up from 40) on a variety of issues, from elections, to the Supreme Court, to the January 6 insurrection and its fallout, to PPP abuse, and shifting demographics. SRT creatively issued a statement on the one-year anniversary of Trump's COVID Day of Prayer, showing how harmful it is to rely on prayer instead of science. The issues we wrote on were diverse and included persecution of atheists abroad and Scotland repealing its blasphemy law.

And much more

Our latest push is on the National Prayer Breakfast, and we sent every congressional sponsor a letter detailing the reasons they ought not to attend or sponsor the sectarian event this year.

Another example is rebalancing the courts. It's hard to measure progress in this area, but we're seeing it. SRT's constant meetings on the Hill, coordination with other groups, and repetitive messaging is making a difference. Biden and the Senate have confirmed more judicial nominees at this point than ever. Relatedly, Rep. Jerry Nadler's press release on "Expand[ing] the Supreme . . . Legislation to Restore Justice and Democracy to Judicial System," quoted FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor, which we believe is the first time FFRF has been positively quoted in a congressional press release.

Jan. 6th report

Seidel has coordinated an intensive and comprehensive report on "Christian Nationalism and the Jan. 6, 2021, Insurrection" with Baptist Joint Committee, Katherine Stewart, Sam Perry and Andrew Whitehead. Seidel conceived the idea in the wake of the attack. Christian nationalism influenced the attack far more than most people realized and more than could be explained in a short epilogue. See Page 1 and Pages 14-15 for a preview of this report.

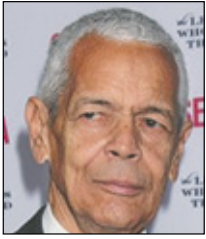
Legislative wins

- The STOP FGM Act of 2020, which prohibits female genital mutilation, was unanimously passed by the House and the Senate and signed into law.
- The Blasphemy Resolution, which calls on the president and the State Department to prioritize the global repeal of blasphemy laws, passed the House and the Senate.
- The Equality Act, which prohibits discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation and gender identity, passed the House.
- The Women's Health Protection Act, which protects the right to access abortion in every state, passed the House.
- The NO BAN Act, which eliminates the Muslim Ban (which could be turned against atheists abroad seeking a safe haven), limits presidential authority to suspend or restrict immigration, and prohibits religious discrimination in immigration-related decisions, passed the House.
- Biden's budget historically omitted the Hyde Amendment, which bars federal funds going to abortions.
- We continue to build support for other key bills such as the Do No Harm Act, Judiciary Act of 2021, District Court Judgeships Act of 2021, and the Supreme Court Ethics Act.

FFRF salutes black history and secularism

In honor of Black History Month, below are highlights of some of the many distinguished African Americans, past and present, who have made known their dissent from religion. To see more, go to ffrf.us/blackhistory.

Julian Bond



Julian Bond

A lifelong champion of civil rights who chaired the NAACP and helped found both the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and the Southern Poverty Law Institute, Julian

Bond was a pioneering black state legislator in Georgia who became a cultural icon and national voice for social justice.

Q. Are you a believer?

A. No. — Interview on “American Forum,” PBS, with Doug Blackmon, March 2015.

Ernie Chambers

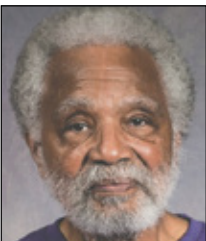


Photo by Ingrid Laas

Ernie Chambers

The “Maverick of Omaha” and “defender of the downtrodden” has served for decades in the Nebraska state Senate, where he has defended civil rights as well as the rights of women, LGBTQ, farmers and criminals in an overwhelmingly white, ultraconservative state. Former Sen. Chambers has been a leading state/church separation advocate, and his case objecting to paid prayer in his state Senate went all the way to the Supreme Court.

“As an elected official, I know the difference between theology and politics. My interest is in legislation, not salvation.” — Ernie Chambers in his acceptance speech for the “Hero of the First Amendment” award at the 27th annual FFRF convention, Nov. 12, 2005.

Ta-Nehisi Coates

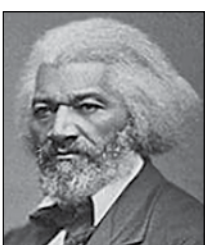


Ta-Nehisi Coates

The son of a former Black Panther, Coates would go on to relaunch the landmark Black Panther comic series featuring the first black superhero. Coates is senior editor at The Atlantic. His signature book is *Between the World and Me*, and in 2015, he was named a MacArthur “Genius.”

“I am an atheist. I don’t believe the arc of the universe bends towards justice. I don’t even believe in an arc.” — Ta-Nehisi Coates, “The Myth of Western Civilization,” The Atlantic, Dec. 12, 2013.

Frederick Douglass



Frederick Douglass

Born enslaved, Douglass escaped slavery at 20, lecturing at personal peril against slavery and founding the weekly publication, North Star. Douglass was the only man to speak in

favor of woman suffrage at the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848. He launched The National Era newspaper, became

a D.C. U.S. marshal and later became consul-general to Haiti. He was not an atheist, but was highly unorthodox and a life-long civil libertarian and brave pathblazer.

“I prayed for 20 years but received no answer until I prayed with my legs.” — Frederick Douglass, *Autobiography*.

W.E.B. Du Bois



W.E.B. Du Bois

Earning his doctorate from Harvard in 1894, Du Bois wrote *The Souls of Black Folk* in 1903, urging black Americans to stand up for their rights. He co-founded the NAACP and edited

its journal, *Crisis*, for 24 years, turning it into a black literary journal. He has been dubbed the “father of Pan-Africanism.”

“We are still trained to believe a good deal that is simply childish in theology. The outward and visible punishment of every wrong deed that men do, the repeated declaration that anything can be gotten by anyone at any time by prayer.” — W.E.B. Du Bois “On Christianity,” a chapter in *African-American Humanism: An Anthology*, edited by Norm R. Allen Jr.

Arian Foster



Arian Foster

NFL Houston Texan player Arian Foster (2009-15), who set franchise records for rushing yards and touchdowns, is a most unusual athlete, who wanted to convey

to his fans that “I recognize the light in you.” He was the only member of the team who didn’t identify as a Christian. He has dabbled in acting, has a podcast, “Now What? with Arian Foster” and founded the Arian Foster Family Foundation to fight childhood obesity, improve financial literacy and provide personal development to inner-city youth.

“Teammates ask me, ‘You worship the devil?’ ‘No, bro, I don’t believe there’s a God, why would I believe there’s a devil?’” — Arian Foster, ESPN The Magazine, Aug. 6, 2015.

Donald Glover



Donald Glover

He graduated from New York University with a degree in dramatic writing in 2006, then began writing for the NBC comedy “30 Rock,” receiving a Writer’s Guild nomination in 2009. Glover is

best known for playing Troy the “jock” in a community college study group on the comedy series “Community.” In addition to writing and acting, Glover performs stand-up and raps. His 2014 album “Because the Internet” was nominated for a Grammy. In the song “Won’t Stop,” Glover refers to himself as “an airport atheist.”

“I think everybody kind of hits that point where they say, ‘OK, am I doing this out of tradition? Do I actually believe this?’” — Donald Glover, interview, Zap2it, Feb. 3, 2011.

Lorraine Hansberry

The daughter of civil rights activists and intellectuals, Lorraine Hansberry



Lorraine Hansberry

wrote the first drama by a black woman to be produced on Broadway and win the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award. “A Raisin in the Sun” (the title derived from a poem by Langston

Hughes) was loosely based on her own experiences growing up in Chicago and also became a movie starring Sidney Poitier. Hansberry wrote *The Drinking Gourd*, commissioned by the National Broadcasting Co. in 1959, about the American slave trade, which was considered too hot for television and was never produced. Hansberry died of cancer at 34. “To Be Young, Gifted and Black” was posthumously adapted from her writings and produced off-Broadway in 1969, also appearing in book form.

“I get tired of God getting credit for all the things the human race achieves.” — Lorraine Hansberry, “Raisin in the Sun,” (words ascribed to Beneatha).

Ayaan Hirsi Ali



Photo by Brent Nicastro

Ayaan Hirsi Ali

Somalian-born Hirsi Ali fled to the Netherlands in 1992 to avoid an arranged marriage, was elected to the Dutch Parliament in 2003 and became a prominent atheist and critic of Islam, particularly against

abuse of women under the religion. She was forced to go into hiding when her colleague, Theo van Gogh, was viciously murdered after producing a film, “Submission,” with her. Her critically acclaimed memoir, *Infidel*, came out in 2005. She founded the AHA Foundation to end honor violence, forced marriage and female genital mutilation.

“I had left God behind years ago. . . . From now on, I could step firmly on the ground that was under my feet and navigate based on my own reason and self-respect. My moral compass was within myself, not in the pages of a sacred book. . . .” — Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Infidel*, 2007.

Langston Hughes



Langston Hughes

For four decades, he chronicled the black experience and perspective in powerful poetry, fiction, nonfiction and children’s books. The *Nation* magazine published his influential essay

“The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain” (1926), in which Hughes advocated racial pride and independent artistry, giving the Harlem Renaissance its due.

Hughes’ satire on corruption in black storefront churches, “Tambourines to Glory” (1963), was not popular with black clergy. Biographer Wallace Best wrote that Hughes disagreed with characterizations of him as anti-religious or atheist while reserving the right to criticize dogma and the Christian church.

“Listen, Christ, You did alright in your day, I reckon— But that day’s gone now. They ghosted you up a swell story, too, Called it Bible— But it’s dead now.

The popes and the preachers’ve Made too much money from it.

They’ve sold you to too many.” — From Langston Hughes’ poem “Goodbye Christ,” 1932

Zora Neale Hurston



Zora Neale Hurston

Novelist, folklorist and short story writer Zora Neale Hurston attended Howard University, graduated from Barnard and did graduate study at Columbia at the height of the Harlem Renaissance.

She wrote seven books, including her classic novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), although she was forced to take “day jobs,” including maid work, to support herself. *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing . . . And Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive*, was published in 1979, after Alice Walker revived interest in her. Her oral history, “Baracoon,” based on interviews with the last survivor of the slave trade in the United States, finally saw the light of day in 2018.

“Strong, self-determining men are notorious for their lack of reverence. Prayer seems to me a cry of weakness.” — Zora Neale Hurston, “Religion,” from “Dust Tracks on a Road,” 1942, anthologized in *African-American Humanism: An Anthology*, edited by Norm R. Allen Jr., 1991.

Sikivu Hutchinson

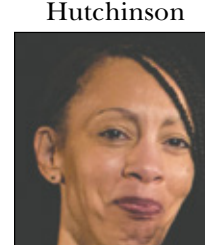


Photo by Chris Line

Sikivu Hutchinson

Hutchinson founded Black Skeptics Los Angeles (BSLA) in 2010 and is the founder of the Women’s Leadership Project. She has written and spoken extensively on the particular challenges of “coming out” as an atheist female of color. She

was honored with FFRF’s Freethought Heroine Award at the 2021 national convention in Boston.

“The white fundamentalist Christian stranglehold on Southern and Midwestern legislatures has proven to be a national cancer that further exposes the dangerous lie of a God-based, biblical morality.” — Hutchinson, commenting on restrictive abortion bills, *The Humanist* magazine, July/August 2019.

Ishmael Jaffree



Photo by Paul Gaylor

Ishmael Jaffree

Jaffree, an attorney, won the U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Wallace v. Jaffree*, (1985), successfully challenging a period of silence for “meditation or voluntary prayer” and a law authorizing teachers

to lead “willing students” in prescribed prayer. Jaffree’s children were ostracized, physically harassed and subjected to racial epithets.

“I brought the case because I wanted to encourage toleration among my children. I certainly did not want teachers who have control over my children for at least eight hours over the day to . . . program them into any religious philosophy.” — Ishmael Jaffree, acceptance speech for “Freethinker of the Year 1985,” awarded by FFRF.

Scott Joplin



Scott Joplin

The “King of Ragtime” propelled that style of music into national prominence when his 1899 “Maple Leaf Rag” became a huge hit. He struggled in his lifetime to support himself, while today he is a household name. He was married at home and buried without a church service, and wrote an opera, “Treemonisha,” where a secular woman is the leader against the town’s useless pastor.

“Ignorance is criminal.” — Scott Joplin, lyrics from “Treemonisha.”

Flo Kennedy



Flo Kennedy

The lawyer, activist, civil-rights advocate and feminist became the first black woman to graduate from Columbia Law School. She ran her own law practice, representing the estates of jazz greats Billy Holiday and Charlie Parker. She co-founded the National Organization for Women, in 1966, and the Media Workshop to better represent black people in journalism and advertising. She started the Feminist Party in 1971, nominating Shirley Chisholm for president, and helped establish the National Women’s Political Caucus and the National Black Feminist Organization.

“If men could get pregnant, abortion would be a sacrament.” — Flo Kennedy, coined while on a speaking tour with Gloria Steinem.

Nella Larsen



Nella Larsen

Larsen, born in 1891, was a well-known Harlem Renaissance writer. Her first book, a 1928 novel titled *Quicksand*, has a young protagonist with resemblances to Larsen, who pointedly disdains the religion she encounters at a fictional Black school. In 1933, Larsen became the first Black woman to receive a Guggenheim Fellowship.

“With the obscuring curtain of religion rent, she was able to look about her and see with shocked eyes this thing she had done to herself. She couldn’t, she thought ironically, even blame God for it, now that she knew he didn’t exist.” — Larsen, writing in *Quicksand* about her character Helga Crane (1928).

John Legend



John Legend

The singer-songwriter started off in a church choir, but began performing in nightclubs after graduating from college and working with big name artists, such as Alicia Keys and Jay-Z. His first album, “Get Lifted,” went platinum and earned three Grammys. He played “Keith” in “La La Land” and co-wrote and performed the song “Start the Fire” for the soundtrack.

“I feel like religion in a lot of ways was intended to control and subdue people rather than to bring out the best in them.” — John Legend on BigThink.com, 2008.

Alton Lemon



Alton Lemon

An aerospace engineer, Alton Lemon also worked as an Equal Opportunity Officer for HUD, served as president of the Philadelphia Ethical Society, was active in the ACLU and won the landmark Supreme Court case, *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971), codifying existing precedent on the Establishment Clause into a test called the “Lemon Test.”

“If any of the three prongs of the Lemon Test are violated by an act of government, it is unconstitutional:

- 1) It must have a secular legislative purpose;
- 2) Its principal or primary effect must neither advance nor inhibit religion;
- 3) It must not foster excessive entanglement between government and religion.” — The Lemon Test, promulgated in *Lemon v. Kurtzman* (1971).

Butterfly McQueen



Butterfly McQueen

Best known for her thankless role as Prissy in “Gone With the Wind,” Butterfly McQueen was a near-lifelong atheist. The role of Prissy, she would later say, was not pleasant to play, “But I did my best, my very best.” She quit movie acting in 1947 to avoid further typecasting, supporting herself as a real-life maid, Macy’s saleslady and seamstress, even working as a Macy’s Santa Claus. She earned her bachelor’s degree in political science in 1974 at age 64, and was one of FFRF’s first Lifetime Members.

“As my ancestors are free from slavery, I am free from the slavery of religion.” — Butterfly McQueen, *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, Oct. 8, 1989.

Thelonious Monk



Thelonious Monk

American jazz composer and pianist’s “Round Midnight” composition is the most recorded jazz standard by any musician. Monk’s idiosyncratic style used unexpected melodic twists, dissonant harmonies and erratic percussive phrases. His views on religion were also unorthodox. He rarely attended church, and a biographer noted he “did not speak about religion in the most flattering terms.”

Charlie Parker



Charlie Parker

Although classically trained, American jazz soloist, saxophonist and composer Parker, known as “Bird,” was a virtuosic improviser, whose work was crucial to the development of bebop. After his death, Parker’s lifelong partner called him a longtime atheist.

Anthony B. Pinn

Humanist scholar Pinn gave up the ministry in favor of humanism. Author, co-author or editor of 35 books, including *Writing God’s Obituary: How a Good Methodist Became a Better Atheist*, Pinn is a professor at Rice University



Anthony B. Pinn

and director of the Institute for Humanist Studies in Washington, D.C.

“Too many humanists and atheists believe disbelief, nontheism, is a prophylactic against nonsense. Because I don’t believe in religion, I cannot be guilty of racism, classism, sexism or homophobia. This is a problem because it doesn’t allow us to take these issues seriously.” — Anthony Pinn, FFRF’s 2015 convention speech.

Chris Rock



Chris Rock

The comedian, actor and producer joined the cast of “Saturday Night Live” in 1990, has been featured in several HBO specials, has won Grammys for comedy albums and has appeared in many movies, including “Dogma” and Netflix specials. Rock’s comedy is peppered with skepticism about religion.

“White people justified slavery and segregation through Christianity, so a black Christian is like a black person with no f***king memory.” — Chris Rock, outtake from the documentary short “Who Is Chris Rock?”

Maya Rudolph



Maya Rudolph

Born to a composer-producer father and an African-American singer-songwriter mother who died when Maya was 7, Rudolph calls her parents “hippies” and her agnostic dad a “pretty adorable Jew.” A *New York Times Magazine* profile reported, “The family was committedly unreligious.” She earned a B.A. in photographer from Porter College, and became a recurring cast member of “Saturday Night Live” from 2000-2007. She was the fourth black woman to join the cast. She has performed in many movies and TV series, including “Bridesmaids (2011) and “Forever” (2018).

“I remember my mom not even saying ‘God bless you.’ She’d say, ‘Guhbless you’ because she didn’t want us to say ‘God.’” — Maya Rudolph, *New York Times Magazine*, Sept. 14, 2018.

Greydon Square

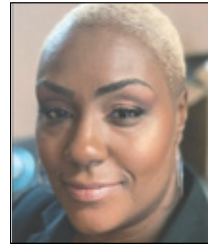


Greydon Square

Square is an outspoken atheist whose clever lyrics focus on atheism, science and other philosophical topics. He also raps about his experiences growing up in Compton, Calif., in a series of group homes, and serving in the Iraq War. Square began studying physics at Arizona State University, but later changed to computer science. He has released many albums, starting with “Absolute” in 2004.

“After a lot of reading and research, I realized I didn’t have any secret channel picking up secret messages from God or anyone else. That voice in my head was my own.” — Greydon Square, 2010 interview with Martin Pribble for his blog “Attempting to Make Sense.”

Mandisa Thomas



Mandisa Thomas

Thomas, who grew up in a nonreligious household, co-founded Black Nonbelievers of Atlanta in 2011, which soon dropped the “Atlanta” reference when the group went national. After a career at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Thomas has become a full-time secular activist and is president of Black Nonbelievers.

“It once felt weird to identify as atheist, but I had to be honest with myself: At the end of the day, I don’t believe in any gods at all.” — Mandisa Thomas, interview, *SecularWoman.org*, July 19, 2013.

Neil deGrasse Tyson



Neil deGrasse Tyson

Tyson, who earned a Ph.D. in astrophysics from Columbia, became staff scientist for the Hayden Planetarium, wrote the “Universe” essays for *Natural History*, hosted PBS’ “NOVA ScienceNOW,” and has served on NASA’s advisory council. He has directed the Hayden Planetarium since 2003. He has written many books and hosted the second “Cosmos” PBS series.

“Let there be no doubt that as they are currently practiced, there is no common ground between science and religion.” — Neil deGrasse Tyson, “Holy Wars,” published in *Natural History*, October 1999.

Alice Walker



Alice Walker

Self-described “Earthling” and “womanist,” Walker has written many novels, including *The Color Purple*, which won the 1983 Pulitzer Prize, a biography on Langston Hughes and other novels and many essays. Although raised Methodist, she has written against the bible’s sexism and asserts that Mother Nature deserves worship.

“What a burden to think one is conceived in sin rather than in pleasure; that one is born into evil rather than into joy.” — Alice Walker, “The Only Reason You Want to Go to Heaven Is That You Have Been Driven Out of Your Mind,” from *Anything We Love Can Be Saved: A Writer’s Activism*.

Faye Wattleton



Faye Wattleton

Reproductive rights activist Alyce Faye Wattleton, who holds a nursing degree, was named executive director of Planned Parenthood in Dayton, Ohio, in 1971 and then in 1978 was named president of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America — its youngest and first African American president. In 1993, she was inducted into the National Women’s Hall of Fame.

“If I was to be a nurse, [people with beliefs different from mine] needed my care and not my judgment. They needed my compassion and understanding and not my moral values. So, I began to really think in a broader context than the narrow religious upbringing of my parents.” — Wattleton, speaking at a St. Louis bookstore about *Life on the Line* (C-SPAN, Oct. 22, 1996)

Convention speech

Chris Cameron: A history of Black secularism

Chris Cameron gave this speech (edited for length) on Nov. 20, 2021, at FFRF's national convention in Boston. (To watch the speech, go to ffrf.us/speeches-2021) He was introduced by FFRF Co-President Dan Barker.

Dan Barker: Chris Cameron earned his Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina and he's an associate professor of history at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. His research interests are Africa American religious and intellectual history, slavery and abolition, religious liberalism and American secularism. He's the founding president of the African American Intellectual History Society and has a group blog called Black Perspectives. He's the author of a fascinating book, *Black Freethinkers: A History of African American Secularism*. Please welcome Professor Chris Cameron.

By Chris Cameron

I'll give sort of a broad overview of the research I did in some of my main findings from my book *Black Freethinkers: A History of African American Secularism*.

From March 21–26, 1953, Langston Hughes — poet, author and playwright of Harlem Renaissance fame — testified before Joseph McCarthy's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations regarding the atheist and communist themes in his 1932 poem, "Goodbye Christ." At one point during the testimony, Sen. Everett Dirksen of Illinois wanted to know whether Hughes thought the book is dead, referring to the bible, and whether or not "Goodbye Christ" could be considered an accurate reflection of African American religious values. Dirksen noted that he was very familiar with African Americans. (He wasn't.) And that he knew them to be innately very devout and religious people, in his words.

Dirksen's statement regarding the supposed innate religiosity of African Americans has become a widespread belief among scholars and in American popular culture. It is an idea that stretches back at least to the 1830s, when Unitarian Minister William Ellery Channing noted in his 1835 book *Slavery* that "The colored race is said to be peculiarly susceptible of the religious sentiment," something that he argued led to an overly affectionate nature.

Freethinkers, later in the 19th century, gave credence to this idea, with William MacDonald, editor of *The Truth Seeker*, proclaiming in an 1883 article that "There is no class of people in the world more religious than the Negroes. Their fervent African temperament makes them peculiarly susceptible to religious sentiment."

These notions are themselves rooted in the idea that African Americans are barbarous, uncivilized, controlled by their emotions rather than logic and reason, and thus incapable of grasping the subtleties of secular thought. As Presbyterian minister Charles Colcock Jones noted in surprise among encountering deism and skepticism in the antebellum slave community, these ideas were usually only found in the cultivated minds, the ripe scholarship and profound intelligence of critics and philosophers.

My book, *Black Freethinkers*, builds off the pioneering work of contemporary scholars and Black atheists such as Sikivu Hutchinson and Anthony Pinn, to show that, despite the ubiquity of notions of Blacks as naturally religious, there is a



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Author and Associate Professor Chris Cameron speaks about his book *Black Freethinkers* at FFRF's convention at the Boston Park Plaza on Nov. 20, 2021.

long and storied tradition of secularism within African American culture.

Early Black freethought

African American freethought first arose in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and it was a homegrown domestic movement. Unlike the European Enlightenment origins of freethought among intellectuals such as Thomas Jefferson or Thomas Paine, Black freethought grew out of the lived realities of enslaved people and the conditions that Blacks endured within it.

The increased evangelism to slaves that characterized the second Great Awakening of the 19th century also brought to the fore what many saw to be the hypocritical nature of their Christian masters, including the very practice of holding slaves, but also the way that their masters treated them. So, one of the key reasons that African Americans in the 19th century embraced freethought was an inability to reconcile the existence of evil in the world with the presence of a benevolent and omnipotent deity. For many, if not all, slaves, the problem of evil was intimately related to their daily lives when they experienced brutal punishments, sexual assault or families being sold away.

While many enslaved people did find meaning in religion, whether monotheistic ones such as Christianity or African-derived traditions such as Conjure, others rejected religion altogether. And I found quite a lot of evidence for this in some of the same sources that scholars use to explore the Black religious experience, namely slave narratives. When I went to these sources asking different questions than most other scholars, I found that these narratives also speak to the presence of atheism within 19th-century slave communities.

One enslaved man named Austin Steward, for example, from Prince William County, Va., immediately after he

discusses a brutal whipping that his sister endured on Sabbath, asks in his narrative, "Can anyone wonder that I and other slaves often doubted the sincerity of every white man's religion? Can it be a matter of astonishment as slaves often feel, there is no just god for the poor African."

Another enslaved man named Charles Ball likewise reflects in his autobiography on the irreligiosity present within slave communities. He writes, "There is in general very little sense of religious obligation or duty among the slaves on the cotton plantations, and Christianity cannot be, with propriety, called the religion of these people. They have not the slightest religious regard for the Sabbath Day, and their masters make no efforts to impress

them with the least respect for this sacred institution." He goes on to say many slaves just prefer to rest on their one day off, have a few drinks, spend time with their families. Some even cultivated a garden plot.

But he also speaks to another key factor pushing slaves away from religion, namely, the opposition of their masters. And there were different schools of thought on this. A lot of masters believed that inculcating a particular type of Christianity would make their slaves more docile in compliance. But then there were events like Nat Turner's Rebellion in 1831, whereby 69 whites were killed by a rebellion led by a slave preacher that led a lot of other masters to think that there are some really dangerous elements in Christianity, and we want to keep those away from enslaved people.

Pro-slavery religion

Another key development that fostered the growth of African American atheism during the 19th century was the rise and increasing prevalence of pro-slavery religion. This became much more prominent after 1830, when the abolitionist movement sort of ramped up with the creation of groups like the American Anti-Slav-

ery Society and the start of publications like William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator* magazine.

Prior to that, there were certainly individuals who argued and took action against slavery, but the movement became much more widespread and much more organized after the 1830s, so defenders of slavery felt that they sort of needed to do the same. And they kind of ramped up their efforts and came up with a lot of religious defenses of slavery: The curse of Ham; the fact that Jesus never preached against it; but, probably, the main one was that slavery was a tool to Christianize uncivilized and savage Africans. While their bodies might be enslaved here on Earth, their souls will be free in heaven.

Most enslaved people felt they were destined to die in bondage unless they were delivered by some deity, and slave Henry Bibb noted in his autobiography that when that doesn't happen, they cannot believe or trust in such a religion. So, most of the evidence that we have for freethought comes from these slave narratives.

A lot of the people are sort of anonymous. You get writers like Bibb or Charles Ball reflecting on atheism within their communities, but we don't necessarily know who these people are. There are some exceptions. Frederick Douglass and William Wells Brown are probably the two main ones that we know of, but our freethought in the 19th century among African Americans wouldn't necessarily be an organized movement. You have bits and pieces and pockets of atheism here and there. That would start to change during the 20th century, especially with the rise of the Harlem Renaissance or the new Negro Renaissance, a literary, artistic and cultural movement that spanned the years from roughly 1919 to about 1935. The Harlem Renaissance itself was a product of the Great Migration to the North, which saw approximately one and a half million Black Southerners migrating to northern cities like Chicago, Detroit, New York and Philadelphia.

New approach to racism

So, after World War I, one development that we saw was anti-communist hysteria that ran rampant throughout the country, and any association of anti-racist efforts and activism that was quickly associated with communism. So, there is an increasing prevalence of race riots in 1919 and 1920, and it led a lot of Black leaders to try to take different or creative approaches to solving the problem of racism. And one was the rise of cultural politics. If we're going to be the victims of race riots by openly protesting against racism, maybe another tack to take, Black leaders said, is to show our equality, to show our fitness for citizenship through our artistic and literary productions. This is one sort of impetus behind the Harlem Renaissance. And it became such an important moment because it had the effect of bringing together a lot of religious skeptics and freethinkers who might have been isolated in their small Midwestern or Southern communities.

But now, all of a sudden, they're in a place like Harlem, or they're in a place like Chicago with like-minded, educated, cosmopolitan people.

The Harlem Renaissance was rife with writings by atheists. Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Alain Locke, the man widely heralded as a father of the Harlem Renaissance, and James Walden



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Chris Cameron

Johnson, novels, plays, poems allowed freethinkers to express their critiques of religion in kind of creative ways where they could almost disassociate themselves from it. They could say, “Oh, that’s just a poem.” Or, “I’m just being creative” or “That’s just a novel. It isn’t necessarily my ideas.”

One of the most important sources to explore freethought during this Renaissance period was Nella Larsen’s 1928 novel *Quicksand*. The central character in this novel was a woman named Helga Crane. It begins with her stating her dissatisfaction with the school in Naxos, an anagram of Saxon, and the main thing that causes her discomfort with the school is religion and the respectability of the middle-class African Americans around her. She doesn’t like that. She’s forced to go to church, to wear certain types of clothes, to act a certain way. She quickly leaves there. She goes to Chicago. She thinks she might be able to build community there with other African Americans and goes to a large Black church. She’s pretty much spurned and ignored by everybody there. Throughout the novel, every time she’s encountering religious people, they’re always pretty negative. And even at the very end, the same is true. She makes a very rash decision toward the end of the novel to marry a revival preacher from Alabama named Rev. Mr. Pleasant Green. She moves from Harlem down to this rural community in Alabama. She’s the preacher’s wife. In three years, she has four children, including a set of twins. And after the fourth, she’s pretty much laid up on her deathbed, realizing how her life is just absolutely terrible. It’s not what she wanted for herself, and it all boils down to her decision to accept this heteronormative, patriarchal life, which itself was based on Christianity. At the very end, she writes, “With the obscuring curtain of religion rent, she was able to look about her and see with shocked eyes this thing she had done to herself. She couldn’t, she thought ironically, even blame God for it, now that she knew he didn’t exist.”

This is one example of how literature becomes a really important source for Black freethinkers, especially, to be able to express their ideas without it necessarily being associated with them personally.

Embracing communism

During the 1910s, in the 1920s, we see an increasing number of African Americans embracing socialism and communism, and this worked hand in hand with the rise of African American secularism during this period because socialists and communists were very antithetical to religion. The Comintern, the Communist International in 1926, put out a very explicit directive that we expect communists to be atheists. If you went to a communist meeting anywhere in the United States, and probably most places in the world, and they knew you went to church or they knew you were religious or something, you would be ostracized and shunned. You’d be expected to put your religion away. And socialism and communism became increasingly appealing to African Americans because, at least theoretically, they subsumed issues of race under issues of class.

Many African American intellectuals and Black secularists also embraced communism, including Claude McKay, Louise Thompson Patterson, A. Philip Randolph and Chandler Owen, publishers of the *Messenger* magazine, and Hubert Harrison, who was widely held during his time as one of the most towering Black intellectuals of the day. Harrison played an important role in Harlem politics and saw himself as an apostle of freethought to African American communities.

And with Hubert Harrison and with early 20th-century Black freethought, this is where you start to see the traditions of Black and white freethought beginning to converge a little bit. This is where you see African Americans starting to come to their religious skepticism through an engagement with readings by Thomas Paine or Robert Ingersoll.

Indeed, Hubert Harrison saw himself as a figure very much akin to Paine, somebody who could take really kind of complicated ideas, boil them down for his broad audience in New York City and try to convert African Americans to secularism. He thought that Black people had suffered more than any other group in this country under Christianity, and that they should be the very first ones to embrace freethought.

From there, my book turns to a discussion of secularism and the Black Power movement during the 1960s and 1970s. And just as in earlier periods, Black freethinkers are central players in civil rights, and we can see this, especially with the Black Power movement. Black Power emerged out of the civil rights activity of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in 1966. SNCC had been created in 1960 and was initially led by Christian activists such as James Lawson and John Lewis, who were committed to the philosophy of nonviolence. This philosophy and approach soon began to change, however, especially after James Forman took over the group.

Forman grew up in rural Mississippi, and he started moving away from religion as a young man. In a scene repeated in many autobiographies and memoirs of Black freethinkers, Forman writes in his book *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, that, at the age of 12, he was attending a revival service. Some of his friends shouted out that they had gotten religion, and the older people shouted this, too. He says, “I did not have the courage to tell my grandmother that I thought this was all nonsense. I simply observe what had been happening around me and knew that I, too, could fabricate some tears in this emotionally charged atmosphere. So, I covered my face with my handkerchief and cried, ‘Lord, have mercy.’ It worked. I was taken off the mourners bench and the people talked of how many children got saved that day by the grace of the Lord.”

Langston Hughes has a very similar story about growing up in Joplin, Mo., and attending a revival service there. Richard Wright has one. James Baldwin. This is sort of a recurring theme among Black freethinkers — the pressure from their community to convert to Christianity. But, also, the moments where they fake this conversion actually becomes the moment where they become atheists or they become agnostics.

Black Power movement

Forman would formally embrace atheism after studying philosophy at Wilson Junior College in Chicago, and he would bring his secular perspective to his civil rights activity. He became the executive secretary of SNCC in 1963 and grounded his activism in secular humanism as he believed that Christianity was a prime reason that Blacks were in a subordinate position in the United States.

In 1966, Forman, along with Stokely Carmichael, led the transition of SNCC from a religious to a secular organization and inaugurated the Black Power movement, the major goals of which were promoting Black economic advancement, a pride in Black culture, independent Black political action and armed self-reliance, or a rejection of nonviolence.

The main institutional expression of Black Power as an ideology was the Black Panther Party for self-defense. This was formed in Oakland, Calif., in 1966 in response to issues of police brutality and police murdering unarmed African Americans. And it began as an explicitly secular organization — not that it promoted secularism, but that it was based off of secular humanism and a desire for human beings to do for themselves

without the assistance of a deity. Some of its main goals were ending health disparities within African American communities. They created clinics and ran ambulance services and created schools for African Americans. And probably the most famous of their endeavors was the free breakfast program for children that was run throughout the nation.

And Huey Newton, one of the founders of the party, is very explicit in his autobiography that these were sort of humanist endeavors. Newton, along with Stokely Carmichael, David Hilliard and Eldridge Cleaver, some of the key leaders of the Black Panther Party, were all very outspoken in their atheism. And the newspaper of the party, the *Black Panther*, also contained poems and other writers by Blacks secular thinkers. Like earlier freethinkers, they saw the church as conservative, and they advanced a humanist politics that rejected the authority of what they termed “Uncle Tom boot-licking preachers.”

While we often see the civil rights movement as a religious movement dependent on ministers and churches, an examination of Black Power in the Black Panther Party, especially in urban regions such as Oakland or New York City, shows that secularism was often just as, if not more, prominent than religion among these activists.

And indeed, even if we look at the traditional civil rights movement in the South, it was actually the case that only a small minority of Black churches engaged in open political activity. In a pioneering work, *Your Spirits Walk Beside Us*, historian Barbara Savage notes that the fact that we’ve come to see the civil rights movement as a religious one is a miracle in and of itself.

Despite views of Blacks as naturally religious, freethought has been a vital and significant component of Black culture and politics since the 19th century. This history is not an obscure one, as sources on Black freethinkers are readily available in print and online. And it’s a history that’s not of obscure people. As you know, some of the people I discuss in my book include Frederick Douglass, Hubert Harrison, Zora Neale Hurston, W.E.B. Du Bois, Nella Larsen, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, James Baldwin, Lorraine Hansberry, Huey Newton and Alice Walker, some of the leading intellectuals, some of the leading political figures in African American culture.

It’s vital to understand and teach this history to show Black skeptics today that they are part of a long and prominent tradition of Black freethinkers. Thank you.



Photo by Ingrid Laas

Chris Cameron speaks with an FFRF member following his book signing during the convention. Order *Black Freethinkers* from ffrf.org/shop.

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FFRF.ORG FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

Jan. 6 report

Christian nationalism was ‘driving force’

In the “Christian Nationalism and the January 6, 2021, Insurrection” report, FFRF’s Andrew L. Seidel lays out the evidence showing the role of Christian nationalism in the attack on the Capitol.

The following are excerpted portions of his report.

By Andrew L. Seidel

There were three paths to the Capitol on Jan. 6. First, the Jericho Marchers shifted their prayerful focus from the Supreme Court to the Capitol. Second, Stop the Steal organized its “Wild Protest,” a name chosen to echo President Trump’s Dec. 19, 2020, tweet: “Big protest in D.C. on January 6th. Be there, will be wild!” Indeed, an Oath Keeper charged in the attack had posted earlier that Trump “wants us to make it WILD, that’s what he’s saying.”



Andrew L. Seidel

The third path was the “Save America” rally hosted and managed by Women for America First, which hosted similar rallies on Nov. 14 and Dec. 12, opposite the Jericho March.

The “Save America” stage opened with Paula White, one of Trump’s court evangelicals who was given a taxpayer-funded position in the White House, delivering an explicitly Christian nationalist and openly militant prayer.

Rep. Mo Brooks, R-Ala., has been credibly accused of helping organize Stop the Steal (along with Rep. Paul Gosar, R-Ariz., and Rep. Andy Biggs, R-Ariz.), an allegation Brooks denies. Wearing body armor under his clothing in anticipation of violence that day (Brooks said he was “warned” about “risks” but did not say who warned him, what those risks were, or why he didn’t tell others), Brooks took the stage between White and Trump to preach Christian nationalist-inspired talking points. He claimed that America was straying from its godly foundations and is therefore in danger. “We are here today because America is at risk, unlike it has been in decades and perhaps centuries. Socialist Democrats attack and mock our moral values, even to the point of sarcastically — in the United States Capitol, one of the most revered places in America — mockingly closing their hedonistic prayers with ‘Amen and a woman.’”

He mixed election lies and Christian nationalism:



Photo by Tayfun Coskun via Getty Images

A man waves a “Make America Godly Again” flag outside the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, as security forces behind him try to quell the insurrection.

“We are not gonna let them continue to corrupt our elections and steal from us our God-given right to control our nation’s destiny . . . Today, Republican senators and congressmen will either vote to turn America into a godless, amoral, dictatorial, oppressed and socialist nation on the decline.”

Trump’s 2016 campaign spokesperson Katrina Pierson reiterated the Trump-as-savior talking points. Trump “loves the United States of America,” she declared. “He loves God. He loves our flag, and he loves all of you. And that’s why we’re all here today.”

Rudy Giuliani infamously asked for “trial by combat.” Alongside Giuliani on the stage was John Eastman, a senior fellow and director at the Claremont Institute, which one observer recently called “an increasingly white nationalist think tank.”

The crowd was at a fever pitch when Trump took the stage. Photos and video show that, amid a sea of maskless faces and red hats, there were American flags, Trump flags, “Don’t Tread on Me” flags, and Confederate flags (including one with an AR-15 and the words “COME AND TAKE IT”), accompanied by a mixture of Christian and patriotic imagery and messages, including Christian flags, “An Appeal to Heaven” flags, “Faith over Fear” flags, flags that read “Jesus is my Savior, Trump is my President,” a cross made of PVC pipe and a sign that simply said, “I am with you. — God.”

Iconic imagery

The imagery and violence of Jan. 6 left indelible stamps on the American memory. Of the thousands of photos and videos taken that day, several moments have come to symbolize the insurrection. There were five categories of iconic imagery, all of which also have ties to Christian nationalism. The Capitol Police on duty that day described seeing the Christian nationalism, even if they didn’t know what to call it. “It was clear the terrorists perceived themselves to be Christians,” D.C. Metropolitan Police Officer Daniel Hodges testified to a House Select Committee.

The gallows

The gallows, noose and calls to hang any who were disloyal to Trump denoted a lynch mob. “Hang Mike Pence!” they chanted. An effigy branded a “traitor” with a noose around its neck was paraded on a stick to the Capitol.

People posed for photos with the gallows. At one point, a man in a “Faith, Family, Freedom,” sweatshirt was seen atop the gallows. People signed their names and added thoughts to the wooden gallows. On one of the gallows erected near the Capitol, writing included “Hang them high,” “In God We Trust,” “God Bless the USA,” “Hang for treason,” and “Amen.”

The cross

One of the most ubiquitous symbols on Jan. 6 was the Christian cross. Latin crosses are “the principal symbol of Christianity around the world,” according to the Supreme Court, and, as used on Jan. 6 by the insurrectionists, one of the clearest displays of Chris-



Photo by Stefani Reynolds via Getty Images

Demonstrators pray with their heads on a wooden cross outside the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.



Photo by Robert Nickelsberg of Getty Images

A man holds up a “Jesus saves” sign during the “Stop the Steal” rally on Jan. 06, 2021.

tian nationalism.

Crosses were everywhere that day — on flags and flagpoles, on signs and clothes, around necks, and erected above the crowd. The crowd prayed around one cross that was approximately eight feet tall. The Proud Boys erected a massive cross using ropes in a viral video of the Michigan Capitol (a sister rally, not in D.C.). The lead image on a New York Times article showed a white cross, maybe three feet tall, atop a flagpole with a “Trump: Keep America Great 2020” flag thrust high above the crowd as people chanted “Fight for Trump.”

Flags

Flags have the potential to be the perfect symbol for the goals of Christian nationalism. We typically associate them with a country or nation or some sort of sovereign entity with geography over which to rule. Flags are meant to be symbols of this power, idea and identity. The insurrection was wrapped in many flags that reflect the mythical Christian nation.

As historians Dr. Keri Leigh Merritt and Dr. Rhae Lynn Barnes wrote, “Wednesday [Jan. 6], for the first time in American history, white supremacists treasonously raised a Confederate flag inside the United States Capitol, disrupting America’s peaceful transfer of power and invoking tangled memories of our nation’s Civil War.”

The Christian flag also was everywhere on Jan. 6. In a conversation caught on video as the mob surged into the Capitol and shots were about to be fired, a man stood flying two gold-fringed Christian flags, the Capitol and mob just behind him, and said, “Donald Trump coordinated it. We’re his surrogates.” He pauses, looks at the flags, and adds, “Jesus loves us.” One photo shows the Christian flag flying above another flag that reads, “JESUS IS KING.”

The insurrectionists also paraded the Christian flag around the Senate.

Signs, clothing, bible verses

Then there were the signs. Printed yellow signs proclaiming “Jesus Saves” stood out everywhere in the crowd, including the mob surging up the steps



Photo by Shay Hors via Getty Images

The U.S. Capitol appears through a makeshift gallows and noose during the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection.



Photo by Eric Lee via Getty Images

A demonstrator prays during a protest at the Ellipse in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 6, 2021.

and into the Capitol itself. Two preachers with the yellow “Jesus Saves” sign — and the same message on sweatshirts and vests — preached to the crowd through a bullhorn.

At least one “JESUS 2020” banner was hung by the crowd, many of whom held signs that echoed the sentiment.

A man wearing skeleton gloves posed for media photos with a bible in the chaos and then, when the crowd finally breached the building and surged into the doors, that same gloved hand thrust the bible in the air for the mob to follow.

White Jesus

Perhaps the best symbol of the day was the modified, syncretic portrait of white Jesus, about four feet tall, that one woman carried. It showed a popular depiction of Jesus, but it was altered to have Jesus wearing a red MAGA hat.

One person carried two 5-foot-tall portraits with re-

ligious iconography. One depicted a white Jesus standing tall in white robes with a halo of light, hand raised in front of his chest shooting out beams of red and blue light with the words “Jesus, I trust in you.”

Another attacker can be seen attempting to breach a different Capitol door with his rosary wrapped around his hand, on which a fellow insurrectionist remarked. He wasn’t the only one, and one priest said he performed an exorcism in the Capitol.

Diversity of extremism

An NPR journalist who is an expert in American extremist groups was struck by the diversity of the extremism that day:

“Am I going to see an Oath Keeper? OK, there’s an Oath Keeper. Am I going to see the Three Percent logo? Definitely saw some of them there. Qanon, huge presence at this one. I saw neo-Confederates in the crowd, all sorts of white supremacist and neo-Nazi insignia, too. And all of the strands of American extremism were there in the same crowd. And what’s wilder is that they were in the same crowd with, you know, a grandmother from Arizona, you know, who fervently believes in her heart that the election was stolen and that her vote didn’t matter.”

Yes, the groups were diverse. But it was the Christian nationalism that united them that day.

One of the authors of this report spoke with Luke Mogelson, the New Yorker journalist who filmed the shocking video of the attack from inside the Capitol. “The Christianity was one of the surprises to me in covering this stuff, and it has been hugely underestimated,” he said. “That Christian nationalism you talk about is the driving force and also the unifying force of these disparate players. It’s really Christianity that ties it all together.”

The full report will be available soon at ffrf.org/news.



Photo by Saul Loeb via Getty Images

A man carries a Confederate flag after breaching the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.



Photo by Alex Edelman via Getty Images

Demonstrators pray during the “Million MAGA March” at Freedom Plaza in Washington, D.C., on Nov. 14, 2020, one week after President Trump refused to acknowledge that he lost the 2020 election.

FFRF awards \$17,850

Grad/older student essay contest winners

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is proud to announce the 10 top winners and 12 honorable mentions in the 2021 Brian Bolton Graduate/Older Student Essay Competition.

FFRF has paid out a total of \$17,850 in award money for this contest.

Students were asked to write an essay on the dangers of religious extremism in 21st century America.

Winners, their ages, colleges or universities they are attending and the award amount are listed below.

FIRST PLACE

Elias Rodriguez, 27, University of Texas at Dallas, \$3,500.

SECOND PLACE

Devin Vertrees, 26, Johns Hopkins University, \$3,000.

THIRD PLACE

Hannah Howell, 23, Stanford University, \$2,500.

FOURTH PLACE

Kyra Miller, 22, Rutgers University, \$2,000.

FIFTH PLACE

George Jean-Babets, 29, Boston College, \$1,500.

SIXTH PLACE

Benjamin Schreiner, 26, American University, \$1,000.



SEVENTH PLACE

Katherine Ferran, 26, Michigan State University, \$750.

EIGHTH PLACE

Lydia Taylor, 21, University of Denver, \$500.

NINTH PLACE

Hanna Talsky, 29, Florida School of Massage, \$400.

TENTH PLACE

Daniella Germonprez, 28, Vanderbilt University, \$300.

HONORABLE MENTIONS (\$200 each)

Victoria Cheung, 30, University of Michigan.

Kristen Chew, 29, Lock Haven University.

Brandon Cooper, 29, California Institute of the Arts.

Carina Garcia, 23, California State University, Stanislaus.

Daniella Leon, 29, Mesa Community College.

Lawrence Mullen, 25, University of Buffalo.

Scout K. Myracle, 28, University of Memphis.

Jenna Slater, 30, California Institute of Integral Studies.

Daniel Spaulding, 25, Concordia Seminary.

Myranda Sullivan, 28, Arizona State University.

Chelsea Westfall, 29, Northern Arizona University.

Cassidy Yñigez, 23, Texas A&M University.

FFRF thanks “Director of First Impressions” Lisa Treu for managing the details of this and FFRF’s other student essay competitions. FFRF would also like to thank its volunteers and staff for reading and judging the essays, including Donald Ardell, Dan Barker, Bill Dunn, Annie Laurie Gaylor, Stephen Hirtle, Greta Martens, Amit Pal, PJ Slinger and Casandra Zimmerman.

FFRF has offered essay competitions to college students since 1979, high school students since 1994, grad students since 2010, one geared explicitly for students of color since 2016, and a fifth contest for law students since 2019.

FIRST PLACE

An increase in religious extremism

FFRF awarded Elias \$3,500.

By Elias Rodriguez

I was 7 years old when a group of religious extremists flew airplanes into the World Trade Center towers. Although I was still relatively young at the time, I can remember being baffled at the thought of someone doing something so heinous. It seems that, with each passing year, instances of religious extremism have increased, especially recently. The instances that have stood out the most to me were President Trump’s photo-op in front of a church and the QAnon conspiracies that culminated with the Jan. 6 storming of the U.S. Capitol.

Although these recent events were not as deadly as a terrorist attack, they highlight a serious problem — an increase in religious extremism in the U.S. The events from this past year are evidence of an insidious approach of the encroachment of religious extremism into government, a government that was set up and intended to be secular. These events have threatened the most basic of American principles, such as the First Amendment right to peacefully assemble and the peaceful transfer of power after a democratically held election. These events highlight why we, as a society, should strive toward a secular approach to analyzing our beliefs.

There has always been a religious divide in this country that affects both politicians and policy, but this divide seems to have come to a head. One of the most egregious displays of this divide was perpetrated by an elected official to the highest office of our government. On June 1, 2020, President Trump commanded law enforcement officers to use tear gas and forcefully remove peaceful protesters from Lafayette Square (ironic, considering how



Elias Rodriguez

instrumental Marquis de Lafayette was to the American and French revolutions) to pose for a photo in front of St. John’s Episcopal Church while holding a bible. This act of religious extremism not only violated one of the most fundamental rights of this country — the right to peacefully assemble — it also violated the established principle that this country was founded as a secular nation. Trump’s posturing could reasonably lead anyone to believe that he views himself as president to only a fraction of the American electorate and he is willing to use religious extremist acts to pander to his voters, even at the cost of American principles.

It is said that the sleep of reason creates monsters. This was very much apparent during the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol by religious extremists, spurred on by words from Trump just hours before the insurrection. Angry extremists, most of whom viewed Trump as appointed by God or who have delved so deep into QAnon conspiracies that they have

turned support for him into a pseudo-religious endeavor, broke into the Capitol to overturn the official results of a democratically held election. There has been documentation of insurrectionists shouting things such as, “Jesus Christ, we invoke your name,” as they broke into the building, culminating with a prayer led by the “QAnon Shaman” in the middle of the Senate floor. Although not all insurrectionists think alike, there seems

to be a through line as to the underlying motivations to invade the Capitol outside of the president’s words.

Either way you slice it, there’s a significant overlap between QAnon followers and evangelicals. These actions to overturn the results of a democratic election, the most fundamental principle of this country and quite literally the reason for the war of independence, were nothing short of a coup attempt. I was watching the most fundamental American principle be erod-

ed in real time.

Religious extremism can come in many forms, from flying airplanes into buildings to trying to overthrow a democratically elected government.

“When your religion is the only thing that informs your worldview, you are less likely to critically examine your viewpoints and are thus more likely to fall victim to bad information.”

When your religion is the only thing that informs your worldview, you are less likely to critically examine your viewpoints and are thus more likely to fall victim to bad information.

As it stands, Christian nationalism is the greatest threat

to our civil rights and principles as is evidenced over the past year. If we examine our beliefs from a secular standpoint, where no political figure is appointed by a god or is part of a divine plan, then we will be able to see that we are all striving for the same thing: equality.

Elias, 27, attends the University of Texas at Dallas and plans to get a master’s degree in business analytics. “When I was working on my bachelor’s degree, I knew that I wanted a career in health care to help fix the system that we have,” Elias writes.

Yip Harburg, from his book: **Rhymes for the Irreverent**



Written by “Over the Rainbow” lyricist Yip Harburg. Illustrated by Seymour Chwast, published by FFRF.

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SECOND PLACE

Religious extremism vs. individual rights

FFRF awarded Devin \$3,000.

By Devin Vertrees

I first witnessed the dangers of religious extremism as a young child raised in a private Catholic school. In fourth grade, our jovial principal known for his kindness and fairness was fired over rumors of a homosexual relationship and was replaced by a domineering disciplinarian hellbent on stifling free thought in the pursuit of “religious redemption.”

Where our original principal cared about fostering community and learning, his replacement cared little about our well-being or education. Instead, she singularly focused on “atoning for our original sin” and achieving “religious enlightenment,” in effect, punishing children for things they had not done. This obviously negates the American principle of justice and imparts on impressionable young children that they are inherently bad. Even worse, if any of the children I attended school with were questioning their sexuality, they would have been shown that expressing their true selves was unacceptable.

I saw that religious extremism led parents and faculty to make decisions not in the best interest of the students, but, rather, in support of some ridiculous religious dogma. The negative impacts of this religious extremism on the lives of scores of impressionable children passing through this school cannot be overstated as it undermined our sense of justice, fairness and individual rights to privacy — core princi-



Devin Vertrees

ples of American society.

In the years since, examples of the danger of religious (and particularly Christian) extremism have arisen again and again. I grew up down the street from Masterpiece Cakeshop, the bakery at the center of a contentious Supreme Court case regarding its refusal to bake a wedding cake for a same-sex couple based on their Catholic beliefs. This case divided my hometown while I was in high school and college as neighbors denounced neighbors and the baker proclaimed his “God-given right” to deny this couple’s humanity. I was struck that religious beliefs in this country could be so pervasive as to affect things as simple as confectionaries.

I felt that we, as a society, had complete-

ly lost the plot when a cake could be perceived as threat to these Christians’ way of life. It seemed rather obvious to me that religious extremism was the real threat when it interfered with this couple’s civil rights. Religious extremism yet again tore at the fabric of American society as this baker’s personal beliefs superseded the tenets of America’s guaranteed rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

And now, as a woman in my mid-20s, Christian extremists continually express and enforce opinions about my body and my ability to obtain contraception and an abortion. Some-

how, the religious extremists in power, predominantly white men, are able to exert power over what happens with my body. Women are denied health-care every day in this country in yet another example of religion superseding our right to life and liberty.

Indeed, many women, including myself, require contraception for the treatment of medical conditions. The regulation of these treatments by religious extremists has tangible impacts on my health and well-being. This is perhaps the most egregious example of religious extremism (and religion in general) interfering with American principles. The thought that some perfect stranger’s religious beliefs holds weight over my medical treatment obliterates my bodily autonomy. This runs count-

er to everything this country stands for, including religious freedom. This precludes my right to life and liberty, and the right to live according to my specific religious (or anti-religious) principles and not those of extremists. The common factor of all these examples and experiences, some of which have had an indelible effect on the country, is that religious extremists believe their tenets come before others’ individual rights. This makes religious extremism a threat to the most significant American principles, the ones upon which this country was founded. We must resist this threat

as this society values individual freedom and autonomy above all. This country was founded on the belief that governance and religion should be wholly removed from each other, and it is our duty to

sustain this separation. A society built on the foundation of secularism is one that respects individual rights — perhaps the cornerstone of this country’s founding. Nothing could be more patriotic, then, than freedom from religion and the centering of the rights of the individual.

Devin, 26, attends Johns Hopkins University, where she started a master’s program in biotechnology. “I spent four years working as a microbiologist following my graduation from the University of Denver,” she writes. “I hope to go on to do research in developing vaccines and understanding infectious diseases.”

“Religious extremists believe their tenets come before others’ individual rights.”

THIRD PLACE

The dangers of Christian nationalism

FFRF awarded Hannah \$2,500.

By Hannah Howell

The aggrandizing of Christian nationalism poses a great threat to American principles and civil rights. Despite the United States’ founding as a secular nation, events throughout history have attempted to transform the country into a Christian-dominated nation, where political ideology and cultural norms are influenced by extremist thought.

A false narrative romanticizing America’s history is the foundation of many Christian nationalist leaders. During times of political instability, this narrative re-emerges into American politics, peddled as what will “save” America. The call to regress rather than progress is particularly threatening. Given the country’s turbulent history with both race and gender, the call to “go back” is alarming, and puts many Americans’ freedoms at risk. Religious and political leaders alike peddle these sentiments with rhetoric synonymous with white power, violence and alt-right perspectives. The most recent example of this is the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

Footage of the event proves the underlying danger and existing power of white nationalist ideals. Rioters proudly wore “Camp Auschwitz” merchandise and swung Confederate flags. The sentiment behind this attack — the desire

to restore America for God — is founded in a false belief that this violence and destruction was for a higher power. President Trump’s ideology heavily aligned with the Christian nationalist resurgence, promulgating the notorious slogan “Make America Great Again,” which may epitomize the foundation of Christian nationalist movements. The vague language leaves room for Americans to identify with it and think back to a time in their life that was “ideal” — ultimately viewing this slogan and its belief system through the rose-colored glasses of their own nostalgia.

The harsh reality is that the time they wish to revert to never existed. As history points out, the same rhetoric was echoed in eras past. Instead of learning from history and expanding upon the freedoms established during the country’s infancy, religious extremists romanticize a nonexistent time. Trump might be the most notable and recent perpetrator of these ideas, but the rise of religious extremism, specifically Christian nationalism, is deeply ingrained in American history. Trump simply amplified these voices, culminating in the horrific incident at the Capitol.

To fully understand the threat this movement has to current civil rights, it is imperative to view the rise of Christian nationalism in the context of the origins of our Constitution. The document is inherently secular, a testament to the Founding Fathers’ apprehension of the



Hannah Howell

combining of church and state, from the generic language of “our creator” to the latter inclusion of the First Amendment.

America was founded by freethinkers for the diverse population who call the United States home, a mission substantiated by the rhetoric and sentiments reflected in early documents. Attempts to use religion and grandiose Christian values to bolster the power of one group over another are a threat to the government’s structure. At the core of the Christian nationalist belief system is the linking of American and Christian values.

The ensnaring of political and religious ideology only intensifies radicalism. Consequently, when Christian nationalism becomes not only a social movement but a political one, democratic institutions are threatened. Much like the Trump era, the 1970s saw an influx in Christian lead-

ers becoming actively involved in politics — often referred to as the new Christian right during the Nixon and Reagan administrations. This right-wing group often used biblical teachings and scripture as guidance for political decisions, and to gain support and leverage political power.

One prominent example was Christian minister and conservative political commentator Jerry Falwell. In 1976, he wrote, “The idea that religion and politics don’t mix was invented by the devil to keep Christians from running their own country.” His desire to transform the United States into a Christian nation was clear and has echoed throughout history.

In his 2016 presidential campaign, Trump adopted the dogma of Falwell, announcing, “I would like to thank the evangelical and religious community because I’ll tell you what. Because the support they’ve given me, and I’m not sure I totally deserve it, has been so amazing.” Under the Trump brand of politics, religion persisted as a dangerous and ubiquitous force in American dynamics.

It is imperative the country uphold the First Amendment’s separation of church and state, promising “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” This distinction, and protection it provides, is the only way to grow as a country and preserve the freedoms of all Americans.

Hannah, 23, is from Corona, Calif., and attends Stanford University, where she is working toward a master’s degree in sustainable science and practice. As an undergrad, Hannah majored in art history while competing on the varsity softball team.

FOURTH PLACE

Freedom has never felt so costly

FFRF awarded Kyra \$2,000.

By Kyra Miller

Since the founding of the United States, secularism has been the law of the land. But this idea of a separation of church and state has never been favored in practice. Throughout history, religion, particularly Christianity, has crept its way into every branch of government and every social institution. Many institutions, from law enforcement to medicine to education, have ties to religion, and these ties have led to inequalities and injustices that are still being felt today. Although a comfort to many on an individual level, religion is a threat to the lives of many and the freedom of all.

The threat that extreme religious views poses on society and individuals comes in many forms, one of the most prevalent being that of legislation. Every day, laws are being proposed and passed with the justification being nothing more than moral superiority on the basis of religion. These laws often help nobody directly but instead infringe on the rights of many, often minority populations, and put many people at risk for harm. These laws and orders are passed on the executive, legislative and judicial branches, elected officials often voting in favor of their own holy views rather than in the interest of their constituents.



Kyra Miller

A study by the Pew Research Center found that about 88 percent of Congress identifies as Christian, compared to 65 percent of U.S. adults, and only 0.2 percent of Congress identifies as religiously unaffiliated, while 26 percent of U.S. adults identify as nonreligious. It is common on the debate floor to hear congresspersons profess that “their faith” makes them vote a certain way, as if faith has any room in government.

But it is not just lawmakers who pose a risk to the lives of U.S. citizens. Extremist groups and terrorist groups have been increasing within the United States in recent years and these

groups are often fueled by religious motivations. One report found that 67 percent of “terrorist plots and attacks” were carried out by white supremacist groups. The Department of Homeland Security named these groups as some of the most lethal threats within the United States. These far-right groups often use religious justifications for their attacks and activities and Christianity is often at the root of these justifications. The danger that these groups pose is often dismissed or minimized because the members of these groups often look like and share similar viewpoints as a majority of U.S. citizens. But their extremist nature and inflated ego from being unchallenged make these right-wing groups even more dangerous. Members of these groups could be anywhere, and anyone who does not agree with their beliefs could be their next victim.

Religious extremists and their beliefs that everyone should hold the same views as them is also a threat to the science and medical community. This war between science and religion dates back thousands of years and today still inhibits many people from getting the help they need. Not only have medical professionals refused to give patients the medication or treatment

they need because it goes against their personal beliefs, but so many people and children under the care of their religious parents are refused treatment because it goes against “God’s plan,” or they deem medical intervention to be unnatural. This action of forcing a person’s own beliefs onto others, especially vulnerable populations, is a danger to individuals and the collective. Scientific and medical advances will always fall behind as long as religion remains intertwined in the institutions that they are supposed to be separated from.

The First Amendment states that people have the right to participate in any religion or no religion. This freedom to not believe can feel like an attack to people who choose to believe, but it is only faith in ourselves and our community without religious intervention that can fight against the dangers of religious extremism.

Kyra, 22, attends Rutgers University, where she is working toward a master’s degree in forensic science with a concentration in forensic biology. “I am hoping to build a career where I can work within a specialized interest and work in the processing of rape kits,” writes Kyra. “I want to have a part in rewriting the definition of justice so it can help to build a better future for everyone.”

“Although a comfort to many on an individual level, religion is a threat to the lives of many and the freedom of all.”

FIFTH PLACE

Implications of doctrinal zealotry

FFRF awarded George \$1,500.

By George Jean-Babets

In training to become a social worker, much of my education has surrounded ideas of diversity, equity, inclusion and cultural competence. In my personal experience, the dogma of religious extremism does not align with these principles.

The National Association of Social Workers’ Code of Ethics has various guiding principles, including social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, and integrity. Historically, religious extremist groups have infringed upon these guiding principles by spreading enmity and voicing their censure of marginalized groups.

Religious extremism, as evidenced by radical agendas, tends to procure violence as seen in the assault on the U.S. Capitol. Extremism can be seen at the group level and individual level. Simplistic representations are often problematic and consequential in that they determine the perception of extremist groups.

For example, following the Sept. 11 attacks, almost 70 percent of the U.S. security policies targeted Arabs and Muslims, since they were seen to be affiliated with the devotees of the ex-

tremist group al-Qaeda. It is crucial to be cognizant of bias born from stereotypes of what constitutes a “religious extremist.” It is important to be self-reflective by recognizing implicit biases and buried assumptions we all hold.

In the essay, “Violent and Non-Violent Extremism: Two Sides of the Same Coin?,” Alex P. Schmid proposes that either for individuals or groups, the five warning signs of religious extremism include belief in absolute truth, endorsement of blind obedience, a quest

to establish utopia, belief that the end justifies the means, and a declaration of holy war.

One of the most dangerous instances of non-violent religious extremism involves public officials’ use of religion-based doctrine as conviction for legislation and public policy. Some officials see fit to govern a woman’s bodily autonomy by promoting increasingly restrictive laws that limit one’s ability to find reasonable access to abortion services.

Regarding the public sphere, I value the First Amendment’s decree that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” While I am no legal scholar, I believe this should mean that no member of the legislature should put forth policy based on religious edict. I respect this first section of the First Amendment

“Contemporary religious nationalist groups represent an extreme platform for many ideas that are regressive and discriminatory”



George Jean-Babets

because it also respects the free practice of religion and denounces religious persecution.

Religious fundamentalist movements such as the Christian right and interest groups like the Family Research Council represent contemporary examples of religious extremism in the United States. Some sects of the Christian right advocate for the removal of sex education in schools, view the LGBTQ+ community as immoral, and believe in strict binary gender roles for men and women.

The mission of the Family Research Council is “to advance faith, family and freedom in public policy and the culture from a biblical worldview.” This religion-based, biblical world-

view holds political influence through its lobbying efforts. The Family Research Council opposes and lobbies against embryonic stem-cell research, abortion, pornography, divorce and LGBTQ+ rights (such as anti-discrimination laws, same-sex marriage and LGBTQ+ adoption).

While I firmly believe in the freedom to practice one’s religious beliefs, contemporary religious nationalist groups represent an extreme platform for many ideas that are regressive and discriminatory. Religious nationalist groups denounce inclusion and multiculturalism in favor of an ideology more aligned with white supremacy. Religious extremism and much of its agenda remain a clear and present threat to the well-being and prosperity of people who call the United States of America home in the 21st century.

George, 29, is pursuing a master’s degree in social work at Boston College. “I am passionate about mental health and have an internship placement at the Department of Mental Health,” George writes. “I have bipolar disorder and have struggled through the extremes of mania and depression.”

What Is a Freethinker?

freethinker *n.*

A person who forms opinions about religion on the basis of reason, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief.

SIXTH PLACE

Extreme to mainstream

FFRF awarded Benjamin \$1,000.

By Benjamin Schreiner

Religious extremism in the United States has always existed on the fringes of the church and larger population. Today, that extreme fringe has now successfully breached, in varied capacity, the mainstream within many Christian churches in the United States. This fringe brings with it not the morally righteous content typically preached, but rather hate, twisted biblical interpretations and conspiracies. What's more, religious extremism has not just bled into the Christian mainstream, but also up through the political spectrum in the United States.

“With increased radicalization among Christians, more people will be willing to act upon what they believe to be true.”

and exploit or encourage extremist ideology to appeal to voters.

Examples that show the connection between these threats are not hard to find. One must only look back to Jan. 6, 2021, to understand how these elements pose an active threat to the United States of America. On that day, thousands of people arrived in Washington, D.C., to protest the 2020 election results and, at the request of President Trump, to “stop the steal.” Around the National Mall, there was an abundance of Christian symbols, prayer groups and vendors. The presence of religion was not just a coincidence, and evidence shows that many of those who faced charges for their involvement in the insurrection

referenced religious motivation as to why they decided to break into the Capitol building.

One such person is Matthew Black, who on Jan. 8, 2021, posted a video on YouTube describing his experience inside the Capitol. Referencing an affidavit in support of a criminal complaint and arrest warrant, Black stated: “I wanted to get inside the building to plead the blood of Jesus over it. That was my goal.” Additionally, he said, “I just felt like the spirit of God wanted me to go into the Senate room, you know?” Statements like Black's are not uncommon, as they are found in dozens of comments from



Benjamin Schreiner

those who talked about their motivations to act on Jan. 6, 2021.

When analyzing the events of that day and the religious context involved, comments such as Black's only lead researchers to unravel how extremism has affected the larger Christian community and political sphere.

In the same month as the insurrection, Lifeway Research, which assists Christian ministries by conducting custom research projects, found that 49 percent of Protestant pastors frequently hear members of their congregation repeating conspiracy theories they have heard. When the mass circulation of conspiracies, such as the lie that the 2020 election was stolen, are put

into the echo chamber of a church congregation and then emboldened by elected politicians, events such as the Jan. 6 insurrection become possible. Additionally, within otherwise peaceful congregations, events like the insurrection are seen as a necessary undertaking at worst, or understandable at best, by many members of the Christian community.

Secularism is necessary in the United States to preserve the foundation of American principles. The effects of religion on policy, be it abortion or immigration, are apparent. Unfortunately, often the results of politicians preaching what should be done because the bible says so are violent interactions of those who believe they must act. Some people are becoming encouraged to share and act upon their nationalist, racist and anti-immigration beliefs. With increased radicalization among Christians, more people will be willing to act upon what they believe to be true, predominantly when those beliefs originate from two highly influential sources: God and country. The leaders of this country need to be the example of peaceful debate and reason. When religion becomes involved in government, it offers people reasons to become extreme. They believe their country and their souls are at stake, and when that is the case, the extreme then becomes mainstream.

Benjamin, 26, is a student veteran attending American University in Washington, D.C. Benjamin served for six years in the U.S. Navy and plans to pursue a career working within the U.S. government.

SEVENTH PLACE

Robert Aaron Long is a religious extremist

FFRF awarded Katherine \$750.

By Katherine Ferran

On March 16, 2021, Robert Aaron Long killed eight people in Atlanta, targeting Asian employees of three different spas from which he may have frequented in the past to solicit sex work. Thus, the narrative emerged that Robert struggled with sex addiction, and his rampage was an expression of guilt over his uncontrollable urges. Even the Cherokee County Sheriff's Office leaned heavily on this narrative. A spokesperson described the mass shooter as a troubled-but-upright young man just having a “bad day.” He was even seeking treatment with his church, and sympathy from evangelicals everywhere poured in upon the discovery of this detail. Meanwhile, following this one mass shooting of many that shook the United States in 2021,



Katherine Ferran

outcry for gun control was this time accompanied by pleas for empathy and justice from the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities, as well as from sex worker advocates. It baffled many of us that their outrage was matched with seemingly earnest sympathies for the killer.

But, as Slate reporter Kelsy Burke pointed out, one may interpret “sex addiction” in this case to be a largely manufactured ailment created by evangelical Christian organizations to sell an entire industry of abstinence and control to young Christian men like Robert. The true ailment underlying sexual frustration and dysfunction in young white American men is the natural result of a culture that teaches them shame and entitlement in equal parts. The entitle-

ment to objects of desire can perhaps be traced to the capitalist and patriarchal pillars of American culture, but I would argue that the shame has nearly exclusive roots in religion, namely Christianity. In the case of the sex addiction myth, the evangelical church has taken advantage of this legacy to take purity culture to its religious extreme.

What makes this a case of religious extremism is debatable. Defining religious extremism itself is already a complex debate waged between religious scholars, historians, sociologists, political scientists, etc. Some argue it is done at the individual level to seek martyrdom, others that it must be performed as a group toward a political goal. Most challengingly, there is difficulty in assessing if a belief is actually extreme within a community. I am choosing to emphasize the dimension of religious extremism that is identifiable by the normative restriction of behaviors as imposed by a religious group. In this way, Long's actions are in line with an act of extremism in that he perceived his own deviation from his group's teachings and took it upon himself to both correct himself and attempt to correct the world in honor of his beliefs.

To clarify, the beliefs at the root of the violence are that sexual indulgence is wrong, and that simultaneously men

cannot be expected to control their urges, topped off with racist notions of women of color being inherently more sexual than white women, and therefore greater sources of temptation. If Long had perceived his sexual desires as socially deviant and instead pursued therapy from a sex therapist without religious affinities, these beliefs may have been challenged. The objectification of women, the xenophobia surrounding AAPI people, and the use of violence as self-expression are symptoms of an American psychosis that secular scholars, doctors and activists work tirelessly to treat. I do not believe it is religion's place to do the same. For a church to attempt to shape a multicultural society toward its own moral ideals

“One may interpret ‘sex addiction’ to be a largely manufactured ailment created by evangelical Christian organizations to sell an entire industry of abstinence and control to young Christian men.”

under the guise of mental health and community support is now demonstrably a pathway by which religious extremism may flourish.

Katherine, 26, attends Michigan State University. “I am a conservation ecologist seeking further education to break into the world of nature-based climate change solutions,” Katherine writes. “Don't worry, my environmental science degree from a Catholic university was surprisingly secular. I currently work at a wildlife preserve in southeast Michigan and volunteer regularly as a corporate accountability researcher with Change the Chamber.”

Women Without Superstition
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EIGHTH PLACE

Christian nationalism's threat to democracy

FFRF awarded Lydia \$500.

By Lydia Taylor

I was 2 years old on Sept. 11, 2001, when religious extremists first altered the fabric of modern American society. I was 21 years old on Jan. 6, 2021, when religious extremists struck again and attacked America and its principles. I don't remember any details from Sept. 11. During the second attack, however, I was much more aware and could only watch in horror as insurrectionists chanting "stop the steal" and waving Christian flags stormed the Capitol.

Although the immeasurable tragic impact of 9/11 on American society cannot be understated, the events of Jan. 6 reveal an intent perhaps even more malicious than that of the religious extremists who orchestrated

9/11. The insurrectionist and religiously fueled mob that stormed the Capitol was made up of Americans, not radicals from a faraway land. The violent mob that attacked not only our government buildings but also our elected officials came armed with weapons, zip ties and materials to erect crosses and even a noose.

As I and countless others across the nation and across the world watched with bated breath, this mob pushed through

“The events of Jan. 6 have revealed what those in the secular community have long known: Christian nationalists pose a clear and present danger to American national security, the American people and American principles.”

barricades and security forces, while bright yellow signs reading “Jesus Saves” bounced above the crowd next to confederate, Trump 2021 and American flags. Yet, in the aftermath of this disturbing scene, during which it seemed American democracy was in its dying days, the bipartisan unity that swept Washington in the wake of 9/11 was nowhere to be found. Instead, our nation faced a stark divide between those who seek to protect American values and those that wish to twist them for their own gain and other malicious ends. The events of Jan. 6 have revealed what

those in the secular community have long known: Christian nationalists pose a clear and present danger to American national security, the American people and American principles. The evidence is all around us. From coordinated legislation aimed at restricting voting rights to limiting the

bodily autonomy of women and the freedom of the LGBTQ+ community.

These issues are often grouped together under the term “culture wars,” but this is a mistake made at our own peril. We as a society should not underestimate the ability of the religious right, and Christian nationalists in particular, to create and perpetuate narratives that paint the secular community and others who seek to protect American principles and democracy



Lydia Taylor

as “dangerous radicals” seeking to destroy “true” American culture.

Although America and its principles can signify many different things to different people, most can agree that America stands for freedom and liberty, although successfully ensuring these rights for all has been a struggle for more than 200 years.

One of the most influential of these freedoms — so important, in fact, that it was ensured by the First Amendment to the Constitution — is this: “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” In short, America was established to be a secular nation where those of different religions, and none at all, could live freely. That

is precisely why the strategy of Christian nationalists is so dangerous. To seek to redefine the narrative of America to that of a Christian nation, governed by Christian principles is to delete all those who are “different” from the story of America and to corrupt and manipulate America's founding principles.

In America, the case for secularism has always been present, though not always clear to all. Today, re-establishing separation of church and state is vital to the protections of other freedoms and to prevent the bastardization and destruction of American democracy. In a truly secular America, civil rights could be better ensured, and all religions could have the ability to practice freely. Those who are secular would be truly free from religious domination in public life.

In sum, the case for secularism in America is strong, although it must be accepted by, and not forced on, the American people in order to be truly successful.

In the wake of the most recent tragedy spurred on by religious extremists, and Christian nationalists in particular, our nation had a rocky start in 2021. But thankfully, Americans have always risen to past challenges to our nation's founding principles. This time will be no different. Though the road ahead may seem uncertain and even polarized, this could be just the moment to rebuild and re-unify America on its founding principles: freedom, liberty and secularism.

Lydia, 21, attends the University of Denver. She would like to become a foreign service officer and represent the United States abroad.

NINTH PLACE

Wolf in sheep's clothing: Evangelical America

FFRF awarded Hannah \$400.

By Hanna Talsky

Humankind has undoubtedly been participating in religion since before recorded history. From ancient Hinduism to modern-age Scientology, religion has been endlessly touted as a means of personal comfort and guidance to millions of people. What is too often overlooked, however, is what can only be described as a form of guilt-driven mind control that permeates today's American culture in the form of extreme evangelical beliefs. In a country that was founded on religious freedom and escape from tyranny, it is all too apparent to those considered outsiders by the religious community that power-hungry religious zealots have burrowed their way into the deepest parts of our society. From national prayer breakfasts to “In God We Trust” plastered onto our currency to legislation being lobbied and enacted against reproductive health, there seems to be no limit to the dangerous ideals' reach.

Separation of church and state seems to be one of the most commonly ignored, albeit the number one, clauses in the Bill of Rights, which evangelical extremists typically claim and reference when disputing many social change attempts. The blatant disregard for this clause has been evident every year since the early 1950s. How can America claim to be a land of religious freedom with separation of religion and political decisions when, every year, thousands of high-ranking political officials gather to



Hannah Talsky

“pray” for our country? How can we trust these individuals to enact legislation that will benefit those who do not share those beliefs, when they hide this religious performance underneath the red, white and blue of patriotism? In truth, there is no regard for religious freedom, because the cash cow that has become the modern-day church has sunk its financial tentacles into the elected officials who swore to protect the very documents they disrespect with this disgusting display of Christianity.

A direct result of the beginning of the National Prayer Breakfast was the enactment of the phrase “In God We Trust” be-

coming the nation's official motto merely three years after the first breakfast was held. The level of lobbying and extreme belief it takes to make such a blanket statement for a country filled with millions of people who do not share that belief is frightening. Currency is an obviously essential aspect to American life, and flagrantly displaying the Christian victory on every last coin and bill is a slap in the face to those who refute those beliefs. This is textbook indoctrination, making it so there is no escape from Christianity. It is a banner that says, “There is no existing without Christianity, and we will prove it by plastering it all over the one thing every single citizen needs — money.”

While the previous two examples are stomach-churning enough, they are hardly as outwardly hateful and violent as the religious fight against reproductive health. It is no surprise that a religion which has a strong foundation in anti-woman, pro-control rhetoric would twist and bastardize the text of the bible they claim to adhere to in order to control the bodies of its citizens. Despite continual disagreement from the scientific community, Christian extremists cling to the fallible claim that a fetus is a human baby that deserves to exist in and feed off of a mother host, no matter the danger or traumatic experience the already living mother must endure to bring that fetus to fruition. They scream behind

“America needs to take a step back and recognize the damage that extreme religious beliefs have caused this country.”

their posters that they are pro-life, when in reality they are pro-birth, as they hardly advocate for continued care for the mother and the fetus once it's born. They would rather see starving, traumatized, unloved living children than they would a woman making an informed choice about what to do with her own body that she inhabits in the developed nation with one of the highest maternal death rates on the planet.

America needs to take a step back and recognize the damage that extreme religious beliefs have caused this country. We are imitating the infamous Dark Ages by retarding immense progress in the fields of science, education, legislation, health care and infrastructure all because of what is supposed to be individual beliefs meant to guide and enrich people's lives. The immense financial power of the church needs to be reconsidered and ultimately disbanded in order to address the real issues of this country: incarceration, homelessness, mental health disease, gun violence, and civil rights. Only then will we see the true land of the free, and home of the brave.

Hannah, 29, attends the Florida School of Massage. “I am a working mother of two, raising accepting and religion-free children. After suffering religious trauma in the ultra-Christian bible belt of Florida, I have made it my goal to ensure that my family will not suffer as I did.”

TENTH PLACE

An outdated worldview

FFRF awarded Daniella \$300.

By Daniella Germonprez

I sat across from her mute. The more she said, the more I couldn't believe that I once shared her thoughts about the world. My mind had begun to wander to keep from arguing when I heard, "I think they just feel that voting against a Republican candidate would be voting against God." Suddenly everything made sense. I began to recount images of the dozens of Trump flags I drove past on the way to my childhood home. Each had been mere accessories to the crosses decorating front doors of houses or centerpieces of car bumper stickers. I wondered what my life would have been like had I never left that town.

Last year, I watched a lawyer fight against a rape exception in court. He explained that while it was terrible that a woman was assaulted and impregnated as a result, it had been God's will. Quoting the bible, he explained that abortion was immoral and should not be allowed even in the case of the woman in the courtroom. My blood boiled as I listened to him speak, but it was clear the anger that I felt for him was ill-placed.

This man truly maintained that God had planned for this woman to be unlawfully violated so that she could give birth



Daniella Germonprez

to a specific embryo as part of a bigger plan. How do you combat that? According to him, the psychological health of this woman was not the cause for concern. It was not important that her body would go through torment without having chosen to do so. For the rest of her life, she would be reminded of her attack every day and forced to deal with the consequences of that. Perhaps even worse, the incredible guilt for feeling

these things, knowing an innocent child searches for love and comfort, would be unbearable. With divine law unable to be modified, how can we update ours to favor all humans equally?

One can reduce anxiety by having faith that everything happens for a reason, but the drawback in trusting anything without question comes at a much greater price. If ever there was a clear example of this, it was exhibited on the political stage during the four years of Donald Trump's presidency.

Whether Trump was a man defending his religious ideals through heinous leadership is one issue, but what matters more is that masses of people support and agree with them.

Based on biblical literature from a time vastly different than the one we live in today, modern worldviews are shaped. To have divine law, which cannot be changed due to a lack of direct communication with its maker, is a difficult place to be. With this mindset, much of our progress is stunted.

Religious extremism is one of the most dangerous things in the world. It is easy enough for most Americans to agree with this when they read a news story about

Muslims, but when Christians enact similar scenarios, it is somehow harder to see them in the same light.

Secularism should be our goal if we wish to have a system that provides equal benefits to every human. It is ridiculous to supplement laws with a book written thousands of years ago, during which only a portion of the population had rights.

The Declaration of Independence clearly states that government should be altered if it becomes destructive. It should be easy to see that when it comes to governing an extremely diverse population, secularism is the only option, but so far it has not been so. It will take time for our country's entire population to accept that many reprehensible viewpoints derive from religious writings, but when we finally do, society will be catapulted forward.

Daniella, 28, attends Vanderbilt University. "I am a native Floridian passionate about the environment, children and psychological health," Daniella writes. "I have spent the last six years teaching art at a public elementary school in Key West, all the way to coaching the kids club at a rock-climbing gym in California."

“Secularism should be our goal if we wish to have a system that provides equal benefits to every human.”

Grad/older student essay honorable mentions

A hope for change

By Victoria Cheung

Engaging with religious extremists about their beliefs quickly becomes fraught with emotion. Critical thinking gets brought to a standstill when these emotions are riled, leading to an even bigger problem: You cannot engage or change anyone's minds. There is no discussion to be had; logic and science cannot penetrate defenses rooted in a wall of feelings. This is inhibiting the progress of our country and its fundamental belief in the right to pursue life, liberty and happiness.

Those in power weaponize religion for money, power and political gain. Religion numbs us to violence that would be unacceptable in any other country or context. It stokes hate and hypocrisy, yet select phrases in the bible justify these agendas. Secularism provides a path to new ideas and off comes the blindfold to religious and, in turn, racial bias. This allows empathy and understanding to blossom.

Victoria, 30, attends the University of Michigan.

A threat to diversity

By Kristen Chew

Religious extremists use their beliefs to degrade women instead of being accepting of the accomplishments that women have made. In worst case scenarios, misogyny can lead to different forms of abuse among women (including sexual).



Kristen Chew

stand up against racism. A notable example is Black Lives Matter, a movement used to highlight racism and discrimination among black people.

Religious extremism is commonly associated with sexism, racism, transphobia, dislike for immigration and toxic attempts to justify these extreme religious beliefs. With less exposure to religious extremism, individuals in the United States can further grow and thrive.

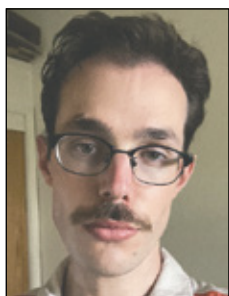
Kristen, 29, attends Lock Haven University.

Theocracy rising

By Brandon Cooper

The most egregious and sly assaults on the democratic process are either pardoned or buttressed by religion.

Like all patriarchal religions, Christianity has no small obsession with controlling women and positing a secondary, subservient status as their inherent lot. It is simply reckless, callous, and myopic to take such draconian measures that threaten the lives and



Brandon Cooper

The forms of prejudice brought on by religious extremism can cause trauma or emotional damage that impairs self-worth. There have been protests, organizations and movements that have aimed to

livelihoods of women. What's more, the current refusal by many to receive the Covid-19 vaccine is, apart from a more generalized demonstration of the lack of information literacy amidst the American public, but a facet of the nation's latent religiosity. In this instance, the dismissal of science, long a tenet of the white Christian radical, takes on a new and deadly salience.

Brandon Cooper, 29, attends the California Institute of the Arts.

Homeland enemies

By Carina Garcia

The relationship between religious extremism and its violent history has existed for centuries. Many isolated combats have been executed in the name of religion. However, it has most recently become fueled by the technological advancements we have achieved in the 21st century.

Ever since the horrific act of Sept. 11, 2001, the United States has been keen on fighting terrorism and has taken pride in keeping its country safe. Yet, the enemy is already on American soil and has been wreaking havoc for years. For instance, an infamous extremist, Dylan Roof, murdered nine individuals at a church and was motivated by extreme Christian beliefs. He was radicalized by ideologies he found on the internet and carried out one of the most horrific crimes ever committed in a place where people go to find comfort.

An extremist, Robert Lewis Dear,

decided to take matters into his own hands. He entered an abortion clinic in Colorado and killed three people and injured nine more. He believed that death was the only solution to end abortion, and he had a deep admiration for the Army of God, a Christian terrorist organization.

Carina, 23, attends California State University, Stanislaus.

Growing up in extreme religion

By Daniella Leon

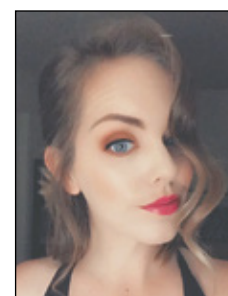
Religious extremism has not only affected me in my rights as a citizen, it also has impacted my life since childhood. I grew up in an intense Christian household where my mother's religion was the core of all decisions.

Questioning Christianity is unacceptable, not following the bible is a sin and eternal damnation is the punishment.

The topic of sex was taboo. We were expected to save ourselves for marriage and boyfriends were completely off-limits.

Time went on and my home life got more and more tense, and I was a prisoner. I was not allowed to have my own relationship; I was not allowed to talk to who I wanted to talk to, and the most dangerous lesson being forced upon me, was my body was not mine, it was God's.

Extreme religion is not about true beliefs or spirituality, it is about control. The rules and expectations from



Daniella Leon

Essay Contest

Continued from page 21

extreme religion remove most human rights and that is why secularism is so important.

Daniella, 29, attends Mesa Community College.

Secularism for the people

By Lawrence Mullen

Across the United States, Christian nationalist and religious extremist rhetoric and ideology becomes apparent in



Lawrence Mullen

state legislatures and acts of physical violence. Anti-LGBT and anti-transgender legislation is rampant, and particularly targets school-aged K-12 children and adolescence. Given that we know there is a

high correlation between mood disorders and suicidal ideation, and sexuality and gender identity, it is particularly appalling and malicious to target youth that are still formulating their identity and their position in the world.

It is the source of a type of logic that denies others their ability to thrive, and in many cases simply survive; with the logic itself being considered “self-evident” by other Christian nationalists, and therefore not needing additional justification.

Lawrence, 25, attends the University at Buffalo.

Undoing extremism

By Scout K. Myracle

As a Southern queer person raised in a fundamentalist Christian church, I have experienced firsthand how religious extremism creates a traumatizing culture for young people. Pastors and people in power use shame and to enforce a standard, and often single out teenagers who exhibit any characteristics they find unpalatable. It's common to see families divided by these issues, and individuals ostracized for not conforming to the dominant structure. Religious fundamentalism pushes LGBTQ people into the margins, and severely traumatizes them



Scout K. Myracle

in an attempt to use shame to control the purity of the congregation, state, or nation.

Religious extremism has long been used as a tool of control to benefit a very small minority of powerful people.

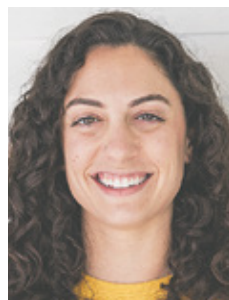
When these people in power can manage to create a collective narcissism, they succeed in weaponizing an entire population against whomever it is they intend to “other,” outlaw or destroy.

Scout, 28, attends the University of Memphis.

The price our planet must pay

By Jenna Slater

Thanks to religious dogma and the individuals driving its rhetoric, we find ourselves in a race against the clock.



Jenna Slater

Without a plan B, no matter how many billionaires decide to embark on a joy ride to space, this planet is the only home we have. Thanks to religious extremism, we are killing it and are unable to even engage in a conversation about how to give Mother Earth a fighting chance.

Jenna, 30, attends the California Institute of Integral Studies.

Inhumane actions

By Daniel Spaulding

Citizens of the United States are given rights that are enshrined in the Constitution. Through centuries of



Daniel Spaulding

amendments and developments, these rights have shaped the course of American society. There are times, however, when these rights are infringed upon. Though freedom of religion is clearly outlined in the Constitution, religious

extremists distort this established human right — among others — in order to mold followers, push agendas, and justify actions that prove disastrous for everyone involved.

Due to these extremists' methods, concerns have been raised for young Americans in the 21st century. Because these young Americans are shielded from an objective point of view, it lessens the likelihood of them being exposed to the objective realities around them. Because these young Americans don't learn the freedoms they've been inherently given, it lessens the likelihood they give those same freedoms to others. This not only leads to a continual distortion of the Constitution, but also provides devastating consequences for their lives, the lives of their fellow Americans, and future generations to come.

Daniel, 25, attends Concordia Seminary.

Extremist Christianity

By Myranda Sullivan

Many Christians believe that non-Christian scientists are trying to prove that God doesn't exist more than they're trying to figure out how the world works. Many facts we know to be true, such as carbon dating, have been “proven” wrong by Christian “scientists” in an effort to prove that God exists, science is wrong, and the bible is right. This has caused a significant amount of distrust of scientists in the Christian community, especially around areas of larger significance, like vaccines and climate change.

Even though many Christian extremists can see the effects of what religion does to governments, they often rationalize that what's happening in other countries won't happen here because it's their own religion. There is absolutely no proof that a government works more efficiently for the people when it's run by religion; it's never had a long-term success rate for the people in any country.

Myranda, 28, attends Arizona State University.

Secularism saves

By Chelsea Westfall

When religious groups come up with laws banning abortion at detection of a so-called “fetal heartbeat,” however, that is entirely unreasonable. These “heartbeat” bills misun-



Chelsea Westfall

derstand what a sonogram is picking up at eight weeks: those sounds are electrical activity in cells, not the pounding of a developed human heart that proves viability.

Remember, an extremist's goal is not to have a nuanced discussion over when abortion might be deemed wrong; it is to outlaw abortion entirely.

Churches, of course, have a vested interest in condemning abortion. The more children their flock has, the more tithing and political support they can expect later, because children tend to carry on the belief systems they were taught growing up.

America's women will remain free and healthy only so long as religious freedom is truly the law of the land.

Chelsea, 29, attends Northern Arizona University.

A nation under fire

By Cassidy Yñiguez

Christian nationalists want to define America as inextricably linked to Christianity and wish to utilize this religious culture as an official template for how and what our country represents. Furthermore, Christian nationalists strive to incorporate this mentality into schools, restrict immigration to avoid religious “pollution,” and believe that Christians are entitled to primacy of place in the social hierarchy due to their role in America's founding heritage.



Cassidy Yñiguez

Under a Christian government, the right to abortion would be gone completely with (maybe) rare exceptions. The conflict between these is that people who are not pro-life lose their choice, but those who are pro-life gain the right to control those who lost said choice — thus emphasizing an unjust power dynamic.

Cassidy, 23, attends Texas A&M University.

CRANKMAIL

Welcome to a fresh new year of some of the odd mail we receive at FFRF. Some of it comes from emails, others from social media. Printed as received.

GIVE UP THE WAR ON CHRISTMAS: I am DISGUSTED by you dumb FFRF radical liberals and your annual War on Christmas! Every year you pull this shit. We could just say MERRY CHRISTMAS like we've done for thousands of years, but instead you just want to say Happy Allah-Days. You think you can CANCEL Santa. You think you can CANCEL Jesus. You muslim atheists are working towards Barack HUSSEIN Obama's COMMUNIST dreams and just think you can CANCEL everything. But I'm gonna bring the cancel culture train to the FFRF station. It's called HELL, where you get cancelled for ALL ETERNITY, when you die alone and sad because nobody likes you lol!!!! We're saying Merry Christmas again in this country, and NOBODY will listen to you libtards saying Happy Allah-Days! — Jim Burns

Let's Go Brandon: LET'S GO BRANDON, YOU MOTHER FUCKERS! — Shane Thomas

Answer this: Wow, you really know how to spend your life wasting time. Perhaps you ought to ask yourself this one simple question: “Why am I so intimidated by religion?” Why have you allowed this fear to completely take over your life? Work on answering that question and then perhaps you can

lead a more productive life. — Margaret Plancher

No evidence: But atheists have a faith because they believe that every thing came about from a single cell there is no evidence for This alleged cell. every alleged discovery is a house of cards that falls down.because athiest are not able to tell us where the single cell came from.arhiest magic trick now you don't see it now you do — Anthony Higgins

Believe it: So, is there a life after death? When we die do we just end and are no more? There's a feeling inside my being that there is an after life. I believe the King James Bible contains all the information my eternal soul needs to live in this world and my life in the world to come. You should too. — Jimmy Ray

God is great! I am a believer of Yeshua! I wouldn't be alive today without GOD! I had a daughter that was stricken with a terminal brain tumor and I got angry with him but I never didn't deny him as my GOD. He is in my heart and forever he will stay. I will NEVER give up my GOD! I CANT GO ONE DAY OR HOUR WITHOUT HIM. — Margo Susanna Tovar

God is real: Atheism Is a religion look it up! I would never say that there is no GOD, never! — Barry Redfern

No atheists; Lmao no such thing as a atheist all of y'all are fake every single one of you believe in a deity because it is ignorant to deny one based on the fact we are crated by design 5 finger 5 toes ever

animal after it's kind we never evolved that's been disproven since we have over 10,000 years of history records and nothing evolved — Daniel Strathairn

Beware of hell: You may noy be afraid to “burn in hell” now as you quoted on tv but you cant erase the fact that there is a hell. If you refuse to believe in Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, your sending yourself to hell. God gives you the free gift, you either take it.....or leave it, seems you have made your choice, but i do pray you change your mind one day, you really think your here by chance, theres nothing after, then why do you have emotions, love? God is love, not goop you think we may have grown from, think about it, your soul depends on it, God bless you. — Kelly Engelhart

Satan has you: You all are in the Antichrist as foretold. You are fulfilling what God said would happen. When I look at your faces all I see is evil like Satan your Father full of blasphemy. Faces like this will never be in Heaven and you know that. You laugh and scoff to what God already said you would so your preaching for Satan is no surprise. So keep preaching death to life and death will take you away and you will be the ones with great surprise. Your hearts are hardened to the truth to all I say or God's Word say will just bounce off. I hate Satan for deceiving you. Satan don't care if you believe in him or not, just as long as you treasure to preach death. — Jeff Robinson

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E pluribus unum or survival of the fittest?

This column first appeared on FFRF's *FreethoughtNow.com* blog website on Dec. 6, 2021.

By Dr. Karen Heineman

The world closed down while I was on spring break during my last year of law school. I left school never to come back. Initially the plan was to, hopefully, return to life as we knew it a month later. Having knowledge of infectious disease, I knew that a global pandemic would not be contained within a month; I hoped for one year. Two years later, we are facing yet another variant of the Covid-19 virus: the omicron.



Karen Heineman

To control the virus and end the pandemic, the Freedom From Religion Foundation advocates for vaccine mandates — sadly viewed by many as assaults on personal autonomy rather than a collective effort to fight a global infectious disease. The truth is, however, that a personal decision to avoid vaccination affects us all.

“E Pluribus Unum” (from many [come] one) is our nation’s motto. It is also a phrase that captures the essence of herd health. As a veterinarian, I use the herd health principle. For vaccines to improve herd health, a critical number of the herd has to be vaccinated within a certain timeframe. The goal is to create a viral firewall. Once the virus runs out of bodies to infect, it cannot continue to spread. If the entire herd is not vaccinated, or not vaccinated in a timely fashion, the spread of the virus may be initially slowed, but the delay allows the virus to mutate to improve its ability to infect.

Once we were fortunate to have vaccines developed to fight Covid-19 and health care professionals started explaining the concept of herd health, I felt comfortable that the end to the pandemic was on the horizon.

The development of new variants of Covid-19 is used



as evidence by some people that the vaccines are not working. The problem, however, is not with the vaccines, but with our resistance to investing in our herd health. Currently, the “*pluribus*” is not supporting the “*unum*.” We did not reach the necessary number of vaccinated bodies to set up a firewall. Instead, we have new variants and the pandemic continues.

Fortunately, most people infected with Covid-19 will recover and some never suffer any symptoms, but, with each new variant, we run the risk that these characteristics will change. Rather than taking advantage of the current state of the viral disease and protecting herd health with vaccination, we continue to play Russian roulette. When will the effects of the pandemic be severe enough, or personal enough, that a critical mass of citizens will be willing to invest in our country’s herd health? We already hold the ignominious record for the country with the most deaths due to Covid-19. And we have surpassed the death total for the Spanish influenza pandemic of 1918. The Greek

alphabet only has 24 letters.

As a scientist, I am disheartened that we cannot improve upon our response to a pandemic in comparison to a century ago, because the science and technology behind the vaccines is truly amazing. We are creating more effective and safer vaccines, and we did so in record time for Covid-19. Rather than supporting these monumental efforts, people point to the novelty of the vaccines as a reason to distrust them or point to other diseases for which we don’t have vaccines, suggesting that there is some insidious motive behind creating the vaccines for this disease. The reality is that not all diseases are created equally; vaccination is not applicable to all diseases. We should embrace the fact that we can utilize vaccines for this disease. Vaccination certainly provides personal benefits, but, more importantly, it improves herd health and is an avenue to ending this pandemic. Let’s trust the amazing science and protect our herd.

Instead, not only have we not met our herd health goals, but we may set a record for the number of court cases arguing for personal exemptions from vaccine mandates. To be clear, there are medical reasons for exemptions because some diseases and medications alter the immune system’s response to vaccines. Herd health can still be achieved when a small number of people are exempted due to the likelihood that their health would be adversely affected. Vaccinating the remainder of the herd is even more important for these vulnerable individuals because they also face an increased likelihood of morbidity and mortality due to infectious disease. Once we start entertaining exemptions for personal liberty or religious freedom reasons, we quickly lose the ability to protect the herd. When did our national motto become “Survival of the Fittest”?

We have the technology. Trust the science. Get vaccinated to protect our herd. We will all benefit when this pandemic is contained. *E pluribus unum*.

Dr. Karen Heineman is FFRF’s Legal Fellow. She has been a practicing veterinarian in Wisconsin since 1992. She also graduated magna cum laude from Marquette University Law School in 2020.

Religions grew out of utter dependence

By Barbara G. Walker

It has been scientifically proven that humans evolved from earlier apelike forms by overdevelopment of the brain at the expense of the physical body. In the womb, physical



Barbara G. Walker

growth of the fetus slows down at the period when brain growth is foremost. Thus, through a process called infantilization, humans are better able than other animals to think, to imagine, to create, to solve problems and to invent language for communication. However, humans have inferior senses and strength than other animals. The fittest human athlete has nowhere near the muscle power or the keen environmental

awareness of the average of what we snobbishly call the “lower” animals.

As a result of this infantilizing process, humans are born much more helpless than other creatures. Human babies can’t get themselves to the teat for milk, as other infant mammals can. They must be picked up and carried and cared for, all day, every day, for many months. During this time, the brain takes in a huge amount of knowledge while the body lags. What the human infant experiences before and above everything else is its own utter helplessness, the need to be cared for by a giant being, much stronger and wiser, who voluntarily supplies all the infant’s needs — the mother. The infant has a primal, inborn need for her nurturing touch. Being fed and hugged and rocked into soothing sleep is the first experience of bliss.

That deepest, most essential feel-

ing of utter dependence naturally affects the human psyche, that keen creator of answers to our questions. It inevitably creates humankind’s first deity, the Great Mother, who supposedly created everything and supplies everything and loves her children and

“What could be more appalling than the eternity of torture that the patriarchal priesthood invented?”

teaches them the basics of behavior. To follow her instruction is natural, to disobey her might prove dangerous and is a sin. Language makes it possible to transmit

her description throughout the community, and to create methods of worship that presumably communicate with her and ensure her goodwill.

It is that bone-deep feeling of helplessness that is never quite outgrown, affecting a majority of human beings throughout our history, and making ever more elaborate images of a presumed spirit world of superior intelligence, ready to hear prayers and watch over us.

When fatherhood was finally recognized and father gods were created, the same characteristics persisted, though the father god tended to be more strict and his punishments more terrible. For what could be more appalling than the eternity of torture that the patriarchal priesthood invented? They finally managed to eliminate the mother goddesses as “pagan” to destroy or appropriate their temples, to murder their priestesses as “witches” and to overturn female ownership of property and family names, though the process took many centuries.

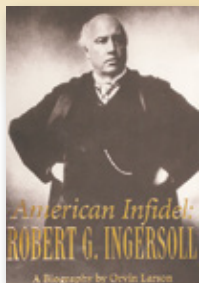
Now we have a paternal god who claims to be the sole source of everything and serves as the single authority figure that our infantilization needs to envision, embodying a promise of eternal bliss. But for those of us who have outgrown this imaginative/emotional dependence, he is obviously as ridiculous as all the numerous deities of the past, or the other supernaturals we have invented: fairies, gnomes, vampires, ghosts, angels, demons, dragons, giants, werewolves, elves or monsters. He has no other substance than our hot air (language) and serves mainly to make unbelievable amounts of money for the organizations that continue to reinforce his image. The childlike souls in our majority keep him going, and it is the perfect scam — getting rich by making promises that never have to be kept.

FFRF Lifetime Member Barbara G. Walker is a researcher, lecturer and author of 24 books.

American Infidel: Robert G. Ingersoll

By Orvin Larson
Prof. Larson writes with affection and respect of this illustrious 19th century freethinker.

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LETTERBOX

Entire staff of FFRF should be commended

I would like to thank and commend the entire staff at FFRF for planning, organizing and professionally executing, with precision, the schedule for the convention in Boston, and for all that FFRF does on behalf of freethinkers in the United States and throughout the world.

Ontario, Canada

Scout badge essay led to Lifetime Membership gift

In the November issue, FFRF announced it had awarded the Freethought Badge to Zachary Van Stanley for his essay challenging the discriminatory policy of the Boy Scouts of America against the nonreligious.

I found his essay well-written and his enthusiasm and good cheer were infectious. In his letter to FFRF after receiving the badge, he mentioned that he was “saving up to pay for a Lifetime Membership.”

I have enclosed a check for \$1,000 to honor Zachary and pay for that membership for him now so that he need wait no longer.

Long live Zachary and all the other young people like him who think for themselves and care about each other and our planet.

California

Dan Barker’s music a perk for FFRF members

I just want you to know that enjoying Dan Barker’s music (both solo and ensemble) is another great perk of belonging to FFRF!

I recall as a girl listening to an old instrumental recording of “Pack Up Your Sins” by Paul Whiteman. (A lot scratchier than Dan’s version!) But I’d never heard the words until listening to your podcast. Very apropos!

There’s a lot of old stuff like that from my past that is lodged deeply within and lies quiescent, since nobody today would relate to it, let alone appreciate it.

I met Paul Whiteman one time back in the 1950s. I don’t remember what was said, but I was sure thrilled to be introduced to him and couldn’t wait to tell my parents.

New Mexico

Editor’s note: You can purchase Dan Barker’s music on FFRF CDs at ffrf.org/shop.

Member’s poem modeled after the Nicene Creed

A Trout’s Creed

I believe in my parents, the Trouts
Creators of my brother and me.
I believe in love, both platonic
and non.

It is conceived by the common
estimation between two people
And born in words and words.
It is unconditional and true.
It cannot be killed or buried.
When it descends into darkness,
it is tested,
But it rises again in time
And is stronger for its wear.

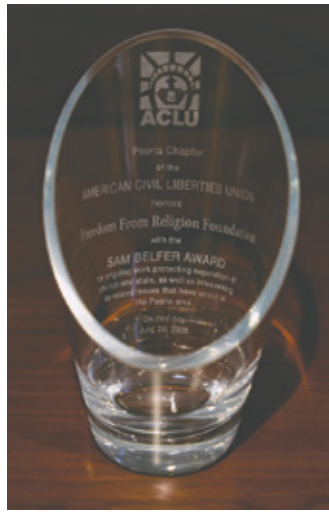
FFRF plays well in Peoria



Photos by Chris Line

The Peoria chapter of the ACLU has given the Freedom From Religion Foundation the Sam Belfer Award “for ongoing work protecting separation of church and state, as well as intervening in related issues that have arisen in the Peoria area.”

Originally, FFRF Director of Strategic Response Andrew Seidel (pictured) had been scheduled to accept the award on behalf of FFRF at a speaking appearance there in spring 2020, but it was canceled due to the pandemic. The chapter recently mailed the award to FFRF, where it is proudly displayed in our lobby.



It is at the heart of all relationships.
It does not judge nor wish ill will;
it transcends death.

I believe in the house that my
parents built,
the family with which they have
surrounded me
the friends I have gathered,
the forgiveness of our common
humanity
the mutual respect we hold
And the peaceful life they have
afforded me.

Athem.

Pennsylvania

FFRF convention was a ‘banquet for my brain’

Thank you for an amazing weekend in Boston. I’d been reading the short bios of the convention speakers for months and their stories had just been that — stories. After listening to each in person, they have become real people to me with significant information to share with us all. The weekend was a banquet for my brain!

Montana

Tamayo’s speech brought visions of Electric Monk

Thank you for the convention!!
While listening to the David Tamayo’s talk about artificial intelligence, my mind kept bringing up author Douglas Adams’ Electric Monk, which appears in *Dirk Gently’s Holistic Detective Agency*.

I finally looked up one of my favorite quotes from that book: “Un-

fortunately, this Electric Monk had developed a fault, and had started to believe all kinds of things, more or less at random. It was even beginning to believe things they’d have difficulty believing in Salt Lake City.”

Ohio

FFRF items are a big hit, especially the stamper

I congratulate FFRF for all its accomplishments and continuing efforts to maintain the separation of religion and state. I am confident that FFRF will continue being effective.

I am proud to have become a Lifetime Member in 2008 and After-Life Member in 2016.

I recently purchased an FFRF 2022 calendar, some Winter Solstice cards, some bible warning stickers and an “In Reason We Trust” stamp. I have enjoyed frequently using that last item.

California

Shouldn’t Christians have thanked the Jews?

I could never reconcile the explicit message of John 3:16 with the “deicide” slander used to persecute Jews for the next two millennia. Shouldn’t Christians have thanked the Jews for carrying out God’s intention? After all, as per Christian mythology, Jesus’ “sacrifice” is the sole reason we are “saved,” provided, of course, we accept him as our “lord and savior.” Had the Jews not killed Jesus, humanity would have continued to be damned,

since God’s plan would not have been fulfilled, right?

Which brings me to another problem I have with John 3:16 — God promises eternal life to those who believe in Jesus. However, humanity had already been promised eternal life prior to Jesus appearing on the scene. Only it was eternal life in hell. That’s why Christians call Jesus “the savior.” He saved us from eternal torment through his suffering on the cross. It would have been nice if John 3:16 mentioned “eternal life in heaven,” but, hey, I guess nobody’s perfect.

New York

FFRF’s Crankmail actually provides many benefits

Regarding the Crankmail “controversy,” this FFRF member votes yes.

I don’t know about other FFRF members, but I enjoy reading the Crankmail section in Freethought Today. I found November’s installment especially entertaining. Aside from their usual obscenity-laden drivel, these Crankmail contributors also waxed quite philosophical.

I can understand why people think Crankmail is gross and shouldn’t be dignified with publication. But consider the many benefits. For one thing, it’s an excellent market research tool — the Crankmailers are confirming the effectiveness of FFRF’s current advertising strategy. They’re seeing FFRF ads on TV and FFRF billboards on their local highways, and it’s obviously driving them crazy. (Admittedly, a short trip.)

Crankmail also puts our adversaries into their larger political context. Fifteen percent of Americans are QAnon adherents who think Satan-worshipping pedophiles run the government, while death threats against elections officials, public health workers and school board members have become commonplace. Can anyone doubt it’s these very same lunatics who are writing these Crankmail offerings?

For FFRF to succeed, we need to see our opponents clearly, in all their godly vileness. The monthly Crankmail installment in Freethought Today lets us do exactly that. And, occasionally, you might even get some crack-brained philosophy to muse upon for awhile.

Colorado



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For related information (or to receive a bequest brochure), please contact:

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info@ffrf.org

*Freedom depends
on freethinkers*

‘Pass away’ is a terrible euphemism for death

Why do people use “pass away” as a euphemism for “die”? We already have so many other fine euphemisms: croak, kick the bucket, vapor lock, slip your cable. People of a spiritual bent already have the euphemism, “Go home to be with the Lord,” so why do they bother with “pass away”?

If your feelings about the dear departed are negative, there is always “Old Nick got his own,” a far better more satisfying of phrase.

South Carolina

Editor’s note: Hear, hear! “Pass away” is never used in FFRF literature.

Christians have become bigoted hypocrites

Thank you for the Freethought Today newspaper!

I am a believer in Jesus, but I am disgusted with what has happened to Christians worldwide, but especially in the United States. They have become bigoted hypocrites. Jesus condemned this attitude. Nowhere in the bible does it say that abortion is a sin or that evolution isn’t true. Why not say evolution is how God created the world? I also dislike the way evangelicals have married politics to religion. This came along when Ronald Reagan became president in 1980.

I’m glad that FFRF fights for women’s rights, especially reproductive rights.

South Carolina

Supreme Court puts faith ahead of reason

I want to thank FFRF for being a great organization and having a very informative newspaper. As an attorney for 40 years, I love your coverage of the religious legal issues and the work your attorneys do to restrain theocracy.

Here’s why I am writing: In the case of *Fulton v. City of Philadelphia*, we have a conflict between an organization that wants government money to do work with adoptions and be allowed to discriminate against LGBTQ people. On the other side, we have the real parties in interest — LGBTQ people who want to adopt children and do not want to be discriminated against by a government-funded religious group.

The church’s basis for the discrimination is its belief in a 2,000-year-old philosophy that has no basis in fact or evidence, and is contrary to current science. This is an organization that, without evidence, demands to be able

Can you use it in a sentence?

Merriam-Webster
@MerriamWebster

Good morning! Today's #WordOfTheDay is 'secular'
[s.m-w.com/3vQyY2P](https://www.m-w.com/3vQyY2P)

WORD OF THE DAY
DECEMBER 11, 2021

secular
adjective | SEK-yuh-ler

not spiritual or religious

7:00 AM · Dec 11, 2021 · TweetDeck

Merriam-Webster’s “Word of the Day” for Dec. 11, 2021, was “secular.” Here’s to hoping it catches on!

to discriminate against actual live humans who have done nothing wrong. And the Supreme Court sides with the myth-based organization?

I can only conclude that our legal system and much of our population are still thinking with a Dark Age mentality. The sad part is that those justices on the Supreme Court are much better educated and generally more intelligent than the general population, but, unfortunately, are lacking in empathy and compassion.

Instead of leading toward more rational solutions favoring humans, and less discrimination, the Supreme Court tails behind the unenlightened religiously indoctrinated masses. The Supreme Court puts faith — beliefs without evidence — above reason, logic, science and commonsense human decency.

California

Facebook could be a threat to democracy

An article in *The Atlantic* (November 2021 issue) titled “Facebookland” is worth a read by FFRF members.

There are 2.9 billion monthly active users of Facebook, which is a commercial venture that cares far less about honest and fair social interaction than about how much those interactions can benefit a few people financially.

To quote the author Adrienne France, “Facebook sold itself to the masses by promising to be an outlet for free expression, for connection,

for community. In fact, it is a weapon against the open web, against self-actualization and against democracy.”

Any organization that threatens our democracy is a threat to the principle of separation between state and church. Facebook has more users than the combined populations of India and China, yet it has no controlling agency other than a board of directors. It’s frightening to think of what one fundamentalist member of that board could instigate against religious freedom.

Ohio

Death penalty makes sense in some situations

In Freethought Today’s November issue, FFRF called for getting rid of the death penalty. As a long-time FFRF member, I, too, was always opposed to the idea of capital punishment.

That all changed a few years ago, though, when I read about a man who admitted to raping a little girl multiple times, then murdering her by burying her alive! Not only did he admit his crime, but said in front of the little girl’s mother and father that, given the opportunity, he would do it again.

I don’t think being sentenced to an air-conditioned room with a TV, free medical and dental care, three meals a day, access to a law library and perhaps an early release for “good behavior” is reflective of the punishment fitting the crime.

One of the arguments that’s always been used against the death penalty is

Write to us
To send a letter to the editor for Freethought Today, please email it to editor@ffrf.org.

its lack of value as a deterrent. I maintain that the death penalty in this type of crime is, in fact, the ultimate deterrent — there are no repeat offenders. That is to say, it is the ultimate cure for recidivism.

I now believe that under certain limited circumstances, the death penalty is appropriate and justified. If anyone is deserving to be unceremoniously dispatched to the great unknown, it is the self-confessed, unremorseful child-rapist murderer.

New Jersey

FFRF bumper sticker reveals good neighbor

Regarding the letter, “Neighbor has similar interest,” I must tell you who moved in next door to me. I was passing the house of my new neighbor and noticed the FFRF sticker on the back of his car. “I like your sticker. I’m a member of FFRF,” I told him. He introduced himself as Randy Pelton, co-president of the Northern Ohio Freethought Society, FFRF’s chapter in Ohio!

Ohio

Can bible publishers be sued for defamation?

Apparently, the voting machine company Dominion is pursuing a suit against Fox News requesting some \$1.6B in restitution for unjustified defamation.

Surely nothing can be more unjustified and more defamatory against atheists than all the bibles that continue to include Psalms 14 and 53.

Given the analogy, perhaps the time has come for one or more atheist groups to sue any organizations that publish, market and sell bibles to the public?

Arizona

I broke free from the stranglehold of religion

I am, as far as I know, the only person in my family to break free from the stranglehold Christianity has on people, and that saddens me. At the same time, it gladdens me to realize that I was able to break free.

When I first screamed out loud to myself, “There is no f—ing God!”, I was angry and it felt like no one else on Earth had ever thought that. To my delight, I discovered a great number of people who had wrestled with those same thoughts over thousands of years. Their struggles and successes put mine to shame. Still, for a Southerner in the Bible Belt of South Carolina, it was an amazing accomplishment.

I want to thank FFRF for all it does to make the world a better place through the sanity and freedom of atheism.

Now, I’m just another happy heretic enclosing a check for a Lifetime Membership.

Florida

Crossword answers

S	K	I	M	S		R	A	F		S	A	G	S
P	E	K	O	E		I	L	O		E	N	N	U
A	P	O	R	T		G	E	L		L	A	T	I
S	I	N	A	T	R	A		I	M	A	G	I	N
						L	E	E		R	O	O	T
C	P	U		E	R	S	E		W	E	B	C	A
R	I	B	S		A	L	S	O		D	I	A	N
A	L	O	E		N	O	T	S	O		A	N	K
N	E	A	R	S		P	O	L	O		S	O	L
K	I	T	B	A	G		R	O	M	P		E	E
						L	O	G	E		P	O	T
S	E	C	U	L	A	R		T	H	O	R	E	A
E	L	O	P	E		A	V	E		D	A	R	N
A	S	C	O	T		V	I	A		L	I	S	T
L	E	A	N			E	E	K		E	N	T	E

Cryptogram answer

If the bible is mistaken in telling us where we came from, how can we trust it to tell us where we’re going?

— Justin Brown

Losing Faith in Faith: From Preacher to Atheist
By Dan Barker

How Dan “threw out the bathwater and discovered there is no baby there.”

—Published by FFRF. 392 pages / HB
\$20.00 Item # FB26

Buy it from FFRF online
ffrf.org/shop

Celebrating the Winter Solstice Season 2021



Photo by Tom Cara

At North School Park in Arlington Heights, Ill., FFRF Metropolitan Chicago Chapter Board Member Bob Hunter stands with the Bill of Rights nativity display.



Photo by Tom Cara

FFRFMCC Members Bob Hunter, Shane Stapley and Josh Ticho (pictured), along with President Tom Cara, set up this new banner, designed by FFRF's Roger Daleiden, outside the Glenview Village Hall. The lighted Dawkins "A" sign also was moved from Chicago's Daley Center Plaza to this location, for the first time.



For the fifth year in a row, FFRF's Bill of Rights nativity display has been installed in the Iowa Capitol. FFRF thanks Member Paul Novak, an FFRF State Representative, for putting up the exhibit.



FFRF Member Jerry Bloom, pictured, along with John Levin, helped install FFRF's "Let Reason Prevail" sign on the Huntington Green in Shelton, Conn. The banner carries FFRF's message, coined by FFRF's principal founder Anne Nicol Gaylor. It was composed as an equal-time challenge, following divisiveness over religious displays in governmental places.

Not shown on this page are FFRF displays from Olympia, Wash., and, for the first time, one put up in the Mini-Park in Keyport, N.J.



Photo by Tom Cara

FFRF Metropolitan Chicago Chapter Members (from left) John Baldwin, Brian McCaskill, Rich Pope, Bob Hunter, Shane Stapley and Steve Foulkes show off its new banner in Daley Plaza. The banner was designed by FFRF's Jake Swenson and the stand was fabricated by Stapley. Foulkes also set up of the FFRF Bill of Rights nativity display at Cook Memorial Park in Libertyville, Ill. The display counters a life-sized Christian nativity.



FFRF's displays were put up in San Diego's Balboa Park again, thanks to a local activist. However, the display was vandalized, with Lady Liberty's head being chopped off and a slash cut through the word "Reason" in the "Let Reason Prevail" sign.



FFRF's Arizona Valley of the Sun Chapter President Philip Lentz and other chapter members brought FFRF's seasonal Winter Solstice display to the Arizona Capitol for the first time.



FFRF's secular sign is back in the Milwaukee County Courthouse for the season with the help of member Ted Shellhamer and his son.