Atheism in America: A History

With Nell Brownell, Ph.D.

Some Famous Nonbelievers:



Definitions!

• "A-theism": literally, 'against god'; an absence or rejection of a belief in the existence of god. Not bound by any ideology.

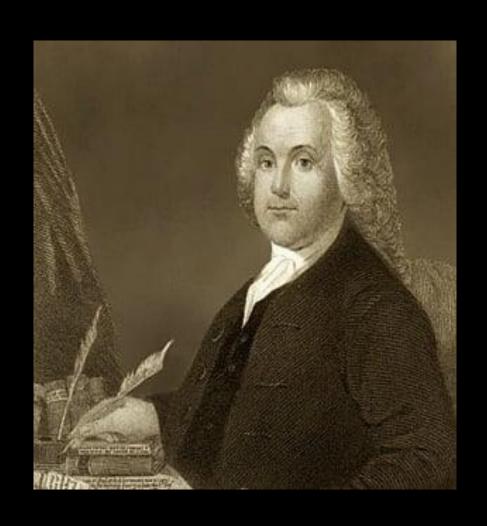
• "Agnostic": literally, 'unknowing'; view that ultimate reality, including the existence of nonexistence of god, is unknowable.

• "Secular Humanism": posits that humans are capable of being ethical without god, and that it is up to each individual to examine truth claims and take responsibility for own actions.

John Winthrop and "Puritan" Theocracies



Roger Williams and "Religious Tolerance"



"A pagan or anti-Christian pilot may be as skillful to carry the ship to its desired port as any Christian mariner or pilot in the world, and may perform that work with as much safety and speed."

"Enlightenment" Men: 'Faith in the Light of Reason'

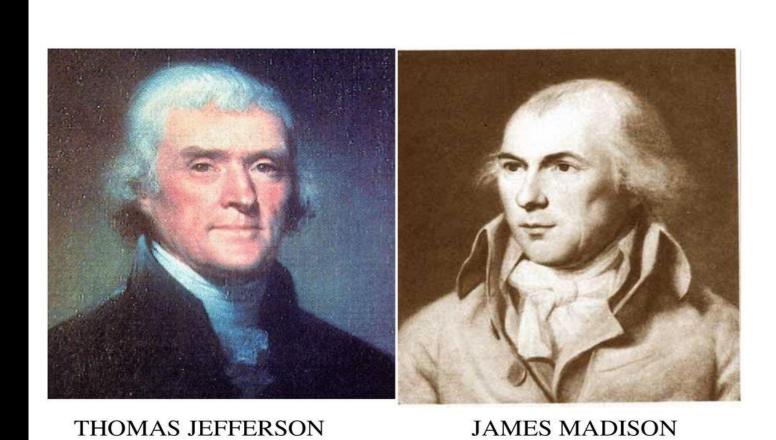
Thomas Jefferson

"It does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no god. It neither breaks my leg, not picks my pocket."

James Madison

"Before any man can be considered as a member of civil society, he must be considered as a subject of the Governour of the Universe."

"Deists" Write Our Founding Documents



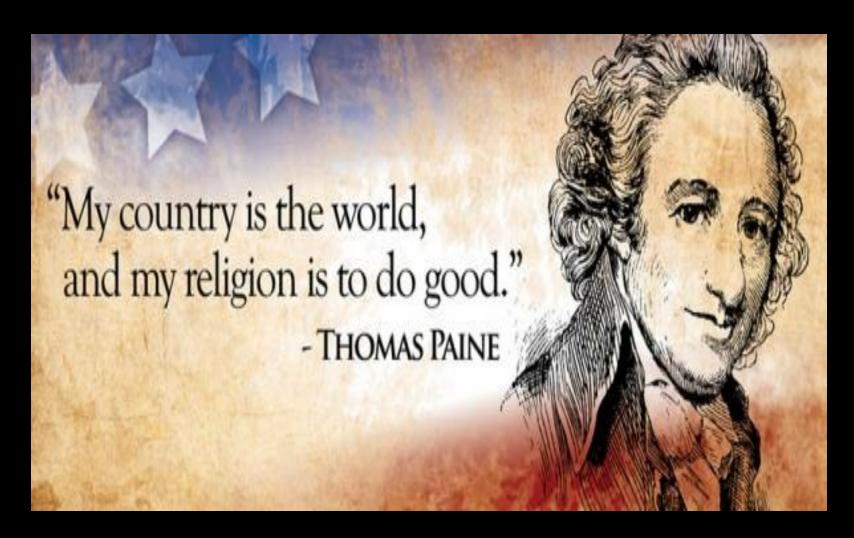
The "godless" United States Constitution

FREEDOM OF RELIGION GUARANTEES

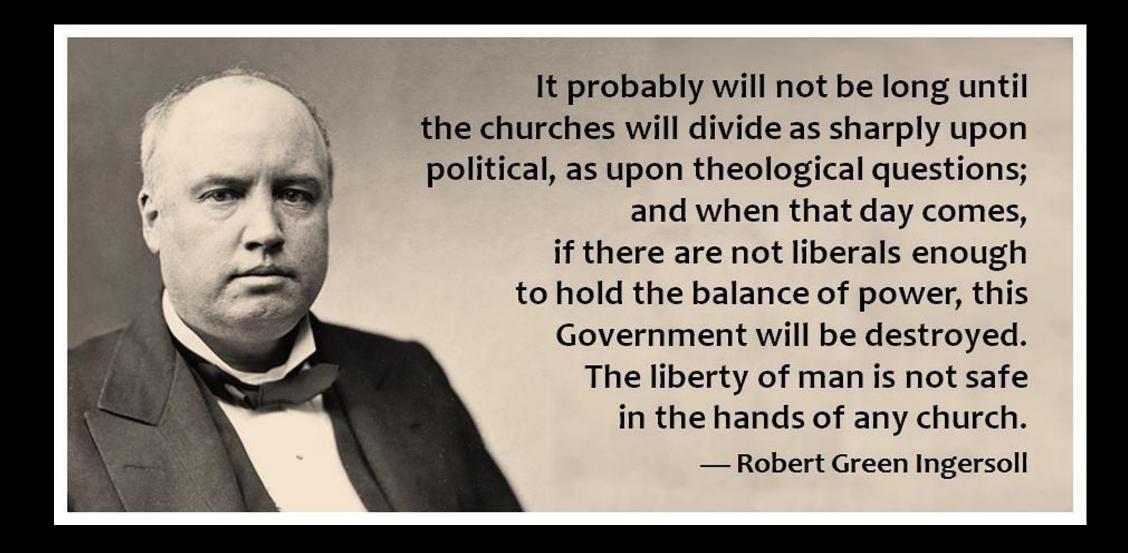
• 1ST Amendment- "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof..."

 Article VI- "no religious test shall ever be required as a Qualification for any Office or public Trust under the United States."

Revolutionary War hero until...his "Age of Reason" challenged the "Second Great Awakening"



Robert Ingersoll: Atheist Superstar, mid 19th c



19th Century Atheists challenge more than god: women's rights, abolition, living wages



The Bible and the Church have been the greatest stumbling blocks in the way of women's emancipation.

-Elizabeth Cady-Stanton

The Haymarket "Riot" and Fears of Instability



Anarchy, Assasination, Atheism in the Public Mind

San Francisco Chronicle.

VOL. TAXY

SAN FRANCISCO, CAL, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 7. 1961-SIXTEEN PAGES.

NO. 84

PRESIDENT M'KINLEY SHOT BY AN ANARCHIST AT BUFFALO FAIR.

Two Bullets Fired by the Assassin, but Only One Penetrates the Body—Surgeons Hopeful of Recovery—An Attempt Made to Lynch the Cowardly Murderer.

WOUNDED AT A PUBLIC RECEPTION.

Stricken by a Man Who Grasped His Hand---Crowd Sought to Mete Out Swift Punishment.

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A RECENT PORTRAIT OF PRESIDENT M'KINLEY.



FAVORABLE REPORT ON PRESIDENT'S CONDITION.

BUFFALO, N. Y., September 7.—At 3 A. M. the following builetin was issued: The President continues to rest well. Temperature 101:6, pulse 110, respiration 24. "P. M. RIXEY."

UFFALO, September 6.—Secretary Chrestyou to sight gave out the following statement:

"The following bulletin was issued by the physicians at y P. M.:

"The following bulletin was issued by the physicians at y P. M.:

of the The Fresident was shot about 4 o'clock. One shot struck birn upon the upper portion of the state of the st

"The following bulletin we GKORGE 38. CORTELLYOU, Secretary to the President."

The President is rallying satisfactorily and is recting comfortably, only. Temperatur

100.41 pulse, 124; respiration, 24.—P. M. Riscy, M. B. Mahn, R. E. Farke, H. E. Minter,

The President continues to compals of painful character of the chest wound. Surgeon

DOCTORS DECLARE INJURIES SEVERE

The Chances of Recovery Said to Be Against President---Cheering Reports Untrue.

Reports Untrue.

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Hood's Sarsaparille

George Santayana: Mystical Atheism...or "Nonbelief"?



In the contemplation of beauty we are raised above ourselves, the passions are silenced and we are happy in the recognition of a good that we do not seek to possess.

First World War: Dissent and "Treason"



The "Cold War" in the 1950s: "Godless Soviets" and "Christian America"

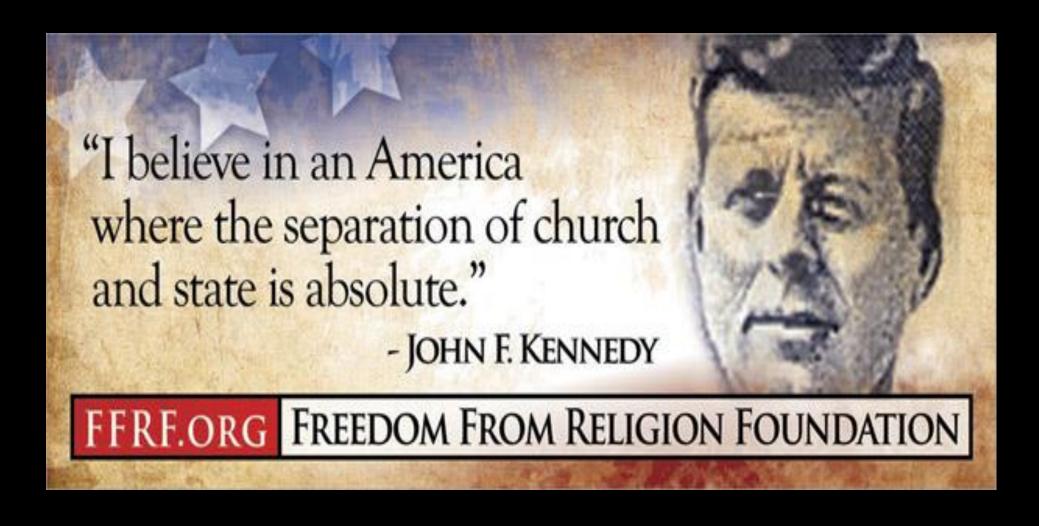
"From the root of atheism stems the evil weed of communism."

Michigan Representative, Luis Rabaut, speaking in the U.S. Congress

<u>Civic Insertions of "God":</u>

- Prayer room in Congress
- Prayer breakfast added to White House agenda
- "Under God" added to Pledge
- National motto "E Pluribus Unum" (Out of Many, One) changed to "In God We Trust"
- "In God We Trust" added to all forms of currency

Retreat from McCarthyism, our first Catholic President and the status of Nonbelievers, 1960s



These challenges to god references led to new judicial language: "Ceremonial Deism"



Courts find references to "God" allowed because "nominally religious statements and practices [are] deemed to be merely ritual and non-religious through long customary usage."

1962, Eugene Rostow,
Dean of Yale Law School

A Historic First! The International Religious Freedom Act adds nonbelief (2016)

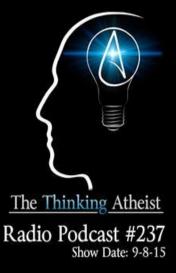


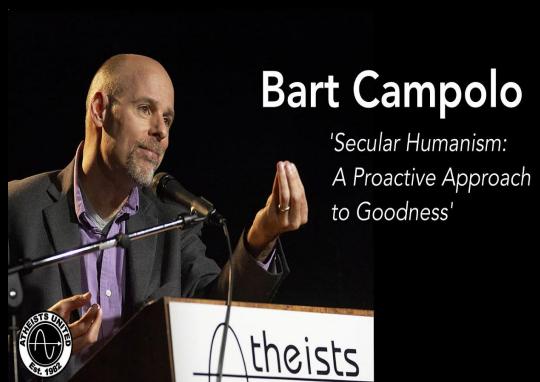
An "Atheist Awakening"?

A "Non-theistic" Minister

USC "Humanist" Chaplain and "Atheist Evangelist"

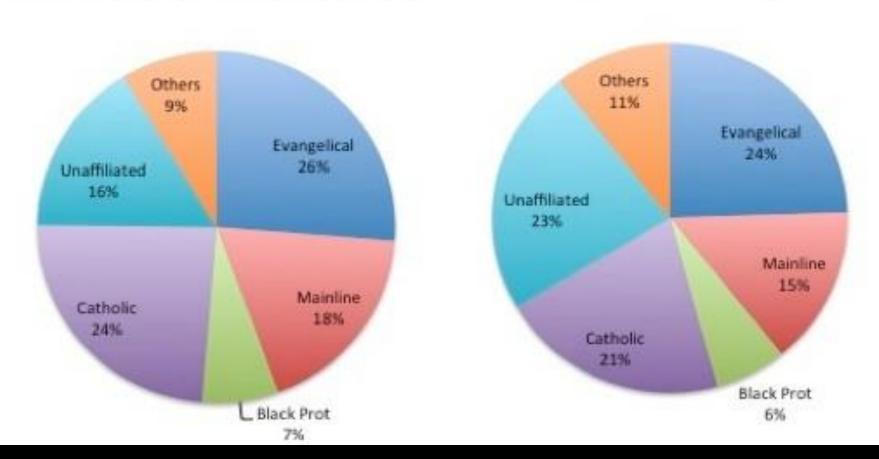






Rapid Changes from 2007!!





Glimpses of the Future: the Class of 2019

