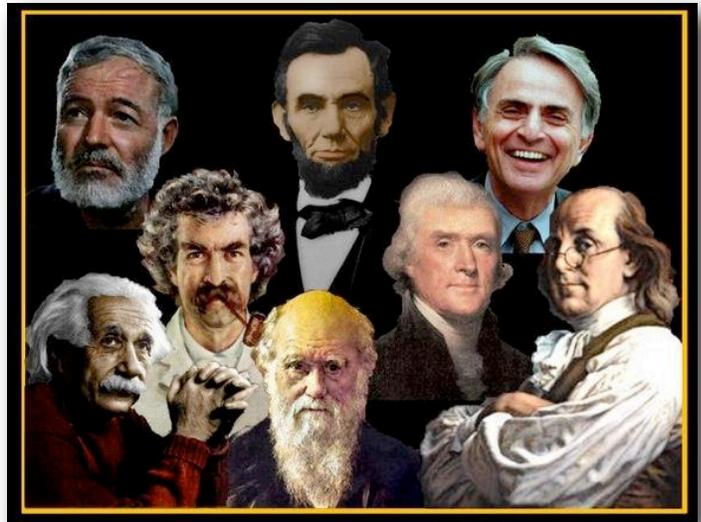


Atheism is a Civil Rights Issue

When is an “issue” considered a “civil rights issue?” The Oxford American Dictionaries define civil rights as “*the rights of citizens to political and social freedom and equality.*” #1 Do atheists have the rights to political and social freedom and equality? The founding fathers would have said yes. After all, The United States of America was founded as a secular government. People came to America to escape the church-state of the Old World, so they could worship or not worship as they wished. But that was then, this is now.

The U.S. has changed dramatically since it's inception. When running for higher office, one must express his/her belief in God to have any chance at being elected. Christians claim that they want the country to be run as a christian government, starting with the return of prayer in schools. What about the rest of us? There are millions of non-theists who are already being affected by these trends. On the surface these non believers seem to have the same rights and freedoms as any other citizen, but a closer look



Many of the people we acknowledge for having made our world a better place, were non-believers.

reveals that there are plenty of problems concerning the equality and livelihood of non-believers. (if needed as filler, list problems. a good idea anyways)

The First Amendment says "*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof;*" #2 People seem to depict the first amendment in a way that backs up their beliefs, and because of this there are many different interpretations. Looking at the founding fathers lives and not just the constitution, it is easy to see that these men were strongly against religion having any involvement in government. Most of these men considered themselves Deists and didn't think much of religions altogether, especially Christianity. A letter from John Adams to Tomas Jefferson says " # 3" Also (ex?) says "if the founding fathers had lived to witness the discovery of darwinian evolution they would almost certainly be atheists." #4

There is no doubt that this country has changed it's attitudes about religion's involvement in the government. in a gallup poll #5 (59%)??? of Americans say they would not vote for a non-believer president based simply on the fact they are an atheist. Any candidate running for higher office is basically forced to express what their religious beliefs are because the majority of people feel it is necessary information to know before they vote. Christians, Jews or Muslims will vote for one of their own based simply on that fact, and this trend carries through to specific religions. A good example of this was seen during the 2008 election year with presidential candidate Mitt Romney. Romney is a member of the "Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints" more frequently known as "the Mormon Faith", and the state of Utah was by far his biggest

supporter with 89% of Utah republicans supporting him. #6 It is hard to believe that all of these voters really align themselves with Mitt Romneys' political ideas. Clearly a lot of these people are simply hoping for one of their own to become president. The religious have to dedicate so much of their lives to their beliefs that they become increasingly biased even toward other religions. After all, there can only be one true religion, right?

There has never been a non-believer who has been open about his/her beliefs while running for political office and won. It simply could not happen right now in this country. So much of what we Americans cherish is our right to vote. Our chance to choose who best represents us and our ideas. Without a fair chance at proper representation any group of people in the United States of America would speak up. Non-believers don't want the government to favor them over the religious, they simply want the government to view the believers and non believers neutrally. That is after all what the first amendment promises.

The religious tend to believe that morals come from God, (if you don't believe, you have no morals.) It's no wonder they wouldn't want a leader who in their eyes is evil. Hog wash! It is disheartening to know that there are millions of people who not only believe this, but are changing the role of our government because of it. The United States of America was looked to as a beacon of hope for the world. A place where religion can be practiced freely while remaining nonaligned to the government.

So where does this become a civil rights issue? There is certainly not a distinct black and white line as far as where are the rights are being jeopardized, but blurred lines all over the place. As mentioned above, is the lack of representation due to non-believers not being openly able to run for office effects every atheist directly. Other

direct violations of rights are children who are forced to memorize and repeat the pledge of allegiance in public schools. This one is very confusing to the theist. It does seem like liberal bellyaching at first, but when one really examines what is happening here, it is a total violation of church and state. (more)

There are even reports of parents not gaining custody of their children due to their disbelief. As one of the largest minority groups in America, ## atheists may not suffer the in the same way as ethnic minorities or homosexuals, but no matter the form of struggle, there are freedoms being taken away and opportunities forfeited.

Works Cited

(1)-*Atheism is Indeed A Civil Rights Issue* (Tabash,Eddie), Free Inquiry Magazine vol 24, #3.

(2)-*By the Numbers* (Flynn,Tom), Free Inquiry Magazine vol 21, #1.

(3)-*The God Delusion*, (Dawkins,Richard).

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