

Title of Session: Social Studies Forum - Religion in American History

Moderator: Michael Hutchison

Guest Speakers: Margaret Hill and Karen Krupnick

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MargaretAH: What is your interest in Religion in American History?

MichaelH: Actually, Peg, I talked a little about that today with my US History students... we were talking about religious fundamentalism in the 1920s, and the Scopes Trial

BJB2: I'm interested in everything Michael plans

MichaelH: Discussed a bit about Billy Sunday and Aimee Semple McPherson

BJB2: He always brings such interesting topics to our attention

MargaretAH: Is it legal to teach about religion? I thought there were laws separating church and state.

DavidWe: I hope it is legal to teach religion

MichaelH: Peg, I think you ask a great question... I have to keep a fine line between teaching about religion, and teaching about the role of religion in history

DavidWe: I took a course in college

DavidWe: Are there rules in your school district, Michael?

EmilyW: I know in college there are religion courses

EmilyW: I don't think it is allowed in k-12

MargaretAH: College is different but how about K-12

MichaelH: it's probably a bit more difficult for me, because I attended Catholic school, and it was always easy for us to interject religion in what we discussed in durn near everything

MargaretAH: Most people do!

EmilyW: well I think if the school is religious, then that's different

MichaelH: I suppose the big issue is whether we teach "religion" or if we teach "how religion affected something in history"

MargaretAH: Right on Michael

DavidWe: Tim went to Divinity school as well as getting a teaching degree

MichaelH: for example, as I mentioned, I taught about the Scopes Trial today, and we discussed about fundamentalist religious views

MargaretAH: How did the kids react?

DavidWe knows that Michael is such a good teacher that the students were excited

MichaelH: Oh, I think they are probably more interested in the dramatic end of things... you know, the Darrow/Bryan conflict, and so on

MargaretAH: Did they connect the discussion to the current creation science stuff?

MichaelH: I did mention a little about the stem cell debate... I don't know how well it went over, though

MichaelH: actually, since I also teach World History, it's a little more difficult to separate religion from history, especially when you discuss the role of the church in the Roman Empire, or during the Reformation, for example

DavidWe: Are there rules at your school (school district), Michael? What you can do/what you can't?

MargaretAH: The hardest part of dealing with religion is keeping it academic.

EmilyW: oh yeah, I studied that in world history

MichaelH: I haven't seen anything specifically written, David, so I don't know if it would be a big issue or not.

DavidWe nods

MichaelH: On the other hand, I suppose if I tried to support a religious view big time, it might come back to haunt me.

MargaretAH: Some parents are upset with California for requiring students to study about Islam and about medieval Islamic society.

DavidWe smiles

MichaelH: I also have to discuss religious themes in government classes... separation of church and state, for example

DavidWe . o O (did we want to do introductions?)

MichaelH: we can

EmilyW: Michael, I think what you are covering is fine

KarenK: We had a 6th grade teacher years back who took the kids to a local mosque

MargaretAH: Great topic for government because it's not a settled issue.

EmilyW: I remember studying those things in high school

KarenK: Some parents were uncomfortable

KarenK: even in a pre-9/11 world

DavidWe: sure

MargaretAH: Sorry I didn't know the protocol on introductions.

MichaelH: it's ok Peg... we just say hi to one another and just tell everyone who we are

MargaretAH: Who starts

DavidWe smiles

BJB2 . o O (whoever types the fastest)

DavidWe: I'm David Weksler. I'm a HelpDesk volunteer and fast typist in northern New Jersey, near New York City

DavidWe grins

BJB2: I teach remedial communication in Pennsylvania and am on Tapped In helpdesk

BJB2 . o O (David wins)

EmilyW: I am Emily and I am on helpdesk at Tapped In

DavidWe smiles

KarenK: I'm Karen Krupnick. I teach 4th grade gifted students in Southern California

MargaretAH: I'm really Peg Hill. Taught history 18 years and was H-SS coordinator in our county for 17 years in So. Cal also.

MargaretAH: I'm here because I run a program in religious liberty for California.

BJB2: very exciting that Peg and Karen are here tonight!

KarenK: How nice to cause excitement!

MargaretAH: How do we best help teachers know the difference between teaching religion and teaching about religion?

DavidWe: Cool, Margaret. How long have you been doing that?

MargaretAH: About 15 years

MichaelH: that's a good question, Peg... I've always had a bit of concern, but haven't had any students or parents complain

DavidWe: very cool

DavidWe: Do you have a web site for the program?

MargaretAH: Michael you're lucky!

MichaelH: well, we don't go into a whole lot of various religious groups, but we talk about the influence of various Christian religions... for example, I always like discussing the controversy about JFK's candidacy because of his Catholicism

DavidWe thinks that is a great example

MargaretAH: Last year in the SF Bay area, a teacher focused his whole 5th grade class on primary sources selected to show that America is a Christian nation. Didn't go well with his mainly Asian student body.

DavidWe smiles

DavidWe: public school?

KarenK: Was that intended to have that effect?

MargaretAH: Influence of public opinion on JFK is a great example and way to bring in "no religious test" in the Constitution.

MichaelH: Did the students complain, or was it parent or community based, Peg?

MargaretAH: Parents mainly. District said, stop it and the teacher sued.

MichaelH: I think the kids are amazed that there actually would be any backlash at all about someone's faith because they are Catholic, Peg. I mentioned it when we talked about the 1920s Ku Klux Klan

KarenK: Did the teacher mean it as a discussion issue or as a fact?

MargaretAH: A fact.

KarenK: What happened in court?

MargaretAH: District was exonerated but the conservative parent groups went ballistic

DavidWe can imagine

MichaelH: Here it's not really an issue. We're not racially or religiously diverse... very few non-Christians at all

KarenK: Fortunately it was SF

KarenK: It would have been worse elsewhere, I think

MichaelH: Our state even mandates that we have a "moment of silence" daily

DavidWe: Margaret, do you know the group, the National Center for Science Education, based in Oakland?

KarenK: Wow

MargaretAH: No

DavidWe: Very interesting group that tries to counter the attempts to confuse "Creation Science" with Evolution teaching

MargaretAH: How are they coming down on the Creation Science issue?

DavidWe: Well, they are an interesting group of science people and theologians who try to make efforts to keep things in separate arenas

MichaelH: I think what they do, Karen, is that veil it as a remembrance of US Military sacrifice and people don't see it as a religious observance. (We are required to say the Pledge daily, also)

KarenK: Yes--the pledge

MargaretAH: What do you think about the challenge to it Karen

KarenK: I know this will date me, but when I was in HS in NY, at least 1/2 of the students would not do the pledge

MichaelH: it's not that I'm not patriotic... but I don't think it should be "required"

DavidWe agrees with Michael

KarenK: Yes, I agree

KarenK: And feel strongly about the "Under God" part

MargaretAH: Actually by law it's not in California where the case started. We just have to do a patriotic activity

MichaelH: My former principal even went as far as to tell me that we were to "require" everyone in class to stand and say the pledge. I WOULDN'T do that...

KarenK: My principal would go ballistic if someone didn't stand at the assembly

MargaretAH: Just working on the Gobidas case today. The Supreme court in 43 said kids didn't have to stand and say it.

MichaelH: mine too... but he wouldn't have been the one to demand that the student stand... he would have been the one telling me that I should demand....

MichaelH: right.. and Peg, of course that was in the middle of World War II, so if there ever would have been an instance to force patriotism on people, that would have been it

KarenK: But if the state says it's not required and your administration feels strongly, the issue is different

MargaretAH: The stand part was not part of the case. These kids were Jehovah's Witnesses and didn't believe in pledges.

MichaelH: right, but the US Supreme Court did a 180 on that issue from about three years before in the... what was the name of that case????

MargaretAH: I think the issue is respect. If the kids are respectful, then we can say OK to non participation.

MichaelH: exactly

KarenK: What about the atheists who fought this for so long?

MargaretAH: You're right about the 180.

KarenK: What qualifies as a "patriotic activity?"

MichaelH: I wish I could remember the names of those cases... oh, now I remember, it was W. Va. vs. Barnette, wasn't it?

MargaretAH: I think so.

MargaretAH: Patriotic is pretty open.

KarenK: Other than a song, I can't think of something that would qualify

MichaelH: I wonder, too, about banning books that have a religious theme... for example, are there school or public libraries that ban books like the Koran, Book of Mormon?

MargaretAH: Schools need a policy about how books will be selected. More likely it would be Harry Potter banned.

MichaelH: I'd always consider that books would be banned because of questionable content as far as racial overtones or sorcery (Huck Finn, for example, or Harry Potter)

KarenK: Whenever we discuss any religious issues, I always have at least one student who says that they were told that we couldn't discuss religion in school.

KarenK: It seems like teachers have told them that

MargaretAH: with history sources, it's sometimes hard to deal with changes in what is politically correct

MichaelH: oh, I even talked about that... when I discussed the Klan, I showed a resource that talked about "colored persons"...

DavidWe smiles

MichaelH: so I explained that what is "politically correct" changes over time

KarenK: We watched a film about MLK today and that really reflected the changes

MichaelH: for example, Martin Luther King repeatedly discusses civil rights for Negroes... and not many of us would use that term today

MargaretAH: He made continuous references to his faith and worked with the religious community. I think that's important to talk about in class.

KarenK: Yes, that was interesting

KarenK: I have noticed that just about every patriotic song of the month has references to God in it

MichaelH: sure... and when I discuss the Civil Rights movement, I discuss that a great number of the activists were ministers and religious people, and they followed the teachings of Gandhi

DavidWe: Tradition

KarenK: I think kids hardly notice if they watch a speech that reflects faith

KarenK: Even if it isn't their faith

MichaelH: are you familiar with Red Skelton's recitation of the Pledge? He even talks about adding the words "Under God"

MargaretAH: Dealing with the level of relig diversity was have in CA and the US is tough

MargaretAH: no. Haven't heard that.

DavidWe: It WAS added in the 50s

MichaelH: I'm looking for a link for you, Peg

MargaretAH: I know about the 50s

DavidWe smiles

DavidWe was born in 1959

MargaretAH: Shut up, kid

DavidWe smiles

MichaelH: Peg, there are several online references... here's one with out a lot of graphics and sound files...

MichaelH: <http://www.usflag.org/skeltonspledge.html>

KarenK: My kids were shocked at how long ago the 60s were

MargaretAH: Thanks, Michael.

KarenK: It didn't sound that long ago to me!

MichaelH: Red was from here... so it was a big deal around here because he named a local school and school teacher that he had

KarenK: Peg, we are learning to debate

BJB2 . o O (we're sounding like our parents Kids today! No sense of history.)

KarenK: and often take topics from TIME for Kids

BJB2 . o O (and no respect for their elders)

DavidWe thought we were discussing the 1860s

MargaretAH: Just remember that the 50s were when the McCarthy repression happened. Maybe the communist issue had a lot to do with the "Under God" addition.

KarenK: Would you recommend steering clear of issues like the Under God in the pledge?

MichaelH: I dunno about anyone else, but I doubt if my students would ever accuse me of being "young"

DavidWe: Yes, Margaret...that's my understanding

MargaretAH: The court will have to decide. I think they will leave it in and say just don't say it if it offends.

MichaelH: I think we should discuss issues such as the pledge... but we should do so with some trepidation...

KarenK: Because I have gifted kids, I don't usually show trepidation

DavidWe smiles

KarenK: although the thought crosses my mind

MargaretAH: That's one that is so unsettled it would only be a shouting match. It might be OK as a writing assignment

MichaelH: sometimes I'm thankful if my kids can find the room before the class period starts

DavidWe: Bigger numbers on the door, Michael?

MichaelH: thought about a neon sign...

DavidWe smiles

MichaelH: Peg, if you want to look at a Red Skelton reference which includes a sound file of him doing the pledge, it's at <http://www.snopes.com/glurge/skelton.htm>

MichaelH . o O (scroll to the bottom for the sound file)

MargaretAH: Thanks. I also have some sites for teachers I located.

KarenK: I don't think she would leave that abruptly intentionally!

MichaelH: still, though, this has been a very interesting discussion...

DavidWe smiles

DavidWe: Yes

KarenK: Peg is great with this issue

MichaelH: and we don't really get into topics like this as much as we should

DavidWe: Michael, if you can estimate, how many of your students go to church on a regular basis?

MichaelH: BJ, this might also be a good topic to discuss with some of the elementary level groups in TI... especially with younger teachers, do you think?

KarenK: It sounds like you have quite a different population

KarenK: Yes, definitely

MichaelH: David, it's hard to say. I've never actually tried to poll that, but I guess I would be surprised if it was 50% or higher

KarenK: Most are so afraid to mention religion at all

DavidWe: Really?

DavidWe: Isn't something most kids want to know about?

MichaelH: That's what I think, David, but I don't really have any statistics

DavidWe: "How come your family does X on Sunday/Saturday/Friday?"

DavidWe nods to Michael

MichaelH: They may want to know, but I don't know if their parents expect them to attend a regular religious service

MichaelH: When I was an elementary school student, we went to church every single day

KarenK: The concept of religion differs so much from one part of the country to another

MichaelH: the only day I did not attend church during the school year from 1960-1969 was Saturday

KarenK: and so it affects your instruction a lot

DavidWe: That's remarkable, Michael

KarenK: wow

MichaelH: I agree. As I mentioned before... I'm so used to religious instruction because we had it daily when I was growing up

KarenK: You made up for the rest of us

DavidWe: Did you encounter any discrimination growing up?

MichaelH: . o O (growing up)

MichaelH: we had mass every single day

MichaelH: I had a nun get VERY mad at me once...

DavidWe smiles

DavidWe: uh-oh!

KarenK: only once?

DavidWe grins

MichaelH: only once that I care to mention, Karen...

KarenK: that's better

MichaelH: Actually, we could possibly do this again sometime if Peg's willing and we can schedule

KarenK: She has so much information to share

DavidWe: It's a great topic, Michael - sorry we didn't get more attendees

BJB2 thinks that is a good idea

KarenK: She is a wealth of material

MichaelH: Bush is going to be on in a few minutes anyway, and we have to learn about the SURGE

DavidWe grins

KarenK: That's a whole other discussion

DavidWe: indeed

MichaelH: oh, yes... I wonder if we could do a session that we could tailor to us as social studies teachers, but to younger teachers as well?

DavidWe: talk about religion and politics!

KarenK: That would be interesting!

KarenK: I just returned from Vietnam, so I have many thoughts on this issue

MichaelH: Oh, wow, I didn't know that, Karen

KarenK: Fascinating trip. Another time...

DavidWe: How long were you there, Karen?

MichaelH: this is just a difficult issue... especially for us who heard all the same lines about "light at the end of the tunnel", and "if we just had a few more troops"...

KarenK: 9 days

KarenK: very crowded days

KarenK: yes, exactly

DavidWe nods

MichaelH: the other thing that's so different is that my students aren't as anti-military as I would have been in the late 60s and early 70s

KarenK: I'm older and wiser than I was in Vietnam days in many ways

DavidWe smiles

KarenK: yes

MichaelH: there was no way that I was going to enlist in the military after high school... just wasn't going to happen

KarenK: but I saw the tunnels and traps used against our boys, and that was hard to see

KarenK: even if I was so opposed to the war

DavidWe: Of course

MichaelH: things have certainly changed there (and with our policy there) since 40 years ago

KarenK: I'll say

KarenK: Do you think that will be Iraq in 40 years?

DavidWe: hard to say

KarenK: Another whole other discussion

MichaelH: I think I'm going to watch Bush... talk to you all later?

DavidWe: Thanks, Michael

KarenK: Thanks

MichaelH: I'll e-mail Peg and thank her... ask her to come back when we can do another discussion.

MichaelH: see you all later!

KarenK: Bye

DavidWe waves

DavidWe: Be interested in hearing more about your trip to Vietnam, Karen