

Future of Atheism Discussion

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What is Our Goal?

- >70% of Population is Atheist
- Openly Atheist President
- Religions have no direct role in government, but are privately accepted philosophies
- Religion in education taught as sociology but completely out of physical sciences
- Tax exemptions based on proof of community service activities, not simply religious ideas

What if We Succeed?

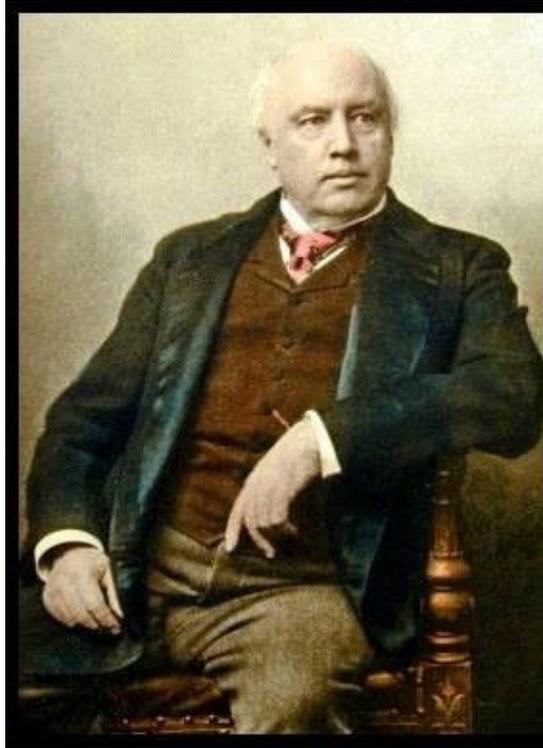
- Will society be better off if Atheism becomes dominant?
 - Better government decisions
 - Faster technological advances
- Will there be less crime & social conflict
 - No
- Will there be fewer wars?
 - Perhaps a little, but most wars are fought over resources, with religion used as a tool. Leaders will use other means of psychological persuasion if traditional religion is absent.

How Long Will it Take?

- How did we get here?
- How did we get to the current impasse between the Conservative/Religious Right and Secular/Intellectual Left?

How Long Will it Take?

- Brief History of Religious vs. Secular Thought in the US.



This crime called blasphemy was invented by priests for the purpose of defending doctrines not able to take care of themselves

- Robert G. Ingersoll

Susan Jacoby

The **AGE**
of

**AMERICAN
UNREASON**

Early History

- **Early 1600's** First Pilgrims arrive seeking freedom from State-controlled religion
- **1632** Gustavus Adolphus' takeover in Europe's 30-Years' War introduces Separation of Church and State
- **ca. 1670 - 1790** Enlightenment promotes scientific thought and attacks religions (Newton, Voltaire, Thomas Paine)
- **Early 1800's** Romanticism pushes back, promotes emphasis on emotion over reason

Modern History

- **ca. 1870 - 1960** Great scientific advances make religion seem relegated to the past
- Darwin (biology), Lyell (geology), Einstein (physics)
- (modern medicine, oil reserves, petrochemicals, cars, space travel, communications)
- Knowledge dissemination often by public lectures, book club's, i.e., face-to-face communication
- Development of birth control

Modern History

- **ca. 1950's - Present** Religious right pushes back on excesses of the 60's
- Southerners are leery of “Elitist northern intellectuals”
 - Civil Rights Movement
 - Roe vs. Wade Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion
 - Holdover feelings from the Civil War
- McCarthyism & Neo-Conservatives equate intellectuals with Communism and Anti-Americanism

Modern History

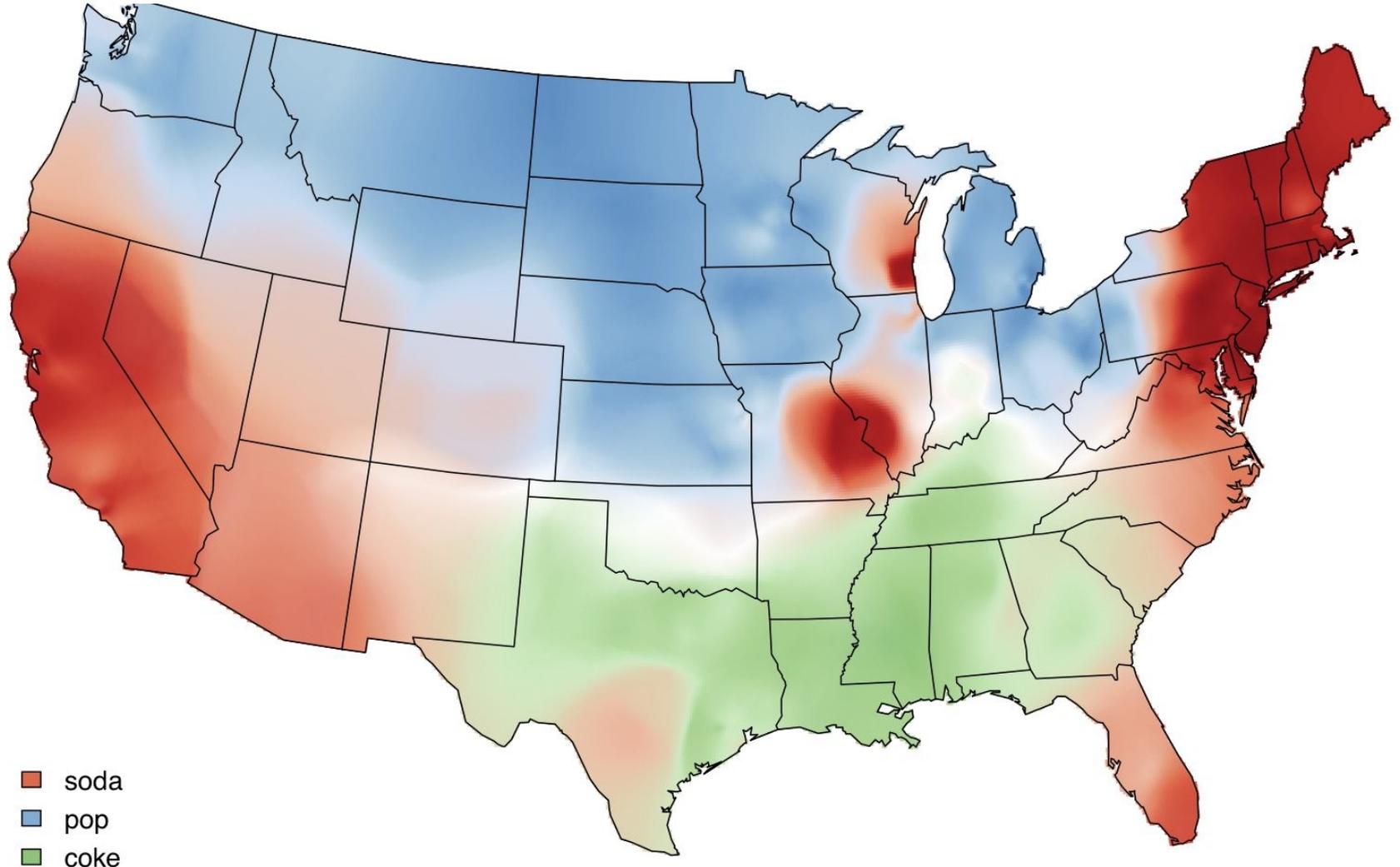
- **ca. 1950's - Present** Advent of Television
- We live in a society where TV, sound bites & blogs dominate whereas reading, deep thought and face-to-face discussions are not valued
- Junk Science has invaded, public has lost the ability to distinguish from real science
- Feeling that every opinion must get equal time, no matter how inane

Current Status: We Speak a Different Language

Education is Under Local

Control

Generic Word for Sweetened Carbonated Drink



Map by Joshua Katz, Department of Statistics, NC State University

Based on survey data from Bert Vaux, Department of Linguistics, University of Cambridge

Current Status

2005 Survey, Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life

- ~65% want both creationism & evolution taught in public schools
- Only 48% accept any form of evolution
- Fully 33% believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible
- Only 26% accept Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection

Current Status

NSF Survey past 20 Years

- ~70% of Americans cannot identify DNA as the key to heredity
- ~90% do not understand radiation and what it does to the human body
- ~20% believe the sun revolves around the earth

Current Status

2005 Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life:

% Believing Life Has Not Evolved

- 50% of High School Graduates
- 42% with Partial College Education
- 27% of College Graduates

Fundamentalist Religion Correlates Inversely with Education

Who's to Blame?



2002 Time Magazine Cover Story

Media want controversies & capitalize on public fear to sell magazines

60-Minutes used to give real analysis, now just hype

Current Status

2002 Time Magazine Cover Story

Discussed how the world ends, but

“....gave no space to those who dismiss the end-times scenario as a collective delusion based on pure superstition and who understand the civic danger inherent in the normalization of ideas that ought to be dismissed as the province of a lunatic fringe”

-Susan Jacoby

Why are We Different from Europe?



- No 30-Years' War
- Local control of education & lower standards
- Anti-intellectualism vs. prized professorships
(Angela Merkel has a Ph.D. in Physics)
- We watch much more television

How Long Will it Take?

Recent quote from a proponent of memetheory:

“I expect to live to see the evaporation of the powerful mystique of religion. I think that in about 25 years, almost all religions will have evolved into very different phenomena...so that.... It will no longer command the awe it does today”

How Long Will it Take?

- Religious fundamentalism is negatively correlated with educational level
- Thus we won't remove religion as a force until we solve the educational non-uniformity in the U.S. and bring all up to a high level

Conclusions

- Christianity has been going for 2,000 years
- Most people follow what their parents did
- Anti-intellectualism is deeply ingrained in American Society
- People have a predisposition to self-delusion
- Religion will not disappear in our lifetimes

Best approach is not to openly conflict with religions, but rather to just offer our alternative and let it grow slowly