

## Charles Miller: White Supremacy and the American Zeitgeist

Our first speaker of 2023 is Charles Miller, who is giving a talk covering a quick overview of white supremacy from the “discovery” of the New World, the justification for race-based chattel slavery by religious adherents, modern white supremacy and the rise of White Nationalism. The presentation concludes with a challenge to



Charles Miller

Humanists and secularists to actively oppose white supremacy and privilege. Charles R. “Chuck” Miller, holds a degree in history and is keenly interested in the subject as an atheist Humanist who is the grandson of a Klansman. He was the Alabama State Director for American Atheists and Life Member of that organization as well as the Freedom From Religion Foundation, and a member of the American Humanist Association. He is also a secular celebrant currently living in Huntsville, Alabama. He is married to Cathy Puett Miller and they have one son.

There will be time for some questions. Information below:

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**AFS January Meeting**  
**Jan. 8, 2023 1:00-2:30 PM (EST)**

To join Zoom meeting go to this link:  
[us02web.zoom.us/j/89006560911](https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89006560911)

### Calendar

Jan 8	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm
Feb 12	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm
Mar 12	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm

All events are via Zoom unless noted and are subject to change.

### Letter from the Editor

As it’s the start of a brand new year, we have exciting things in the works for good old Atlanta Freethought Society. First of all, thanks to our board and Charles Shapiro, we will be getting internet access to the hall because we plan to eventually start having combination hall and Zoom meetings where you can either come by and see all those folks you missed so much since the pandemic began, but you can also check in on Zoom from anywhere in the world. Some speakers will be in the Hall and others will be on Zoom where they will be projected live.

You may have noticed that we didn’t have Board elections in December, because we didn’t have any candidates. Hopefully as a one-time thing, we can run people once the Hall opens back up. Help us figure out who would like to be on the Board election roster. Perhaps that person is you!

At the risk of forgetting someone, we would like to thank Diane and Ed Buckner for caretaking the hall and checking mail since the beginning of the pandemic and checking on the plumbing during the late December deep freeze, finding someone to repair damaged wood and mailboxes, and putting plastic over the windows, for Steve Yothment for hosting our Zoom meetings each month, cleaning the pavillion, and proofing the newsletter, for Dwight Lyman for putting in the new thermostat, for Judy Thompson for doing our taxes and other governmental stuff, to Shane Langnes who checked mail and kept an eye on our building, and to the Mankind Project who cleared the shelter and serviced the AC. Thank you to Ed for finding us awesome speakers and for the speakers agreeing to take the time to give a presentation. Especially, thank you to our generous donors!

Have a safe and happy New Year!

**For the latest in upcoming AFS events, join our Meetup group!**  
[meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society](https://meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society)

## Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at AF Hall, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Atlanta, GA, 30339 unless presented online due to global pandemic (see link on page 1). Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:30 for socializing. Visitors are always welcome.



The views and opinions expressed by speakers at AFS do not necessarily reflect those of AFS members or its policy.

8 Jan	Chuck Miller, "White Supremacy and the American Zeitgeist"
12 Feb	TBD
12 Mar	TBD
9 Apr	TBD
14 May	TBD

### AFS Email List

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To keep up to date on the Atlanta Freethought Society calendar of upcoming events, please join our Meetup group: [meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society](https://meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society).

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*The Atlanta Freethought Society is a member-run organization dedicated to advancing freethought and protecting the rights and reputation of freethinkers, agnostics, atheists and humanists.*

We welcome anyone who is interested in learning about living a good life free from religion through attending AFS speeches, debates, and discussions. We employ protests, letters to the editor, broadcast appearances, and any other reasonable and civil means available to achieve our mission.

We define freethought as "the forming of opinions about life in general and religion in particular on the basis of reason and the evidence of our senses, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief."

We actively support a strict separation of church and state as the best means to guarantee liberty for all, regardless of religious belief or lack of belief.

We seek to educate ourselves on many topics but especially on religion and non-religion. We do this through a series of thought-provoking speakers and programs, and by maintaining a web forum and an extensive library of freethought, religious, and related books, pamphlets, videotapes, and audiotapes.

We provide an organization where freethinkers and non-theists can develop friendships, talk freely, socialize and enjoy each other's company. We do not discriminate against anyone on such irrelevant grounds as race, sexual orientation, age, gender, class, or physical disability. We welcome members and leaders of all political parties and preferences. Any who are like-minded are welcome to join us.

Because we are designated by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) educational organization, contributions to AFS are tax deductible.

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## Atlanta Freethought News An AFS Publication

Editor: Laura Ross  
Assistant Editor: Steve Yothment

### How to Contact the Editor

Send correspondence to AFS at:  
4775 N. Church Lane SE,  
Atlanta, GA 30339,  
phone Laura at 404-634-1005, or send  
e-mail to [Laura@LauraRossDesign.com](mailto:Laura@LauraRossDesign.com)  
or [luara.mom@gmail.com](mailto:luara.mom@gmail.com)

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### Atlanta Freethought News

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AFS Wordpress specialist: Dwight Lyman  
AFS Facebook page: Laura Ross, Ed Buckner,  
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# Is it Really a Free Country?

By Ed Buckner, *Letters to a Free Country*

## First things first: Happy New Year 2023 CE\*!

The overall title for this series is *Letters to a Free Country* and the book my son Michael and I wrote a decade ago was titled *In Freedom We Trust* (Prometheus Books, 2012). People then and people now have questioned whether the US really is a free country, as our titles suggest.

Yes and no.

Formally, legally, officially, aspirationally, yes—mostly at least.

But is a woman free to be President of the US? Not yet, apparently. Are Christians sometimes free to use the government to promote their religion? Sometimes in practice though not constitutionally. (The US Supreme Court has recently disagreed—but they're mistaken. More on that later.)

Isn't everyone equally free, in the sense suggested by the famous words of Anatole France in his 1894 book, *The Red Lily*?

The law, in its majestic equality, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges, to beg in the streets, and to steal bread.

And, for a Democratic Socialist like me, a related declaration was made by Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez on Stephen Colbert's show: "In America, no one should be too poor to live." And we all remember the last words Bat said, yes?

"We all get the same amount of ice. The rich get it in the summer. The poor get it in the winter." —Bat Masterson, lawman and journalist, on Oct. 25, 1921.

Religious people (maybe irreligious ones, too) sometimes suggest that they're not free if they cannot require others to accept their ideas or at least to stand to the side, quietly and respectfully, while the religionists use government resources to promote or privilege those ideas. (More on this subject later.)

But any idea of freedom in a nation or even just in a neighborhood group requires some limits. It's plainly unreasonable for me to declare that I'm not free unless I can wander into your house and eat your food or kill one of your pets whenever I want.

As we wrote in our book,

Fundamentally, *all* citizens of the United States are free (and Christian only if as individuals they choose to be Christian) because the Constitution of the United States, the supreme law of the land, establishes that. As the Constitution is the legal foundational document of the United States, for the United States to be a Christian nation (or a Buddhist nation, or a Masonic nation, or a monarchy), it would have to be declared in the Constitution. But not only does the Constitution fail to establish the United States as a Christian nation, it specifically avows that "under the United States" "no religious test" is allowed (Article VI), and it guarantees equal religious liberty to all with only a few exceptions (if your religion tells you that it is desirable to harm someone else, you will not be free to do that in this country)—it establishes the United States as a free country right from the start.

But these "letters" are not just about the constitution and religious liberty (plenty on those subjects for sure). These mutterings turn on the valuable ability of all of us to be free—to think, to disagree, to assert things (and defend them if we choose), to be interested in different things, and to change our minds.

On Fridays, the post will usually be on matters of freethought, religion, secularism, atheism, and related things. On other days (Mondays starting on

9 January, at least for openers), the focus will be less constrained. And every day, all readers will be invited to agree or disagree and to say so in the comments. (So don't worry too much about being careful what you say—though please avoid personal insults, extended preaching, rants, and invective.)

I already have subscribers who I know have major disagreements with me over politics, religion, and other important things—and I count all the ones I know in these categories as friends or loved ones and want to keep them as friends and loved ones.

I'll mix it up, with opinion, analysis, an occasional explanation of something I have some expertise on (the Bible or statistical significance or the 1796-97 Treaty with Tripoli, say), and, once in a while (maybe on the odd Wednesday?), I'll invite a friend to say a few words. First guest will be philosopher Keith Parsons with a brilliant essay on Wednesday, 4 January. Others may include good writing on Braves baseball (Kay) or on Justice Robert H. Jackson (Oliver) or on workers' rights (David) or on minimum wage and basic guaranteed income (Ben) or on Robert Green Ingersoll (Steve) or on museum matters (Monica) or on being an atheist versus an agnostic (Pam or Perry), or on "How Music is Great for Me" (Lisa) or on mental illness (Karon) or even on a Christian take on the "rights fight" (Jay). And I harbor fond hopes of browbeating my favorite writer, my son Michael, into offering his views—maybe even on the one significant set of issues, gun control, on which he's wrong—er, uh, I mean on which we disagree. And he knows more history than I do, too (and that may turn out to be the basis for one of my posts).

These are some topics I may talk about (if you're desperate to know what I think on one of these, let me know; most of these aren't written yet, and when I actually write on something, sometimes it falls apart as boring and too obvious—but most of these will make their way into *Letters to a Free Country*)—

- Why do Atheists Use Christian Dating? (After all, 2023\* is, in full, 2023 anno domini, or "the 2023rd Year of Our Lord and Savior," or at least realize it's 2023 AD, not just some random number?)
- On Straw Man Arguing
- What Would it Take to Get You to Change Your Mind About God?
- Conversion Therapy for Adult Children

**Letters continued on Page 4**

## Letters continued from Page 3

- On Being a Good Neighbor
- Are You a “-phobe” If You Disagree?
- What Good is the “Good Book”? An Atheist Sings the Praises of Scripture
- On The Tragedy of the Commons
- On Yard Signs in the Public Right of Way
- Is Socialism the Opposite of Conservatism? Must We Choose?
- World History or American History? A Father’s Brag
- On Diversity
- Should Every Organization Have a Resident Philosopher? “In God We Trust”?
- On Supporting Activism and Charitable Groups
- Is Newt Gingrich Really An Abuser of Power, Anti-American, Bizarre, A Cheater, Corrupt, Cynical, Destructive, Disgraceful, Endangering, An Excuse-monger, A Failure, Greedy, A Hypocrite, Ideological, Incompetent, Insecure, Insensitive, Intolerant, A Liar, Obsolete, Pathetic, Pessimistic, Radical, Self-serving, Selfish, Sensationalist, Shallow, Shameless, Sick, A Threatening Traitor Who is Willing to Destroy Freedom to Win Power?
- Message to Atheist International Conference in Celebration of Gora and Saraswatha Gora
- On Serving on a Community Board
- Does Religion Do More Good than Bad?
- On Avoiding Simple-Mindedness
- Statistically Speaking
- On Fast Eddie’s Guaranteed Greener Golf Greens in Only Six Weeks (really little to do with golf greens, of course)
- On Managing Risk
- On The Power of and Need for Estimating
- You’re a Humanist, Ed—Are You a Species-ist?
- On Being a Socialist in a Capitalist Economy (“If You’re So Smart, How Come You Ain’t Rich?”)
- On Demography and Religion
- When Should You Talk About Politics and Religion?
- Whaddya Want From Me, Anyway?

And of course, the events and the politics of the day may cause me to offer some analysis, though I certainly won’t be as likely to be topical in the wonderful way **Heather Cox Richardson** is—she’s far more likely to be a good source for putting the day’s news in good historical context than I am.

So, please understand, the *Free Country* in my series title certainly refers to the nation where no government can tell you what to say or believe, but it is also the country where many matters are interesting to talk about among people who care about each other even if we disagree. Start writing today. Use the button below to create your Substack and connect your publication with Letters to a Free Country.

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# This Shadow Network Group Is Attempting To Coopt Jefferson's Famous Letter Describing Church-State Separation

by Rob Boston • AU.org • Wall of Separation

The 221st anniversary of Thomas Jefferson's **famous letter** to the Danbury, Conn., Baptists is coming up soon – Jan. 1, 2023. For those who aren't familiar with it, this is the letter in which Jefferson invoked the famous metaphor of the First Amendment erecting a “wall of separation between church and state.”

It has been amusing to watch how Christian Nationalist groups have reacted to this letter over the years. They spent decades trying to minimize its importance, downplay the contributions of Jefferson to religious freedom or, in the case of Christian nationalist faux historian **David Barton**, inserting things into the letter that it doesn't contain.

Recently, the Christian Nationalist legal group First Liberty – a member of the billion-dollar **shadow network** seeking to undermine church-state separation and redefine religious freedom – launched a different approach: They're trying to coopt the letter. First Liberty now admits that the letter is an important statement on religious freedom, but, in a new video, the group distorts its meaning and fails to put it in proper context. From the start, they frame separation of church and state as a principle that's not in the Constitution – a common **Christian Nationalist myth**.

The First Liberty video, titled “No Better Letter,” is a cartoon with narration in rhyme. It's obviously aimed at children, and First Liberty probably harbors hopes of getting it into public schools, which is something we'll have to watch out for.

The video doesn't belong in public schools because it misinterprets the letter. Chiefly, First Liberty fails to grasp what Jefferson knew instinctively – that religious freedom can only exist when protected by a church-state wall.

## True Religious Freedom Was Denied In Connecticut

To understand Jefferson's letter, you have to know why the Danbury Baptists wrote to Jefferson in the first place on Oct. 7, 1801: They were upset because Connecticut didn't have separation of church and state. At the time, Connecticut was essentially a Congregationalist theocracy. The state had a “Toleration Act” that allegedly allowed dissenters the right to worship – once they had proved to a magistrate that they belonged to another church.

In most parts of Connecticut, a powerful combination of church and state could and did make life very difficult for dissenters like the Baptists. In their letter to Jefferson, the Baptists observed, “[W]hat religious privileges we

enjoy (as a minor part of the State) we enjoy as favors granted, and not as inalienable rights: and these favors we receive at the expense of such degrading acknowledgements, as are inconsistent with the rights of freemen.”

At the time, the First Amendment did not yet apply to the states. But the Danbury Baptists knew of Jefferson's reputation as a foe of established churches (after all, he drafted **the law** that ended Virginia's state-established church) and wrote to express their hopes that his view would one day apply to all of America, or, as they put it, “like the radiant beams of the Sun, will shine & prevail through all these States....”

Those beams did reach Connecticut, eventually. In 1818, the Congregational Church was disestablished, and true religious freedom came to that state. What First Liberty won't admit is that separation is key to this story. Without it, there would have been no religious freedom in Connecticut. Separation of church and state is what the Danbury Baptists really wanted – and Jefferson knew that.

## Wall Bashing: A Tiresome Christian Nationalist Trick

It's a tiresome trick of groups like First Liberty to claim that religious freedom and separation of church and state are somehow in conflict. In fact, as Connecticut's history proves, they rely on one another. For all their bloviating about “religious freedom,” a Jeffersonian separation of church and state is the last thing groups like First Liberty want because, properly applied, it prevents them from

forcing all of us to live under their narrow, discriminatory and often hate-based theology.

Separation of church and state is the protector of religious freedom. The Danbury Baptists knew this. Jefferson knew this. When will First Liberty learn it?

P.S. If you want the true story of the Danbury letter, I hope you'll read **this article I wrote in 2002** to mark its 200th anniversary.

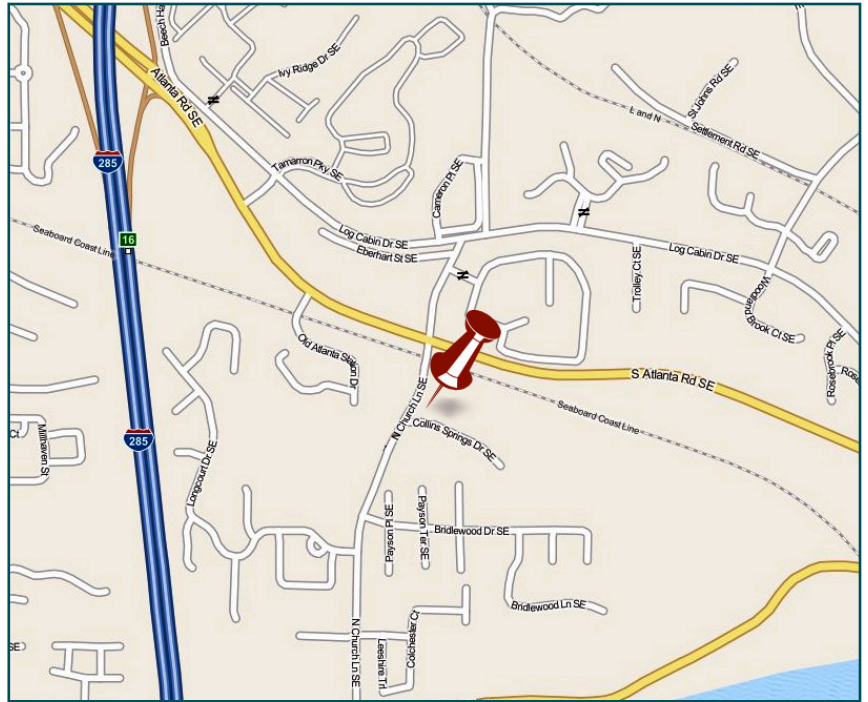


*Dare To Think  
For Yourself!*



**AF Hall  
4775 N. Church Lane SE  
Atlanta, GA 30339**

**Charles Miller  
1/8/23 1:00 pm EST  
(via Zoom)**



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