

“Should a Man Who Served as a Congressman, Governor, US Senator, and Possibly Even Delayed a Civil War Be Given a Statue or Forgotten?” (via Zoom)

This time AFS will host a perennial speaker, amateur **Ed Buckner** (he'd be an amateur historian if only he were more of an historian). Our program will be on **James Henry Hammond** (1807-1864) of South Carolina. Buckner plans to excoriate Hammond and dares anyone to rise to defend his honor!



Ed Buckner

From his **Wikipedia** page: “A Democrat, Hammond was perhaps best known during his lifetime as an outspoken defender of slavery and states’ rights. He popularized the phrase that “Cotton is King” in his March 4, 1858, speech to the US Senate, saying: “In all social systems there must be a class to do the menial duties, to perform the drudgery of life. ... It constitutes the very mudsill of society.” He went on to utter the oft-repeated words, “You dare not make war on cotton — no power on earth dares make war upon it. Cotton is king.”

In his writings, he consistently compared the South’s “well compensated” slaves to the free labor of the North, describing the latter as “scantily compensated” slaves (as he termed the hired skilled laborers and operatives).



Going beyond articles in local newspapers, he co-authored *The Pro-Slavery Argument* with **William Harper**, **Thomas Roderick Dew**, and **William Gilmore Simms**. Hammond and Simms were part of a “sacred circle” of intellectuals,

including **Edmund Ruffin**, **Nathaniel Beverley Tucker**, and **George Frederick Holmes**, who promoted reformation in the South in various forms. As supporters of slavery, they both

justified it in terms of stewardship of inferior beings and promoted slaveholders’ improvement of their treatment of slaves.

Hammond promoted Redcliffe, his plantation in Beech Island, SC, as his ideal of the perfectly run plantation in his *Plantation Manual, 1857-58*. It includes a wide range of material, with detailed rules regulating treatment of pregnant and nursing slaves (whom he allowed to nurse their infants for 12 months), old slaves no longer fit for heavy field work, together with rules about clothing, quarters, food, etc., in addition to livestock and crop management.

He openly had a same sex affair with a college friend, had sex with four teenage nieces, ruining their social prospects, and raped two slave women, one of which may have been his own daughter and she bore him 12 children.

Steve Yothment again has set up a free Zoom session for Sunday, July 12 from 1:00-2:30 p.m. Log in at 12:30 to socialize and of course everyone is welcome to hang out and chat afterwards. Below is the meeting invitation as generated by Zoom. Log in with a computer, tablet, or smart phone.

AFS July Meeting July 12, 2020 1:00-2:30 PM (EST)

To join Zoom meeting go to link below:
us02web.zoom.us/j/86843137944

Meeting ID: 868 4313 7944

Calendar

July 12	General Meeting on Zoom	1 pm
Aug 9	Stay tuned!	1 pm

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

For the latest in upcoming AFS events, join our Meetup group!
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 otherwise noted. Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:00 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.



July 12: Ed Buckner gives historical talk about despicable slave owner James Henry Hammond of SC

August 9: TBA

September 13: TBA

October 11: TBA

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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.

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

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Atlanta Freethought News

Vol. 26, Number 7, July 2020 CE
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Is Evolution a Fact?

by Dwight Lyman

atheology.com

It drives me crazy (not really, of course) when atheists (and lately even some scientists) assert that evolution is a “fact”.

Now, the word “fact” can have various (conflicting) meanings. For example there is a sense in which calling something a “scientific fact” simply means “most scientists agree” it’s true. In that sense I’m sure everyone would admit that evolution is a fact. But it’s a weak use of the word “fact”—and not at all the sort of thing most of us mean when we call something a fact.

Of course, if we examine “facts” closely enough we discover that they become less and less “factual” the more we look—but I won’t go into that here. I don’t want to sound like what my younger daughter used to call “a crazy philosopher guy” who “gives people headaches” when she was young. I’ll avoid casting too critical an eye on *factuality* and stick with the ordinary meaning of the word.

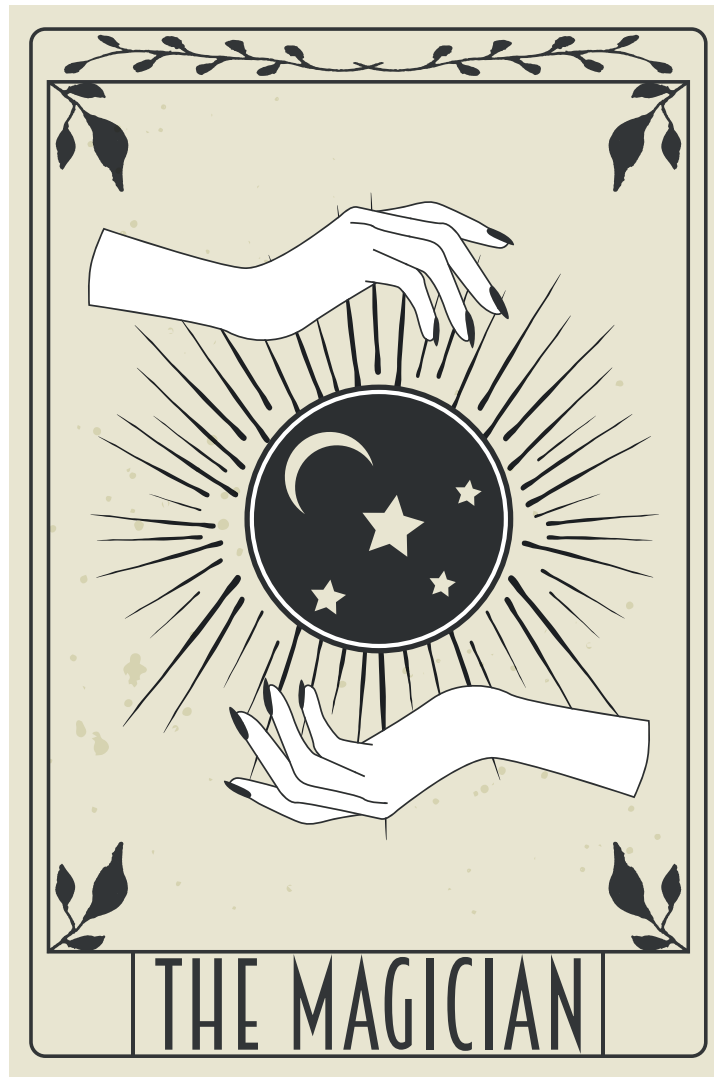
Facts are the evidence upon which inferences and hypotheses and theories are built. So in ordinary usage if you see a red apple on the table, that there is a red apple on the table is a *fact*. If someone then lays a table cloth over the apple, so that now you only see an apple-sized lump under the table cloth where previously you saw the apple, it is now an *inference* rather than a fact that there is an apple on the table.

Is it a sound inference? Probably so—unless you are attending a magic show and the person who placed the cloth over the apple is a magician. Magicians, after all, make their living by tricking audiences into false inferences, or confusing inferences with facts.

Consider a simple magic trick. The magician sets a glass of water on the table, and then asks a member of the audience for a quarter. Magician holds the quarter up for all to see, then takes a handkerchief and drapes it over the quarter. With two fingers he holds the quarter up, hidden by the handkerchief, so that you can make out the circular shape of the quarter underneath. The magician even passes it to an audience member to hold (without peaking underneath the handkerchief, of course.) Finally the magician asks the audience member to hold the handkerchief and quarter over the glass of water

and let go, so that the quarter should fall into the water (and the handkerchief drape over the glass. He then asks the volunteer to pull the handkerchief away and reveal the glass of water.

The quarter is gone! Disappeared. The magician even pours the water slowly out of the glass and dramatically holds the glass upside down—no quarter!



Where is the false inference? In this case, when the magician covered the quarter with the handkerchief, he swapped the quarter with a piece of glass exactly the size and shape of a quarter. The glass may not weigh exactly the same as a quarter, but draped under the weight of the handkerchief, who can tell? When the quarter-sized glass is dropped into the water it is for all practical purposes invisible, especially to an audience expecting to see a real quarter. The surface tension of water makes the glass quarter cling to the bottom of the drinking glass even when it is held upside down.

All magic tricks rely on inducing the audience into mistaking inferences for facts. If you want to avoid being tricked, one thing you must do is become acutely aware whether you are inferring something or directly observing it. The apple on the table is a factual observation, but the apple-sized lump under the table-cloth is only an inference.

So, is the origin of species by evolution (whether by natural selection or otherwise) fact or inference? Do we see evolution happening the way one sees an apple on the table, or is species change not observed directly but rather based on a set of inferences? The answer, I think, is obvious.

All scientific theories are built on inferences from facts, and are therefore never factual themselves. They are always—oh, what is the word?—oh yes, now I remember—they are always *theoretical* rather than *factual*.

Trump's Proposal For Statues Is Yet More Pandering To His Christian Nationalist Base

By Rob Boston / Wall of Separation Blog

au.org

In recent weeks, the country has been undergoing a long-overdue discussion about what types of monuments should occupy public spaces. In some states, notably Virginia, statues that glorify leaders of the Confederacy **have been removed** due to orders by government officials. Other statues have been **pulled down** by crowds of protestors.

Americans of goodwill may disagree about the best way to deal with offensive monuments, but we all ought to agree that this period should be a teachable moment for our country. We need to do the hard work of facing up to difficult periods of our past and begin a dialogue about how we can best move forward as one people. Unfortunately, we lack the national leadership to kick start that conversation. President **Donald Trump** actually wants to make things worse. **He has issued an executive order** to create a type of national garden that would contain statues of alleged "American heroes" – at least a few of whom are problematic and divisive figures.

Trump has proposed adding statues of evangelist **Billy Graham** and Supreme Court Justice **Antonin Scalia** to the collection. Neither deserves that honor.

When Graham died in February of 2018, Congress allowed his body to lie in honor at the U.S. Capitol, something that is rarely granted. As Americans United **noted at the time**, while many Christians admired Graham, he spent most of his life trying to convert people to his brand of conservative Christianity. His work served a private religious interest; it's not the type of activity that deserves high recognition from the federal government.

AU also noted that during this long career, Graham made troubling statements about Jews, African Americans and LGBTQ people. And while he met

with presidents of both parties, Graham ultimately got sucked into right-wing politics. Late in his life, Graham stated that his political activities were his one regret.

Likewise, Scalia was no champion of the American people and certainly does not qualify as a hero. The late high court justice held a cramped vision of the rights of the people, firmly anchored in a time when a privileged few held sway over everyone else. His view of church-state relations was similarly outdated, and all too often his response to church-state violations was a shrug.

As Americans United pointed out after Scalia's death, "His vision of the Constitution excluded too many Americans and left a lot of people on the outside looking in. His was a jurisprudence that too often looked back to the 19th century instead of forward to the 22nd."

While the current national conversation about who we honor and how we honor them has at times been difficult and painful, it's also necessary. Trump's proposal is merely another sop to his far-right Christian nationalist base. It adds nothing of value to the discussion we so desperately need to have.

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Five Years Later, Christian Nationalist Predictions About Marriage Equality Look Pretty Silly

By Rob Boston / Wall of Separation Blog

au.org

June 26th marked the fifth anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, a ruling that had the effect of extending marriage equality nationwide.

Prior to the decision and after it came down, Religious Right groups made a number of claims about marriage equality, predicting dire consequences from the ruling.

Five years have passed. How many of these predictions have come true? Let's take a look:

Western civilization will collapse: In October 2014, Christian nationalist attorney **Mat Staver** told a right-wing radio show that if the Supreme Court were to uphold marriage equality, **the consequences would be devastating.**

"This is something that I believe is the beginning of the end of Western Civilization," Staver said. "You can't simply redefine and pretend that ontological differences between men and women do not exist. This will have consequences."

Admittedly, Western Civilization has taken a bit of a hit lately – all civilization has. But that's due to the coronavirus pandemic and a reckoning over systemic racism, not marriage equality. In the main, Western Civilization is still plugging along.

The American people will rebel: As states began legalizing same-sex marriage and courts started striking down bans on it in 2013, **Tony Perkins**, president of the Family Research Council, was certain the American people were going to rise up.

"If you get government out of whack with where the people are and it goes too far, you create revolution," **Perkins said while appearing on a right-wing radio show.** "I think you could see a social and cultural revolution if the court goes too far on this. [It] could literally split this nation in two and create such political and cultural turmoil that I'm not sure we could ever recover. ..."

Didn't happen. Instead, the country underwent a fairly rapid shift in public opinion on the question of marriage equality. A number of polls now show support for it hitting the **low to mid-60s.** Among millennials, support for marriage equality **is even higher** at 70 percent. Stick a fork in this one; it's done.

Houses of worship will be forced to perform marriage ceremonies for same-sex couples: When it became obvious that marriage equality was coming to Alabama, **Eric**

Johnston, president of the right-wing Southeast Law Institute, hit the panic button.

"There will be a lot of lawsuits over whether ministers have to do it," **Johnston blathered.** "It will be a clash between fundamental rights under the Constitution."

What nonsense. The flood of lawsuits never materialized, in part because it's obvious that houses of worship have an ironclad right to decide to whom they will extend their sacraments and religious services. Nothing about that has changed since June 26, 2015. The number of houses of worship that have been compelled to allow same-sex couples to marry stands at zero.

Religious conservatives will be imprisoned: **James C. Dobson**, the founder of Focus on the Family, seriously argued that people would be **sent to prison** for refusing to accept marriage equality.

"Many of us will be dragged into court to be prosecuted or subjected to civil judgments," **Dobson grouched in a column.** "... Some may go to prison as the years unfold."

Wrong again. No one is sitting behind bars for refusing to accept marriage equality. (Anti-LGBTQ Kentucky county clerk **Kim Davis** was briefly in jail, but that's because she was found guilty of contempt of court. Davis, a government official, defied court orders and refused to issue marriage licenses to same-sex couples even after *Obergefell* had come down.)

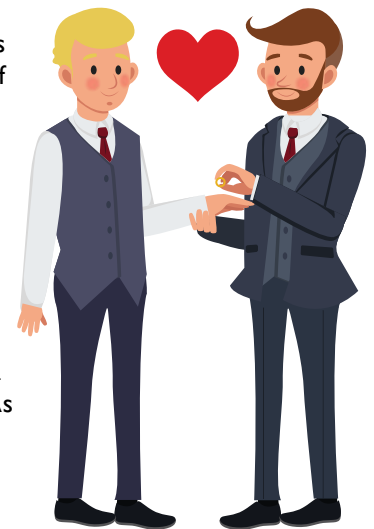
Religious freedom will be obliterated: After *Obergefell* was handed down, **Bryan Fischer**, a radio talk show host affiliated with the American Family Association, **tweeted:** "Every advance of the gay agenda comes at the expense of religious liberty. As of today, free exercise is toast."

But the free exercise of religion is not toast – it's not even scorched. In the post-*Obergefell* world, people remained free to meet in houses of worship for prayer and fellowship. Pastors who disliked the ruling had the ability to criticize it from the pulpit. No church had to admit LGBTQ members. Nothing changed. It's true that secular, for-profit businesses were expected to follow state and local anti-discrimination laws and serve everyone equally – but that doesn't stop anyone from worshipping as they please. It's a strange definition of "religious freedom" that allows one person to treat another like a second-class citizen.

People will start marrying animals, microwave ovens, lakes, etc.: U.S. Rep. **Louis Gohmert** (R-Texas) and former U.S. Sen. **Rick Santorum** (R-Pa.) were big fans of this **insipid talking point.** Some assertions are simply too stupid to merit a reply. This is one of them.

Even as these claims were being made, we at Americans United were debunking them. They just aren't true. Will the Christian nationalist groups that spread them take an honest look back five years later and admit they were wrong?

Don't hold your breath.

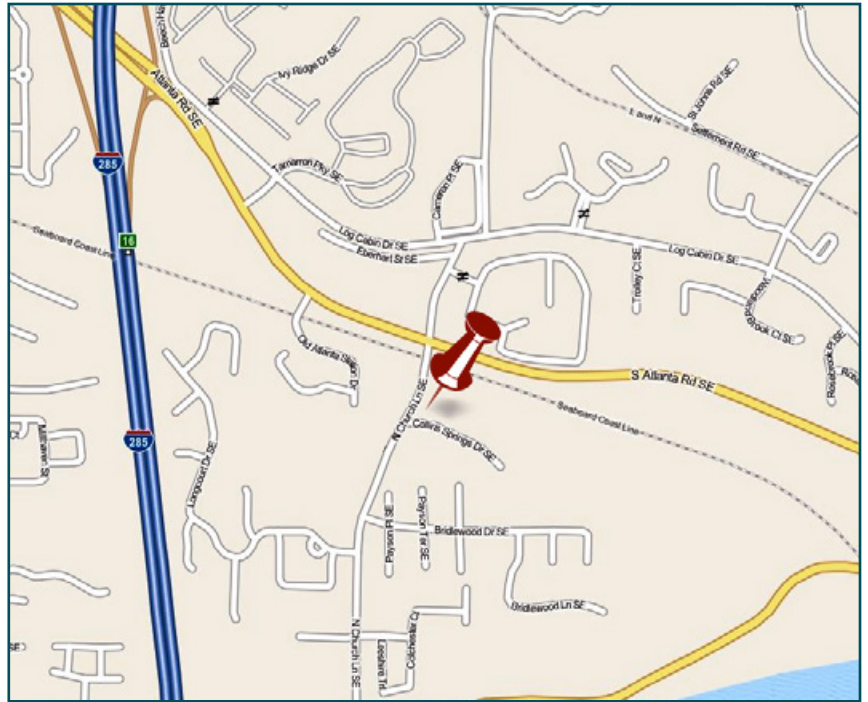


*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



**AF Hall
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**Ed Buckner
(via Zoom)**



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