

## Alison Gill of American Atheists talks about Project 2025

On Sunday, October 13th, we will once again present Alison Gill, the Vice President for Legal and Policy at American Atheists, where she manages the organization's federal and state advocacy for religious equality and litigation activities to protect the separation of religion and government. Alison is a nationally recognized expert on civil rights law and state advocacy.



Alison Gill

Following is a definition of Project 2025 from the ACLU ([www.aclu.org/project-2025-explained](http://www.aclu.org/project-2025-explained)):

Project 2025 is a federal policy agenda and blueprint for a radical restructuring of the executive branch authored and published by former Trump administration officials in partnership with The Heritage Foundation, a longstanding conservative think tank that opposes abortion and reproductive rights, LGBTQ rights, immigrants' rights, and racial equity. Project 2025's largest publication, *Mandate For Leadership*, is a 900-page manual for reorganizing the entire federal government agency by agency to serve a conservative agenda.

Project 2025 includes a long list of extreme policy recommendations touching on nearly every aspect of American life, from immigration and abortion rights, to free speech and racial justice. A number of its recommendations



### AFS Calendar

Oct 13	Board of Directors Meeting	11 am
Oct 13	General Meeting (Live/Online)	1 pm
Nov 10	Potluck Lunch	11 am
Nov 10	General Meeting (Live/Online)	1 pm
Dec 8	Board of Directors Meeting	11 am
Dec 8	General Meeting (Live/Online)	1 pm

All events are combo Live/Zoom unless noted and are subject to change.

rely on support from the executive branch and from Congress. Many other initiatives are outright unconstitutional.

Prior to her work with American Atheists, Alison Gill worked as a consultant to nonprofits focusing on advocacy strategy and systemic change and as Senior Legislative Counsel at the Human

Rights Campaign, where she managed state-level advocacy on issues such as conversion therapy, bullying prevention, education discrimination, health and wellness, youth homelessness, and data collection.

We hope you can make this free and

important meeting whether in person at the Hall or via Zoom (The link to join is below):

### AFS October Meeting Oct 13, 2024 1:00-2:30 PM (eastern)

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

Also at Atlanta Freethought Hall

 **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 and also presented online (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. Announced events are subject to change.



- 13 Oct Alison Gill: "Project 2025"  
10 Nov Paul Broman: "Whatever Happened to Deism?"  
8 Dec TBA  
12 Jan TBA

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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

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## Arguing with the Right and the “Left” About Identity Politics

Ed Buckner • Letters to a Free Country

<https://edbuckner.substack.com/p/arguing-with-the-right-and-the-left>

### **Demand Equal Outcomes? No! Ignore Unequal Outcomes? No! Oppose Discrimination? Mostly. Identity Politics? Mostly Not.**

Let me start by throwing out some close to cliches about what I support firmly on the record:

#### **Outcomes are not always equal, and that may matter**

Short guys and tall guys are *not* equally likely to make it in the men’s National Basketball Association. As a pretty short guy (and getting shorter, damn it), I never once felt this was unfair. Speed, agility, thousands of hours of practice, grit, intelligence, determination—many things affect who makes it in the NBA. But being closer to the height of the basket when you’re standing (or jumping) helps—and pretending that’s irrelevant would be silly.

But if chief executive officers of corporations are disproportionately men vs. women or white vs. hispanic, etc., those unequal outcomes matter—and should have consequences—but nothing should be done *just* to equalize outcomes. Instead, careful analysis of why the outcomes are unequal needs to be undertaken. And if mistreatment and discrimination is the cause, take steps to correct.

#### **Equal opportunity is worthwhile, nearly always**

Opportunity for what? If it’s for power, control, economic advantage, better food, and the like—then opportunity needs to be equal as far as irrelevant crap like sex (nearly always), skin color, etc., is concerned. But if the “opportunity” is to get cooler looking seashells or the like, never mind.

#### **Discrimination is usually bad**

This is pretty much the mirror image of the opportunity bit above. Discriminate regarding irrelevant stuff? No problem. Arbitrary discrimination impeding reaching desirable goals? No.

#### **Elect or appoint the person who is best qualified, who most closely expresses ideas and policies you prefer—not someone who is the “right” identity: ethnicity, gender, race, height, or from the right state or went to the right university**

Yep. But exceptions may be needed. Read on.

A Case in Point: Appointing United States Supreme Court Justices

When the President of the United States has the chance to appoint a US Supreme Court Justice, how many people can he choose from? Must he

choose a judge? A lawyer? A college graduate? A man? A caucasian (“white”)? Someone over 30? A smart person? An American citizen?

Here’s what the US Constitution (Article II, Section 2, Clause 2) directs:

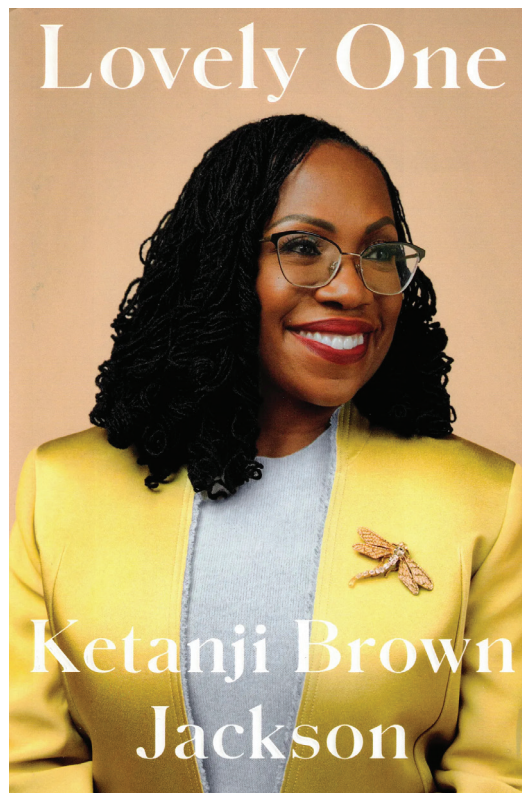
*He [the President] shall have Power, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, to make Treaties, provided two thirds of the Senators present concur; and he shall nominate, and by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, shall appoint Ambassadors, other public Ministers and Consuls, Judges of the supreme Court, and all other Officers of the United States, whose Appointments are not herein otherwise provided for, and which shall be established by Law: but the Congress may by Law vest the Appointment of such inferior Officers, as they think proper, in the President alone, in the Courts of Law, or in the Heads of Departments.*

So the prez has essentially the whole world—billions of people—to choose from, assuming he can get the Senate to go along. He (and so far it’s always been a male prez—may that change soon!) can hardly start riffling through the resumes of billions of people, so he *has* to discriminate—to make sweeping decisions about who to consider at all even before he chooses who to seriously consider and then who to nominate.

An obscure subsistence farmer in France, even a brilliant one, won’t have any chance of getting Senate approval, of course, but what about state governors and US Senators? What about a prominent thinker about the US Supreme Court like Edward Tabash? Or a smart philosopher like Keith Parsons?

Is choosing a younger person—to spread out the influence over more expected years—justifiable? If he wants to name someone who didn’t graduate from college, is that politically OK—or might it be (or be seen as) affirmative action for the formally less well educated? By the way, the Justice I hold in highest esteem, Robert H. Jackson, appointed by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1941, was not a college or law school grad.

Whatever else a President does when a vacancy arises, he must winnow the field quickly from a few billion to a manageable few. US citizen?—that



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## Arguing continued from page 3

drops it by well over 95% right away. Judicial experience? Not always required—but usually—another chunk. Protestant Christian—surely not required, but historically, the overwhelming majority of Justices were. (And arguably are way underrepresented now.) An open atheist? None to date, so way, way underrepresented. **Benjamin Cordoza** (1870—1938) was Jewish, but a secular Jew, identifying as an “agnostic.”

## Identity Politics—the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Time to discuss a fascinating case in point for identity politics: **Ketanji Brown Jackson**.

Justice Jackson was born in 1970, the same year as our son, **Michael**. Justice Jackson’s father, **Johnny Brown**, was born at almost the same time I was (only a few months before me) and—prepare to be astonished—he was born in the very same pretty obscure southern Georgia small town as I was: Fitzgerald, Georgia! This is relevant because ...well, OK, it’s not. But it seems cool to me and I never heard of anyone else, famous or not, being born there, so I knew you’d want me to mention it.

For a bit of background that may be relevant: there have been, including the current nine, 116 Supreme Court justices in the history of the US. (The Court has not always had nine justices.) Counting Ketanji Brown Jackson, three of these have been/are African American (that’s 2.6%). Also counting Ketanji Brown Jackson, six have been/are female (that’s 5.2%).

Does that mean identity politics—“Gotta find a suitable white guy!”—have been in play throughout most of American history? Probably not literally—just instead in effect, based on unconscious presumptions, prejudice, and thoughtlessness. The Presidents have all been white (except **Barack Obama**) guys (so far, at least) and probably most of the people they knew, trusted, and liked were, too. And no one probably even said, “Boss, how about **Harriet Tubman**?”

**Joe Biden** was not the first President to make a campaign promise based on these kind of things, by the way—**Ronald Reagan** pledged that if elected

he’d appoint a woman to the Supreme Court. When he got the chance—in 1981—**Sandra Day O’Connor** got the nod and became the first woman on the Court. It only took 192 years.

So, is it just a matter of now making up for past stupidity? I mean, can 115 wrongs be corrected by making another one—by appointing someone based on irrelevant factors instead of based on meaningful qualities?

Remember, the President—any President, not just Joe Biden or Ronald Reagan—has to winnow that field quite dramatically before he can even start to seriously weigh which person to pick. Once upon a time, geographic diversity—need someone from the Northwest on the Court to balance out the Easterners and Southerners—was an important part of it. Why not make up for a couple of hundred years of bad consideration by giving preference based on race and sex in the opposite direction?

Wouldn’t it be wiser, say those on the right, to quit making bad choices and just pick the best person, period? One possible problem with that is that the pool of really good possible appointments probably includes thousands of people and there is no meaningful way to rank the ones in that elite group.

Quite possibly the best case for identity politics in these matters I’ve ever heard came from US

**Arguing continued on page 5**

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## Arguing continued from page 4

Senator from New Jersey **Cory Booker** at Ketanji Brown Jackson's confirmation hearings. He had millions of Americans, especially African American women, especially KBJ's family, in tears. Here's some of what Booker said:

*And I want to tell you, when I look at you [KBJ], this is why I get emotional. I'm sorry, you're a person that is so much more than your race and gender. You're a Christian, you're a mom, you're an intellect, you love books. But for me, I'm sorry, it's hard for me not to look at you and not see my mom, not to see my cousins, one of them who had to come here and sit behind you. She had to have your back. I see my ancestors and yours. Nobody's going to steal the joy of that woman in the street, or the calls that I'm getting, or the texts. Nobody's going to steal that joy. You have earned this spot. You are worthy. You are a great American.*



And—

*You and I and everyone here, generations of folk who came here and said, "America, I'm Irish. You may say no Irish or dogs need apply, but I'm gonna show this country that I can be free here. I can make this country love*

*me as much as I love it." Chinese Americans – forced into near slave labor building our railroads, connecting our country – saw the ugliest of America. But they were going to build their home here, saying "America, you may not love me yet, but I'm going to make this nation live up to its promise and hope." LGBTQ Americans from Stonewall, women to Seneca, hidden figures who didn't even get their play until some Hollywood movie talked about them and how they were critical for us defying gravity. All of these people loved America.*

And—

*Harriet Tubman is one of my heroes because the more I read about this person, the more – I mean, she was viciously beaten. Her whole life she used to fall under spells, cracked skull. She faced starvation, chased by dogs. And when she got to freedom, what did she do? She rested? No, she went back, again and again and again. The sky was full of stars, but she found one that was a harbinger of hope – for better days. Not just for her and those people who were enslaved, but a harbinger of hope for this country. She never gave up on America. She fought in – led troops in the Civil War. She was involved in the suffrage movement. And as I came back from my run, after being near assaulted by someone on the street, I thought about her and how she looked up, she kept looking up. No matter what they did to her, she never stopped looking up. And that star was a harbinger of hope.*

*Today, you're my star. You are my harbinger of hope. This country is getting better and better and better. When that final vote happens and you ascend onto the highest court in the land, I'm gonna rejoice. And I'm gonna tell you right now: The greatest country in the world, the United States of America, will be better because of you. Thank you.*

Am I convinced? Should we make compensating choices, choices to try to balance destructive past discrimination?

I don't think Reagan or Biden should've pandered for political gain by promising to choose "a woman" (Reagan) or "a Black woman" (Biden). That inevitably meant that the women they chose carried, for some people, at least a dismissive hint of "Oh, just an affirmative action choice. Too bad." Senator Booker's slightly defensive words reflect that.

I think both Presidents should have said, "I'll name the best person in America to the Court if I get to appoint."

And then Reagan should have appointed O'Connor.

And of course Biden should have named Ketanji Brown Jackson. And if anyone said to him, "Mr. President, you named a Black Woman," then he could have replied, "About damned time."



**John Carver**, age 86 died on August 16 2024 in Atlanta GA. He was an important leader for AFS, including writing the bylaws still in force for this group.

Born in Chattanooga TN, the fourth child of **John Bruce** and **Lena Edith Carver**, John was the proud father of **Tanya Moore** and **Jennifer Jenkins**, the loving grandfather of **Hannah, Elizabeth** and **Erin**, and the proud stepfather of **Terry Richardson**.

A Ph.D. graduate of Emory University, John managed several Mental Health organizations and systems, ultimately developing an interest in governance, the job of the governing board. John developed a unique theoretical framework for governance, the Policy Governance Model. He taught, facilitated and coached both boards and consultants worldwide. The author of five books and hundreds of articles and monographs, he may have been the most published writer in his field.

A Secular Humanist, John read widely in philosophy, history and political theory.

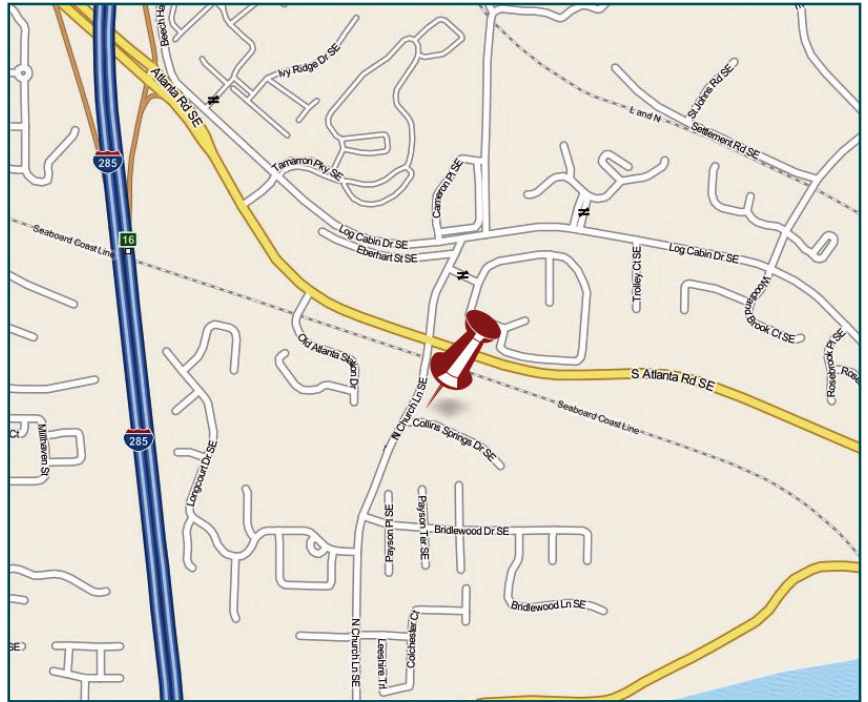
Since 1995, John was married to his best friend, **Miriam**.

*Dare To Think  
For Yourself!*



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

**Alison Gill  
October 13 1:00 pm EST  
(At Hall and on Zoom)**



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