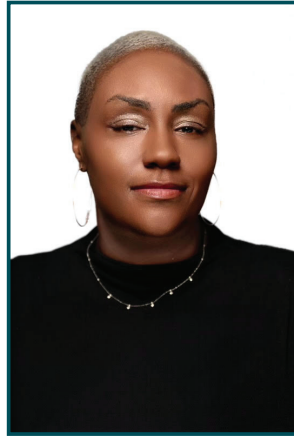


Mandisa Thomas of Black Nonbelievers: "Revival of Reason"

Mandisa Thomas, a native of New York City, is the founder and President of **Black Nonbelievers, Inc.** Although never formally indoctrinated into belief, Mandisa was heavily exposed to Christianity, Black Nationalism, and Islam. As a child she loved reading, and enjoyed various tales of Gods from different cultures, including Greek and Ghanaian.



Mandisa Thomas

"Through reading these stories and being taught about other cultures at an early age, I quickly noticed that there were similarities and differences between those deities and the God of the Christian Bible. I couldn't help but wonder what made this God so special that he warrants such prevalence today," she recalls.

Mandisa has many media appearances to her credit, including *CBS Sunday Morning*, *CNN.com*, and *Playboy*, *The Humanist*, and *JET* magazines. She has been a guest on podcasts such as NPR's *Code Switch* and *IA*, as well as the documentaries *gODTalk* and *Contradiction*. In 2022, Mandisa was featured on the Atlanta billboard and newspaper ad for the Freedom From Religion Foundation's "I'm Secular and I Vote" campaign. She is also a

Dec 8	Board of Directors Meeting	11 am
Dec 8	General Meeting/Elections (Live/Online)	1 pm
Dec 21	Festivus/Saternalia party	5 pm
Jan 12	Potluck Lunch	11 am
Jan 12	General Meeting (Live/Online)	1 pm
Feb 9	Potluck Lunch	11 am
Feb 9	General Meeting (Live/Online)	1 pm

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

certified Humanist Celebrant, and a member of the *Godless Gospel* music ensemble.

Mandisa is the recipient of the following awards:

- 2022 – Irving and Anabel Wolfson Award (Unitarian Universalist Church of Worcester)
- 2020 - Harvard Humanist of the Year
- 2019 - Freethought Heroine (Freedom from Religion Foundation)
- 2019 - Backbone Award (Secular Student Alliance)
- 2018 - Person of the Year (Unitarian Universalist Humanist Association)

As the president of Black Nonbelievers, Mandisa encourages more Blacks to come out and stand strong with their nonbelief in the face of strong religious overtones.

"The more we make our presence known, the better our chances of working together to turn around some of the disparities we face. We are NOT alone."

Atlanta Freethought Society presents 2025 candidates for three open board spots that are due Dec 8. Be sure to mail early and/or bring back your ballots to the meeting. Members who have paid their dues for 2025 can vote. Choose three:

- Mark Banks** (Incumbent)
- Paul Broman** (Former Board Member)
- Michael Buckner** (Incumbent)
- Hollow Horned** (Volunteer)
- Daniel Pyron** (Former Board Member)
- Judy Thompson** (Incumbent)

AFS December Meeting
Dec 8, 2024 1:00-2:30 PM (eastern)

To join Zoom meeting go to this link:
us02web.zoom.us/j/89006560911
Also at Atlanta Freethought Hall



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.



8 Dec Mandisa Thomas - "The Revival of Reason"

12 Jan TBA

9 Feb TBA

AFS Email List

The AFS Announcements email list provides subscribers with reminders and updates on AFS activities. Send an email to AFS-Announce-subscribe@yahoogroups.com to subscribe. The AFS Forum email list is a place for discussions of freethought, atheism, agnosticism, church-state separation and religion. To subscribe to this list, send an email to AFSForum-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. The AFS Facebook page is at facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought. For calendar information on AFS activities, please join the [Meetup group](#). The AFS website is www.atlantafreethought.org.

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. 30, Number 12, December 2024 CE
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Memo to President-Elect Trump: Prayer in Public Schools Exists – But It Can't Be Compelled

Rob Boston • Wall of Separation

<https://www.au.org/the-latest/articles/memo-to-president-elect-trump-prayer-in-public-schools-exists-but-it-cant-be-compelled/>

As we noted on “The Wall of Separation” Nov. 25 (<https://www.au.org/the-latest/articles/disruptive-christian-nationalist-culture-wars-may-be-coming-soon-to-a-public-school-near-you/>), President-Elect Donald Trump has released a list of education priorities, one of which is “bringing back prayer to our schools.”

The idea that there can be absolutely no prayer in public schools is such a persistent myth that it's worth debunking in some detail. While the facts that follow aren't likely to persuade ideologues like Trump, we hope you can use them when talking to family members and friends who have fallen for Christian Nationalist distortions.

Voluntary prayer exists in public schools

First off, students have the right to pray in public schools in a voluntary, non-disruptive way. If students want to pray at the start of the day, over lunch, before they take a test or at other points of the day, that is protected.

What's not protected – and, in fact, is not allowed – is anything that smacks of government-sponsored religion, force or coercion.

And make no mistake, that's what used to happen in many American public schools. Prior to the Supreme Court rulings of 1962 and '63, school officials in several states broadcast prayers and passages from the Bible over the loudspeakers, and everyone had to participate (or at least listen). These practices were Christian in nature; they were also coercive and amounted to state-sponsored religion. They violated students' right of conscience. That's why the Supreme Court put a stop to them.

What the Supreme Court really said

The 1962 case, *Engel v. Vitale* (<https://www.oyez.org/cases/1962/142>), challenged recitation of the so-called “Regents Prayer,” a devotional composed by a government body, the New York State Board of Regents, for recitation in the state's public schools.

The high court was rightly alarmed at the prospect of a government body composing a prayer and pressuring children to recite it. In its decision, the court observed, “[W]e think that the constitutional prohibition against laws respecting an establishment of religion must at least mean that, in this country, it is no part of the business of government to compose official prayers for any group of the American people to recite as a part of a religious program carried on by government.”

Nothing in this ruling, or 1963's School District of *Abington Township v. Schempp* (<https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/370/421/#tab-opinion-1943887>), a Pennsylvania case that struck down mandatory, school-sponsored recitation of the Lord's Prayer and the reading of Bible passages in public schools, affects students' ability to engage in truly voluntary prayer. The religious practices were invalidated because they were sponsored by the government and involved coercion and pressure.

The voluntary principle

Students who want religious experiences in public schools can have them – but it must be their freely chosen decision. The practices must be voluntary. A 1984 federal law called the Equal Access Act allows students in secondary schools to form voluntary religious clubs (and other types of clubs) that meet during non-instructional time. The clubs are student-run, and the young people who choose to attend can pray, read religious texts, talk about their

faith and engage in other activities because these are entirely *voluntary* clubs. Only students who want these activities attend them. There is no

Prayer Continued on pg. 4

Holiday Party / Festivus / Saturnalia!



Freedom From Religion Foundation and Atlanta Freethought Society will celebrate the Winter Solstice on Sat, Dec 21st, 5-9 pm at AFS Hall. The ancient Romans celebrated the god of Saturn by having a banquet, exchanging gifts, and reversing social norms. Festivus includes a banquet, gag gift exchange, airing of grievances, feats of strength, Festivus miracles and other fun stuff.

Please join us for a delightful evening for all.

For the pot luck dinner let's forget the traditional fare—some possible alternatives:

- Pastafarian: lasagna, spaghetti, or pizza.
- BBQ, Chili, Tacos, hot dogs, hamburgers.
- Most of our ancestors lived near water: how about some sea food?
- And let's not forget deserts.
- Drinks: some home brew wine and spirits or maybe some mead?

Doors open at 5 PM for set up. We plan to start eating at 6 PM.

The gift exchange will start around 7 PM. The gag gift should be as cheap as possible—something from a garage sale, thrift store or something you want to “re-gift” will be fine. After the gifts are opened we will vote on the most bizarre, weird, strange, obscene, or funny gift. Afterwards we might engage in something fun like dancing or shooting fireworks over the graveyard.

If anyone wants to bring some dancing music please let us know. FFRF/AFS will provide coffee, soft drinks, hot chocolate, plates, cups, and cutlery.

Prayer Continued from pg. 3

coercion from the school.

Public schools can also teach about religion as an academic subject. This requires great care, and the approach must be truly neutral. As the Supreme Court noted in the *Schempp* case, "It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented ob-

jectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment." (This even-handed approach is a far cry from what's being promoted in Oklahoma (<https://www.au.org/the-latest/press/ryan-walters-lawsuit-bible-mandate/>) and Texas (<https://www.au.org/the-latest/press/texas-bluebonnet-elementary-curriculum/>))



Some AU wisdom from 1962

Americans United supported the school prayer rulings in 1962 and '63. In a statement issued in response to the *Engel* ruling, AU observed, "Public

school children in New York State have been, in effect, required by law to pray and have been regimented in their prayers. To establish such a religious exercise upon these citizens is an unconstitutional use of government authority."

Sixty-two years have passed, but that state-

ment remains true. If this type of government-mandated school prayer is what Trump wants to bring back, he's going to have a fight on his hands. And Americans United will be there to lead it.

P.S. AU's "Know Your Rights" guides (<https://www.au.org/knowyourrights/>) are great resources for students, parents and teachers that

discuss what's legal and what's not when it comes to religion in public schools. Check them out and feel free to share them!

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Sustaining memberships: One person can become a sustaining member for \$100 per year.

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Thank you for your support! We look forward to your being with us in the coming months!

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Thanks to Trump's Win, the Views of a 19th Century Christian Nationalist May Shape Reproductive Rights

Rob Boston • Wall of Separation

<https://www.au.org/the-latest/articles/thanks-to-trumps-win-the-views-of-a-19th-century-christian-nationalist-may-shape-reproductive-rights/>

As we've noted previously, abortion rights amendments (<https://www.au.org/the-latest/articles/despite-trumps-victory-church-state-separation-scored-important-wins-last-night/>) were on the ballot in 10 states on Election Day. They passed in seven of those states. (In Florida, the measure received majority support at 57%, but a 60% threshold is required to pass ballot initiatives there.)

These results, coupled with earlier votes in other states supporting reproductive rights, are strong evidence that Americans want abortion and access to birth control to remain legal.

Don't expect that to matter to the incoming Trump administration.

today considered to be classics.) But Comstock interpreted the law broadly and also used it to attack Americans' access to birth control.

Comstock: A Christian Nationalist crusader

As Margaret Hamm noted (<https://www.au.org/the-latest/church-and-state/articles/a-19th-century-christian-nationalist-a-book-sheds-light-on-anti-birth-control-crusader-anthony-comstock-and-the-women-who-opposed-him/>) in a review of a book about Comstock in *Church & State*, "Comstock's motivation for these laws, which banned sending contraceptives and other 'obscene' materials through the mail, stemmed from his desire to root out societal behavior that went against his Christian beliefs, and he worked closely with the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) while doing this work."

The Comstock laws eventually faded away as Americans decided they weren't interested in allowing aggressive religious groups to screen their reading material. But the act, violations of which are punishable by five years in prison, was never formally repealed.

Could it come back? Some scholars believe so. "All it takes is one person in the DOJ or some zealous U.S. attorney to threaten a clinic with criminal sanction under the Comstock Act, and that could potentially cause a tremendous chill among health care providers that are providing abortion," Wendy Parmet, director of the Center for Health Policy and Law at Northeastern University in Boston, told NBC News (<https://www.nbcnews.com/health/womens-health/abortion-rights-under-trump-rcna178998>).

Brace yourself. Our country may be about to take a giant step backward to the 19th century.



Reviving the Comstock Act

Trump insisted during the campaign that he'll let states decide abortion policy. But Trump will be under intense pressure from his Christian Nationalist allies to interfere with reproductive rights, and, let's face it, the man often lies about his policy views. We should prepare for the worst.

One way a Trump administration could meddle in reproductive rights would be to resurrect the Comstock Act, an 1873 law that prohibits using the U.S. Mail to send "obscene" material. In Project 2025 (<https://www.au.org/project2025/>), Christian Nationalists call for using the law to block sending abortion drugs by mail, which is currently legal in many states.

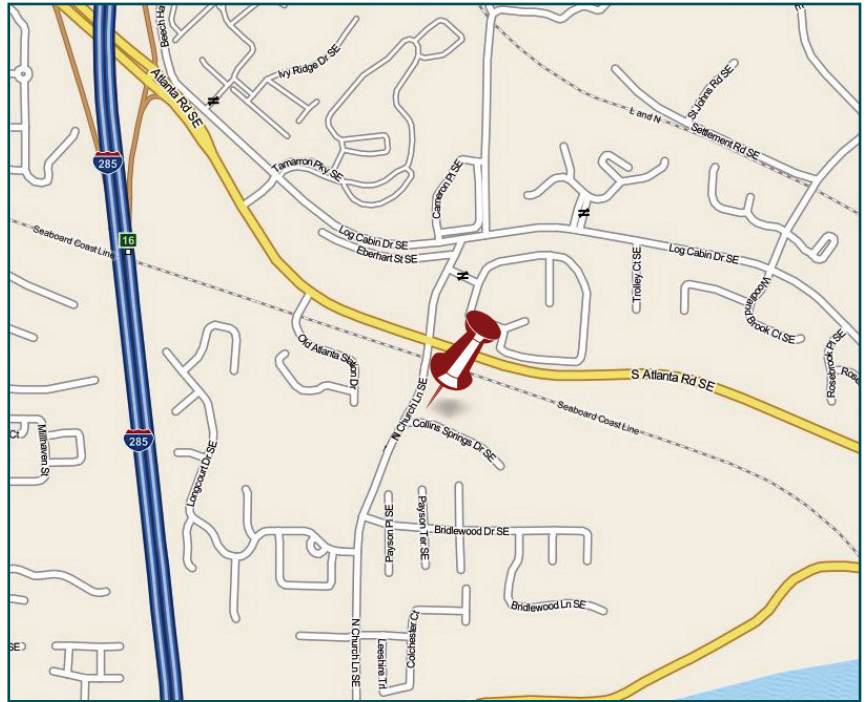
Where did this law come from? Its origins go back to **Anthony Comstock** (<https://www.vox.com/politics/23678636/supreme-court-anthony-comstock-abortion-mifepristone-matthew-kacsmaryk>), an anti-vice crusader who used the law to crack down on books and magazines he considered obscene. (They weren't. In fact, many of the books Comstock targeted are

*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



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

**Mandisa Thomas
Dec. 8 1:00 pm Eastern
(At Hall and on Zoom)**



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***Elections for Board Members will be held
before the December meeting.***

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Atlanta GA 30339

