

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENCE OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

Press Release 1049

The Importance of Separation of Religion from the State in

Public Education:

Current American Experience

DOGS support public education which is free, universal, and secular because this is the only way that children of our democratic nation can be educated in schools that are open to all and offensive to none.

This is also why **DOGS** support the separation of religion from the State, and State Aid for State schools only.

When religious people attempt to legislate who can be taught ; what can and taught and who can teach you have a situation like that in Trump's America.

Christian Nationalists in that country, a nation which pioneered separation of religion from the State, have been instrumental in the banning of books and are still arguing about the teaching of evolution.

Book Banning in the USA.

The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) has been forced to release [a list of 596 books](#) it is seeking to ban in schools it operates in seven states, Guam, Puerto Rico and 11 countries.

The move came in response to a lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union on behalf of military families who oppose the censorship crusade. According to the site [Book Riot](#), these schools, run by the Department of Defense Education Activity, serve approximately 67,000 children of military families worldwide.

LGBTQ+ titles targeted

Not surprisingly, many of the titles on the list deal with LGBTQ+ issues. Some of them, such as Maia Kobabe's Gender Queer, have been in Christian Nationalist crosshairs for years. Others appear to have been added because they have terms like "LGBTQ," "transgender," "trans," "equality" and "diversity" in their titles. Still others are about race or sexual health and, oddly, some are even study guides for advanced placement tests.

It's unclear who pulled the list together, but Book Riot noted that the list has some similarities to one drawn up in 2021 by Matt Kraus, a former member of the Texas House of Representatives. Kraus had demanded that titles on it be removed from public libraries in the state.

Trump EOs require censorship

The DOD's list came about in response to a series of executive orders issued by President Donald Trump that purport to oppose "gender Ideology extremism" and "radical indoctrination" in federally funded programs. One order specifically targeted the military.

Shortly after the orders were issued, officials at the Department of Defense directed staff at department-run schools to "ensure books potentially related to gender ideology or discriminatory equity ideology are removed from the student section."

Many military families were outraged by the censorship and challenged the book banning in court.

The History of Teaching of Evolution in the USA

There is a long history of controversy in the teaching of evolution theory in the US.

One hundred years ago, the famous Scopes "monkey trial" in Dayton, Tenn., had just concluded. A teacher John T. Scopes was found guilty of teaching evolution on July 21, 1925, and fined \$100. Five days after the trial, William Jennings Bryan, the populist orator and fundamentalist Christian who assisted with the state's case, died in his sleep.

The culmination of the case was a bit anti-climactic. There was an appeal, and in January of 1927, the Tennessee Supreme Court voided Scopes' verdict on a technicality – the court ruled that Scopes' fine should have been determined by the jury, not the judge who presided over the trial – even as it upheld the state's anti-evolution law.

The Tennessee high court seemed to be happy to be shed of the legal tussle, [asserting](#), “Nothing is to be gained by prolonging the life of this bizarre case.”

It would be nice to say that 100 years later, we’ve put all this behind us and reached a consensus, and by some metrics, things are moving in that direction. A [recent poll](#) showed that fewer than 20% of Americans back the creationist view that humans have existed in their present form since the beginning of time. 33% of Americans said they believe humans have evolved over time due to natural selection with God playing no role. The largest number, 47%, back what could be called “theistic evolution” – the idea that humans evolved over time in a process that was guided by God.

But - ‘Culture wars’ still rage

Despite findings like these, the teaching of evolution remains contentious in some parts of the country, and various anti-evolution proposals continue to surface in state legislatures.

With the Supreme Court eroding church-state precedents, this is not a time to be complacent. As Glenn Branch, deputy director of the National Center for Science Education, [said recently](#), “On the one hand, evolution education is increasing and improving overall, and the chance that a local teacher is espousing creationism in the classroom is dwindling. ... On the other hand, in light of the upheaval in church-state jurisprudence, it is entirely possible that the foes of evolution education will redouble their efforts in the hopes of making up lost ground.”

Branch concluded, “Now more than ever, eternal vigilance on the part of the friends of evolution education is in order.”

An endless battle

That’s often the case with church-state issues. We have to fight them over and over, always alert to new tactics from Christian Nationalists who yearn to turn the state into an enforcer of their theology.

The events in Dayton, Tenn., that steamy summer 100 years ago were the beginning, not the end, of a long “culture war” over science education in America’s public schools. Christian Nationalists aren’t quite done trying to monkey with the First Amendment just yet.

The tactics of those who wish to be enforcers of the national ‘conscience’ – usually at taxpayer’s expense - keep evolving.

Those like **DOGS** who wish to separate religion and the State must remain diligent.

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