



Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism

By Susan Jacoby

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An authoritative history of the vital role of secularist thinkers and activists in the United States, from a writer of “fierce intelligence and nimble, unfettered imagination” (*The New York Times*)

At a time when the separation of church and state is under attack as never before, *Freethinkers* offers a powerful defense of the secularist heritage that gave Americans the first government in the world founded not on the authority of religion but on the bedrock of human reason.

In impassioned, elegant prose, celebrated author Susan Jacoby paints a striking portrait of more than two hundred years of secularist activism, beginning with the fierce debate over the omission of God from the Constitution. Moving from nineteenth-century abolitionism and suffragism through the twentieth century’s civil liberties, civil rights, and feminist movements, *Freethinkers* illuminates the neglected accomplishments of secularists who, allied with liberal and tolerant religious believers, have stood at the forefront of the battle for reforms opposed by reactionary forces in the past and today.

Rich with such iconic figures as Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Clarence Darrow—as well as once-famous secularists such as Robert Green Ingersoll, “the Great Agnostic”—*Freethinkers* restores to history generations of dedicated humanists. It is they, Jacoby shows, who have led the struggle to uphold the combination of secular government and religious liberty that is the glory of the American system.

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Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism By Susan Jacoby Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Is America really one nation under God? Not according to Pulitzer Prize–finalist Jacoby (*Wild Justice*, etc.), who argues that it is America's secularist "freethinkers" who formed the bedrock upon which our nation was built. Jacoby contends that it's one of "the great unresolved paradoxes" that religion occupies such an important place in a nation founded on separation of church and state. She traces the role of "freethinkers," a term first coined in the 17th century, in the formation of America from the writing of the Constitution to some of our greatest social revolutions, including abolition, feminism, labor, civil rights and the dawning of Darwin's theory of evolution. Jacoby has clearly spent much time in the library, and the result is an impressive literary achievement filled with an array of both major and minor figures from American history, like revolutionary propagandist Thomas Paine, presidents Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Robert Green Ingersoll. Her historical work is further flanked by current examples—the Bush White House in an introduction and the views of conservative Supreme Court justice Antonin Scalia in a final chapter—that crystallize her concern over secularism's waning influence. Unfortunately, Jacoby's immense research is also the book's Achilles heel. Her core mission to impress upon readers the historical struggle of freethinkers against the religious establishment is at times overwhelmed by the sheer volume of characters and vignettes she offers, many of which, frankly, are not very compelling. Still, Jacoby has done yeoman's work in crafting her message that the values of America's freethinkers belong "at the center, not in the margins" of American life.

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From [Booklist](#)

Starred Review Jacoby reclaims a key facet of American culture, secularism, or freethinking, the belief that public good is "based on human reason and human rights rather than divine authority," a concept codified in the Constitution's separation of church and state. Veteran author Jacoby feels that now is the perfect time for a thorough reexamination of America's secular tradition because, as she documents, it is being severely eroded by the politics of the Christian Right. Her cogent and engaging narrative presents myriad neglected yet significant historical episodes and compelling profiles of such clarion freethinkers as Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Paine, William Lloyd Garrison, Lucretia Mott, Walt Whitman, and John F. Kennedy. Jacoby reveals how the abolitionist and women's rights movements, archetypal freethinking efforts, challenged orthodox religious institutions as obstacles to social reform, and she dissects the church's role in organized censorship and negative impact on public education, especially its opposition to the teaching of evolution. As Jacoby critiques the rise of religious correctness and tracks President Bush's assault on the line between church and state, she reminds readers that humanist values are the bedrock of democracy. Enlightening, invigorating, and responsibly yet passionately argued, Jacoby's unparalleled history of American secularism offers a much needed perspective on today's most urgent social issues.

Donna Seaman

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Review

"Freethinkers is not only a good book, it is a necessary one. Ranging from the freethinking Revolution to the pious administration of George W. Bush, this dramatic study offers a welcome reminder that the Founding Fathers were intent on keeping church and state firmly separated. Lively, impassioned, and impartial, Susan Jacoby's argument deserves more than respect; it deserves support." —Peter Gay, Sterling Professor of History Emeritus, Yale University

“This book is fresh air for those who defend the separation of church and state. Here, clearly written and without apologetics, is the noble record of the struggle to retain America’s precious freedom of conscience, her pride for two centuries, now under threat from the political Right as never before.” —Arthur Miller

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Karen Bell:

This Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism book is absolutely not ordinary book, you have after that it the world is in your hands. The benefit you get by reading this book is actually information inside this reserve incredible fresh, you will get info which is getting deeper anyone read a lot of information you will get. This Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism without we comprehend teach the one who looking at it become critical in contemplating and analyzing. Don't always be worry Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism can bring any time you are and not make your tote space or bookshelves' turn out to be full because you can have it inside your lovely laptop even mobile phone. This Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism having excellent arrangement in word and layout, so you will not really feel uninterested in reading.

George Falls:

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Melvin Lucero:

Playing with family within a park, coming to see the coastal world or hanging out with pals is thing that usually you have done when you have spare time, then why you don't try issue that really opposite from that. 1 activity that make you not feeling tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you have been ride on and with addition of knowledge. Even you love Freethinkers: A History of American Secularism, it is possible to enjoy both. It is good combination right, you still desire to miss it? What kind of hang-out type is it? Oh come on its mind hangout men. What? Still don't buy it, oh come on its named reading friends.

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