“Religion and Politics”

DAVID GOLDFIELD
The mission of the John O’Sullivan Memorial Lectureship is to provide students, secondary school teachers, faculty and public guests with exposure to a distinguished historian of 20th century American history whose lecture/presentation broadens and deepens our understanding of the major thematic and conceptual aspects of America’s modern history.

The John O’Sullivan Memorial Lectureship allows the Department of History each fall semester to host a distinguished scholar in 20th century American history to lecture to students, secondary school teachers, faculty and the public. The lectures will focus on topics relevant to O’Sullivan’s specialties which include: World War II, the Vietnam War, the Nuclear Age, Peace, the Holocaust, Peace History, Oral History, and Modern American Political and Diplomatic Affairs.

To make a contribution to this fund (HUM 235), please contact:

Laurie Carney at 561.297.3606 or the Department of History at 561.297.3840 or email zlinn@fau.edu or engle@fau.edu
JOHN O’SULLIVAN MEMORIAL LECTURES IN PRINT


“Religion and Politics”

DAVID GOLDFIELD
Robert Lee Bailey Professor of History
University of North Carolina, Charlotte

Second Annual
*John O’Sullivan Memorial Lecture*
Florida Atlantic University 2006
I unfortunately I've never met, Professor O'Sullivan, but I understand from all of his colleagues what a wonderful colleague he was, a fine teacher and a great credit to this university. It's a great honor to appear in a series – in a lecture that bears his name.

Okay, I also want to thank, by the way, the History Department for their good judgment in inviting me to give this lecture. It's a fine department with some, some fine scholars. I'm pleased to be associated with them as well. You know one of my favorite people in the world is Mark Twain. Ya'll like Mark Twain? Yeah, okay. He's one, one, he was the first stand-up comic – as many of you know. He had a friendship, sort of an odd friendship with Andrew Carnegie. [Of] course Carnegie was the big steel baron, owned Carnegie Steel later US Steel. I'm sure ya'll have heard of him. Carnegie in a speech said that, and I'm quoting Carnegie here, that: "America is a Christian country." Well, Mark Twain heard that and said, "Well Andrew so is hell but we don't brag about it." Now, as I said, ya'll know Twain as a comedian and he didn't take himself or, or his country too seriously. However, one of his writings I think bears a very different tone from most of his other writings—that is his War Prayer. This is a prayer that he offered as Americans went into battle against the Spanish, in the Spanish American War in the late nineteenth century, 1898. I'm not going to give you the whole prayer but this is what Twain wrote in his War Prayer. He said, [jovially] and, and you can bow your heads while I'm saying this. He said, “O Lord Our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells. Help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead. Help us to drown the thunder of the guns with the shrieks of their wounded writhing in pain. Help us to lay waste to their humble homes with a hurricane of fire. Help us to turn them out roofless with their little children to wander unfriended the wastes of their desolated land. We ask it in the spirit of love of him who is the source of love.” That's Mark Twain's War Prayer, which I think is a good introduction to our topic Religion and Politics.

You know this is nothing new in American History—that is, religion and politics. It's nothing new despite the fact that almost from the very beginning, from the very beginning of the American experiment our forefathers warned us against mixing religion and politics. For example, Roger Williams, way back in the seventeenth century, said “Government derives no authority from God. Government is merely human and civil!” This sentiment was almost word for word expressed in the same way by Thomas Jefferson more than two centuries later. Jefferson said, in 1779: “Our civil rights have no dependence on our religious opinions anymore than on opinions in
Baptist, a good old southern Baptist. Black noted that the Constitution protects everyone equally and that we can have freedom of religion, but also freedom from religion. That I think is a key, key distinction.

The Supreme Court in subsequent cases of course talked about separation of church and state. There was a case in the early 1980s about the Ten Commandments. Interesting enough this was a bone of contention with Archbishop John Hughes in the early 1840s. Because he contended that the Ten Commandments posted in schools in New York City were not Ten Commandments that Catholics were familiar with. These were also annotated Ten Commandments. I'm not aware that when Moses got the tablets they were annotated. Ya know just thought – I just saw Charlton Heston with the one, two, three, four, five, six but apparently there were some annotations. It really depends, there are different versions of – the Ten Commandments – very different versions of the Ten Commandments. The Supreme Court said that ah you cannot have them on public grounds.

The key issue I think, in this religion and politics is that under the current discussion it's not a question of religious – religion and politics it's really a question of sectarian religion and politics. In Lincoln's day it was a pan-Protestantism to some degree, but it was also ecumenical in terms that the religious fervor was being channeled and focused on the sacred secular texts which Lincoln, and Madison, and Jefferson before him believed derived from man, not from God. The point really is that a faith that requires the support of the government is an infirm faith. If they demand an implication of Jesus at a football game and the light of all other religions be damned it must be because the implication of Jesus at home, and in church, and in voluntary associations are proving inadequate. They must pretend that what stands in the way of their Christian life are the rights of non-Christians. I will tell you—religions will flourish or they will not flourish according to the spiritual quality of their exertions.

Thank you very much.
It was all over but the shouting, some cleaning up had to be done. It was only a matter of time before Richmond fell. People were expecting from Lincoln one of those rousing speeches – well we’ve beaten these guys and now we ya know we’re triumphant and this proves of course that God is on our side. But he disappointed those people, he disappointed those people. Instead, he said, he declared that God cursed both sides and had visited a destructive war because of the sin of slavery. A sin that wasn’t localized in the south but a sin that was national. As he said in his second inaugural: “If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which in the province of God must needs come, but which having continued through His appointed time He now wills to remove and that He gives to both north and south this terrible war as the war do to those by whom the offense came shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in the living God always inscribed to Him.” The president warned against smug self-righteousness. “Yes;” he said, “it was strange that any man should dare to ask a just God’s assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men’s faces but,” in other words the southerner, “but,” and this is the key phrase, “ But let us judge not that we be not judged.” As I said, this second inaugural really upset many people. In fact, it upset Harriett Beecher Stowe’s sister [brother] the ah Evangelical minister Henry Ward Beecher who wanted you know we’re trampling out the vintage with grapes of wrath stored we’re gonna to ah get these southern dudes with our terrible, swift sword – but he was not triumphant. He was merely stating that the sin of slavery was a national sin and that this war was visited upon both north and south and that God was on nobody’s side – except maybe for the slaves.

All this is prefatory a bit to our situation today and I will just mention the contemporary situation just, just briefly cause I want to leave time for some questions. If you look through the span of American history this conflict of religion and politics has always been with us – sometimes more, sometimes less. Perhaps the key event in the twentieth century in reviving this conflict occurred not with Roe v. Wade in the early 1970s which’s been talked about very recently, but actually a case in New York state in 1962 – Engel v. Vitale which outlawed school prayer. Engel versus Vitale, 1962. That energized Evangelical Christians in both north and south, but particularly in the south where Evangelical Protestantism had particularly flourished cut off primarily from the mainstream of Evangelical Protestantism in the north as a result of this division that I mentioned earlier. Hugo Black rendered the majority decision in Engel versus Vitale. That’s kind of interesting because Hugo Black is/was a good old southern wrote a letter to Thomas Jefferson. You know we’ve had these Supreme Court nomination debates, and in the newspapers you read about originalist versus contemporary interpretations – that is those conservative justices like to go back to the founding fathers – well here is what the founding father, one of the most important founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson, said. Because this Danbury, Connecticut Baptist Association asked him: “Mister Jefferson, interpret the First Amendment for us.” That’d be great if we can just send an e-mail to Thomas today, wouldn’t it, no – please interpret the First Amendment for us where it talks about where Congress shall make no law establishing any religion. He said, “This is my interpretation of the First Amendment – the First Amendment to the Constitution builds a wall of separation between church and state.” A wall of separation, that’s pretty clear. I mean if you’re looking for original intent, if you’re looking for a founding father’s view – that is pretty darn clear – a wall of separation.

Now actually, as time went on, after the turn of the nineteenth century, in the early 1800s and beyond, this idea of a wall of separation between church and state became a very contentious issue, just as it is today. It became a contentious issue originally because beginning in the 1830s the United States experienced a tremendous wave of immigration. Much of this immigration was from Germany and Ireland, particularly of course with the Irish immigration much of it was Roman Catholic. If you asked an individual in the 1830s, let’s say you went to New York or Boston, what was the greatest threat to American democracy? That individual would not say slavery, that individual would not say economic depression, that individual would most likely say—Roman Catholics. The reason why Roman Catholics were so dangerous from the perspective of Protestants – and don’t forget this was a time, the 1830s, at the height of a religious revival movement known as the Second Great Awakening. A revival that grew the Evangelical churches – the Methodists, the Baptists and the Presbyterians, all over the country. This was a national movement. The great fear was that these individuals [Roman Catholics] coming over would destroy American democracy. Why? Because these individuals, these Roman Catholics, owed their allegiance to Rome – not to the president of the United States, not to the Constitution – but to Rome. In fact, during the Mexican War, in 1846, an entire regiment of Roman Catholic soldiers defected to the Mexican Army. Mexican Army had sent pamphlets – not dropping the pamphlets from a plane obviously – but they had sent pamphlets saying hey you know, why are you fighting your fellow brother Catholics? Why don’t you come fight with us for the true faith? These guys don’t care anything about you – so they defected. Of course
this realized the worst fears of American Protestants.

The other thing about the Roman Catholic faith was that ever since the Protestant reformation there were groups of Protestants, even more so in the United States in the early nineteenth century, who believed that eventually Jesus Christ would return to the earth—the second coming of Jesus. But, before Jesus can come we have to rid the world of sin. One of the greatest sins is the Roman Catholic faith because the pope is the anti-Christ in the Bible. So we’re going to have to do something about these folks. In 1832 a large family from Massachusetts moved to Cincinnati, Ohio. The purpose of this move was to establish a Protestant Theological Seminary on the banks of the Ohio River in Cincinnati, to as this patriarch said, “to convert the heathen,” meaning Roman Catholics. Those words were interchangeable, by the way. This minister was Lyman Beecher, and perhaps you know his daughter, even more famous—Harriet Beecher Stowe, who wrote Uncle Tom’s Cabin, of course. Well, Harriet Beecher Stowe didn’t really engage in this anti-Catholic movement. She found, and her letters state this very clearly, she found a little odd, little, little strange, her interests lay more in, in the anti-slavery movement. Nevertheless, nevertheless ah this was a great concern of Americans ah in the 1830s and 1840s.

In fact, it became such a great concern because a gentleman by the name John O’Sullivan – not the same John O’Sullivan – wrote an article in a newspaper. Where he said, and this John O’Sullivan was obviously Irish immigrant, but he had, unlike most Irish immigrants he came over with some large bank account and eventually wound up at Yale University, and became a prominent journalist and a writer, and fancied himself also as a historian. Well, John O’Sullivan wrote an article where he claimed that it was America’s destiny – and by the way he was a converted Protestant, I should add that as well – that it was America’s destiny, God given destiny to people a continent. He called this destiny – Manifest Destiny. Not only would we people the continent with Americans but we would extend democracy and extend the Protestant religion. Of course, there was a great conflict going on in the west. See the Indian tribes were very smart because they invited Protestant missionaries and they invited Catholic missionaries knowing full well that they’d wind up fighting amongst themselves and the Indians could go off and practice whatever the heck they wanted. But, they were new areas for their mission and of course this was in the far west. It was important to keep the far west free, not only free from slavery but free from Roman Catholics. That was one of the motivations of the Mexican War in the 1840s.

particularly in his, in his ah speech about a house divided against itself cannot stand, that’s biblical. He quoted the Bible frequently but he always used it to make a point about our sacred documents – our civil and civic religion.

Well of course given these religious metaphors it’s not surprising that many people in the north and the south believed that God was on their side, in the Civil War. Listen to this Union soldier: “I believe our cause to be the cause of liberty and light, the cause of God, and holy and justifiable in his sight. And for this reason I fear not to die in it if need be.” A confederate soldier at the same time felt a similar sentiment: “Our cause is just, and God is just. And we shall finally be successful whether I live to see the time or not.” Now the shocking carnage of this war left some soldiers shaken in their faith, in their faith. Yet, most did not question God but gloat imperfectly for the divine purpose behind this slaughter.

Now one of the highlights of course of the Civil War was the Emancipation Proclamation. Now Lincoln of course, some people believe did this primarily for military purposes. That after all you had four million slaves helping out the Confederate cause wouldn’t it be great if we could put some of them under Union arms and have them shoot and, and kill the Confederates. In other words it’s a particle way. But, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Wells kept a diary of all the Cabinet meetings – it’s one of the great things that historians do, you know we look at diaries, we’re the initial, original voyeurs. He took notes in – most of the Cabinet meetings ah and according to Wells’ account Lincoln made little reference to political or military strategy at the meeting where he announced this. Instead, he [Lincoln] explained according to Wells, that he had made a vow, a covenant that if God gave us the victory in the approaching battle – that was the battle of Antietam, in Maryland – he would consider it an indication of divine will and that it was his duty to move forward in the cause of emancipation. “It might be thought strange,” Wells wrote, “but there were times when he felt uncertain how to act, that he had in this way submitted to disposal of matters when the way was not clear to his mind what he should do.” He said unequivocally God had decided this question in favor of the slaves.

Well, perhaps if the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are sacred texts ah I think we ought to include Abraham Lincoln’s second inaugural address in this. Picture the scene – it’s March fourth 1865. The ending of the war is pretty much a foregone conclusion. Nobody would put their money on the south in March of 1865.
“Apostles of the justice of the Creator to his creatures.” Notice the word ‘apostle,’ obviously a religious word, and he refers to the founding fathers. The Declaration of Independence for Lincoln was a political restatement of the golden rule. When later that year Mississippi Senator Jefferson Davis brandished the Bible on the floor of the Senate and declared, and I quote him, “God stamped diversity on the races of men.” Lincoln responded not with a contrasting Biblical image or passage, but with the words of the Declaration of Independence, “Mr. Davis all men are created equal.” For Lincoln, the core of the nation’s ideals rested with these civic documents; they were his religious text. The Bible could endorse, but could never supersede the authority of civil government, which rested with the people and the laws they created. It’s interesting if you read these debates with Douglas, he emphasized the sacredness of the nation’s key documents. At Lewiston, Illinois Lincoln urged his listeners to quote “Come back to the truths that are in the Declaration of Independence,” as if calling back the faithful to the original word of God. On another occasion, Lincoln called the Declaration of Independence immortal and its principles sacred. “That document,” Lincoln argued in Lewiston, “contradicts the institution of slavery, in the founders enlightened belief,” he said, “nothing stamped with the divine image and likeness was sent into this world to be imbruted by his fellows.” That’s his statement against slavery.

There were other points of view. Southern evangelicals said look, look at your Bible, is there anything in the Bible that condemns slavery – nothing, nothing. Benjamin Morgan Palmer, a New Orleans Presbyterian minister declared at a Thanksgiving sermon in 1860 that, “It was the religious duty,” and I’m quoting him, “the religious duty of every southerner,” of course he meant white southerner, “to defend the cause of God and religion and in particular to consider and to perpetuate the institution of domestic slavery.” Because for Palmer, slavery was the divine burden placed upon southern whites to civilize Africans. That was their divine burden, and so that institution must be protected.

And so, we went to war – the Civil War. For religious people and a religious nation, and of course as Tocqueville said ah he had never come across a more religious nation in – than the United States, and he had never come across a nation that was more free than the United States. We are free because of our religion, and we are free because of our religious freedom. Because we exist in a society where religion operates in a market place of ideas – no one is more equal than the others – and Lincoln understood this. Because, while he talked in the metaphors and in the direct language, in 1842 Archbishop John Hughes, obviously Roman Catholic, archbishop in New York City, said that it was time to get the Bible out of the public schools. I mean this is a controversy today, is it not – school prayer. Archbishop Hughes joined by Jewish leaders, Baptists, Anglicans – now that’s an odd quartet, a very odd quartet – filed suit in New York against the New York City schools to get the Bible out of public schools. Reason being is that the schools in New York used the King James version of the Bible, and that version was not approved by the Vatican. Not only that, but the particular King James version of the Bible that New York City schools used had annotations in it. Now annotated Bibles are nothing new. I mean we have them today, right? But these annotations had some rather strong commentary on the Roman Catholic Church, which probably did not appear in the original Bible. In fact, for certain it didn’t appear in the original Bible. Well, the school authorities and the governor of New York State at that time, William H. Seward, ah decided that the Roman Catholics were right and they decided to take the Bible out of the public schools. Well, there were riots in the streets of New York; there were riots in the streets of Philadelphia when this issue came up in Philadelphia. Finally, Hughes got what he wanted: a separate school system for Roman Catholics; supported in part by state money. Again the, the separation of church and state. Well now the, the Protestants holler bloody murder, you can’t do this, you can’t, you can’t mingle church and state; yet here it was a Catholic school system supported in part by donations from the state of New York.

Now much of this controversy lingered. In fact in the 1850s a new political party, the Know-nothing Party was formed, expressly directed to limiting the civil rights of Roman Catholics. In fact, it went as far in the state of Oregon, the new state of Oregon, that Roman Catholics were barred from holding office. This rarely happens in the United States when we bar a group of individuals because of their religion or ethnic background from holding office. Now of course in North Carolina we did it all the time for African–Americans. But, this was the first time that a new state constitution had barred Roman Catholics from holding office. Then they – Massachusetts among other states–passed a law saying that you now had to wait twenty-one years before you became a citizen. Then, when you did become a citizen you would have to wait two more years before you could vote, if you were Roman Catholic. So, this certainly was an issue that would not go away.

Paradoxically, or maybe not so paradoxically, this was also a great time of reform in
America. I mean you had these really, very conservative ideas about religion. But at the same time you had these ideas that we can reform the world, but it was part of this idea of, this millennial fervor that said in order for Jesus Christ to come we’re gonna have to rid the world of sin. Well, the greatest sin of – at that time was, was the Roman Catholic Church. You know we gotta get rid of them, somehow. We also have to get rid of slavery because slavery is, is a sin, is it not? A Boston minister wrote before the 1846 Congressional elections: “The great problem for the Christian world now, and for us to accomplish, is to affect a close union between religion and politics. The government must make men to do good and be good.” This is 1846, the idea being that it’s the government’s role to affect this union between religion and politics. Now of course this Boston minister was anti-slavery, he was an abolitionist. Northern – southern Evangelicals were aghast! Just aghast, at this mixing of religion and politics because southern evangelicals through the nineteenth, the first half of the nineteenth century believed in this separation of church and state, and that slavery should not be an issue that should be preached about from the pulpit. Northern ministers said that we preach on all moral issues; if they happen to be in the political realm, so be it. Southern ministers thought that this was a sacrilege. Slowly but surely what happened is that the Evangelical churches split apart. You had northern Baptists, southern Baptists. You had northern Methodists, southern Methodists. You had northern Presbyterians and southern Presbyterians. All of this before the Civil War when north and south separated. The churches, the churches separated before the Union separated. If you listen and read the rhetoric of the ministers and even the politicians of the time. Jefferson Davis at the time, Senator from Mississippi, Jefferson Davis said that the break-up of these Evangelical churches was the most ominous thing that he had seen happen in this country in his lifetime. He feared that it was but a [prelude] to the break-up of the Union. Of course he was correct. In fact so dangerous did this mixture of religion and politics become – because politics, democratic politics by its, its nature is the art of compromise, give here take here. Religion assumes no compromise, it’s either good or evil, it’s either sin or grace. And so, they’re two very different philosophies, two very different philosophies.

In the winter of 1857/58 a new revival spread across northern and mid-western cities. It was called, oddly enough the Revival of 1857/58. Amazing how these things come out. It’s also been called the Businessman’s Revival because this was a revival of middle class businessmen in, in the cities who were concerned about this growing polarization between religion and politics. What they did was to get together at noon every weekday, Monday through Friday, every weekday and go into a church and hold prayer meetings during the lunch hour for about forty-five minutes to an hour. The only rule they had, the only rule they had was that you cannot mention politics, you cannot mention any political issue. Because they were concerned that politics had so polluted the pulpit, that religion had lost its way. They were concerned that politics had become so polluted by religion that our political system was in danger—so they wanted to separate the two. Of course, they were not successful.

Here we have one of the most interesting figures in this debate on religion and politics emerge. That figure is Abraham Lincoln. Now, Lincoln is an interesting character. There have been books written recently that portray Lincoln as an extremely religious man, ah, others, as an extremely agnostic individual. It’s difficult to get a pinpoint on Lincoln but people are going to try because any book with a title Lincoln in it, as my ah friend Andrew Frank mentioned last night, is guaranteed to sell. Lincoln in the 1830’s, interesting thing, Lincoln wrote a manuscript, a pretty thick manuscript. The title of the manuscript was On Infidelity. Now when we think of infidelity today we think of adultery and uh, uh Dr. Phil and stuff like that. But, the word infidelity actually in nineteenth century terminology, means that you’re unfaithful to God – that you don’t believe in God. Lincoln wrote this treatise on infidelity and it was about his unfaithfulness to God—that he just didn’t believe in God. Well, his colleague tossed it into a file and said Abe if you have any political ambitions this may come back to haunt you. Of course, he was absolutely right but I think throughout his lifetime Lincoln wrestled with this. His ancestors, way back in the 1630s had settled in Puritan Massachusetts. Now we all think of Lincoln from Kentucky and moving to Indiana but his ancestors actually came from Massachusetts. He had this Puritan fear of God; yet at the same time his rational side said you know if God loves us why is he gonna plunge us into this everlasting hell called Hell. Yet in almost all of his major speeches, he used the Bible. If you read his speeches and you listen to what he says, they’re struck with religious metaphors. But you know something, it wasn’t a religion of the Puritans, it wasn’t the religion of the Baptists, it wasn’t a religion of the Unitarians – it was a religion of America. To Abraham Lincoln the Declaration of Independence was the sacred document. The Constitution was a sacred pact.

His debates with Stephen A. Douglas in Illinois in 1858, Lincoln put forth his spiritual vision for democratic principles, particularly contained within the Declaration of Independence. In these debates with Douglas, Lincoln called the founding fathers
America. I mean you had these really, very conservative ideas about religion. But at the same time you had these ideas that we can reform the world, but it was part of this idea of, this millennial fervor that said in order for Jesus Christ to come we’re gonna have to rid the world of sin. Well, the greatest sin of – at that time was, was the Roman Catholic Church. You know we gotta get rid of them, somehow. We also have to get rid of slavery because slavery is, is a sin, is it not? A Boston minister wrote before the 1846 Congressional elections: “The great problem for the Christian world now, and for us to accomplish, is to affect a close union between religion and politics. The government must make men to do good and be good.” This is 1846, the idea being that it’s the government’s role to affect this union between religion and politics. Now of course this Boston minister was anti-slavery, he was an abolitionist. Northern – southern Evangelicals were aghast! Just aghast, at this mixing of religion and politics because southern evangelicals through the nineteenth, the first half of the nineteenth century believed in this separation of church and state, and that slavery should not be an issue that should be preached about from the pulpit. Northern ministers said that we preach on all moral issues; if they happen to be in the political realm, so be it. Southern ministers thought that this was a sacrilege. Slowly but surely what happened is that the Evangelical churches split apart. You had northern Baptists, southern Baptists. You had northern Methodists, southern Methodists. You had northern Presbyterians and southern Presbyterians. All of this before the Civil War when north and south separated. The churches, the churches separated before the Union separated. If you listen and read the rhetoric of the ministers and even the politicians of the time. Jefferson Davis at the time, Senator from Mississippi, Jefferson Davis said that the break-up of these Evangelical churches was the most ominous thing that he had seen happen in this country in his lifetime. He feared that it was but a [prelude] to the break-up of the Union. Of course he was correct. In fact so dangerous did this mixture of religion and politics become – because politics, democratic politics by its, its nature is the art of compromise, give here take here. Religion assumes no compromise, it’s either good or evil, it’s either sin or grace. And so, they’re two very different philosophies, two very different philosophies.

In the winter of 1857/58 a new revival spread across northern and mid-western cities. It was called, oddly enough the Revival of 1857/58. Amazing how these things come out. It’s also been called the Businessman’s Revival because this was a revival of middle class businessmen in, in the cities who were concerned about this growing polarization between religion and politics. What they did was to get together at noon every weekday, Monday through Friday, every weekday and go into a church and hold prayer meetings during the lunch hour for about forty-five minutes to an hour. The only rule they had, the only rule they had was that you cannot mention politics, you cannot mention any political issue. Because they were concerned that politics had so polluted the pulpit, that religion had lost its way. They were concerned that politics had become so polluted by religion that our political system was in danger—so they wanted to separate the two. Of course, they were not successful.

Here we have one of the most interesting figures in this debate on religion and politics emerge. That figure is Abraham Lincoln. Now, Lincoln is an interesting character. There have been books written recently that portray Lincoln as an extremely religious man, ah, others, as an extremely agnostic individual. It’s difficult to get a pinpoint on Lincoln but people are going to try because any book with a title Lincoln in it, as my ah friend Andrew Frank mentioned last night, is guaranteed to sell. Lincoln in the 1830’s, interesting thing, Lincoln wrote a manuscript, a pretty thick manuscript. The title of the manuscript was On Infidelity. Now when we think of infidelity today we think of adultery and uh, uh Dr. Phil and stuff like that. But, the word infidelity actually in nineteenth century terminology, means that you’re unfaithful to God – that you don’t believe in God. Lincoln wrote this treatise on infidelity and it was about his unfaithfulness to God—that he just didn’t believe in God. Well, his colleague tossed it into a file and said Abe if you have any political ambitions this may come back to haunt you. Of course, he was absolutely right but I think throughout his lifetime Lincoln wrestled with this. His ancestors, way back in the 1630s had settled in Puritan Massachusetts. Now we all think of Lincoln from Kentucky and moving to Indiana but his ancestors actually came from Massachusetts. He had this Puritan fear of God; yet at the same time his rational side said you know if God loves us why is he gonna plunge us into this everlasting hole called Hell. Yet in almost all of his major speeches, he used the Bible. If you read his speeches and you listen to what he says, they’re struck with religious metaphors. But you know something, it wasn’t a religion of the Puritans, it wasn’t the religion of the Baptists, it wasn’t a religion of the Unitarians – it was a religion of America. To Abraham Lincoln the Declaration of Independence was the sacred document. The Constitution was a sacred pact.

His debates with Stephen A. Douglas in Illinois in 1858, Lincoln put forth his spiritual vision for democratic principles, particularly contained within the Declaration of Independence. In these debates with Douglas, Lincoln called the founding fathers
“Apostles of the justice of the Creator to his creatures.” Notice the word ‘apostle’, obviously a religious word, and he refers to the founding fathers. The Declaration of Independence for Lincoln was a political restatement of the golden rule. When later that year Mississippi Senator Jefferson Davis brandished the Bible on the floor of the Senate and declared, and I quote him, “God stamped diversity on the races of men.” Lincoln responded not with a contrasting Biblical image or passage, but with the words of the Declaration of Independence, “Mr. Davis all men are created equal.” For Lincoln, the core of the nation’s ideals rested with these civic documents; they were his religious text. The Bible could endorse, but could never supersede the authority of civil government, which rested with the people and the laws they created. It’s interesting if you read these debates with Douglas, he emphasized the sacredness of the nation’s key documents. At Lewiston, Illinois Lincoln urged his listeners to quote “Come back to the truths that are in the Declaration of Independence,” as if calling back the faithful to the original word of God. On another occasion, Lincoln called the Declaration of Independence immortal and its principles sacred. “That document,” Lincoln argued in Lewiston, “contradicts the institution of slavery, in the founders enlightened belief,” he said, “nothing stamped with the divine image and likeness was sent into this world to be imbruted by his fellows.” That’s his statement against slavery.

There were other points of view. Southern evangelicals said look, look at your Bible, is there anything in the Bible that condemns slavery – nothing, nothing. Benjamin Morgan Palmer, a New Orleans Presbyterian minister declared at a Thanksgiving sermon in 1860 that, “It was the religious duty, and I’m quoting him, “the religious duty of every southerner,” of course he meant white southerner, “to defend the cause of God and religion and in particular to consider and to perpetuate the institution of domestic slavery.” Because for Palmer, slavery was the divine burden placed upon southern whites to civilize Africans. That was their divine burden, and so that institution must be protected.

And so, we went to war – the Civil War. For religious people and a religious nation, and of course as Tocqueville said ah he had never come across a more religious nation in – than the United States, and he had never come across a nation that was more free than the United States. We are free because of our religion, and we are free because of our religious freedom. Because we exist in a society where religion operates in a market place of ideas – no one is more equal than the others – and Lincoln understood this. Because, while he talked in the metaphors and in the direct language, In 1842 Archbishop John Hughes, obviously Roman Catholic, archbishop in New York City, said that it was time to get the Bible out of the public schools. I mean this is a controversy today, is it not – school prayer. Archbishop Hughes joined by Jewish leaders, Baptists, Angliitarians – now that’s an odd quartet, a very odd quartet – filed suit in New York against the New York City schools to get the Bible out of public schools. Reason being is that the schools in New York used the King James version of the Bible, and that version was not approved by the Vatican. Not only that, but the particular King James version of the Bible that New York City schools used had annotations in it. Now annotated Bibles are nothing new. I mean we have them today, right? But these annotations had some rather strong commentary on the Roman Catholic Church, which probably did not appear in the original Bible. In fact, for certain it didn’t appear in the original Bible. Well, the school authorities and the governor of New York State at that time, William H. Seward, ah decided that the Roman Catholics were right and they decided to take the Bible out of the public schools. Well, there were riots in the streets of New York; there were riots in the streets of Philadelphia when this issue came up in Philadelphia. Finally, Hughes got what he wanted: a separate school system for Roman Catholics; supported in part by state money. Again the, the separation of church and state. Well now the, the Protestants holler bloody murder, you can’t do this, you can’t, you can’t mingle church and state; yet here it was a Catholic school system supported in part by donations from the state of New York.

Now much of this controversy lingered. In fact in the 1850s a new political party, the Know-nothing Party was formed, expressly directed to limiting the civil rights of Roman Catholics. In fact, it went as far in the state of Oregon, the new state of Oregon, that Roman Catholics were barred from holding office. This rarely happens in the United States when we bar a group of individuals because of their religion or ethnic background from holding office. Now of course in North Carolina we did it all the time for African–Americans. But, this was the first time that a new state constitution had barred Roman Catholics from holding office. Then they – Massachusetts among other states–passed a law saying that you now had to wait twenty-one years before you became a citizen. Then, when you did become a citizen you would have to wait two more years before you could vote, if you were Roman Catholic. So, this certainly was an issue that would not go away.

Paradoxically, or maybe not so paradoxically, this was also a great time of reform in
this realized the worst fears of American Protestants.

The other thing about the Roman Catholic faith was that ever since the Protestant reformation there were groups of Protestants, even more so in the United States in the early nineteenth century, who believed that eventually Jesus Christ would return to the earth—the second coming of Jesus. But, before Jesus can come we have to rid the world of sin. One of the greatest sins is the Roman Catholic faith because the pope is the anti-Christ in the Bible. So we’re going to have to do something about these folks. In 1832 a large family from Massachusetts moved to Cincinnati, Ohio. The purpose of this move was to establish a Protestant Theological Seminary on the banks of the Ohio River in Cincinnati, to as this patriarch said, “to convert the heathen,” meaning Roman Catholics. Those words were interchangeable, by the way. This minister was Lyman Beecher, and perhaps you know his daughter, even more famous—Harriet Beecher Stowe, who wrote Uncle Tom’s Cabin, of course. Well, Harriet Beecher Stowe didn’t really engage in this anti-Catholic movement. She found, and her letters state this very clearly, she found a little odd, little, little strange, her interests lay more in, in the anti-slavery movement. Nevertheless, nevertheless ah this was a great concern of Americans ah in the 1830s and 1840s.

In fact, it became such a great concern because a gentleman by the name John O’Sullivan – not the same John O’Sullivan – wrote an article in a newspaper. Where he said, and this John O’Sullivan was obviously Irish immigrant, but he had, unlike most Irish immigrants he came over with some large bank account and eventually wound up at Yale University, and became a prominent journalist and a writer, and fancied himself also as a historian. Well, John O’Sullivan wrote an article where he claimed that it was America’s destiny – and by the way he was a converted Protestant, I should add that as well – that it was America’s destiny, God given destiny to people a continent. He called this destiny – Manifest Destiny. Not only would we people the continent with Americans but we would extend democracy and extend the Protestant religion. Of course, there was a great conflict going on in the west. See the Indian tribes were very smart because they invited Protestant missionaries and they invited Catholic missionaries knowing full well that they’d wind up fighting amongst themselves and the Indians could go off and practice whatever the heck they wanted. But, they were new areas for their mission and of course this was in the far west. It was important to keep the far west free, not only free from slavery but free from Roman Catholics. That was one of the motivations of the Mexican War in the 1840s.

particularly in his, in his ah speech about a house divided against itself cannot stand, that’s biblical. He quoted the Bible frequently but he always used it to make a point about our sacred documents – our civil and civic religion.

Well of course given these religious metaphors it’s not surprising that many people in the north and the south believed that God was on their side, in the Civil War. Listen to this Union soldier: “I believe our cause to be the cause of liberty and light, the cause of God, and holy and justifiable in his sight. And for this reason I fear not to die in it if need be.” A confederate soldier at the same time felt a similar sentiment: “Our cause is just, and God is just. And we shall finally be successful whether I live to see the time or not.” Now the shocking carnage of this war left some soldiers shaken in their faith, in their faith. Yet, most did not question God but gloat imperfectly for the divine purpose behind this slaughter.

Now one of the highlights of course of the Civil War was the Emancipation Proclamation. Now Lincoln of course, some people believe did this primarily for military purposes. That after all you had four million slaves helping out the Confederate cause wouldn’t it be great if we could put some of them under Union arms and have them shoot and, and kill the Confederates. In other words it’s a particle way. But, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Wells kept a diary of all the Cabinet meetings – it’s one of the great things that historians do, you know we look at diaries, we’re the initial, original voyeurs. He took notes in – most of the Cabinet meetings ah and according to Wells’ account Lincoln made little reference to political or military strategy at the meeting where he announced this. Instead, he [Lincoln] explained according to Wells, that he had made a vow, a covenant that if God gave us the victory in the approaching battle – that was the battle of Antietam, in Maryland – he would consider it an indication of divine will and that it was his duty to move forward in the cause of emancipation. “It might be thought strange,” Wells wrote, “but there were times when he felt uncertain how to act, that he had in this way submitted to disposal of matters when the way was not clear to his mind what he should do.” He said unequivocally God had decided this question in favor of the slaves.

Well, perhaps if the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are sacred texts ah I think we ought to include Abraham Lincoln’s second inaugural address in this. Picture the scene – it’s March fourth 1865. The ending of the war is pretty much a foregone conclusion. Nobody would put their money on the south in March of 1865.
It was all over but the shouting, some cleaning up had to be done. It was only a matter of time before Richmond fell. People were expecting from Lincoln one of those rousing speeches – well we've beaten these guys and now we ya know we're triumphant and this proves of course that God is on our side. But he disappointed those people, he disappointed those people. Instead, he said, he declared that God cursed both sides and had visited a destructive war because of the sin of slavery. A sin that wasn't localized in the south but a sin that was national. As he said in his second inaugural: "If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which in the province of God must needs come, but which having continued through His appointed time He now wills to remove and that He gives to both north and south this terrible war as the war do to those by whom the offense came shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in the living God always inscribed to Him." The president warned against smug self-righteousness. "Yes," he said, "it was strange that any man should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces but, in other words the southerner, "but," and this is the key phrase, " But let us judge not that we be not judged:"

As I said, this second inaugural really upset many people. In fact, it upset Harriett Beecher Stowe's sister [brother] the ah Evangelical minister Henry Ward Beecher who wanted you know we're trampling out the vintage with grapes of wrath stored we're gonna to ah get these southern dudes with our terrible, swift sword – but he was not triumphant. He was merely stating that the sin of slavery was a national sin and that this war was visited upon both north and south and that God was on nobody's side – except maybe for the slaves.

All this is prefatory a bit to our situation today and I will just mention the contemporary situation just, just briefly cause I want to leave time for some questions. If you look through the span of American history this conflict of religion and politics has always been with us – sometimes more, sometimes less. Perhaps the key event in the twentieth century in reviving this conflict occurred not with Roe v. Wade in the early 1970s which's been talked about very recently, but actually a case in New York state in 1962 – Engel v. Vitale which outlawed school prayer. Engel versus Vitale, 1962.

That energized Evangelical Christians in both north and south, but particularly in the south where Evangelical Protestantism had particularly flourished cut off primarily from the mainstream of Evangelical Protestantism in the north as a result of this division that I mentioned earlier. Hugo Black rendered the majority decision in Engel versus Vitale. That's kind of interesting because Hugo Black is/was a good old southern wrote a letter to Thomas Jefferson. You know we've had these Supreme Court nomination debates, and in the newspapers you read about originalist versus contemporary interpretations – that is those conservative justices like to go back to the founding fathers – well here is what the founding father, one of the most important founding fathers, Thomas Jefferson, said. Because this Danbury, Connecticut Baptist Association asked him: “Mister Jefferson, interpret the First Amendment for us.” That'd be great if we can just send an e-mail to Thomas today, wouldn't it, no – please interpret the First Amendment for us where it talks about where Congress shall make no law establishing any religion. He said, “This is my interpretation of the First Amendment – the First Amendment to the Constitution builds a wall of separation between church and state.” A wall of separation, that's pretty clear. I mean if you're looking for original intent, if you're looking for a founding father's view – that is pretty darn clear – a wall of separation.

Now actually, as time went on, after the turn of the nineteenth century, in the early 1800s and beyond, this idea of a wall of separation between church and state became a very contentious issue, just as it is today. It became a contentious issue originally because beginning in the 1830s the United States experienced a tremendous wave of immigration. Much of this immigration was from Germany and Ireland, particularly of course with the Irish immigration much of it was Roman Catholic. If you asked an individual in the 1830s, let's say you went to New York or Boston, what was the greatest threat to American democracy? That individual would not say slavery, that individual would not say economic depression, that individual would most likely say—Roman Catholics. The reason why Roman Catholics were so dangerous from the perspective of Protestants – and don't forget this was a time, the 1830s, at the height of a religious revival movement known as the Second Great Awakening. A revival that grew the Evangelical churches – the Methodists, the Baptists and the Presbyterians, all over the country. This was a national movement. The great fear was that these individuals [Roman Catholics] coming over would destroy American democracy. Why? Because these individuals, these Roman Catholics, owed their allegiance to Rome – not to the president of the United States, not to the Constitution – but to Rome. In fact, during the Mexican War, in 1846, an entire regiment of Roman Catholic soldiers defected to the Mexican Army. Mexican Army had sent pamphlets – not dropping the pamphlets from a plane obviously – but they had sent pamphlets saying hey you know, why are you fighting your fellow brother Catholics? Why don't you come fight with us for the true faith? These guys don't care anything about you – so they defected. Of course
Baptist, a good old southern Baptist. Black noted that the Constitution protects everyone equally and that we can have freedom of religion, but also freedom from religion. That I think is a key, key distinction.

The Supreme Court in subsequent cases of course talked about separation of church and state. There was a case in the early 1980s about the Ten Commandments. Interesting enough this was a bone of contention with Archbishop John Hughes in the early 1840s. Because he contended that the Ten Commandments posted in schools in New York City were not Ten Commandments that Catholics were familiar with. These were also annotated Ten Commandments. I’m not aware that when Moses got the tablets they were annotated. Ya know just thought – I just saw Charlton Heston with the one, two, three, four, five, six but apparently there were some annotations. It really depends, there are different versions of – the Ten Commandments – very different versions of the Ten Commandments. The Supreme Court said that ah you cannot have them on public grounds.

The key issue I think, in this religion and politics is that under the current discussion it’s not a question of religious – religion and politics it’s really a question of sectarian religion and politics. In Lincoln’s day it was a pan-Protestantism to some degree, but it was also ecumenical in terms that the religious fervor was being channeled and focused on the sacred secular texts which Lincoln, and Madison, and Jefferson before him believed derived from man, not from God. The point really is that a faith that requires the support of the government is an infirm faith. If they demand an implication of Jesus at a football game and the light of all other religions be damned it must be because the implication of Jesus at home, and in church, and in voluntary associations are proving inadequate. They must pretend that what stands in the way of their Christian life are the rights of non-Christians. I will tell you—religions will flourish or they will not flourish according to the spiritual quality of their exertions.

Thank you very much.
David Goldfield is the Robert Lee Bailey Professor of History at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. A native of Memphis, he grew up in Brooklyn, New York, and attended the University of Maryland. He is the author or editor of thirteen books dealing with the history of the American South, including two works, *Cotton Fields and Skyscrapers: Southern City and Region* (1982) and *Black, White, and Southern: Race Relations and Southern Culture* (1991), nominated for the Pulitzer Prize in history, and both received the Mayflower Award for Non-Fiction. *Still Fighting the Civil War: The American South and Southern History* appeared in 2002 and received the Jules and Frances Landry Prize and was named by *Choice* as an Outstanding Non-fiction Book. His most recent book is *Southern Histories: Public, Personal, and Sacred*, published by the University of Georgia Press in 2003. He is currently working on a re-interpretation of the Civil War, “Rebirth of a Nation: America during the Civil War Era,” for Holt Publishing Co. The Organization of American Historians named him Distinguished Lecturer in 2001. Goldfield is the editor of the *Journal of Urban History* and a co-author of *The American Journey: A History of the United States* (2005).

He also serves as an expert witness in voting rights and death penalty cases, as a consultant on the American South to museums and public television and radio, and serves with the U.S. State Department as an Academic Specialist, leading workshops on American history and culture in foreign countries. He also serves on the Advisory Board of the Lincoln Prize. Among his leisure-time activities are reading southern novels, listening to Gustav Mahler and Buddy Holly, and coaching girls’ fastpitch softball.
The mission of the John O’Sullivan Memorial Lectureship is to provide students, secondary school teachers, faculty and public guests with exposure to a distinguished historian of 20th century American history whose lecture/presentation broadens and deepens our understanding of the major thematic and conceptual aspects of America’s modern history.

The John O’Sullivan Memorial Lectureship allows the Department of History each fall semester to host a distinguished scholar in 20th century American history to lecture to students, secondary school teachers, faculty and the public. The lectures will focus on topics relevant to O’Sullivan’s specialties which include: World War II, the Vietnam War, the Nuclear Age, Peace, the Holocaust, Peace History, Oral History, and Modern American Political and Diplomatic Affairs.

To make a contribution to this fund (HUM 235), please contact:

Laurie Carney at 561.297.3606
or the
Department of History at 561.297.3840
or email zlinn@fau.edu or engle@fau.edu