

Freedom For All Faiths?

What Was the Founding Father's Purpose in the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment?

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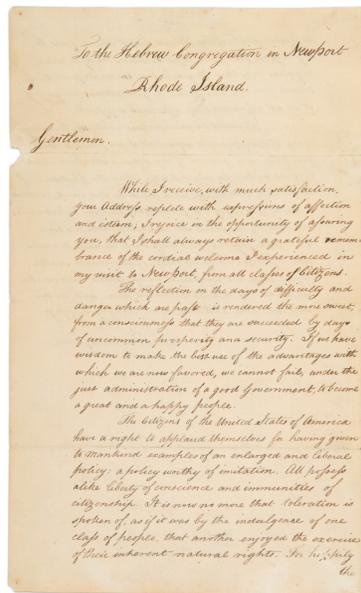
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Abstract

The first amendment is a pivotal part of The United States of America that has been a shining light to other countries heading into democracy. Many countries boggle at the fact that our press has so much leeway, that people can say anything they want, and assemble to protest things they find fault with the government. What about the free exercise clause, what did the framers intend? Were other religions within Christianity protected, what about Jews, or Muslims? The purpose of this research is to look at the writings of the framers to get a better idea of the intention of free exercise. The founding fathers intent is in their writings on the subject and specifically a letter to a Hebrew Congregation from George Washington, the intent was for all religions.



<https://www.sps.gov/toyo/index.htm>



<http://religiousfreedom.nmah.org/>



<http://www.toursofnyagoga.org/photos-gallery/toursofnyagoga-gallery>

http://www.thearda.com/timeline/events/event_347.asp

"It is now no more that toleration is spoken of as if it were the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights, for, happily, the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens in giving it on all occasions their effectual support."

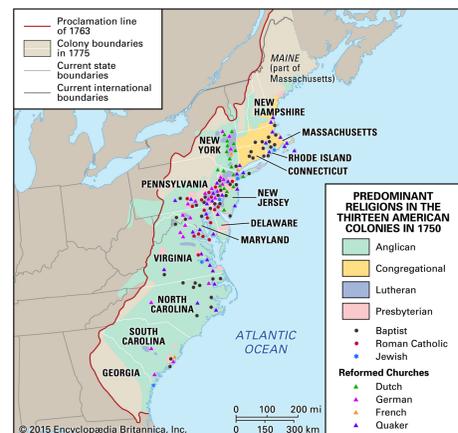
~George Washington in the letter to Touro.

Background

The American colonies evolved tremendously between the 1620's and the writing of the United States Constitution and subject of religious freedom is still an issue today. It is necessary to look at the beginning to understand what the factors were leading up to the Revolutionary War. The people of English descent, who would be the instigators of religious freedom in what was then the British American Colonies, had narrow ideas of religious freedom. Starting with the first colony of Jamestown to the pilgrims in Massachusetts and the Quakers in Pennsylvania to the Catholics in Maryland and the hodgepodge of Georgia, welcoming even Jews.

Methodology

The basis for this research came about based on the letter from Washington to Touro. This letter pushed forward ideas set forth in the First Amendment in term so f free exercise. The methodology used in this research was to examine the writers of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, as well as those promoting the words written in them. This entailed looking at other letters from Washington, Adams, Jefferson, Madison, Franklin, and others to ascertain thoughts religious freedom.



<http://media.web.britannica.com/eb-media/30/180930-650-6683201.jpg>

James Madison

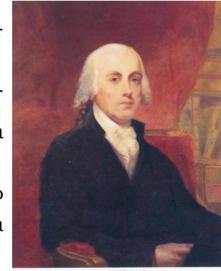
- ❖ Author of both the constitution and the Bill of Rights.
- ❖ Madison was from Virginia and graduate of College of New Jersey (now Princeton), a Presbyterian school.
- ❖ "The religion, then, of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man," a view he championed in the Bill of Rights.



<https://www.whichhousehistory.org/photos/thomas-jefferson>

Thomas Jefferson

- ❖ One of the most enlightened men of his time
- ❖ Also from Virginia, but educated in a more traditional Protestant and Anglican way through the College of William and Mary.
- ❖ Highly influenced by the Age of Enlightenment happening in Europe.
- ❖ "But it does me no injury for my neighbor to say there are twenty gods or no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg?"



<http://edu.lva.virginia.gov/dlva/items/show/182>

Benjamin Franklin

- ❖ "When a religion is good, I conceive it will support itself; and when it does not support itself, and God does not take care to support it so that its professors are obliged to call for help of the civil power, 'tis a sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one."



<http://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.38935.html>

Thomas Paine

- ❖ Thomas Paine was born in England, unlike most of the other founding fathers, and moved to the colonies in 1774.
- ❖ While the religious persuasion of the others leaned towards Christianity, Paine was an atheist, a very uncommon thing at that time.
- ❖ "Organized religion was "set up to terrify and enslave" and to 'monopolize power and profit.' Paine repudiated the divine origin of Christianity on grounds that it was too "absurd for belief, too impossible to convince and too inconsistent to practice."
- ❖ "Persecution is not an original feature in any religion; but it is always the strongly-marked feature of all law-religions, or religions established by law. Take away the law-establishment, and every religion re-assumes its original benignity".



http://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.87.43

John Adams

- ❖ John Adams, the second president was a more cautious founding father, with a more traditional view of things.
- ❖ Misquoted as saying, "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other".
- ❖ "We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion . . . Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."



<https://www.bostonianmuseum.org/about/publications/selections-acquired-items/peter-adams-ca-1815-pibert-stuart>

"...I beg you be persuaded that no one would be more zealous than myself to establish effectual barriers against the horrors of spiritual tyranny, and every species of religious persecution."

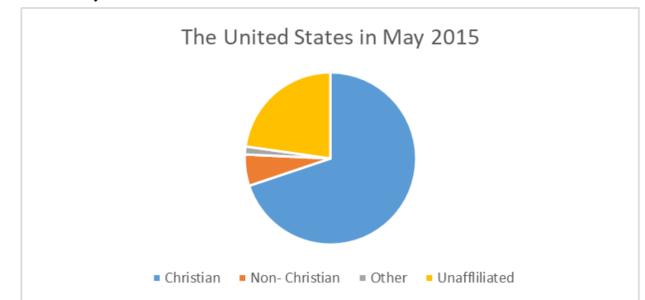
[George Washington, to United Baptists Churches of Virginia, May, 1789 from The Washington papers, edited by Saul Padover]

Analysis

Between morality and religion, Adams like Washington was not specific in his regard, but defending the first amendment was his duty.

The country's first two presidents, George Washington and John Adams, were firm believers in the importance of religion for republican government. As citizens of Virginia and Massachusetts, both were sympathetic to general religious taxes being paid by the citizens of their respective states to the churches of their choice. However, both statesmen would have discouraged such a measure at the national level because of its divisiveness. They confined themselves to promoting religion rhetorically, offering frequent testimonials to its importance in building the moral character of American citizens that, they believed, undergirded public order and successful popular government.

While he was more devout than others discussed in this research he, while being a staunch Christian, stood for religious freedom. These first two presidents set a standard for how the country was going to proceed. By no means does this mean that there was no religious strife in this time, but only what the intent was at this time.



Conclusion

The idea of religious freedom was an encompassing idea to the founding fathers and intended for more than just Christianity based on the letter to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport and in the writings of those who forged the United States. The time of the revolution was ripe for a great stirring regarding religion,

Among the founders who rejected the faith of their Puritan fathers for the enlightenment were Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine, John Adams, Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, all of whom, with the exception of Franklin and Paine, attended college during the period of 1755-1775 . . . Jefferson and the other founders relied heavily upon Enlightenment ideas to shape their views of religion and politics and the place and role of each in the new republic

Freedom of religion was an integral part of the founding of the United States and is still an important issue to this day. When in 2017 the majority of the nation is still identifying as Christian at 70% with over 45% Protestant, 20% Catholic, and a minority of other Christian faiths there is still a need to protect the free exercise of the minority; that minority includes about 2% of Jews, almost 1% Muslims, less than 1% of Buddhist and Hindus, and 22% considered unaffiliated (meaning Atheist or Agnostic). The analysis of this research still points to the idea that the Founding Fathers did intend on freedom for all religions in the first amendment and the free exercise clause. Continuation of this research into the Nineteenth century and even to the present time would be a enlightening project to understand how the Founding Fathers shaped the United States of America, and how their plans have gone astray or stayed true.

Acknowledgements

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