



The California Three Rs Project

Rights, Responsibility, and Respect

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BULLETIN

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Broaching Borderlands Beyond Religion (Part One)

Mynga Futrell

Lead Curriculum Developer for Objectivity, Accuracy, and Balance in Teaching About Religion

Here in California, administrators and teachers need to be aware that principles of liberty of conscience derived from the U.S. Constitution apply to every citizen, irrespective of their position on faith. Many occasions will call for educators to be civically neutral when dealing with religious and nonreligious students alike.

To help educators understand “the secular side of the coin,” I wrote an article by that title for this [Bulletin](#) in 2008. The present article will add how important it is that we in education confront stereotypes on *both* sides of the “all faiths or none” civic equation. For the religious, there is a wide range across the board from orthodox to nonobservant, and for the nonreligious, perhaps the range is better termed “from staunch to

nonchalant.”

According to “‘Nones’ on the Rise,” a 2012 survey by the Pew Research Center, American society on the whole is seemingly growing less religious. Of the citizenry at large, fully a third do not consider themselves “religious persons,” and two-thirds of U.S. adults think religion is losing its influence.

The Pew survey also revealed that the religiously unaffiliated, or those who do not belong to a traditional or organized religion (nicknamed “the Nones”), comprise a rapidly growing segment of the adult population. Being a “None” does not, however, mean being entirely nonreligious. In fact, most of the country’s 46 million unaffiliated adults are religious or spiritual in some way. Two-thirds of them say they

believe in God; more than half say they often feel a deep connection with nature and the earth; and more than a third classify themselves as “spiritual but not religious.” The proportion of the unaffiliated jumped from just over 15 percent to just under 20 percent of all U.S. adults (and actually a third of those under age 30) in scarcely five years. The geographic distribution is quite uneven, with the unaffiliated being more represented in our

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The California Three Rs Project co-sponsored by Constitutional Rights Foundation, California County Superintendents Educational Services Association, and the Religious Freedom Education Project at Newseum



RELIGIOUS FREEDOM EDUCATION PROJECT
AT THE NEWSEUM

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Recent studies place atheists and agnostics combined as barely 6 percent of the national population. But that small minority also appears to be growing.

California households (both the Northeast and the Far West include the least religious general population).

Most religiously unaffiliated Americans do deem religious institutions of benefit to society by strengthening community bonds and aiding the poor. With few exceptions, however, the unaffiliated say they think that religious organizations are too concerned with money and power, too focused on rules, and too involved in politics.

It is worth noting that recent studies place atheists and agnostics combined as barely 6 percent of the national population. But that small minority also appears to be growing.

Only an unknown fraction of the nonreligious ever bother to organize around their values and convictions into “communities” or “congregations.” (Their aggregates are somewhat analogous to a religious “denomination” or to a “world religion.”) When they do form associations, they may choose to cluster in more or less organized fashion around some secular philosophy or life stance, selecting identity labels with regard to distinctions to which they give considerable import.

The most popular organizational categories are humanists, atheists, skeptics, and freethinkers. There are corresponding national associations with their assorted “chapters” (e.g., the American Humanist Association) or autonomous groups (e.g., Atheist Alliance of America).

By whatever label or whatever declaration of association, members generally deem themselves “nontheists” or “secularists.” This is to set themselves apart from associations that are largely religious. Some exceptions offer culturally filial nontheistic alternatives to the religious sources from which they sprang. For example, HUUmanists and the Society for Humanistic Judaism provide alternatives to mainstream Unitarian Universalism and Judaism, respectively.

The actual contours of this complex nontheistic landscape are nigh impossible to impart in a brief article like this. Still, because there is increased activism in society as the varied organizations unite to press for equal treatment and rights within American society, there is some merit to glossing a few of the characteristics that nontheistic folks generally have in common:

- An expectation of having only one life per human (giving no credence to any form of afterlife).
- A naturalistic (supernatural-free) understanding of how the world works and of the source and character of human morality, and a general skepticism about supernatural claims.
- Relishing free inquiry and critical scrutiny, with appreciation of public education and the right of children to develop their worldviews free of any kind of indoctrination or coercion.
- Regard for civil liberties, human rights, human reason, scientific rationality, and secular democracy, with distrust of propositions and assertions that are lacking in empirical evidence.
- Strong concern regarding the cultural privileging of religion, religious symbols, and religious organizations in law and custom, and opposition to melding patriotism and religion.
- Strong support for the separation of church and state (desiring separation of religion and governance at all societal levels, including within public education).

(See “Beyond Religion” on Page 3.)

Beyond Religion (cont'd)

In keeping with their particular underlying values, certain spots on the calendar are marked for appreciation by a fraction of nontheistic associations. Atheists and rationalists often celebrate the Winter Solstice for its astronomical significance, while many humanists mark December 23 with HumanLight holiday parties (celebrating human reason, compassion, family, and children). Other examples of commemorative days either started by or popular with nontheistic people are Thomas Paine Day or Freethought Day (January 29), Darwin Day (February 12), World Humanist Day (June 21), Church/State Separation Week, International Human Rights Day (December 10), International Women's Day (March 8), National Day of Reason (first Thursday in May), Earth Day (April 22), and Ingersoll Day (August 11).

Part Two will appear in the April issue of the Bulletin.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN SOCIAL STUDIES?

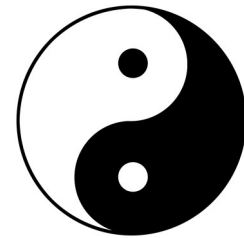
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CA3Rs Publications

Teaching About Chinese New Year



by

Dr. Margaret Hill

An information and resource guide for schools with a list of children's literature.

Free download:

ca3rsproject.org

CA3Rs *Bulletin* Editorial Statement

Margaret Hill and Damon Huss
Co-directors, The California Three Rs Project

The following editorial statement appeared one year ago in the January 2014 issue of the CA3Rs Bulletin. We are reprinting it here, as we will from time to time, in order to introduce new readers to our editorial approach.

The California Three Rs Bulletin is a newsletter of the work and mission of the CA3Rs. We intend to make it informative for all

stakeholders in California's public schools, including district and county superintendents, administrators, teachers, and parents.

To reach our important goals, we often invite specialists and concerned persons to contribute articles and relevant news items to the *Bulletin*.

We intend for the opinions and information expressed on the pages of the *Bulletin*

to execute the CA3Rs mission of finding common ground on vital issues of religious liberty and free speech in schools. We intend to help schools build cultures of mutual respect and shared responsibility to protect the rights of all students.

Some of the views expressed on these pages are personal to the authors and may not reflect the opinion

of the CA3Rs directors and advisory or planning committees.

Some legal information may be provided for educational purposes only, but none of the views expressed in the *Bulletin* are meant to serve as legal advice to any reader. For specific legal questions concerning your school or community, please seek legal counsel or consult with your district's legal office.

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For information on teaching world religions:

Dr. Bruce Grelle

Director, Religion and Public Education Resource Center
 Department of Religious Studies
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 239 Trinity Hall
 Chico, CA 95929-0740
 Phone: 530-898-4739
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For information on First Amendment religious liberty:

Dr. Charles C. Haynes

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The California Three Rs Project (CA3Rs) is a program for finding common ground on issues related to religious liberty and the First Amendment in public schools. The CA3Rs' approach is based on the principles of American democracy and citizenship, reflected in the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights and applied in a public school setting.

For over a decade, the CA3Rs has provided online resources, professional development, and leadership training for teachers and education professionals in order to disseminate essential information about religious liberty and the history of religion in America.

Common Ground Resources

Haynes, Charles C., and Oliver Thomas. *Finding Common Ground: A Guide to Religious Liberty in the Public Schools*. Nashville: First Amendment Center, 2007.

< <http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/madison/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/FCGcomplete.pdf> >

Religious Freedom Education Project at the Newseum.

< <http://religiousfreedomeducation.org> >

News About The California Three Rs Project

CA3Rs Welcomes New Members to the Advisory Committee

The California Three Rs Project is pleased to welcome two new members to our Advisory Committee, Steve Herrick and Jacqueline Regev.

Steve Herrick is the chief information officer for the American Academy of Religion (AAR), a 9,000-member association of teachers and scholars who teach or research in the academic study of religion. Steve has worked for the AAR since 1994, focusing most of his work on initiatives to enhance the public under-

standing of religion. He has been the liaison to the AAR's Committee on the Public Understanding of Religion, and between 2004 and 2010, he served as staff liaison to the AAR's Religion in the Schools Task Force. He is also a former eighth grade social studies teacher.

Jacqueline Regev is the senior curriculum developer and trainer for the Institute for Curriculum Services (ICS) in the Bay Area of California. Based in San Francisco, ICS is a non-

profit project of the Jewish Community Relations Council and the Jewish Council for Public Affairs. Jacqueline directs ICS's outreach to educators, designing and developing new lessons and curricular materials on topics of high interest in education and the Jewish world.

We would also like to acknowledge and show our gratitude to Jackie Berman as she retires from her work with the Jewish Community Relations Council.

Jackie served on the Advisory Committee for the California Three Rs Project for many years, giving her time and energy to make positive contributions to the work of the project. We congratulate her on her retirement and wish her the best. We are also thankful she considered the continuity of the CA3Rs by facilitating the membership of Jacqueline Regev as an advisor in her place.