



Council for America's First Freedom

Faces of Religious Freedom

A Selection of Exhibition Text

Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) - Virginian, diplomat, author of the Declaration of Independence and the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom (*A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom*), Jefferson was also the third President of the United States. He described his own views on religious pluralism when he said: "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."

James Madison (1751-1836) - Madison was the co author of Virginia's Statute for Religious Freedom, "the father of the Constitution," a cunning political strategist, and the fourth President of the United States. Madison engineered the passage of the Statute into law by anonymously circulating his "Memorial and Remonstrance;" that document listed many reasons why neither the church nor the state would benefit from an established church. An alternative system for limited disestablishment, proposed by Patrick Henry, was defeated. Madison and Jefferson's Statute received strong popular support, especially from petitions signed by thousands of from Virginia Baptists.

John F. Kennedy (1917-1963) - As the first Catholic President of the United States, Kennedy faced and overcame strong anti Catholic discrimination and accusations that his loyalty to the Vatican might outweigh his fidelity to the nation. Similar accusations are still lodged against Catholics and the Vatican today, particularly in East and Southeast Asia. The anti Catholic voice in this country is no longer audible, but we have not had another Catholic President since Kennedy. Although he was assassinated only halfway through his first term, many still consider Kennedy to be one of the greatest American Presidents ever.

Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) - King is the most famous leader of the American civil rights movement. He was a political activist and a Southern Baptist minister. He is recognized as an American national hero. Committed to the principle of nonviolence, he successfully led the American Civil Rights movement for nearly a decade. His efforts culminated in the Civil Rights Act of 1964, when he also won the Nobel Peace Prize. His religious faith was a motivating and integral factor in his civic endeavors. His life ended abruptly when he was assassinated in 1968.

Thomas Paine (1737-1809) - Paine was a pamphleteer, revolutionary, radical intellectual, and skeptic. Born in Great Britain, he lived and died in America. Celebrated for his philosophical and revolutionary writings, he became notorious with the publication of his book, *The Age of Reason*, in which he wrote: "I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church."

Richard Allen (1760-1831) - In 1787, Allen and his collaborator, fellow Methodist Absalom Jones, formed the Free African Society, a non-denominational religious mutual aid organization for African Americans, after years of discrimination and second class treatment by their white church brethren. Seven years later, Allen moved on to found the first independent African American denomination, the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, which still thrives today. Black churches have served their communities as centers for identity building, social activism, musical expression, and as the cradle of the black civil rights movement.

Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910) - A self described visionary and scriptural interpreter, Eddy was the founder of the Christian Science Church. She powerfully tapped into a rising American interest in the connection between science, spirituality, and health. Eddy taught that all material reality, including disease, was an illusion and the result of separation from the spirit of God. These could be overcome through spiritual cultivation and Bible study. Thus the model Christian Scientist could leave behind the material illusion of disease and distraction. The church has over 400,000 members world wide today. Eddy's is one example of how the flourishing of religious freedom gives rise to new religions and to new religious leaders.

Dallin H. Oaks (1932-) - As a leader in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), Oaks is a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. As a lay member of the church he had also distinguished himself as a professor of law at the University of Chicago, the president of Brigham Young University, and a justice of the Utah Supreme Court. This is particularly noteworthy in the context of the adversity that the LDS church has long faced. In the mid 19th Century, the members of the Church fled across the country with their possessions in wagons and handcarts, after leader was murdered by a mob and they faced government persecution. The hostility of the U.S. Government continued until the Church gave up its theocratic rule of the territory and agreed to abandon plural marriage. Despite continuing suspicion and discrimination, the Church professes: "We claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege."

Mohammad Ali, born Cassius Marcellus Clay, Jr. (1942-) - Ali is a three time World Heavyweight Champion, Olympic gold medalist, and Muslim. Ali changed his name after joining the Nation of Islam. He has subsequently converted to Sunni Islam. He refused to serve in the United States Army during the Vietnam War claiming conscientious objector status: "We are not supposed to take part in no wars unless declared by Allah or The Messenger. We don't take part in Christian wars or wars of any unbelievers." As a reaction to his refusal to serve, the boxing commission stripped him of his title in 1967. He was also convicted for refusing induction and sentenced to five years in prison. Ali successfully challenged both the penalties and the conviction. In 1970, Ali was allowed to box again; a year later, the Supreme Court upheld his conscientious objector claim.

Slow Bull, "Tata ka-hu keshni" (1844-unknown) - Slow Bull became a sub chief of the Oglala Sioux Indians of North Dakota in 1878. Legend has it that at seventeen, he received medicine from buffalo in a dream while he slept on a hilltop, not fasting, but resting from travel. This photograph illustrates many aspects of the differences that have posed, and continue to pose, challenges to our ability to protect the religious freedom of our native people: their religion has no house of worship; their sacred place is the land; their rituals and practices, including ritual attire and adornment--from peace pipes to loin cloths to eagle feathers--challenge customary norms and sometimes even federal laws, and finally, their source of authority is a rich and multi faceted oral tradition and not a written text or canon.

Billy Graham, Jr. (1918-) - Graham is the foremost American evangelist of our day, with wide following in the public media. He has been the spiritual adviser to multiple U.S. presidents of varying faiths and parties, even though he is a member of the Southern Baptist Convention and a registered Democrat. He has a long history of support for the civil rights movement. He maintains his political independence, and is known to vote according to his conscience rather than on straight party lines. Graham has devoted much of his life's work to successful efforts to foster a better understanding among all faiths. He was recognized for these interfaith efforts by the Anti-Defamation League of the B'nai B'rith and the National Conference of Christians and Jews.

Elie Wiesel (1928-) - Wiesel is the Nobel prize winning author, whose book, *Night*, about his personal experience in a Nazi concentration camp, has educated thousands of people worldwide about a persecution that resulted in the deaths of over 6 million Jews.

Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962) - As the former first lady, and widow of a United States president, Eleanor Roosevelt decided to join the United States Delegation to the newly created United Nations. There she surprised all onlookers with her leadership abilities as she oversaw the drafting and unanimous passage of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) , a document which has set the standard for Human Rights, and is the cornerstone of the human rights movement.