

Case Study Challenge Entry Form

Individual Entry Information:

Title of Case Study	The Distorted Line Between Patriotism and Faith
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Case Study Title: The Distorted Line Between Patriotism and Faith

Article information:

Article headline: Faith shouldn't be red, white, and blue

Byline: Sam Ward

USA Today publication date: 7-2-07

Section: News

USA Today page number: 11A

Article headline: The Founders got it right

Byline: Stephen Mansfield

USA Today publication date: 7-16-07

Section: News

USA Today page number: 13A

Article headline: Our real national pastime

Byline: Richard W. Garnett

USA Today publication date: 9-10-07

Section: News

USA Today page number: 11A

Article headline: So what does the Constitution say about religion?

Byline: Oliver "Buzz" Thomas

USA Today publication date: 10-15-07

Section: News

USA Today page number: 15A

Summary statement:

The words "separation between church and state" had a different meaning when they were first written. The government encouraged religion among the people without submitting to any one doctrine. The first sentence in the Bill of Rights states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion." This statement guarantees that a national church would not be established to create another religious tyranny. The First Amendment only limited the power of government and not the power of the people or of the church. The people were free to be as religious or unreligious as they desired, and this law went undisputed for many years.

Religious faith and patriotism are especially confused on occasions of patriotic activities. On Memorial Day, a three-day salute to the troops also featured Christian worship services and bible giveaways. The same thing is happening during religious celebrations where American flags and red, white, and blue bunting are used to adorn the churches. The Pledge of Allegiance and patriotic songs joined the religious services around the Fourth of July. Pastor Bob Hyatt, appalled at what he was witnessing, suggested during a pray-for-our-troops rally that the congregants pray for the Iraqi people - an idea that was not well received. Hyatt later commented on those patriotic services, "We had taken a time that belonged to the worship of God and turned it toward the appreciation of a country, a political system, a flag. We said that we were worshiping God through the singing of patriotic songs, the saying of the Pledge of Allegiance and the rest, but in fact...we were worshiping America." However, many people believe that a separation between church and state during war time is impossible. Political and military leaders have always appealed to God during a war and they still do. While faith has had a history with the American military, different denominations are respected. The current trend among the executive branch is to try and turn the war against terrorism into a crusade for righteousness. Illinois Sen. Barack Obama said, "The danger of using good vs. evil in the context of war is it may lead us to be not as critical as we should be about our own actions."

Clearly, the attempted mixing of patriotism and faith has caused a great amount of confusion and difficulty. Religious faith and patriotism are two different ideologies that can require vastly different allegiances and should not be intermixed. Religious faith is not necessary to have patriotism and vice versa. The question is, to what extent should faith and patriotism be separated? The confused state that this nation is in obviously suggests that a measure of distance is needed between faith and patriotism.

Discussion questions:

1. Is allowing Christian beliefs to freely influence America's development as a nation conflicting with allowing all religious beliefs to be practiced? Explain.
2. Give a detailed example of a time in history when religious faith and patriotism demanded different allegiances.
3. How do the first ten words of the Bill of Rights, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion," and Thomas Jefferson's words, "separation between church and state", differ from each other?
4. How have Americans already put the war on terrorism in terms of good vs. evil, and how has this affected the attitude of Americans?
5. How has the relationship between patriotism and religion changed over time?

Future implications:

Eventually, no matter how hard people try to combine the two sides, everyone will have to choose where their allegiances lie—with patriotism or faith. History is littered with times that, because of differing beliefs, the government persecuted certain religions. While the two ideologies may be able to coexist enough now, what will happen when those who choose faith over patriotism have to put their loyalty to God over their loyalty to their country? Will religious people have to make a stand against their government? Since only the power of the government is limited and not the church, should non-religious people worry about the potential power of religion? In America's increasingly "righteous" war against certain radical religious regimes, is there a danger of America becoming one itself? The two ideologies should not be combined, and the fact that it is getting harder and harder to separate them should be a cause for concern.

Additional resources:

Mansfield, Stephen. How the Founding Fathers Tried to Protect Religion in America...and What's Happened Since. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc, 2007.

Shenkman, Richard. Legends, Lies, and Cherished Myths of American History. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1988.

http://www.adl.org/issue_religious_freedom/separation_cs_primer.asp

<http://www.allabouthistory.org/separation-of-church-and-state.htm>

<http://www.mssu.edu/socsci/cebula/voices/faiths.htm>