

# The Reality Check

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## Cultural Suppression and a Great American

By Carl Ledendecker

Conspiracy theories are usually fantasy theories, examples of the human ability to make connections and associations that either don't actually exist or that are useless in terms of actual cause and effect significance. That is not to say that conspiracies don't ever occur. It should also be noted that most series of events that may appear to be conspiracies would be more accurately described as folly or blunder theories. That is, most of the conspiracy appearing events are the result of human ignorance, incompetence or irrationality.

In a broader sense though, there is, I think, an actual conspiracy that is operating continuously. That conspiracy is much like the economists "invisible hand," or the ideal that people are significantly controlled by ideas and forces of complex interactions of social and biological phenomena. It can be called cultural conspiracy.

This idea can be pursued in many directions, but I am only going to address one of these in this article and primarily it is going to address only one individual, Robert Green Ingersoll.

Many in the Freethought/Humanist/etc. movement have at least heard of Ingersoll, but if you ask the average American who he was, well the answer is going to be either a blank look or a wild guess. Our culture has suppressed the history of this man and his impact in the mid to late 1800's. Now it is true that he was never a President or holder of a major office, but that just suggests that the "cultural conspiracy" involves not only suppression of information, but also has as an element a shallowness that ignores the underlying structure of history. There are many other examples of this phenomenon. For example, the history of black Americans' contributions (with the possible exception of music), until recently, has had scant attention. The underlying principles of the Enlightenment, the Deistic positions of many of the Founding Fathers and the distaste for religious meddling in civil affairs has been suppressed and when it does surface, denied or ignored by the general cultural commentary. How many Americans are aware of the position, so wonderfully stated, of Thomas Paine in *The Age of Reason*? In fact, how often is Paine even

mentioned any more? What about Ethan Allen? You many see a road sign with the name when you travel in some parts of the North East, but that is about it. (Well there is the furniture company.)

So, to resist this suppression, let us become again more familiar with Robert Green Ingersoll. The following is the entry on Ingersoll found in the *Encyclopedia Britannica, Electronic Edition 2002*.

*"born Aug. 11, 1833, Dresden, N.Y., U.S.  
died July 21, 1899, Dobbs Ferry, N.Y.*

*American politician and orator known as "the great agnostic" who popularized the higher criticism of the Bible, as well as a humanistic philosophy and a scientific rationalism. Although he had little formal education, Ingersoll was admitted to the Illinois bar in 1854, and he subsequently enjoyed a lucrative law practice in Peoria, Ill., New York City, and Washington, D.C. After service in the American Civil War (1861-65), he became a staunch Republican, serving as Illinois attorney general (1867-69) and as a party spokesman in presidential campaigns. In spite of his outstanding contribution to his political party, his unorthodox religious views deterred Republican administrations from appointing him to the Cabinet or to the diplomatic posts that he desired. Nationally known as a lecturer, Ingersoll was in great demand and received as much as \$3,500 for a single evening's performance, in which with brilliant oratory and wit he sought to expose the orthodox superstitions of the times.*

*Ingersoll's principal lectures and speeches, published as *Some Mistakes of Moses* (1879) and *Why I Am Agnostic* (1896), are found in *The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll*, 12 vol. (1902), edited by Clinton P. Farrell."*

Here was a man who openly and frequently attacked superstition, especially Christianity. He was a man who was the principal spokesman for the Republican Party



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(not today's Republicans), attorney general of Illinois, and respected and well known world wide. And, he rejected the notion of god(s). He not only held this philosophical position but also earned a significant income from spreading the word. His lectures were frequently standing room only. In his biography, Herman E. Kittredge states, "In 1896, he held, for over two hours, as though it were entranced, an audience of twenty thousand people which, a few nights before, had completely disconcerted and discomfited two veteran Republican orators whose names are familiar on both sides of the Atlantic." This was at a time of non-amplified sound and horse and buggy transportation.

This same biography points out that, with the exception of two, he participated in every national campaign for thirty-two years. This was a man who was an extremely successful lawyer, who convinced jurors who were almost always aware of his religious positions and biased against him. He supported women's rights and opposed slavery. He was considered to be not just a good lawyer, lecturer, and defender of free thought, but acknowledged to be completely honest, and affectionate as well as possessing great strength of character and being ideal husband and father.

His death was described in Kittredge's biography as follows:

*"THE DEATH of Robert G. Ingersoll on July 21, 1899, was one of the most widely noted events of that year in the civilized world. It was also one of the most widely and profoundly regretted,-the most deeply deplored. Everywhere, the wisest knew (and the noblest felt) that the cause of humanity had met its greatest loss. To many thousands who realized the intellectual amplitude, the moral heroism and grandeur, the boundless generosity and sympathy, the tenderness and affection, of this incomparable man, his passing was as an intimate and bitter bereavement."* (p. 489)

Thousands of wires and cables came from from many distinguished personages in America and in Europe Of course, these communications differed widely in wording ; but their common burden seemed to be : "The greatest and noblest of his kind has fallen, and we mourn." (page 490)

*The attention of the daily press was universal, the papers of the United States, Canada, Mexico, Europe, and even of Africa, publishing accounts of his death, biographical sketches, anecdotes, and extracts from his works."* (p. 490)

Another example that his influence was broad comes from the American Federation of Musicians who wrote the following response upon his death.

*"On behalf of 15,000 professional musicians, comprising the American Federation of Musicians, permit me to extend to you our heartfelt and most sincere sympathy in the irreparable loss of the model husband, father, and friend. In*

*him the musicians of not only this country, but of all countries, have lost one whose noble nature grasped the true beauties of our sublime art, and whose intelligence gave those impressions expression in words of glowing eloquence that will live as long as language exists."* (p. 499)

Let us as intellectual descendants of Ingersoll work to bring truth to those words and work to ensure that his "glowing eloquence ... will live as long as language exists." The spoken words have died; long live the ideas.



A very complete collection of Ingersoll's works and biographical writings can be found on the CD collection, American's Greatest Infidel. This is a collection of the complete twelve volume Dresden Edition of The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll and five additional rare Ingersoll books, available from Bank of Wisdom, P.O. Box 926, Louisville, KY 40201. The Kittredge quotes were from this collection as well as the following quotes of Ingersoll's.

**"Only a few days ago our President, by proclamation, thanked God for giving us the victory at Santiago. He did not thank him for sending the yellow fever. To be consistent the President should have thanked him equally for both."**

Dresden Edition, The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll, lecture on superstition p. 324

**As long as we love we will hope to live, and when the one dies that we love we will say: "Oh, that we could meet again," and whether we do or not it will not be the work of theology. It will be a act in nature. I would not for my life destroy one star of human hope, but I want it so that when a poor woman rocks the cradle and sings a lullaby to the dimpled darling, she will not be compelled to believe that ninety-nine chances in a hundred she is raising kindling wood for hell.**

Dresden Edition, The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll, p. 523

"I had rather think of those I have loved, and lost, as having returned to earth, as having become a part of the elemental wealth of the world - I would rather think of them as unconscious dust, I would rather dream of them as gurgling in the streams, floating in the clouds, bursting in the foam of light upon the shores of worlds, I would rather think of them as the lost visions of a forgotten night, than to have even the faintest fear that their naked souls have been clutched by an orthodox god. I will leave my dead where nature leaves them. Whatever flower of hope springs up in my heart I will cherish, I will give it breath of sighs and rain of tears. But I can not believe that there is any being in this universe who has created a human soul for eternal pain. I would rather that every god would destroy himself; I would rather that we all should go to eternal chaos, to black and starless night, than that just one soul should suffer eternal agony."

*Robert Green Ingersoll*

*Dresden Edition, The Works of Robert G. Ingersoll, p. 524-525*

## A "National Day of Reason"

In response to the federally funded National Day of Prayer (which should be considered unconstitutional), a consortium of leaders from within the community of reason recently endorsed the idea of a National Day of Reason. It will be held on the same day as the National Day of Prayer, on the first Thursday in May (1 May 2003). The web site ([nationaldayofreason.org](http://nationaldayofreason.org)), which was officially launched on January 14, 2003, states that, "*The goal of this effort is to celebrate reason - a concept all Americans can support - and to raise public awareness about the persistent threat to religious liberty posed by government intrusion into the private sphere of worship.*" The web site was launched by the American Humanists Association and the Washington Area Secular Humanists. This campaign can be endorsed individuals at the web site and local groups can submit upcoming events related to this issue.

## Lying About Lincoln for God

by Edwin Kagin

I have known Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, delivered at the Gettysburg Civil War battlefield on November 19 1863, all of my life.

According to family legend or history, I recited the address, when my precocious cuteness was but three years old, in the rotunda of the Kentucky State Capitol in Frankfort, Kentucky. It was rendered from rote memory of course, with little comprehension. I called it, I am told, the Lincoln's Get His Birth Address. You know, sorta like Olive the Other Reindeer.

I had learned the Address from a volume that still exists in Kagin family archives maintained by my sister Mary (and is still in print) entitled One Hundred and One Famous Poems. Yeah, I know it is not a poem. It is contained in a supplement at the back of the book. The edition from which I learned the words of the Great Emancipator was printed in 1926.

So what, you say. The so what is that I have been, and you have been, and everyone has been, unconscionably deceived by those who have wanted, since our county was founded, to have it be a Christian nation when it is not and when it was not so founded.

Contained among those famous few words attributed to President Abraham Lincoln I quoted was the ringing phrase: "...that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom..."

There is more. It is magnificent use of the English language. It is part of our heritage. It has helped to define us as a nation and as a people.

And, as to the under God part, it is a lie.

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**Question: "Are you a Cartesian dualist?"**

What Lincoln actually wrote and, may we not therefore presume, actually said was, "...that this nation shall have a new birth of freedom...."

Shocked? You should be. I was. The under God appears in almost every printed version of the Address. It appears chiseled into the white marble murals of the Lincoln Memorial, completed in 1922, in our nation's capitol.

But it is a lie created by those who wish it were so.

This is from the web site of the Library of Congress (<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/gadd/gadrft.html>):

"Of the five known manuscript copies of the Gettysburg Address, the Library of Congress has two. President Lincoln gave one of these to each of his two private secretaries, John Nicolay and John Hay. The copy on exhibit, which belonged to Nicolay, is often called the "first draft" because it is believed to be the earliest copy that exists.

Considerable scholarly debate continues about whether the Nicolay copy is the "reading" copy. In 1894 Nicolay wrote that Lincoln had brought with him the first part of the speech, written in ink on Executive Mansion stationery, and that he had written the second page in pencil on lined paper before the dedication on November 19, 1863. Matching folds are still evident on the two pages, suggesting it could be the copy that eyewitnesses say Lincoln took from his coat pocket and read at the ceremony."....  
and

"The "second draft," probably made by Lincoln shortly after his return to Washington from Gettysburg, was given to John Hay, whose descendants donated both it and the Nicolay copy to the Library of Congress in 1916. There are numerous variations in words and punctuation between these two drafts. Because these variations provide clues into Lincoln's thinking and because these two drafts are the most closely tied to November 19, they continue to be consulted by scholars of the period."

Incredibly, the Library of Congress, on its web site, opines:

"However, one of the arguments supporting the contrary theory that the delivery text has been lost is that some of the words and phrases of the Nicolay copy do not match contemporaneous accounts. The words "under God," for example, are missing from the

phrase "that this nation [under God] shall have a new birth of freedom...." "

Under God isn't in the Hays copy either.

Can't you hear the newsmen of the time, in a crowd, in 1863, without tape recorders, VCRs, or even microphones, talking: What was that he said, One's Station? Oh, One Nation? What about it? Did he say something about God? Yeah, you think so. Sure, that's probably what he said, a Nation Under God. Or that's what he meant. That's what patriotic people want to hear. Damn rebels! Can we ask him? No, he's on his way back to Washington, and the paper's due out. What was that again? One Station Under God? Oh, One Nation Under God. Got it. Thanks Vern. Was that True Mirth? Oh, yeah, that's right, New Birth. That's great copy. Let's write it up.

The Library of Congress thoughtfully provides a "translation" of what Lincoln said at Gettysburg. They say he said, "...that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom..."

Dare we conclude that Lincoln did not say under God in the Gettysburg Address? That a mistake or a deliberate lie has been substituted for the truth? Is it possible that what he said is what he wrote, both before and after his Address at Gettysburg? And that what he said is what his handwritten words say? Such an idea is as radical as the notion that when Jesus said one should pray in their closet that Jesus meant one should pray in their closet.

Perhaps President Lincoln did not intend to include god in his Gettysburg Address. Just like the drafters of the Constitution of the United States did not intend to put god in the secular document that defined our freedoms. Just like the nation's money did not intend to have god on it. Just as the Pledge of Allegiance did not intend to have god in it.

No matter who doesn't like it and no matter who wants it to be otherwise.

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Answer: "I think therefore I'm not."

## Lying About Lincoln for God

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"Yes, I am familiar with the accounts that say he said god.

I have given some talks myself wherein I changed the wording of the written text at the time of delivery, so I can accept the possibility that Abe might have done so. But, were I to later give someone a handwritten copy of the text of what I in fact said, I think I probably would make the modification to the written text I provided for purposes of history. Don't you reckon Mr. Lincoln might have felt the same way?

Would you rather trust what Honest Abe said he said or what some on the take fundangelical scrivener said he said?

This is one question to which it may be truly impossible to ever know for certain the correct answer."

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213 E. Indiana St., Chicago. 10 Copies for 30 cents.

### ABRAHAM LINCOLN

#### HIS RELIGION

BY ROBERT N. REEVES.

SOME years ago Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll engaged in a controversy with General Charles H. T. Collis over the religion of Abraham Lincoln. Colonel Ingersoll contributed but two short letters to the discussion, as it soon became apparent to him that General Collis knew little or nothing of the real life of Lincoln. These two letters, however, together with the letters of General Collis, have recently been published by the latter in a little pamphlet entitled, "The Religion of Abraham Lincoln," in which is included also a letter from General Daniel E. Sickles and one from the Hon. Oliver S. Munsell, both of whom, like General Collis, attempt to prove that Abraham Lincoln was a Christian.

I have read carefully these letters of General Collis and his friends, and, beyond finding that Lincoln had great faith in God, that he prayed occasionally, and attended church now and then while in Washington, I am unable to discover any positive evidence that Lincoln was a Christian. On the contrary, from the weakness of the evidence presented, and upon which they base their belief that Lincoln was a Christian, I am convinced that General Collis, General Sickles, and Mr. Munsell are in much the same position as those orthodox Christians who, as soon as a man has attained some degree of fame in the political, scientific or literary world, insist on making him a Christian in spite of all evidence to the contrary.

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**Next Issue:**  
More on Lincoln's Freethought background,  
his "little book" on Christianity and his border  
line atheism.

## Upcoming events:

Visit [www.rationalists.org](http://www.rationalists.org) or call 982-8687 for more information.

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**April 5, 9:00 AM meeting at the Burger King at Lovell road and Pellissippi Pkwy  
Highway Clean Up**

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**April 6, 5:00 PM at Barns and Noble, Kingston Pike  
Book: The Future of Ideas by Lawrence Lessig**

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**April 13, 10:30 AM at The Candy Factory, World's Fair Park  
Roundtable discussion on "Medical Ethics: Abortion and Stem-Cell Research"**

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**April 20, 10:30 AM at The Candy Factory, World's Fair Park  
Topic: "Using the F (feminism) word in philosophy"**

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