Explorations in American History:
In God We Trust
Explorations in American History:  
In God We Trust

- From the ancient Greeks and Old Testament Jews, the character of a people’s leader has been closely associated with the well-being of his subjects.

- According to Founding Fathers, the American experiment relied on the character of the populous and the leaders they choose.

- From 1776 to the present, increasing religious and cultural pluralism has made America’s civic religion more expansive.

- Evolved from an evangelical consensus to Protestantism-in-general, to Christianity-in-general (inclusion of Roman Catholics) to the Judeo-Christian ethic and finally to a general sort of deism.
Explorations in American History: In God We Trust

- Going on its third century, America has operated with the conviction that it has a unique calling from God (commonplace among nations).
- America was settled by people fleeing European imposition of state-established religions in search of the freedom to express their beliefs.
- Americans rejected the maxim, *Cuius regio, eius religio*
- John Winthrop (right), described America’s potential as “a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people upon us.”
- A nation with the soul of a church.
- Civic religion justified Manifest Destiny
Explorations in American History:
In God We Trust

- Separation of church and state.
- First amendment prohibited establishment of a state religion.
- Country’s founding documents provided no guidelines for how a republic of national, state, and local governments should interact with multiple religions.
- The Second Great Awakening (1820s and 30s) imposed evangelizing Protestantism across a broad spectrum of activities and policies in the public sphere.
- 1893 Supreme Court decision declared, [T]his is a Christian nation.”
- In the post-World War II years, the Supreme Court significantly affected the place for organized religion in America’s public sphere.

The First Amendment
Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.
Explorations in American History: In God We Trust

• Constitution made the President the commander-in-chief, but the office has often been invested with the responsibility of pastor-in-chief.
• Every inaugural address, except George Washington’s incredibly brief second one, has invoked a supreme being and asked his blessings on the nation.
• Men who occupied or sought to occupy the Oval Office have been accused of pandering to religious groups or sentiments to further distinctly secular and political ambitions.
Explorations in American History: In God We Trust

- Scholars divided presidents into three categories of denominational attributes.
- 1. Goal-oriented presidents, most Congregationalist or Unitarian traditions and leaned towards deism (included Jefferson and Lincoln);
- 2. “Legalist” Presidents who came from theologically conservative Christian denominations (Theodore Roosevelt, Wilson, and Eisenhower) and interpreted the national cause as a righteous crusade.
- 3. Situational ethicists” who grew up in Episcopal churches or elite families and tried to find a middle ground (Washington, Franklin Roosevelt, and Kennedy).
Explorations in American History:
In God We Trust

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LAvHHTt2czU
Explorations in American History: In God We Trust

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hwQWuQVE6sw
Explorations in American History: In God We Trust

- Starting in the 1770s, increasing numbers of slaves converted to evangelical religions, e.g. Methodist and Baptist.
- Christian message of equality before God, provided slaves hope.
- Many southern white clergymen preached a message of strict obedience.
- Owners feared if slaves worshiped independently they would plot rebellion.
Explorations in American History: In God We Trust

- After end of slave trade in 1810, slave population increased naturally and an African-American culture grew.
- After 1863 Emancipation, slaves and ex-slaves challenged to organize religious communities.
- Free northern blacks worked to bring their nascent churches to their freed Southern brethren.
- In previous 70 years two African-American religious traditions had moved far apart, in terms of both theology and ritual.
- Black churched North and South found common cause in opposition to Jim Crow.
Explorations in American History: In God We Trust

• A missionary effort by northern Black churches and white evangelicals proved enormously successful.
• Financed and built new Black churches and schools.
• Helped to increase Black literacy.
• South to North migration in the 1890s taxed northern stretched the churches’ resources.
• Proliferation of urban ghetto storefront churches.
• African-American secular leaders saw in the churches a place to rally the population and as places to organize for social, cultural, and political redress.
In 1955, the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, AL welcomed its new minister Martin Luther King Jr. Arrived at his new position almost simultaneously with Rosa Parks’ refusal to leave her seat on a city bus. Barely 26-years-old, he organized the Montgomery bus boycott of 1955. Raised in an activist family. Studied Thoreau’s and Gandhi’s non-violent and passive-resistance tactics.
Explorations in American History: In God We Trust

- On November 23, 1956, the Supreme Court ended segregated public transport.
- Boycott placed King in the national spotlight.
- Assumed leadership of the nascent civil rights movement.
- With Ralph Abernathy, King founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), an organization dedicated to fighting Jim Crow segregation.
- By 1960, the nonviolent Civil Rights Movement had gained strong momentum and public support.
- Staged sit-ins and freedom rides.
Explorations in American History: In God We Trust

- King devolved power and responsibilities to new organizations which arranged ongoing campaigns.
- The courts and federal government appeared to support civil rights movement.
- Slowly the wall between races was being torn down.
- Set a goal of a federal law banning racial discrimination in all public accommodations and in employment.
- President Kennedy indicated support.
- In 1963, Dr. King led massive march on Washington D.C.
Explorations in American History: In God We Trust

• http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABklm8KLrqU
Explorations in American History: In God We Trust

- After march, church burnings and bombings increased.
- Kennedy’s arms-length support changed to President Lyndon Johnson’s active embrace of civil rights goals.
- Signed Civil Rights Act in 1964.
- Same year Dr. King won the Nobel Peace Prize.
- New focus on voting rights.
- In March 1965, Dr. King led a 50-mile, voting-rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama.
- Met with extreme police violence.
- Passage of 1965 Voting Rights Act.
• After 1965, Dr. King came out against Vietnam War and economic injustice.
• On 3 April 1968, traveled to Memphis, TN to support sanitation workers’ strike.
• Warned by colleagues of an intractable situation and violent atmosphere; urged not to go.
Explorations in American History: In God We Trust

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0FiCxZKuv8
Explorations in American History: In God We Trust

• (Top left) On 3 April 1968, Dr. King arrived in Memphis, TN to support sanitation workers’ strike.

• (Bottom left) On April 4th, James Earl Ray shot and murdered Dr. King.

• In 1986, Dr. King’s birthday first celebrated as a national holiday.
Explorations in American History: In God We Trust

- The first of the British colonies to take hold in North America was Jamestown (1607).
- Fortune seekers were more interested in finding gold than farming.
- Britain’s religious upheavals of the 16th and 17th centuries spawned the Puritans who sought to reform the Church of England from within.
- Anglican establishment feared Puritan reforms would create political divisions.
- Puritans comprised the next British colonials.
Explorations in American History: In God We Trust

• Leaving England first for Holland, in 1620, 101 Leyden Puritans, with land secured from the Virginia Company set sail aboard the *Mayflower*.

• Blown north by a storm, the Puritans decided to organize their own government via the Mayflower Compact (left).
In 1630, another group of primarily Puritans founded the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

With their charter in hand, power rested not in London but in Boston at their General Court.

The “freemen’ who sat in the General Court had to be Puritans.

Puritan orthodoxy inspired dissent—Roger Williams left to form Rhode Island.

A colony which installed separation of church and state and freedom of religion.
In 1632, Calvert family established Maryland as a colonial refuge for English Catholics but also welcomed immigrant Protestants. Mid-17th century religious and civil conflict in England limited immigration. In early British colonies groups vied for political as well as religious primacy. Maryland’s tolerance rebuked during Cromwell’s protectorate and restored in 1650.
Explorations in American History: In God We Trust

- Not all new New World colonies religiously founded.
- After 1664 New York retained New Netherlands’ commitment to commerce.
- North and South Carolina founded more as political experiments.
- Last colony, Georgia (1632) offered opportunity to England’s poor and imprisoned.
Explorations in American History: In God We Trust

In 1681 William Penn, a wealthy Quaker and friend of Charles II, received a large tract of land west of the Delaware River, which became known as Pennsylvania (Penn’s Woods).

Penn recruited England’s religious dissenters—Quakers, Mennonites, Amish, Moravians, and Baptists.

Founded Philadelphia, the "City of Brotherly Love."

Penn unique in his commitment to equality—women’s rights and fair treatment of native Americans.
For a long time the United States was said to be run by WASPs—White Anglo-Saxon Protestants.

Puritans believed in Predestination—an all-powerful God set individual’s fate who could do nothing to change it.

Those chosen by God to be saved — the elect — would experience Conversion.

In 1636, Harvard College established to train Puritan ministers

For economic purposes, puritans allowed some Dissenters to live in the Massachusetts Bay Colony.
Explorations in American History: In God We Trust

- 14,000 Puritans left England for Massachusetts as part of their “Great Migration.”
- The public sphere in the Puritan world was “men only.”
- Preached the soul had two parts, the immortal masculine half, and the mortal feminine half.
- Church attendance mandatory.
- As they believed they did God’s work, Puritans allowed little internal dissent.
- Punishment meted out to persons who strayed.
Explorations in American History:
In God We Trust
• Anne Hutchison (right) dissented from Puritan dogma.
• Claimed rigid instruction deviated from belief in “Predestination.”
• Massachusetts Bay authorities feared dissent would spawn anarchy.
• Hutchinson seen as threat to entire Puritan experiment and arrested for heresy.
• Found guilty and banished from Massachusetts Bay in 1637.
• Hutchison case sewed seeds for 1692 Salem Witch Trials.
Explorations in American History:
In God We Trust
Explorations in American History: In God We Trust

- American theological scholars in 19th century came out strongly against Charles Darwin’s, *On the Origin of Species*.
- In 1874, Calvinist theologian Charles Hodge published *What is Darwinism?*, and declared Darwinism to be synonymous with atheism.
- Refused to believe natural laws responsible for the complexity on display throughout creation.
- Hodge not a zealot, but opposed evolution being taught at university.
Explorations in American History: In God We Trust

- Confrontation between modernists and traditionalists during 1920s begat a wave of religious revivalism.
- (Left) John Scopes (left) walks beneath "Read Your Bible" banner at his 1925 trial for illegally teaching evolution.
Explorations in American History: In God We Trust

• By 1925, traditionalists had succeeded in getting legislation introduced in 15 states to ban the teaching of evolution (Tennessee in February).

• (Right) Famed attorney Clarence Darrow (left) and 3-time Democratic presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan led the defense and prosecution teams at the Scopes Monkey Trial.
• Carnival atmosphere prevailed in Dayton during trial.
• Presiding judge suggested moving case to a tent to accommodate 20,000 onlookers.
• First trial broadcast on radio.
• Over Darrow’s objection, the trial opened with a prayer.
• Defense made initial motion to quash charges on constitutional grounds.
• Defense did not seek Scopes’ acquittal, but a higher court ruling on laws’ invalidity.
Explorations in American History: In God We Trust

• Education in the higher branches" (Wall Street Journal 1925)

• Opening statements included, Bryan’s, "if evolution wins, Christianity goes,” and Darrow’s, "Scopes isn't on trial; civilization is on trial."

• Judge ruled scientific evidence irrelevant.

• Defense called Bryan to the stand as an expert on the bible; he accepted.

• Became one of the most dramatic courtroom scenes in the history of the state.
Explorations in American History: In God We Trust

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtNdYsoool8
Explorations in American History: In God We Trust

• Darrow questions Bryan during the Scopes Trial (July 20, 1925)
• Bryan denied opportunity to deliver a closing speech he had worked on for weeks.
• The jury complied with Darrow’s request, found Scopes guilty, and Judge Raulston fined him $100.
• In 1926, Tennessee Supreme Court reversed the decision of the Dayton court on a technicality—not on constitutional grounds as Darrow had hoped.
• Scopes trial did not end evolution debate.
In 2004, science teachers in Dover, PA instructed to inform high school biology students suggesting an alternative to Darwin's theory of evolution called intelligent design.

Teachers refused to comply.

Testimony from expert witnesses responded to the questions, "What is evolution?" and "Is intelligent design a scientifically valid alternative?"

Judge ruled decided for the plaintiffs, and wrote that intelligent design "cannot uncouple itself from its creationist, and thus religious, antecedents."