

Ask The Tennessee Mockingbird

by June Griffin

Great Debates of the Twentieth Century



"She dipped her pen in controversy"

tions of moment. National boundaries have been argued, political philosophies hammered out by orators filled with the spirits of patriotism or righteousness or even wrongness, for that matter. Their arguments, bound in high and noble principles, have held their audiences in deep thought and consideration. Writings and commentaries recorded the annals of these awesome topics.

As late as 1892, the Supreme Court of the

United States, after reviewing hundreds of documents and records, supremely concluded that this is a Christian nation (Trinity vs. USA). However, after the World Parliament of Religions in 1893 in Chicago, we have debates of a different sort and the Courts have had to muddle through lesser and preponderous, yeah, supremely stupid considerations.

Infamous atheists took to the streets with the inane question: Was there really a God?

1913 - Can the Federal Government tax a man's in-

come and set a precedent unheard of in civilized America. Indeed, can a man keep what he earns? (The courts said a resounding "NO" to the Sixteenth Amendment, yet a lawless Congress did it anyway.)

Then in 1925: Did Man come from monkeys?

The floodgates of insensibility were now opened.

Is there a difference between men and women?

Should we win a war?

Should God's Eternal Law be publicly displayed? (Stone v. Graham - "If the

posted copies of the Ten Commandments are to have

any effect at all, it will be to induce the school children to read, meditate upon, perhaps to venerate and obey the Commandments. This is not a permissible state objective under the Establishment Clause." 1980) !!!

Can a surgeon torture an unborn infant in part of a birth and be held unaccountable?

Can you hire a person by their qualifications and skills?

Can you hire who you want to?

Can you ride a bicycle without a helmet?

Can you drive a car with-

out a social security number?

Or can you fish without a social security number?

Or can you hunt without a social security number?

Can two people of the same sex get married?

Maybe you can add to this list of uncommon and nonsensical premises of debate.

May the Lord help us from cowards whose incompetence's, higher learning and attendant fears have forced their stupid ways upon the people of common sense.

The famous superintendent of schools in California, Dr. Max Rafferty, in the 1960's, stated: "To adjust to the twentieth century is to come to terms with madness."

Down through the centuries, there have raged great debates around ques-

The First Amendment to the US Constitution..... www.firstamendmentcenter.org

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.

— *The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution*

The First Amendment was written because at America's inception, citizens demanded a guarantee of their basic freedoms.

Our blueprint for personal freedom and the hallmark of an open society, the First

Amendment protects freedom of speech, press, religion, assembly and petition.

Without the First Amendment, religious minorities could be persecuted, the government might well establish a national religion, protesters could be silenced, the press could not criticize government, and citizens could not mobilize for social change.

When the U.S. Constitution was signed on Sept. 17, 1787, it did not contain the essential freedoms now outlined in the Bill of Rights, because many of the Framers viewed their inclusion as unnecessary. However, after vigorous debate, the Bill of Rights was adopted. The first

freedoms guaranteed in this historic document were articulated in the 45 words written by James Madison that we have come to know as the First Amendment.

The Bill of Rights — the first 10 amendments to the Constitution — went into effect on Dec. 15, 1791, when the state of Virginia ratified it, giving the bill the majority of ratifying states required to protect citizens from the power of the federal government.

The First Amendment ensures that "if there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation, it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be or-

thodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein," as Justice Robert Jackson wrote in the 1943 case *West Virginia v. Barnette*.

And as Justice William Brennan wrote in *New York Times v. Sullivan* in 1964, the First Amendment provides that "debate on public issues ... [should be] ... uninhibited, robust, and wide-open."

However, Americans vigorously dispute the application of the First Amendment.

Most people believe in the right to free speech, but debate whether it should cover

flag-burning, hard-core rap and heavy-metal lyrics, tobacco advertising, hate speech, pornography, nude dancing, solicitation and various forms of symbolic speech. Many would agree to limiting some forms of free expression, as seen in the First Amendment Center's State of the First Amendment survey reports.

Most people, at some level, recognize the necessity of religious liberty and toleration, but some balk when a religious tenet of a minority religion conflicts with a generally applicable law or with their own religious faith. Many Americans see the need to separate the state

from the church to some extent, but decry the banning of school-sponsored prayer from public schools and the removal of the Ten Commandments from public buildings.

Further, courts wrestle daily with First Amendment controversies and constitutional clashes, as evidenced by the free-press vs. fair-trial debate and the dilemma of First Amendment liberty principles vs. the equality values of the 14th Amendment.

Such difficulties are the price of freedom of speech and religion in a tolerant, open society.