

### **Third Place: Malachi Wang**

Historically, the United States has been referred to as an “experiment in self-governance”. Compared to the American Revolution, the French Revolution is the foremost example in terms of timing and scale. However, an important difference between the two movements is their philosophy toward religion. The French removed religion from state matters, while the Founding Fathers believed that religion would be necessary for self-governance. Furthermore, with the recent American social movements toward secularization, one might ask, how will this event change our ability to self-govern?

At first, freedom and restraint appear to be opposites of one another. However, in our civilized society, the use of restraint in the form of law and its enforcement actually gives us liberty. For example, the laws against murder, a form of restraint, give us the liberty to live without the fear of being killed. The passage “...Then you have to keep the laws of God, for God’s law is the only thing that gives you the right to be free...” (Wilder, *Little Town on the Prairie*, 76) states that restraint (referred to as laws of God), gives people liberty. Another passage reads, “...in America, it is religion that leads to enlightenment; it is the observance of divine laws that guides man to freedom...” (Tocqueville, 42). These texts argue that the vitality of religion in self-governance comes from the laws and restraints that they produce. Tocqueville then explains the differences between civilized liberty under the law to corrupt liberty that is “inconsistent with authority” and “impatient to all restraint.” To conclude, restraint is actually a requirement for liberty.

The idea that restraint is required for liberty is valid today. An important recent event to consider is the “Defund the Police” movement. As the police play a major role in law

enforcement, defunding them leads to a reduced ability to enforce the law. As a result, crime rates increased throughout the country. Without restraint from law enforcement, people's rights to life and safety got violated. In a broader sense, we still need restraint and authority to support our liberty.

As our country moves away from religion, it's probable that we will move farther away from restraint (e.g. the law). Increases in sexual freedom, incarceration rates, and crime rates are examples of movement away from restraint. Furthermore, all of these values are hostile or contrary to Christian beliefs. It's apparent that this push towards secularization leads to less restraint. With less restraint, there will almost certainly be less liberty. As a result, our ability to self-govern would deteriorate the further we went away from religion.

When looking at modern philosophical and social movements that tend toward secularization in America, one may wonder about its impact on politics. By observing the existing effects of such movements in politics, we can find a fairly accurate answer: they also tend away from restraint (leading to less liberty). In turn, we can conclude that movements toward secularization will likely ruin our ability to self-govern, showing the vitality of religion in self-governance.