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Secular Humanism and Atheism beyond Progressive Secularism

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Abstract

The organized atheist and secular humanist movements have long operated under the premise of secularism progressing in American society. In the last

two decades, however, progressive secularism has come under increasing criticism. This article examines how atheists and secular humanists—collectively, “freethinkers”—have responded to the failure of secularism to become a dominant force in the United States and how they have rethought their role and strategy from that of acting as the secular vanguard to assuming a subcultural identity and engaging in defensive competition in order to find a place in American society. They have done so by adopting three strategies: (1) creating a niche for secular humanism among the unchurched and “secular seekers”; (2) mimicking and adapting various aspects of evangelicalism, even as they target this movement as their main antagonist; and (3) making use of minority discourse and identity politics.

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