UNDERSTANDING THE PROMOTION OF
BIBLE LITERACY CLASSES IN U.S. PUBLIC SCHOOLS

A Thesis in

Educational Theory and Policy

by

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ABSTRACT

Efforts to promote religion in the American public education system have been going on since the initial founding the American schooling system. However, as a result of the Bible wars of the 1800’s and the Supreme Court rulings in *Everson v. Board of Education of the Township of Ewing* (1947), *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), and in *School District of Abington Township, Pennsylvania v. Schempp* (1963), confusion persists around what can and cannot be done with regard to the Bible in the public schools. Thus, the topic of religion in schools has been met with much controversy. Recently, efforts to promote an elective course studying the history and literature of the Old and New Testaments have been met with both strong support and fierce opposition. The current study seeks to explore the promotion of Bible literacy classes as proposed in the *Bible Literacy Act* of the *Project Blitz* initiative. Interviews were conducted with major stakeholders of the *Project Blitz* initiative, as well as members of watchdog organizations, academia, and state legislatures. In addition, documents were gathered from mainstream media outlets. These data were used to examine the purpose, the public’s concern, and the curriculum preferred in these Bible literacy classes. Following this examination, in contrast to the promotion of Bible literacy classes, the closing pages of the study propose recommendations, such as the promotion of religious literacy classes, which are much more vital to the American populace as society becomes more globalized.

*Keywords: Project Blitz, Bible Literacy Act, Bible literacy classes, qualitative study*
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Chapter 1
Introduction

The public education system in the United States has a history of religious and political tension. What makes this system so contested is, at its foundation, the public education system is designed for the mass schooling of the next generation of Americans: To learn about our country’s history and government, to foster students’ potential, and to learn the necessary skills in order to successfully transition from the school house into civil society and the workforce. However, what constitutes necessary knowledge and skills is the subject of much controversy. Topics such as sex education, history curriculum, and the teaching of evolution consistently provoke fierce opposition from those who feel as though their core values are being attacked. As a result, numerous legal battles and Supreme Court cases have discussed a wide range of issues found within the U.S. public education system. Of these issues, one of the most contested topics involves whether or not religion belongs in the classroom and, if so, in what capacity?

To begin answering this question, I will first examine the differences between the topics of religious literacy and biblical literacy. Specifying these definitions will allow for a more focused examination into this highly contested topic. In doing so, I will provide perspective into the motives and agendas of the individuals that I have had the opportunity to speak with regarding religious literacy and biblical literacy in the U.S. public education system and the organizations those individuals work with. Thereby, I hope to provide readers with an understanding of the debate surrounding religion in the public schools. In addition, I hope to contribute to existing scholarship on the movement to promote Bible literacy, which has been sparse.
**What is “Religious Literacy”?**

Before proceeding, it is important both to define “religious literacy” and to distinguish it from a political movement to advance “Bible literacy.” Given the scope of religious literacy, one may surmise that “Bible literacy” is a part of this curriculum, as any credible curriculum in comparative religions would provide students with core knowledge of the Judeo-Christian Bible. On the contrary, Bible literacy is aimed at providing students with the core knowledge of Judeo-Christianity, while leaving out other religions, including Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism, or Hinduism.

The meaning of religious literacy builds on E.D. Hirsch’s book, *Cultural Literacy* (Hirsch, 1987). Hirsch (1987) set out to warn others about the civic problems awaiting a culturally illiterate society. He documented how unaware the U.S. population is of cultural idioms, historical dates, and names and concluded his book with a dictionary of information that “every American needs to know” (Hirsch, 1987). Given the influence of the Bible in history and culture in many parts of the world, it is not surprising that numerous names, dates, and idioms Hirsch provides are religious and/or have religious origins (Hirsch, 1987). For example, among the phrases Hirsch included are “good Samaritan,” “wolves in sheep’s clothing,” and “sweat of your brow,” which are all idioms derived from the Judeo-Christian scriptures (Hirsch, 1987).

Hirsch hoped that inclusion of the dictionary—which failed to provide readers with any context or definitions—would spur the nation to rally behind a return to the teaching of “core knowledge” one needs in order to communicate effectively with a globalizing society (Hirsch, 1987; Prothero, 2007). Stephen Prothero, Chair of the Department of Religion at Boston University, then applied this definition of cultural literacy to his coined term, “religious literacy,” in his book, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—and Doesn’t* (2007).
However, unlike Hirsch, Prothero’s dictionary of idioms, terms, and names are defined quite extensively. By failing to do so, Hirsch’s book, which stresses the importance of comprehending cultural knowledge, becomes ironic as it is lacking explanations for phrases such as “you cannot serve God and Mammon” and “strain at a gnat and swallow a camel” (Hirsch, 1987). Prothero is thus a better starting point for readers who wish to understand the history of commonly used phrases in American society. Likewise, Prothero (2007) is an excellent starting point for readers who wish to learn more about the importance of religious literacy in American society.

**The Promotion of Bible Literacy**

In contrast to religious literacy, Bible literacy is the ability to read and sufficiently understand the Judeo-Christian Bible, as it pertains to literature, world events, and the impact the Bible has had throughout history. The importance of religious literacy has become overshadowed by the Christian-right’s effort to advance Bible literacy in the U.S. public school system. This advancement of biblical literacy is not a unique phenomenon. In Chapter 3, I discuss the United States education system’s long history of pursuing such an agenda. However, what is unique about this reemerging push for Bible literacy classes is the large initiative currently underway in American politics: *Project Blitz*. This initiative seeks to install Christian-right inspired legislation into most facets of American society. Legislation involving policy resolutions “favoring sexual intercourse only between a married man and woman;” and a “proclamation recognizing Christian Heritage Week” are just a few of the 25 pieces of model legislation, or counters to legislation, that make up the *Project Blitz* initiative (Report, n.d.). *Project Blitz* is mentioned frequently throughout this thesis, because it plays a key role in the current the *Bible Literacy Act*. A detailed examination
into *Project Blitz*, along with the organizations who sponsored its agenda, is discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

**A Roadmap for the Current Study**

In order to examine the current promotion of Bible literacy classes in the U.S., I have focused on the following research questions: (1) who authored the *Bible Literacy Act* found in *Project Blitz*; (2) what was the purpose of this curriculum; (3) why was there a focus on Bible literacy and not religious literacy; (4) was there any curriculum that the *Bible Literacy Act*’s stakeholders had in mind?

Chapter 2 will provide readers with the theoretical framework that serves as the foundation of the current study. This chapter provides theory relevant to understanding how solutions to societal problems are solved through the development of policy, and how this policy is then backed by “policy entrepreneurs”.

Chapter 3 presents the literature review. This entails a brief look at the history of how religion and the public schools were intertwined. Chapter 3 then provides legal context, including what the Constitution says about religion and the public schools and notable court cases, which provide the legal precedents on these topics. This current agenda regarding religion in schools is further explored as I review the main stakeholders of the *Project Blitz* initiative, along with the contemporary political clashes centered around the advancement of Bible literacy classes.

Chapter 4 explores the methodology that was used in conducting this qualitative study. In this chapter, I discuss my motives for conducting this research as a case study, how I went about collecting data, and the software I used to support the analysis of the data I had collected.
Chapter 5 presents the findings of my research. I draw on the data I collected and coded to shed light on my research questions and support my research findings. Quotes were derived from phone interviews that I had completed with the main stakeholders of the Bible Literacy Act and Project Blitz, a state legislator who sponsored the act in their state, and watchdog organizations who voice their concerns over this legislation.

Chapter 6, the final chapter of this thesis contains the discussion of what I had found throughout my research into the Bible Literacy Act of Project Blitz. Moreover, the discussion section notes limitations that I faced when completing this study, along with implications for further research into Bible literacy and religious literacy classes.

To grasp the foundation of Project Blitz, readers should be familiar with the following key words associated with this initiative: The Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation, WallBuilders, National Council on Bible Curriculum in the Public Schools, The National Legal Foundation, and the Bible Literacy Project. These terms will be examined in Chapter 3 of this thesis.
Chapter 2
Theoretical Framework

The current study employs John W. Kingdon’s multiple streams approach as the theoretical framework to understand the promotion of Bible literacy classes. Kingdon (1995) proposed that three independent streams work to influence policy by opening up (or capitalizing on) brief windows that allow for agenda setting to take place. These “policy windows,” are affected by uncontrollable events that affect society (e.g. natural disasters, mass-shootings, etc.) as well as rely on the problem stream, the policy stream, and the political stream, (Kingdon, 1995).

1) Problem stream: the problem stream involves matters that are raised by public awareness, national/global events, or are determined to be an issue, as deemed by legislators (Kingdon, 1995).
2) Policy stream: solutions to the problems society is facing. This stream contains the work of interest groups and experts whose proposed solutions may be logically possible, but not practical. As such, this stream requires the assistance of “policy entrepreneurs” who ascertain the required resources needed for these policies to become ratified (Kingdon, 1995).
3) Political stream: concerned with ideology and “national mood” (Kingdon, 1995).

Kingdon’s multiple streams approach can be applied to the promotion of Bible literacy classes: Perceiving a problem to be the abandonment of religious principles in American society, members of the Christian-right have acted as a policy entrepreneur and proposed alleviating this illiteracy through policies that would install Bible literacy classes in the public schools. To battle this perceived rise of secularism in society, the Christian-right (via Project Blitz) has compiled legislation seeking to alleviate this concern.

The Project Blitz initiative is the result of a policy window opening for the Christian-right to promote a Christian-centered agenda. One such cause for the opening of this policy window is the perceived moral hazard by members of the Christian-right, who feel as though the rise of
secularism in the United States is detrimental to society. This rise in secularism, as reported by *The Atlantic* in 2017, shows the percentage of Americans who are not religiously affiliated, has increased from 6 percent in 1992 to 22 percent in 2014 (Beinart, 2017). In addition to this, the sociologist W. Bradford Wilcox at the University of Virginia found that since the 1970’s, “…rates of religious attendance have fallen more than twice as much [underline in original source] among whites without a college degree as among those who graduated college” (Beinart, 2017). Correlated with this phenomenon was lack of economic success, as well as growing rates of pessimism, resentfulness, and family breakdown for “culturally conservative white Americans” (Beinart, 2017). Similarly, growing rates of divorce, addiction, and financial distress are found among white working-class Americans who did not attend religious services regularly (Beinart, 2017).

Moreover, according to a 2017 report published by the Public Religion Research Institute, “white Republicans who seldom or never attend religious services are 19 points less likely [italics added] than white Republicans who attend at least once a week to say that the American dream ‘still holds true’” (Breinart, 2017). However, despite the mantra that correlation does not lead to causation, the relationship between a growing secular population and increases in addiction, family breakdown, and financial distress, is perceived by the Christian right to foster the growth of a moral hazard in American society.
Chapter 3  
Literature Review

The following sections of the literature review will provide context for understanding religion in schools via both historical and legal sources. I will first discuss the *New England Primer* and various other textbooks that were used in colonial America and then transition into the Bible wars of the 19th century, which led to the rise of Catholic private schools. Following that, I examine the abandonment of religion in the public schools with the Supreme Court cases of *Everson v. Board of Education of the Township of Ewing* (1947), *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), and *School District of Abington Township, Pennsylvania v. Schempp* (1963). These three cases are largely responsible for the narrative that religion is not allowed in the public schools. This provides a jumping off point to explore the legal context surrounding Bible literacy in the U.S. public schools. After providing a legal framework, I consider the contemporary movements surrounding religious and biblical literacy.

The foundation of the American education system was established long before the ratification of the U.S. Constitution. Beginning in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1642, a law was promulgated for the purposes of educating children to “…understand the principles of religion and the capital laws of this country” (Spring, 1994). This law provided the basis for one of the most notable colonial-era laws—the “Satan Deluder Act” of 1647 (also referred to as the “Old” Satan Deluder Act) (Spring, 1994). Which mandated villages to create and support their own schools. The underlying motivations for these laws were to promote basic literacy and social order among the populace.
Desire for basic literacy gained momentum in the 16th Century, during the Protestant Reformation in Europe. At that time, the notion that the church was the sole means of reading and interpreting the scripture was challenged by new technology. This new technology, the printing press, allowed for religious scriptures to be spread throughout villages and even among members of the populace (Prothero, 2007). With this new technology came a radical shift: An understanding that individuals’ devotion to God rests on their ability to personally read the Bible, and that, in turn, required widespread literacy. Thus, colonists set out to make sure literacy was an available skill that members of the New World were able to acquire.

Similarly, in mimicking the environment in which they were already familiar, colonists also believed that the foundations of social order were garnered when one reads and carries out the principles taught in the Bible. From these principles, adopted from their European way of life, we begin to see just how intertwined education and religion were in the colonial-era. For if the colonies were to develop further, a standardized social order, based upon the leading means of morality and civility in society (i.e. the Bible), must be mandated and upheld by every village and colony in the New World. Such an adherence to the teachings found within the Bible was prevalent within the growing school movement, as schools began to seek curricular materials.

With the exception of the Judeo-Christian Bible, the first school book used by colonial students was the New England Primer. First published around the late 1600’s, the New England Primer was a textbook meant to teach students basic literacy by heavily relying on rote memorization and rhyming patterns of religious material. For example, in memorizing the letter “A”, students would recite the rhyme, “In Adam’s Fall/We Sinned all” (Prothero, 2007). Likewise, for the letter “B”, students would recite, “Heaven to find; The Bible Mind” (Prothero, 2007). The
New England Primer quickly became one of colonial America’s best-selling pieces of literature and continued to be used into the early 20th century (Prothero, 2007).

The next textbook, which would go on to surpass the New England Primer, was the American Spelling Book, commonly referred to as the “blue back speller” because of its vivid colors. Created by Noah Webster, publisher of the popular dictionary series, Webster was dedicated to the pursuit of a common language among the vast colonies in America. As such, his blue back speller was a standardized textbook meant to teach students similar words, pronunciations, and biblical lessons (Prothero, 2007). While keeping with the religious themes like that of the New England Primer, the blue back speller centered around morality more than theology. The blue back speller asked students to live a life of mercy, justice, gratitude, and a host of other positive traits and emphasizing that the fate of the nation relied on morality (Prothero, 2007).

The third major textbook in American history, the McGuffey Reader, expanded upon the need to teach children biblical lessons, but also began to increase in difficulty—which was an uncommon characteristic of textbooks at the time (Bohning, 1986). Unlike the New England Primer and the blue back speller, the McGuffey Reader was more like a textbook we would see today, than a simple book dedicated to the memorization of biblical characters, verses, and lessons. This textbook provided teachers with suggestions on how to teach the subject material, a learning process, which guides students to more difficult content, and the inclusion of questions to be given to students at the end of each lesson (Bohning, 1986). For these reasons, the McGuffey Reader would go onto to sell over 120 million copies and become one of the best-selling books throughout the course of American history (Bohning, 1986).
Following in Webster’s footsteps in seeking to promote a standardized textbook, William Holmes McGuffey, for whom the *McGuffey Reader* is named, introduced biblical lessons and stories through “folksy translations” (Prothero, 2007). For example, when discussing the *Ten Commandments*, the *McGuffey Reader* presented this content through rhyme:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Thou no gods shall have but me.} \\
\text{Before no idol bend the knee.} \\
\text{Take not the name of God in vain.} \\
\text{Dare not the sabbath day profane.} \quad \text{(Prothero, 2007).}
\end{align*}
\]

These textbooks all relied on biblical lessons, characters, verses, and themes as a means of teaching students. Moreover, these biblical elements centered around Puritan and Protestant ideology. This ideology stirred controversy, which was exacerbated by the growing number of Catholics who were immigrating into America from Europe. Religious tensions between Catholics and Protestants erupted during the mid-1800’s in what are referred to as the “Bible wars.” These were metaphorical and literal wars, as several individuals were murdered (Fessenden, 2005).

One such conflict began to boil over in Cincinnati, Ohio. In 1842, Catholic parents, under the auspices of John Purcell, Archbishop of Cincinnati, publicly opposed the use of the King James Bible and other curriculum in the public school system. This opposition was on the grounds that the use of such curriculum was Anti-Catholic in nature (Fessenden, 2005). However, school leaders—most of whom were Protestant—stayed the course and kept the King James Bible in the school system on the grounds that the teaching of the King James Bible was nonsectarian. After nearly three decades of on-going disputes, litigation seeking a resolution was heard by the Ohio Supreme Court in 1869.

The Ohio Supreme Court, in 1872, ruled in favor of the plaintiffs (i.e. the Catholic community), who sought to remove the Bible as curriculum in Cincinnati (Fessenden, 2005). In
response to the growing fears of the Catholic presence, Protestants focused their efforts on promoting a moral education, instead of an education that is explicitly religious in nature (Fessenden, 2005). Perceiving a growing threat that the public-schools were at risk of secularization, Joseph Marsh, Professor at Baptist Pacific University, sought the assistance of the Oregon State Teachers’ Association in 1884, in order to retain Bible reading in Oregon public schools by insisting that (Fessenden, 2005):

[T]here must be a religious basis to our educational system...This does not involve either cant or sectarianism. It involves the recognition of certain facts and laws relating as closely and as scientifically to our moral nature as the laws of physical attraction and chemical affinity to the objects of sense. (Fessenden, 2005).

As a result of Protestant efforts to, “…demonstrate the compatibility of the Bible with increasingly secular education…”, many states would go on to pass legislation that required Bible reading in public schools (Fessenden, 2005, p. 807). Among the 10 states ratifying such legislation were Pennsylvania (1913), Alabama (1919), Georgia (1921), Kentucky (1924), and Ohio (1925) (Fessenden, 2005).

Understanding the historical events that promoted Bible reading legislation in schools provides context for the arduous legal battles surrounding the U.S. public school system and religion. In most cases, court rulings are not conducted as unprovoked attacks on religious expression. Instead, they are used to resolve past legislation that had been ratified as a means of establishing one religion over another.

**Legal Context**

An examination of court cases that contribute to the widespread and often incorrect interpretations regarding religion in the public schools would warrant an entire book. Hence, the
following section provides only a brief glimpse into some of the court cases that often get cited in discussions of religion in the public-school system. I set the context for these court cases with a brief overview of both the Establishment Clause and with the Free Exercise Clause of the U.S. Constitution.

**Establishment Clause.** Found within the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, the Establishment Clause is a declaration that, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof…” (U.S. Constitution.). The Establishment Clause is the statute referenced in Jefferson’s famous phrase, “…a wall of separation of church and State” (Alexander & Alexander, 2019).

**Free Exercise Clause.** Also included in the First Amendment, the Free Exercise Clause of the U.S. Constitution ensures that all members of the populace are guaranteed the protection to hold any religious beliefs and to act on those beliefs as they see fit. However, despite the founding fathers’ best intentions, these two clauses prove to be in a perpetual state of conflict, as it is up to the legal system to decide what is the proper balance between the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause. This balance can often be seen in statutes where the Establishment Clause may be violated, but in ruling in the affirmative, the Supreme Court must be conscious that doing so will not violate the rights afforded under the Free Exercise Clause. For example, in striking down statutes that encourage Bible reading and/or prayer in the public schools, the Supreme Court must be conscious that in doing so, it is not infringing on anyone’s religious expression.

*Everson v. Board of Education of the Township of Ewing (1947).* Prior to the Everson decision, the Establishment Clause was only applied by the Supreme Court to federal matters. The Everson decision dealt with the use of government funds as a means of reimbursing parents the
transportation fees for sending their children to nearby parochial schools (330 U.S. 1). The argument for the basis of the lawsuit is that government aid to parochial schools creates excessive entanglement between a government body and a religious institution. However, as per the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace & World Affairs, a state government “…cannot exclude individuals from receiving generally available public welfare benefits just because they are members of a certain religious faith” ("Everson," n.d.). In ruling in favor of the defendants, the reimbursement plan authorized by the State of New Jersey was not deemed a violation of the Establishment Clause, as this government aid came solely in the form of promoting equal accessibility to student transportation (“Everson,” n.d.). Thus, Everson proves to be a landmark Supreme Court decision for setting precedent that the Establishment Clause of the U.S. Constitution may be applied to state law.

Engel v. Vitale (1962). The Engel v. Vitale ruling, with assistance from the School District of Abington Township, Pennsylvania v. Schempp (1963), contributed to widespread misunderstanding that U.S. public schools were to be without God. In a 6-1 ruling, the Supreme Court ruled that sanctioned prayer was in violation of the Establishment Clause even if the act itself (i.e. prayer) was completely voluntary (370 U.S. 421). Moreover, the act of a government entity authorizing prayer in the public schools was unconstitutional. From this, the Supreme Court declared that a government body has no business in the creation and implementation of prayers in the public-school system, even if these prayers were non-denominational.

School District of Abington Township, Pennsylvania v. Schempp (1963). Together with the Engel case, the Court’s ruling in Abington that state-sanctioned Bible readings were in violation of the Establishment Clause, was thought to be a one-two-punch to proponents of religion in the
public-school system. On the contrary, these back-to-back rulings were not meant to be fatal blows to religion in the public-school system but were instead intended to forbid any governmental body from enforcing and/or authorizing religious demonstration. The Supreme Court in these cases neither “outlawed” personal prayer nor reading one’s Bible while on school grounds, for these proscriptions would be a violation of one’s free exercise.

*Lemon v. Kurtzman (1971).* In *Lemon,* the Supreme Court outlined a three-pronged test to determine if a violation of the *Establishment Clause* has occurred by examining the *purpose,* *effect,* and degree of *entanglement* of a statute/event in question (403 U.S. 602). Using these criteria, the Supreme Court determined that:

1) *The statute must have a secular purpose.* (403 U.S. 602)
2) *[The Statute’s] principal or primary effect must be one that neither advances nor inhibits religion.* (403 U.S. 602)
3) *[The Statute] must not foster excessive government entanglement with religion.* (403 U.S. 602)

The Supreme Court’s *Lemon* test has provided guidance in determining the constitutionality of a statute entailing religion in schools. Yet, there is no legal precedence requiring the *Lemon* test, as the complexity of a topic like religion in the public schools at times requires a different lens to view the situation present. For example, there have been some cases in which the Supreme Court has moved away from the *Lemon* test, such as in the cases of *Lynch v. Donnelly (1984)*—which looked at school endorsement of religious practice (465 U.S. 668)—and *Lee v. Weisman (1992)*—which examined student coercion to partake in religious expression (505 U.S. 577). For this reason, an examination into religion and the U.S. education is not complete without inclusion of *Lemon* and its landmark test.
Mozert v. Hawkins (1987). Mozert was a case decided by the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in the Sixth Circuit, in which a coalition of parents declared that their freedom of expression was being denied by the school district (827 F.2d 1058). The parents asserted that the school district was requiring students to read a series of books, the *Holt* series, whose subject matter was deemed offensive to the plaintiffs’ religious beliefs (Michael, 1988). Initially, this case was ruled in favor of the plaintiffs by a district court, which ordered that the local school boards (i.e. Hawkins County Public Schools, Tennessee) allow for parents to opt-out of this required reading series and to instruct their children with reading material in accordance with the Tennessee Home Schooling Statute (Michael, 1988). However, this decision was then overturned on appeal by the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. The court stated that requiring students to study a foundational reading series does not create an unconstitutional burden for students when these individuals are not required to either confirm or deny the religious beliefs they are being exposed to or their own personal convictions (827 F.2d 1058; Michael, 1988). Hence, there was no endorsement of these religious beliefs by the school board, nor was the school district attempting to interpret the reading material for the students in the hopes of proselytization. Thus, this case set the precedent that schools may teach controversial subject matters without a violation of the First Amendment.

**Contemporary Context**

In his 2005 book, *Does God belong in the Public Schools?* the legal scholar, Kent Greenawalt, explores the constitutionality of issues ranging from school prayer and moments of silence to religious clubs and the teaching of intelligent design. In addition, Greenawalt discusses the limits the Constitution has set on where religion may fit into the U.S. public education system (Greenawalt, 2005). In examining this topic, Greenawalt reviews the Supreme Court case of *School
District of Abington Township, Pennsylvania v. Schempp (1963), in which the Supreme Court stated, “...one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization” (374 U.S. 203; cited in Greenawalt, 2005, p. 19). Justice Clark, in delivering the opinion of the court, went on to say that,

...the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities. Nothing we have said here indicates that such study of the Bible or of religion, when presented objectively as part of a secular program of education, may not be effected consistently with the First Amendment (374 U.S. 203; cited in Greenawalt, 2005, p. 19).

Despite this 1963 ruling, there continues to be widespread confusion surrounding what can and cannot be with regard to religion in the public schools.

In 2010, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, a nonpartisan organization founded in 1948 that advocates for the separation of church and state, posted an article detailing the results of a survey conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. The results of this survey quantify the complexity between religion and public schools: only 23 percent of participants were aware that religious scripture may be (objectively) examined in a literature course (“Americans,” 2010). Similarly, the result of the survey showed that only 36 percent of the participants knew that the public schools may teach a course on comparative religions (“Americans,” 2010). The survey participants were far more likely to acknowledge that teacher-led prayer was unacceptable, as well as to recognize the First Amendment’s decree that the government must neither advance nor prohibit religion at 89 percent and 68 percent, respectively (“Americans,” 2010). These numbers exemplify the tension surrounding the role of religion and the U.S. public education system. Likewise, results of this survey help to explain why the narrative of “religion-free schools” is so strong in America today.
However, this narrative is incorrect. Establishing public schools as “religion-free” would be in violation of the Free Exercise Clause, which guarantees protection of religious beliefs and acting by way of religious convictions. Therefore, this thesis sets out to clarify the role of religion in the public schools. Doing so may help teachers, school board members, and school administrators to have a firmer footing in addressing the topic of religion when it inevitably presents itself in the classroom. Previous avoidance of religion may actually prove detrimental to the well-roundedness of students.

The notion of “religion-free public schools” began to gain strength in the early 1960’s, as a result of Supreme Court cases involving school-sanctioned prayer (Engel v. Vitale (1962)) and nonsectarian classroom Bible readings (School District of Abington Township, Pennsylvania v. Schempp (1963)). Fear of litigation led to the abandonment of religion from U.S. public schools (Garry, 2006). The resulting abandonment has allowed for a failure to equip students with the necessary skills for understanding how religion plays a part in history, politics, and literature in the U.S. and around the world.

Religious Literacy and its Absence from the Public-School System

Stephen Prothero, Chair of the Department of Religion at Boston University, is one of the most influential writers on both Bible and religious literacy. In his book, The New York Times best-seller, Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know—and Doesn’t (2007), Prothero discusses the general lack of knowledge among Americans about religion (2007). Prothero then argues that we must denounce our lack of religious knowledge in favor of the study of religious literacy under the auspices of one of the most “dominant venues for education in the United States”: the public schooling system (Prothero, 2007). Prothero’s justifies this proposal with a
simple statistic, “…nine out of every ten American schoolchildren attend a public school” (Prothero, 2007, p. 127).

Given that statistic, it comes as no surprise that this institution would be called upon to aid in the widespread benefit of religious literacy. However, because of public confusion surrounding what’s constitutional and what is not, religion is often left out of the classroom. As such, the U.S. public education system has become largely “religion-free.” The public schools have become free of religion because of a self-imposed banishment imposed under the presumption that mentioning religion in the classroom could bring litigation. As this presumption spread throughout the public education system, students have gone without an understanding of one of the most influential topics in human civilization.

Although Christianity is still the dominant religion in the United States, at 70.6 percent of the U.S. population, per a 2014 Pew Research survey, this number has dropped by nearly 8 percent since 2007 (America’s Changing, 2015). During this time, non-Christian faiths (e.g. Muslim, Hindu, etc.) increased 1.2 percent, while the percentage of individuals claiming no religious affiliation (e.g. Atheist, Agnostic, etc.) has increased by 6.7 percent (America’s Changing, 2015).

New generations of Americans are more religiously diverse. The 2014 Religious Landscape Study, conducted by the Pew Research Center, found that of survey participants from the “silent generation” (i.e. those born between 1928-1945), 85 percent were Christian, of which 24 percent identified as being Catholic, 4 percent affiliated with other faiths, and 11 percent of participants labeled themselves as “unaffiliated” (America’s Changing, 2015). In contrast, among “younger millennials” (i.e. those born between 1990-1996) 56 percent identified as Christian, (of this percentage, 16 percent identified as Catholic), 8 percent of participants were from other faiths, with
36 percent of participants being unaffiliated (America’s Changing, 2015). These statistics demonstrate a changing demographic nationally.

**Religious Illiteracy and the Rise of Xenophobia**

This increase in diversity is not without challenges. According to *The New York Times*, hate crimes have increased by 17 percent since 2016, and hate crimes have increased in America for the third year in a row (Elignon, 2018). According to Derrick Johnson, President of the *National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*, “…the acceptance of intolerance that has been condoned by President Trump and many others across the country”, has “…simply emboldened individuals to be more open and notorious with their racial hatred” (Elignon, 2018). The FBI has reported that, 59.6 percent of hate crime victims were targeted as a result of the offender’s “race/ethnicity/ancestry bias” (“FBI,” 2018). Likewise, 20.6 percent were targeted as a result of their “offender’s religious bias” (“FBI,” 2018).

One example of religious bias that demonstrates lack of religious literacy is the hate crimes against Sikhs—being mistaken for Muslims—that is still prevalent in America even after 15 years since the events of 9-11 (Basu, 2016). Among the victims was Balbir Singh Sodhi who, being mistaken for a Muslim, was shot outside of a gas station he managed in Arizona, just three days after September 11th, 2001 (Prothero, 2007; Basu, 2016). The offender stated his intent was to, “…go out and shoot some towel heads” (Basu, 2016). As members of the Sikh faith were being mistaken for Muslim, an advocacy group called the Sikh Coalition was formed. Yet, hate crimes against Sikhs continued. More bloodshed occurred in 2012 as a lone gunman opened fire at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin, which left 6 people dead and wounded four others (“Police identify,” 2012).
Unnecessary violence such as this occurs when fear and paranoia become radicalized. Such an increase in xenophobia must be matched by an even larger movement towards increasing tolerance in America. Race, ethnicity, and ancestry bias could be alleviated partially by promoting the study of religious literacy in U.S. public schools.

**The Emergence of Bible Literacy Classes in Contemporary Society**

Efforts to promote Bible literacy/religion in the public schools is common. Two examples most relevant to the current study occurred in Georgia in 2006 and then in Texas in 2007. The legislation from current efforts to promote Bible Literacy via *Project Blitz* is based on the legislation found in Georgia and Texas.

Georgia’s 2006 bill laid the foundation for the *Bible Literacy Act* found in *Project Blitz*, which seeks to install Christian-right inspired legislation into most facets of American society. With its emphasis on an objective study of the Old and New Testaments, familiarization with the historical and literacy influence of the Bible, and the possibility of inclusion for elective courses on non-Judeo-Christian religions, Georgia’s SB 79 serves as the model bill upon which the other recent Bible literacy bills are founded. Georgia was also the only state to have its Bible literacy bill signed by the governor. In contrast, other states, such as Alabama, Missouri, and Tennessee had similar bills proposed, but these failed (Chancey, 2007).

The political confrontation that surrounded Georgia’s SB 79 provides insight into the underlying motive of the *Bible Literacy Act*. During the early 2000s, a political war was waged in various state houses (such as those where similar bills failed—e.g., Tennessee, Alabama) regarding how a Bible curriculum was to be outlined. Georgia Democrats promoted an objective study of religion in their bill, SB 437, by giving a favorable nod to a course curriculum named *The Bible*
and its Influence, published by the Bible Literacy Project. That course sought to maintain a true neutral approach to religion in the public schools.

However, Georgia Democrats soon found themselves under scrutiny for their supposed advancement of a secularized Bible class (Chancey, 2007). True neutrality was met with hostility from Republican lawmakers, who preferred to see a Bible curriculum using the Judeo-Christian Bible as the textbook for the course (Chancey, 2007). This preference, backed by Republican lawmakers, gave a favorable nod to a competing Bible curriculum, The Bible in History and Literature, published by the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools.

The favorable nod to The Bible in History and Literature carried beyond Georgia and entered the public spotlight. Advocates of Bible literacy, such as the American Family Association and Concerned Women for America, as well as Alabama lawmakers and evangelical leaders, like D. James Kennedy and John Haggee, sought to defame and undermine any adoption of The Bible and its Influence (Chancey, 2007). Such critics described the objective curriculum as “…a tremendous mistake to impose such very anti-biblical material upon our children in public schools” and “…a masterful work of deception, distortion, and outright falsehoods.” The Bible and its Influence faltered under the uproar (Chancey, 2007, p. 7).

As a result of this effort to derail the integrity of The Bible and its Influence, Georgia Democrats pulled away from their own legislation, while still in defiance of the Republican alternative. Ultimately, Georgia Democrats failed to gain traction with their attempts to bring religion back into the public schools. Although they had intended to show that southern Democrats could still be in conversations involving faith, their plan backfired. They could not escape the
narrative that their Bible bill attempted to take God out of the Bible. Instead, the Republican bill, SB79, was a big victory to the Christian right and for a number of reasons.

First, this bill put into law the religious study of the Bible. The Republican bill gave a nod to the National Council for Bible Curriculum in Public Schools curriculum, The Bible in History and Literature, by outlining the details of their Bible bill using the same verbiage that is used by the National Council to outline their curriculum. Second, interest groups, state lawmakers, and evangelists were able to successfully link the only notable competing curriculum, The Bible and its Influence, with fears of anti-biblical teachings, liberal ideology, and deceit. Third, this calculated hysteria was also able to take the Democrats out of the discussion that they, too, could be involved with religion. Fourth, Georgia SB 79 set the standard for the advancement of Bible literacy classes in U.S. public schools. The only Bible bill to become law out of the previously mentioned states (e.g., Alabama Missouri etc.), Georgia’s SB 79 gave a favorable nod to a religiously motivated curriculum, while also establishing the model legislation that states could advance in their own statehouses, knowing that their colleagues were able to see this bill ratified.

Using the Georgia experiment as their foundation, lawmakers in Texas successfully saw their own Bible bill ratified as well. Texas’s HB 1287 in 2007 took what Georgia lawmakers had done the previous year and expanded on it. Texas’s Bible bill contained similar verbiage about advancing the understanding of the history and literature found within the Old/New Testaments. Unique to the Texas bill, however, was a section on “bible course training” that would allow teachers to deploy additional training materials and resources to assist in the instruction of students (H.B. 1287, 2007).
From the Bible wars to the Bible curriculum wars, efforts to advance religion in the public schools have failed to find common ground. In fact, one may surmise that efforts to promote Bible literacy have since laid quite dormant as a result of this quarrel. Accordingly, Bible bills such as the ones in Georgia (SB79) and Texas (HB1287) have since fallen out of the public spotlight, much like the topic of Bible literacy in general. That was, however, until a single tweet by President Trump reignited the fire once more.

On January 28th 2019, via President Trump on Twitter: “Numerous states introducing Bible Literacy classes, giving students the option of studying the Bible. Starting to make a turn back? Great!” (realDonaldTrump, 2019). This tweet came out soon after a Fox News television show, Fox & Friends, had North Dakota State Representative Aaron McWilliams discuss recent legislation to advance Bible literacy classes in North Dakota public schools (Parke, 2019). The tweet was immediately picked up by media outlets such as The Washington Post, Fortune, Vox, and Bloomberg. However, what the mainstream media picked up on was just the tip. Unbeknownst to much of the American populace, a larger effort was underway to turn the nation toward officially espousing Judeo-Christian theology.

What is Project Blitz?

The Project Blitz initiative is a national movement that seeks, “[t]o protect the free exercise of traditional Judeo-Christian religious values and beliefs in the public square, and to reclaim and properly define the narrative which supports such beliefs” (“Project Blitz,” n.d.). It operates in co-operation with four organizations.

First, The Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation (CPCF) is a non-partisan organization seeking to “…cultivate a national mindset of humility by acknowledging the Creator’s favor and
grace. The CPCF is an advocacy group that is dedicated to “protecting religious liberties.”, promoting the engagement of public prayer and religious expression”, and “…restoring Judeo-Christian principles to their rightful place” (“The Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation, Inc.,” n.d.). Moreover, the CPCF serves as a watchdog for anti-faith legislation and violations to the First Amendment.

Second, WallBuilders, whose name is a reference to the Old Testament book of Nehemiah, in which the nation of Israel comes together to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, so as to “…restore stability, safety, and a promising future to that great city [Jerusalem]” (“WallBuilders,” n.d.). WallBuilders is a Texas-based non-profit concerned with making a “direct and positive influence in government, education, and the family” (WallBuilders,” n.d.). This organization largely seeks to advocate for the revitalization of America’s “forgotten history and heroes, with an emphasis on the moral, religious, and constitutional foundation on which America was built…” (“WallBuilders,” n.d.). Moreover, The Pro-Family Legislative Network, a division of WallBuilders, works in the realm of public policy and serves to promote “pro-family” legislation across all political issues (“WallBuilders,” n.d.).

The third organization that assisted in the creation of the Project Blitz initiative is the National Legal Foundation. A Virginia-based public-interest law firm, the National Legal Foundation serves to:

...prayerfully create and implement innovative strategies that, through decisive action, will cause America’s public policy and legal system to support and facilitate God’s purpose for her, all while conducting ourselves at all times with the utmost integrity and in such a way as to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ. (“Our mission,” n.d.)
In order to go about this, the National Legal Foundation seeks to “…protect America’s legal system from being usurped to ends which run counter to God’s purposes” (“Our mission,” n.d.). Moreover, another goal of the National Legal Foundation is to educate Americans “…regarding legal and public policy…”, as well as “…fighting for the adoption of those positions which further God’s purposes…” (“Our mission,” n.d.).

The final organization that assisted in the creation of the Project Blitz movement was Claybrook LLC. This small Washington D.C.-based law firm specializes in litigation related to religious freedom, pro-life, and government contracts (“Claybrook,” n.d.). At the time of this thesis, Claybrook LLC was being operated by a single person, Rick W. Claybrook, Jr.

The Project Blitz initiative openly promotes a three-point mission, (“Project Blitz,” n.d):

1) To provide research, information, and analysis to support lawmakers who may be enacting specific legislation to fully protect religious liberty and the free exercise of our faith in the public square by eliminating paths for legal retribution or government interference; and to see the public discourse related thereto understood and defined on our terms (“Project Blitz,” n.d.).

2) To encourage numerous key conservative legislators at the local, state and federal level who are submitting legislation and public policy positions, while building a broad coalition of citizens supporting them with public relations, messaging and grassroots activists on multiple fronts (“Project Blitz,” n.d.).

3) To reclaim and properly frame the narrative and the language of religious liberty issues (“Project Blitz,” n.d.).

Project Blitz is described in the Report and Analysis on Religious Measures Impacting Prayer and Faith in America (n.d.). This report outlines the phases of Project Blitz, as well as the necessary legislation to implement this initiative. The legislation proposed in the Project Blitz initiative is divided into four main categories:

1) Legislation Regarding Our Country’s Heritage (Report, n.d.)
2) Resolutions and Proclamations Recognizing the Importance of Religious History and Freedom (Report, n.d.)

3) Religious Liberty Protection Legislation (Report, n.d.):
   a. Public Policy Resolutions (Report, n.d.)
   b. Protection for Professionals and Individuals (Report, n.d.)
   c. Protection for Teachers and Students (Report, n.d.)

4) Talking Points to Counter Anti-Religious Freedom of Legislation (Report, n.d.)

The first category of Project Blitz contains legislation seeking to recognize “the place of Christian principles in our nation’s history and heritage” (Report, n.d., p. 5). Some legislation found within this category involves promoting the establishment of our national motto, “In God We Trust,” on license plates and public schools; the displaying of religious documents “…that have been instrumental in the development of law in the United States and this state [i.e. the state proposing this legislation, italics added]” (Report, n.d., p. 18); and the Bible Literacy Act (Report, n.d.).

Category two of Project Blitz provides model proclamations promoting Christian Heritage Week, recognizing the importance of the Bible in history, and to recognize Christmas Day (Report, n.d.).

Category three of Project Blitz is comprised of three sub-categories, each involving the protection of the Christian-right’s views. A sample list of these resolutions includes one to “Establish Public Policy Favoring Intimate Sexual Relations Only Between Married, Heterosexual Couples”; the “Clergy Protection Act”, seeking to protect members of the clergy and religious organization “…for honoring a sincerely held religious belief relating to participation in a lawful marriage” (Report, n.d., p. 98); and the “Preserving Religious Freedom in School Act,” which protects students, teachers, and school personnel from facing discrimination with regards to their religious expression (Report, n.d.).
The final category of *Project Blitz* is focused around “talking points to counter anti-religious freedom legislation” (Report, n.d.) and designed for State Legislators/supporters of *Project Blitz*. These points are mainly focused around countering pro-LGBT legislation such as, the inclusion of one’s sexual orientation and gender identity as a “civil rights category”, prohibiting conversation therapy, and countering the repeal of state “RFRAs” (i.e. Religious Freedom Restoration Act) (Report, n.d.). Whereas, the talking points provided in the other categories are meant to promote adoption of the legislation in question, the talking points within category seek to provide counters to existing left-wing initiatives.

**Bible Literacy Act**

The *Bible Literacy Act* (See Appendix A) builds on Texas’s 2007 HB 1287 and seeks to establish an elective high school course covering the Old and New Testament (Report, n.d.). This course attempts to familiarize students with the contents, history, and influence of the Old and/or New Testament, by using the Bible as the “basic textbook of the course” (Report, n.d.). In addition, the *Bible Literacy Act* also proposes supplemental reading selections of “secular historical and cultural works”, as well as selections of reading material derived from non-Judeo-Christian religions (Report, n.d.). The latter may serve more as a failsafe against arguments of proselytization, than a willingness to teach students the religious and cultural influence of other works, as I will discuss below.

The *Bible Literacy Act* states in Section 2, subsection (g), that this course must be taught objectively and without any and all attempts at proselytization (Report, n.d.). Moreover, it states that no attempts at validation and/or falsification of the Judeo-Christian faith or non-Judeo-Christian faiths should be made (Report, n.d.). This sub-section goes on to stress the importance of
neutrality and the requirement to stay away from actions/statements that may lead to a public endorsement of any religion (Report, n.d.).

In maintaining their stance on objectivity, subsection (l) states that elective courses of other religions outside the Judeo-Christian faith are not prohibited (Report, n.d.). The model legislation also makes an appeal that these courses should consider the locality’s demand for such a course, as well as the “impact such books have had on history and culture.” (Report, n.d.). Moreover, if one were to promote the objective study of a non-Judeo-Christian faith, other courses must be compliant with the standards outlined in the *Bible Literacy Act* (Report, n.d.).

At the end of the model legislation, included in the “talking points” section (See Appendix A), is a single sentence to justify the possible the inclusion of non-Judeo-Christian elective courses given the increased diversity within the U.S. population, as well as the need to educate students on the contributions that other religions have had (Report, n.d.). Yet, the acknowledgement of increasing diversity would warrant a comparative religions course, rather than a course emphasizing Judeo-Christian texts. In addition, the actual support for the teaching of other religions is harnessed to the provisions of the *Bible Literacy Act*, which states that non-Judeo-Christian courses are allowed, provided that they use the same strict standards in the *Bible Literacy Act* and also becomes law—an unlikely event in a country with relatively small representations of non-Christian faiths.

The end of this model legislation includes “talking points” (See Appendix A) that reference the relationship between religion and the United States’ origins, the biblical references that are found throughout literature (e.g. Shakespeare, Milton, etc.), and a statement discussing the inclusion of a provision allowing for the study of non-Judeo-Christian religions and traditions
“…in recognition of the increasing diversity of our population and communities and to help students understand the respective contributions of religions and traditions” (Report, n.d., p. 25).

The next chapter introduces the methodology used to gather and analyze data to shed light on the *Bible Literacy Act* and to answer the following questions: (1) who authored the *Bible Literacy Act* found in *Project Blitz*; (2) what was the purpose of this curriculum; (3) why was there a focus on Bible literacy and not religious literacy; (4) was there any curriculum that the *Bible Literacy Act*’s stakeholders had in mind? This will enable me to illuminate the authentic purposes of this model legislation; explore the stakeholders’ perspective of the public’s concerns about this legislation, and examine the public’s response to this legislation as captured in news media.
Chapter 4
Methodology

I formulated my research questions for this study by considering what I would want to know as a parent, scholar, and/or a concerned citizen if the local school board was introducing a course promoting the Bible in the public schools.

This thesis is a qualitative study because a primary goal of my research was to ascertain the purpose behind the Bible Literacy Act. Given the recency of this bill and the Project Blitz initiative, published information on this topic was sparse. As such, I conducted interviews as my primary method of gathering data for this study. The methodological approach used in this thesis was a case study, specifically a case of a particular effort to promote Bible literacy classes in the public schools. My hope is that this approach will be useful or future researchers of Project Blitz and efforts to promote Bible literacy in schools.

To choose interview participants, I reached out to both individuals and organizations who have written on the subject of Bible/religious literacy, whose organizations have come out publicly in support of, or opposition, to the Bible Literacy Act and/or Project Blitz, and to elected state-level representatives who have sponsored the Bible Literacy Act in their state. Some individuals who I interviewed were garnered from connections that I made throughout this study. These individuals also fall into the category of stakeholders involved with either Bible Literacy Act and/or Project Blitz.

For this case study, I focused on the promotion of Bible literacy courses in the states of West Virginia, Iowa, and Kentucky. These were among first seeking to adopt the Bible Literacy
Act in *Project Blitz*. I did not seek to conduct interviews entailing in Texas and Georgia, since these states preceded reemergence of Bible literacy classes promoted by *Project Blitz*.

**Data Collection**

To gather the data, I conducted interviews with two of the primary stakeholders of *Project Blitz* and analyzed documents related to the interviews, state legislation, and prior Supreme Court rulings (for interview questions, see Appendix B). Working alone, I sought out potential interviewees by creating a pool of possible participants based on their sponsorship of a state bill to promote Bible literacy, their organization’s involvement in *Project Blitz*, and their personal and/or organization’s vocal support/opposition to Bible literacy classes. Invitations to participate in these interviews were sent via email, with every interview being conducted over the phone. In total, nine interviews have been completed. The table below provides more detail on interview participants. Interviewees were given the option of having their identities masked via pseudonyms or being identified by their actual name. Bolded names in the table below are pseudonyms. Participants included:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Name</th>
<th>Position/Role</th>
<th>Organization</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Mark A. Chancey</td>
<td>Professor of Religious Studies</td>
<td>Southern Methodist University</td>
<td>Texas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Charles C. Haynes</td>
<td>Founding Director</td>
<td>Religious Freedom Center of the Freedom Forum Institute</td>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Todd Rodgers</td>
<td>Withheld to maintain confidentiality</td>
<td>Anti-Bible Literacy Act organization</td>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex Johnson</td>
<td>Withheld to maintain confidentiality</td>
<td>Anti-Bible Literacy Act organization</td>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle West</td>
<td>Withheld to maintain confidentiality</td>
<td>Anti-Bible Literacy Act organization</td>
<td>Kentucky</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position and Organization</td>
<td>Location</td>
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<td>---------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steven Fitschen</td>
<td>President/Senior Legal Advisor National Legal Foundation/Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation</td>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Douglas</td>
<td>Withheld to maintain confidentiality Pro Bible Literacy Act organization</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan Shay</td>
<td>State Representative Iowa State Legislature</td>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob Boston</td>
<td>Senior Advisor and Editor Americans United for Separation of Church and State</td>
<td>Washington, D.C.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prior to the beginning of each interview, participants were informed about the nature of the interview, what purpose the interview had in relation to my thesis, and to ensure anonymity—unless participants wished to be identified by name, which several did. Participants were also informed they could skip any questions as they saw fit and were able to withdraw their consent at any point during the interview. Additionally, interview participants were asked for their consent to record the phone conversation (see Appendix C). Interviews were recorded using Cube Call Recorder ACR, a phone recording application, which were then backed-up to a password-protected computer. After interviews were conducted, memos were written in order to provide some initial reflections on the interview and provided a starting point for analyzing and coding the interview transcripts.

Documents were gathered via readily accessible state legislature websites, the Congressional Prayer Cause Foundation website, and online articles posted by Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the ACLU, and various news outlets such as the Washington Post, The Hill, and The Atlantic, as well as local news agencies in the states being examined. In addition to these articles, the online database, NewsBank, was used to locate additional news articles. These documents were gathered for both practical and theoretical reasons. Given the recent
nature for this push in Bible literacy classes, documents were used to help gauge public awareness to this phenomenon.

Entering the keywords, “West Virginia, Kentucky, Iowa, HB 2551, HB 128, HF 2031, SB 252, Bible Literacy, Bible Literacy Classes, 2016-2019” into NewsBank and Google, a total of 50 news articles were gathered. After removing articles because their relevance was not apparent, or the date and place of publication were beyond the bounds of this case study, a total of 36 articles remained. Broken down by state, there were 14 articles from Iowa, 15 from Kentucky, and 7 West Virginia.

**Data Analysis**

Interviews were transcribed using Temi, an audio-to-text transcription service available online. After transcriptions were created, transcripts were uploaded to the qualitative analysis software, Dedoose. Once in Dedoose, interviews were compared question-by-question in order to analyze common phrases, justifications, and concerns across all interview participants. News articles obtained from NewsBank and internet searches were uploaded into Dedoose and coded inductively, in order to identify developing themes and buzzwords used news outlets.

After coding had ceased, a total of 22 codes had been developed. Codes were generated based on relevance to the Bible Literacy Act and its purpose(s). If a sentence included the need for Bible literacy classes because of the founding fathers’ reliance on the Bible for establishing our government, the “historical” code was used. Likewise, if interviewees and/or news articles referenced the need to have Bible literacy classes in order to understand the works of Shakespeare, Milton, or Dante, the code “literature” was allocated. Other codes include, “religious literacy,”
“proselytization,” “confusion about religion in the public schools,” “secularism,” “curriculum,” and “how to teach it?”. After coding was finished, a total of 452 code applications had been recorded.
Chapter 5

Findings

The current study set out to examine four questions related to the *Bible Literacy Act*. These questions were as follows: (1) who authored the *Bible Literacy Act* found in *Project Blitz*; (2) what was the purpose of this curriculum; (3) why was there a focus on Bible literacy and not religious literacy; (4) was there any curriculum that the *Bible Literacy Act*’s stakeholders had in mind?

Given the lack of information surrounding the *Bible Literacy Act* and the *Project Blitz Initiative*, one of my primary goals for the current study was to uncover who authored this legislation. During my interview with Steven Fitschen, President of the *National Legal Foundation*, I discovered that a team comprised of four individuals worked on the *Bible Literacy Act*. These individuals were: Steven Fitschen; Rick Claybrook, of *Claybrook LLC*.; and two contracted workers. The primary author of the *Bible Literacy Act* was one of these contracted workers. However, Steven Fitschen did not disclose the names of these individuals, nor could he remember which one was the primary author.

An emerging theme identified with supporters of the *Bible Literacy Act* is the recitation of the points at the end of the *Bible Literacy Act* (*See Appendix A*) that are used to advance this legislation. Upon examining the interview transcripts common topics included “unalienable rights,” “core principles,” the works of Shakespeare, and the 1988 study conducted by Louisiana State Professor, Donald Lutz, who gathered 3,154 direct quotes made by the founding fathers from 15,000 historical documents (Report, n.d.). Of these quotes, the Bible accounted for 34 percent of the total (Report, n.d.).
Similar to the recitation of the talking points found in the *Project Blitz* report, a common phrase was mentioned in almost half of the news articles examined. The phrase that kept being reiterated, summarizes the proposed purpose of the *Bible Literacy Act* (and the classes in general): to teach students about, “…biblical content, characters, poetry, and narratives that are prerequisites to understanding contemporary society and culture, including literature art and music” (Report, n.d.). Common codes found in the analysis of news articles were: “historical,” “literature,” “cultural,” “art,” and “need for contemporary society.”

Proselytization was also a theme found throughout the analysis. Unsurprisingly, concerns over proselytization were seen primarily in data collected from sources such as the *ACLU*, *Americans United for Separation of Church and State*, and members of academia. Rob Boston of *Americans United* was skeptical that the proposed *Bible Literacy Act* is a sincere attempt to promote the objective study of the Bible in the public schools:

> The problem is that some of the people pushing these bills aren't really interested in an objective study about the Bible. What they're really after is a certain interpretation of the Bible being promoted in public schools, usually a fundamentalist or a very conservative approach. So, I think what some of these folks are trying to do is bring into the public schools the types of lessons that you might normally encounter in a church Sunday school. And that's really not appropriate for public education.

Any resemblance to a Sunday school approach to teaching biblical history brings up two important concerns about constitutionality: how to teach these courses and confusion about religion in the public schools. While the *Bible Literacy Act* does outline how these courses should be taught, modern teachers do not have the necessary training to teach religious courses in an objective manner.
The document analysis identified concerns over how to teach the topic of Bible literacy 25 times (out of 452 total code applications). Voicing their concerns over Iowa’s Bible Literacy Act (HF 2031) in The Gazette, a local newspaper serving the Cedar Rapids-Iowa City area, three university professors, Kenneth Atkinson, Hector Avalos, and Robert Cargill said:

[Without additional training and any regular and strict peer evaluation of high school or elementary school teachers by academic biblical scholars, the implementation of any standards will be largely unenforceable (Atkinson, Avalos, & Cargill, 2017).

Likewise, “[t]eachers may be encouraged or unrestrained in offering theological and subjective opinions” (Atkinson, Avalos, & Cargill, 2017). These concerns over how to teach a subject like Bible literacy are only exacerbated by the amount of confusion related to religion and the U.S. public-school system. Almost every interview I had conducted addressed this phenomenon in some capacity. In sharing their thoughts on this matter, Todd Rodgers of an organization opposing the Bible Literacy Act, said:

Very few people actually understand the law and what the Supreme Court has said about what is constitutional and what isn't. So many people think you're not allowed to talk about religion in school. That's not true. The Supreme Court has explicitly stated that you can teach about religion, but it has to be part of a secular program of education. Um, and that it can't be confessional. It has to be academic; there has been decades of work done by people across the political, ideological and religious spectrum to try to clarify what is and is not allowed. Um, but generally the public doesn't understand what is and isn't allowed. And so, my concern is that they will react strongly to religious literacy or Bible literacy courses without fully understanding the context. Um, and that, you know, teachers are not immune from that misunderstanding.

However, this situation is not unique to just teachers in the community. In fact, confusion about religion in the public schools is found among state legislators. In examining this point, Charles Haynes of the Religious Freedom Center said,

Many folks, particularly these legislators, are frankly not aware of what the academic study of the Bible looks like. They're not. So, for them, it just is a puzzle to them. [I]t's a strange
thing to them. And you say to them, no, you can't do that. [They say] so, what do you mean? We were just giving the kids the Bible to read..., well, how can that be unconstitutional? We're not promoting it [we're just] giving it to them. And then you push them a little bit and [they’d] say, well, uh, you know, kids treat these Hebrew scriptures as history, treat the gospels as history. Yes, sure. [Y]ou know, it happened...

Peter Douglas of an organization favoring the Bible Literacy Act shared his concerns not about the lack of knowledge legislators and teachers may have, but his concerns over spreading misinformation. He indicated that misinformation may affect one’s perception on religion in the public schools:

All I get concerned about is when the information is not actually accurate, there are opinion pieces saying this [promotion of religion in schools] is not constitutional. Well then how come the courts have upheld it all over? And so, what happens is people conflate editorial opinions with facts and that's, that's the difference between Fox and CNN is each side [has] an opinion. It's very different from the others. And if you're a CNN viewer, then you have one view. If you're a Fox viewer, you have a different view on the same issue. So, what I guess what concerns me most is that opinion often masquerades as fact, when there are actual facts decided by courts that have clear positions or they're decided in law. And just because you may not like the law or you may not like the court ruling doesn't mean it's unconstitutional. And so that's the thing we find most often.

Providing an example of misinformation Douglas has dealt with, he went on to say:

And dealing with school board attorneys, school attorneys are not experts in constitutional law. They're experts in insurance law, they're experts in employment contracts, et cetera. But not in constitutional issues. And just because someone's an attorney doesn't mean that their view of what's constitutional or not is informed at all by court decisions. And so that's the way the flurry tends to be in the news cycles. You know what somebody picks up on it. It tends to be that a whole chain of newspapers and media will pick up on that and they kind of echo each other.

In the data I collected, concerns were raised over the ambiguity of the Bible Literacy Act. Alex Johnson of an organization opposing the Bible Literacy Act believes this ambiguity is intentional and is aimed at skirting any constitutional challenges. To do this, proponents of the
Bible Literacy Act may seek to hide the true intentions of this act through various layers. Speaking about the intentional ambiguity of these courses, Alex stated:

One layer is sort of a state level. We encourage this type of course to be taught in public schools without getting into the detail. I actually think on that layer they are not afraid of publicity because it's vague enough that you can't really get your hands around it.

Those in opposition to these Bible literacy classes rely on the perceived intent of the legislation or other signs that the legislation is unconstitutional. Among these signs is that the course curriculum is never mentioned within Bible literacy legislation. Speaking on this topic, Alex went onto say:

The layer where they are hiding the ball intentionally is the actual content of the courses that they don't want anyone to see. They realize that once it's being taught in a class, it's very difficult to get ahold of it. Um, I mean you can file an open records request, which is the best way to get it, short of having a student enroll in the class and actually bring home the materials. That's the stuff they want to hide, because that is where the smoking gun evidence of unconstitutionality live[s].

Information pertaining to stakeholders’ focus on Bible literacy instead of religious literacy centers around the historical importance of the Bible and not of other religious scriptures in the founding of America. As Steven Fitschen explains:

[Bible literacy classes are] being argued for by us and by others because of our unique history. I mean, I think if we were in a different country, where ...the Scriptures of the predominant historic religion, you know, ...it had impacted the country's history, then I would think that folks in those, those countries would very likely, might want, to see that happen in their country. And so that's the unique feature is, is this historical significance of the Bible as opposed to scriptures of other religions.

Iowa State Representative and a sponsor of Iowa’s bible bill, Jordan Shay, proposed a similar reason for why Bible literacy has been singled out over religious literacy:
I think with the direction that we were looking at was again, the significance of the role that the Bible played in the founding of America. Um, you know, we are not a Christian nation. We are a nation founded on Christian values and moral Christian principles. And, that's what already, you know, that's where our focus lies. But let's embellish it with, again, the literatures and the arts and entertainment and all of that that had the role for, I guess that's why we're not a nation founded on Muslim religion. We're not a nation founded on Hindu religion. We're not a nation founded in atheism. You know, we are a nation founded with Christian values. And, so that was the intent.

Among my interviewees were some who were proponents of biblical literacy, but not a supporter of the Bible Literacy Act. One such example came from Rob Boston of Americans United for Separation of Church and State:

I think that Bible literacy as a concept sounds good and not threatening to a lot of people. Uh, the Bible, no matter how an individual might interpret it, has had a powerful impact on world history and US history. I don't think there's any denying that. So, on the surface, the idea that people should generally be familiar with the Bible and understand what it says sounds like a good idea.

In fact, support for the subject of Bible literacy was nearly unanimous amongst all interview participants. However, because of who supports the Bible Literacy Act, efforts to advance the Bible into the public schools by any means necessary, and the intentional ambiguity of the Bible Literacy Act, many of the individuals I interviewed oppose the Bible Literacy Act. Despite stakeholders’ attempt to write a constitutionally-abiding piece of legislation, the fact that this legislation is a part of the Christian-right’s Project Blitz initiative, may prove to be the fatal flaw that generates enough opposition to end the reemergence of Bible literacy legislation.

The political disputes surrounding Georgia’s Bible literacy bill show how supporters of the bill may suggest course curriculum through the use of verbiage found within the bill. By doing so, bill supporters are able to stay silent publicly, while still having a preferred curriculum in mind for Bible literacy courses. For this reason, my interviews with stakeholders supporting the Bible
Literacy Act did not supply useful information on the course curriculum they preferred to see accompanying this bill.

Both supporters and opponents of the Bible Literacy Act whom I interviewed did not provide informative responses to any curriculum attached with this legislation. What can be said is that references to the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools’ textbook, The Bible in History and Literature, was the most cited curriculum during the interviews. In referencing the National Council’s influence on the Bible Literacy Act, Steven Fitschen indicated that when authoring this model legislation, his team may have gone back to the National Council and used the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools as a starting point for the current Bible Literacy Act. However, Fitschen said he was just speculating. That being said, he discussed doing work with National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools sometime back in the 1990’s—when exactly, Fitschen did not specify. On the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public School’s website, both the National Legal Foundation and David Barton, founder of WallBuilders, are included in the “endorsements” section for the National Council (“Thank you,” n.d.).

The second most referenced curriculum, published by the Bible Literacy Project, was The Bible and its Influence. This curriculum was referenced primarily by skeptics of the Bible Literacy Act, such as Rob Boston of Americans United; Mark Chancey, Professor of Religious Studies at Southern Methodist University; and Charles Haynes of the Religious Freedom Center, who cited it as a better alternative to that of the National Council’s curriculum in terms of both content and constitutionality. The Bible and its Influence attempts to be more of an objective study of the bible, and its proponents seek to gain approval from, as Mark Chancey stated:

...a broad spectrum of groups, Jewish and Christian and secular, conservative and liberal.” [In seeking this approval], “...there had obviously been a level of intentionality
and coming up with something that will be acceptable to a broad spectrum with the Bible Literacy Project and people appreciated that...”

Nevertheless, Mark and Rob shared their concerns over material found within the course and the overall constitutionality of this curriculum.

The final curriculum, the Chattanooga Bible Curriculum, was noted twice in the data. It is less well-known, because it is localized within the state of Tennessee. Peter Douglas of an organization favoring the Bible Literacy Act, who was aware of this curriculum, said:

Yeah, there is very little information on it. I've been with those guys on occasions, I've spoken to some events were where they were with schools from Chattanooga. They showed me the curriculum. I cannot find it online, but it definitely is out there. And I've talked to a number of schools that have used it ... I keep hearing from legislators out there about it, it could be tracking down some legislators in the Chattanooga area, Tennessee state reps or state senators. They may well know about it, but these guys have kept themselves well below the radar screen. Okay. Because like everybody else, if you don't want to be sued by the Freedom from Religion Foundation, you just don't talk about yourself. And so, they have stayed out of legal controversy simply because there is so little they put out publicly. ...And when I was there and dealing with them, they're very active group and I've heard from many legislators about them from Tennessee. I just can't find anything publicly about them.
Chapter 6
Discussion

The current study set out to explore the reemergence of Bible literacy classes as legislators in several states move to adopt the Bible Literacy Act, which is being promoted by the recent Project Blitz initiative. In examining this topic, data were obtained in the form of interviews conducted with stakeholders across a wide range of organizations, as well as from documents, such as state legislation, and internet articles posted by stakeholders and news agencies (both national and local).

From the data collected, I was most concerned with four questions surrounding the conversation of Bible literacy classes in U.S. public schools. These questions were: (1) who authored the Bible Literacy Act found in Project Blitz; (2) what was the purpose of this curriculum; (3) why was there a focus on Bible literacy and not religious literacy; (4) was there any curriculum that the Bible Literacy Act’s stakeholders had in mind?

In response to these questions, I have found that the Bible Literacy Act was authored by a group of four individuals: Steven Fitschen, Rick Claybrook, and two contracted workers, with the primary author being one of these contracted employees for the National Legal Foundation. Second, the purpose of these courses rests largely on who is asked. According to news outlets, the purpose of these courses is to teach students, “…knowledge of biblical content, characters, poetry, and narratives that are prerequisites to understanding contemporary society and culture, including literature, art, music, mores, oratory, and public policy” (Report, n.d., p. 22). Furthermore, this verbiage was found frequently when transcribing the phone interviews of supporters for this act. In contrast, among opponents of the Bible Literacy Act, the main goal of these courses, according to
Alex Johnson, is to advance “…religious education and indoctrination”. However, the current study could not ascertain the true purpose of these courses and could only provide speculation.

Regarding the third question, Bible literacy classes were singled out over religious literacy courses because of the historical significance the Bible has had in the founding of America and, as mentioned by Peter Douglas of an organization favoring the Bible Literacy Act, there is, “…an overwhelming amount of support from people who want the Bible in the public schools.” However, skeptics to this legislation, like Rob Boston of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, believe that proponents of the Bible Literacy Act are merely attempting to bring Sunday school courses into the public school system.

The final question I set out to answer dealt with if there were any curricular materials stakeholders had in mind for the Bible Literacy Act. Unfortunately, I was unable to answer this question fully. The most referenced curriculum during the study was the Bible in History and Literature published by the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools, which has 12 total references. In addition to these direct references, two of the main organizations responsible for Project Blitz and the Bible Literacy Act, endorse the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools: National Legal Foundation and WallBuilders. Furthermore, Steven Fitschen, President of the National Legal Foundation and Senior Legal Advisor for the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation, has a past working relationship with the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools.

**Limitations**

The limitations for the current study arose from restrictions in time and labor. With more time, I would seek to research the rise of Bible literacy classes in greater depth. In addition, given
the limited time, my interview pool was modest. Despite this, the participants I interviewed provided me with substantial information, which allowed for a useful examination into this under-researched topic. Moreover, on the subject of time, I found myself conducting this thesis while on the forefront of the battle as it was developing. Being in this position may seem like a dream to most graduate students writing their thesis or dissertation. However, I found myself struggling to keep up with the developing stories, as the topics of Bible literacy classes and *Project Blitz* hit the mainstream media cycle. I also believe the stakeholders I sought to interview were being flooded by interview requests as Bible literacy courses became more mainstream, as a result of President Trump’s tweet. Thus, my humble request for an interview for my master’s thesis might have gone unnoticed as major advocacy coalitions, policy-makers, news agencies, and journalists flooded the phone lines and inboxes of state legislators, stakeholders, and researchers.

**Further Research**

Despite these limitations, my thesis lays the foundation for future research into the topic of *Bible Literacy Act* and the *Project Blitz* initiative. At the writing of this thesis, a handful of other states, such as Virginia, Missouri, Florida, and North Dakota have discussed adopting Bible literacy classes in their public education curriculum. Thus, further research may track the legislation, support and policy entrepreneurs working in these states. Another area that must be researched is what curriculum the states plan on using in order to teach these literacy classes. While I sought out to find what curriculum options were available (e.g. the *Bible and Its Influence* and *The Bible in History and Literature*), it may be that there will be an emergence of a larger Bible literacy curriculum market, as more states seek to adopt—and ratify—a Bible literacy curriculum. Therefore, future research should look more closer into companies looking to tap into this market.
In addition to further research into the curriculum options, research must be conducted to ascertain the teaching requirements or professional development needed to teach a course about religion in public schools. If this curriculum push continues to gain strength, there will be a need to create a certification for potential teachers to demonstrate that they understand the correct ways to teach about and discuss religion. This leads into a final implication for further research: litigation.

At the time of writing this paper, the subject of Bible literacy classes in public schools was in its infancy. Despite this, there was already litigation possibly brewing among watchdog groups waiting for legislators, school boards, or other pro-Bible literacy groups to err. Such litigation has a potential to become fertile grounds for future research, as we begin to see just how states and local school boards plan to implement these proposed classes. One potential lawsuit might entail efforts by school boards seeking to adopt the curriculum offered by the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools. The course curriculum has been extensively investigated by Southern Methodist University Professor of Religious Studies, Mark Chancey. As outlined in his textbook, The Bible in History and Literature, runs afoul with a not so subtle “theological agenda” (Chancey, 2005). As such, a lawsuit is bound to occur if this course curriculum is officially adopted.

Recommendations

At the time of this writing, additional states will likely follow that of Kentucky, Iowa, West Virginia, Florida, North Dakota, and others in introducing this Bible Literacy Act into their state legislatures. Despite ongoing efforts, only Kentucky has been able to ratify this legislation. Even though this act tends to die in the state legislature, members of the public should learn about the Bible Literacy Act and the Project Blitz initiative. This initiative seeks to impose a radical right-
wing fundamentalist Christian agenda, while staying out of the public spotlight. The agenda includes: anti-LGBT provisions, via counters to the prohibition of conversion therapy and counters to the inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity as civil rights categories; a resolution “condemning religious persecution worldwide”, which only describes persecution against Christians; and provisions seeking to uphold religious expression, but only reference Christianity (e.g. *Preserving Religious Freedom in School Act*) (Report, n.d.).

My research helps to unravel the intentional ambiguity of the *Bible Literacy Act* and *Project Blitz* through interviews with main proponents and members of watchdog organizations. One of the recommendations for this study is for members of the public to speak with their state legislators in order to voice your concerns about the nature of these bills.

Second, the *Report and Analysis on Religious Freedom Measures Impacting Prayer and Faith in America* that lays out *Project Blitz* just recently had its third annual report released for the 2018-2019 congressional cycle. This report is substantially longer than its predecessors. This is one indication that *Project Blitz* is gaining traction as groups such as *WallBuilders*, *National Legal Foundation*, and the *Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation* continually seek to advance their Christian-right narrative, even as the majority of the populace remains largely unaware of such efforts. Thus, I recommend efforts to bring this initiative into the public spotlight through the publication of op-eds, blog posts, tweets, and other media. In doing so, I hope that more individuals will become aware of this push for Christian-right legislation.

Third, given how recent the push is for Bible literacy classes under the *Project Blitz* initiative, path dependency is not prevalent. Thus, the opportunity to advance religious literacy as a substitute to Bible literacy is still possible. Moreover, these courses are plausible if the public
voices their support for them instead of Bible literacy classes. Religious literacy courses address the Judeo-Christian Bible and its influence, but they also teach students about other major world religions and their influences. This approach supports the development of understanding of broad cultural differences and belief systems. Given the increasing diversity of the United States, efforts to promote such knowledge is desirable. Thus, my final recommendation would be to promote religious literacy as a catalyst to better understand one another in an increasingly diverse society.
References


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https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/cases/everson-v-board-of-education


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H.B. 1287, 80th Leg., Reg. Sess. (Tex, 2007)


U.S. Constitution, Amendment 1

Appendix A

[The] Bible Literacy Act

An act relating to public school elective courses in the history and literature of the Old and New Testaments eras.

Section 1. Title

This act shall be known as the Bible Literacy Act.

Section 2. Elective Courses in History and Literature of the Old and New Testament Eras

(a) A school district shall offer to students in grades nine or above an elective course in the history and literature of the Old Testament era and an elective course in the history and literature of the New Testament era.

(b) The purpose of a course under this section is to:
   a. Teach students knowledge of biblical content, characters, poetry, and narratives that are prerequisites to understanding contemporary society and culture, including literature, art, music, mores, oratory, and public policy; and
   b. Familiarize students with, as applicable:
      (i) the contents of the Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures) or New Testament;
      (ii) the history of the Old or New Testament;
      (iii) the literary style and structure of the Old or New Testament; and
      (iv) the influence of the Old or New Testament on law, history, government, literature, art, music, customs, morals, values, and culture.

(c) [Insert this section if relevant: Notwithstanding [relevant statutory reference(s)], respectively, for a course under this section, the [relevant state government organization] may not:
   a. identify the essential knowledge and skills; or
   b. adopt textbooks under [relevant statutory reference].

(d) The book or collection of books commonly known as the Old and New Testaments shall be used as the basic textbook for a course in the history and literature of the Old or New Testament era. In addition to the basic textbooks, students may be assigned a range of reading materials for the courses, including selections from secular historical and cultural works and selections from religious and cultural traditions other than the Judeo-Christian tradition.

(e) A course under this section must familiarize students with, as applicable:
   a. the contents of the Old or New Testament;
   b. the literary style and structure of the Old or New Testament;
   c. the customs, cultures, and religions of the peoples and societies recorded in the Old or New Testament;
   d. the history and geography of the times and places referred to in the Old or New Testament;
   e. the influence of the Old or New Testament on law, history, government, literature, art, music, customs, morals, values, and culture.
   f. the methods and tools of writing during the period when the Old or New Testament was written;
g. the means by which the Old or New Testament book was preserved;
h. the languages in which the Old or New Testament book was written; and
i. the historical and cultural events that led to the translation of the Old or New Testament book into English.

(f) The [title of relevant local school organization] of a school district may recommend a version of the Old or New Testament to be used in a course offered by the district under this section, except that:
   a. the teacher of the course may not be required to adopt the board’s recommendation and may use the recommended version or another version; and
   b. a student may not be required to use a specific version as the sole text of the Old or New Testament and may use as the basic textbook a different version of the Old or New Testament from that recommended by the [title of relevant local school organization] or chosen by the teacher.

(g) A course offered under this section:
   a. must be taught in an objective and non-proselytizing manner that does not attempt to indoctrinate students as to either the truth or falsity of the Judeo-Christian biblical materials or the truth or falsity of texts from other religious or cultural traditions other than the Judeo-Christian tradition;
   b. may not include teaching that favors a religious doctrine or a sectarian interpretation of the Old or New Testament or of texts from other religious or cultural traditions other than the Judeo-Christian tradition;
   c. may not disparage or encourage a commitment to a set of religious beliefs; and
   d. shall follow applicable law and all federal and state guidelines in maintaining religious neutrality and accommodating the diverse religious views, traditions, and perspectives of students in the school. A course under this section shall not endorse, favor, or promote, or disfavor or show hostility toward, any particular religion or nonreligious faith or religious perspective. The [relevant state organization], in complying with this section, shall not violate any provision of the United States Constitution or federal law, this state’s Constitution or any state law, or any administrative regulations of the United States Department of Education or the [relevant state organization].

(h) The [title of relevant local school organization] of a school district may recommend a version of the Old or New Testament to be used in a course offered by the district under this section, except that:
   a. the teacher of the course may not be required to adopt the board’s recommendation and may use the recommended version or another version; and
   b. a student may not be required to use a specific version as the sole text of the Old or New Testament and may use as the basic textbook a different version of the Old or New Testament from that recommended by the [title of relevant local school organization] or chosen by the teacher.
(i) The [title of relevant local school organization] of a school district may recommend a version of the Old or New Testament to be used in a course offered by the district under this section, except that:

a. the teacher of the course may not be required to adopt the board’s recommendation and may use the recommended version or another version; and

b. a student may not be required to use a specific version as the sole text of the Old or New Testament and may use as the basic textbook a different version of the Old or New Testament from that recommended by the [title of relevant local school organization] or chosen by the teacher.

(j) A course offered under this section:

a. must be taught in an objective and non-proselytizing manner that does not attempt to indoctrinate students as to either the truth or falsity of the Judeo-Christian biblical materials or the truth or falsity of texts from other religious or cultural traditions other than the Judeo-Christian tradition;

b. may not include teaching that favors a religious doctrine or a sectarian interpretation of the Old or New Testament or of texts from other religious or cultural traditions other than the Judeo-Christian tradition;

c. may not disparage or encourage a commitment to a set of religious beliefs; and

d. shall follow applicable law and all federal and state guidelines in maintaining religious neutrality and accommodating the diverse religious views, traditions, and perspectives of students in the school. A course under this section shall not endorse, favor, or promote, or disfavor or show hostility toward, any particular religion or nonreligious faith or religious perspective. The [relevant state organization], in complying with this section, shall not violate any provision of the United States Constitution or federal law, this state’s Constitution or any state law, or any administrative regulations of the United States Department of Education or the [relevant state organization].

(k) The [title of relevant local school organization] of a school district shall determine the qualifications, assignment, and training of teachers of a course under this section, except that:

a. the teacher must be certified as provided by [relevant statutory reference], unless an exception to that requirement exists under [relevant statutory reference]; and

b. the board may not assign a person to teach a course under this section based in whole or in part on any religious test, profession of faith or lack of faith, prior or present religious affiliation or lack of affiliation, or criteria involving particular beliefs or lack of beliefs about the Old or New Testament.

(l) For the purpose of awarding credit for high school graduation, a school district shall grant [desired amount] academic elective credit for satisfactory completion of a course in the history and literature of the Old Testament era and [desired amount] academic elective credit for satisfactory completion of a course in the history and literature of the New Testament era. This subsection applies only to a course that is taught in strict compliance with this section.

(m) The [title of relevant local school organization] of a school district may, as it determines appropriate, monitor the content and teaching of a course offered under this section.

(n) This section does not limit the authority of the [title of relevant local school organization] of a school district to offer a course regarding the Old Testament or the New Testament that does not comply with this section, except that the district may not spend state funds...
distributed under this title in connection with a course that does not meet the requirements of this section.

(o) This section does not prohibit the [title of relevant local school organization] of a school district from offering an elective course based on the books of a religion or society other than one with Judeo-Christian traditions. In determining whether to offer such a course, the board may consider various factors including student and parent demand for such a course and the impact such books have had on history and culture. In order for such a course to qualify for award of academic elective credit and for use of state funds, it must be in strict compliance with the requirements of this section, except that the books of a religion or society other than one with Judeo-Christian traditions are substituted in place of the Old or New Testament.

Section 3. Guidance for Implementation

No later than [date], the [appropriate state government organization] shall develop and issue guidance for local school districts on the implementation of this act.

Section 4. Effective Date of Requirement

(b) A school district shall offer a course in the history and literature of the Old Testament era and a course in the history and literature of the New Testament era that comply with [appropriate statutory reference], as added by this act, beginning with the first school year beginning at least one year after this act becomes effective.

(c) A school district shall offer a course in the history and literature of another non-Judeo-Christian tradition book era as the need for such a course is determined by the school district.

NOTES

In 2007, Texas enacted SB

In 2017, Kentucky enacted HB 128.

In 2006, Georgia passed SB 79.
http://www.newsweek.com/see-you-bible-class-107495

In 2018, Tennessee enacted HB 2174

TALKING POINTS

• The American form of government is based on core principles related to the inherent dignity and freedom of individuals, balanced by what is necessary to promote the common welfare
of the governed. To fully grasp the importance of these founding principles (and why they should be defended), it is necessary to understand their source and how the Framers of our government understood and were motivated by these principles, such as unalienable rights endowed by a Creator.

- Regardless of one’s views regarding the truth or untruth of the Bible, it cannot be disputed that it was one of the most widely read and widely quoted books used by leaders in the formation and history of our government. To not discuss it or understand it would make it extremely difficult to understand the history of our nation. Justice Tom C. Clark, writing for the Court in *School District of Abington Township v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203, 225 (1963) stated this well: "[I]t might well be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilization. It certainly may be said that the Bible is worthy of study for its literary and historic qualities.

- Literary references to the Bible are numerous and widespread. For example, one cannot understand many allusions of Shakespeare without have a basic appreciation of the Bible, much less Dante's work or Milton's. A grasp of the Bible's content and literary style is a critical element in understanding and appreciating literature written in English and other languages.

- Provision is made for elective courses that focus on the religious literature of non-Judeo-Christian religions and traditions, in recognition of the increasing diversity of our population and communities and to help students understand the respective contributions of religions and traditions.

- In 1988, Donald Lutz, a Louisiana State University professor, conducted a study to determine who most influenced the thinking of the Founding Fathers. He gathered documents that the Founders wrote to examine who was quoted most by them as authoritative sources that influenced their political philosophy. Of the 15,000 documents reviewed, Professor Lutz was able to isolate 3,154 direct quotes made by the Founders. The persons most quoted were Baron Charles Montesquieu, followed by Sir William Blackstone and John Locke. However, the chart developed by Lutz reveals that the Founders cited the Bible four times more often than Montesquieu or Blackstone and twelve times more often than Locke. This means that biblical references accounted for 34 percent of the total.
Appendix B

Interview Questions

1) What was the central idea behind the Bible literacy bill?
   - Why do we need Bible literacy classes?
2) Who are the bill’s sponsors?
   - Why do you believe people would sponsor this bill?
3) What was the purpose of the Bible literacy bill?
4) Can you tell me anything about how the bill was authored?
5) Do the state legislators have a curriculum they prefer to see accompanying the bill?
6) Can you tell me how your constituents/colleagues in the field are receiving this bill?
7) Why bible literacy? Why not religious literacy classes?
8) Tell me about any concerns you may have about the public’s response to introducing Bible literacy classes?
   - How are legislators prepared to handle the criticism of such a bill?
Appendix C

Interview Consent Form

Thank you for taking my call and for considering participating in a brief interview about Bible literacy in public schools. My research for my master’s thesis at Penn State is aimed at understanding the advancement of Bible literacy in public schools. The interview consists of about 10 questions, and it aims to understand ordinary activities to advance Bible literacy. If for any reason you don’t want to answer a question or you decide to not continue the interview, just feel free to let me know. I appreciate your consideration whether or not you continue. The interview should take between 15-30 minutes. Your name will not be used in the study. I will be using pseudonyms, unless you specifically wish to be identified by name.

Are you alright with participating in the interview?
Would it be alright with you to record the interview? The interviews will only be heard by me and used by me to create written transcripts from which I can understand the main themes related to advancing Bible literacy in public schools.