Secularism

Objective:
1) Introduce students to secularism in the United States
2) Explore the various measurement strategies used to examine secularism
3) Familiarize students with online research tools

Activity:
Introduce students to the various measures sociologists utilize when examining secularism (Atheism and Agnosticism, Belief in God, Religious Behavior, Religious Tradition, Religious Salience).

Using QuickStats, investigate the percentage of Americans that report no religious preference, the demographic patterns of this group, and changes in the size of this group over time.

Using QuickStats, examine how many Americans report never attending religious services, the demographic patterns of this group, and changes in the size of this group over time; also investigate other religious behaviors like frequency of prayer (demographics, over time) or reading sacred texts (demographics).

Using QuickStats, observe the opinions of Americans toward one secularist group, atheists and the socio-demographic patterns of these opinions; compare these findings with opinions toward the non-religious (patterns).

Using the Compare Members tool investigate the demographics, moral attitudes, and political attitudes to Atheists and Agnostics; these two groups could also be compared with up to three other denominations (example).

Using QuickLists, examine the nations and regions of the world with the highest percentages of atheists.

Using QuickLists, observe where atheists and agnostics rank in number of adherents against all other world religions.

Using the Interactive Timeline for Social Movements and Religion, read about the Secular Movement and note the movement’s leaders and key outcomes.

Assessment:
Using what they now know, direct students to write a response piece to one of the Ahead of the Trend articles on The ARDA concerning irreligion or secularism.

Ask students to create a “demographic profile” of atheists and/or agnostics using the QuickStats (those with no religious preference, never attend, never pray) and QuickLists (compare denominations) tools introduced as possible class activities.
Suggested readings:


“Secularization” in “Religion Dictionary” in the Teaching Tools on The ARDA

