

## ACTIVITY WEEK 4:

DEBATE: Is this decision UNDEMOCRATIC? Which “rights” are competing in this case? How does this compare with the West Virginia Board of Education *versus* Barnette *et al* (both to the court decision and to the dissenting opinion)?

### *French M.P.s vote to ban Islamic full veil in public.*

link: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10611398>)

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France's lower house of parliament has overwhelmingly approved a bill that would ban wearing the Islamic full veil in public. The ban has strong public support but critics point out that only a tiny minority of French Muslims wear the full veil.

Many of the opposition Socialists, who originally wanted the ban limited only to public buildings, abstained from voting after coming under pressure from feminist supporters of the bill.

President Nicolas Sarkozy has backed the ban as part of a wider debate on French identity but critics say the government is pandering to far-right voters.

After the vote, Justice Minister Michele Alliot-Marie said it was a victory for democracy and for French values. "Values of freedom against all the oppressions which try to humiliate individuals; values of equality between men and women, against those who push for inequality and injustice." The bill would make it illegal to wear garments such as the niqab or burka, which incorporate a full-face veil, anywhere in public.

"Democracy thrives when it is open-faced," Ms Alliot-Marie told the National Assembly when she presented the bill last week. Mohammed Moussaoui, the head of the French Council of the Muslim Faith, a government advisory body, has supported taking steps to discourage women from wearing the full veil but has said a legal ban would stigmatise a vulnerable group. Jean Glavany, a Socialist MP, said he opposed the ban on the grounds that it was "nothing more than the fear of those who are different, who come from abroad, who aren't like us, who don't share our values".