Worshipping in the West –

Christian Nationalism: In Conversation with Bradley Onishi

September 11, 2025

Elizabeth Logan: [00:08:13] Welcome to the first webinar in ICW's *Worshipping in the West* Fall series. I am Elizabeth Logan, the co-director of the Institute on California on the West. And on behalf of my colleagues, Bill Deverell, Eryn Hoffman, and Jessica Kim, I really want to express our gratitude to you all for joining us today on this somber day already, September 11th. And also to today's guests, Brad Onishi, who has come to discuss his book, *Preparing for War: The Extremist History of White Christian Nationalism and What Comes Next*. I think that end of the title is really an important one. So welcome, Brad. Thanks for being here today.

Onishi: [00:08:58] Thanks for inviting me. It's great to be here.

Logan: [00:09:00] No, we're really grateful. In addition to his book and his teaching, Dr. Brad Onishi is the President of the Institute for Religion, Media and Civic Engagement and the co-host of the Straight White American Jesus Podcast. So our format for today will be a conversation mainly between Brad and me on his work, which is templated as a national history but seems to have very deep roots and raises questions for historians of the American West that I know we'll get into. We hope that you, as audience members, will add questions to the Q&A, and we will try and kind of weave and sprinkle those in throughout our conversation, and then also save some time at the end. And my colleague Bill is going to put into the chat for you all a link to the publisher for Brad's book. And just a little note, maybe aim for the more recent paperback version, which has an update from 2024, which I found really helpful to read too. All right, so we jump in.

Onishi: Okay

Logan: I think, you know, people talk about Christian Nationalism, White Christian Nationalism, but I'm not sure that everyone's always using the same definition. So I hope we just start with that. So for the context of our conversation, let's use the terms as

you use them in the book. Do you mind setting out for us: what is White Christian Nationalism?

Onishi: [00:10:25] Sure. I think I think Christian Nationalism in general is a kind of cultural identity that tells a story that goes like this: *The United States is a country that was built for and by Christian people. Doesn't mean that non-Christian people can't be here, depending on who you ask. It doesn't mean that even non-Christian people can't succeed in this society, be part of it. It just simply means that in its original vision, Christians were the ones who built it, and it was built for them.* And so you should have a situation, the narrative goes, where the country retains that ethos both officially and unofficially, officially in its laws and in its policies, and unofficially in its culture, in its public square and, you know, there's the kind of cultural identity way to explain it. And you say, well, how do you arrive at that? And for me, if you go to data from Pew, data from PRI in recent years, they're going to ask people questions like, *Should the United States laws be based on the Bible? Should we teach the Bible in public schools as truth, as religious truth? Should the federal government declare that this is a Christian nation?* And so people who are answering “yes” to those questions are people that I would and, you know, folks who do those surveys categorize as Christian nationalists. I'll mention one more survey that's more extreme and may speak to more to the current moment. And that's a colleague at Denison University named Paul Djupe, who's a great sociologist. He did a study, a survey, and he found that in his survey, 9% of people in the survey, which he takes to be as representative of the United States, so 9% of Americans, he would say, believe that only Christians should be citizens of the United States. And that's pretty representative of Christian nationalism. 14% said that the church should have some sort of veto power over the Supreme Court and other governing bodies in the United States. So when people need a concrete example of Christian nationalism, I think Paul's study is pretty illustrative.

Logan: [00:12:47] Okay. So let's let's move forward kind of using that example. And then when we turn to the book itself, when you describe the book to others, what is the kind of for nerdy historians they always want to know: when does it start in time and where does it finish? So for the scope and kind of scale of your book, how would you frame that?

Onishi: [00:13:07] Yeah, this is really a book about the 1960s to the present. And so my argument would be that if you want to study Christian Nationalism in the United States, you can start in the colonial period, you can start with the Massachusetts Bay Colony, if you, like many people have. And the reason for me to start in the 1960s is twofold. This is a book written for a public audience. And it felt like there was a really clear and communicable modern era to say from before the Civil Rights Movement, before Women's Liberation Movements, Gay Liberation Movements, before what happened in the 1960s till now, you saw this rise in Christian Nationalism. So why? What happened there? And I think sort of more in depth, the book really is trying to look at Christian Nationalism in the West, in California and Southern California in particular. And so there's kind of an emphasis on that region in conjunction with the history that goes from just before the Civil Rights Act, all the way to just about the pandemic.

Logan: [00:14:20] And I think that's one of the really special things about this book is this focus on Southern California and blending your own personal story with this really broad history from the 60s forward. And in fairness to you, I mean, it goes back much before the 60s, like kind of a lot of the people you're mentioning and we can talk about that rhetoric of Manifest Destiny or some of the research of Popenoe and others that's predating that 60s moment. But I want to start kind of at the beginning for you. So can you tell us about being a teen, being a young adult in Yorba Linda, and how the trajectory of that experience led you to this work?

Onishi: [00:15:01] Sure. I converted to Evangelical Christianity when I was 14. I grew up in a largely non-religious home, and I converted at a megachurch. Now, some of you out there, I know some of you are historians and Southern California historical experts. And so Yorba Linda is where I grew up. That is Richard Nixon country. The church that I attended is one of the Quaker or Society of Friends churches that Richard Nixon's parents helped to found in the beginnings of the 20th century. So Yorba Linda is this really peculiar place in the American religious landscape where in a very small town right next to Disneyland, you have two Society of Friends churches. And when I was there, one of them had - Yorba Linda Friends - had about 4 or 5000 people on a Sunday. And my church, Rose Drive Friends had 2000 people. So, you're not supposed to have Quaker megachurches. We did that anyway…how did this many Quakers get to Southern California? Most people don't know. I'm sure many of you in the audience do know that history. So, when I converted, I was an extreme convert, right? So I wasn't

there for fun. I was there because I was fully committed in what I would call an extreme way to the worldview that I was being presented with. I led a Bible study at my public high school at lunchtime. I often walked around my high school and asked other students if they knew Jesus and if they were going to go to heaven. I first entered ministry when I was 18, and then I took over as a full time youth pastor at that church when I was 20. And, and as soon as I graduated from college, I went to seminary. So my involvement in this culture was later than some. I came to it as a convert in my teen years, but my commitment to it, I think was hard to surpass. I was fully in, in every way possible and really imagined myself as never leaving, but things happen, so…

Logan: [00:17:05] I do I want to get to that moment where things happen. Right? Because at some point, there's a pivot to then putting on your academic hat and taking a pass at blending your personal story with these big questions that you have. And so what did that look like?

Onishi: [00:17:19] Yeah. So I you know, I went to Azusa Pacific University, which right down the road from The Huntington, a Christian University, Evangelical University. And my goal was to become a pastor. They always said, if you read too many books, they'll lead, your brain will lead your heart away from God. They were right and not right: they were right in the sense that the version of God that I had learned about definitely started to crumble, and a new version of faith began to reappear. But I started to think, you know, I don't know if I want to be a pastor. I think I want to be like a Christian theologian or maybe a Christian historian. What does that look like? And I had never met anyone like that. Orange County is this place where, when I was growing up, all the parents around me were contractors or bankers or business people, small business owners, financiers. I didn't know anyone who was a poet or a historian. I didn't know anyone who read books for a living or wrote books for a living. I had no idea what NPR was. So this was all new. The idea that you could become an intellectual who studied things. In a very strange course of events that I won't recount today but I'm happy to tell anyone who would listen over a beer or a cup of tea, I finagled my way into Oxford University to get a two year master's degree. And when I moved to England, 6000 miles from Southern California, away from the subculture that I had been immersed in for a decade, I had the chance to kind of really rethink everything about my life, and that included the intellectual foundations of my theology, my theology and philosophy. And I

decided there I wanted to study religion and for the rest of my life, but I no longer participate in the same way I did when I arrived.

Logan: [00:19:11] That's fair. I mean, I'm curious, as you were doing the research for this book, you had to be going over pathways that you had spoken about, maybe even taught your classmates before. And I'm curious, is there a person's story or a story of an event that, as you're researching, it, really surprised you? The difference between kind of what you were taught or teaching and what you found.

Onishi: [00:19:37] … I think that the one of the things I think about a lot are the ways that we were just kind of constantly told in the 90s, I converted in 1995, the ways that we were told that the moment we were living in was the downfall of the United States because we had fallen away from God. And, when you're in the moment and you're going to public high school and you're living in the culture of MTV and everything else, you can believe that you're like, *yeah, I think you're right, Youth Pastor. I think that makes sense.* And you start to just do a little bit of history. Right? And I think everyone, everyone here today knows this, and you realize that folks have been hearing that forever, that this was the moment we fell away from God. It was 1973 *Roe v Wade*. It was Anita Bryant and oranges down in Florida talking about gay representation and gay rights. It was the era Phyllis Schlafly and the fight over the ratification of that amendment. It was the election of Jimmy Carter, a dyed in the wool evangelical who carried a Bible everywhere. And yet when he held a conference on families at the White House in 1979, 1980, ended up reviled by the people that he thought were his comrades in faith because they said, *this is the moment America is falling away from God, because the American family is so different now than it should be*. All that to say, I think, writing this book was a was of going home, and it was a way of treading paths and going over terrain that I haven't for a long time. And I, I was kind of uncomfortable at moments. But it's one of those moments, too, where you totally readjust your understanding of your experience and where you grew up, and it all gets bigger and wider and you're able to situate yourself in history, which is which is illuminating, if nothing else.

Logan: [00:21:36] One of the aspects of the going home portion that actually surprised me when I was reading and Bill as well, is this is this kind of the way you came to it? Because I don't associate Quakers mainly with White Christian Nationalism. So I'm

curious, do you have a sense of what percentage of the larger movement is Quaker, or is Yorba Linda just anomalous because of the Quaker connection to Nixon in that space?

Onishi: [00:22:02] Yeah. Yorba Linda is super anomalous. Yorba Linda is a peculiar place in a lot of ways. But the Quaker communities in Yorba Linda, I think are indicative of a larger phenomenon in American Christianity and American evangelicalism writ large. So the Quaker communities in Yorba Linda, I recount this, this story in the book where in the midst of World War I, somebody had brought an American flag in the meeting house of the small and fledgling Quaker meeting in Yorba Linda and none other than Richard Nixon's parents and their friends said, *Get that out of here. That doesn't belong in God's house*. Right? Well, as the decades go on, Orange County, Southern California becomes this stalwart of the defense industry, conservative politics and so on. And those Quaker churches really kind of take themselves and put themselves through a transformative process where they align with what I would call kind of evangelical megachurch culture in general. Right? The generic megachurch evangelical white culture that we could see in Chicago, we could see in Florida, we could see in Maryland, but we certainly see dotted all across Southern California. They start to look like Willow Creek or other megachurches rather than a Quaker meeting house where there is silence, where Egalitarianism and justice and abolition are like theological principles and foundations. So, I think in some ways they're super anomalous. I think in other ways they're indicative of way of how many denominations have seen a kind of like, you have to align your theology with conservative politics, otherwise you're outside the bounds of evangelical orthodoxy. And if you're outside of those bounds, you might be theologically and ecclesiastically homeless. So you can take that bet if you want, but it's probably better if you get in with the program and align yourselves with the larger movement so that you're not out in the desert and all alone.

Logan: [00:24:17] I think one of the key components of your work that I found interesting was your focus on myth making as tying different aspects of the movement together. And as historians, I think many of us are comfortable with the idea of analyzing myth making, but are very concerned in this moment…about the public and ourselves, our own abilities to discern truth, and to help equip our students with the tools to, especially in an AI world, to kind of sort through and find trusted sources, which are related to this conversation, I think, in the way that you began, which is that a lot of

this movement involves telling stories about the American West. So I'm hoping you can walk us through kind of one of those framings of the American West that becomes foundational to White Christian Nationalism. There's so many in your book.

Onishi: [00:25:16] Yeah. No, it's I mean, it's a great question. And I think, so one of the figures I like to discuss in the book, and I'm sure there's people here who know more about this person than I do, but, so I grew up in Orange County and our airport's named after John Wayne. Right. So John Wayne becomes this figure, in Orange County and in Southern California in general, who represents the ideal man? Well, what is the ideal man? Well, the ideal man is self-reliant, hardworking, doesn't need the government. Doesn't need anyone else. And he doesn't take any guff from anyone - that includes women. That includes people of color. That includes folks that are not on his level. He acts; he doesn't think. And the story that gets told about John Wayne, but I think, of course, about this caricature of the kind of American cowboy is that the American West is the place where you see the fulfillment of American masculinity and American idealism, that you are a self-reliant, independent, not government dependent person who forges his own path, thwarts his enemies in the name of God and country and never backs down from anyone, right? And I think for me, one of the things that came like roaring to the front as the, as I wrote the book was, here, ah, here I am, growing up in a suburban context, a place with minivans and, you know, just the trappings of suburbia there. There's nothing wild about the place left. And yet the men at my church looked up to someone like John Wayne way more than they did Mister Rogers. And to me, there is a myth there about the American West as a place where that kind of man can still exist, that that kind of man can still roam free. That kind of man can still be the head of his home and his church and his society, and he can still explore the frontiers that need taming by the White Christian American man who will have the guts to do so in the name of Manifest Destiny. So I'm not sure if I'm totally answering your question, but, you know, the idea that that John Wayne would be a hero to the suburban dads I grew up with who were driving kids to soccer practice and, you know, backing their cars, out of their three car garages rather than getting anywhere near something like a frontier was this kind of iteration for me of, like, myth making and myth telling about what it means to be an American, what it means to be a Christian, and certainly what it means to be a man.

Logan: [00:28:05] And I think you're mentioning of Manifest Destiny, part of the book, that I mean, maybe I'm naive or just a little bit misinformed, that really surprised me is the kind of really trying to put that on the landscape in the more recent past and imagining a future that is tied up in those myths of maybe it's John Wayne, American cowboy ism. Maybe it's Manifest Destiny. And I think when you were talking about movements, is it American Redoubt? I mean…I really don't even know the word. Can you explain this for those that haven't been tracking that conversation?

Onishi: [00:28:41] Sure. So, you know, the book is largely about Southern California and I try to show folks that, you know, Southern California is not a place that we often expect to find conservative Christian history. It's not a place that we imagine as the epicenter of conservative, White Evangelical Christianity in the United States. Right. Isn't that the Bible Belt? Isn't that in the Deep South? Isn't that in Jerry Falwell's church in Virginia? John Hagee's church in Texas, etc.? And the answer is, that the more you look, the more you find you're going to find James Dobson gets his start in LA. You're going to find all of the folks who just stumped for Goldwater, right? In the 60s, you're going to find the spiritual birth of Reagan's political career. In Southern California, you're going to find the anti-Communist school, you know, Fred Schwartz or the Knott family of Knott's Berry Farm, right, who were just ardent supporters of these movements. You know, all of these, all of the more you look, the more you find. And yet, as I think about home now, 25 years after graduating high school, if we just took a trip right now, today and landed in Idaho and you gave me, like, a day, you said, *All right, scavenger hunt, you have a day. You got to find as many people as you can from your church or your school. And if you get to 100, you know, you win a prize.* I think I could get there. I think I could find 100 people I grew up with in Idaho. So as I was writing the book, the question became like, all right, so why Idaho? What? What's going on? The two places that everyone I grew up with has moved are Idaho and Nashville. Why? And here's my explanation, and I'm open to folks you know, thoughts on this. And people from the region challenge me on this. But here's my thought is: Orange County has become different than the one that folks populated in the 50s and 60s. In the 50s and 60s, the population of Orange County explodes. It goes from a bucolic farming region to this suburban hub. It becomes the home of Disneyland. It becomes the place where the defense industry is headquartered in some sense. It becomes what we now know today of a region that is a wealthy suburb of Los Angeles with millions and millions of people. Well, today, that suburb is way more diverse than it used to be. There are way, like so

as an example, in Yorba Linda, we used to have Yorba Linda Bowl, which was an old school bowling alley that smelled like greasy hamburgers and hot dogs and French fries. And when I was a kid, that's where we went. If you wanted to bowl for cheap or get a bad hamburger, it is now a Japanese grocery. So like, I'm Japanese American and we used to drive like 70 minutes to Gardena. All my family's in Gardena to go to the Japanese grocery and see our cousins every Saturday. The idea that they put a Japanese grocery store in our bowling alley is bonkers to ten-year old me, but that's Orange County now. Orange County has way more boba and taquerias and pho than it used to. It is a more diverse place. Voted for Clinton plus 5 in 2016, voted for Biden, etc. What's that mean? Well, it means that a lot of folks have looked around the Orange County that they, their grandpa like came to in the 50s and 60s and said, *I don't want to be here anymore. It's too expensive. Yes, too much traffic. Sure. Too many regulations. Maybe Governor Newsom…don't like him. So, what are we going to do? Well, we're going to move to a place that reminds us of the Orange County that our grandfather or grandmother discovered in the 50s and 60s.* My mom arrived in 1958 from Missouri because her dad decided to drive their Oldsmobile West to find something new. Well, for a lot of folks, that's Idaho, right? And many of you in the audience are going to know all of this, right? That the population of Boise has exploded. It's going to reach a million people here in a couple of years. The real estate prices are through the roof from where they were 20 years ago. And if you start to think about Idaho, it starts to look like Orange County of 1965. It's 90% white. There are no historical enclaves of ethnic or racial minorities. So right there, there's just no population of folks, Vietnamese folks, Chinese folks, Black folks who have been there four and five or 2 or 3 generations. Just does not exist in Idaho, period. And there's this sense that Idaho is like an unknown land. Where you, it's like a canvas, where you can actually make a difference politically. So social scientists from Boise State have found that there are throngs of Californians moving to Idaho every year. There are throngs of Seattleites moving to Idaho every year. And the fear from the native Idahoans is, *oh, you're going to turn our state super blue…You're going to make this a liberal place.* The social science tells us they have made it way more conservative. So what you have is a self-selecting exile from these places, creating a set of communities in places like Idaho that are way further to the right politically than they used to be. Now, is that a coincidence? It's not. It turns out that there has been a movement underfoot for about two decades, called the American Redoubt movement. And this movement says that Idaho and Montana and Wyoming and the eastern parts of Oregon and Washington, the eastern east of the Cascade,

parts of those states are the last refuge where it is possible to create a kind of Christian society that is based in certain values and a certain way of life, and where you can prepare for the collapse of the United States as we know it and really engage in what will come after what we know as the United States. So preppers and doomsdayers and extremists have been moving to Idaho for a long time. My argument in the book is that that guy named Ryan, who I went to high school with, who moved to Eagle, Idaho during the pandemic. When I asked Ryan, like, *yo, why are you moving to Idaho?* He didn't say, *well, I'm a white supremacist and I'm really into White Nationalism. And it's just it's just brewing up there. I really love that. That's what I really want to teach my kids that*. He said things like *traffic and cost of living* and *guns and can't have those in California. And I want to raise my kids around nature. Okay. Sounds good. Ryan. That's great. Hey, did you consider Albuquerque? Nah, didn't do that. Mm. Alright. Like, how about anywhere over here? No.* And whenever I would suggest cities or places, it would come up that those are places that look too much like the Orange County. They're leaving too much diversity, right? Too many folks not voting the way they want, too many folks wearing masks and getting Covid vaccines. And what I would say to folks like Ryan is like, *so you're okay with your kids going to school in places where, you know, there are pockets and actually influential figures in the community who are White Nationalists, who are Christian extremists, who want to make it such that we live by the laws of the Old Testament and gay people are stoned. That's okay with you. But you don't want to move to Albuquerque or Memphis or somewhere else because of other things.* Right? And so there is a large scale exile among this homogeneous group to places like Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, and in my mind, they're creating a kind of Christian nationalist subculture that is one of the most radical in the United States. If you follow Idaho politics, Kootenai County, Coeur d'Alene, other places, you know, some of the most radical politics in this country are coming out of those communities. And it's because of everything I just talked about. Sorry, that was a really long answer. But yeah.

Logan: [00:36:45] No, that's I mean, I feel like tying together what many historians have seen as kind of like conservative white flight from California to places like Idaho with this larger, I would call it a “dream” that seems to be to create this form of society. That piece I had not seen. So, we do have a question from the audience that is wondering, just as a historical concept, is it fair to say that Idaho is kind of like the current version of

the old Colorado Springs. Or is in your framing, Idaho, kind of more extreme White Christian Nationalism?

Onishi: [00:37:23] Yeah, I think it is…And I think that these places around the country have acted in the evangelical imaginary as like, oh, that's the promised land, right? And so Orange County was that in the 50s and 60s: 90% white, like solidly, overwhelmingly anti-communist, pro-capitalist pro individual. There's no guessing why this place was the Goldwater country, the Reagan home, the place that was just going to build the epicenter of, like, mid 20th century conservatism. Well, that got crowded and expensive. And then Colorado Springs popped up as like, oh, yeah, that's the place. That's the spot, right? I think what you have with Idaho is a similar imagination about what it can mean. But it's filled with what I would take is even more openly extreme politics in a place that has already had wide scale movements of white nationalism. So I think a lot of folks in the audience will know about, you know, the Aryan Nations in Idaho and just the longstanding kind of white nationalist presence in that region. A lot of folks will know about Doug Wilson and Moscow, Idaho, and how he has been building his kind of empire, his white Christian nationalist empire there for decades now. And so, I think moving to Idaho is a place where they're thinking, not only will we have a chance to live together in what is a kind of…

Logan: [00:39:03] We froze for a second. Brad, we've lost you for a second. Oh, wait. You're back. We froze.

Onishi: [00:39:08] Oh, no. Did I freeze? Okay. I was just saying that Idaho is a place that they feel like they can take over and you see that. You see that when you talk to native Idahoans, you see that in the politics that when people move there, they're not sitting back and sort of getting to know the place. They don't think of themselves as transplants. They are implants. They're there to like, conquest. And I'm not sure that we had that kind of rhetoric coming out of Colorado, the movement to Colorado Springs.

Logan: [00:39:35] We have another question from the audience. These are terrific questions, not meaning to kind of push the metaphor too much, but if you turn back to the 19th century and we think about other religious groups kind of moving west to create political, religious spaces, we have to think about the LDS church, right? And, so what do you see as kind of different from that movement and this and then also there's a sub

part to the question, which is, how much do you see the LDS church involved in White Christian Nationalism?

Onishi: [00:40:07] Sure. Yeah. So I would say, obviously a great question. And obviously Idaho, especially southern Idaho, has just, you know, large, a long standing Mormon population and a lot of influence by the LDS church in that part of the state. I'm not a scholar of Mormonism or Mormon history, LDS history, but what I would say is that when you think about that move west by the Latter Day Saints, you have a movement that is trying to find a place of refuge where it can be safe to practice what they take to be their minority religion. And I think, de facto, we can see in that sort of migration, a new religious movement trying to find its kind of spiritual resting place where we're going to build our temples and our generations will live. The difference I see with this move to Idaho is that while many of the people moving there will tell you that they are victims and minoritized and that they are refugees from the communist state of California, what they will tell you that, it's difficult in any way, shape or form to look at the data and say that they're not part of a religious, political movement that has had overwhelming power in the country and continues, of course, to have overwhelming power in the country. So I think we can make the comparison in some sense of a migration and people looking to kind of build a society. But in another sense, these are folks who are always claiming to be the victim, who have, who have had and still do, maintain an overwhelming political, economic and cultural hegemony in this country. And nothing's changed in the current administration and it's only increased, really.

Logan: [00:41:53] So I want to carefully, because it's really, I think, challenging and heart heavy…your title is *Preparing for War*, and I think throughout the book that feels like a framing of Christian Crusade somewhat. But it also to me reads like some of the stories about violence on the landscape in the American West had kind of created that foundation for the concept of war. So as someone who's interested in kind of not simply de-escalating, but coming to reckoning and to seeing the humanity and the complexity of humanity in all of us and moving towards a place of creating community together, which I understand is a big leap from “preparing for war,” I'm wondering if you've found any historical examples of moments when this concept of “preparing for war” could get re-spun and reframed at the community level? Or I know interpersonally, you know, in your conversations in Oxford, something switched in your mind as you read books and

talked to people. So the hopeful historian in me is wondering if we could reframe from “preparing for war” to something else?

Onishi: [00:43:13] You know, it's interesting I started writing the book during the pandemic. And, I think in that moment, a lot of folks saw family members and friends who had kind of been going down a radicalization path in the first Trump era really start to go down that path, like in ways that were startling when it came to Covid vaccines, Covid mandates, wearing masks, and so on. And this question just came up all the time. Well, I see in real time, like my family members and my colleagues and my nephew and my friend getting radicalized online by all of this misinformation, this conspiracy, what do I do? And, you know, we then had the Biden presidency, which was a lot of things. And I'm not going to try to talk about those things right now, but it the way I described it was always the eye of the storm, because I think there was a sense there that something had calmed down and something had kind of relaxed. And what I knew just from somebody who whose work is in this every day, is that there was no calming down from those who had been preparing for war since the 1960s. And I guess what I'm trying to say here in a long-winded way is that from that point, only five years ago till now, I feel like things have only heightened and heightened in ways that are truly frightening. And, whether or not I have a historical example, I don't know that I do; what I do know is that we seem to have entered a phase where everything that we thought would break the fever and the hysteria surrounding this political moment has not done so. There's been no puncturing. There's been no breakthrough of that. And so I what I fear and I'm not going to answer your question very well and I apologize, Elizabeth, is that the only way to come to that next American and next global consensus, like anything we might have seen after World War II, whatever folks think about the idea of World War II consensus, is going to be through something that is catastrophic, violent, and something that truly knocks the world order off of its axis, as it has been since in the 75 years - since the end of World War II, the 80 years since the end of World War II. So,I used to talk to a lot of people at conferences and universities and in my classes about the interpersonal dynamics of talking to people who had been radicalized, talking to them in ways that allowed for them to be vulnerable and to get to the emotion of their belief, to realize that the emotion was first and the belief was second, that the resentment and the grievance and the fear and the uncertainty was first. And then they filled all that with conspiracy and misinformation and myth making and and dangerous rhetoric. And now we're to the point where I still think that's possible, but we're living in an age to where it feels

increasingly dangerous to try to engage folks on those grounds, because the political pressure is so high and so unstable.

Logan: [00:46:49] I'm not sure I've ever said this to a guest. I hope you're wrong.

Onishi: [00:46:52] Yeah. No, I hope I am, too.

Logan: [00:46:53] I do very much as someone who spent a lot of time thinking about legal history and moments in our past, when we have come to those violent times, when the kind of ability to amend law has failed and we've taken up arms and I think you mentioned the dangers of engaging in those conversations. But to me, the danger is so much worse to not. So I'm going to keep trying. And if that proves us all naive as, as historians or those interested in that, then that's okay for me.

Onishi: [00:47:28] I think some of us can have those conversations. I think for other folks, they feel like just being who they are now in public, right? Because of their sexual identity, their gender identity, their racial. They feel like I can't even leave the house without thinking that Ice is going to kidnap someone who looks like me, much less try to convince, you know, Greg over there or Jerry over there, who with his MAGA hat on. But, I used to work with that. He should kind of rethink things. You know, I think that's what I mean.

Logan: [00:47:55] Oh, no. Absolutely. And I think how public a conversation these conversations are is going to have to be determined by individual circumstances and whether it's even just a family member.

Onishi: [00:48:05] Yeah.

Logan: [00:48:07] Okay. Maybe we should pivot. We do have a question,in the chat that I will pose as written - do you have any thoughts about churches that present themselves as being hip and cool and inclusive and liberal, but in reality are more of the same old conservatism and white nationalism, but they just don't discuss it publicly?

Onishi: [00:48:29] Oh, I got so many thoughts. Yeah, I don't know how long. If everyone can stay, maybe we can order pizza and have dinner because I have, like, a lot of

thoughts. The church I grew up in was that to some degree. I when I went to that youth group at age 14, I thought everyone was going to be Ned Flanders. Right? And everyone was, like, 23 years old and had tattoos and played the guitar, and I was like, 14 and these guys are the coolest people I've ever met. I want to hang out with them. They had long hair and surfed. You know, this was like, let's cool. Who are you? You like me? I'm allowed to be here. You're welcoming me. This is awesome. My wife actually, through work, in various ways through the State Department and the Fulbright program, often hosted scholars from other places. And they would visit churches like this. And she had never been to one. And so the first time she went, she was like, *what should I expect?* And I was like, *I don't know, you. You go and check it out.* And she did. And I said, when she got home, I said, *how'd it go*? She said, *well, I got there. They gave me a latte. It was great.* I said, *wow, that's good. You got a latte?* She says, *yeah. And on in the church, the kids were in the back climbing on a climbing wall. It was insane. And, you know, everyone was wearing sandals and a Hawaiian shirt. It was fun. And then I started listening to the sermon and I realized what they were saying, and it was really patriarchal and misogynist and homophobic* and so on and so forth. So, I think for a lot…Here's what I'll say is for a long time that has been the strategy of a lot of mainstream evangelical culture. And I honestly think we're seeing the end of it. I think we're seeing something worse take over. I think we're seeing now a culture that is less trying to bait and switch people and persuade them by way of lattes and hip music and lasers and a kids' program and more, a culture that says, *we're here to conquer American culture for Christ and to be a real American, you need to be a Christian. And if you're not a Christian, then, you know, you're just not one of us.* We've really moved from a place of a missional church to King Jesus, right? That Jesus is the king of the public square. *We will show up anywhere we want and sing and pray and rally and dehumanize. And it doesn't matter. You're not going to be able like you might have in the 90s or 2000, to exclude us from polite conversation or culture because we're just too impolite, too, you know, politically incorrect.* So I thoroughly detest the culture of church that you're bringing up in your question. And I actually think something worse has taken root and you can see this in - and so some of you will know who these people are - Sean Feucht, or and some of the rallies he does, or others where there's just this sense of Jesus is the king of the land. *And if you don't pledge allegiance to my king, then you're not a Christian and you're not a patriot.* If you go back and listen to Pete Hegseth praying at the very first Pentagon prayer service that he led a couple of months ago, he begins that prayer with *Dear King Jesus*. Okay. And to the untrained ear, it's like, well, I

don't know, that's the religious thing to say. But to me, that is a signal of where we've come in 20 years: that is an imperial conquering, Manifest Destiny Christianity that is saying *we're not here to persuade. We're here to colonize and either get on board or get out of our way.*

Logan: [00:52:09] I'm wondering if you can comment on…I do see in connection with that some rhetoric with regard to…so if we think about 19th century violence against Indigenous Western peoples, right, it's violence aimed at eradication or forced assimilation and a genocidal cultural argument. So we see that. But then I do see more recently this argument of it's like a total erasure, where Native American means White Christian Nationalist, as opposed to it's like a co-opt. It's a different spin. And I think it's related to what you were just saying. Do you have thoughts on that one?

Onishi: [00:52:50] Totally. So the popular rhetoric now among like the White Christian male punditry, the podcasters, the manosphere, those kind of folks, is that white, Anglo-Saxon? Let me back up. *White people are the real Native Americans. There was no America before this. There was just this untamed, chaotic, uncivilized place. Did it have human beings in it? Sure. But no civilization to speak of, no humanity to speak of. So we, the white settlers are the Native Americans. We are not immigrants. You're an immigrant, right? You pre - or excuse me, you post 1965 Asian person from China, from Korea. You're the immigrant. You the person from Mexico. You the person - you know, from another place. You're an immigrant. I'm a settler. And as a settler, I'm the Native American, not you.* There's even a meme that kind of rates how American you are. So, you know, if you can trace your family to the Mayflower, you get an A; colonial period, still largely a kind of Anglo Saxon sort of heritage, you get a B. You know, you come in the wave of immigration, you come in the early 19th century, right? You get a C, you might be like an Italian family, 1895 or an Irish family like 1915. Whatever. You know, you get you're passing the class, right? You get a C. You know, if you come 20th century, maybe from Scandinavia or somewhere else, probably a D and then post 1965, you're really flunking the class. And so, the people I study now for my next book call themselves Heritage Americans. And they believe that the only way that the United States can be itself is if it is dominated by white Anglo-Saxon Christian culture, politics and economics. And any deviation from that is an aberration and will bring the judgment of God and the downfall of the country.

Logan: [00:55:06] Let's talk about this more. So your next project is, what's the time scope on that?

Onishi: [00:55:12] Yeah. It's should be out next fall, about a year from now. It's called *American Caesar: The Theocrats and Tech Lords who Want to Make the United States a Dictatorship.* So super light read, beach read. You know, just take it on vacation kind of thing. But I'm really examining how and why three groups are now openly calling for the end of democracy in the United States and that are those are post liberal Catholics - in the vein of Patrick Deneen, Adrian Vermeule, people who have a large influence on our vice president; Reconstructionist Protestants - so people like Doug Wilson, who is Texas' favorite pastor and has been in the news quite a bit over the last month or so; and tech technocrats, tech fascists, etc., people like Peter Thiel and Curtis Yarvin. These are not groups that you that often play nice with each other. They often don't really; they're like oil and water, but there's a strange coalescence among them right now where they are all calling for the end of democracy as we know it in the United States and for some form of monarchy, Theocratic Caesarism dictatorship, because that is the only way to save the country. So, again, it's a pretty heavy read, but, I'm trying to show how there's a real confluence of forces. And their political hopes are really pinned on JD Vance. JD Vance to all three groups is really the guy that will finish the work that Donald Trump started. And so the vice president is this is this strange amalgam of a guy that is a Peter Thiel acolyt, obviously spent time in Silicon Valley. He converted to a reactionary, traditional form of Catholicism in 2019. But he is also beloved by the Doug Wilson Reconstructionist Protestants. So all of them see him as kind of their man in waiting to take the movement forward.

Logan: [00:57:18] It seems like just listening for these few minutes, that a lot of this relies on their ability to kind of rewrite the past entirely and sell a version of history that makes this palatable and also perhaps even feasible. And so since you're talking to so many historians right now, I'm just curious if you have any ideas about ways that we can really kind of secure historical curiosity and historical interest and reliance on sources and continuing to ask questions and push at narratives as they're created to kind of test them, even amongst our own teams. Right. Like where, where are the fault lines? Do you have any advice for people having studied these others?

Onishi: [00:58:12] Well, I, you know, the one of so many I don't know. There's so many thoughts on this question. I think one of the things that we're always going to have to offer as academics, historians and scholars of religion and so on, are complex stories. And we have to find ways to say, to communicate those stories in a way that are accessible and engaging…Refuse the kind of reduction that we see in most of the ways that the stories you're referencing are being told. How do we transpose our work into narrative that honors its nuance and complexity, but is and avoids reduction, but is accessible and engaging to a public that is increasingly primed to get its information from TikTok and from YouTube, from podcasts? It's a huge challenge. And it's not an easy one. And, I think that, I'll just say for me, over the last five years, one of the biggest lessons I've learned as somebody who's done just a lot of public scholarship is that kind of work is just as hard and takes just as much brain as it does to write an article for that peer reviewed journal. It's easy to look down on that kind of work. *Public work is kind of dumbing down what you do or talking to the plebeians or something.* And, the creativity and the strategic kind of framing that is required requires an intense amount of work, but it's worth it. It's possible to do this work. Ao we started Straight White American Jesus five years ago or actually seven years ago just to kind of get through the first Trump term. And what we found were, when we did what we took to be kind of Senior seminar, intro-level grad kind of class kind of analysis, people were dying for that, thirsty for it. Because they wanted folks who could present the breadth of the academic work in a way that they could listen to and digest while driving to/on their commute or doing the dishes. And so, if you want to reach people, you have to be willing to talk to people. We have to be willing to not stay in the ivory tower. It's more comfortable there sometimes, better coffee, etc. but, it's also just never going to happen unless we - those with the training who've spent decades doing this - are willing to go have the conversations in places that feel like we're a little bit out of our comfort zone. I know that's increasingly true as we teach. Just every time you teach now, you feel like, you know, your authority is undermined, your legitimacy is questioned and people think they know more than you because they watched a YouTube video about Nietzsche or listen to someone on TikTok talk about the French Revolution. But, yeah, it's something that takes an immense amount of work, but I cannot think of something more important in this current moment than that.

Logan: [01:01:32] So we share that goal with you at ICW about blending the kind of academic and public conversations and having it truly be a conversation seems to be

the way forward. So on that note, I would like to welcome you back whenever you have that next book. We can continue this conversation, but we have a couple more minutes and I'd like to end it with an audience question. We have been spending a lot of time talking about men in the movement. And the question is about women in the movement, and also kind of the flip side, the vision of women in this new society that's coming out of the movement. Do you want to weigh in on that one?

Onishi: [01:02:10] Yeah. I mean, I think one of the reasons I decided to write the book I'm writing now is because the discourse on gender and sexuality has changed so much over the last five years. And I think we've seen that the recoil is now brought the movement to a place where there's a lot of folks, including Pete Hegseth, favorite pastor, Doug Wilson, who would say that the 19th Amendment should be repealed. And there's a lot of women saying that, too, that women should not vote, that there should be one vote per household. The man is the deciding factor in that. And that's assuming that all households are heterosexual, households are heteronormative, and so on. It also assumes that if you're an unmarried woman, that you probably just don't get to vote. So that's kind of where we've arrived. And I guess for me, that's, you know, with only having a few minutes, that's a barometer. I mean, …I know I don't have to tell anybody. Like, we're living in a moment that feels, you know, like a fever dream. But if you think back to Trump's first term when he ran against Hillary Clinton, if you would have gotten on TV as a pastor and said women should not be able to vote, you might have had some people that like that, but for the most part, you would have been ushered off stage quickly and never invited back. That was just not a position you could hold. And now we're at a place where that is more mainstream, I think, than most people in polite company understand that in the manosphere, in Christian Nationalist circles, among tradwives, among certain church cultures, the idea that women should not vote, much less have any kind of power is thoroughly, thoroughly popular. It's ubiquitous in some places. So, and, you know, in the book, I trace some of those histories through Phyllis Schlafly and others in the new book I'm writing. I spent a lot of time on Connie Marshner, who was kind of Paul Weyrich's, you know, co-conspirator. But there have always been women in this movement. There have always been women in the White Christian Nationalist, patriarchal movement that have tried to cultivate a masculinist society where women have a certain role. And as long as they play that role, they are afforded, you know, certain measures of whatever. But we're seeing that change and I think a lot of it, just to close with this, is a direct backlash to everything that happened in

2019, 2020 and 2021, when gender and sexual expression in this country started to become mainstream. When you started to see people say *my pronouns are this* right, this is a direct and vicious recoil to all of that. And it's focused on trans rights, of course, but it's focused on women and queer folks as well.

Logan: [01:04:56] I think that's the right place to leave it for today. Brad, thank you so much for talking about your book and also about the future work that you're working through. And please do keep in touch. For the rest of you who have spent this hour with us, we are very grateful for your time, especially on a busy month and we hope that you'll join us next week for Bill Deverell's conversation with Claire Hoffman on *Sister Sinner*. So we're going to move back in time to Los Angeles and Aimee Semple McPherson, and switch it up a little bit for next week. But thank you so much and we hope to see you then. Bye bye.

Onishi: [01:05:34] Thank you.