

Conspiracy! Evangelicals, Fear, and Nationalism in the 21st Century

A public lecture by Prof. Anthea Butler, University of Pennsylvania

Introductions by Prof. Marie Griffith and Prof. Laurie Maffly-Kipp, both Washington University in St. Louis

Emerson Auditorium at Washington University in St. Louis

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7:00 pm – 8:30 pm

Griffith:

Greetings everyone and welcome to tonight's lecture by Professor Anthea Butler, sponsored by the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics at Washington University in St. Louis. I'm Marie Griffith, the Center Director, and I say this every time but it is truly great to see all of you here in this room and also to welcome all of you joining us by livestream or Zoom from home. This is our first major public event in two years and I don't think we'll ever take gathering together for granted again. And in fact we're so excited to gather with you that we have a surprise gift for you all at the end, at least for those of you here in this room, so please stay tuned for that. We also hope you'll stay for a reception and book signing with Professor Butler, whose celebrated book *White Evangelical Racism: The Politics of Morality in America* will be available in the Lobby. We have a couple more events this semester to which I'd like to call your attention. Next Thursday April 14th we will welcome Anthropologist Kevin Lewis O'Neill on the topic "An Island Retreat: Sin, Secrecy, and the Offshoring of Sexually Abusive Priests," and that will also be at 7:00 in this same room, as well as on Zoom. And on Tuesday April 19th the Danforth Center welcomes Journalist Mark Oppenheimer to speak about his recent book *Squirrel Hill: The Tree of Life Synagogue Shooting and the Soul of a Neighborhood*. Further information is available on the welcome table outside this room as well as on our website, and we hope all of you will join us for these events as well. And now it's my pleasure to welcome my colleague Laurie Maffly-Kipp to the podium to introduce our distinguished speaker. Laurie is the Archer Alexander Distinguished Professor in the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics and she has served as the Director of Religious Studies as well as the Interim Dean and Vice Provost for Graduate Education here at WashU. Prior to joining the Center, she taught for 24 years at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is a renowned scholar in several areas of American Religious History, including African-American Religious History, Religion in the Western United States, and Mormonism, among others.

Maffly-Kipp:

Good evening. It is my distinct pleasure this evening to introduce our guest, and my dear friend, Anthea Butler. Professor Butler is the Geraldine R. Segal Professor in American Social Thought and Chair of Religious Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Her research and writing spans African-American religion and history, race, politics, Evangelicalism, gender and sexuality, media and popular culture. She's also the recipient of numerous honors and a driving force behind several important public initiatives. She was awarded a Luce/ACLS Fellowship for the Religion, Journalism, and International Affairs grant in 2018-19 to investigate the Prosperity gospel and politics in the American and Nigerian contexts. She was also a Presidential fellow at

Yale Divinity School for the 2019-2020 academic year. Currently, she co-directs the Henry Luce Foundation-funded Crossroads Project for black religious histories, communities, and cultures. Finally, she is also the current President of the American Society for Church history, one of the oldest professional guilds in our field. Some of you may know Professor Butler more from her public engagement in social media, print, and television. She is an op-ed contributor for MSNBC. Her articles have also been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, CNN, NBC, and *The Guardian*. She has served as a consultant to PBS series', including Billy Graham, The Black Church, God in America, and Aimee Semple McPherson. For all her titles and accolades, however, Anthea is quite simply a force of nature and a scholar who can speak truths (?- 4:45) that cut through much of what passes for academic rhetoric. We were trying to remember, earlier today, just how long we had known one another and when we had met. While neither of could recall exactly, I believe it must have been some time in the late 1990s when Anthea was in graduate school. Even at that time she was sought after as a conversation partner because she could talk about race, religion, and politics in ways that few other people would; the woman does not mince words. She brings to her work a unique mix of deep generosity for religious communities of all stripes, a biting wit, and a willingness to hold people to account when necessary, something I have a feeling she will do with us this evening. Anthea also brings her own real-life experience from very different worlds to bear. First, from her research and experience in African-American Pentecostal communities she had intimate knowledge of the politics of Black Church spaces, including, I should note, wonderful stories about female dress requirements in particular churches. That part of her life informed her first book project, *Women in the Church of God in Christ: Making a Sanctified World*, in 2007. Second, from her traversing of White Evangelical spaces and her deep friendships with people who live in those worlds she brings an empathy, tempered by a commitment to truth-telling. You may not always agree with Anthea, but you know exactly what she thinks. Moreover, you know that her shots are not cheap ones but are grounded in understanding and a commitment to sustaining relationships across the political spectrum. She wants us to think better and to view our current political and religious tensions from new vantage points. She has certainly helped me to do that. Those goals are on full display in her most recent book, *White Evangelical Racism: The Politics of Morality in America*, as well as her contribution to the 1619 book, *A New Beginning*, and I suspect we will hear more about them tonight but I will let you experience them for yourselves. It's now my great pleasure to welcome Professor Anthea Butler here to talk about "Conspiracy! Evangelicals, Fear, and Nationalism in the 21st Century".

Butler:

Thank you all for coming. This is really lovely. This is the first time in two years that I have spoken to a group of people in front of me and not on, you know, some kind of "thing," so that's great.

And hello everyone out there in Zoom-land! This is how you're used to seeing me, you haven't seen my legs in two years; it's probably good that you haven't. So, thank you Laurie for that wonderful introduction. Thank you, Marie, for inviting me. I have known these two lovely professors and women for a very long time and they are good friends as well as other people in the Center, Leigh Schmidt and Mark Valeri. Everyone in the Center has just been wonderful, and I just want to talk about the Center staff, Debra especially, who have been really gracious to. So I just want to say thank you, first of all. And then, to begin, how about that...

This is not going to be an easy talk tonight, but I think it is a talk you need to hear. And it is a talk about where we are right now. January 6, 2021 was a defining moment in American history. It was the first time that the capital had been stormed by a large crowd of people since 1814. While other attacks at the capital have happened, most notably bombings and the shooting of five congressmen in 1954, 1/6 marked the first time that an attack of this magnitude occurred. And while we are still processing, at least I am anyway, what this might all mean for America, I want to single out a particular moment that I think encapsulates what I will be talking with you about this evening. And that is the prayer in the Senate Chamber. I am going to play this main clip for you, and then I want to talk about its meaning and how this connects to conspiracy theories and Evangelicalism today. [Video clip]

Amen. They did end with Amen, I just cut it badly. The leader of this prayer, known colloquially as QAnon Shaman, was Jacob Chansley, who was recently sentenced to forty-one months in prison for his role in the insurrection. There are specific parts in his prayer that, to the normal listener, would not appear to be part of a conspiracy, but they were. The way that he spoke about globalists, communists, and the like, all resonate with things we hear every day, but we might not know where they come from. His prayer is an imprecatory prayer, a prayer designed to move God to make things happen, to speak on behalf of things he felt were evil. “Commanding Jesus,” according to his words, to be in the Senate Chamber to fight against the “tyrants,” “communists,” and “globalists,” he called his fellow insurrectionists “patriots.” He called on the “white light” of love to fill the Chamber. And he, like everyone else in the room, thought he had God’s favor because he has successfully broken into the Chamber.

Now, on one level, we know that this is all wrong. It is wrong because it is a breach of the capital building, people died, politicians and staff had to be evacuated alongside the Vice President of the United States all because of the certification of Joe Biden’s presidency. In no short order, people began to call this, within twenty-four hours, an attempted coup. Moreover, and this is crucial to my talk tonight, it marked the moment that prayer wasn’t just a prayer, but a prayer for insurrection. A prayer for overthrow. And a prayer that sounded like an Evangelical prayer. It was a mash-up of several different beliefs that are held by these insurrectionists; they are also held by politicians, church members, and many other people who believe conspiracy theories in America. And they are held by Evangelicals.

What I want to talk about today, is how Evangelicalism has changed and where we are now. This is not a talk to denigrate Evangelicals, this is not a talk about trying to put them in a certain spot, this is about telling you the truth. And so, while many may disagree with me, I think what we can agree on is that this is a moment for this particular movement in American religion that bodes ill. That is trouble. And one of the reasons why I wrote the book, which came out before 1/6, was because I already saw Evangelicals in trouble. And I already had friends that I couldn’t be friends with anymore because they decided to move into a very radical space. Their God, that they prayed to, was not the God that I thought we shared. But it wasn’t just about God, but it was the ways in which they thought they were doing the right thing, but were willing to embrace things that were not legal, were not part of civic engagement, and were harmful. And so, out of all this, what I realized was that Evangelicals both, traditional ones and cultural Evangelicals, and I will talk a little but about that, have embraced conspiracy theories, in part, because of their support of Donald Trump, fear of demographic and social change, and the embrace of conspiracy theories such as “Stop the Steal” and QAnon.

The appeals you hear, from both religious figures and politicians about pedophilia and child pornography, are QAnon beliefs and talking points that have made their way into the mainstream because of disinformation, a robust and vicious media system, and the proliferation of organizations outside of local churches that have enormous social reach and political connections. While this may be surprising to some, it is not something that happened because of the election of Donald Trump. It happened because of a longer history of conspiracy theories surrounding Christianity. Whether there was an antisemitic trope about eating babies, or what Catholics do and how they have a fealty to the papacy, or to the Illuminati, many Evangelicals are hearing variations on these conspiracies from people who are not just coming at them from the church pews, but from Facebook, through Twitter, through social media channels, and through, unfortunately, the recent hearing for Ketanji Brown Jackson through the mouths of politicians. What's happened? Why are we in this space? We are here in this space because of the proliferation of Christian nationalism. When I was a grad student, I remember reading a book by Michael Barkin(??, 15:11), which was about the rise of the racist right. And this was about the regular kinds of people that we used to think about, Storm Front, all these groups that were white identity groups that espoused some kind of Christianity. And that's true, but what has taken their place is something more dangerous. Something deeper. It is sitting next to you in the pew at church. It is the person who is bagging up your groceries. It might be a friend of yours. But now, you can be a Christian nationalist who believes in conspiracy theories that have no place in either the Gospel or any place else. So, while I'm not out here talking about how I want to reform Evangelicalism tonight, what I am here to talk about is to help you understand and hear what is being said, and also to understand the space that this religious group is in, and the people who are outside of it too.

What has happened is you have a confluence of Christian nationalism. And so we have to think about what the definition is, so I want to read a couple of definitions and then I'm going to talk about how I said it in the book. So one of the people that I've been working with, two of them actually, are Andrew Whitehead and Samuel Perry, both sociologists. Their definition of Christian nationalism is at heart: Christian nationalism fights to preserve a particular kind of social order. An order in which everyone, Christians and non-Christians, native-born and immigrants, whites and minorities, men and women, recognize their proper place in society. In other words, this is about hierarchy and about hierarchies that are not supposed to be broken, hierarchies that are important to the way that people feel both in a nostalgic sense, and most of the time this is harkened back to the 1950s, or in a way in which they believe in a kind of biblical authority – men over their wives, God over the church, and also, this is important, certain kinds of men over other kinds of people. That's one. Katherine Stewart, who is author of *The Power Worshipers*, says that Christian nationalism relentlessly promotes a message that the world is divided between the pure and the impure, insiders and outsiders, and assures their followers that if they conform they will be on the inside, and I think that's important; this is about making a community but a different kind of community. At gatherings of people who believe in Christian nationalism, loyalty is a test of truth and supporting the right candidates is a key to the path of spiritual salvation. In other words, it's not just about receiving Jesus Christ as your savior anymore; it's about how are you going to show yourself true to the Gospel? If you vote for the right candidate, if you support God's candidate, or, in the case of the 2016 election, the King Cyrus, who was Donald Trump. Now, at the end of my book that you will see tonight I said that Evangelicalism is not simply a religious group at all. It is a national political movement whose purpose is to support the hegemony of white Christian men over and against the flourishing of

others. Now, that may sound very stark, but when I think about Christian nationalism and I think about the people who support that, no matter what color they are they think about a certain kind of hierarchy. Men are on top of it and it's also very political. And so while we have had years of talking about Evangelicalism, from the Moral Majority to Ronald Reagan to Christian Coalition to the Promise Keepers to what happened after 9/11 to all of these different kinds of people and the ascension of Donald Trump, what I think has happened is that Evangelicalism is not simply a religious group but it is a political movement, and we haven't wanted to talk about that. We've talked about the ways that Evangelicals move throughout society to do kinds of political things, but we don't want to admit that the ways in which they've used morality have been both, as I talk about in my book, as a shield to protect them from anybody thinking that they were after power but also as a bludgeon to make sure that the public does not get out of line and that the kind of beliefs that they have are important.

Now, while we can think back to a time when Evangelicals used to say "Oh, you know, we're going to get rid of somebody if they have sexual sin," or whatever. Now that's not the case... sexual sin is not a disqualifier. None of it is a disqualifier anymore. It is a disqualifier if you are somebody else, if you are outside of the camp. If you are inside of the camp, that's a different story all together. The other part of this is that Evangelicals have embraced conspiracy theories about race, government, money, and all of these things tie into certain kinds of Evangelical beliefs. But now they are coalescing around white nationalist beliefs that threaten American democracy. So, we have these kinds of messages that happen, and the kinds of messages that happen, that make Evangelicals embrace these kinds of things are very important. How do we get here? What does this mean for democracy, where we are in 2022, with an election coming this fall and the 2024 Presidential election. I think it means several fore boarding things. One, is an increase in QANON, nationalist, and white supremacist language that is used by mainstream politicians and religious leaders alike. We heard some of this last week, we hear it from certain kinds of republican figures all the time, whether they are government officials, legislators, senators, others, and people who are outside of that, so that's very important. It's a realignment of educational systems in America, from K-12 to university life. We can think about this in terms of the recent things that have happened with book banning, school board captures and others, the fights about masking in schools. These have been very virulent kinds of things that have happened. Or, we can think about the ways in which we don't talk about the nation's history anymore. I happen to have a chapter, the 1619 project about black church, which is historically straight forward but you know you can't talk about slavery because that's a bad thing now, and you basically can't talk about certain kinds of historical things. We've fought battles like this before, but now it's growing. You also can't say "yay, you can't do this, you can't do that" but actually, the most important one, which I won't get to tonight but am happy to ask questions about, is vaccine pushback and COVID restrictions, because that's the new iteration of what is happening in terms of public health. And so, what we have to ask ourself is this question: how have Evangelicals changed? Well, I think there are several reasons how they've changed. One is the embrace of conspiracy theories such as QANON that intersect with Evangelical beliefs. They intersect with beliefs about the end times. You know, Evangelicals, if you are a certain age remember movies like "Left Behind" or "Thief in the Night," other kinds of things where people would talk about the return of Jesus Christ. But first it was going to be a tribulation, maybe you get rapture, right. Demonic activity. This is something that is outside Evangelicalism for the most part but I think we are going to talk about it tonight because I need to talk about Pentecostals. Child abuse, some of you are old enough to remember, and this was right before I

went to Graduate school and lived in California, the McMaster case where you had people who thought about Satanic abuse, and all of this was false, but this created a huge stir within the country. And conspiracy theories about the government; the government is out to get you, they're going to put a chip in the vaccine, all of these kinds of things. So, that's one way that Evangelical belief systems embrace these kinds of things.

The second is the embrace of white supremacist talking points and beliefs – Critical Race Theory (CRT), Black Lives Matter repurposed from a statement about trying to save black lives in terms of Black Lives Matter meaning you are a terrorist or whatever, right? CRT is actually, as one of my friends so aptly put it, is a way to code somebody black, or the biggest one that I did not put on [the slides] is “being woke,” and you're probably hearing this a lot. There are actually conferences for Evangelicals right now about “wokeness,” whatever that is. I don't know, you have a hard time sleeping, you don't really want to be woke, right? Well there you go. Individuality is not just about personal sin, but about how you manage the “truth”. “Do your own Research” is a big thing in QANON. You might have heard this about people who talk about the vaccine; “Oh, I did my research. I've looked at everything I needed to look at, and as a result I've decided that it's not for me or I've decided that it's for me,” right? And so this idea about individualism takes on a whole new meaning; it's not just that you're an individual, you are better than the doctor, you are better than the scientist, you are better than anyone else, you're better than me. It doesn't matter if I went to school and did 6 years of Graduate school; you know better than I do because you read the literature. And so I started noticing this in social media like 2011 and 2012. I was like “what's going on?” because people would just question a truthful fact they should put down that's historical but it didn't matter because they had already done the research and you were wrong.

This is important; “Pentecostalizing of Evangelicalism.” Folks, Evangelicalism, as I said to somebody today over dinner, is not Calvin Seminary anymore. It is something else. Evangelicalism does not sit on the same kind of premises and theological premises that you would expect because they have embrace certain kinds of beliefs that come out of Pentecostalism and charismatic movements. I'm going to talk about that in a minute in terms of an article that just came out today. These kinds of beliefs in spiritual warfare, Dominionists who are going to take over these 7 areas of power, theocratic beliefs that America doesn't need to be just one Nation under God but it needs to be a country that is fully Christian, it does not need to be Egalitarian and thinking about other religions and it's not like when everybody came over who decided “well, I want to get rid of the state religion from England, so let's go over and be in some place where we can actually worship.”

Authoritarianism as a Christian worldview. It's very interesting to hear the kinds of conversations about Authoritarianism that tie into certain kinds of Biblical beliefs and how people interpret them. In order to say “yeah, that's going to be okay if we have a King or Emperor” but I really thought that was a thing that we were fighting about in 1776, but that's what people want now.

Republican Party has turned into Republican Religion. I saw this coming from a while back, and I used to tell it to people and they would laugh at me and they were like “No, it's not that bad. This is just about money, it's about politics.” No, no, no, no, no. They're a religion. And now that they're a religion it has changed what Republicans really do and how they think and how they walk, except for a couple of people who end up stepping out of that, and we can talk about Mitt Romney later because I think he's an example of every now and then stepping

away to do something else. Church and state; there's no separation, folks. For them this is together, and it's together in a certain kind of way and it's together very importantly for them.

And then finally this is for all my folks who are either in the audience or watching right now: the Bebbington quadrilateral doesn't matter. It doesn't matter because that is an assumption about thinking theologically about what it means to be an Evangelical but now what we realize is that people are not thinking about this in a theological way, they're thinking about it in a cultural or political way. And so that fact of the matter is they don't even know nor care. They can say that they're born-again or anything else, but, you know, they'll say "yeah I believe in the cross and all this other stuff, but I don't believe in anything else". So let me give you an example of how this misunderstanding is happening now, and it's in *the New York Times* today, a great article called "The Growing Religious Fervor in the American Right: 'This is a Jesus Movement'". Well, yeah, it's a Jesus movement if you're thinking about the Jesus movement being like the '60s and early '70s, but "these rituals of Christian worship are embedded in conservative rallies," and this is how they have the bottom line, "as praise, music, and prayer blend with political anger over vaccines and the 2020 election". Great article if you want to just read it for what it is, but unfortunately, it's not telling you the truth. The people in this article are parts of certain kinds of groups. They are people who are connected to Dominion groups and others, and if you look at this simply as "they're just worshipping God and hoping that Donald Trump comes back," you have missed the point, you have missed the plot. And you've missed the plot because you don't hear the language that people are saying it in, you're not tuned to that ear. So while I respect the two authors in *the New York Times*, they didn't talk to anybody who does this on a regular basis, they didn't talk to the scholars or either of the journalists who could tell them what they're listening to. And so I want to quote somebody who is a friend of mine today, Peter Montgomery, who works for People for the American Way. He's been watching things for this for over 25 years, so he has seen all the movement. He said "This is what's not mentioned in the article: Christian Nationalism, Dominionism, even note..who I knew when I was in Seminary, who was involved in the Toronto Blessing, which is a whole other kind of thing that you can ask me about afterwards, is quoted rattling off the Seven Mountains of Power, which is about Dominionism, the centrality of Evangelicalism and the 'stop the steal' movement and January 6, politics of spiritual warfare rhetoric, and the accompanying denunciation of political ??? (28:14) as Satanic or Demonic," and this is true, we used to hear this in the '90s with Bill Clinton and Hilary Clinton. This erupted again in 2016, but now anybody who disagrees with this thing is labeled as Demonic. The embrace of violence as righteous. The praise music is the least of our problems, even though ?? (28:35) subjected to hours of it at a time. Not as Peter, because he goes to all these meetings. But here's the thing: even the praise music is militaristic. "Jesus come and take over this world," "Jesus bring your power down," "Jesus give us power". And so I wish this was just about praise music and people getting together, but let me talk to you about a Praise Leader who did this, Sean Feucht, who traveled around the country during coronavirus and held meeting with people who were unmasked and violated local health laws to bring people together to worship. This isn't simply about praise music, it's about religious righteousness, it's about what they believe. That is the kind of thing that they should think about in terms of what the government should do for religious groups and how they felt that these boundaries broke through their religious freedom. And so while these articles will tell you this one thing and you think "man, I'm reading about this and I'm understanding it," you are not understanding it to the fullest extent that you should, and neither are the writers who are missing the plot and missing the point. Before 1/6 happened, there was a Jericho March in D.C. back in December. That was

the setup. You had praise and worship music all day long. What is a Jericho March, for those of you who don't know your scriptures? When Joshua went to fit the Battle of Jericho and marched around seven times and the walls came down. That Jericho March was the way they set up, with praise and worship and preaching, to get ready and to gather people up for 1/6. So if you think about this naively, you will miss the point about everything that is happening right underneath your nose.

Alright, so we've got two charts here. I want to talk about these charts for just a minute. There's two charts; one says "White Americans with warm views of Trump more likely than those with cold views to adopt an evangelical identity between 2016 and 2020" and the other chart talks about "more White Americans began identifying as evangelicals than stopped doing so". You've been told a story in the press: "oh, people left evangelicalism because they were, you know, disgusted with Trump". No, that's not what happened. More of them came in and not only did more of them come in, they started out as people who were not even in evangelical churches and began to call themselves evangelical because they saw what Donald Trump was doing for evangelicals. So this is serious. This is the Pew Research Center, people, this is not some made-up thing. Evangelical became a different kind of **appalachian** over these few years; it has become a political kind of thing, first of all, and secondarily it's about White identity. If you're outside, I used to call these people, when I was working on a book that I had to leave behind about Sarah Palin, "Nascar Christians," they love Jesus, they love the flag, they went to NASCAR, they watch football, they watch sports, and maybe they were "C and E Christian," you know Christmas and Easter but they didn't go to anything else. And so these people came in. So while we had all these articles that said "oh, African-American evangelicals left, Latino evangelicals are feeling uncomfortable, White evangelicals who are progressive are leaving," that's a little piece. The rest of these people came flooding in because they knew that this was the place to be because they were gaining political power. The thing that I like to say about this is that, unfortunately for Democrats, Donald Trump gave evangelicals what they wanted. He paid off the bargain. He said he was going to do things, he gave them judges, he gave them judges across the country. Everything they wanted they got. Why wouldn't they like him? And so that's the hard thing you have to hear.

Alright, let's look at this chart a little bit: "White Evangelical Identity and church Attendance PRRI," this is from the Public Research Institute and if you know Robert Jones' "White Too Long" book, this is what he has as his **[could not hear mumbling]** Predictive probability, "White Evangelical Identity and church Attendance." That strong line that says "frequent church attenders" that is going up, these are infrequent church attenders going down. But the more frequent church attenders were more likely to embrace Christian Nationalism. So, what's happening here? They're hearing a message. They're hearing it in these particular spaces, in their churches. So one of the things I thought was always funny, and I wish we had more time, if this was a classroom kind of setting, sorry, if this was a classroom kind of setting, I would have shown a clip from First Baptist Church of Dallas, Robert Jeffers, when he made for the 4th of July, a whole choral rendition of "Make America Great Again." You can find it online. And it's great, you know it sounds very patriotic and everything else, and this was played in the church on the 4th of July. It used to be in the church on the 4th of July, but some people got uncomfortable if you just had an American flag and you played the Pledge of Allegiance or whatever. No, no, no, no, he made a song of a whole political thing for Donald Trump. That is really important.

So, the way in which these things are happening, is that these messages are being reinforced, that they are hearing, they're bringing people into Christian Nationalism. So, you can hear people say things like "God called me here," you start to read the transcripts of the people who ran into the Capitol, and they're like "this was Jesus." There were crosses alongside, you know, along a whole thing where you could hang somebody. You know, so while they're breaking into the Capitol they're also ? (33:55) , praying in the Senate chamber, all of this stuff. But these are church people, not people who don't go to church. There are Pastors who were arrested. That's a whole other talk, too. There's a great piece by Peter Manseau in *the Washington Post* that you can go back and look for where he traces a young man who's a part of a church in Kentucky to his radicalization to the day he walks into the Capitol with one of these popular culture Christian shirts on to wreak havoc because he believes that that's what God has called on him to do. But it's not only that, it's about how people think about what they think America should be. Now, I want to play this clip right here for you, it's about a minute, and then we'll talk about it. **(One Nation Under God – Michael Flynn)**. There's a lot to unpack here, but first of all I'm very interested in the fact that America showed up in Matthew, right? I mean, that's a stretch, right? It's a little bit of a stretch that Matthew saw down the pipe and it was going to be America. That's number one. Number two is, you know I really would love to have a conversation up here with Mark Valeri about how Winthrop has been used in all these different ways and "City on a Hill" has turned into the catchphrase from Reagan but now **[Michael Flynn]** has repurposed it into something else. But then finally what he says is that there's this one Nation and it should be one religion and all your ? 36:50 stuff can go out the window. That's serious. He got in so much trouble for this. This was a huge backlash back in November, but it's important to talk about the context he gave this speech in. The context is that he was in Cornerstone Church in Texas, which was the former church where, he's retired now, from John Hagee, John Hagee's son is over that church right now, and this was a whole meeting from Clay Clark's "reawaken America tour," there's all these tours that are happening about how to reawaken America and all this stuff. This is a cottage industry, folks. I could walk out of here tomorrow and I could tell you that I could open up a place and make a ton of money, but that's not what I'm doing, okay? I'm just telling you about it. There were several luminaries that, you'll know these voices, you'll know that My Pillow CEO Mike Lindell was there, disgraced political operative Roger Stone was there to provide the event with a legitimate dose of illegitimacy, as they say in Rolling Stone, Alex Jones was there growling at the attendees that the devil's reign on this planet is coming to an end and that Bill Gates and Hilary Clinton and Barack Obama know that they chose Satan and they are going to fail. So, here's this way in which people are being demonized and put in this other kind of camp, right? And then there's the usual "Let's Go Brandon" stuff, and then Sean Feucht, who I just told you about, was there because he'd just lost a race for a seat in the California legislature, he had just lost and so he showed up at Cornerstone. Now, Cornerstone, if you don't remember, has been a big church in terms of these kinds of things ? **38:25** back in the 2008 election John Hagee's old tapes came out where he said "God needed a hunter and that's why Jews were going to be killed" and John McCain had to give up the endorsement that Hagee had given him, and that put the church in a lot of trouble. The bitter piece about this church is that they also have, so you got to figure out how we're doing antisemitism on one hand and Christian united for Israel, or CUFI, on the other hand, which is a Christian organization that works with Israel on different kinds of things and supports that, but they support it just because they believe Jesus is going to come back over there and then all these people who need to get saved will become Christian. So, these are connections that are

happening for people and you can livestream these things, you can watch them, but, even more importantly, what they are doing is spreading a certain kind of message. They're instantiating this Christian Nationalism and this is happening in so many different ways that you have got to figure out where this is coming from, but it's not just that. It's QAnon. This is a picture from Dallas, Texas, not that far away from where John Hagee's Cornerstone Church is. You're probably thinking "oh, this is a normal woman with Trump stuff on," but there's something different about that sign. What do you see? "JFK Jr." Last time I checked, he died in a plane crash, but QAnon folks, and a particular branch of QAnon, believed that he was going to come back on ? 39:51 in this past November, physically. He was going to resurrect. And this phrase "where we go one we go all," that is from QAnon and this particular leader who is doing things right now called Michael Protzman. There are a group of people who were out there every day in November. They've now decamped and gone to Arizona and some other kinds of places, but they haven't given this up. This is like, for the American ? 40:14 folks out here, this is like the Millerites standing on the hill in 1843 and then they come back in 1844 and nothing still happens. But, can't tell people anything. They have tons of prophecies, there are ways in which they read scripture or read these messages that come from Q, alright? QAnon is a belief that arose on the internet in 2017 from an anonymous post on the 4chan board. I knew about 4chan because 4chan was running all of these different kinds of scams and abusing women on social media since back in 2011/12. But, they ramped this up and somebody who was posting from there who, people sort of think they know now but they're not quite sure, has posted all these different kinds of things about what was going to happen, the coming storm, and I'll talk about some of these phrases in a minute, but this is the kind of QAnon beliefs that are not just the ones that people are receiving in the pews but people are actually leaving their families and everything else to follow after a guy that is also known as "negative 48". He's antisemitic and he has followers to believe that JFK Jr. is going to come back and he and Trump are going to clean the world out of pedophiles and the secret deep state ? 41:24 . Now, you're probably going "I'm really lost right now." Don't worry, most of us who try to study this are always scratching our heads, too. But the other part of this that's really important is that regular people fall into this; they fall into it for very innocuous ways. Some of this they do because they have people who are on Instagram who post things about this through either they're talking about yoga, or other things, and then they fall into a very deep space about seeing these kinds of things: you'd get friends, your friends and you talk about these conspiracy theories, you have these QAnon talking points, and some of these talking points are now showing up with people Ted Cruz, you know, your Senator from this state, Josh Hawley, that's right, Josh, hope you're listening tonight, and others who picked up these phrases because it's really easy. There's phrases you can say that are going to bring people into this, right? And so the ways in which this has infiltrated Evangelicals is really important to understand because it's not now just simply about language but it's about different kinds of things. So, for instance, words like "the deep state": people can say "the deep state" and say "Oh, we think that Joe Biden and other politicians who are democrats are doing a shadow government, and it's not the government that you see, and this is about the Illuminati, which is just the same thing as old beliefs about this, okay? Or people who follow after the rules of the pandemic: you might be sheepy, you are people who follow after everybody. "The storm" is a political apocalypse that will include the massive arrest of deep state figures and liberation of children that are held captive, okay? So, there's been talk about "there's tunnels underneath the White House and every place else where they're keeping children for sex abuse," okay? Or for sex trafficking and all of this kind of thing. "Pizzagate," if you remember the man who went to

the pizza store in D.C. and they had targeted this place, that was part of that kind of conspiracy, okay? Or you're thinking about being redpilled, you know this is from *the Matrix* if you watched it; the redpill is the way to get **Q awareness or indoctrination into Q**. So, this is the realization that you are liberated from all of the things that people are telling you. And so why all Evangelicals don't believe this, you hear these kinds of phrases about "there's going to be a coming storm" or "there's this other kind of deep state" or "there's a cabal of people in which, you know, think about this," and so you have to understand that part of this is about really deep things that are conspiracy but then there are conspiracies like "stop the steal".

Now, here's a chart. This is from Samuel Perry and Philip Gorski, and I would just encourage you to look at their new book that's just out this coming week and I'm sorry I forget the title, Sam forgive me, but you can look it up it's on Amazon, and he has another great book with Andrew Whitehead "Taking America Back for God". But this [chart] is a predicted projection of percentage of Americans who believe the 2020 election was stolen from Trump across Christian Nationalism and Race. So, the big chart that is going up, up, up, you know, and they have a seven item scale about "how do you measure Christian Nationalism?," are our Whites up at the top, you have Hispanics, and then you have Black people down here at the bottom, obviously they're trending a lot lower. So, there are tons of people who are White who believe that 2020 was stolen. The moment that this started to be talked about, it was a QAnon talking point, brought up by Trump and then brought up by others, reinforced by a whole slew of people he had around him, and so when you hear his talks right now he is still talking about "the election was stolen". You're going to hear something in a minute where for some people Joe Biden is not President, okay, and that does not exist. It's fake. Look at this: "Major Religious Groups Most Likely to Believe Tenets of QAnon Conspiracy". One is "the government, media, and financial worlds in the U.S. are controlled by a group of Satan-worshipping pedophiles who run a global child sex trafficking platform," so that's blue, this green is "there's a storm coming," that's QAnon, "soon that will sweep away the elites in power and restore the rightful leaders," and then "because things have gotten so far off track, true American patriots may have to resort to violence in order to save our country," this is the line that should scare you, okay? So, all Americans are on top, White evangelical Protestants here in the middle, 25% believe the media and everything, 26% "the storm is coming," and then 24% means that "we've got to resort to violence". What is interesting is that Hispanic Protestants are right up there with everybody else. Now, why is that? Lots of them are Evangelicals, too, and they are hearing these same messages. So, while there was a whole bunch of surprise in the Democratic party about how many Latinos voted for Trump, I'm like "You're not paying attention." You're not paying attention where people are in church, you're not paying attention to these major leaders who are running mega-churches in places like Florida, Texas, Arizona and California who are leaders who are tied in with White evangelical leaders who are talking about the same things. And then we have Mormons down here at the bottom and I thought it was really interesting about Mormons, and Laurie might want to say something about this, but they were the ones who were more willing to resort to violence than to believe the first two. So, we can talk about all of this and say "Oh, these are people who are just saying things and whatever," but what is happening is that our tracking and the way that sociologists and others are polling, whether that's PEW, whether that's PRRI, whether that are individual sociologists that are running those polls, the fact of the matter is that something really deep is happening here and something is happening that we have to pay attention to because if we don't we're in **? 47:08**.

Here's the next [chart]: "Predicted Percentage of White Americans Who Believe Various Conspiracy Theories Across Christian Nationalism". So, if we look at the top here in this topmost corner of the chart "the government, media, and financial worlds are controlled by Satan-worshippers and pedophiles," okay, "storm is coming," and then COVID. So, COVID is way up here, you know, "the government is hiding what it knows about the origins of COVID-19," so you imagine this whole talk about "this came from China," "the China virus," remember all that that happened at the beginning of the Pandemic, all that. There were all of these things that happened, again pegged against the Christian Nationalism scale, right. So, here's the thing: all of these things are tied into QAnon, Christian Nationalism, regular Christian beliefs all coming together, alright? So what does this mean? And this comes to the hard part, okay? It means several kinds of things. Number one, what it means is that we have a very interesting scenario going into 2022. Where you saw conference that Michael Flynn was at, and I am going to show you somebody in a minute, what you have is a system, a closed system of people who are beginning to be listened to in different kinds of ways. So the kind of signaling that happened when they had the Senate hearing for the supreme court hearing for that person, Ketanji Brown Jackson, this is about, oh, it's not just about her, we need to get this out as a way to get our messaging out. It's something that you could hear. The regular person who did not pay attention to this, but might have paid attention, who follows Ted Cruz on Twitter or Facebook or one of those things, could hear all the crazy things that he asked her about Ibram Kendi's children's book about race. That book sold off the shelves, by the way, I'm like "God I wish one of them would sell my book," I could sell a whole bunch of books, right? But, that never happens and this is really interesting, that's fine. So, he mentions that there were all these kinds of questions that were really incisive. One of the questions that really drove me crazy I think is worth talking about is when Senator Lindsey Graham asked her where she went to church, how she went to church, what her beliefs were, and they did that in retaliation because that was one of the questions that came up when Amy Coney Barrett went through a year or two ago. Now, he asks those questions in a very different way. The way those questions were asked to her were about wanting to find out if she went to a black church or white church, I want to find out what kind of church you're going to, I want to find out what kind of places... because what it does is it sets up a difference. If you are outside of this kind of Evangelical world view, and you don't have the same kinds of pastors or beliefs, you are not one of us. You are not worthy to be here. Why did you give these types of sentencing guidelines. You gave this type of sentencing guidelines because that's what the law says if you are a judge. You have a set of guidelines. No, no, no, no, no, that was about pedophilia. There are all these kinds of ways these things come out in certain kinds of ways. Let me talk to you about somebody else that has been a big figure in the last couple weeks. We've got a person who has a tent set up outside of Nashville, Tennessee. He has been burning books. Not only has he been burning books but he has been casting out demons. He put somebody out of his church because he said that they were witches. But he has become a huge figure on the scene on all of his QAnon beliefs. Part of what he is preaching is, and I just went blank for a minute because I forgot his name, so sorry, part of what he is preaching, though, is about this QAnon theory, but it is couched in Pentecostal things. And so, there is a clip where they were asking (50:47 stopped)