REVIEW ESSAY

Freedom As and Against Democracy

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School Choice and the Betrayal of Democracy. By Robert Asen. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021; pp. 248. $34.95 hardcover.

Freedom: An Unruly History. By Annelien De Dijn. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020; pp. 432. $35.00 hardcover.

I the People: The Rhetoric of Conservative Populism in the United States. By Paul E. Johnson. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2022; pp. 336. $54.95 cloth.

Decoding the Digital Church: Evangelical Storytelling and the Election of Donald J. Trump. By Stephanie A. Martin. Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2021; pp. 280. $49.95 cloth.

As Annelien de Dijn tells it in her *Freedom: An Unruly History*, the political story of the West has been written between two concepts of liberty—one *democratic*, the other *modern*.[1] The first of these dates to ancient Greece and Rome and defines freedom in terms of democratic self-government. In this understanding, citizens are free to the degree that they are able to participate in the selection and maintenance of the laws to

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which their community is subject. Unlike slaves—and understood, in fact, as their political opposite—free citizens are empowered to act in the public square. They have the agency to acquire knowledge, to form opinions, to take stands, to persuade others, and perhaps thereby to assist in guiding the course of the state. Along the way, they may enjoy the satisfaction and assurance that accompany the free practice of their citizenship on equal footing with their countrymen, who enjoy that practice as well. This *democratic* concept of liberty was the original of Western civilization, and remained dominant across the two millennia that followed.

Its usurper is de Dijn's second concept, with advocates as ancient as Plato but without widespread purchase until the turn of the 19th century. This *modern* concept defines freedom in terms of non-interference from the state. For proponents of this view, citizens are free only to the degree that laws do not bind them, effectively casting government of whatever sort as the antagonist of liberty. Following the turmoil of the 18th century's Atlantic Revolutions, especially the Terror in France, political thinkers including Benjamin Constant and Edmund Burke reacted to democratic excess by locating freedom within the private individual. Though others have traced this development to the Protestant Reformation and the emergence of market economies, de Dijn asserts that it is best understood as a counterrevolutionary riposte. The presumption that individuals must be prioritized and popular power contained has been widely touted ever since. Today its influence is carved into our increasingly undemocratic institutions.

Unsurprisingly, then, this story of long rise and short but dramatic decline follows a trajectory similar to that of rhetoric itself. Crafted by the Greeks and refined by the Romans, democratic freedom fell out of favor in Medieval Europe but bounced back during the Renaissance, found champions during the Enlightenment, and provided the vital theoretical framework for a generation of revolutionaries who were defiant of subjugation and committed to self-government. In rejecting monarchy, the architects of the United States insisted also on a degree of popular sovereignty. And in securing the franchise for (some) citizens, they built a political system in which persuasion matters, in which good ideas and rhetorical polish could wield real influence. Attractive to the rank-and-file, this model worried the elites, who quickly set to work fortifying their institutions against the mass. Early in the 21st century, their legacy survives in gerrymandered districts, disproportionate Senate representation, the Electoral College, and the passage of state-level voting restrictions, including thirty-four new laws across nineteen states

in 2021 alone.[2] Because rhetoric and democracy are so closely linked, the deterioration of *democratic* freedom unavoidably presages the forfeiture of rhetorical power.

De Dijn's narrative is clearly oriented around this sense of loss. She recalls the Atlantic Revolutions as a collective eruption of democratic potential, ultimately confounded by internal complexities and class antagonisms. If the *modern* conception of freedom was first animated by fears of democratic anarchy and mob rule, it was refined and popularized by continental liberals such as John Stuart Mill and Alexis de Tocqueville, who were anxious at the plight of powerless minorities. Adopted then by Federalists and Whigs, it was made to serve primarily as a rampart around the wealthy and a check upon the rest, effectively recasting equality as a threat to liberty rather than its actualization. Challenged by radical movements including abolitionism, women's suffrage, and labor, *modern* freedom was revived during the Cold War and represented by a fresh host of intellectual advocates. "Today," de Dijn laments, "the West's most ardent freedom fighters (who are now more likely to call themselves conservative than liberal) remain more concerned with limiting state power than with enhancing popular control over government." Indeed, freedom now serves as "a battering ram against democracy" rather than its raison d'être.[3]

Long and sweeping but precise and detailed, de Dijn's account provides an illuminating backstory to the present, a compelling context in which to understand what's happening now.[4] In the United States and Western Europe especially, diversifying populations are altering the composition of the citizenry and so threatening the traditional, hegemonic whiteness of the power structure. In response, resurgent rightwing movements and politicians are relying on restrictive institutions to save them and the *modern* conception of freedom to justify that project. By insisting that government remain small and its purview limited, by creatively sorting and containing the voters, and by challenging the legitimacy of elections themselves, the dominant agents of the American Right have worked hard to constrain *democratic* freedom and to secure their advantages. Over the three sections that follow, this review will consider their progress within three specific venues, applying de Dijn's two concepts of freedom to the work of rhetorical scholars examining politics, religion, and education in the United States.

In politics, *modern* freedom is advocated most assertively by the Republican Party and most aggressively by those at the rightward reaches. In 2010, a group of these activists posted a "Contract from America" online, ostensibly revising and updating the 1994 "Contract *with* America" that had helped to prompt a conservative surge in Congress. Calling for a variety of crowd-sourced initiatives and claiming to speak for "the people," this document articulated an agenda attractive to a narrow set of demographics, demanding to preempt the sort of democratic deliberation that might more accurately reflect the will of a diverse nation. At the outset of his *I the People: The Rhetoric of Conservative Populism in the United States*, Paul Elliott Johnson characterizes the Contract in familiar terms. It "figured the relation between the freedom of the population and the authority of government as one of inverse proportionality," he writes, meaning that, "the less 'the people' are governed, the freer they are." Surveying a short list of policy goals including fewer regulations, lower taxes, and the repeal of the Affordable Care Act, Johnson notes that, together, these imagined the "real" population of the United States to be "a set of radically autonomous individuals united in their possession of liberty," with economic and popular liberty fashioned identically and used interchangeably throughout.[5] For the Tea Party and its legacies, freedom has meant nothing more or less than the removal of government constraints from personal and corporate activity, consistent with a set of assumptions about who these persons and corporations are supposed to be. Fully realized, theirs is a world in which one does whatever one wants, provided only that one is one of us.

For Johnson, this atomized collective is the animating ideal of conservative populism, a rhetorical mode through which a distinctly white, masculine resentment is gathered and arrayed against a nefarious liberal establishment. Cast at once as both central and marginal, the subject of this discourse is the disenchanted silent majoritarian, the white citizen with an empowered self-concept but without power itself, or at least without power in proportion to certain *others* with more than they deserve. "By positing a population simultaneously sure of its identity, positioned outside or beyond the messy world of politics, and in possession of a vitality self-same with freedom," Johnson writes, "conservatism's 'people' is oriented with hostility toward the democratic side of the liberal democratic equation."[6] Conservative populists speak the languages of grievance and privilege, claiming entitlement unbound by accountability and indignant at restraint, especially when delivered with official sanction on legal ballots. Reproved once-too-often by electoral defeats, their rhetorical fetishization of freedom must be either abandoned entirely

or validated through anti-democratic violence. In October of 2021, at an Idaho rally featuring conservative media figure Charlie Kirk, this tension was expressed succinctly by an audience member who asked his demagogic host, "When do we get to use the guns?" When the crowd responded with laughter and applause, the befuddled young man assured everyone that he was purely in earnest. "That's not a joke," he said. "I mean, literally, where's the line? How many elections are they going to steal before we kill these people?"[7] Here de Dijn's image of the battering ram becomes especially evocative, updated, and weaponized.

Though populism as a rhetorical style is traditionally deployed by mass movements against elites, conservative populism draws its boundaries vertically, uniting a portion of the mass with a portion of the elite and activating race as the applicable category for exclusion.[8] If the *modern* concept of freedom has traditionally proven useful to the white managerial class as a means to reinforcing its prerogatives, it has also attracted the white working class with promises of autonomy and status. In each case, the appeal pledges to relieve a self-consciously self-reliant and overwhelmingly white faction of any obligation to the maintenance of a welfare state that, they suppose, caters primarily to black and brown people who do not want to work. Johnson assigns race a central role in his analysis, situating the rhetoric of conservative populism within a larger biopolitics that aligns whiteness with life and blackness with death. The white and the black circulate ominously within the conservative worldview, constituting discourses that inform and mobilize the conservative "people." If past theoretical treatments of conservative rhetoric have understated these racialized dynamics, *I the People* centers them.

To make his case, Johnson surveys key moments in conservative history, starting with Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential candidacy, proceeding through Ronald Reagan's 1984 landslide victory, through Newt Gingrich's 1994 takeover of the House, through Tea Party opposition to Barack Obama in 2009, and, finally, an analysis of Donald Trump as candidate and executive. Overall, Johnson convincingly charts a rhetorical trajectory most notable for its consistency, arguing against those who claim that conservatives learned identity politics from the Left or who cite Trump as a one-off perversion of an otherwise rich and nuanced intellectual legacy. On the contrary, Johnson argues, the conservative tradition in the United States has long been driven by the same impulses that drive it today, including overt commitments to whiteness and masculinity, to hegemony and marginality, to individualism and freedom as against government and its pretensions to the common good.

Stirred and mobilized still by a dogged populist tone, the movement today is the same as it ever was, if further amplified and pronounced. Proponents of democracy should be candid about what conservative populism is, and responsive to the threats that it poses.

Among religious constituencies, the *modern* conception of freedom has been received most warmly by white evangelical Christians. Remarkably active and reliably Republican, white evangelical voters have ensured the election of conservative presidents from Ronald Reagan to Donald Trump. Their support proved especially decisive in 2000 and 2016, a pair of contests in which the President-elect lost the popular vote while clinching the Electoral College.[9] After the latter race, in particular, when exit polls revealed that 81 percent of self-described white evangelical voters had gone for Trump, the racial, religious, and political identities had become so deeply entangled that pastors, pundits, and scholars were moved to revisit the age-old question of what, exactly, an evangelical is.[10] For critical observers both within and without the fold, such an examination was necessary to explain how the teachings of Christ could possibly have moved millions into the politics of Trump. In the years since, books pledging to answer the central questions have been published to impressive sales and critical acclaim.[11] One of the most recent and most nuanced has come out of rhetorical studies.

In her *Decoding the Digital Church: Evangelical Storytelling and the Election of Donald J. Trump*, Stephanie A. Martin suggests that white evangelical voting behavior is intelligible, at least in part, in the light of evangelical sermonizing. Following the dramatic housing market collapse of 2008, Martin wondered whether the "Great Recession" would prompt white evangelicals to question the linkage between their theological and economic commitments—their concomitant beliefs in the holiness of God and of free markets. Between 2010 and 2018, she transcribed and analyzed hundreds of sermons delivered in evangelical megachurches across more than three dozen states, coding specifically for economic themes.[12] Because these large churches are joined weekly by such a high volume of congregants, their discourses would provide a useful window into demographic thought and practice. And because their sermons are streamed and archived online, they would be easily accessible from home. In 2016, Martin attended to election framing as well, performing the analysis that eventually culminated in a different sort of project.

Decoding the Digital Church makes a pair of key contributions to the

evangelicals-and-Trump discourse. The first is that, because white evangelical megachurches are gathering places for conservative citizens, they operate necessarily as vectors for the transmission of ideas and assumptions that circulate in conservative media. From conversations in the coffee shop to the message in the pulpit, these mutually reinforcing commonplaces achieve a high degree of rhetorical resonance, or what Martin calls "*esprit de finesse*."[13] In this environment, claims made by Tucker Carlson or Laura Ingraham on Friday night mingle comfortably with points made by the pastor on Sunday morning; the border lines between theology and politics having long since vanished. Though pastors have undeniable agency in crafting their messages, they are also beholden to the ideas, values, and tithes of the people in the pews, a reality that further delimits the range of available themes and arguments.[14] And because the pastors of the largest and most influential churches make their sermons available online for free, their work is routinely studied, imitated, and plagiarized by pastors of smaller bodies as well. Like Facebook, the digital church takes conservative discourse viral.

Martin's second observation is that, in 2016, the nationwide network circulating megachurch messages distributed *political* messages of a particular sort, popularizing a rhetoric of *active passivism* to help congregants navigate the questions and confusions of the cycle. The high-profile antics of Robert Jeffress notwithstanding, most evangelical pastors did not endorse Trump for the presidency. Instead, they delivered tailored versions of an otherwise uniform three-part homily that stressed their political independence while guiding their listeners invariably home to old habits. First, the pastor emphasized the importance of voting. America is an exceptional nation, he said, privileged by God and served for centuries by committed citizens, dutiful troops, and noble statesmen who have sacrificed to protect this sacred right, and citizens should exercise it.[15] Second, the pastor acknowledged that, this time around, the options were bad. If you feel depressed by the candidates on offer, he said, so do I. The approval ratings are low, the moral values are suspect, and the lesser evil is not clear. So finally, the pastor, having created an intractable tension between his first two points, relieved it in the third, encouraging his listeners to vote their values, vote the issues, and trust God with the outcome. Having stated the imperative to vote as the *active* part of the appeal, the assurance of God's providence delivered the *passive*, effectively calming worries and dismissing fears and excusing the congregation from any accountability for the real-world impacts wrought by the boorish and

thoughtless candidate that their ingrained political loyalties would persuade them to elect.

For Martin, one clear moral of this story is that the ever-tightening linkage between white evangelical identity and Republican partisanship—enabled by churches, enflamed by Fox, justified by the alleged collapse of religious freedom, and threatened by diversity—is certain to entrench further a rightwing religious politics more committed to hegemony than to democracy. Beholden in principle to neoliberalism and sanctified by faith, this impermeable bloc is likely to back candidates that promise small government and Christian nationalism, leaving the vulnerable to God's protection.[16] Such candidates would not need to be perfect—they needn't even be *good*—provided only that they are strong. Their strength provides a bulwark against the damnable majority.

Where education is concerned, the opponents of democracy have presented themselves, once again, as defenders of freedom. Conservative advocates of "school choice" have argued that, as consumers, parents should be able to send their children to a school of their own choosing, either public or private, using publicly funded vouchers to cover the costs. In this way, schools would be reoriented within an educational marketplace, driven by market forces to innovate and compete, or die. Countering the democratic logic that schools should be locally situated and managed through deliberation, the school choice movement hopes to withdraw decision-making power from local deliberative bodies and reassign it instead to individual families, thereby converting education into yet another realm in which de Djin's *modern* conception of freedom seeks to displace the *democratic* mode.

In his *School Choice and the Betrayal of Democracy: How Market-Based Education Reform Fails Our Communities*, Robert Asen characterizes the situation as a showdown between competing visions of public life. The first is best represented by John Dewey, who argued that democracy requires constant attention, with public education serving as an essential mechanism for this maintenance. Accordingly, rather than optimizing for efficiency and innovation, schools have been made to facilitate webs of relations, serving as community keystones. Because everyone in a given locality is implicated in the school system, citizens are automatically placed into relationship with their neighbors, and all are invested together in the generation to come. Everyone is invited to contribute to the ongoing conversation about how

schools should be run, and all are cast from the start as stakeholders in the larger public works. Their participation is welcomed; their influence dependent on an ability to deliberate, debate, and persuade. They are, in a word, *citizens*, working to maintain an inclusive system through which citizens are produced.

The second vision is represented by Milton and Rose Friedman, the famous economist couple who first conceived of vouchers as a means to market-based education reform. Through influential books such as *Capitalism and Freedom, Free to Choose*, and *Tyranny of the Status Quo*, the Friedmans rose to prominence in the 1960s and 70s while advocating individualism as a means to economic and political freedom. Casting the driven individual as an innovator in a world of collective conformity, they imagined an America in which singular citizens may act and achieve without intrusive regulation. Unbound by deliberative inefficiency, individuals would be free to pursue their genius wherever it leads, propelled by imagination and constrained by little more than personal choice. And yet, because individuals necessarily live in a community, operating with and among other people, the Friedmans needed to establish them as responsible social beings. They did this with help from a pair of relational institutions—the family and the schools. By reserving educational choices for individual families (with vouchers) and by directing schools to equip students with a particular set of values (especially individualism, freedom, and choice) they argued that any given community could offer citizens an array of competitive schools in which to train a generation of entrepreneurs.

As forms of community life, the democratic and market-oriented approaches are productive of strikingly different yields. Throughout his analysis of former Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker and Michigan billionaire-turned-Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, Asen argues that the stylized boldness of the market perspective necessarily ignores and elides the communal supports on which individual success always depends, as well as obscuring the harms incurred by the supportive majority in a market-based system. Though the United States is home to a proud tradition of individualism, and though our national mythology does lionize the talent and work ethic of remarkable persons, we cannot reorient our means of education around individual choice without promoting broadly anti-social ends in the community as a whole. Thus, Asen argues persuasively that, in order to preserve democracy as a way of life, we need to practice it at the institutional level, starting with the schools. These should be situated locally, managed deliberatively, available to all students, and productive of neighborly connections. Asen's conversations

with education advocates in Wisconsin suggest that the democratic approach has broad support, but that it has yet to be implemented effectively. Thus the best way to reform American education would be to start with democratic institutions and then correct their historic inequities and exclusions. Rather than prioritizing freedom, individualism, and choice, such a system would train young citizens in social values like freedom, equality, and justice, seeking to build strong communities in which individuals can excel, rather than raising certain individuals to the detriment of the rest.

Though the market orientation in education poses a variety of challenges to traditional public schooling, these are unified and fortified by a common rhetorical packaging. They are advanced in a commonsense idiom that has proven very useful for conservative causes writ large. Asen notes that, throughout their work, the Friedmans successfully deployed the "realist style of economics," a manner of speaking and writing marked by "the confidence and authoritativeness of individuals possessing the special insight of unyielding truths."[17] In practice, this simply means that they presented their views as self-evident, grounded in a market framework that anyone can understand. Unlike social reformers, who are apt to find themselves tied up in complicated theories and plans, market economists deliver easy axioms that appeal to a broad and receptive audience. Their key claim—that markets are morally neutral, open to everyone, driven by competition, and productive of quality—resonates with American beliefs and values. Their focus on individuals and families as political and economic actors has broad appeal. If their advance is to be checked, proponents of democracy in any venue must learn to deliver their position with comparable simplicity and power. Rhetorical adaptation is not a panacea in any case, and Asen's book wrestles with some thorny problems. But at minimum, the restorative process many require Dewey-ites to speak like Friedmans.

Five or ten years from now, these concerns about the decline of American democracy may appear either prescient or overwrought. Their critical focus on the American Right and its advocates in the Republican Party may prove either perceptive or simply partisan. But it is important to emphasize, if only for the sake of clarity, that the scholars here reviewed all agree that American democracy is in danger, and that the danger is located somewhere specific. While a bland, bipartisan finger wag may feel more comfortable, a "both sides" approach to contemporary American politics can be productive only of false

equivalence. For citizens hoping to understand the relevant dynamics across a range of settings, the books featured above are recommended reading.[18]

In each of them, the threat to democracy is animated by a purported love of freedom, or at least a particular type of freedom. Suspicious of collectivity, cooperation, and solidarity, proponents of this *modern* conception imagine the individual as unattached and supreme, able to move and act in the world without obstruction from others or imposition by government. Inclusive of both political and economic liberty, this freedom blends the two into one, pairing a cowboy ethos with a love of markets, and appealing to citizens as independent spirits and money-making agents.[19] Conjoined to an identity, it is powerful, assuring white conservatives that they built this country and deserve to run it, that this country was built explicitly upon a particular set of Christian values, and that, in this country, education should package and sell these values like a commodity, subject to market forces and indifferent to social bonds. Whatever merits this concept of freedom may have, the broader impacts of its American ubiquity have proven predictably fractious, atomizing, and risky. Its prevalence divides and disarms us against large problems that demand our cooperation.

One obvious remedy to the dangers posed by *modern* freedom is a concerted reassertion of *democratic* freedom, the once and (perhaps) future standard. In a diverse nation, democracy requires the inclusion and input of all sorts of citizens. In the United States, a broad and cohesive coalition of those citizens may still check the conservative populist power. The avenues for such collaborative action are narrow and winding, threading and climbing their way through institutional constraints at every level, from local voting restrictions and doctored districts through the dogged persistence of the filibuster and the veto power of the Electoral College. Their navigation will require just about every tool in the civic tool chest, testing the array of theories and skillsets that rhetorical scholars cover in their classrooms every day, from public speaking and composition through debate and deliberation. In that sense, this is the sort of moment for which rhetorical training is made. The task is admittedly formidable, but the challenges posed by the maintenance of democracy pale in comparison to those obstructing the resurrection of democracy after its untimely death. These books issue a call to (rhetorical) arms.

Notes

1. Annelien de Dijn, *Freedom: An Unruly History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020), 2. All subsequent references to the *democratic* and *modern* conceptions of freedom refer to de Dijn's terminology.
2. Jane C. Timm, "19 states enacted voting restrictions in 2021. What's next?" *NBC News*, December 21, 2021, https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/elections/19-states-enacted-voting-restrictions-2021-rcna8342.
3. De Dijn, *Freedom: An Unruly History*, 343.
4. Some reviewers have accused de Dijn of presentism—of smoothing over inconvenient historical rough spots and at times suturing events together in the service of a narrative designed to culminate in the political dynamics of the author's own moment. This critique is made eloquently by Aziz Huq, who offers some other notable caveats as well. See his "Freedom's Just Another Word," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, August 14, 2021, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/freedoms-just-another-word.
5. Paul Elliott Johnson, *I the People: The Rhetoric of Conservative Populism in the United States* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2021), 1.
6. Johnson, *I the People*, 27.
7. Philip Bump, "'When do we get to use the guns?' The ongoing danger of false fraud claims," *Washington Post*, October 27, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/10/27/when-do-we-get-use-guns-ongoing-danger-false-fraud-claims/.
8. This observation is central to Jeremy Engels's work on resentment and features prominently in Mary E. Stuckey's latest book as well. See Jeremy Engels, *The Politics of Resentment: A Genealogy* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2015) and Mary E. Stuckey, *Deplorable: The Worst Presidential Campaigns from Jefferson to Trump* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2021).
9. Though this outcome has occurred only five times in US history, a polarized electorate makes it far more likely to occur in the future—and to benefit Republicans. One study found that, "In the modern period, Republicans should be expected to win 65% of Presidential contests in which they narrowly lose the popular vote." See Michael Geruso, Dean Spears, and Ishaana Talesara, "Inversions in US Presidential Elections: 1836–2016," National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 26247, revised October, 2020, http://www.nber.org/papers/w26247.
10. On the exit polls, see Jessica Martinez and Gregory A. Smith, "How the Faithful Voted: A Preliminary 2016 Analysis," *Pew Research Center*, November 9, 2016, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/11/09/how-the-faithful-voted-a-preliminary-2016-analysis/. On the argument, see, for starters, Ryan Burge, "Why 'Evangelical' is Becoming Another Word for 'Republican,'" *New York Times*, October 26, 2021, https://

www.nytimes.com/2021/10/26/opinion/evangelical-republican.html; Thomas S. Kidd, *Who is an Evangelical? The History of a Movement in Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020); Mark A. Noll, David W. Bebbington, and George M. Marsden, eds., *Evangelicals: Who They Have Been, Are Now, and Could Be* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019); and Paul A. Djupe and Ryan L. Classen, eds., *The Evangelical Crackup? The Future of the Evangelical-Republican Coalition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2018).

11. See, for example, Anthea Butler, *White Evangelical Racism: The Politics of Morality in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021); Sarah Posner, *Unholy: How White Christian Nationalists Powered the Trump Presidency and the Devastating Legacy They Left Behind* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2021); Tony Keddie, *Republican Jesus: How the Right Has Rewritten the Gospels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2020); John Fea, *Believe Me: The Evangelical Road to Donald Trump* (Grand Rapids, MI: 2018); and Stephen Mansfield, *Choosing Donald Trump: God, Anger, Hope, and Why Christian Conservatives Supported Him* (New York: Baker Books, 2017).
12. For a sample of this work, see Stephanie A. Martin, "Differing Definitions: How Conservative Evangelicals and Mainline Protestants Frame Freedom," in *The Rhetoric of Religious Freedom in the United States*, ed. Eric C. Miller (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2018), 51–71.
13. Stephanie A. Martin, *Decoding the Digital Church: Evangelical Storytelling and the Election of Donald J. Trump* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2021), 27.
14. It is important to note that the rhetorical exchange between pastor and congregation is always bilateral, often with the people in the pews wielding the greater influence over the preacher in the pulpit. See, for example, J. Russell Hawkins, *The Bible Told Them So: How Southern Evangelicals Fought to Preserve White Supremacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).
15. I revert to "he" in this section simply because, among conservative white evangelicals, pastorships are generally reserved for males and defined by masculinity. For much more on those dynamics, see Kristin Kobes Du Mez, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright, 2020).
16. In recent years, scholars in religious studies have identified "Christian Nationalism" as a useful lens for understanding the appeal of rightwing Christianity in the contemporary United States, as well as the danger it poses to democracy. See, for example, Paul D. Miller, *The Religion of American Greatness: What's Wrong with Christian Nationalism* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022); Philip S. Gorski and Samuel L. Perry, *The Flag and the Cross: White Christian Nationalism and the Threat to American Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022); Andrew L. Whitehead and Samuel L. Perry,

Taking America Back for God: Christian Nationalism in the United States (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020); and Katherine Stewart, *The Power Worshippers: Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020).

17. Robert Asen, *School Choice and the Betrayal of Democracy: How Market-Based Education Reform Fails Our Communities* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021), 72.
18. Other titles, also prompted by recent developments on the American Right, include Anne Applebaum, *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism* (New York: Doubleday, 2020); Jason Stanley, *How Fascism Works: The Politics of Us and Them* (New York: Random House, 2020); Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die* (New York: Crown, 2019); and Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century* (New York: Crown, 2017).
19. Several recent books from American history scholars have emphasized the appeal of the West, its images, and its expanding frontier to the development of American thinking about freedom. See, for example, Heather Cox Richardson, *How the South Won the Civil War: Oligarchy, Democracy, and the Continuing Fight for the Soul of America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020); Greg Grandin, *The End of the Myth: From the Frontier to the Border Wall in the Mind of America* (New York: Metropolitan, 2019); and Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2019).