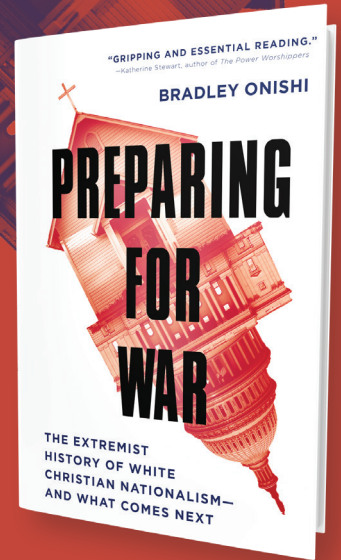


BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE

PREPARING FOR WAR

THE EXTREMIST HISTORY OF WHITE CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM— AND WHAT COMES NEXT.

BRADLEY ONISHI



This discussion guide serves as an invitation for you to engage thoughtfully with the material from *Preparing for War: The Extremist History of White Christian Nationalism—And What Comes Next* by Bradley Onishi. It is written with the intent of helping you go even deeper with a group of people, whether that be your book club, church group, or friend group. You'll probably want to pick and choose from among these questions, especially if you will be discussing the book in one session. Note that some of the questions draw you into the arguments of the book itself, while others encourage you to reflect on your own experiences. Choose the ones that make most sense for you and your group, and of course, feel free to add questions of your own!

CHAPTER 1

1. Many outsiders to White Christian nationalism might ask, How could anyone ever espouse these beliefs? Many were bewildered as they looked on at the violence at the Capitol on January 6, 2021. Onishi writes that if he hadn't left his Christian nationalist church, he might well have been there. What do you think drives people to become White Christian nationalists? What do these groups offer to their members?
2. The Christian nationalist war on our democracy "didn't start after the November 2020 election," Onishi contends. "It didn't even start with Trump. Rather, it has been raging for over half a century." Reflect on this reality. Why did the insurrection come as a surprise to so many people?
3. Onishi writes that White Christian nationalists may—or may not—attend church, read the Bible, pray, or be practicing Christians. He writes that some Jewish people fit in the category, as well as people who aren't White. The author himself is biracial. So, what do we mean when we say "White Christian nationalism"? What do you see as its hallmarks or defining characteristics?

CHAPTER 2

4. Onishi describes the megachurch in Orange County, California, that shaped him, as well as the political landscape of the mid century United States. In what ways did the church and the state provide support and cover for each other?

CHAPTER 3

5. Many associate White Christian nationalism with the South, but Onishi makes an argument that Orange Country, California, was an epicenter of White evangelicalism that created what he calls the New Religious Right. Was there anything you found surprising about this history?

CHAPTER 4

6. In what ways, according to Onishi, is segregation lodged at the center of White evangelical family values? Do you agree or disagree?
7. Onishi refutes the idea that opposition to abortion led to the creation of the New Religious Right. Instead, he argues that what White Christian nationalists have called “religious freedom” has always been rooted in racism. What evidence does he offer to support this claim?

CHAPTER 5

8. In the White American Christianity that Onishi belonged to, he writes, “there was no question that the flag and the cross belonged together. They were the twin pillars of our faith.” Where do you see the flag and the cross, either literally or metaphorically, showing up as inseparable? In politics, churches, media, conversation?
9. Onishi looks at the reasons President Jimmy Carter didn’t capture the allegiance of the White evangelicals who, from many angles, shared multiple traits with him. How did Carter and the Religious Right reflect different understandings of the relationship between religion and politics?

CHAPTER 6

10. How does Onishi connect the 1980s and 1990s drive for sexual purity among White evangelicals to national purity? Did you grow up influenced by purity culture? If so, how has it affected you into adulthood?

CHAPTER 7

11. Onishi connects his experience of praying at the flagpole of his high school and the view that the United States is a “city on a hill,” and a “Christian nation.” What are the dangers, as you see them, of conflating the “kingdom of God”—or any such religious vision—with the nation-state?
12. Onishi describes the comfortable fit between the theological and political convictions of the New Religious Right and autocratic leadership. Where do you observe those links today?

CHAPTER 8

13. Conspiracy and conspiracy theories play a large role in the rise of White Christian nationalism. Have you or your loved ones been influenced by conspiracy theories? Why do you think White Christian nationalism and conspiracy theories go hand in hand?

CHAPTER 9

14. As you read this chapter, what surprised you about the way Christianity showed up at the Jericho marches and then at the insurrection itself?

CHAPTER 10

15. “Myths are like ivy,” Onishi writes. “Myths root themselves in the public imagination when they become accepted knowledge that most people refuse to investigate.” Onishi describes the powerful role of myths in American history (the Lost Cause, for example) and the potential directions in which myth-making about January 6 might go. What predictions would you make about how White Christian nationalists will reflect on January 6 five or ten years from now?

CHAPTER 11

16. What is the American Redoubt movement as you understand it? Had you heard of it before? In what ways does the Redoubt help you understand the longings of White Christian nationalists?

EPILOGUE

17. Do you know people who have been heavily influenced by White Christian nationalism? Are you seeing manifestations of it in your local community? What new understandings from this book will help you consider conversations you might initiate or actions you might take to help others understand the importance of faith freedom for all?
18. Do you think White Christian nationalism will be a winning identity in politics in the future? Why or why not? And now, having the historical context that you do, what are your thoughts on our political future?