

power. They had much to learn from Jewish, Catholic, and secular women's enthusiasm for women's liberation. Bendroth concludes with her subjects' poignant realization that their mantle had passed to a new generation – a generation of women who failed to consider churchwomen as pioneers or their methods as worthy of imitation.

In *Good and Mad*, Margaret Bendroth takes seriously Ann Braude's 1997 charge to write a woman-centered history of the mainline churches. As a result of this new perspective, Bendroth argues that the mainline church's story in the twentieth century is less about decline and more about resilience; it is less Northern and liberal and more interracial and international than we realized. Bendroth deftly addresses persistent bugaboos in the field of women's history. Acknowledging the myth of feminization, she nonetheless recognizes the fear of feminization as a powerful animating force in church life. Bendroth refuses the temptation to assume that the teleology of women's restlessness was seeking the pulpit. And when she does turn to ordination, Bendroth argues that women's call for ordination was to the altar as much as to the pulpit, that is, driven by a desire to celebrate the Eucharist as much as to preach.

It takes reading between the lines to sense these churchwomen's anger, perhaps because they were so good at hiding it: "It's possible that Cynthia Wedel was incandescently angry . . . [but] she didn't say" (179, 182). As a result, the "good and mad" heuristic is more persuasive in some cases than others. More convincing is Bendroth's explanation of why churchwomen were not angrier. She writes poignantly of her subjects' optimism, and how she herself has shared this "certain kind of hope, belief in the power of persistence" that women's dogged efforts could still transform the church and the world (186).

Good and Mad succeeds in filling a gap in the existing literature on Protestant women between the Social Gospel and the final push for women's ordination. Alas, the \$83 price tag will be cost-prohibitive for most students, but we should urge our libraries to buy the digital and hardcover versions of this title and hope Oxford releases an affordable paperback. It merits a place alongside classics like Catherine Brekus's work on early women preachers, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham on the Black church women's movement, and Dana Robert's works on missionary women. It belongs on syllabi not just for classes on women's religious history but also surveys on Christianity in the U.S. Since women have always formed a majority in the church, shouldn't we know their story?

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***Righting the American Dream: How the Media Mainstreamed Reagan's Evangelical Vision.* By Diane Winston. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023. 256 pp, \$35.00 cloth.**

In 1983, President Ronald Reagan spoke at the annual meeting of the National Association of Evangelicals. "Freedom," the president began, "prosper when religion is vibrant and the rule of law under God is acknowledged." He insisted that the

“Founding Fathers” passed the First Amendment “to protect churches from government interference. They never intended to construct a wall of hostility between government and the concept of religious belief itself.” He denounced secularism and abortion and called for Congress to pass a prayer-in-schools amendment. Then, turning to foreign policy, he directly linked his opposition to a nuclear freeze with his faith in God. As he reached the climax of his speech, he famously identified the USSR as the “evil empire.”

Many commentators panned the speech and depicted Reagan’s hyper-religious language as dangerous. But in reporting on the meeting and highlighting the connections Reagan made among the nation’s exceptional nature, its supposed godly mission, and its foreign policy, journalists inadvertently pushed Americans to see Reagan as the champion of a religious sensibility that many shared, and to view his policy initiatives as byproducts of his efforts to lead the nation in fulfilling its divine destiny.

Diane Winston, in her excellent new book, *Righting the American Dream*, explains how Reagan went from floundering toward reelection into transforming into “America’s white knight.” In 1983 “the economy rallied, Americans’ global standing rose, and Reagan convinced many conservatives and evangelicals that he was still their man.” How did he do it? Reagan’s ability, she argues, “to set and dominate news media narratives was crucial to his success” (2).

Winston tracks how “the mainstream news media, bound to cover the words and activities of the commander-in-chief, reported on Reagan as objectively as possible.” In the process they ensured that his ideas circulated widely, and they normalized “them through repetition” (8). The media provided Reagan with a platform for explaining the nation’s mission and purpose, which the president then used to justify his specific policy initiatives on everything from foreign affairs to taxes to deregulation. Furthermore, despite critics’ denunciations of “liberal” media bias (then and now), newspapers and newsmagazines depended on corporate advertising, and they had no intention of biting the hands that fed them. They were complicit in the normalizing of Reagan’s neoliberalism; their jobs depended on it.

At the heart of Reagan’s ideological vision, which the press helped publicize, was what Winston labels Reagan’s “American religious imaginary.” Behind this clunky phrase lay “a shared orientation to everyday life, especially political and economic convictions reflecting a higher purpose” (2). Reagan integrated two core beliefs into his “imaginary.” First, the nation is exceptional and was chosen by God to do his great work, and second, to obey God, Americans must be free – free of the shackles of government and of a welfare state that supposedly smothered individual initiative. Generations of conservative Christians, Winston explains, had “asserted the connections among democracy, Christianity, and capitalism. Now the American president was singing the same tune while the news media circulated the lyrics” (92).

Winston argues that in the 1980s, the news media helped normalize Reagan’s neoliberalism. Here she means mostly the print media – although she occasionally mentions coverage on weekly news shows and on National Public Radio, she does not seem to have spent time in Vanderbilt’s Television News Archive. Journalists routinely parroted Reagan’s wholistic vision that linked individual freedom and free market capitalism with a sense of American exceptionalism rooted in the nation’s supposedly divine origins, identity, and mission in the world.

Although this is a relatively slim book, it covers significant historical ground. To support her arguments, Winston begins by tracking the evolution of the print media. In the 1930s, Franklin Roosevelt pioneered a new approach, seeking to manage the reporters

that covered his administration. Winston then focuses on the larger and longer historical context that facilitated Reagan's rise, especially highlighting the many challenges Americans faced in the 1970s. The media in this era stoked Americans' fears of changing ideas about race, gender, and family. Next, she turns to the larger religious context and the ascent of modern evangelicalism, which sets the stage for her analysis of Reagan's response to challenges including the AIDS epidemic and the debate over a nuclear freeze. Meanwhile, journalists' efforts to provide "balanced" coverage led them to interview and quote those with somewhat fringe beliefs such as Jerry Falwell. Reporters understood that Falwell and his allies made good copy and provided cover for those who might otherwise seem critical of Reagan administration policies.

For Winston, Reagan's decision to invade Grenada in 1983 serves as a centerpiece of the book. Having learned from the coverage of the Vietnam War that the media could undermine administration objectives, Reagan prohibited reporters from accompanying the military as the invasion unfolded. Instead, Americans received almost all of their early news on the operation from Reagan himself. His "control of the story reinforced his religious imaginary" and "helped dispel Vietnam syndrome and reawaken the country's sense of righteous patriotism" (136).

Finally, Winston turns to the battle over economic policy and the welfare state. Reagan reframed "the 1960s notion that poverty is a systemic problem requiring government intervention" and instead he "cast it as an individual problem that required personal change" (192). Entertainment media – television and film – reenforced rather than challenged the racial stereotypes at the heart of Reagan's policy initiatives.

This is a well written, smartly argued, and carefully researched book. Winston masterfully supplements her meticulous reading and analysis of print media sources with other materials from film to popular novels that help bolster her arguments. While too often historians separate Reagan's economic policy from his religious rhetoric, Winston demonstrates that the two were mutually constitutive. In following Reagan's lead, journalists linked faith and policy together, which mainstreamed the president's religious vision and in the process transformed American politics and culture.

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***The Feeling of Forgetting: Christianity, Race, and Violence in America.* By John Corrigan. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2023. 248 pp. \$99.00 cloth; \$30.00 paper.**

Christian nationalism is having a moment in the discourse. Ever since the January 6, 2021 attack on the United States Capitol, pundits have poured forth a voluminous stream of commentary on the religious roots of the violence. Others have just as eagerly urged Americans to move on as if there is nothing left to see here. Both postures reveal a strange kind of forgetting. Faced with the resurgence of one of America's most influential and enduring political traditions – white Christian nationalism – some act as if they