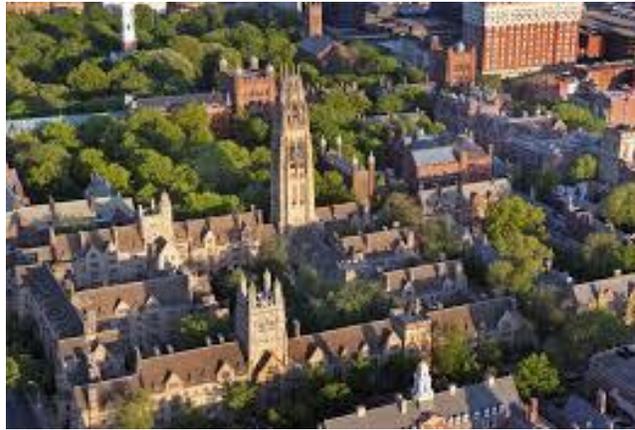
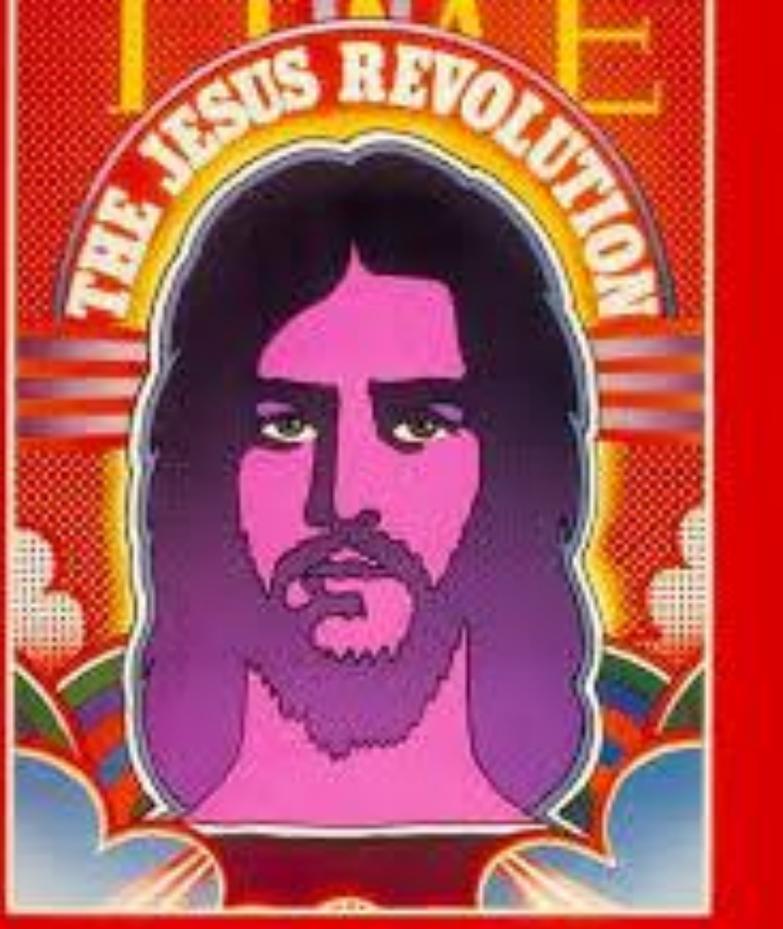




Living
Against the
Grain



My background

-



Living Against the Grain: Class Overview

Does Christianity have any light to shine in our deeply divided nation? Or are we part of the problem?

This class asks us to follow the lead of the Apostle Paul who called believers to be transformed by the renewing of their minds.

With transformed minds, we see more clearly that we are often being duped or, perhaps we are duping ourselves and others. At least we are not helping to bring peace to our trouble world.

A central concern is to renew our use of language.

The class will use “White Christian Nationalism” to illustrate the discussion.

Interruptions are welcome!





Romans 12: 2



“Do not be **conformed to this world**, but be **transformed by the renewing of your minds**, so that you may **discern** what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

This is related to loving God with all our minds.



Romans 12: 2: Who am I and where do I stand?

“What am I doing and by what am I compelled? How is it with me? How is it with the clarity of the ...seriousness of my seeking the will of God, of my asking after that good and well-pleasing and perfect thing which is ascribed and applied to me here and now?”

Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, p. 497.



The grain is the world and its way that invites and often compels our conformity.





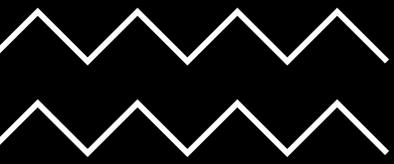
We believe there is evil in our hearts because we confess our sins every week.

Left to ourselves, we run from the light and not to it.

We're stuck in our ruts of belief and things are comfortable if we stay in them.

We allow the media to have access to our minds.





Transforming our minds



Because we believe in evil, we accept that we can be deceived and that others will try to deceive us.

Because our nature is to run from the light, we know we need to stop and question ourselves before we commit and act.

We force ourselves out of our ruts by investigating thoughts and approaches different from the ones we normally take.

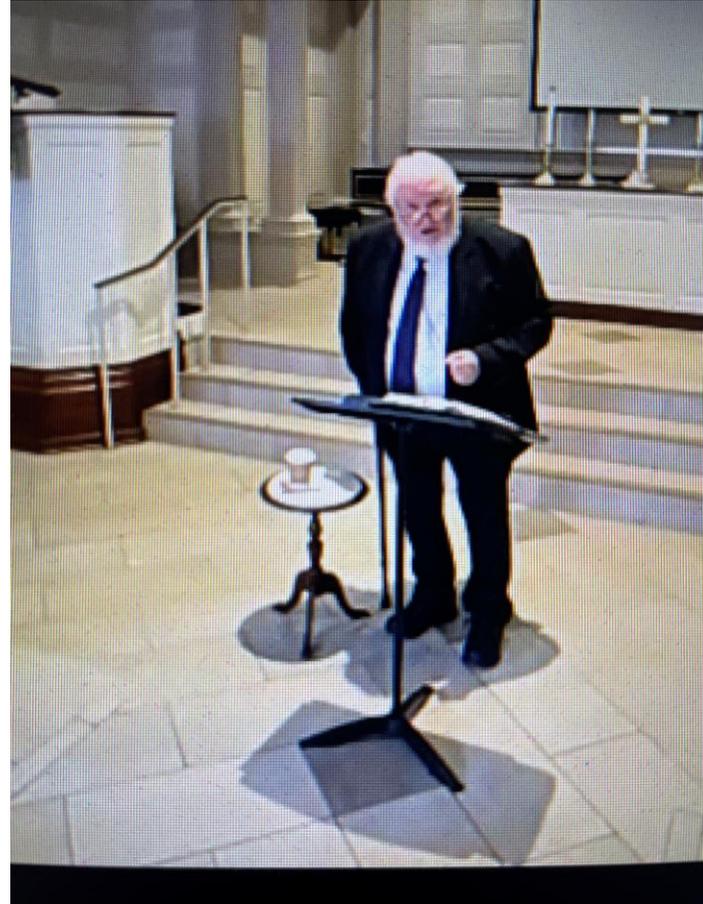
Because the media fills our minds and reinforces our worst thoughts, we become media skeptics and go on media diets.



Immigration: Exodus 22: 21

“You shall not wrong or oppress a ‘resident alien,’* for you were aliens in the land of Egypt.”

*** foreigner, stranger,
immigrant living in your midst**



Exodus 22: 21: Who is “you” as in “you” shall not wrong or oppress an immigrant?

- Israel in 1000 BC?
- An empire?
- An ancient or modern nation?
- The Church as a whole?
- A particular congregation?
- An individual believer?



Exodus 22: 21: Who is the “immigrant” who is not to be oppressed in modern-day America? Is there a difference that makes a difference?

- **Someone who goes through the citizenship process?**
- **A green card holder?**
- **A temporary , i.e., migrant worker?**
- **An asylum seeker?**
- **Someone who crosses the border illegally and who checks in?**
- **Someone who crosses the border illegally and then disappears?**
- **All above?**



With all due respect....

Prof. Tuell ended by quickly alluding to legitimate problems associated with interpreting these verses in a twenty-first century democratic republic that has a legitimate interest in borders, finances, and national security. He left us with a general and helpful admonition to treat all people in ways that recall that our spiritual ancestors were foreigners in ancient Egypt.

Reinhold Niebuhr on the self-interest of the state.



What do we do?

For some Christians, the biblical passages about resident aliens in Exodus inspire acts of charity for “immigrants” wherever they are found, tying that charitable spirit to a demand for no borders, tax-funded services, and a pathway to citizenship for all.

For other Christians, the biblical passages about resident aliens in Exodus inspire acts of charity for “immigrants” wherever they are found without tying that charitable spirit to a demand for open borders, tax-funded services, and a demand for citizenship for all. These latter things are prerogatives of the state.



In a tsunami of words and anger, can one of the callings to Christians be to speak honestly, not just passionately and prophetically?



**“Blessed are the
peacemakers for
they shall be called
children of God.”
Matthew 5:9.**

**Peacemaking
and the
renewing of our
minds and our
language.**



HILLARY!

TRUMP!

I'M SICK OF THE POLARIZATION!



ANGELINA!

BRAD!





News casting has
become an
exercise in
rhetoric, the art
of persuasion.



**The corrosive
side of
algorithms.**



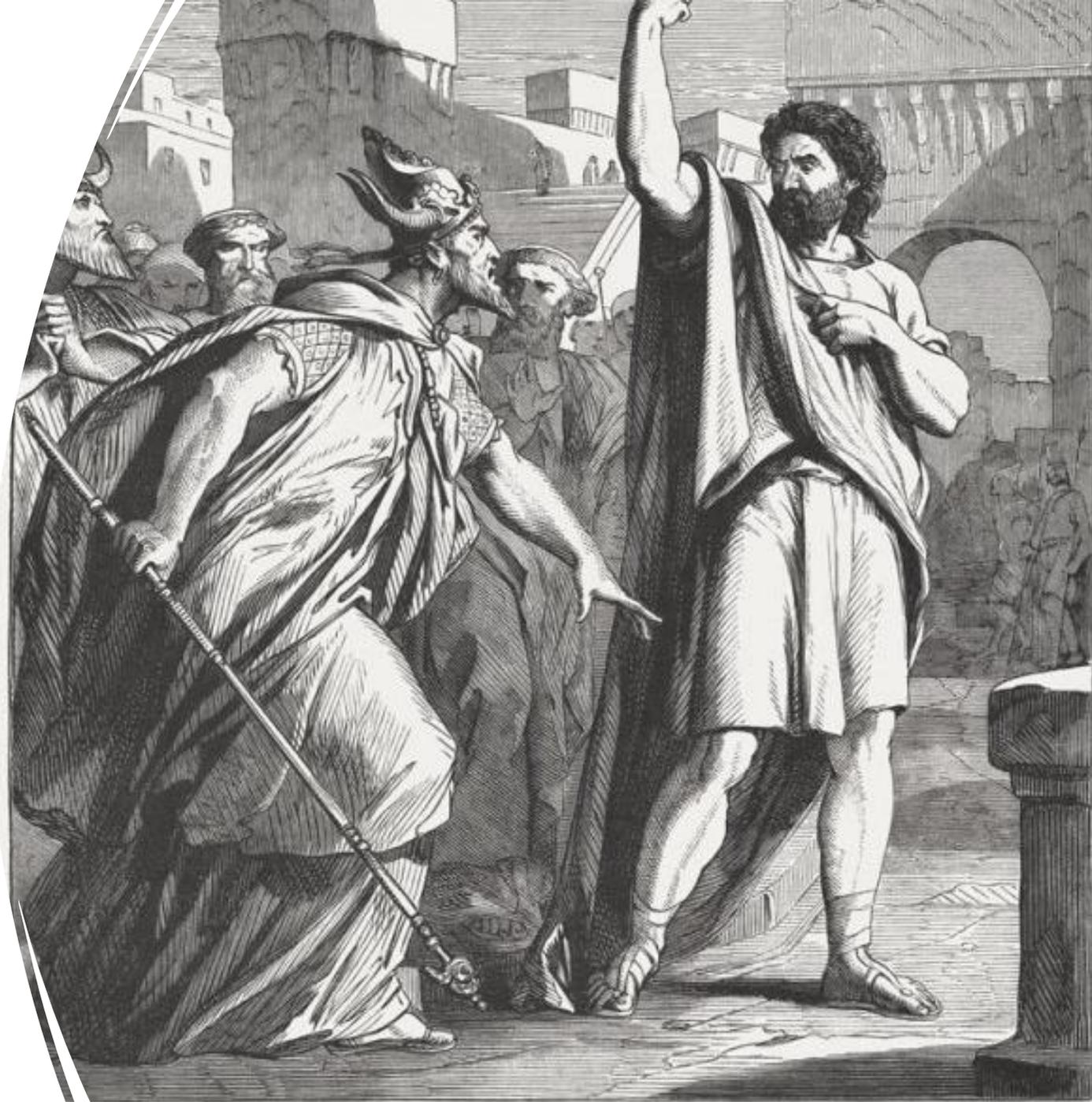
“Whose filthy lies are ‘they’ hoping you will believe this morning?”



Of course,
persuasion can
involve explanation
and motivation
without
manipulation.



**We Presbyterians
pride ourselves on
speaking truth to
power—on being
prophetic—like the
prophet Amos .**



THE PROPHETIC IMAGINATION

Walter Brueggemann

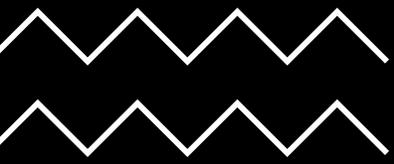
“The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a [Christian] consciousness and perception **alternative** to the consciousness and perception of **the dominant culture around us.**”

Many interpret this politically and culturally and assume that their task is to speak truth against certain political and cultural positions in the dominant American culture.



To be truly prophetic means developing a consciousness and perception against our own subculture before or while we look to the dominant culture.





First Presbyterian Church of New Haven

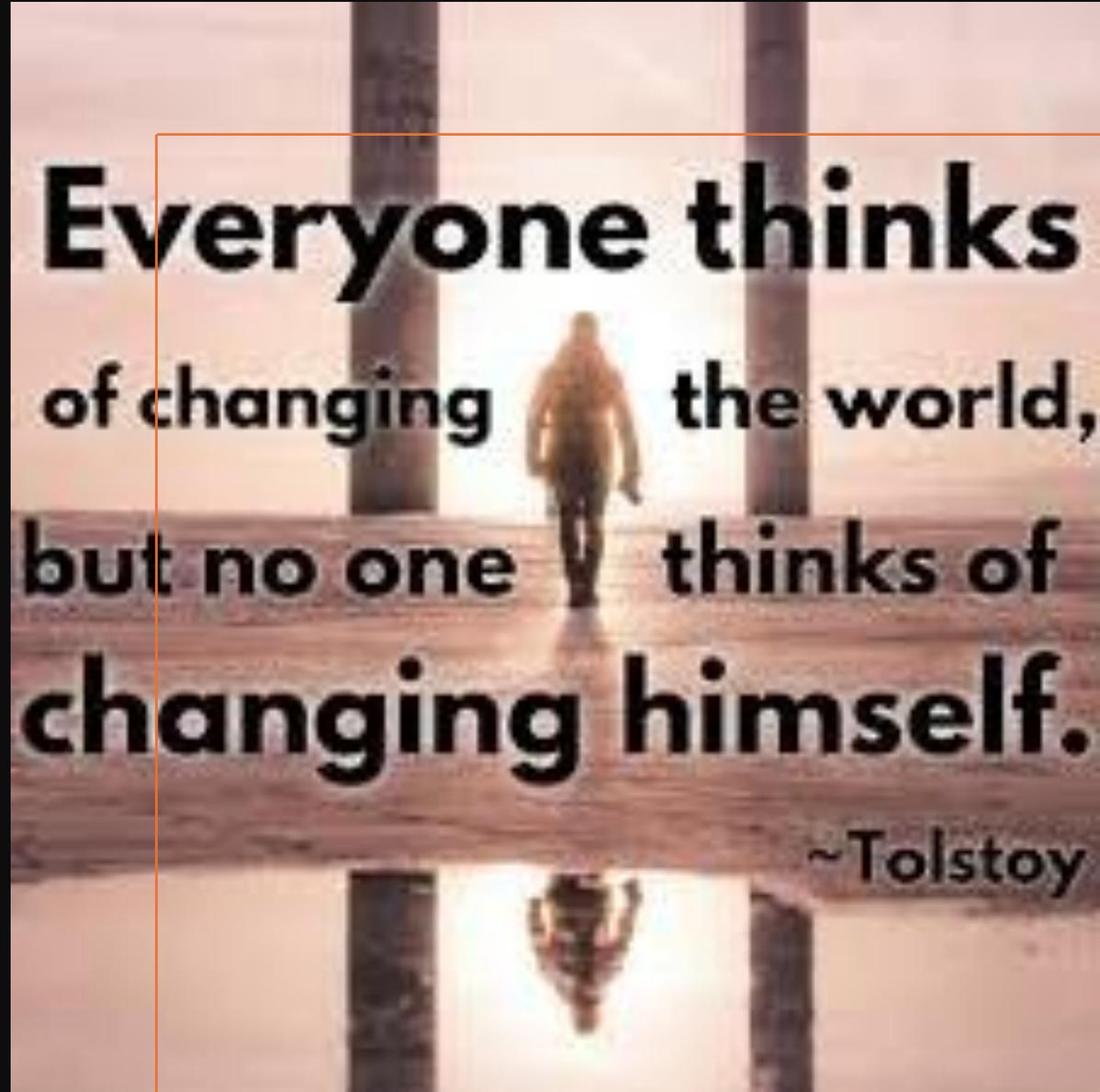


- How do you be prophetic in a church where the present and former pastor are married lesbians?
- How do you be prophetic in a church that actively supports Black Lives Matter?
- How do you be prophetic in a church that favors open borders and is a sanctuary for all immigrants?



Is it a matter of just trying harder to be righteous?

Or, is it a case of, “First remove the log from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye.”



**Everyone thinks
of changing the world,
but no one thinks of
changing himself.**

~Tolstoy

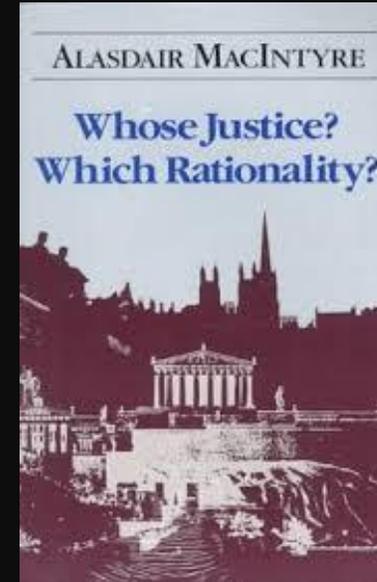


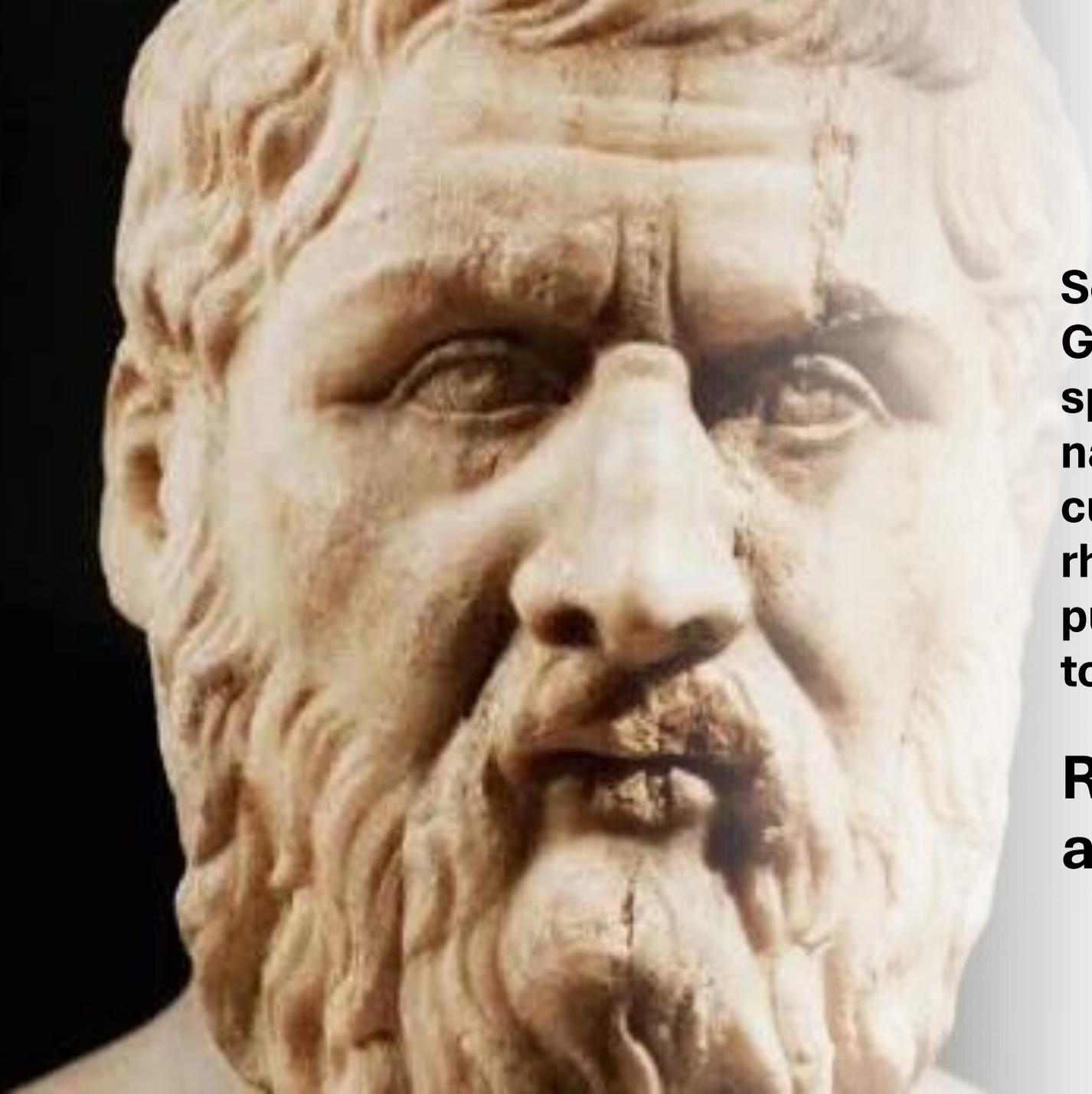
How do we
crawl our
way to a
better place?

More honest
communication?

Alasdair MacIntyre

Every sense of justice or rationality is the justice or rationality of some position or tradition. In other words, these and many other words need to be defined in relation to something else.





Sophists were ancient Greek intellectuals who speculated about the nature of language and culture. They employed rhetoric to achieve their purposes, which were to persuade others.

Rhetoric is the art of persuasion.

Modern
sophists.



St Paul on the Areopagus (Acts 17:16ff.)

The sophists were rhetoricians skilled in using language. Paul had no problem with that. He was one of the most skillful rhetoricians in antiquity. He had a problem with sophistry apart from truth.



Rhetorical tactics.

#1 Words with multiple meanings.

We all need to come clean and admit that the meaning of the words we use are often tied to particular traditions and purposes. If we do not come clean, we are either uninformed or we are deliberately (and cleverly) using rhetorical tricks to score points.



Oakmont Presbyterian Church

Prayer of Confession:

“Almighty God, you call us to work for a world where all will be fed and have dignity, but we find ourselves distracted by our own desires. You call us to seek justice and peace, but we are satisfied with injustice and discord. You call us to bring liberty *to the* oppressed, but we do not insist on freedom for all.”

Are there not multiple, indeed contradictory, ways to understand the pursuit of dignity, justice, peace, and liberty to the oppressed? How do Christians adjudicate these differences?

Obviously, many words in our political, cultural, and even religious discourse have multiple meanings, but they are often intentionally used without clarification.

- **Extreme/Extremism**
- **Far right/Far left**
- **Hate**
- **Violence**
- **Racism**
- **Sexism**
- **Nationalism**
- **Globalism**
- **Fascism/Socialism**
- **Democracy**
- **Genocide**
- **Nativism**
- **Immigrant/Migrant**

- **Insurrection**
- **Riot/Demonstration**
- **Justice/Injustice**
- **Tyranny/Tyrannical**
- **Authoritarianism**
- **Peace**
- **Patriotic/Patriotism**
- **Any word ending in “phobic”**
- **Misinformation**
- **Disinformation**
- **Equality/Equity**
- **Patriarchy**
- **Existential Threat**

**All
TOGETHER
NOW!**

A
BENEFIT MUSIC
FESTIVAL FOR
PITTSBURGH'S
IMMIGRANT
COMMUNITY

AUGUST



**7,8,9+10
2025**

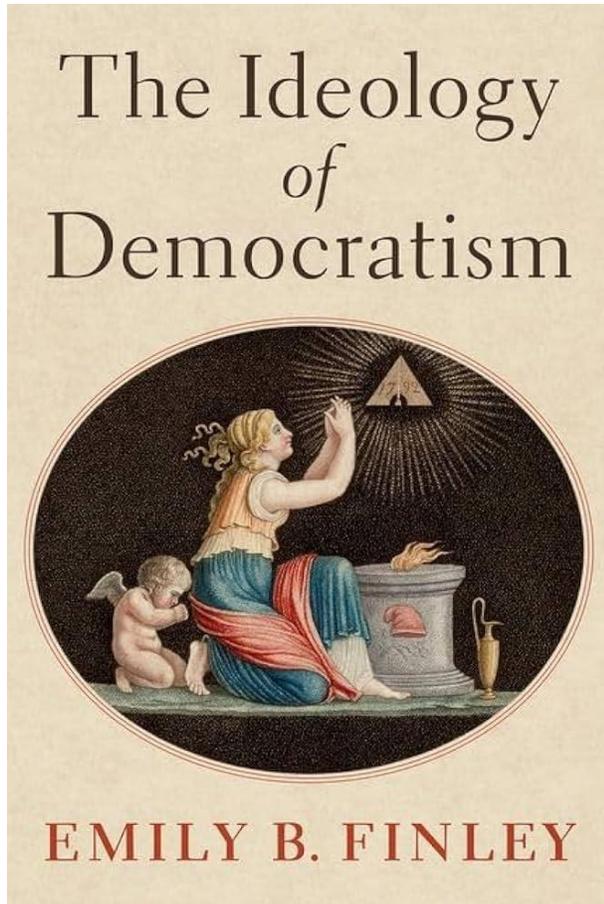
Clinton Clegg + Buffalo Rose + The Buckle Downs
John Gresh Gris-Gris + Polkamaniacs + Cisco Kid
Nied's Hotel Band + Jon Bindley + Townsppl + Small Hours
Penna Players + Devilish Merry
The Doo Wop Doctors + Slag Mountain
Jagtime Millionaire + Whiskey River
VZHM Acoustic Union
Turkey Foot and MORE!

A benefit for undocumented immigrants/illegal aliens.

“An immigrant is someone who makes a decision to leave his or her home and move to a foreign country with the intention of settling there, but not because they are fleeing war, violence or persecution. Immigrants often go through a lengthy vetting process to immigrate to a new country. Many become lawful permanent residents and eventually citizens.”

(International Rescue Committee, 2018)

“A threat to our democracy...”

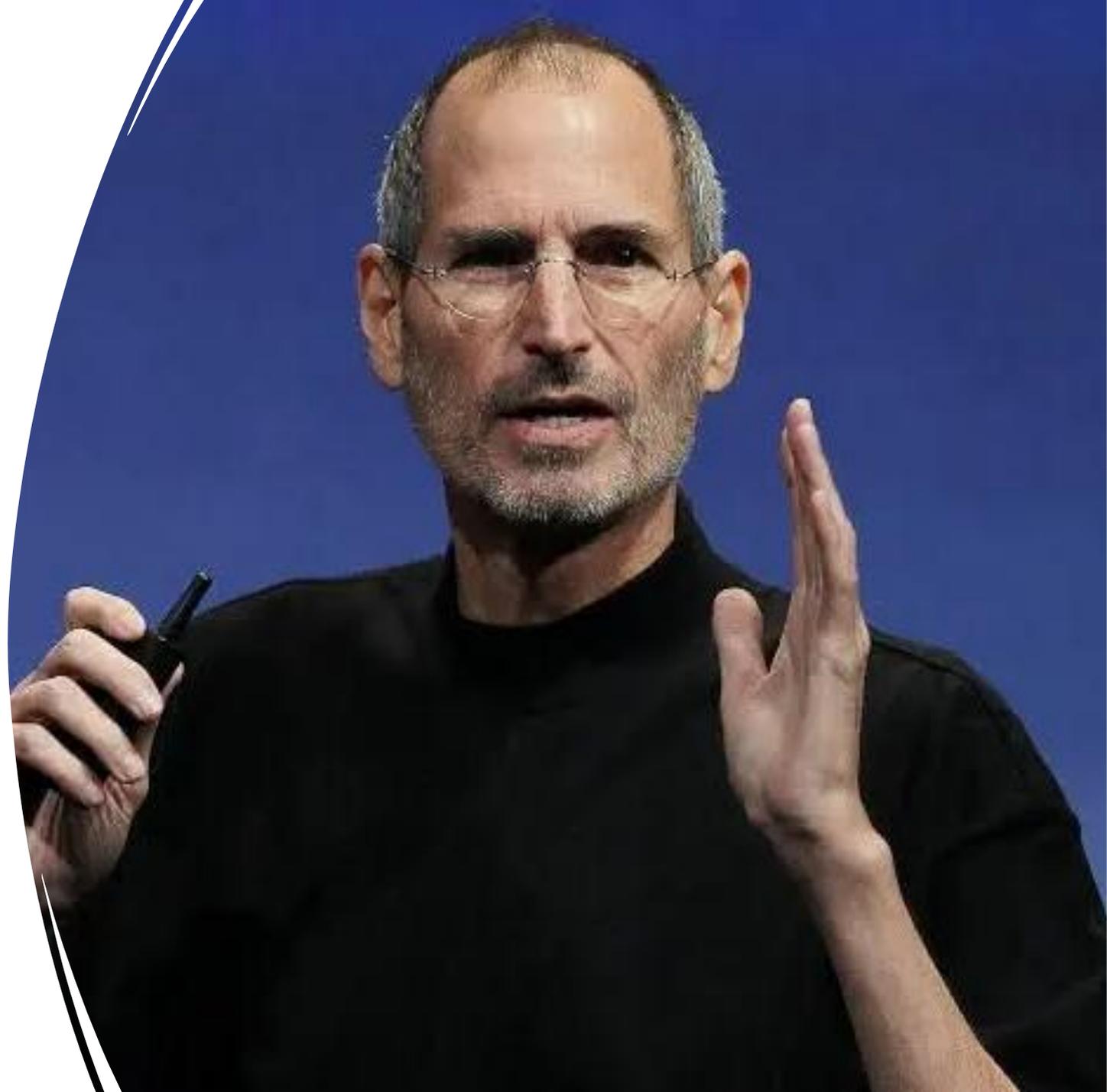


“At its core, democratism is a hypothetical or ideal conception of democracy that is only tenuously connected to the actual, historical desires of real popular majorities.”

According to Emily Finley, in democratism the assumption is that a true democracy is made up of positions and policies that a democratic people SHOULD desire, not what they actually desire.

Steve Jobs

“The most powerful person in the world is the story-teller. The story-teller sets the vision, values, and agenda of an entire generation that is to come.”



2. Controlling the narrative. Whose story can gain primacy?

Riot or Insurrection?
Riot or mostly peaceful protest?



YEAR OF THE



Undercover
in the
British
Far Right

HARRY SHUKMAN



- Mostly “losers” who out of loneliness banded together to talk about forbidden subjects.
- Favor legal immigration over mass immigration.
- Favor prioritizing British history and culture over multiculturalism.
- Favor British law over sharia law.
- Engaged in naughty talk about eugenics and race science.

Narratives are subject to manipulation by omission and distortion.





3. The Bogeyman Tactic



4. Guilt by Association Fallacy

“Occurs when someone connects an opponent or position to a demonized group of people or concept to discredit the person or the group’s arguments.”

(Excelsior Online Writing Lab)



A “Guilt By Association” fallacy occurs when:

Political progressives associate political and cultural conservatives with a demonized group like the “Ku Klux Klan” or “White Christian Nationalists” to discredit their positions.

Conservatives are deemed “guilty” by simply being similar to or associated with this “bad” group and, therefore, their arguments should be disregarded.



Guilt by Association

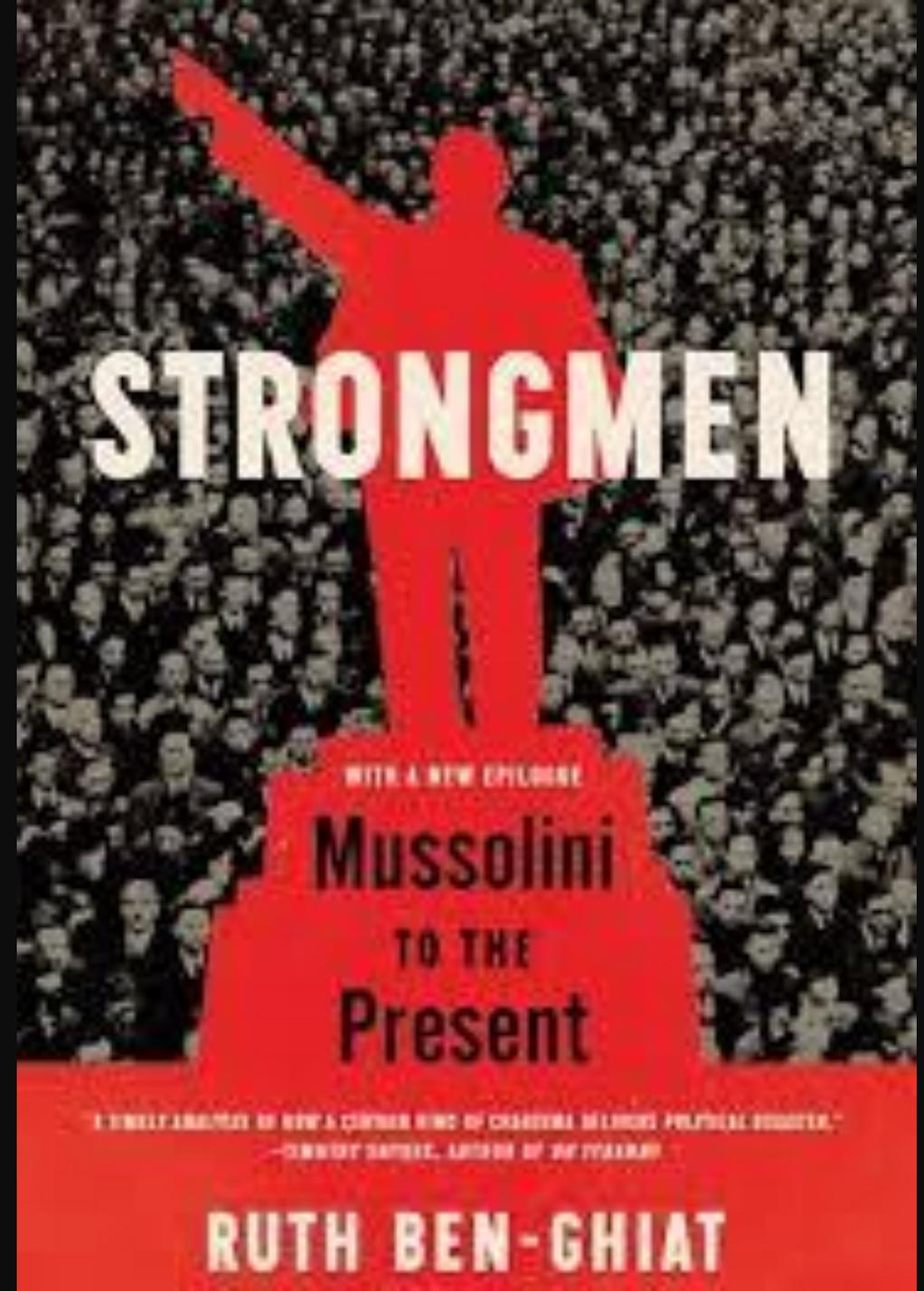
Political and cultural conservatives associate political progressives with a demonized groups like “jihadists” or “antifa” to discredit their positions.

Progressives are deemed “guilty” by simply being similar to or associated with these “bad” groups and, therefore, their arguments should be disregarded.



Guilt by Association (2020)

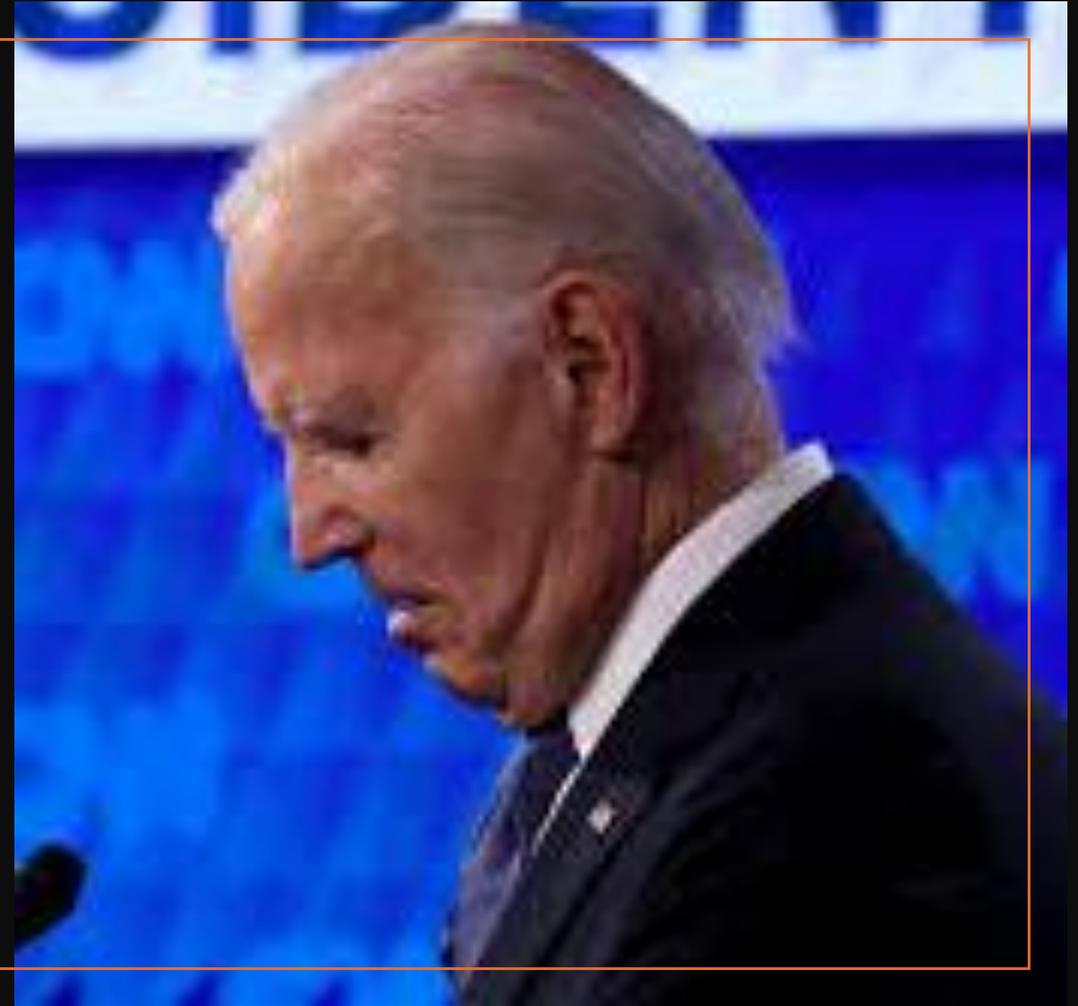
- Francisco Franco
 - Muammar Gaddafi
 - Adolph Hitler
 - Mobutu Sese Seko
 - Benito Mussolini
 - Augusto Pinochet
 - Vladimir Putin
 - Guess who?
-

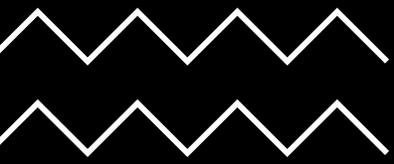


5. The ad hominem fallacy

Attacking the person instead of the positions he or she holds. The tactic is used to distract an opponent from the issues to focus instead on the foibles of the person.

Joe Biden is an angry and senile old man. His positions can't be any good.”





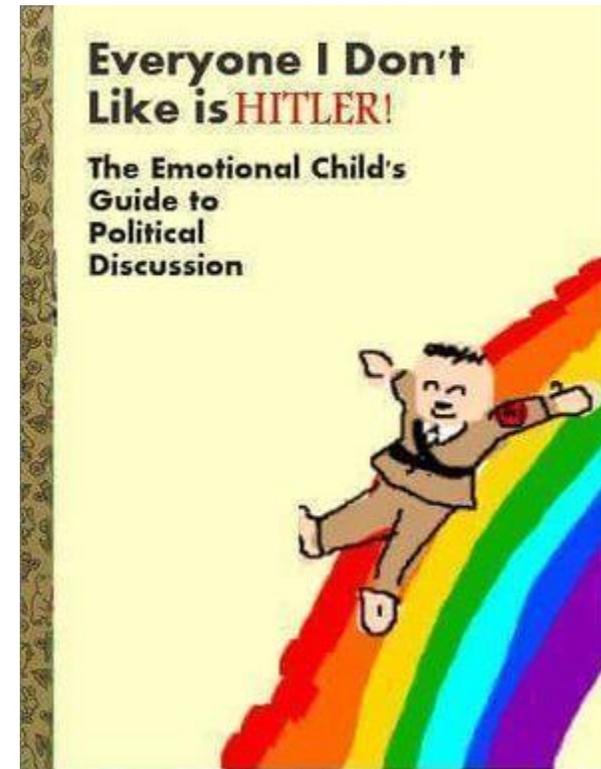
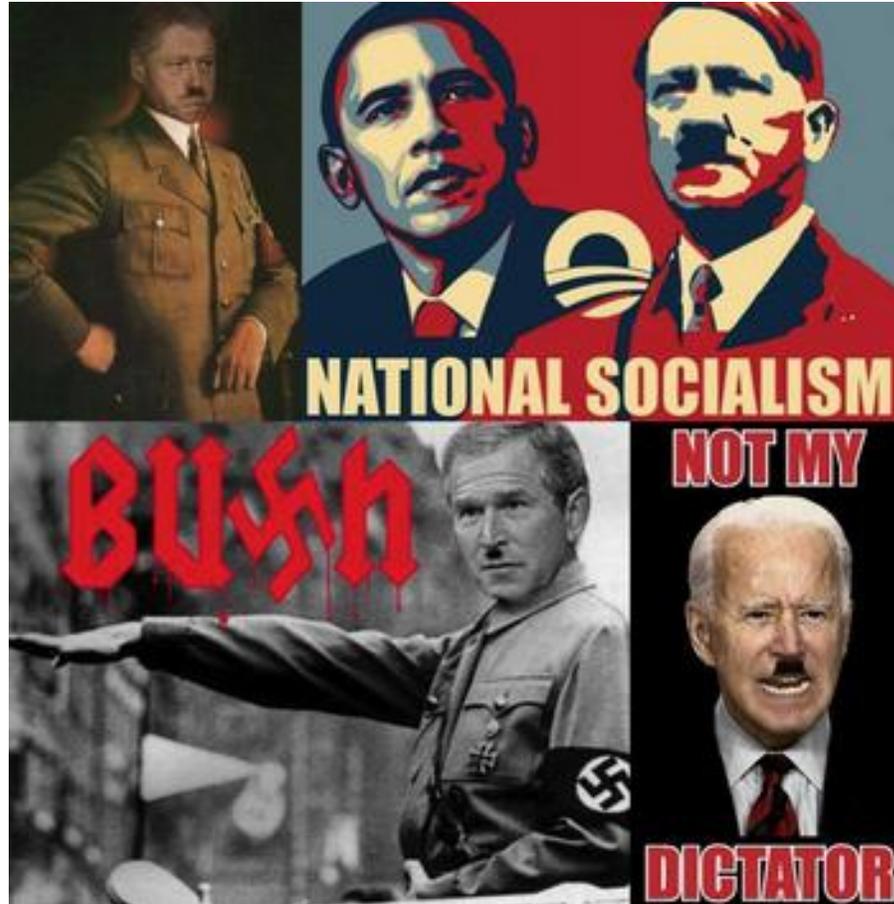
The ad hominem fallacy



“Donald Trump is a convicted felon. He’s mean and he has no filters. His positions can’t be any good.”



6. *reductio ad Hitlerum*. “An eternally popular rhetorical tool in which one likens the opposing side in the argument to Hitler in some way, shape, or form.”



7. The presumption fallacy: “Of course, you agree with me.”



8. Using different standards.

Interpretating someone or some position in the most favorable manner.

Or, *interpreting* someone or some position in the least favorable manner.





Stopping the rhetorical bullets to open the door to conversation.

Wrestle with the use of rhetorical tactics and being tricked by them.

1. **Words with multiple meanings**
2. **Controlling the narrative**
3. **Bogeyman**
4. **Guilt by association**
5. **Ad hominem**
6. ***Reductio ad Hitlerum***
7. **Presumption**
8. **Using different standards.**



White Christian Nationalism



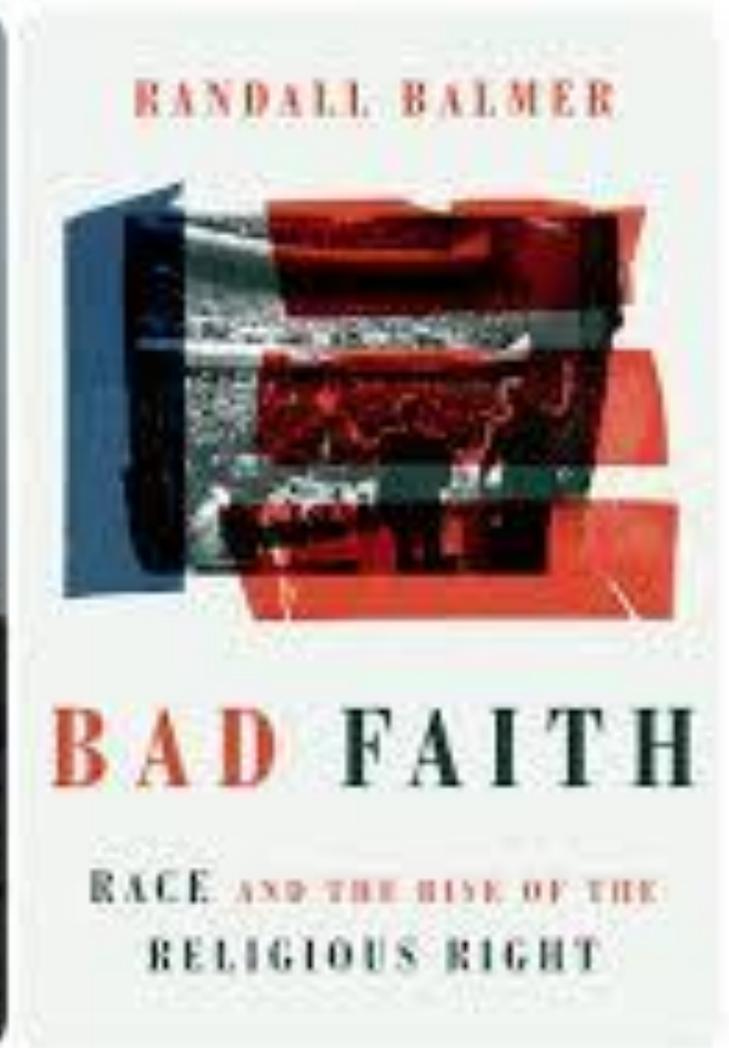
Three facts about White Christian Nationalism.

FACT # 1. WCN exists.

Fact #2

The number of people who embrace the label “white” is miniscule and their influence is even less. Making this label stick to a group can be a major achievement.

There are more subtle manifestations of white Christian nationalism that we will consider later.

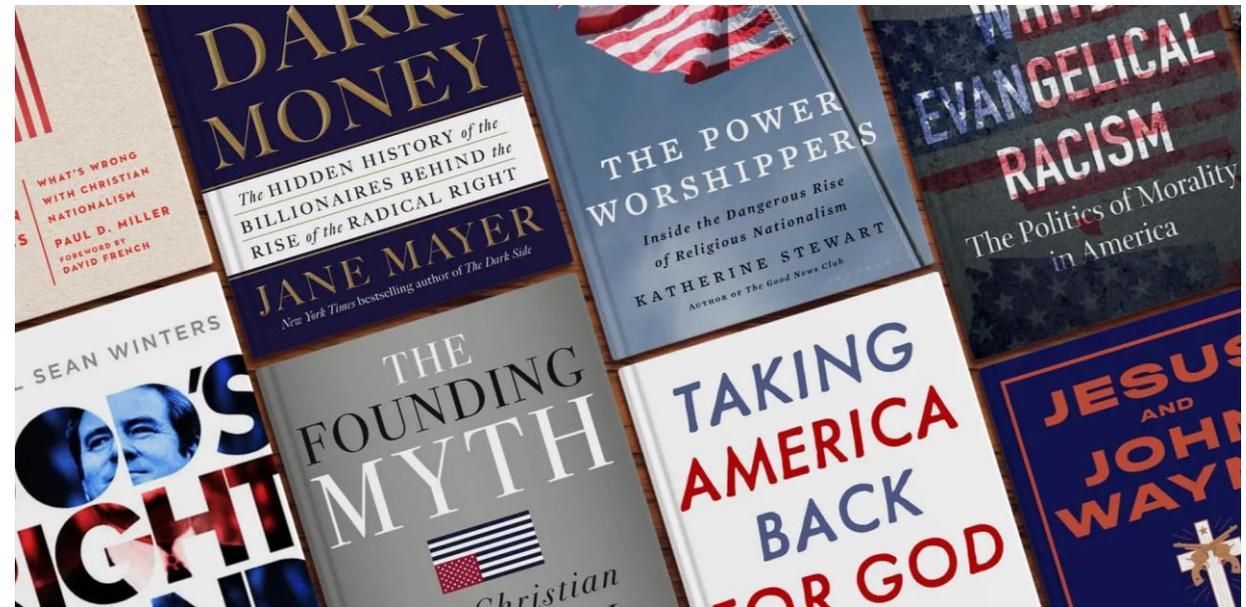
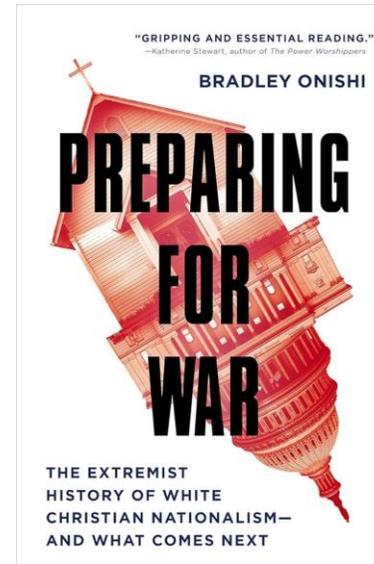


Fact #3

WCN is a useful bogeyman to frighten people into certain behaviors.



A few years back, a pundit noted that there are probably more books criticizing (White) Christian Nationalism and warning about its influence than there are (White) Christian nationalists.



What do White Christian Nationalists believe?

1. **Claims the superiority of the white race?**
2. **Believes the American nation is ordained by God to promote white supremacy?**
3. **Believes America was founded as a Christian nation primarily for Christians?**

OR is a WCN someone who is

1. **Opposed to open borders?**
2. **Willing to defend America even though it actively participated in slavery and gross injustices to the indigenous population?**
3. **Believes that some cultures and nations are superior to others in terms of their compatibility to Western/Christian civilization?**

Parallels of “white
Christian
nationalism?”

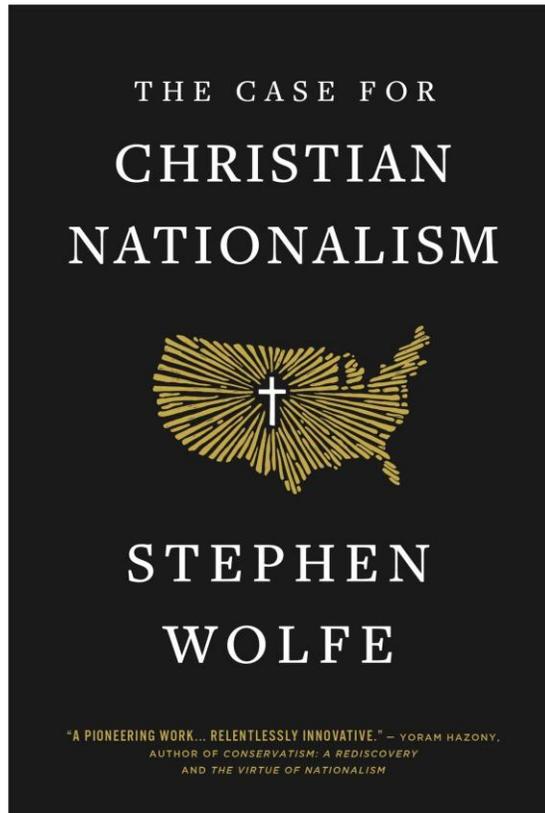
**Rainbow Anarchistic
Globalism?**





**Parallels of
White Christian
Nationalism?**

**Brown
Progressive
Jihadism?**



“Christian Nationalism” (minus the white) or Nationalists who are Christians?