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Review of *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation*

By Kristin Kobes Du Mez. New York: Liveright, 2020. ISBN: 978-1631495731

Kristin Kobes Du Mez is a professor of History at Calvin University, specializing in gender, religious, and political history while also teaching social and cultural history. These topics inform her writing, including her first book *The New Gospel for Women: Katherine Bushnell and the Challenge of Christian Feminism* (Oxford, 2015). Her new book under review, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (Liveright, 2020), likewise combines the frameworks of religious, political, cultural, and gender history. The book assesses how white evangelical Protestants forged their own political alchemy of Christian nationalism in the United States based on chauvinism, masculinity, and religious fundamentalism. This topic she explores is centered in the continental United States ranging in the decades from the mid-1940s through 2020, assessing the importance of prominent figures and archetypes such as John Wayne, evangelical leaders like James Dobson and Billy Graham, and Republican presidents Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Donald Trump.

Du Mez's central argument with this book is that the Evangelical Christian movement influenced right-wing politics with their ideas of family, nationalism, and masculinity shaping their own subculture, which in turn, linked with the ideology of social conservatism. She explains that since the 1940s and 1950s, white evangelicals synthesized an identity composed of traditional gender roles, militarism, and Christian nationalism; this was first challenged during

the social movements of the 1960s and a response to these changes was mobilized during the 1970s onward through evangelical influence on the marketplace and mainstream politics (11-12). This formation of an evangelical identity was the reason why this demographic was able to have such a strong hold on traditional social conservatism. Du Mez's book is chronological, but each group of chapters are dedicated to a certain subtheme. The first four chapters assesses the formation of their ideology from the 1940s to the early 1970s, with discussions about the origins of American Christian nationalism, John Wayne as an archetype, women's role, and the patriarchal domestic sphere. Chapters 5 through 7 elaborate on evangelicals' influence in the political sphere, especially in presidential politics. Chapters 7 through 8 explain their views on the American military. Chapters 9 through 11 are dedicated to explaining Christian masculinity and its perceived threats; the theme of masculinity strongly compliments the theme of the military. She then returns to the idea of the Christian military in Chapters 12 through 15 in regard to foreign policy, especially towards Islamic nations. Chapter 16 and the conclusion looks at the evangelical movement in the Trump era, ending in 2020. At this point of the book, their support for Donald Trump shows that nothing has changed in the evangelical movement as they still valued leaders that asserted masculine, chauvinistic, and militaristic values (272).

Du Mez's book is not a brand-new topic discussed by historians as there were other authors that have addressed this specific phenomenon. She notes that books such as John Eldredge's 2001 book *Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man's Soul* explored this same topic and inspired her to write *Jesus and John Wayne* to describe the evolution of the Religious Right in recent history (xiii-xiv).¹ Many of her sources include televangelist talk shows, interviews with prominent religious leaders, evangelical newsletters and magazines, public

¹ According to Du Mez, Eldredge's book is more centered around the image of Christian masculinity and the military up to the early 2000s, but it was popular among evangelical churches and Christian campuses.

opinion surveys, and books by evangelical authors. Each type of primary source adds its own contribution to show why this demographic was such a strong force, especially in social and political issues; this was one of the book's greatest strengths. Books that were religiously charged were used to serve as inspiration for evangelical views of the army as well as guides for the family and this was especially true with James Dobson's 1970 book *Dare to Discipline*. Many of the Christian newsletters and magazines were especially important for Du Mez's book as they represented the power of the evangelical consumer marketplace. This marketplace consists of their media in all formats which was used to portray their values and teach their religious communities (12). Surveys were also important as it demonstrate this demographic and their political and social preferences.

Jesus and John Wayne is targeted toward a general audience. Du Mez succeeds in providing an in-depth history of white evangelicalism in the United States but stays concise with a certain group of chapters dedicated to each theme. Readers should have a grasp on what each chapter is based on. This was especially effective since it keeps the book from feeling as dense as it seems; it make this book much easier to read and understand, especially for a general audience. This book could have expanded on certain concepts that were important, such as the evangelical "war against homosexuality". While it was mentioned in certain chapters, this book would be stronger if there was at least one chapter dedicated to this as it is a central part of evangelical ideology. In spite of this, Du Mez has succeeded in providing a chronological assessment of the Christian Right, including recent history, to help readers understand why the evangelical movement and right-wing politics linked with one another.

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About the author

Albert O’Neal Jackson Jr. is a graduating senior at the University of South Carolina Aiken, currently majoring in History with a minor in Political Science. For his dedication and achievements as a history student, Albert has received the Betty M. Toole History Scholarship and the Rosamond Durban McDuffie History Preservation Scholarship. He also serves as President of his university’s History Club. Albert has a strong interest in studying law and plans to attend law school after he receives his Bachelors of Arts in History in May 2022.