

patience and optimism about the future of our “beloved community.”

Response to Allyson F. Shortle, Irfan Nooruddin, and Eric L. McDaniel’s Review of *Embattled America: The Rise of Anti-Politics and America’s Obsession with Religion*

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— Jason C. Bivins

I am deeply grateful to Professors Shortle, Nooruddin, and McDaniel for their lively, generous, and thoughtful response to *Embattled America*. Having read their book carefully, and with admiration, I have a better understanding and appreciation of their remarks and queries. I appreciate chiefly that they identify our two books’ urgent concern for the precarious fate of American democracy. In very different ways, we aim to call attention to structural and attitudinal fault lines that have been steadily deepening and widening.

In their reading of *Embattled America*, my interlocutors have given me much to think about. Some of their queries and observations focus on issues I have long wrestled with, and others provide fresh, helpful insight. In terms of the former, I agree with their observation that my focus on conservatism occupies far more of my time and energy than what they identify as “the Left’s reactionary trolling.” I wrestled a fair deal with this concern and, because the book was already fairly well stuffed, decided that I would focus on the conservatism that has largely driven anti-politics and related conversations about religious persecution. My hope was that this imbalance was more or less justifiable, given that American politics since at least 1980 has been driven by the claims trumpeted by those I call martyrs.

As for their high-minded detractors, in addition to seeing them as reactionary I tried to characterize them as indignant and shocked by the continued appeal of conservative religion. This constellation of attitudes, I claim, is fuel for the entire range of persecution complexes and thus preserves the awful status quo. Beyond this, however, my interlocutors prompt me to think more broadly about where the “religious Left” is in this religio-political landscape.

I would observe that, in contrast to the Twitter/talk-show critics I identify as whistleblowers, the religious Left in America is flinty, focused, and comparatively quiet. Despite highly visible figures like Reverend William Barber, the religious Left is, like the Left more broadly, open and polymorphous and therefore still struggling to achieve a shared purpose and momentum.

The authors also ask me to reconsider and expand my analysis of martyr conservatives by naming other exemplars and also some who are more successful than those I

discuss in the book. I would complicate the latter consideration by noting that narratives of failure are a condition of embattlement for those seeking to carve out the persecutionist path. Nonetheless, I might name Marjorie Taylor Greene (the pugnacious, Q-Anon-avowing representative from Georgia), Tucker Carlson, Matt Gaetz, or even Kid Rock as potential candidates for further scrutiny. The influence of this mode of anti-politics is, sadly, only increasing.

It was with the aim of carving out a different politics that I wrote the book, focusing on constructive reappraisals of key categories in each chapter and more robustly in the conclusion. Yet as my interlocutors deftly document in their book and in their response to mine, no assessment of American problems can avoid reckoning with the weight and brokenness of our outdated political institutions, the rigorous analysis of which is beyond my book’s purview. I certainly agree with them that an emboldening of genuine democratic discourse and civic associations might allow for the kinds of collaborative thinking that can transform institutions.

This strikes me as possibly the only way in which to address the authors’ question about where apathetic moderates sit in my story. Knowing that well over one hundred million Americans do not vote, there is reason to believe that change is possible in America. But if these same Americans are overworked, distracted, and enraged, I too fear that too many citizens may be too far gone to invest in the work the country needs.

The Everyday Crusade: Christian Nationalism in American Politics. By Eric L. McDaniel, Irfan Nooruddin, and Allyson F. Shortle. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. 272p. \$34.99 paper.

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During the last two decades, and increasingly as we approach the present moment, scholarship dealing with contemporary events has struggled to keep pace with the depth and rapidity of change. It is a difficult task to write about history as it is happening. For this and other reasons, Eric L. McDaniel, Irfan Nooruddin, and Allyson F. Shortle’s *The Everyday Crusade* is an impressive and necessary addition to work on the contested phenomenon of “Christian nationalism.” Grounded in a range of empirical methodologies (including particularly rigorous surveying) and with a broad historical sensibility, the authors identify a three-tier group of identities that they believe captures the range of religio-political dispositions at work today. The result is a very specific interpretive model for a particular form of social and political imagination.