

## **Stephen Prothero Lecture Text: “Why Liberals Win: America’s Culture Wars from the Election of 1800 to Same-Sex Marriage”**

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**Washington University in St. Louis**

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Welcome to this evening’s public lecture sponsored by the John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics, as part of our ongoing series of Danforth Distinguished Lecture events. We are also privileged, in this instance, to have as our cosponsor, Washington University Assembly Series. I’m Leigh Schmidt, Acting Director for the Center, filling in for Marie Griffith while she is on academic leave. If you haven’t done this on your way in, I invite you to take information available on the table outside on your way out this evening about the Center’s broader enterprise, including our upcoming public events. I also invite you to join our email list, to contact us with any questions or feedback, and to follow our online journal on Religion and Politics. As no doubt many of you have already heard by now, the Center serves as a non-partisan, research oriented, public-minded venue for fostering rigorous scholarship, and for forming both academic and broader community audiences about the intersections of religion and U.S. politics. We encourage the sustained investigation, and careful reflection that make possible serious engagement with the religious and political debates that shape American life now and in the past. With those ambitions set before us, we could hardly have a more appropriate and accomplished speaker than Stephen Prothero, a professor in the Department of Religion at Boston University, a scholar of American religions very much in the plural. His books, as impressively broad-ranging as they are numerous, have established his reputation as an acclaimed public intellectual, a go-to commentator on American life who consistently makes plain why the study of religion matters, both nationally and trans-nationally. His books include, *The American Bible: How Our Words Unite, Divide, and Define a Nation*, published in 2012, *God is Not One: the Eight Rival Religions that Run the World and Why their Differences Matter*, published in 2010, the New York Times best-seller, *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know, and Doesn’t*, published in 2007, as well as *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became a National Icon*, published in 2003, which was named one of the top religion books that year by Publisher’s Weekly. He is a frequent interlocutor on National Public Radio, as well as on television, including on CNN, NBC, MSNBC, FOX, and PBS. His ease, wit, and insight have also been amply displayed in appearances on the Daily Show with Jon Stewart, the Colbert Report, the Oprah Winfrey Show, the Today Show, and the O’Reilly Factor. A regular contributor to the Wall Street Journal and USA Today, he has also written for the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times, and the Boston Globe. As prodigiously active as a speaker as he is as a writer, Professor Prothero has lectured across the country at college campuses, at churches, and libraries, interfaith gatherings, and even at the White House, working assiduously to raise the nation’s religious literacy. In 2012, 2013, Professor Prothero was a Goldman Sachs Senior Fellow with the Smithsonian Museum of American History, where he is leading efforts to bring religion more fully into view as part of the nation’s public memory. He received his B.A. from Yale in American Studies, and his PhD in the study of

Religion from Harvard, and has taught at Boston University since 1995. We are delighted to host him here at Washington University, all the more, I must say, because his daughter Molly, who happens to be a student here at Wash U, also happens to be such a great co-worker with us at the Center, indeed, Molly's working the event tonight for us. We are delighted for this opportunity to hear Professor Prothero's lecture tonight, which is drawn from his latest book project, on the history of America's culture wars. His title this evening is "Why Liberals Win: America's Culture Wars from the Election of 1800 to Same-Sex Marriage." Please join me in welcoming Professor Stephen Prothero.

### **Stephen Prothero**

Wow I'm glad that was on tape, that was the best introduction of me I've ever heard. That person sounds very impressive. Thank you Leigh, it's great to be here at Washington University. It's nice to see Leigh and Marie Griffith again, who I've known for a long time in this field, along with some others involved in the Center. I'm also very impressed you figured out a way to get my daughter to come to one of my talks. That's much appreciated. So it's great to be here, it's also fun to be speaking on the culture wars at a place that earlier this year hosted a conference called "Beyond the Culture Wars" and as you will see tonight I don't think there is to be getting beyond them, at least not anytime soon.

So I shouldn't need to tell you, any of you, that politics in the United States is a mess. Politicians in both parties treat their political opponents as enemies, Democrats call Republicans "terrorists," Republicans call Democrats "radicals" and "socialists." We've been doing this for decades on so-called values issues, questions from abortion to homosexuality that many see as matters of absolute morality or unchanging Biblical truth and therefore not subject to negotiation or compromise. But in recent years this M.O. has spread from cultural politics to politics in general. As moderates have been purged from both major parties or left office, disgusted, of their own accord and as institutions that benefited from political polarization have become more influential, those who were left behind fought life-and-death battles with their enemies over matters such as the death ceiling, that used to be resolved unanimously and without debate. The outrage normally reserved for disputes over family values bled into debates over marginal tax rates and presidential appointments. This expansion of the footprint of the culture wars has made our politics even more polarized and our politicians more partisan. And as a result, approval ratings for Congress are hitting all-time lows. The latest I saw was 7%, which means Congress is less popular than, according to a recent survey, than root canals, head lice, and communists, as well, also more popular than members of the U.S. Congress.

But polarization is not confined just to Capitol Hill. It could be that Facebook is at fault for seducing us into spending less time with people with whom we disagree politically. It could be the fault should be apportioned to gerrymandering, the redrawing of Congressional districts. But either way, Republicans and Democrats are more deeply divided today than they have been in my lifetime. Roughly a third of rank-and-file party members today seeing the opposing party as a threat to the nation's well-being. And in fact, this hyper partisanship has gotten so bad that it's no longer confined to politics itself. It now has spread into art, and sports, and even into the marketplace. Companies such as Chick-fil-A and Hobby Lobby now wear their conservative politics on their sleeve, and a

Smartphone app called Buypartisan, will help you spend your money on companies that align with your political ideology. Apparently Dawn dish soap is Republican, and Celestial Seasonings Tea is Democratic. “This is a Civil War without violence,” writes conservative journalist and blogger Andrew Sullivan, and we are the two countries now.

Years ago, during the Ground Zero Mosque controversy, this controversy over whether Muslims that own land a few blocks from Ground Zero in lower Manhattan would be able to build an Islamic Center that would include a small mosque, I started to think about this issue of America’s culture wars. I was disappointed and surprised that this had become a political campaign issue, the Ground Zero mosque. It didn’t seem to fit in with what I understood to be American principles of private property rights and religious liberty, and so I decided to follow my historian’s instincts and look back into American history to try to make sense of how we got to a place where we would actually be debating this question of the Ground Zero mosque. And what I discovered was that our culture wars are nothing new. We’ve always been, to borrow from Sullivan, two countries.

And so today what I want to do is talk briefly about my current book project, which examines America’s culture wars from Jefferson to Obama. And then I hope when we’re done there will be time for questions and comments. So first, what is a culture war? What do I mean by this term when I say that I want to look at culture wars in American history? Culture wars as I see them have four features. These are public disputes that we can find in public places like magazines and newspapers and presidential speeches and the Congressional record. Second, the disputes are not purely economic disputes, over taxing and spending. In other words, they’re not the things we normally associate with politics, but they include moral cultural, and religious concerns that are typically less open, or so we think, than normal politics to negotiation and compromise. Third, they give rise to larger questions about the meaning of America, who is and who is not the true American. And fourth they are heated disputes, fueled by rhetoric of war and driven by the conviction that one’s enemies are also enemies of the nation.

Historian George Marsden once defined a fundamentalist as, and this is his phrase, “an evangelical who is angry about something.” In culture wars are citizens who are angry about something. Repeatedly they resort to martial metaphors, accusations of sedition, threats of civil war. To them, these are not merely political disputes—they are battles for the soul of the nation. And so the term culture wars, as I see it, refers to angry and even violent public disputes that are simultaneously moral, religious, and cultural, and address the meaning of America. What is this country all about?

Many see the contemporary culture wars as an aberration. A time when American politics took a sharp turn down a strange road and citizens started to care more about obscure religious matters than bread and butter economic ones. The United States, on this view, is supposed to be a nation of immigrants, and it’s supposed to be a nation of religions. The Statue of Liberty opens her arms to newcomers from every land. The First Amendment guarantees every citizen religious liberty. So where there are Qu’ran burners or mosque arsonists, our reflex is to see them as exceptional—departures from American norms of *laissez faire* and tolerance and goodwill.

But is cultural conflict really so un-American? In key compromises meant to smooth things over in the states that formed the United States, the founders left unsettled key questions that would foment discord and even rebellion in decades to come. One, of course, was slavery. Another was the relationship between religion and politics. Before today's Islam scare and outfits such as Stop Islamization of America, there were anti-Catholicism and the Know-Nothing Party, anti-Semitism, and the Ku Klux Klan. Philosopher Horace Kallen has described the United States as an orchestration of mankind, in which people of many different races and religions contribute to a symphony of civilization. But the United States has also been a babble of civilizations in which people of different races and religions turned the nation into something akin to Tennyson's vision of the state of nature. Red in tooth and claw. There's also a strong tradition though, in American life, of coming to the defense of religious minorities and of conducting our public debates with some measure of civility. But it's hard to find moments in American history when our politics were not tied up in clashes of religious identity and cultural commitments. Because Americans have not inherited an ancient culture, it had to invent one, or more. So Americans have always disagreed about which of these inventions they should value. And culture here has always been hotly contested.

In fact Americans have been engaging in the cultural equivalent of war at least since the early Republic. Puritans may have played a role here by twisting God in governance tight, and transforming America into a land of moralists, ever on the lookout for demons in our midst. But whatever culture wars were prosecuted in the colonies ended when the first shots were fired at the battle of Lexington and Concord in 1775. During the American Revolution, patriots were united in their opposition to British rule, and their love of the patriot king, George Washington. But not long after the muskets went quiet and the canons grew cold, Americans turned on one another about a series of culture wars: about the propriety of the French Revolution, and the meanings and ends of their new nation. On questions as varied as polygamy and free thought, Catholicism and Mormonism, temperance and abortion, they denounced their fellow Americans as ungodly and immoral.

So this book that I'm working on has five episodes in this ongoing story of America's culture wars. I want to talk a little bit about each of them now, give you a sense of what the book is about, and then I want to talk about some of the arguments I advance before we engage in some conversation together.

The first of these five episodes is the election of 1800. This is the election that pitted Jefferson and the Jeffersonians, sometimes also called Republicans or Democratic-Republicans, against the Federalists, and John Adams. And it happened against the backdrop of the French Revolution, which acted, in a way, in these early culture wars like the sixties do in ours, where you kind of align on a given side based on how you look at the sixties or how you look at the French Revolution. This culture war included a battle on the House floor, and when I say a battle I don't mean discussion, I mean someone spitting tobacco into a Congressperson's eyes and then someone hitting them with a hickory cane and another coming back with fireplace tongs. This is a time, by the way, when they had a fireplace on the floor of the House. This happened at a time unlike our own, in which every single paper was a partisan newspaper. There weren't non-partisan papers really in

America in 1800. The Federalist papers called Jefferson and Jeffersonians the “very refuse and filth of society.” Jeffersonian papers called Adams “blind, bald, crippled, and toothless.” Jefferson called Federalists “enemies of the Constitution,” and referred to their time in power as a “reign of witches.” Alexander Hamilton on the Federalist side spoke of saving the United States from the “fangs” of Jefferson. Federalists, who were the conservatives in this culture war, were popular in New England among merchants. So we have a period here where New England is sort of the hotbed of religious conservatism. They favored a strong National Bank, a strong executive branch, strong Senate. They were in favor of a state establishments of religion, where the states could tax and give money to religious denominations to support the various forms of Protestantism. They favored England over France in foreign affairs. Their key words were security and order and stability. On the other side, on the left, in this culture war, the Jeffersonians were popular among farmers in the South. They opposed the National Bank. They favored agriculture over commerce. They pushed for low taxes, for limited government, for popular sovereignty. Their key word was liberty, which could only be secured by representative government, by state’s rights, and by the separation of church and state. According to Federalists, Jeffersonians were Francophilic anarchists willing and eager to sacrifice social order on the altar of liberty. According to Jeffersonians, the Federalists were Tories in disguise; an Anglican, monarchical, and aristocratic party, consisting of “timid men who prefer the calm of despotism to the boisterous sea of liberty.”

But the key issue in the election of 1800, the issue on which it turned, was Jefferson’s religion. Was he, as Massachusetts Federalist Theophilus Parsons said, the great arch-priest of infidelity? Or was he, as the Connecticut Current intimated, a secret Jew or Muslim? As you might recall from your history class, the election ended in a tie. This was the period before when you would vote for president and the electors would vote and then whoever got the most votes would be president and whoever got the second most votes would be vice president, so we didn’t have the system of running with a ticket. And so the way you’re supposed to do it is you’re supposed to have one of your delegates withhold a vote for the vice president so that person comes in second and your number one guy wins. The Jeffersonians, they won the election, but they kind of forgot this little minor detail. And so Jefferson tied with Burr. And the election was thrown into the House, according to the Constitution, which was controlled by the Federalists. So the situation was like if you were trying to decide between Clinton and Gore and it was being decided by a Republican House that wanted none of the above. And so there were 35 ballots. It happened over a period of many days. There was a delegate from Delaware who was very sick who had to be carried through the snow every day on a stretcher in order to cast his vote so as to not tilt the election toward Burr. And many thought that the only way this would be settled—remember this is a new country, this is only a decade or so after the Constitution—and many thought it wouldn’t be settled without a civil war. But finally, and it’s unclear exactly what happened, if there were behind-the-scene deals, but finally enough people said they would abstain on the Federalist side that Jefferson was able to be elected President.

In his first inaugural, Thomas Jefferson attempted to calm things down by, among other things, invoking God, which is something he had hardly ever done before in public. And he also made a plea for conciliation, which becomes, in my view, one of the great

expressions of our great tradition of conciliation in American politics which has been submerged in recent decades, when he said, and I'm quoting from his first inaugural, "but every difference of opinion is not a difference of principle. We have called by different names brethren of the same principle. We are all Republicans, we are all Federalists." This would be like saying today we are all Republicans, we are all Democrats. We are all together in this experiment we call the United States.

The second culture war that I look at is the battle between Protestants and Roman Catholics in the 1830s and 1840s. But that's a little bit of a misimpression, it's really a battle by Protestants to excommunicate Catholics from the family of America. And I begin this story with a story of the burning of the Ursuline Convent in Charleston, Boston, now called Somerville, Massachusetts, in 1834. This was a convent that was attended, oddly enough, mostly by Protestant school children, but it was run by Catholic nuns. And there were Protestants in the area that didn't like this convent, and they got in back and forth feuds with the nuns in the convent, and they finally decided to burn the convent down. Ironically, some of the fire trucks that had come in anticipation, because this was being threatened, had come in anticipation of observing the fire. Back then they had lanterns that illuminated their rucks at night, because we didn't have electricity yet, and those lanterns were actually used to light the fires that burned down the Ursuline Convent. So the firefighters actually provided the fire to burn down this convent.

This led to a big debate in Boston about Catholicism, and whether Catholicism was compatible with American principles, and arguments that it wasn't for three main reasons: one, that Catholics were immoral; two, that they were theological imposters, that they were pretending to be Christians but really weren't; three, that they were traitors to the nation. So there was a critique on moral grounds, on theological grounds, and then also on political grounds. They were traitors to the nation because they owed their supreme allegiance to the Pope, and not to the president, not to the Constitution. Anti-Catholicism isn't confined to Boston in the 1830s though, it spreads to a series of debates about the public schools which emerge in the 1830s and 1840s over what Bible is going to be read in the public schools. There isn't really any debate when public schools begin that there will be bibles read, because the whole purpose of the public school was to create good citizens and the only way to be good citizens was if they were moral and the only way to be moral was if they were Christian and the only way to be Christian was to be Protestant and the only way to be Protestant was to read the Bible. And the only bible to be read was the real Bible which was the King James Bible. And so the King James Bible was read in public schools in the 1830s and 1840s. And Catholics, when they grew to large enough populations in certain cities, in New York, in Philadelphia, in Cincinnati, they started to say hey why is the wrong bible being read in the public schools? Why are our kids forced to read the Protestant Bible? They should be free to read their own bible, the Catholic Bible. And this led to riots in Philadelphia which I write about in my anti-Catholicism chapter, where dozens of people were killed in a series of riots in a time where riots were seen actually in the United States as a form of democracy. It was a way that ordinary people could express their political sentiments in a face of a society that wasn't legislating for them. And so this was a point where this long tradition of anti-Catholicism that had been around in the West since Martin

Luther and the Protestant Reformation, proved to be deadly in the United States in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s.

The third episode I looked at is anti-Mormonism, which we say a contest between eastern Protestants and western Mormons, mostly after the Civil War but some before. Initially, anti-Mormonism focuses on the Book of Mormon, which is published in 1830 as the new scripture, which Mormons accept alongside the Bible as revelation. And the claim is this book is a fake and that Joseph Smith, who is the finder and translator of the book, is a fake. But over time, and particularly after the Civil War, the debate shifts from the veracity of the Book of Mormon and the fakery of Joseph Smith to two main questions, the foremost of them being polygamy and the second one being theocracy. In the Utah territory, the Mormons are basically hounded out of the eastern United States and pushed through a series of moments of exile, you might say, until they finally decide they have to leave the United States in order to practice their religion freely. And when they go to the Utah territory it's actually not part of the United States. Shortly after they arrive it becomes part of the United States and the problem of Mormonism becomes, once again, an American problem. And this is actually, in some ways, the most extraordinary episode in American religious history because this is a time when the full force of local, state, and federal governments, the judiciary, the Congress, the presidency, are all used to denounce a particular religion, to send the army to attack a particular religion, when the founder of the religion is killed by a mob after being jailed. It's quite an extraordinary tale for those of us who like to celebrate religious liberty in the United States. It's a profound and important counter-example to that story.

Mormons called their critics un-American for warring on religious liberty and for trampling the Constitution, and they also defended polygamy on sociological and biblical grounds. They argued that, have you read the Old Testament lately? Have you looked at how many wives the various Hebrew patriarchs had? The number was not one, the number was greater than one in most cases, they argued. And so we are reviving Biblical tradition. The Mormons are identifying in the Bible more with the Israelites and the Hebraic culture than with the New Testament stories. And they also make sociological arguments for polygamy. They say that actually there is not monogamy in the East. What there is is prostitution and infidelity and broken homes in the East. And what there is in the Western Utah territory is marriage, where there is no adultery and where there is no prostitution. They make demographic arguments about the fact that there are women who will remain unmarried unless there is the possibility of multiple women being attached to a single husband. And so they try to defend their tradition.

But the critics of Mormonism see no Constitutional cover for heathenism. That Latter-day Saints Church, as the Mormons are officially called, is an enemy of the State, they argue, for reasons parallel to the Catholic story because they follow a different sovereign than the sovereign that Americans follow, namely the President, they have their own President whom they follow, that Mormonism is treason against the government of God, it's a total subversion of Republicanism because these women married to these men will vote for whomever their husband tells them to marry. They also argue as many anti-Catholic critics argue, that Mormonism actually isn't a religion and that's why it doesn't deserve the

protection of the First Amendment religious freedom clause. Mormonism is a business enterprise, or Mormonism is a political conspiracy. It's not really a religion. This debate starts to come to a close in 1890, when the president of the Latter-day Saints Church agrees to give up on polygamy and on theocracy, and bend his tradition towards mainstream American norms of the separation of Church and State, and of monogamy.

The fourth culture war that I look at is the battle between drinkers and teetotalers, between the wets and the dries in the Prohibition Era of the 1920s into the early 1930s. This is the period when the 18<sup>th</sup> Amendment is passed to outlaw the sale and drinking of alcohol, and the 21<sup>st</sup> Amendment is then passed to repeal the Constitutional prohibition. And this is a period where we have preachers like Billy Sunday, the best-known preacher of the time who starts his career as an outfielder for the Chicago White Sox, ends his career as the most popular preacher in the United States who denounces Prohibition in a famous sermon he gave hundreds of times on booze, where he calls booze the mother of all sins. Carrie Nation famously has her "hatchetations" as she calls them, where she takes a hatchet into the saloon, which is the object of the hatred of the Prohibition movement and starts hitting the bar and hitting the mirrors and hitting the bottles and breaking them as a protest against saloon culture.

But this movement is not just about booze, it's not just about the saloon. It's also a wider culture war in my reading, about jazz, about organized crime, about the automobile, about sex, about racial mixing. And the core tension here, as I see it, is between diversity and homogeneity. Is the United States a blend of many peoples, or is it a white anglosaxon protestant country?

Today's culture wars started in the late 1970s, and they continue, as I understand them, today. They begin with a debate over segregation academies, when the IRS in the late 1970s changes a rule so that segregated white private schools, founded after the 1954 Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* mandated the desegregation of public schools, in order to get around that Supreme Court case. In many cases there were whole towns that would close down their public schools so that there were no public schools and then they would open, sometimes in the same building, a private school, which was not subject to the desegregation rule, which only applied to public school. And then all the students in the town could pay one dollar to go to the segregation academy which would admit only white people. So they were functionally the same schools. These segregation academies grew up in the late 50s and particularly in the 60s all around the South. And the IRS issued a rule in the late 70s saying that these groups do not have tax exempt status anymore because how could you say that they should get the privilege of tax exemption in a country that had decided by its highest judiciary that what they were doing was contrary to the principles of the United States. And this galvanized the group that comes to be known as the Religious Right, where they really start to protest the incursion of the federal government into what they see as their way of life. It did not begin with Supreme Court rulings against religion in the public schools in 1962 and 1963, that didn't galvanize the Religious Right. It didn't begin with *Roe v. Wade* in 1973, which also didn't galvanize, it got a big yawn from white evangelicals for the most part. This was really what did it. But over time, this initial focus on race shifted. And there was a pivot among Religious Right leaders.



Two pivots actually: from race to family values, as they came to be called to questions of gender and abortion and homosexuality and the patriarchal family, and the breadwinner male of that family. And that was the pivot from race to religion where the claim was that the IRS was discriminating against religion, discriminating against Christianity. That the victims of discrimination in the IRS rule were not black children who wanted to get an education in the South, but the victims were the parents and the superintendants and the students who went to these white segregation academies, because they weren't segregation academies, they were Christian academies. And they were victims of anti-religious anti-Christian bigotry.

Like early culture wars, the culture wars we live with today, which I call the contemporary culture wars, were a response to an anxiety about a way of life passing away, about the end of the traditional family or the end of white supremacy or the end of Christian America or the end of all of the above. And they were also battles over two different understandings of the nation, one that I refer to as mono-culture and the other as multi-culture. Is there one sort of American family, or many? Jimmy Carter had famously organized a "White House Conference on the Family," whose name was changed in 1979 to the "White House Conference on Families." This change in nomenclature incensed the Religious Right because there weren't multiple ways of being family, there was one way of being a family, and that's what the government should be studying, should be propagating. Is the United States a Christian nation or, to borrow from President Barack Obama's First Inaugural, a nation of Christians and Jews, Hindus and Muslims and non-believers? Again, the one or the many question. One religion or many. American religions. Is this a place for one race? Or is it a composite nation as Frederick Douglas put it.

So as I explore these five episodes, I make three main arguments about the culture wars. The first, culture wars cannot be reduced to moral contests pitting moral absolutists against moral relativists. This is a position taken up in the first great book about the culture wars, published by sociologist James Davidson Hunter in 1991 where he says that American politics is not about competing political parties or economic theories but, in his words, about competing moral visions. On the one hand, people who believe in unchanging transcendent authority, in scripture and natural law. And on the other hand people who believe in malleable, earthbound authority that resides in the self rather than in the transcendent. And this I think is a helpful way of looking at the contemporary culture wars, which did pit moral absolutists against moral relativists, but if you look at earlier culture wars you find actually moral absolutists on both sides. So I don't think this moral frame really helps.

Culture wars can't be reduced to religious wars either. This isn't a battle between those who see America as a religious project and people who see it as a secular project. This is a view that's common on the Religious Right, where there's this complaint that the Supreme Court took God out of the public schools, it took God out of the public square in the early 1960s. It's also popular on the secular Left. Susan Jacoby who's written a number of books on the history of free thought in the United States, she says, "at the heart of the culture wars lies this question: is America founded for humans and humans alone, or is it a society singularly blessed by and answerable to God?" And again, the culture wars fit this bill to some extent. At least through the 2004 election, when President Bush proclaimed his born-again faith with the easy grace of a child preacher, while his Democratic challenger, Senator John Kerry, seemed incapable, in kind of classic New

England style, of talking in public about his Catholicism. But our culture wars are rarely battles between belief and unbelief; they're usually intra-religious affairs between religious folks of one sort and religious folks of another. So between Protestants and Catholics or Protestants and Mormons.

Another popular interpretation is that the culture wars are just economic wars in drag. And we see this in Thomas Frank's bestseller *What's the Matter with Kansas?*, published a decade ago, where he makes the argument that culture wars are distractions from real politics, which is about money and about political power. They're cynical tactics used by Republican politicians to con cultural conservatives into voting against their own economic interests, in Kansas and in the Heartland and elsewhere. Frank writes, "the trick never ages, the illusion never wears off. Vote to stop abortion, receive a rollback in capital gains taxes. Vote to make our country strong again, receive de-industrialization. Vote to strike a blow against elitism, receive a social order which is more concentrated than ever in our lifetimes. And I think what Frank ignores is that human beings are cultural as well as economic animals. Why assume that politics is about economics and that religion, morality, and culture have nothing to do with it?"

And so my first argument is that culture wars need to be seen as cultural wars. As fights that engage on a number of fronts, but cannot be reduced to morality or religion or economics alone. They're all of the above. But they're also cultural. They're accelerated by anxieties about the loss of old forms of life and the invention of new forms. They pit monoculturalists, holding on to a unified past, against multi-culturalists, who are thrilled by an increasingly diverse nation.

The second argument of this project is that culture wars are conservative projects. Culture wars are battles between conservatives and liberals, but only superficially so; deeper, they are conservative morality plays, which are directed and written by conservatives, in which Liberals act as props or play very minor roles. Modern Conservatism is written, as I see it, in a narrative of loss and restoration. A form of culture is passing away, and it is worth fighting to revive it. In this regard, modern conservatism has obvious affinities with modern Evangelicalism, which also offers meaning in uncertainty through a narrative of loss and restoration. Of lost souls at revivals, and a Christian America stolen away by secularists. It too has affinities with the Bible. As Adam and Eve look over their shoulders on their exodus from Eden, as they mourn their loss and plot its reversals, they become the first conservatives.

Still there is much debate about whether the contemporary culture wars started on the Left or the Right. Conservatives repeatedly say the Left started it by banning prayer from public schools or by pushing for the Civil Rights Movement or for women's rights or *Roe v. Wade*. But as I see it this is advocacy in politics. It's not history. And if you look at the history what you'll find I believe, what I found, is that conservatives typically fire the first shots in the culture wars. Anti-Catholicism and anti-Mormonism were not backlash movements against revolutions on the Left. They were reactions to the immigration of Catholics and the invention of Mormonism. And similarly the culture wars of the 20s and 30s were responses to the rise of the saloon, to mixed drinks and to interracial dating. But the imagination of today's cultural conservatives says that feminists in the 60s were bra burners, angry activists who hated not only men, but also the traditional family, and

perhaps even America itself. But activists for women's rights were not typically culture warriors. Few of them were angry, and many of them were Republicans, who voted for Richard Nixon in 1968. The Equal Rights Amendment, the signature legislative effort of the women's movement, was endorsed by the Republican party platform every four years, from 1940 until 1976. It was ratified by Texas and by Tennessee and by Kentucky, states rarely associated with radicalism.

But culture wars are not just instigated by the Right. They're waged disproportionately by the Right. The metaphor of war in "culture war" conjures up two sides in the American Revolution for example, advancing on each other in relatively equal numbers of blue and red coats. But most of the shots in the Concords and Lexingtons of our culture wars were fired by those who had the most to lose as the nation opened its borders to Irish Catholics and its arms to lesbians and gay men. To be sure, the Left responded in each case, and provoked skirmishes of its own. But if you are looking for an infatuation with violence, both real and imagined, you are going to find it more often and more thoroughly on the Right than on the Left.

My third and last argument is that America's culture wars have been won by pluralists on the Left. If culture wars are conservative morality plays, produced and directed by conservatives, then we should expect right-wingers to play the big roles, and wanna-be culture warriors on the Left to be assigned the bit parts. We should also expect conservatives to get the best lines, and we should not be surprised that conservatives cast themselves as the victims. What is surprising is that these dramas always seem to take on a life of their own, overtaking the intentions of the writers and directors. Gays and lesbians get marriage. Papists and an infidel get the White House in Kennedy and Jefferson. In every case, those who declared war on Jefferson or Catholics or Mormons or the sins of the 20s or the abominations of the 1960s go down to defeat.

And so there's an obvious and, at least to me, intriguing paradox here in that culture wars are conservative projects, but liberals win. How can this be if conservatives are orchestrating them? So liberals may win for philosophical reasons, because the American principle of liberty is on their side. This is the kind of Libertarian, so called Wiggish argument. They may win for practical ones, because the nation is becoming more Catholic, or more brown.

But the most important reason they win, in my view, is because their opponents attach themselves to lost causes by design. In culture wars from 1800 to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, conservatives picked fights they were already losing, and once the fight was over the liberals had, not surprisingly, won. This strategy makes zero sense if the goal is to win. But that's not the goal of culture warriors. Their goal is to preach a gospel of the fallen and the lost. To demonstrate just how far America has descended from the glory of its founding, and just how urgently the nation needs their projects of revival, recovery, and restoration. So I talk in the book about a culture wars cycle that propels the nation from one cultural conflict to the next, and this is how that cycle goes. The cycle starts on the Right, with conservatives anxious about some cultural change they are experiencing as loss, and this anxiety is different in each case. During the election of 1800, which was held amidst the aftershock of the French Revolution, Federalists are anxious about their country falling into chaos. During the anti-Catholicism culture war, Protestants are anxious about the ways that immigrants are remaking their society. The anxiety catalyzed in the anti-Mormon culture war concerns the breakdown of what we will later come to think of as family values. The

drama of Prohibition and repeal is about alcohol, of course, but it is activated by an anxiety about the complexity and confusion of multicultural modern life. In the contemporary culture wars, conservatives give voice to their anxieties about the browning of their population, and with it the demise of White Christian America. And in the face of each of these anxieties, conservatives launch an attack, blaming their political opponents for the loss they are experiencing, and for threatening the health and welfare of the nation in the process.

After this first strike, the Left strikes back, which is stage number two in the culture wars. Progressives launch a counter-attack, responding either by defending the change as a positive good or, more often, by appealing to the principle of liberty, to insist that Americans have every right to run for office without being Protestants, or to drink a beer after work, or to secure an abortion.

Next comes some sort of combination. Culture wars are characterized by a rhetoric of no compromise, by appeals to moral absolutes and unchanging divine commandments, but they're always resolved, in part, by some sort of accommodation. Yes, Catholicism comes to be accepted as a legitimate American religion, but only after Catholics accept the separation of Church and State. And Mormons become "quintessential Americans," in the words of conservative columnist George Will, only after they give up on polygamy.

In the fourth stage of the culture wars, liberals win. In the contemporary culture wars of recent decades, conservatives did win a few victories. They put down the ERA, the Equal Rights Amendment, in 1982. They slashed the budget of the National Endowment of the Arts in 1994. More importantly, they expanded the role of religion in public life, turning explicit talk about God into the new normal inside both major political parties. And they also succeeded in turning "liberalism" into a dirty word, recasting liberalism for large numbers of Americans as a moral threat. But conservatives lost the contemporary culture wars as a whole, and they lost them badly. They lost on tax exemptions for segregation academies, they lost on Clinton's impeachment, they lost on school prayer, they lost on killing the National Endowment for the Arts, they lost on casual sex, which as some of you may have noticed is alive and well, they lost on the counterculture, which became the culture, they lost on the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial, they lost on abortion which is still legal in every state, they lost on marijuana, they lost on the traditional family, and they lost most strikingly and most quickly, on same sex marriage. In almost every arena where the contemporary culture wars have been fought—education, law, media, entertainment, family, and the arts—liberals control the agenda. Movies, television shows today, make the sort of entertainment decried by the moral majority in the 1980s look like *Leave It To Beaver*. *Modern Family* has won five straight Emmy's. HBO's *Girls* is clothing optional. In secondary and higher education, virtually all of the trends decried in the 1980s by conservatives remain firmly in place. Or as sociologist Nathan Glacier put it, "we are all multiculturalists now."

But liberals did not just win the contemporary culture wars. All the culture wars explored in my project went their way. The Federalists lost, and went out of business by the 1820s. Anti-Catholics lost. Anti-Mormons lost. Prohibition was repealed. There will always be culture warriors who want to retire after losing a big fight. But for most conservatives, any given loss energizes them for the next conflict, not least because it confirms their victimhood. Having lost one culture war conservatives become even more convinced that other Americans are out to get them. They become more fearful that American society is

going to hell. And so they cast about for another complaint, something else that is precious and is passing away. "All conservatism begins with loss," says Andrew Sullivan, and so it goes with America's culture wars, which at least for conservatives end with loss as well. Though I finished with under one minute to go with my allotted time, which means you have one extra minute for questions and then answers, so I'd love to hear from you. Thank you very much.