

# Trump's Charisma

**Ivan Light**   
University of California, USA

Critical Sociology  
2023, Vol. 49(3) 529–544

© The Author(s) 2022



Article reuse guidelines:

[sagepub.com/journals-permissions](https://sagepub.com/journals-permissions)

DOI: 10.1177/08969205221087425

[journals.sagepub.com/home/crs](https://journals.sagepub.com/home/crs)



## Abstract

Max Weber insisted that followers grant charismatic authority, but he did not address the cultural prerequisites that enable leaders to acquire it from them. Prophecy is the royal road. When a prophetic tradition has taught people to expect saviors in times of crisis, believers are primed to award charismatic authority to someone who resembles their expectation. The case of Donald Trump illustrates the importance of prophecy on the bestowal of charismatic authority. Within the Republican Party, two distinct prophetic traditions validated Trump's salvific mission, thus enabling him to acquire power of command. Adhering to Biblical prophecy, conservative Protestants identified Donald Trump as God's agent in preparation for the return of Jesus Christ. Also within the Republican Party, adhering to developmental economics, secular conservatives identified Donald Trump as a heroic entrepreneur whose vigor would restore America's greatness. Because of Trump's striking resemblance to Batman, the comic superhero's many fans also had prior ideational access to Trump's salvific mission. In the United States, the messianic prophecy of a tough-guy entrepreneur can derive from sacred culture, academic culture, popular culture, or from all three. The confluence produced a voter bloc primed to award charismatic authority to Trump.

## Keywords

popular culture, capitalism, political movements, Protestantism, Donald J. Trump, charisma, Max Weber

Since Max Weber (1958) identified it, charismatic authority has been the starting point for many studies of leadership (Bell, 2020; Breuilly, 2011; Eisenstadt, 1968; Fagen, 1965). Weber appropriated the term *charisma* from the history of Christianity, generalizing from the ministry of Jesus in a manner still acceptable to Bible scholars (Piovanelli, 2005). As originally explained, charisma referred to 'a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities' (Fagen, 1965: 275; cf. Weber, 1994: 32). Weber proposed that rare individuals are endowed with powers of persuasion and personal magnetism that enable them to acquire authority to which they have no official or traditional claim. Nonetheless, on the strength of this authority, they command obedience. He called that charismatic authority.

## Corresponding author:

Ivan Light, Department of Sociology, University of California, Box 951551, Los Angeles, CA 90095, USA.

Email: [light@soc.ucla.edu](mailto:light@soc.ucla.edu)

Although charisma originates in personality, personal charisma was not Weber's focal concern nor did he elucidate its cognitive or emotional content (Wasielewski, 1985: 5). Instead, Weber asserted the priority of social conditions and social context. These determine which constituencies award charismatic authority to a claimant. Weber insisted that leaders acquire charismatic authority only when believers grant it to them, and believers grant it only to those whom they regard as engaged on a mission of vital importance. A charismatic leader derives authority from his supposedly privileged relationship with some powerful abstraction such as God, nation, or history. When followers accept their obligation to serve that mission, then, in Weber's (1958) view, the mission's embodied leader becomes 'their master' (p. 246). That is, they obey him without question.

Most research into Trump's political supporters has focused upon their interests, material and cultural. On the material side, Trump offered voters protection from Chinese imports and immigrant labor. On the cultural side, he redeemed patriarchy, racism, xenophobia, and so forth. Analysis of Trump's charisma begins where interest analysis ends. Of course, charisma is related to interest in complex ways, but interest cannot explain why, in addition to their franchise, voters bestow charismatic authority on a politician.<sup>1</sup> Charismatic authority is the difference in status between a politician and a savior. For example, among his supporters, Adolf Hitler was not just the Chancellor of Germany, his legal office, he was Germany's leader (Führer) whom all others addressed as 'my leader', a personal subordination. Seeking to explain the adulation that Donald Trump elicited from his voters, several scholars have addressed Trump's charisma, leaving to others the inquiry into voters' material and cultural interests. Three studies (Falk, 2020; Lukes, 2017; Taki, 2020) were satisfied to demonstrate that Trump really exercised charismatic authority over his followers. Of these three, the most faithfully Weberian was that of Lukes whose point of departure was Weber's (1958) observation that charismatics 'break with all traditional or rational norms' (p. 250). Lukes argues that, as president, Trump repeatedly and casually violated established legal, moral, and traditional norms but retained his followers despite howls of shocked indignation from opponents. This is charismatic authority at work.

Other studies of Trump's charisma just assumed that Trump was charismatic and then sought to explain why. Beyond this point of initial agreement, they lack coherence. What is more, they revisit theoretical positions that Willner (1984) reviewed decades ago and rejected as inadequate for reasons that remain valid. Prost and Doucette (2019) advance a psychiatric explanation of Trump's charisma, arguing that in times of crisis frightened people turn for reassurance to an inspiring leader.<sup>2</sup> Insisting that Trump's charisma consists of a relationship between him and followers, not in the leader's narcissistic personality, Prost and Doucette (2019: xxii) support a key argument of Weber's, but when they posit a psychological need for leadership in the fearful masses, they insert a plausible idea derived from social psychiatry (Fromm, 1941), not from Weber. Similarly, Hassan (2019: 65, 119) observes that cults proliferate when societies undergo rapid change and then claims that Trump employs 'mind control' techniques to build a personal cult. Plausible as they are, theories of psychological stress cannot explain why, from a pool of available candidates, one leader is given charismatic authority that others are denied. For this reason, Willner (1984: 56) acknowledges that psychological stress is 'conducive' to emergence of charismatic leadership, but concludes that 'the catalyst must be found elsewhere than in the psychological states of followers'.

Aswad (2019; also Joosse, 2018a) claims that Trump's 'charismatic leadership rhetoric' outshone the lackluster rhetoric of his political opponent in 2016. Addressing Trump's rhetorical skill, which admittedly captivated his voters, Aswad does not probe the emotional and cognitive underpinnings of rhetorical skill. Emotional manipulation of audiences is a learned skill that requires as prerequisite 'understanding of the emotional organization of society' (Wasielewski, 1985: 5). On the cognitive side, Aswad's explanation ignores the ideational substance of Trump's communications, the personal and historical genealogy of his ideas, and the fit between Trump's ideas and

those of his followers. Separating rhetoric from the program also poses an interpretive problem. For example, hearing Trump's slogan (Make America Great Again), were audiences reacting to his rhetoric, to the message, to the messenger or to all three? It matters because revivifying a glorious past is a classic mission statement, not rhetoric (Willner, 1984: 176). Also, Aswad ignores the intense leader/follower relationship that Prost and Doucette, following Weber, deemed essential to the exercise of charismatic leadership. Acknowledging the essential contribution of 'outstanding rhetorical ability' to charismatic appeal, Willner (1984: 56–61) only concludes that it cannot stand alone as an explanation because so many effective orators (Demosthenes, Cicero, Stephen A. Douglas) never obtained charismatic authority.

Gaufman (2018) applies Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of 'carnival culture' to explain Trump's appeal to working-class voters. Carnival culture projects coarseness, vulgarity, and anti-elitism that attract working-class supporters. Similarly, Southall (2020; also Thorpe, 2020) argues that Trump's charisma arises from 'acting out the charlatan and the fool', a performance he dubs buffoonery. He proposes that political buffoons sometimes attract working-class support for stylistic reasons. When a candidate introduces the size of his male member as a qualification for the presidency, as did Trump, it is plausible to conclude that he plays the clown. Cautioning against that conclusion, Willner (1984: 131–132) long ago pointed out that 'a virility syndrome' and 'extremes of sexual indulgence' convey a message of vitality, energy, and self-confidence that build confidence in a leader's vigor. Sex clowning conveys a substantive message of manliness especially congenial to right-wing voters and cannot be dismissed as rhetorical or stylistic. Finally, there is no shortage of buffoons in high office, but how many were elected *because* they were buffoons? Trump's followers do not regard him as a buffoon or charlatan even if his opponents do. Trump's adherents regarded him as a high-energy agent in the service of national reinvigoration.

Krause-Jensen and Martin (2018) claim that Trump's charisma depends upon 'tricksterism', which they identify as 'the new spirit of capitalism', referring obliquely to Weber's celebrated monograph. What makes Trump a trickster is his seeming ability to reconcile systemic contradictions. 'By holding contradictory trends and opinions simultaneously, he presents himself as being capable of embodying seemingly mutually exclusive social trends . . . ' In effect, a political trickster claims to reconcile what cannot be reconciled, an impossible task that requires a savior, not a politician. However, all politicians offer solutions to public problems. Claiming the ability to solve knotty problems is a politician's mantra that weary voters have learned to ignore. Then the question becomes why do infrequent politicians parlay problem-solving claims into charismatic authority when most cannot? If the answer focuses on an intense crisis that awakens intense fear in non-elites, then we have returned to fearful masses who need a savior. At that point what began as an objective crisis theory turns into a psychological stress theory that, as reviewed above, cannot stand alone. Willner (1984) confirms that, in time of crisis, public perception of a leader's 'indispensability' (pp. 19–21) to its solution greatly improve a leader's charismatic appeal, but warns that confirming one's indispensability requires plausible grounds in the culture.

Krause-Jensen and Martin confirm Weber's judgment that charismatic leaders arise in times of crisis, but they transfer the theoretical frame to Marxism. In a Marxist frame, acute systemic contradictions may elicit a charismatic leader whether reactionary or revolutionary. A partial rapprochement between Weber and Marx can certainly be claimed on this point, but serious differences remain. Weber's historical method traces ideas that endow a charismatic relationship with ideational content. To grant charismatic authority, followers must connect its claimant to ideas that move them. They need to understand that this crisis requires a savior and why this claimant is that savior. This ideational prerequisite links a charismatic leader to belief constituencies. All these ideas lie on the subordinated superstructural side of Marxist theory. Without access to ideational content, contradictions theory cannot clothe a leader with cultural legitimation that yields charismatic authority.

Herein, a new context is the same conceptual problem that Weber famously addressed in his *Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*. To mix the metaphor, Marxism can move the football to the goal line, but cannot score without support from the cultural superstructure.

### Clothing the charismatic leader

Ironically, a once-prominent Marxist theoretician came close to expanding Weber's argument on this very point. Karl Kautsky (1854–1938) was a contemporary of Max Weber's and the leading Marxist theoretician of the Second International. Most of Kautsky's publications addressed political questions of the moment, such as the Erfurt Program, and Lenin famously denounced him for reformism. That debate is not relevant here. Kautsky wrote one work of enduring scholarly importance (McLellan, 1987: 64–76). This was his *Foundations of Christianity* in which Kautsky (1972 [1925]) depicted primitive Christianity as a revolutionary communist movement whose priesthood ultimately sold out to Roman authorities. In this work, Kautsky doubted the existence of a historical Jesus, rejected the resurrection as a hoax, and ridiculed the contrivances by which the Gospel writers framed the ministry of Jesus in a prophetic tradition. For Jesus to acquire charismatic authority, Kautsky (1972 [1925]) reasoned, the Gospels needed to depict him as a 'descendant of David' (p. 361) because ancient prophets had declared that the Messiah would be a descendant of King David. For this same reason, it was necessary to cause Jesus 'to be born in Bethlehem, the city of David' (Kautsky, 1972 [1925]: 361, 388). Thanks to ancient prophecy, Jews expected a Messiah born in Bethlehem and descended from King David so Jesus could plausibly be that Messiah only if he met both conditions. Kautsky left the critique at that point without generalizing the importance of prophecy in legitimating charismatic authority. Had Kautsky asked why the framers of the New Testament needed to introduce prophecy to bolster the authenticity of Jesus, he would have asked that question. This is a Weberian question that Weber never asked.

Weber emphasized followers' ratification of a leader's mission but never inquired what ideas may eventuate in a ratified mission. For the ratification of a leader's charisma, his mission must derive from and appeal to prior cultural knowledge that people already trust. To claim authority in the name of God, a prophet needs a population who already knew that God sends prophets. To claim charismatic authority in the name of the nation a fascist needs voters who already endorse nationalism and all the mythology that attends it. In general, therefore, to obtain charismatic authority in times of crisis, a skillful orator must tap preexisting ideas widely shared among the constituencies addressed. Prophecy is the ideal spring from which to draw that authority, especially prophecy that predicts saviors. By resembling what prophets had already led the people to expect, ambitious leaders encourage believing constituencies to recognize and authenticate them as saviors and their mission as salvific.

For this reason, Willner (1984) concluded that the pre-eminent requirement for obtaining charismatic authority is *cultural legitimation* rather than crisis, eloquence, or psychological stress, contributory as these certainly are (p. 61). As she put it, all charismatic leaders derive their authority from the invocation of myths that are 'common symbols of a shared cultural heritage'. A charismatic leader is 'assimilated to the dominant myths of his culture'.<sup>3</sup> For charismatic leaders to obtain charismatic authority, a cultural history needs to be tapped in a manner that explains and authenticates the claimant's identity and proclaimed mission. Before the charismatic claimant is granted authority, there must exist shared ideation that legitimates both his mission and his identity. This ideation is unavoidably historical and often prophetic. The ideation is historical because old, possibly ancient. It is prophetic because prior prediction best authenticates the mission and the leader. Leaders most easily acquire charismatic authority by resembling saviors earlier predicted by sages, oracles, and prophets, whether sacred or secular.

## Explaining Trump's charisma

Turning now to Trump's charisma, a parallel construction proposes that Trump, like Jesus Sukarno, Castro, Bolivar, Gandhi, or any charismatic leader, required prior ideational legitimation in order to convert personal magnetism into charismatic authority (Bell, 2020). This ideational legitimation must also predate Trump and the crisis to which he responded. In addition, the ideational legitimation must link Trump directly to constituencies that long have believed it. Finally, Trump must cast himself as and be understood as a predicted savior. In the sections that follow, I offer evidence that falls into place just that way. Ideational traditions linked Trump to both secular and religious constituencies in the Republican Party. Trump could acquire charismatic authority in the Republican Party because both its secular and religious wings had anticipated saviors who, for different but related reasons, he resembled. On the religious side, the most important influence was the transformation of the Protestant ethic into a prosperity gospel spread by televangelists. Accompanying that transformation were the 40 independent 'prophets' who declared that God had endorsed Trump's policies, if not the sinful man (Roth, 2021). On the secular side, a combination of social Darwinism, Austrian School economics, and entertainment media had led Americans to understand rich entrepreneurs as exceptional individuals whose strength and intelligence, when autocratically exercised, would reinvigorate the nation as well as the economy.<sup>4</sup> This secular message had been spread to the general public by the economics profession as well as by entertainment superheroes. Trump's mission was understood inside and outside the Republican Party as salvific, and Trump depicted himself as a savior in both traditions.

## From protestant ethic to prosperity gospel

Weber modestly proposed that 20th-century capitalism had outgrown the need for religious legitimation but he added that the work ethic's 'ghost' still stalked the halls. Decades later, Daniel Bell (1976) put that ghost to rest in his account of 'the greening of America' during the 1960s. Ratified by its successors, that generation's innovative choices (sex, drugs, and rock and roll) proclaimed that the heirs of American capitalism no longer valued the worldly asceticism that had animated the Puritans. Accurate as far as it went, Bell's conclusion ignored religion. As was apparent even at the time, work-shy hippies had serious spiritual concerns. Bryan Wilson (1990) has shown that while hippies abandoned the work ethic, and many gravitated into New Age mysticism, their generation also launched the 'Jesus movement' that invigorated Billy Graham's evangelical crusades; their generation also embraced 'televangelism' that matured into what Kate Bowler (2013) dubbed the prosperity gospel (p. 227).<sup>5</sup> At this point, a line of historical descent is unmistakable. 'Modern prosperity believers are not unlike Max Weber's early Puritans whose religious insecurity . . . transmuted into capitalist virtues'. The prosperity gospel teaches that faith enables believers to claim health, wealth, and victory by persistently asking God to provide them. Instead of working and saving as did the Puritans, prosperity believers now claim entitlement from the Lord. The prosperity gospel is exceptionally influential in American Protestantism. While mainstream Protestant churches faltered and their congregations dwindled in the late 20th century, the prosperity gospel thrived. During the 1990s, the prosperity gospel enjoyed a growth spurt, becoming by the end of the decade 'the foremost Christian theology of modern living' and 'a decisive theological, economic and social force shaping American religion' (Bowler 2013: 9, 78).

Since the middle of the 20th century, a major development in American Protestantism has been the development of media-driven clergy independent of denominations. These clergy compete for congregations in a religious marketplace. Jim and Tammy Bakker, Oral Roberts, Jimmy Swaggart,



Paula White, and above all Pat Robertson (1982) developed television ministries that brought the prosperity gospel to small towns and rural America. Of contemporary clergy, the most prominent preacher of the prosperity gospel is Joel Scott Osteen, Pastor of the Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas. Lehmann (2016) calls him 'the nation's most popular, beloved, and successful pulpit orator' (p. 361). Osteen's televised sermons were seen by approximately 10 million viewers in the United States in 2018. Osteen did not graduate from college and he holds no degrees from any school of divinity. In November 2021, Osteen gave successive sermons with these titles: 'A Turnaround is Coming', 'The Hand of Blessing', and 'Deaf to the Negative'. In these sermons and in his many books, Osteen explains that faith and a positive mental attitude enable believers to claim health and prosperity from God. 'Name it and claim it' is the nickname given his formula. Osteen preaches the 'soft version' of the prosperity gospel. Soft prosperity directs believers to cultivate a positive outlook through repetitions of inspiring declarations such as 'I am blessed, I am prosperous, I am healthy, I am talented, I am creative, I am wise' (Bowler, 125). The practice is expected to bring wealth by supernatural means. In contrast, the hard version of the prosperity gospel links salvation to faith and faith to present circumstances, finding that those with money have faith, and those without lack it. Hard prosperity is closer to the original Calvinist source, and, after tracing the transformations of 'the money cult' from John Winthrop (1587–1649) to Joel Osteen, Lehmann (2016: 361) finds 'nothing novel about prosperity preaching' whose various forms have all 'taken shape across the last three centuries of American life. . . .'

Donald Trump understood the prosperity gospel because he was raised in it. The Trump family attended the upscale Marble Collegiate Church on Fifth Avenue. Marble Collegiate was part of the Reformed Church of America, a Calvinist denomination (Light and Dana, 2020). The rector of this church was Norman Vincent Peale whose *The Power of Positive Thinking* sold millions of copies in the 1950s. Peale encouraged readers to build extreme self-confidence in order to succeed in life. Donald Trump's father was an enthusiastic proponent of positive thinking (Brody and Lamb, 2017: 93). According to Gwenda Blair (2000), Norman Vincent Peale 'provided much of the spiritual underpinnings for the entrepreneurial culture in which the Trumps flourished' (p. 305). Trump and McIver (2008: 1654–1655) and Trump and Kiyosaki (2006: 96) have frequently and enthusiastically acknowledged the influence of Peale on his business practice. Trump and McIver (2009) listed *The Power of Positive Thinking* as one of 10 books he recommended to his students (p. 189). When Donald Trump married in 1977, Dr Peale officiated. Brody and Lamb (2017), Trump's evangelical biographers, acknowledge his debt to Norman Vincent Peale and through him to a Protestant religious heritage (p. 93). Paired quotations from Peale (1952) and from Trump (Light and Dana, 2020: 100) display the extent to which Peale influenced:

- Trump: 'Positive thinking got me to where I am today'.  
 Peale: 'Think positively and you . . . bring positive results to pass'.  
 Trump: 'Doubt leads directly to failure'.  
 Peale: 'Positive self-confidence expels all . . . doubts', enabling success.  
 Trump: 'When in doubt believe in yourself and assume that you will succeed'.  
 Peale: 'Believe in yourself. Have faith in your abilities'.  
 Trump: 'Drop all your so-called friends who are negative and think small'.  
 Peale: 'Surround yourself with friends who think positive thoughts. . . .'  
 Trump: 'Defeat is a state of mind'.  
 Peale: 'Think defeat and you are bound to feel defeated'.  
 Trump: 'Negative thinking stems from low self-esteem'.  
 Peale: 'Lack of self-confidence is one of the great problems besetting people today'.

Trump appointed a prominent prosperity preacher, Paula White (2020), as his spiritual advisor in 2002 and appointed her again to his religious cabinet in 2016. Trump's personal resonance with the prosperity gospel explains why its partisans are his most fervent supporters. Admittedly, the prosperity gospel is a minority movement within evangelical Protestantism. Centrist evangelical leaders, such as Rick Warren, Ben Witherington III, and Jerry Falwell, have criticized the prosperity gospel, sometimes denouncing it as heretical. Keenly aware that Trump is personally irreligious and a passionate libertine, mainstream evangelicals nonetheless supported his political candidacy in 2016 because of his policy on social issues of concern to them, especially Israel, abortion, immigration, and sexual minorities. It is also true, as Deckman et al. (2017) argue, that decades of prior effort by leaders of the Christian Right moved evangelical opinion in a direction friendly to free-market conservatism. This was not difficult because evangelicals' marked indifference to war, racial injustice, and poverty had been apparent to their own clergy decades earlier (Henry, 1947: 23). This indifference combined easily with 'shameless promotion of capitalism in its American form' (Ward, 2006: 529–530) and what Rosenberg (2021) sees as a belief in 'unfettered capitalism as ordained by God'. Oral Roberts even expounded a faith that mimicked the bond market, advising followers to 'invest in God' in order to obtain 'returns' (Forrester, 2006: 530). Pat Robertson (2011) advised believers to invest in the stock market, make deals, take risks, start a business, and sell goods 'at a profit' because the Lord is 'a hard-nosed businessman'. For these long-term reasons, Trump's economic policies as well as his social policies appealed to evangelical Protestants in 2016 and could have been expected to draw their votes on that basis alone.

Rational choice cannot, however, explain the charismatic authority that evangelical Protestants awarded Trump.<sup>6</sup> In 2017, the Pew Research Foundation asked a national sample to agree or disagree to this statement: 'God chose Trump to become president because God approves of Trump's policies'. Fifty-three percent of White evangelical Protestants agreed as did 32% of Republicans, but only 18% of White Catholics and 17% of Democrats agreed (Djupe and Burge, 2020). White evangelical Protestants believed that God had chosen Trump because television clergy had declared him the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy (Christerson and Flory, 2017: 100; Harding and Martin, 2021). In the prophetic eschatology of conservative Protestantism, the return of the Jews to Israel had occupied center stage long before Trump (Chartier, 1969; Henry, 1947: 66). Evangelicals understood political events of the twentieth century as reflecting God's providence but the creation of the state of Israel was of unique importance because it was understood as a prophesied harbinger of the imminent return of Jesus Christ. These evangelical beliefs came together in Hal Lindsey's (1970) best-selling book of the 1970s, *The Late Great Planet Earth*. In this volume, Lindsey predicted the return of Jesus would follow 'the repossession of ancient Jerusalem' by the Jews, the rejection of Bible literalism by denominational clergy, the creation of a European Union, and loss of world leadership by the United States. After watching these events take place in the next 50 years, many evangelicals already hoped, well before Trump's candidacy, that the return of Jesus Christ was imminent.

Although they approved his other policies as well, Trump's unconditional support of Israel emboldened evangelical clergy to proclaim him as the one chosen by God to accomplish his divine purpose (Akasoy, 2019; Balmer 2020; Harding and Martin, 2021; Onishi, 2021). Trump's miraculous victory validated their prophecy. For this reason, Berry (2020: 71, 83) declared Trump's voters 'prophecy voters'. 'These Christians were motivated to support Trump because of alleged prophetic revelations that he was God's anointed candidate chosen to lead America at that particular moment in God's unfolding plan for the world'. Equally important in Berry's judgment, Trump claimed before the press on multiple occasions that he was indeed God's 'chosen one'.<sup>7</sup> Once understood as God's prophesied vehicle, candidate Trump could elicit charismatic authority from

those primed by their religious tradition to expect one. Indeed, television prophets began to predict Trump's presidential victory years *before his candidacy* was announced and the momentum built throughout 2016.<sup>8</sup> Hailed as a miracle, Trump's underdog victory in 2016 solidified his evangelical support. 'We believed that God had raised him up' (Strang, 2017: 22, 31). Evangelical pastors prayed in public for Trump's victory in 2020.<sup>9</sup> Once again, self-appointed prophets predicted that Trump would be re-elected in 2020, and when he was not, Trump faced the abrupt loss of political momentum. Ironically, that loss of momentum implies that Trump was running on charisma. As Weber (1958) explained, charismatic authority requires success and withers in the face of failure (p. 249). To avoid the devastating imputation of failure, which would strip him of charisma, Trump insisted that, having won the election, he had been defrauded of victory. Most television prophets repeated this message (Kestenbaum, 2021), but a few acknowledged that Trump had lost the election.<sup>10</sup> Djupe et al. (2021) predict that Trump's charisma will survive the lost election of 2020 despite the lost election.

## Secular Republicans

In 2018, one-quarter of American adults characterized themselves as evangelical Christians. Approximately 70% of evangelicals voted for Trump, so evangelical votes for Trump accounted for 18% of the total presidential vote in 2016. Critical as was that bloc, Trump received 48% of the total vote. Therefore, his evangelical voters represented no more than a third of the total Republican vote. Trump's non-evangelical voters accounted for two-thirds of his support. Except for conservative Roman Catholic voters, who did not recognize Trump's divine sponsorship, most non-evangelical Republicans were secular. Nonetheless, among these secular Republican voters Trump appeared to embody economic predictions that identified him as a uniquely gifted person who could save an imperiled nation. When he declared that 'Only I can fix America', a demand for charismatic authority, they applauded (Myers, 2019).<sup>11</sup> When he said, 'Believe me', they cheered.<sup>12</sup>

Secular Republicans could identify Trump's salvific mission because of the celebration of entrepreneurs in orthodox free-market economics and in derivative arts media. It was not just America's vaunted celebration of self-help and individualism to which Trump appealed (Langman and Lundskow, 2017: 94–99). Conventional developmental economics specifically addresses the importance of rich entrepreneurs for restarting prosperity in stagnant economies. Developmental economics predicts that, in times of crisis, rich entrepreneurs become economic saviors. The Austrian economist, Joseph Schumpeter (1883–1950) introduced the concept of 'creative destruction' that put entrepreneurs at the epicenter of the capitalist innovation cycle (Light and Dana, 2020). Schumpeter proposed that, in order to ascend to a higher state of productivity, systemic capitalism had first periodically to destroy a stagnating status quo. Entrepreneurs accomplish this demolition by 'moving fast and breaking things' as Mark Zuckerberg cheerfully expressed it. Doing so, the entrepreneurs serve as agents of a distressed system that needs the controversial medicine they apply. Thomas Edison introduced electric lighting but destroyed the gas lighting industry; Henry Ford invented mass production of automobiles but destroyed the carriage industry; Jeff Bezos invented online selling but destroyed the shopping center.

Schumpeter's economic theory of entrepreneurship derives importantly from Max Weber's sociological writing.<sup>13</sup> In Langlois' (1998) view, Schumpeter's entire schema is an application of Weber's concept of charismatic authority to the problem of economic growth (p. 2). Schumpeter specifically simply hooked Weber's category of charismatic leadership to entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs are owners of large business firms that introduce risky innovations. Langlois (1998) concludes that '... entrepreneurial action is an instance of charismatic leadership, which, for Weber as for Schumpeter, is central to the theory of social change' (p. 7). In Schumpeter's vision,



entrepreneurs rejuvenate stagnant economies. Entrepreneurs have a unique vision. They take chances and break rules. As entrepreneurs are progressive innovators, economists teach, the public's best course is toleration of their rule-breaking. Understood in the marketplace of political ideas, Schumpeter's economic theory amounts to secular prophecy. Decades ago, long before Trump was born, this influential economist *prophesied* that when economies stagnate, rule-breaking entrepreneurs will appear to revivify them. These entrepreneurs rejuvenate the capitalist system. Schumpeter's theory still defines orthodoxy in the field of development economics.<sup>14</sup>

Schumpeter (1934) might have depicted entrepreneurs as functions in a system of equations, but he intentionally humanized them (p. 85). Schumpeter admired and even idealized entrepreneurs. He praised their superior intelligence, their physical energy, their courage, and their 'heroic' individualism. The early Schumpeter even depicted entrepreneurs as biological supermen endowed with genius, will, and physical energy well above ordinary levels because of superior genetic endowment. Although Schumpeter later retracted this view, the idea that entrepreneurs are genetically superior individuals still finds space in business journals (Nicolaou and Shane 2009; Shane and Nicolaou 2015). Schumpeter's heroic entrepreneurs resembled the Superman comic hero (invented 1938), the Batman comic hero (invented 1939), and the Aryan superman of Nazi race theory (Andrae, 1987). As Weber (1958) had specifically acknowledged the ability of secular heroes, 'even a pirate genius' (p. 246), to obtain charismatic authority, Schumpeter's extrapolation to rich business owners was fully justifiable. However, Schumpeter introduced these ideas to professional economists who broadcast it to the world. People exposed to developmental economics were thus primed to expect heroic entrepreneurs who would push through controversial changes in defiance of entrenched opposition. Entrepreneurs are autocrats because, as capitalists, they own the means of production but also because they alone project the master vision of the future. For these reasons, believers in developmental economics can be said to await saviors to whom obedience is owed. As a rich entrepreneur, Trump resembled the saviors Schumpeter had predicted; he played the role and received from believers the obedience the role demanded.

## From Schumpeter to Batman

Ordinary people read comics, not economics, but long before Trump was born, Schumpeterian economics had found its way into popular entertainment media (Mirowski, 2014: 199). The Batman comic hero projected Schumpeter's economic soteriology out of the textbook and into an entertainment mass market. Before Trump was born, a comic book had outlined his life story. Invented in 1939, the Batman superhero bears an 'eerie similarity' to the real Donald Trump, born 1946 (Sebastian, 2015). This astonishing similarity is not a product of chance. Like Trump, Batman is a billionaire entrepreneur turned political actor. Like Donald Trump, Bruce Wayne (Batman) inherited and runs a vast family business. Like Donald Trump, Bruce Wayne built a reputation as a spend-thrift playboy who conspicuously appears in the company of beautiful women. Ordinary people admire Wayne's glamorous and sybaritic lifestyle as in reality they admired Trump's. Like Donald Trump, Bruce Wayne becomes a celebrity in Gotham City as a result of his conspicuous consumption and high-profile affairs with meretricious women. Batman/Wayne has a genius-level intelligence and high energy, characteristics Trump has claimed for himself; and, taking a page from Schumpeter, Trump boasted of his superior genetic endowment too (Mackey, 2020).

Batman and Trump have a social conscience. Given their wealth, they could enjoy lives of private luxury, but both choose public service. Wayne puts his life in danger in violent confrontation with depraved criminals. Trump invited the partisan hostility of unpatriotic opponents in order to 'put America first'. In both cases, extreme wealth produced righteous saviors and enabled them to defend society. One learns from Batman that rich entrepreneurs care about ordinary people and

Trump proves it. Trump parlayed his inherited wealth into media celebrity, thus expanding his political following prior.<sup>15</sup> Wayne's inherited wealth purchased astonishing gadgets and flying personnel carriers that enabled him to fight crime. As political actors, Batman and Trump are rule-breakers. Batman protects Gotham as a vigilante because the police and laws are corrupt. Because of his genius, athleticism, technology, energy, ferocity and determination, Batman defeats criminals when police cannot. Batman's methods are illegal, but they work. 'Batman is violent, sadistic and a borderline fascist. . . . At one point, social order breaks down across the country and Batman imposes martial law on Gotham with a small army made of his own personality cult' (Greenstone, 2018), a maneuver Trump imitated on 6 January 2021. The Batman superhero tutored Americans how to understand Donald Trump's indifference to law as proof of his salvific mission.

During the 2016 election campaign, these striking resemblances between Trump and Batman drew wide attention in public media. Just as he claimed divine sponsorship, candidate Trump exploited his resemblance to Batman (McGrath, 2015). Claiming the image, Trump repeatedly assured voters that *he was Batman* (Andersen, 2017; Cavanaugh, 2015; Sebastian, 2015: 419). Trump quoted a Batman character in his inaugural address.<sup>16</sup> A violent confrontation between Batman and The Joker in Hollywood's *The Dark Knight Rising* was shot at the Trump International Hotel in Chicago. Trump's 2020 reelection committee used the theme music of *Dark Knight Rising* for its campaign anthem until Warner Brothers protected their copyright.<sup>17</sup> Because Batman resembled Trump, Americans easily understood Donald Trump's dark side had a redeeming reverse side. Because Batman had already brought the economists' soteriology into their living rooms, secular Americans could understand Trump as a savior, not just a politician.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, they were primed to grant him charismatic authority.

## Discussion

In her critical amplification of Weber's sociology of charismatic authority, Ruth Ann Willner (1984) identified prior cultural iconography as the indispensable ingredient without which a leader's eloquence even in a crisis cannot become charismatic authority. To identify a charismatic leader, believers need prior cultural exposure to messages that authenticate and legitimate a future savior. Addressing the sources of Donald Trump's charisma, I have presented evidence that candidate Trump tapped into religious and secular soteriologies that predated his birth. Before Donald Trump was born, he existed in prophesy. Reading from their own religious tradition, evangelical Protestants understood Trump's candidacy as validating Biblical prophecy in whose inerrancy they had long struggled to believe. This understanding enabled independent evangelical prophets to identify Trump as God's emissary and his enemies as 'demonic forces' (White, 2020). Wall Street Republicans understood Trump as the kind of savior predicted by economic theory, and entertainment audiences understood him as the Batman superhero. All this cultural iconography thus primed both sacred and secular Republicans to anticipate saviors whom Trump resembled. Trump could tap into all these soteriologies because he derived from, shared, understood, and claimed both. Moreover, Trump consciously depicted himself as the savior his audiences expected.

From William Bradford to Joel Osteen, from Schumpeter to Batman, a succession of cultural influences had prepared Americans to recognize, validate, and unleash billionaire entrepreneurs upon a stagnating economy in order to revive and rejuvenate it. Importantly because of this cultural iconography, rich entrepreneurs have enjoyed a preferred qualification to secure the nomination for president. In the 21st century, all Republican candidates for president have been rich entrepreneurs.<sup>19</sup> Democrats are less receptive to entrepreneurial qualifications, but during the Democratic presidential debates in 2020, three entrepreneurs were finalists (Bloomberg, Steyer, and Yang) and two of these were billionaires. None were janitors although there are many more janitors in the

United States than billionaire entrepreneurs. Unlike janitors, who carry a cultural freight of meritocratic failure, billionaire entrepreneurs are understood as the most successful products of the competitive marketplace, a status that certifies their fitness to lead (Mijls, 2021). Thanks to long-dead theologians, philosophers, economists, and comic strip artists, back in 2016 the American public already knew that rich entrepreneurs possess high intelligence, energy, drive, ambition, and the killer instinct, qualities needed in high public office. Moreover, because predicted by prophets of old, those long-dead scribblers to whom John Maynard Keynes referred, the public knew that billionaire entrepreneurs revive prosperity by the exercise of charismatic authority in the service of rule-breaking innovation. Trump did not convince them of this. They already knew it.

Quite apart from insight into the political drama in the United States, obviously of widespread interest, the case of Donald Trump stretches our understanding of charismatic authority in important ways. First, the Trump case clothes with additional evidence Willner's (1984) path-breaking conclusions regarding the necessity of cultural grounding for ratification of charismatic authority, a complementary point Weber did not make. Second, although Weber clearly specified that charismatic leaders could be sacred or secular, he did not propose that they could simultaneously offer both. Yet that is what Trump accomplished and it is clearly advantageous to do so. In general, the more audiences a leader can mobilize behind his charisma claims, the more power a leader commands. Trump's religious followers were not numerous enough to elect him in 2016 nor were his secular adherents. Both together could do so.

That said, it might appear from the analysis that Trump's secular and religious voters were mutually exclusive constituencies. In reality, they heavily overlapped. As Gorski (2009) tersely acknowledged, 'Conservative Protestants are also typically Republican' (p. 85). As such, conservative Protestants shared economic ideas with Wall Street Republicans, including faith in the salvific mission of entrepreneurs. Obeying Trump, Republicans obeyed a savior who made economic as well as religious sense, a potent validation (McGauvran and Oldmixon, 2018; Ritenour, 2020). Secular Republicans and conservative Protestants both read Batman comics and derived political ideas from them. What is more, Batman fans included voters who were neither economists, Republicans, nor conservative Protestants but who were nonetheless enabled to recognize Trump's salvific mission because of their familiarity with Bruce Wayne's salvific mission. In the iconography of the American right, the image of the entrepreneur as a tough-guy messiah can derive from sacred culture, academic culture, popular culture, or from all three. The confluence produced a huge voting bloc that awarded charismatic authority to Trump because, thanks to their cultural iconography, they could recognize him as a savior. The point here is not to supersede or ignore interest-based politics or race-based politics, both of which were clearly at work, but only to identify the sources of Trump's charisma. Ordinary politicians appeal to constituencies, obtain interest-based supporters, and win elections without obtaining the charismatic authority voters awarded Trump.

Broadly understood, messianic prophecy offers the royal road to charismatic ratification because it creates a base of backward-facing believers primed to anticipate a savior to whom obedience will be owed. Prophecy is profoundly conservative in the first sense and profoundly revolutionary in the second. A claimant who resembles what backward-facing believers anticipated has fast-track access to their charismatic ratification. Just what it means to resemble a heralded savior remains an unanswered question worthy of future exploration. After all, uncertainty attended prophetic claimants in the past (Wallis, 1918). Most were dismissed; a few honored. Why should it disappear in the future? Presumably, a claimant for charismatic authority bears serious responsibility for enabling believers to find in him a resemblance to their mental icon. Finally, the royal road is not the only road to charismatic ratification. Even someone who physically resembles a long-dead folk hero may parlay that physical resemblance into popular identification with the mission of that hero. In

such cases, the possibility for successful access to charismatic authority arguably exists, but the likelihood seems less than would be expected from messianic prophecy. Nonetheless, even in such marginal cases, what opens the possibility of charismatic ratification is a backward-facing believer base primed with a traditional hero's salvific mission.

## Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## ORCID iD

Ivan Light  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9832-3008>

## Notes

1. Gorski (2017; also Leggewie, 2021) concludes that evangelicals voted for Trump because he is a white Christian nationalist. Assuming these voters preferred Trump because of this interest, what explains the charismatic authority they granted him? All by themselves, interests do not explain why voters grant charismatic authority above and beyond legal authority.
2. Adams (2021) offers a comparable, psycho-historical interpretation of the 'Trump death cult'.
3. Joan of Arc was a charismatic war leader, but Ruth Ann Willner could identify no other women in history who obtained political authority based on charisma.
4. Joosse (2018b) identified Trump as a 'charismatic entrepreneur' by which he meant a charismatic *moral entrepreneur*, not a charismatic business owner. Joosse ignored Trump's prior career in business whereas my argument highlights it. The terminological confusion requires clarification here, but Joosse's argument is independent of mine and compatible with it because a business owner can be a moral entrepreneur.
5. Hippie spirituality is on display in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, a rock opera that opened on Broadway in 1971 and was produced as a feature film in 1973.
6. What Gorski (2019) calls 'white Christian nationalism' could produce that charismatic acclaim to the extent that it was Christian. A secular white nationalist movement could not. American neo-Nazis are preponderantly atheists or neo-Pagans and deeply regret the influence of Christianity in right-wing politics. See: Berry (2017).
7. 'President Donald Trump: "I am the chosen one"'. YouTube video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=js4wcaPqSow>
8. In 2011, a fireman had a vision from God that Donald Trump would be the next president. A feature-length film was made around this story. 'The Trump Prophecies'. YouTube video, available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWtTrTGCI-A>.
9. Christian leaders pray over Trump during launch of evangelicals for Trump coalition NBC News. YouTube video, available: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HrBvMFJ\\_drs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HrBvMFJ_drs)
10. When prophet Jeremiah Johnson (2021) announced that Trump really had lost the election of 2020, viewers insisted that Trump had won and been cheated of victory. 'The same way I was attracted to your prophecies at first I am confused now!' 'Trump won the election and he will be back to office yet this year. Watch and see the miracle God will perform'. 'Jeremiah . . . Trump did get re-elected'. 'Sir, God is not finished with Trump, for he will be back'.
11. 'Donald Trump's Dark, Fiery RNC Speech: "I Alone Can Fix" America|today', YouTube video, available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8pnmMxbEjdc>.
12. "Believe Me". Should We Take Trump at his Word? YouTube video, available: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1q4\\_sVysd2c&t=28s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1q4_sVysd2c&t=28s).
13. It also derives from nineteenth-century social Darwinism, but Langlois did not explore that connection. For Schumpeter's intellectual debt to social Darwinism, see: (Light and Dana, 2020: ch. 7).
14. Still orthodox, Schumpeter does have critics within the business academy. See: Goss (2005) and Williams and Nadin (2013).

15. Trump was not a successful entrepreneur, and he was less wealthy than he claimed. With the assistance of mass media, he played the role and convinced the public (Light and Dana, 2020: ch. 7).
16. 'Trump quotes Batman villain Bane in inaugural speech'. YouTube video, available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dA9EeuzoBxs>.
17. Warner Brothers takes legal action against Trump over Batman music, *The Guardian*, 10 April 2019.
18. Hollywood's 2005 'Batman: The Dark Knight Rises' grossed \$359 million of which sales in the United States represented 57%. Only 5% of the world's population, Americans consumed 57% of Hollywood's Batman product. Hollywood's 2016 film, 'Batman vs Superman: The Dawn of Justice', grossed \$867 million dollars worldwide of which sales in the United States represented 39%. Batman was more popular in the United States than elsewhere because Batman is a projection of American culture rather than of global capitalist culture (Light and Dana, 2020: 125).
19. Spokesmen of the Christian right declared that 'God had put George Bush in the White House' (Fitzgerald, 2017: 46).

## References

- Adams KA (2021) The Trump death cult. *The Journal of Psychohistory* 48(4): 256–276.
- Akasoy A (2019) Messianism. In: Paul H (ed.) *Critical Terms in Futures Studies*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.183–190.
- Andersen K (2017) *Fantasyland: How America Went Haywire*. New York: Random House.
- Andrae T (1987) From menace to messiah: the history and historicity of superman. In: Lazere D (ed.) *American Media and Mass Culture*. Berkeley, CA; Los Angeles, CA: University of California, pp.124–138.
- Aswad NG (2019) Exploring charismatic leadership: a comparative analysis of the rhetoric of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential election. *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 49(1): 56–74.
- Balmer R (2020) "Pro-Israel and anti-Semitic: Understanding evangelical support for Israel." *Palestine - Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 25(1): 100–103. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/pro-israel-anti-semitic-understanding-evangelical/docview/2448438498/se-2?accountid=14512>
- Bell D (1976) *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. New York: Basic.
- Bell DA (2020) *Men on Horseback: The Power of Charisma in the Age of Revolution*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Berry DT (2017) *Blood & Faith: Christianity in American White Nationalism*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Berry DT (2020) Voting in the kingdom: prophecy voters, the new apostolic reformation, and Christian support for Trump. *Nova Religio* 23(4): 69–93.
- Blair G (2000) *The Trumps: Three Generations of Builders and a President*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Bowler K (2013) *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Breuilly J (2011) Max Weber, charisma and nationalist leadership 1. *Nations and Nationalism* 17(3): 477–499.
- Brody D and Lamb S (2017) *The Faith of Donald J. Trump: A Spiritual Biography*. New York: Broadside Books.
- Cavna M (2015) Donald Trump says he's Batman: here are 15 reasons why he might be right. *The Washington Post*, 15 August. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/comic-riffs/wp/2015/08/18/donald-trump-says-hes-batman-here-are-15-reasons-why-he-might-just-be-right/>
- Chartier MR (1969) The social views of Dwight L. Moody and their relation to the workingman of 1860-1900 (Fort Hays Studies Series 40). Available at: [https://scholars.fhsu.edu/fort\\_hays\\_studies\\_series/40](https://scholars.fhsu.edu/fort_hays_studies_series/40)
- Christerson B and Flory R (2017) *The Rise of Network Christianity: How Independent Leaders Are Changing the Religious Landscape*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Deckman M, Cox D, Jones R, et al. (2017) Faith and the free market: Evangelicals, the Tea Party, and economic attitudes. *Politics and Religion* 10(1): 82–110.
- Djupe PA and Burge RP (2020) Trump the anointed? *Religion in Public*, 11 May. Available at: <https://religioninpublic.blog/2020/05/11/trump-the-anointed/>



- Djupe PA, Neiheisel JR and Adkins JM (2021) Do Americans still believe in prophecy after Trump? *Religion in Public*, 8 June. Available at: <https://religioninpublic.blog/2021/06/08/do-americans-still-believe-in-prophecy-after-trump/>
- Eisenstadt SN (1968) *Max Weber on Charisma and Institution Building*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago.
- Fagen RR (1965) Charismatic authority and the leadership of Fidel Castro. *Western Political Quarterly* 18(2): 275–284.
- Falk A (2020) The secret of Trump's charisma. *The Times of Israel*, 17 July. Available at: <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-secret-of-trumps-charisma/>
- Fitzgerald F (2017) *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Forrester DB (2006) Wealth and poverty. In: McLeod H (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 9. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.514–533.
- Fromm E (1941) *Escape from Freedom*. New York: Farrar and Rinehart.
- Gaufman E (2018) The Trump carnival: popular appeal in the age of misinformation. *International Relations* 32(4): 410–429.
- Gorski P (2009) Conservative Protestantism in the United States: Toward a comparative and historical perspective. In: Brint S and Schroedel JR (eds) *Evangelicals and Democracy in America*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, pp.74–114.
- Gorski P (2017) *American Covenant: A History of Civil Religion from the Puritans to the Present*. Princeton: Princeton University.
- Gorski P (2019) Why evangelicals voted for Trump: a critical cultural sociology. In: Mast JL and Alexander JC (eds) *Politics of Meaning/Meaning of Politics: Cultural Sociology*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp.165–183.
- Goss D (2005) Schumpeter's legacy? Interactions and emotions in the sociology of entrepreneurship. *Entrepreneurship: Theory and Practice* 29(2): 205–218.
- Greenstone S (2018) Batman is Donald Trump in the 30-year-old comic book that inspires 'Batman vs. Superman'. *Daily Emerald*, 6 November. Available at: [https://www.dailymerald.com/arts-culture/batman-is-donald-trump-in-the-30-year-old-comic-book-that-inspires-batman-v/article\\_3e1d1d61-451c-5f95-bf4f-3717ed863b58.html](https://www.dailymerald.com/arts-culture/batman-is-donald-trump-in-the-30-year-old-comic-book-that-inspires-batman-v/article_3e1d1d61-451c-5f95-bf4f-3717ed863b58.html)
- Harding S and Martin E (2021) Trump time, prophetic time and the time of the lost cause. *Anthropology Now* 13(1): 30–36.
- Hassan S (2019) *The Cult of Trump*. New York: Free Press.
- Henry CFH (1947) *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans.
- Johnson J (2021) I was wrong – part 3: Donald Trump and prophetic maturity (YouTube video). Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=As4uaX\\_XL4U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=As4uaX_XL4U)
- Joose P (2018a) Countering Trump: toward a theory of charismatic counter-roles. *Social Forces* 97(2): 921–944.
- Joose P (2018b) Expanding moral panic theory to include the agency of charismatic entrepreneurs: the case of Donald Trump. *British Journal of Criminology* 58(4): 993–1012.
- Kautsky K (1972 [1925]) *Foundations of Christianity*. New York: Monthly Review.
- Kestenbaum S (2021) The Trump prophets regroup. *The New York Times*, 19 September. Available at: <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2573666699?accountid=8381>
- Krause-Jensen J and Martin K (2018) Trickster's triumph: Donald Trump and the new spirit of capitalism. In: Moeran B and Malefyt TW (eds) *Magical Capitalism*. Cham: Springer, pp.89–113.
- Langlois RN (1998) Personal capitalism as charismatic authority: the organizational economics of a Weberian concept. *Industrial and Corporate Change* 7: 195–214.
- Langman L and Lundskow G (2017) *God, Guns, Gold, and Glory: American Character and Its Discontents*. Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books.
- Leggewie C (2021) Trump Messiah: Rechte soziale Bewegungen als Stütze des Autoritären Nationalismus in den USA. *Forschungsjournal Soziale Bewegungen* 34(1): 59–75.
- Lehmann C (2016) *The Money Cult: Capitalism, Christianity, and the Unmaking of the American Dream*. Brooklyn, NY: Melville House.
- Light I and Dana LP (2020) *Entrepreneurs and Capitalism Since Luther*. Lanham, MD: Lexington.

- Lindsey H (1970) *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publications.
- Lukes S (2017) The big picture: Trump's charisma. *Public Books*, 25 October. Available at: <https://www.publicbooks.org/big-picture-trumps-charisma/>
- McGauvran RJ and Oldmixon EA (2018) 'God is a pretty fair guy': Evangelicalism and economic attitudes. In: Djupe PA and Claassen RL (eds) *The Evangelical Crackup? The Future of Evangelical-Republican Coalition*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University, pp.239–158.
- McGrath M (2015) Is Donald Trump the real-life Batman? He certainly thinks so. *The Guardian*, 18 August. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2015/aug/18/donald-trump-batman-bruce-wayne>
- Mackey R (2020) Trump hails 'good bloodlines' of Henry Ford, whose anti-Semitism inspired Hitler. *The Intercept*, 22 May. Available at: <https://theintercept.com/2020/05/22/trump-hails-good-bloodlines-henry-ford-whose-anti-semitism-inspired-hitler/>
- McLellan D (1987) *Marxism and Religion*. London: Macmillan.
- Mijs J (2021) The paradox of inequality: income inequality and belief in meritocracy go hand in hand. *Socio-Economic Review* 19(1): 7–35.
- Mirowski P (2014) *Never Let a Serious Crisis Go to Waste: How Neoliberalism Survived the Financial Meltdown*. London: Verso.
- Myers WR (2019) Following Trump are evangelicals willing participants in a new religion? *Theology Today* 76(2): 103–113.
- Nicolaou N and Shane S (2009) Can genetic factors influence the likelihood of engaging in entrepreneurial activity? *Journal of Business Venturing* 24(1): 1–22.
- Onishi B (2021) Trump's new civil religion. *The New York Times*, 19 January. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/19/opinion/trump-lost-cause.html>
- Peale NV (1952) *The Power of Positive Thinking*. New York: Prentice Hall.
- Piovanelli P (2005) Jesus' charismatic authority: on the historical applicability of a sociological model. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73(2): 395–427.
- Prost JM and Doucette SR (2019) *Dangerous Charisma: The Political Psychology of Donald Trump and his Followers*. New York: Pegasus.
- Ritenour S (2020) A Christian view of economics (YouTube video). Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Jp5G1Sfl5w&t=266s>
- Robertson P (1982) *The Secret Kingdom*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson.
- Robertson P (2011) The secret kingdom: the law of use (YouTube video). CBN.com. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjFLY25QmMg>
- Rosenberg P (2021) How extremist Christian theology is driving the right-wing assault on democracy. *Salon*, 31 October. Available at: <https://www.salon.com/2021/10/31/how-extremist-christian-theology-is-driving-the-right-wing-on-democracy/>
- Roth S (2021) What's up with the prophets & Trump election prophecies? Dr. Michael Brown (YouTube video). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUCZxtmlztA>
- Schumpeter JS (1934) *The Theory of Economic Development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.
- Sebastian M (2015) 10 Reasons Donald Trump is actually Batman: they're eerily similar. *Esquire*, 17 August. Available at: <https://www.esquire.com/news-politics/news/a37221/donald-trump-batman/>
- Shane S and Nicolaou N (2015) Creative personality, opportunity recognition, and the tendency to start businesses: a study of their genetic predispositions. *Journal of Business Venturing* 30(3): 407–419.
- Southall R (2020) Donald Trump and Jacob Zuma as charismatic buffoons. *The Journal of South African and American Studies* 21(4): 382–393.
- Strang SE (2017) *God and Donald Trump*. Lake Mary, FL: FrontLine.
- Taki S (2020) Donald Trump is a genuine charismatic leader. *The Domino*, 29 July. Available at: <https://medium.com/the-domino/donald-trump-is-a-genuine-charismatic-leader-e0595adaa8c4>
- Thorpe C (2020) The carnival king of capital. *Fast Capitalism* 17(1): 87–108.
- Trump DJ and Kiyosaki RT (2006) *Why We Want You to be Rich*. New York: Rich Press.
- Trump DJ and McIver M (2008) *Never Give Up*. New York: John Wiley.
- Trump DJ and McIver M (2009) *Think Like a Champion: An Informal Education in Business and Life*. Philadelphia, PA: Vanguard.

- Wallis WD (1918) *Messiahs: Christian and Pagan*. Boston, MA: Richard D. Badger.
- Ward K (2006) Christianity, colonialism, and missions. In: McLeod H (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, vol. 9. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.71–88.
- Wasielewski PL (1985) The emotional basis of charisma. *Symbolic Interaction* 8(2): 207–222.
- Weber M (1958) The sociology of charismatic authority. In: Gerth HH and Mills CW (eds) *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp.245–252.
- Weber M (1994) In: Heydebrand W (ed) . *Max Weber: Sociological Writings*. New York: Continuum.
- White P (2020) Donald Trump's faith advisor leads viral sermon after election day (YouTube video). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I4daeEacIVI&t=12s>
- Williams CC and Nadin SJ (2013) Beyond the entrepreneur as a heroic figurehead of capitalism: re-representing the lived practices of entrepreneurs. *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development* 25(7–8): 552–568.
- Willner RA (1984) *The Spellbinders: Charismatic Political Leadership*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Wilson B (1990) New images of Christian community. In: McManners J (ed.) *The Oxford History of Christianity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.572–601.