



# One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America

By Kevin M. Kruse

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We're often told that the United States is, was, and always has been a Christian nation. But in *One Nation Under God*, historian Kevin M. Kruse reveals that the idea of "Christian America" is an invention—and a relatively recent one at that.

As Kruse argues, the belief that America is fundamentally and formally a Christian nation originated in the 1930s when businessmen enlisted religious activists in their fight against FDR's New Deal. Corporations from General Motors to Hilton Hotels bankrolled conservative clergymen, encouraging them to attack the New Deal as a program of "pagan statism" that perverted the central principle of Christianity: the sanctity and salvation of the individual. Their campaign for "freedom under God" culminated in the election of their close ally Dwight Eisenhower in 1952.

But this apparent triumph had an ironic twist. In Eisenhower's hands, a religious movement born in opposition to the government was transformed into one that fused faith and the federal government as never before. During the 1950s, Eisenhower revolutionized the role of religion in American political culture, inventing new traditions from inaugural prayers to the National Prayer Breakfast. Meanwhile, Congress added the phrase "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance and made "In God We Trust" the country's first official motto. With private groups joining in, church membership soared to an all-time high of 69%. For the first time, Americans began to think of their country as an officially Christian nation.

During this moment, virtually all Americans—across the religious and political spectrum—believed that their country was "one nation under God." But as Americans moved from broad generalities to the details of issues such as school prayer, cracks began to appear. Religious leaders rejected this "lowest common denominator" public religion, leaving conservative political activists to champion it alone. In Richard Nixon's hands, a politics that conflated piety and patriotism became sole property of the right.

Provocative and authoritative, *One Nation Under God* reveals how the unholy alliance of money, religion, and politics created a false origin story that continues to define and divide American politics to this day.

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## One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America By Kevin M. Kruse Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #228990 in Books
- Published on: 2015-04-14
- Released on: 2015-04-14
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.63" h x 1.38" w x 6.63" l, .0 pounds

- Binding: Hardcover
- 384 pages

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

##### **Ari Kelman, author of the Bancroft Prize-winning *A Misplaced Massacre***

"In this brilliant and iconoclastic book, Kevin M. Kruse shows how an unholy alliance of greedy businessmen, venal clergy, and conservative politicians exploited American spirituality for partisan gain. Kruse's research is extraordinary, his prose vivid, his argument profound. *One Nation Under God* is essential reading for anyone interested in understanding contemporary culture in the United States."

##### **Lizabeth Cohen, author of *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in America, 1919-1939***

"Prepare yourself for a startling and important discovery: 'Christian America' is not a legacy of the nation's founders or a construct of the Cold War Era. Rather, as Kevin Kruse so powerfully shows, it was the deliberate invention of conservative corporate leaders who allied with like-minded clergymen in the 1930s to fight the antichrist they most feared: Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. Kruse convincingly argues that the rise of the religious right over the next decades grew out of these anti-liberal politics, not the other way around. 'Church and state' in America has rarely had a better historian than Kruse."

#### **New York Times Book Review**

"Kruse tells a big and important story about the mingling of religiosity and politics since the 1930s."

#### **Wall Street Journal**

"America was founded in 1776, but it was only in 1953, with the inauguration of Dwight David Eisenhower as the 34th president, that it became a Christian nation. Such is Kevin M. Kruse's thesis and, after reading *One Nation Under God*, it makes perfect sense... an important and convincing reminder that the roots of Christian America were cultivated well before the era of the religious right."

#### **Washington Post**

"Fascinating."

#### **The Nation**

"An illuminating addition to the growing field of the history of American conservatism and capitalism, as well as a vibrant study of the way cultural influence works—one that will make it impossible to take for granted the small print on the back of a dollar bill ever again.... This is what's most interesting in the story Kruse is telling: the pattern of continuity and change that links our own time with those that came before."

#### **Foreign Affairs**

"[A] fine new book.... Kruse's thoughtful book illustrates a kind of life cycle of American religious politics: fervent social movements rise up, crest with presidential support, and then slip away, leaving behind rituals, rhetoric, rules, and reforms."

#### **H-Net, H-AmRel**

"Both contributes decisively to an ongoing scholarly conversation and introduces its readers to a plethora of little-known documents, archives, organizations, and individuals.... A significant contribution to the history of the Christian Right, the Cold war, and the culture wars of the recent past..."

### ***Religion in American History***

“An eminently readable book, chock-full of lively and entertaining anecdotes.”

### ***Patheos***

“Engagingly traces the rise of the Christian Right as a political force in America.... *One Nation Under God* is an important book. We — Christians and Americans — need to understand our history.... In *One Nation Under God* Kruse offers us a potent reminder of where we have come from, and, perhaps more importantly, how far we still have to go.”

### ***Sojourners***

“A thorough and fascinating treatment of a little known thread of U.S. history.”

### ***National Memo***

“A new, meticulous, and vital historical account that should be read by anyone who still scratches their head over whether the Tea Party is a religious movement, or wonders how the idealized conception of America as a ‘Christian nation’ was constructed.... Essential reading for anyone who wants to understand that uniquely American alliance between God and mammon.”

### ***Shelf Awareness for Readers***

“A detailed history of the roots of the campaign arguing that the United States is a Christian nation.”

### ***Commonweal***

“A lucid narrative...”

### ***Bookforum***

“[An] engaging history of modern religious nationalism ... briskly narrated and richly detailed...”

### ***Library Journal*, Editors' Spring Picks**

“Kruse addresses how corporations used clergymen in their PR war against Roosevelt's New Deal and how evangelist Billy Graham helped Dwight Eisenhower and Richard Nixon use religion as the ‘lowest-common denominator’ to unite the public. I've yet to finish it, but I can already tell this will be an informative, insightful read.”

### ***Kirkus*, starred review**

“In a book for readers from both parties, Kruse ably demonstrates how the simple ornamental mottoes ‘under God’ and ‘In God We Trust,’ as well as the fight to define America as Christian, were parts of a clever business plan.”

### ***Library Journal*, starred review**

“Thorough and thought-provoking scholarship.... Kruse reveals the marketing machine behind American godliness with authority, insight, and clarity. He illustrates key turning points along the way to provide a cohesive picture of a well-powered movement. He hands us the agenda behind the Pledge of Allegiance, ‘in God we trust,’ and other cornerstones of American patriotism. In short, he exposes the PR man behind the pious curtain.”

### **E.J. Dionne, Jr., author of *Souled Out: Reclaiming Faith and Politics after the Religious Right***

“Much has been written about the religious right, but Kevin Kruse has written a breakthrough book by describing the movement's pre-history in the 1930s and 1950s—and in fascinating detail. Engagingly written, *One Nation Under God* will provoke many arguments, but it will require all sides to come to terms

with facts and events largely buried in our collective memory until Kruse bravely set out to challenge our assumptions.”

**Dallas Morning News**

“Illuminating ... a useful corrective to preacher-politicians who endlessly call for a return to the nation's religious roots. As Kruse skillfully demonstrates, some of those roots took hold only yesterday.”

**The New Republic**

“A deftly detailed history of Christianity's service to capitalism in the United States.”

**Christianity Today**

“An engaging and important book...”

**The American Prospect**

“Fascinating, vividly drawn portraits of many players in this drama.”

**America**

“A fresh and revealing re-examination of the oft-studied career of the phrase ‘under God’.... A deft elaboration on the irony of the corporate involvement in the Christian America promotion ... [a] literary portrait taken during the last decades in which Protestant powers ‘ran the show.’”

**Humanist**

“The author lays out a new mega-subdivision in our sprawling religious history. The result exposes a class of pulpit vipers who infect an insecure quarter of the population and who can never shake the feeling they are not as believed in as they believe they should be.”

**Jon Butler, Professor Emeritus of American Studies, History, and Religious Studies at Yale University**

“Kevin M. Kruse's startling *One Nation Under God* reveals the extraordinary Cold War politics that put 'under God' in America's Pledge of Allegiance, 'In God We Trust' on U.S. stamps, and Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* on Hollywood's biggest movie list. The political warriors for a 'Christian America' made the Puritans look like pikers, and Kruse dissects their successes and foibles with grace, glowing research, and more than a little humor. A compelling read!”

**Andrew Preston, author of *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy***

“In this riveting book, Kevin Kruse combines the history of religion with the history of capitalism to craft an original interpretation about America's religious identity. Revisionist in the best sense—bold, daring, and intelligent—it will change how we think about the American past.”

**About the Author**

**Kevin M. Kruse** is a professor of history at Princeton University and the author or co-editor of four books, including the award-winning *White Flight*. Kruse lives in Princeton, New Jersey.

**Users Review**

**From reader reviews:**

**Susannah Williams:**

Why don't make it to become your habit? Right now, try to prepare your time to do the important behave, like looking for your favorite e-book and reading a guide. Beside you can solve your long lasting problem; you can add your knowledge by the publication entitled One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America. Try to the actual book One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America as your buddy. It means that it can to be your friend when you sense alone and beside that of course make you smarter than before. Yeah, it is very fortuned for you personally. The book makes you considerably more confidence because you can know every little thing by the book. So , let me make new experience in addition to knowledge with this book.

**Ryan Connors:**

The knowledge that you get from One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America could be the more deep you searching the information that hide within the words the more you get interested in reading it. It doesn't mean that this book is hard to know but One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America giving you excitement feeling of reading. The author conveys their point in specific way that can be understood by simply anyone who read it because the author of this reserve is well-known enough. This kind of book also makes your personal vocabulary increase well. Making it easy to understand then can go along with you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We propose you for having this specific One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America instantly.

**Vincent Johnson:**

Reading can called head hangout, why? Because when you are reading a book mainly book entitled One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America the mind will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in every single aspect that maybe mysterious for but surely can be your mind friends. Imaging just about every word written in a reserve then become one web form conclusion and explanation that maybe you never get ahead of. The One Nation Under God: How Corporate America Invented Christian America giving you a different experience more than blown away the mind but also giving you useful information for your better life within this era. So now let us teach you the relaxing pattern the following is your body and mind is going to be pleased when you are finished studying it, like winning a game. Do you want to try this extraordinary wasting spare time activity?

**Arthur Ramires:**

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