



## EXCERPT

IVP Books

### **Last Call for Liberty:** *How America's Genius for Freedom Has Become Its Greatest Threat*

Available October 2, 2018 | \$27, 336 pages, hardcover | 978-0-8308-4559-0

*"It will be a tragedy of inestimable proportions for the American people if that great nation eats its own legendary commitment to freedom from within. Equally, to lose the leadership of the world's most powerful champion of liberty would be truly dangerous for non-Americans everywhere in these increasingly unsettled times. Os Guinness has gifted us magnificently with the insights and understanding of a lifetime in this book, which really needs to be read—urgently—across the length and breadth of the world."*

—John Anderson, deputy prime minister of Australia 1999-2005

## The 2016 Election and the Danger of Power

The US election of 2016 left the watching world alternately amused, entertained, shocked, dismayed, aghast, and smug. Was that the way for the world's lead society to conduct its affairs? Was that what freedom had come to mean to the once-proud land of the free? Was that what Americans meant by *democracy* as the self-rule of the people? The real winner, it was said, was not Donald Trump or Hillary Clinton, the Republicans or the Democrats, but China, Russia, Iran, and Saudi Arabia—countries with an open disdain for freedom and democracy. "The race to the bottom will make people rethink the value of democracy," one Chinese state-owned newspaper commented. Another stated that the presidential race had become "an unprecedented joke." What President Xi Jinping calls China's "consultative democracy" was far better than American democracy, the Chinese claimed. The ugly American election of 1800, long taken as the benchmark for raucous and uncivil politics, had finally been surpassed by the angry and scandal-ridden election of 2016. The American republic no longer seemed to be working. Americans tore at each other's throats and competed with each other in seeing how far anyone could go in challenging the legitimacy of those they disagreed with.

At the end of the 2016 election, the gale force logic of trends that had begun to course through American society for several decades did not subside. There was no question that the candidates and their surrogates were responsible in part, but beyond them a generation of developments had suddenly combined to form a perfect storm of mud-slinging invective and power politics that was destructive not only to American civility and freedom, but to the republic itself. Above all, both candidates, both parties, and pundits and commentators on all sides demonstrated the dark logic of the hurricane of unbounded power that was raging through America. Friedrich Nietzsche's notions of post-truth, truth-free power, amplified powerfully by the postmodern analyses of Michel Foucault and others, and carried by the social media, swept like a hurricane through the centers of academic and political power, destroying what was in its path.

The 2016 election and its buildup was a perfect illustration of Andrew Schmoekler's *Parable of the Tribes* and its portrayal of the danger of the logic of power that is uncontrolled and uncontrollable. The logic of post-truth power is inexorable. When freedom is untrammled, as contemporary libertarian freedom is, it becomes a striving for expansion and for new spheres in which to exercise its freedom—and therefore for the power to do so. But this situation soon becomes disordered and anarchic. Freedom, when considered from the perspective of the individual, is chaos when viewed from the perspective of society as a whole. Such freedom quickly descends to a form of Thomas Hobbes's war of all against all in which "No one can choose that the struggle for power shall cease." The outcome and the overall lesson is then plain: "no one is free to choose peace, but anyone can impose upon all the necessity for power."

America's political activists and culture warriors must therefore stop and think. There are always a thousand reasons why the other side presents us with every excuse to answer insult with insult, accusation with accusation, and power with power. But down that scorched-earth path lies disaster for everyone, for the common good and for the American republic. Unbounded and disordered freedom that is reduced to power is an invitation to social chaos, political anarchy, and national decline. Schmoekler's conclusion is sober: "Power is like a contaminant, a disease, which once introduced will gradually yet inexorably become universal in the system of competing societies. . . . A selection for power among civilized societies is inevitable."



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Can such disordered freedom and its rampant abuse of power be corralled once it has broken loose? Without a sufficiently shared moral and political understanding, there will eventually be a collapse of the rules of the game. The most troubling aftermath of the 2016 election was the lengths to which the losers were willing to challenge the legitimacy of the result—even if it meant that they called into question the republic itself. The way that the Democrats took to “resistance” rather than “loyal opposition” was in contrast to Al Gore’s magnanimous attitude in 2000. The overall trajectory of America’s descent was troubling for the future.

Needless to say, the problem of the abuse of power was what the founders’ ordering of freedom was designed to answer in the first place, with its constitutional framework, its separation of powers, its checks and balances, its underlying realism about the abuse of power, and its insistence on civic education and the golden triangle of freedom. There were to be rules of the contest for all the players, rules for the contest to be fair for all the players, and rules for the contest to remain a contest and not a brawl. Which means that the rules of the contest had to be accepted and respected by all the players, with no exception. All that broke down in the 2016 election.

Far from being outmoded and irrelevant as the progressives claim, the Constitution’s “rules of the game” are more relevant than ever. Indeed, today’s post-truth politics and its bullying and chaos are precisely what the great experiment was set up to prevent. But such are the destructive forces at work in America today that chaos is not the end of the problem. An even deeper issue is at stake—the question of American legitimacy, the legitimacy of the American republic, and this is what the seventh question on the checklist addresses: *How are Americans to justify their vision of a free and open society?*

—Taken from “Question Seven: How Do You Justify Your Vision of a Free and Open Society?”



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## TALKING POINTS

IVP Books

### ***Last Call for Liberty:*** *How America's Genius for Freedom Has Become Its Greatest Threat*

**Available October 2, 2018** | \$27, 336 pages, hardcover | 978-0-8308-4559-0

*"Os Guinness has stood as a beacon of eloquence and insight. In a host of important books, he has chronicled the struggle of those who resist the modern world's descent into carnival culture. Last Call for Liberty is his masterwork—an urgent guide that leads out of the maze America has wandered into. For those who seek to understand the best of freedom's vital gifts, Guinness is the master class leader."*

—Shelby Coffey III, vice chairman of the Newseum and former editor of the *Los Angeles Times*

## Can America remain the guiding light for liberty?

The hour is critical. The American republic is suffering its gravest crisis since the Civil War. Conflicts, hostility, and incivility now threaten to tear the country apart. Competing visions have led to a dangerous moment of cultural self-destruction. This is no longer politics as usual, but an era of political warfare where our enemies are not foreign adversaries but our fellow citizens.

Yet the roots of the crisis are deeper than many realize. Os Guinness argues that we face a fundamental crisis of freedom, as America's genius for freedom has become her Achilles' heel. Our society's conflicts are rooted in two rival views of freedom, one embodied in 1776 and the ideals of the American Revolution, and the other in 1789 and the ideals of the French Revolution. Once again America has become a house divided, and Americans must make up their minds as to which freedom to follow, will the constitutional republic be restored or replaced?

- What is the state of freedom in America?
- When did Americans lose sight of true liberty?
- How is pluralism helpful? How can it be harmful?
- What leaders, countries, influencers, or historical figures can we look to for guidance regaining liberty and freedom?
- If America loses freedom, will other countries follow?
- You write that Americans are "asleep" when it comes to their own liberty. What do you mean?
- How does religious history inform America's current crisis of freedom?
- You write that "freedom is the absence of coercion." What does that mean?
- What is America's Catch-22?
- Why do Americans put so much emphasis on the Constitution being central to freedom today?
- How did the 2016 US election change the way America is viewed in terms of their capacity to hold and value liberty? What are the possible consequences of that election on the way freedom is viewed globally?



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**Last Call for Liberty:**  
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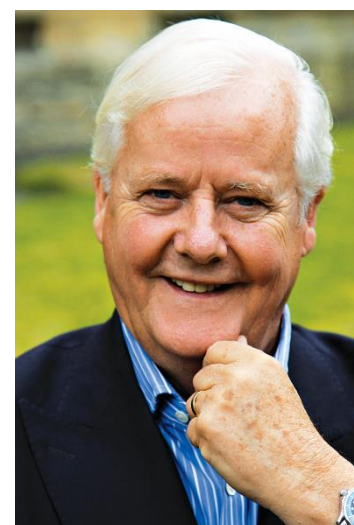
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*"A timely and important book from one of the most insightful observers of American society and politics. Guinness argues that America's future depends on learning the right lessons from America's past. Provocative without being incendiary. Sobering without being gloomy. Inspiring without being glib."*

—Peter Feaver, professor of political science at Duke University

## Os Guinness

Os Guinness (DPhil, Oxford) was born in China and educated in England. He is the author of more than thirty books, including *The Global Public Square*, *A Free People's Suicide*, *Renaissance*, *Fool's Talk*, and *Impossible People*. He has been a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution and a senior fellow at the EastWest Institute. A frequent speaker and prominent social critic, he has addressed audiences worldwide. A passionate advocate of freedom of religion and conscience for people of all faiths and none, he was the lead drafter for both the Williamsburg Charter and the Global Charter of Conscience. He lives with his wife, Jenny, in the Washington, DC, area.



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