

EXCERPT



Zero Hour America

History's Ultimatum over Freedom and the Answer We Must Give

September 20, 2022 | \$23, 208 pages, hardcover | 978-1-5140-0589-7

"A must-read for anyone hoping to grapple with the decline of the United States, and who longs to see it return to the grand vision of its founding ideals."

—**Steve Forbes**, chairman and editor in chief, Forbes Media

New from Os Guinness

"Let my people go!" "Let freedom ring!" "Let liberty be proclaimed throughout the land!" Nothing is more stirring to individual human beings than freedom. Freedom is one of God's greatest gifts to humanity. Human freedom is precious, human freedom is rare, human freedom is awesome in its mystery and its meaning. There is no other life form on planet earth with the capacity for freedom and responsibility that we humans have. Nothing is more essential and more fulfilling to our existence than freedom—the ability truly to be who we are, to think freely, to speak freely, and to choose and act freely in the fullest and most responsible possible way—and to be able to do so in community with others committed to living the same way. Nothing is more inspiring than working to liberate those who through no fault of their own are not free, and together with them and others, seeking to build and sustain societies that seek to fulfill the aspirations of freedom for every single one of their members.

This short book is no doomsday pronouncement. It is more of a Paul Revere's ride, though ironically the call to wake up this time is by a Brit and the warning is not about other enemies coming—the enemies are already within the gates. Even now when events in America are so often disheartening and at times angering, I remain confident that there are still Americans who will not give up on their great experiment in freedom, citizens for whom the cause of freedom remains unquenchable in their hearts, and leaders who know that the cause of freedom is moral, responsible, collective, and anything but selfish. Are there enough of such Americans? Are there leaders who will give them a voice? Who will be the ones to protect the torch of freedom in the present crisis? Are there still Americans who recognize that facing up to the challenge of America's decline is not an act of resignation but a call for renewal?

The answers to these questions are not my responsibility as a visitor and outsider, but no one should think that the challenges to freedom in today's world are easy, self-evident, or even congenial. The challenges are more difficult, arduous, and controversial than ever—and made even harder by the blanket of complacency and clichés with which Americans have smothered freedom. So, freedom's defense is never done. "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty," we say, but we must never forget that such vigilance must be internal before it is external. The greatest dangers to freedom always come from within. We, whoever we are, are freedom's greatest enemy, so courage must always rise hand in hand with realism and humility.

There will be no prediction here of any imminent American collapse. The abandonment of America's ordered freedom need not mean the immediate fall of America but only of the end of, first, the republic, and then of any meaningful democracy. America may continue powerful and wealthy for a while longer, but the reality is that more and more American ideals are breaking down or being exposed as a sham. And more and more Americans appear intent only on hedonism and the pursuit of their own pleasure and reliance on prosperity and technocracy to deliver dividends that virtue no longer strives for. Americans are either unsure of their distinctive ideals or openly cynical and dismissive about the way they have been set out recently. If this fatal drift runs its course, Americans will have carved into the chronicles of history yet another example of the failure of a free society and how the corruption of the best so easily becomes the worst.

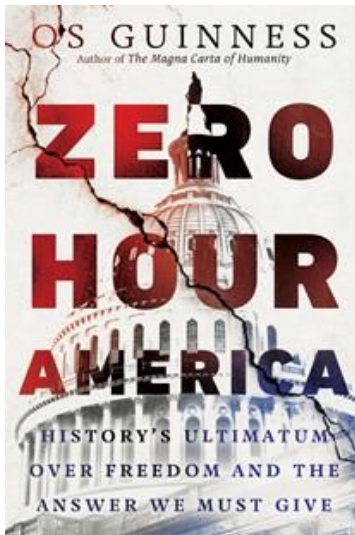


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"Os Guinness is the Paul Revere for this generation, warning America to wake up before it's too late. With his keen insight and characteristic wisdom, Os diagnoses the root cause of the threats to our freedom and prescribes a look back and inward. In his helpful and engaging style, Os persuasively explains why knowing history and understanding virtue are prerequisites for the restoration of true freedom."

—Steve Daines, US senator for Montana

All this raises urgent questions not only for Americans and admirers of the American republic but also for all who appreciate the ideal of ordered freedom. In the nineteenth century Søren Kierkegaard famously announced his ambition to "reintroduce Christianity into Christendom." Even at this late hour, it is urgent for Americans to reintroduce the first principles of freedom into the land of the free—to proclaim what those first principles are and to join hands with all those around the world who are striving to resist tyranny and to build their own free communities regardless of what happens to freedom in the one-time, self-proclaimed "empire of liberty."

Socrates famously called for an "examined life" and pronounced the unexamined life not worth living. Is there a national equivalent of the examined life, and is the present generation of Americans ready to face the findings of such a moral and historical testing? History is now presenting an ultimatum to America over freedom as the four questions already asked boil down to one essential question: *If Americans wish to continue as the land of the free, will they recognize the intrinsic character of freedom and respond to freedom as freedom itself requires, or will they continue to follow faulty and specious views of freedom and remain satisfied with their distortions and imitations until they suffer irreversible decline?* The period America is now entering represents *zero hour* for the American republic and its freedom. It calls for a grand historical decision and then a decisive *reset* and a *starting all over* that are not merely current fashionable slogans but genuine national repentance and about-face. Such decisive about-faces are rare in history, especially for a superpower still at the height of its dominance. But if America is not to decline as other nations have at a similar point, nothing less than the highest resolve and the wisest, most farsighted, and determined response will be required. The normal run and rules of history are clear, but for people who know and respect freedom, freedom is never fate. For free people tomorrow can be different from yesterday and today. The future is open, not fixed, and America's choice between restoring America's freedom and continuing America's decline is now.

—Taken from chapter one, "America Will Fall—Unless"



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Os Guinness, Prolific Author and Social Critic

"For decades now, Os Guinness has served readers with excellent cultural analysis that helps us to 'read our times.'"

—Trevin Wax, senior vice president of theology and communications at Lifeway Christian Resources, author of *This Is Our Time*

Os Guinness (DPhil, Oxford) is the author or editor of more than thirty books, including *Last Call for Liberty*, *Impossible People*, *Fool's Talk*, *Renaissance*, *The Global Public Square*, *A Free People's Suicide*, *Unspeakable*, *The Call*, *Time for Truth*, *The Great Quest*, and *The Case for Civility*. A frequent speaker and prominent social critic, he has addressed audiences worldwide from the British House of Commons to the US Congress to the St. Petersburg Parliament. He is a senior fellow at the Oxford Centre for Christian Apologetics and was the founder of the Trinity Forum.

Born in China to missionary parents, he is the great-great-great-grandson of Arthur Guinness, the Dublin brewer. After witnessing the climax of the Chinese revolution in 1949, he was expelled with many other foreigners in 1951 and returned to England where he was educated and served as a freelance reporter with the BBC. Since coming to the United States in 1984, he has been a guest scholar at the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Studies and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. He was the lead drafter of the Williamsburg Charter, celebrating the First Amendment, and has also been senior fellow at the EastWest Institute in New York, where he drafted the Charter for Religious Freedom. He also coauthored the public-school curriculum *Living with Our Deepest Differences*.

Guinness has had a lifelong passion to make sense of our extraordinary modern world and to stand between the worlds of scholarship and ordinary life, helping each to understand the other—particularly when advanced modern life touches on the profound issues of faith. He lives with his wife, Jenny, in McLean, Virginia, near Washington, DC.



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