

White Evangelical Racism: The Politics of Morality in America. By Anthea Butler. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2021. 176 pages. \$25.00
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For many pollsters, reporters, and voters, American evangelicalism is synonymous with white Republican voters. After 81 percent of self-described white evangelicals overwhelmingly voted for President Donald Trump, some historians of US evangelicalism wrote books for general audiences exploring the politicization of evangelicalism. Although these historians often maintain that racist and nationalistic politics have crept into US evangelicalism, Butler in *White Evangelical Racism* argues that “racism is a feature, not a bug, of American evangelicalism” (2). She joins this growing chorus of US historians, but she offers a melody sung in counterpoint. She aims “to tell the story evangelicals won’t” (12).

Butler insists that white evangelicals have promoted religious beliefs and practices grounded in white supremacy and anti-Black racism in a quest for political power. Like the public, she does not try to distinguish evangelical belief from evangelical politics. Instead, Butler adopts the mainstream definition of American evangelicalism as a fusion of whiteness, Republicanism, and Christianity. Because this definition serves as her point of departure from other historians, Butler does not offer a history of racist ideologies in evangelical theology but a history of racism in conservative white evangelical politics.

In four short chapters, Butler traces racism within white evangelicalism from the nation’s founding to the rise of Trumpism. In chapter 1, she describes white evangelicalism’s religious foundation: slaveholding Christianity and the “Religion of the Lost Cause.” One of the book’s many strengths is how Butler tells the contrasting stories of Black and white evangelicals. In the same way enslaved Africans used the Bible to develop freedom-loving “slave religion,” Butler maintains that white evangelicals used the Bible to uphold what Frederick Douglass called “slaveholding Christianity.” After the Civil War, white Southern evangelicals blended Christianity and slaveholding values in the violent “Religion of the Lost Cause.” Chapter 2 then explains how Billy Graham’s Americanism mainstreamed white evangelicalism during the Cold War and the US Civil Rights movement. Graham’s Americanism comingled Christianity, whiteness, patriotism, political activism, and anti-communism. According to Butler, it linked civil rights work to communism and promoted a conflicted, color-blind gradualism at odds with Black evangelicalism. Chapter 3 describes the rise of the evangelical religious right in Republican partisan politics under President Ronald Reagan. Butler rejects the theory that abortion wedded white

evangelicals to the Republican Party. Instead, she points to Roman Catholic Paul Weyrich's endorsement of voter suppression and gerrymandering to explain how racism united white evangelicals and establishment Republicans. She also offers a fascinating history of tokenism in white evangelical ministries and outright racism in white evangelical colleges, which banned Black students and interracial dating for several years after the Civil Rights movement. Finally, chapter 4 explores how white evangelical voters transformed Republican politics when they abandoned a colorblind politics of respectability for Islamophobia, birtherism, and Trumpism. Butler concludes with a heartfelt plea for white evangelicals to reject racism.

Although Butler wrote the book for a general audience, she addresses several issues that call for more academic research. First and foremost is the need for a history of Black evangelicalism. Most African Americans are evangelicals in Baptist, Methodist, and Pentecostal traditions. Second, by contrasting Black and white evangelicalism, Butler forces the reader to consider whether American evangelicals ever separated their religious beliefs from their politics. Like Billy Graham and Jerry Farwell, Frederick Douglass and Martin Luther King closely aligned themselves with Republican and Democratic presidential politics, respectively. Third, Butler notes that Roman Catholics such as Weyrich have long played a role in evangelical politics. When it comes to white evangelical politics, racism often trumps anti-Catholic sentiment. Butler's book invites historians to consider how white Roman Catholics have conspired with Protestant evangelicalism to create and further contemporary right-winged politics.

White Evangelical Racism offers a much-needed intervention in the ongoing conversation about American evangelicalism. It would make an excellent textbook in an undergraduate course on American religious history or a seminary course on church and society. Because the book somewhat assumes that the reader is familiar with the dominant narratives about evangelicalism, instructors might need to pair *White Evangelical Racism* with a book like Kidd's *Who Is an Evangelical?: The History of a Movement in Crisis*.

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