

Review of Anthea Butler's *White Evangelical Racism*

Paul Miller

Email: paulmmiller01@gmail.com

Abstract

Anthea Butler's¹ 2021 book *White Evangelical Racism* pulls no punches on the Evangelical movement, alleging that "racism [is] at the core of evangelical beliefs, practices, and political allegiances," that "Race and racism have always been foundational parts of evangelicalism in America," and that "evangelicals' love for Trumpism" is explained by "one reason ... most important: racism," being quick to add, however, that "Trump isn't the reason why evangelicals turned to racism. They were racist all along."² That's fairly clear! ... and problematic. Her book would not be problematic if Butler was decrying the racism in parts of American Evangelicalism's past, where with other segments of America it shamefully supported both pre-Civil War slavery and post-Civil War Jim Crow laws. Her book is problematic only because she argues that this racism rages unabated today³ and, moreover, has been "at the core" of post-WWII American Evangelicalism, especially from the 1970s onward as it became politically engaged through the "Religious Right."

This review argues that while her allegations of racism are strong, her evidence is weak. Her evidence fails in multiple ways: by focusing on irrelevant outliers as supposedly typical Evangelicals, by ignoring important truly representative Evangelical figures, by misrepresenting or misinterpreting some of the major research upon which she relies, by misidentifying the exact problem in the "the problem of whiteness," and lastly fails in its narrow-minded approach to differences: those with a different political position from hers are categorised as racist!

Key words: Evangelical, Evangelicalism, NAE, racism, Butler, whiteness, blackness, Billy Graham, Bob Jones, Religious Right, Moral Majority, Jerry Falwell, Ben Kinchlow, Randall Balmer, Voddie Baucham

Uses Outliers, not true Evangelical Models

Butler's first problem is that in attempting to back up her charge of Evangelical racism she uses totally fringe outliers as her "model Evangelicals." Butler's approach here is akin to a sociologist flying off to France and studying the French in order to establish the characteristics of ... the typical American! She is not looking in the right place. For instance, she repeatedly (30 times) cites Bob Jones, Jr./Sr. and their Bob Jones University (BJU did not admit blacks until the 1970s

¹ Anthea Butler is a "former Evangelical" who did her MA in theology at Fuller Seminary while attending the Evangelical and Pentecostal megachurch in Pasadena, CA pastored by the then-internationally prominent Jack Hayford. She currently serves as Professor in American Social Thought, and chair of the department of Religious Studies at the University of Pennsylvania.

² Anthea D. Butler, *White Evangelical Racism* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, Kindle Edition, 2021), 5, 10, 140.

³ Regarding the past, Butler admits, "As a historian, I know that American evangelicals made important and substantial contributions to the abolitionist movement and to the education and uplift of African Americans during Reconstruction," (Butler 2021:15) but to her this past is overshadowed by the current racism she sees centrally motivating the movement.

and even then it banned interracial dating⁴) to prove her point, insisting that Jones's segregationist policies were "ground zero" triggering Evangelicalism's Religious Right.⁵ But Bob Jones was anything but typically Evangelical; rather, ironically, he is the precise model of separatistic fundamentalism from which post-WWII Evangelicalism purposefully labored to distance itself as post-WWII it established new institutions like the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) and Fuller Seminary.⁶

In fact, with equal vigor did Jones, and those in his camp, vigorously distance himself from the NAE, pushing back against that very Evangelicalism and its Religious Right movement which Butler asserts he typifies. Jones would say:

For a long time I believed that Billy [Graham] was doing more harm than any other living man. What a tragedy to see him building the church of Antichrist.⁷

And against Falwell, who with his Moral Majority worked with Catholics and Mormons and Jews, Jones pronounced:

Falwell ... the most dangerous man in America today as far as Biblical Christianity is concerned ... [the Moral Majority being] one of Satan's devices to build the world church of Antichrist.⁸

Not satisfied with that, Jones leveled his guns against another leading figure in the Religious Right, Pat Robertson with his 700 Club, saying:

I have grown sick and tired of the "Praise God" sanctimoniously sighed and the "Bless the Lord" blasphemously belched forth by the phonies and hypocrites, the deceivers and the deceived who appear on television like the "700 Club."⁹

This does not sound like someone who is joined to the Evangelical movement hip and thigh; and yet Butler uses him as her Evangelical model.

Even Randall Balmer, whose critique of Evangelicalism Butler cites favorably, warns against the very mistake Butler here falls into. Balmer points out in his review of Daniel K. Williams's *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (a book resembling Butler's both in subject and approach) that:

⁴ "News & Views," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2009. Available at: https://www.jbhe.com/news_views/62_bobjones.html

⁵ Butler 2021:63.

⁶ Modern Evangelicalism, taking shape in the 1942 founding of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), was moving the opposite direction to Jones, with the NAE explicitly formed in reaction to his sort of fundamentalism, the NAE seeking a more positive and less combative tone. (See G. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995)) Indeed, though Bob Jones, Jr. participated in the formation of the NAE and was elected its vice-president in 1950, he resigned from the NAE after only one year because "it was insufficiently separatist." (S. Hill, C. Lippy, C Wilson, eds., "Bob Jones University," *Encyclopedia of Religion in the South*) We read:

Although he participated in the founding of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in 1942 and was elected vice president in 1950, Jones left the organization in the following year because of its interest in cultivating a more moderate---to Jones, "compromising"---stance with those who denied biblical orthodoxy. By 1959, Jones had formally broken with Billy Graham who had accepted the sponsorship of liberal Protestants and Roman Catholics for his 1957 New York City crusade." (<https://en-academic.com/dic.nsf/enwiki/325399>)

⁷ Bob Jones, *Cornbread and Caviar* (Greenville, N.C.: Bob Jones Univ. Press, 1985), 159.

⁸ P. Allitt, *Religion in America Since 1945: A History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 153.

⁹ Jones 1985:183.

Williams also, in my judgment, reads far too much into the antics of outliers like ... Bob Jones Jr. These are colorful characters, to be sure, but to infer that they represented much more than themselves and small bands of followers gives them far too much credit.... Too often the author conflates evangelicals with fundamentalists....¹⁰

Not only does Butler misstep in attempting to use these fundamentalist outliers as model Evangelicals, but she has missed the significance of these fundamentalists' ultimate development: that they themselves have changed and eventually succumbed to the wider Evangelical community's anti-racism!¹¹

So, we see Bob Jones University dropping its interracial dating ban in 2000. Then, in 2008, its then-President Stephen Jones, great-grandson of evangelist and university founder Bob Jones Sr., apologized for BJU's past racial discrimination, with the 2017 president Steve Pettit admitting that the university's racist social policies were sorely unbiblical: "The Bible is very clear We are made of one blood."¹²

Sidelines and so Ignores the Easily-Available Counter-evidence

To her "outliers" problem, Butler adds yet another serious evidential problem: she simply will not allow counter-evidence. She sidelines and ignores it, or presents only a partial picture. So, for instance, she takes on Evangelicalism's most public post-WWII face, Billy Graham, and denounces him for his mission "to save souls and make believers of all races conform to white, Western Christian ideals" and preached a "White Jesus" along with the rest of the "new evangelicalism" which simply "held on to their fundamentalist racial ideologies but, under the guise of 'Americanist' culture ... updated ... to soften the edges."¹³

But this, frankly, distorts both Graham's life and his public pronouncements. We read, for instance, that at the outset of his ministry "William Franklin Graham Jr. did the unthinkable at the 1952 Jackson, Mississippi crusade when he removed the red segregation rope that separated black and white worshippers."¹⁴ We read that, Graham "paid Martin Luther King's bail to spring him from jail. Graham declared that there was no scriptural basis for segregation."¹⁵ We see that

¹⁰ Randall Balmer, "Review: God's Own Party," *Journal of Southern Religion* 13 (2011): <http://jsreligion.org/issues/vol13/forum-balmer.html>.

¹¹ Butler would doubtlessly simply argue that this change is not real and that all that has happened is that these have just hidden their racism away; an approach she hints at several times in her book. Her conviction concerning the centrality of racism to Evangelicalism is unshakeable, and is not moved by even the evidence she herself writes when saying, "as an historian, I know that American evangelicals made important and substantial contributions to the abolitionist movement and to the education and uplift of African Americans during Reconstruction." (Butler 2021:15).

¹² N. Cary, "Bob Jones University regain non-profit status," *Greenville News*, Feb. 16, 2017. Available at: <https://www.greenvilleonline.com/story/news/education/2017/02/16/bju-regains-nonprofit-status-17-years-after-dropped-discriminatory-policy/98009170/>. This reverses their former stand and argument that, as their public relations spokesman Jonathan Pait explained in 1998, that, "God has separated people for his own purposes. He has erected barriers between the nations, not only land and sea barriers, but also ethnic, cultural, and language barriers. God has made people different from one another and intends those differences to remain." ("News & Views," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 2009)

¹³ Butler 2021:34-35.

¹⁴ M. Johnson, "Billy Graham did the unthinkable," *Geaux Therefore*, Feb. 8, 2021. Available at: <https://www.nobts.edu/geauxtherefore/articles/2021/RemovingtheRopes.html>

¹⁵ Dirk Smillie, *Falwell Inc.* (London: St. Martin's Press, 2008), 73.

in 1956 *Life Magazine* published a multi-paged Graham article entitled *A Plea for an End to Intolerance*. In it Graham made clear his ministry's opposition to segregation:

It was after study of the Bible, as well as current events, that we [his ministry team] decided that all of our future evangelistic crusades would be on an equal basis. We have decided to hold no more crusades unless all of any race can sit where they please. Our last four southern crusades, Nashville, New Orleans, Richmond and Oklahoma City, have been on a nonsegregated basis. We have not had one incident. Where men are standing at the foot of the Cross, there are no racial barriers....

There may be reasons that men give for practicing racial discrimination, but let's not make the mistake of pleading the Bible to defend it.... The Bible speaks strongly against any kind of discrimination.¹⁶

And Butler herself recounts Graham's opposition to his own pastor W.A. Criswell, a segregationist, writing, "For his part, Graham told reporters after the South Carolina speech, 'Criswell and I have never seen eye to eye on the race question.'"¹⁷

With all this, it is no wonder, then, that John Perkins—long-time black Christian activist in Mississippi—said:

Billy Graham and I were partners in removing ropes of segregation and replacing them with a foundation of love and brotherhood. We worked to build a ministry based on what brings us together as believers rather than what divides us as people..... Billy Graham was a humble servant of God.¹⁸

So this is Butler's racist Evangelical?

Butler similarly dismisses the interracial television productions of televangelists Oral Roberts, Pat Robertson (the "700 Club"), Jan and Paul Crouch, Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker—all of whom regularly had black guests on their show. Butler is unimpressed by this because, she writes, the blacks chosen were "Pious and reverent, they met white expectations and produced a cottage industry on the televangelist and evangelist circuit."¹⁹ It is not immediately clear why their piety and reverence disqualifies their participation from being meaningfully interracial, but delving into the case of Ben Kinchlow at the 700 Club should give us a clue as to why Butler thinks so.

Ben Kinchlow's case is particularly interesting because he was not just a side entertainer or an occasionally wheeled-on celebrity who warmed up the crowd for the main event; he was *part of the main event*, being a regular co-host alongside of Pat Robertson. As a co-host he sat on equal terms with Robertson. Moreover, he would often, in Robertson's absence, host the show all on his own. This he did for twenty years. In other words, he was an important central figure. Here below is a picture of the two in their early years.

¹⁶ B. Graham, "A Plea for an End to Intolerance," *Life*, October 1, 1956. Available at: https://books.google.com/books?id=sEEEAAAAMBAJ&pg=PA138&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=2#v=onepage&q&f=false

¹⁷ Butler 2021:50

¹⁸ <https://blackchristiannews.com/2018/02/civil-rights-leader-john-perkins-remembers-billy-graham-literally-taking-down-the-ropes-set-up-to-divide-blacks-and-whites/>

¹⁹ Butler 2021:80.



So Kinchlow's role was not merely the sort of "tokenism" or "subservient" sideshow which belies genuine integration. Additionally, we must remember that Kinchlow was no *naïf*, a simple stooge to Robertson. He had wide life experience before joining the 700 Club, having spent 13 years in the Air Force, subsequently becoming a committed Black Nationalist looking to Malcolm X and the Black Muslims; then, after his Christian conversion, he spent time as an ordained minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church.²⁰

And yet, Butler is no more impressed by Kinchlow's joint hosting than she is by any of the other Evangelical productions in which their platforms were shared interracially. None of that, as far as she is concerned, touched "the racism that lurked in their hearts."²¹

The question is: "Why? Why does none of this impress Butler?" The first hint as to why comes when she describes Kinchlow as "affable";²² the next hint comes when she similarly dismisses Mahalia Jackson's regular participation in Oral Roberts TV production as racially meaningless because Jackson "was not a threat to white evangelicals. She was simply singing and praying—not *marching*."²³

There it is: Butler does not want blacks and whites to simply get along in mutual respect; she wants to see confrontation, battle, marching, protests, whites made to feel uncomfortable and put up against the wall. That is what racial progress looks like to her. Anything else is unauthentic, not flushing out that "racism that lurked in their hearts," as she puts it.

In this regard, Butler is a disciple of W.E.B. Du Bois (who in 1895 became the first black man to earn a PhD from Harvard). In the early 20th century Du Bois collided with Booker T. Washington—Du Bois attempting to wrest control from Washington as the dominant force nationally in the African American community. Both sought black equality but they collided over tactics, in which they differed widely. Washington opted for the slow, gradual, more non-confrontational approach of self-help and economic independence, whereas Du Bois dismissed this as woefully insufficient, insisting on the necessity of challenging the status quo directly

²⁰ "Ben Kinchlow Returns to the 700 Club," *CBN*. Available at: <https://www1.cbn.com/700club/ben-kinchlow-returns-700-club>

²¹ Butler 2021:86.

²² Butler 2021:81.

²³ Butler 2021:79 (emphasis in the original)

through political agitation. Both wanted black liberation, but they clashed over tactics—how to reach the goal they shared. Clearly, however, neither was a racist or “anti-black.” Certainly Washington, who devoted his entire life to the betterment of his fellow blacks, was no racist simply because he adhered to the tactic of gradualism. And yet, Butler would classify modern-day Booker T.s as racist, simply because they adopt his tactics.

Butler's mistake is to confuse tactics—how to reach an end goal—with the end goals themselves. She thinks that if you have not adopted her tactics—marching and confrontation and so forth—that this indicates the rejection of her end goal of racial equality. But at this point Butler betrays both her analytical confusion and methodological narrowness: analytical confusion in confusing tactics with end goals; methodological narrowness because for Butler it's either “my way or the highway.” There is no flexibility in her thinking, tied in as she is to a hardened cast of mind incapable of seeing other's point of view.

It would seem that it is this narrowness which explains Butler's inability to properly assess the evidence before her, filtering out any other explanation of differences than “they're a racist.”

Mischaracterizes some of her Key Research Support

Randall Balmer's Research

Another problem with Butler's evidence, is the way she frames one of the few research articles she relies on in her book for support: namely, a *Politico* article by Randall Balmer. Butler writes:

In a *Politico* article called “The Real Origins of the Religious Right,” historian Randall Balmer debunked one of the most durable myths ... that the religious right ... emerged as a political movement in response to ... *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. Racism, not abortion, explains why evangelicals came together to pursue political action....²⁴

But this mischaracterizes Balmer's article, which has three major points:

- first—and Butler is correct here—that abortion was *not*, as is commonly supposed, the triggering issue bringing about the Religious Right as a political force, abortion only coming into focus much later in the movement's life, c. 1978;
- second—and again Butler is correct here—the IRS's rescinding in 1976 of Bob Jones University's tax-exempt status due to its policy of racial segregation was “for many evangelical leaders” what “alerted the Christian school community about what could happen with government interference” and is what then got them politically involved;²⁵

²⁴ Butler 2021:65

²⁵ Balmer makes much the same point in his biography on Jimmy Carter when he writes:

“What caused the movement to surface was the federal government's moves against Christian schools,” Weyrich reiterated in 1990. “This absolutely shattered the Christian community's notions that Christians could isolate themselves inside their own establishments and teach what they please.... It wasn't the abortion issue.... It was the recognition that isolation simply would no longer work in this society.” (Randall Ballmer, *Redeemer: The Life of Jimmy Carter* (New York: Basic Books, 2014),106)

https://books.google.com/books?id=rEZAwwAAQBAJ&pg=PA106&lpg=PA106&dq=Fallwell+%22It+took+me+several+years+to+get+segregation+flushed+out+of+my+soul%22&source=bl&ots=oUM7nC_0c9&sig=ACFu3U2mn_bKzTCbi-bxOltT_TJYxJqWA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjdu_J9sH0AhUKIWoFHcoEDhgQ6AF6BAGDEAM#v=onepage&q=Fallwell%20%22It%20took%20me%20several%20years%20to%20get%20segregation%20flushed%20out%20of%20my%20soul%22&f=false

Moreover, while these Christian school heads were altogether wrong when and if they fought for the right to segregate by race, their underlying intuition that government interference in private schooling could all too easily lead to the suppression of fundamental First Amendment rights of the free expression of religion have proved sadly correct. See Appendix One.

- third—and here is where Butler errs in citing Balmer as support—while this issue of racial segregation in private Christian schools (and the governmental crackdown it provoked) may have been what initially triggered the concern of some southern Evangelicals, it was not what could enable a nationwide movement, Balmer's *Politico* article noting:

Although Bob Jones Jr., the school's founder, argued that racial segregation was mandated by the Bible, Falwell and Weyrich quickly sought to shift the grounds of the debate, framing their opposition in terms of religious freedom rather than in defense of racial segregation.... But Falwell and Weyrich ... [r]ecognize[d] that organizing grassroots evangelicals to defend racial discrimination would be a challenge. It had worked to rally the leaders, but they needed a different issue if they wanted to mobilize evangelical voters on a large scale.... [And now entered the abortion issue in the] 1978 Senate Race.

So racial segregation was the initial issue for some southern fundamentalists, but not for the new Evangelicals. As Balmer writes, a "different issue" than racial segregation was needed to rally these Evangelicals, and this was because outside of a narrow band of certain Southern Evangelicals, it simply wasn't a national Evangelical value. Indeed, Balmer put it even more strongly in his book review of Daniel Williams' *God's Own Party* where he pointed out that the issue of racial segregation was actually an obstacle to wider Evangelical participation, Balmer writing:

Williams makes the compelling point that evangelical leaders in the South had used opposition to the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision [the court case declaring unconstitutional segregationists' "separate but equal" doctrine] as a rallying cry, but the "end of the civil rights movement facilitated the formation of a new Christian political coalition, because it enabled fundamentalists and evangelicals who had disagreed over racial integration to come together."²⁶

That is, when southern Evangelicals-or-fundamentalists by the end of the civil rights movement finally jettisoned their advocacy of racial segregation, now the rest of American Evangelicals could in good conscience join with them on other agreed points to form finally a national movement. Now the Religious Right was born, but only when racial segregation was no longer on the agenda. Typical of this Southern abandonment of the defense of racial segregation would be Virginian Evangelical, Jerry Falwell Sr.: He told Dinesh D'Souza in 1983, "It took me several years to get segregation flushed out of my soul."²⁷ This is a very different picture than the one

²⁶ Randall Balmer, "Review: God's Own Party," *Journal of Southern Religion* 13 (2011):

<http://jsreligion.org/issues/vol13/forum-balmer.html>. Balmer, in his Williams book review also notes the broad scale of issues which brought Evangelicals into the Religious Right, noting:

... the growing compatibility between evangelicals and the Republican Party in the 1950s and 1960s, especially their shared commitment to anticommunism. By the late 1960s, Williams says, evangelicals found further compatibility with the Republicans on social issues: opposition to abortion, feminism, pornography, and gay rights. (Balmer 2011)

²⁷ Dinesh D'Souza, *Falwell Before the Millennium: a Critical Biography* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 1984), 81. D'Souza writes, "Falwell told me, 'Through my Bible reading and spiritual development, I began to this issue in my own life. I realized that I was completely wrong, what I had been taught was completely wrong.. For me it was a scriptural and personal realization....'"

that Butler projects from Balmer's article, an article which admittedly has its own ambiguities.²⁸ And it is a picture that does not support the widespread and deep-rooted racism within the Religious Right that she alleges.

National Association of Evangelicals (NAE)

Butler also mischaracterizes the NAE's founding when she argues from the fact that "at the NAE's founding, no Black denominations were represented." To her, this is incontrovertible proof of their deep-seated racism.²⁹ In doing so, of course, she simply assumes that no other reason could possibly explain it. But not so fast. Surely the fact that the large majority of white conservative, Evangelicals also stayed out of the NAE at the beginning demonstrates that other reasons besides race were involved. We read:

While NAE did represent a diverse coalition, the sizeable coalition for which the founders had hoped did not emerge. By 1945, just fifteen relatively small denominations, representing less than 500,000 communicant members, had signed on, a far cry from the fifty denominations and fifteen million Christians that had been unofficially represented at the constitutional convention. Some larger conservative denominations, such as the Southern Baptist Convention and the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, remained outside of NAE the Reformed Church in America and the old United Presbyterian Church of North America ... decided to remain with the Federal Council [and out of the NAE].³⁰

Racism does not explain this.

And what are we to make of the fact that when black Evangelicals in 1963 formed their own National Black Evangelical Alliance they only scraped together 5,000 on their mailing list with just a few hundred attending their annual conference?³¹ That is, most black Evangelicals stayed away. Was that racism? Clearly not. Once again, Butler is far too eager to jump to the racism accusation.

²⁸ That is, Balmer's article strikes out simultaneously in two different directions, and never successfully resolves the tension—which is a weakness of the article. On the one side, as cited in the main article above, Balmer maintains that the Religious Right had to move beyond racial segregation in order to ignite a national movement. On the other hand Balmer equally posits racial segregation as their "real motive" and the "real roots," writing: "Paul Weyrich, seized on abortion not for moral reasons, but ... [b]ecause the anti-abortion crusade was more palatable than the religious right's real motive: protecting segregated schools.... Although abortion had emerged as a rallying cry by 1980, the real roots of the religious right lie not the defense of a fetus but in the defense of racial segregation." (Randall Balmer, "The Real Origins of the Religious Right," *Politico*, May 27, 2014. Available at: <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/05/religious-right-real-origins-107133/>) Butler, unsurprisingly for a polemicist, only highlights one side of Balmer's conclusions, remaining studiously silent as to his other findings.

²⁹ "At the NAE's founding, no Black denominations were represented, even though major Black denominations such as the National Baptist Convention and the Church of God in Christ could have easily signed the statement of belief. Segregation was not just for housing or buses but for churches as well." Butler, Anthea D. . *White Evangelical Racism* (A Ferris and Ferris Book) (p. 37). The University of North Carolina Press. Kindle Edition.

³⁰ ("National Association of Evangelicals (NAE)," *Archives of Wheaton College*. Available at: https://archives.wheaton.edu/agents/corporate_entities/1158)

³¹ "National Black Evangelical Alliance," *Encyclopedia.com*. Available at: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/national-black-evangelical-association>

The “Problem of Whiteness”

Now, I admit that there is “a problem of whiteness” within Evangelicalism, and it operates very often to keep black and white Evangelicals apart. But we need to be clear: yes, “the problem of whiteness” does indeed exist, as Butler alleges; on the other hand, no, the nature of the problem is not racism, as Butler assumes.³²

As to the nature of this “problem of whiteness,” Dr. Voddie Baucham is instructive. Baucham is a black Southern Baptist, currently Dean of Theology at African Christian University in Zambia, certainly a long way from the fatherless home of his youth in East Los Angeles surrounded by drugs and gangs. After his Christian conversion and a lifetime spent in the black church (and at a white seminary where, to preserve “the black experience,” he was a co-founder of its Black Student Fellowship), his encounter in the 1990s with *Promise Keepers*’ focus on racial reconciliation challenged him to a course change—the deliberate pursuit of reconciliation with white Christians. He took the radical step of actually leaving his black church and joining the staff of a large and largely white Baptist church in Sugar Land, Texas. The result? Turbulent if rich times; there were problems. He writes:

I was constantly aware of the fact that in many ways, I was a stranger in a strange land. These people had different worship styles, leadership styles, came from different backgrounds, watched different shows, and in many ways lived very different lives than the other people I knew.... That season of life was not only a challenge for me, it was also a challenge for my wife and children.... They also grew weary of having to live in the ... environment[] where they were ethnic “others”....³³

What Baucham is describing here is “the problem of whiteness,” or more accurately, “the problem when whiteness meets blackness.” He is here describing classic culture clash. When Baucham describes his difficulties as being “a stranger in a strange land,” the strangeness was not his skin color, but rather the “different worship styles, leadership styles, ... watched different shows, ... lived very different lives than the other people I knew.” Baucham’s comments suggest that it was learned behaviors that played the larger role in the problem, not skin color. Even so, racism played some role in the difficulties Baucham’s family had at their new church, with Baucham noting, “They [the children] grew weary of statements that were sometimes insensitive, and sometimes downright racist.”³⁴

³² Butler does not actually use the precise phrase “the problem of whiteness.” She does, however, complain long and loud about the centrality of “whiteness” in American Evangelicalism, and clearly sees it as a problem. She criticizes Evangelicals for their “equation of Christianity with whiteness. For evangelicals, ‘Christian race,’ America, and belief are synonymous. Christianity is whiteness as well as belief. It is this conflation that causes evangelicals to ignore their racism.” (Butler 2021:8)

Kristin Du Metz does favor the phrase “the problem of whiteness,” and when asserting that “Evangelicals” is “a white religious brand” in which race is “foundational to white evangelical identity,” she references Butler’s book as one of her sources for this assertion. (Kristin Du Metz, *Jesus and John Wayne: How White Evangelicals Corrupted a Faith and Fractured a Nation* (New York: Liveright. Kindle Edition, 2021), 6)

³³ Voddie T. Baucham, Jr., *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism’s Looming Catastrophe* (Washington, D.C., Salem Books, 2021), 35.

³⁴ Baucham 2021:35

John McWhorter takes us further on this issue of “cultural Blackness.” McWhorter, himself a black American, serves as associate professor of linguistics at Columbia University as a linguist with a specialty in creole languages and Black English. He comments:

I think there is a tacit sense that some people are Blacker than others.... There's such a thing as cultural Blackness. Some people have two feet in it, some people who are brown skinned have one foot in it, some people who are brown skinned, basically don't have any foot in it. There's nothing wrong with us saying that.³⁵

McWhorter further comments:

[L]inguists have documented that one can indeed sound black. Both white and black Americans can almost always immediately tell whether someone is black on the phone even when the subject matter is race-neutral and there is no “slang” involved....

And then, wouldn't it be strange if black culture somehow consisted only of speech? Like any culture, black culture also includes favorite foods, modes of dance, senses of humor (Black Twitter, anyone?), religious traditions, dress fashions and aspects of carriage and demeanor. This is what black culture is. To pretend the entire conception is a stereotype because people exhibit it to varying degrees is to dismiss generations of scholarship and art lovingly documenting exactly this culture. Blackness is beyond skin color.³⁶

That last sentence—“Blackness is beyond skin color”—alerts us to the problem with phrases like “black culture,” or “acting white,” or “the problem of whiteness.” These phrases—used to describe behavioral patterns, cultures and the relationship between cultures—make it sound like the central controlling feature is race, skin color, the amount of melanin one possesses. The color terms used, such as “the problem of whiteness,” suggest almost irresistibly that the problem is racism, prejudice because of the skin color of the actor. Here the wording does us a disservice.³⁷

While the impression given in these phrases is that the practices have to do with skin color (“black” or “white” culture)—something passed down through one's genes and DNA—skin color does not actually determine these activities. Our likes in music, dance, literature, conversation styles, and behavioral ticks are not physical traits passed down through genes and DNA, rather they are cultural traits passed down through our cultural groups. We practice and love these traits because we have grown up with them, been surrounded by our particular cultural

³⁵ B. Booker, “Diving into ‘woke racism’ with John McWhorter,” *Politico*, Oct. 29, 2021

<https://www.politico.com/newsletters/the-recast/2021/10/29/woke-racism-john-mcwhorter-494906>

³⁶ J. McWhorter, “What Charles Barkley Gets Wrong About Race,” *Time*, Oct. 29, 2014. Available at: <https://time.com/3545960/charles-barkley-russell-wilson-black/>

³⁷ The confusion of cultural features with race caused by terms such as “whiteness” bedevils other groups beyond the English-speaking world. So in the Hawaiian language, where there has been a renaissance of Hawaiian culture and language since the 1960s, there is the word “ho‘ohaole,” meaning “to act like a white person.” (M. Pukui, S. Elbert, *Hawaiian Dictionary* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1986) But “white people” act in all sorts of ways, determined not by their skin color but their cultural unit, whether it be West Coast American, working class vs. aristocratic Brit, or Russian Muscovite. Acting white doesn't mean anything at this point.

Of course, in Hawaii, identifying a haole (a foreigner) by their skin color was indeed a convenient and even accurate tag because most in the opening decades of the 19th century indeed were white! But where the term “ho‘ohaole” as defined by Pukui/Elbert misguides is in giving the impression that skin color—not the cultural attributes which “happened” to be attached to the skin color—was the primary and most important aspect. “To act like a person having adopted many of the attributes of the larger Western civilization” would have been a far more accurate term, but admittedly it lacks the punch of simply “whiteness.”

group exhibiting them, and as a result have imbibed them, been formed by them, and grown comfortable with them. They become part of us and our identity.

And here then comes the problem: not the skin color, but rather the clash we experience as our ways encounter different ways. And “clash” says it well: there’s friction. The gears are grinding, and as a result both groups feel uncomfortable. And people don’t like feeling uncomfortable! We avoid it, where possible. The result? Self-imposed segregation continues. And thus, as many have observed, “Sunday morning becomes the most segregated hour in America.” Again, the problem is not skin color but culture.

This is not to say that skin color is irrelevant to the issue of “cultural Blackness” and to “the problem of whiteness,” it is just that it is secondary. That is, skin color is secondary as a contemporary issue to the problem of whiteness (with culture being primary to the contemporary relational friction), while it is primary as to the historical aspect. By this I mean that it is history that has led to this problem: America’s long and shameful history of color-based racism is the reason we have today these two separate communities of black and white.

Then, out of these long-separated groups, it was only to be expected that they would each gradually develop their own distinct cultural traits separately from each other. And these cultural distinctions remain even after the earlier discriminatory laws which originally caused the differences have disappeared. So we are then left with a social scene in which two groups, black and white, face each other, whose interaction causes friction (culture clash)—this being the case even in the absence of legal discrimination and any individually-held racism.³⁸ It is these cultural frictions, not skin color, which makes up the “problem of whiteness”—a problem which, again, is more accurately described as “the problem of whiteness meeting blackness.”

None of this does Anthea Butler factor into her analysis, though inadvertently she admits to the cultural factor when writing:

³⁸ I would argue that not only have the laws changed banning slavery, Jim Crow, red-lining etc. but that beyond that, even the prevalence of personally-held racism has shrunk (not disappeared!) dramatically. This assertion is of course a contested one, and one that demands larger treatment than possible in this book review. I will only mention two points in support: first, the radically changed view on the acceptability of mixed black-white marriages and, second, how well black immigrants have done economically, their skin color clearly not disadvantaging them. On these two themes we read:

Ninety-four percent of U.S. adults now approve of marriages between Black people and White people, up from ... [j]ust 4% approved when Gallup first asked the question in 1958. (See Justin McCarthy, “U.S. Approval of Interracial Marriage at New High of 94%,” Sept. 10, 2021, *Gallup*. Available at: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/354638/approval-interracial-marriage-new-high.aspx>)

And Wilfred Reilly, a black political science professor at Kentucky State University, writes:

As of 2019, seven of the top 10 American ethnic groups in income terms—Indian, Taiwanese, Filipino, Indonesian, Persian, and Arab Lebanese Americans—were “people of color” as this term is generally conceptualized, while an eighth group (South Africans) is composed of both black and white individuals. First-place Indian Americans have almost double the median white household income, earning roughly \$127,000 vs. \$65,902 on average for legacy whites. Chinese and Japanese Americans are not far behind, while Nigerians brought in a tidy salary as well (\$68,658) and also ranked as the most educated group in the United States. Many black immigrant groups besides Nigerians have also done well, with Ghanaians and the Guyanese coming in well above the white median income. All West Indians combined (\$65,258) are just a few dollars behind whites. (W. Reilly, “The Good News They Won’t Tell You about Race in America,” *Commentary*, April 2021. Available at: <https://www.commentary.org/articles/wilfred-reilly/race-in-america-good-news/>)

... tensions surrounding race and ethnicity commonly (are) lodged in harsh criticism of Black cultural practices of dress, singing, or worship expressions. In order for Black evangelicals to belong, they had to emulate whiteness.³⁹

Here she recognizes the tension is not over blackness (skin color) per se but over cultural practices. And these tensions are the typical sorts of cultural clash that occur even between cultures of the same skin color (think Americans in Britain, or Britons in France etc., etc. (not that Britain or France are monoracial)). Butler, however, insists on conflating cultural preferences with racism and race hatred. It is a conflation that confuses her analysis.

Completely Falsifies a Report

Not only does Butler's evidence for her claims of white Evangelical racism fail in the ways listed above, but most appallingly—and, fortunately, unusually (i.e. it only happens once)—in her reporting of the McCain-Palin rally of 2008 which she asserts “resonated with ... racist animus.” She presents Sarah Palin—a staunch and public Evangelical who Butler argues typifies most American Evangelicals—as the author of the heinous racist statements heard there, Butler writing:

Reporters for Al Jazeera, attending a McCain-Palin rally in St. Clairsville, Ohio, were dumbfounded by Palin's responses to questions about Obama, such as “I'm afraid if he wins, the Blacks will take over. He's not a Christian! This is a Christian nation! What is our country gonna end up like?” or “When you got a Negra running for president, you need a first-stringer. He's definitely a second-stringer.”⁴⁰

But Palin never said any of this! And Butler carelessly reports these as Palin's own statements anyway. A quick and easily conducted search of the sources reporting at the time show otherwise. The *HuffPost* article written by Avi Lewis, host to Al Jazeera's English TV, made clear that it was not Palin herself but “people attending a Sarah Palin” who were being quoted.⁴¹ And a Charleston city paper, having watched the same Al Jazeera video, went on to specifically identify the quoted “folks attending the McCain-Palin rally” as a “kindly old codger,” a “bespectacled gal,” an “enraged granny,” and one “hysterical golden girl.”⁴² It was not Palin herself. This sort of misreporting by Butler damages her credibility.

Right-wing Politics: Automatically Racist

Lastly, Butler's evidence for racism fails in the low bar she sets for what she considers as “evidence”: people who disagree with her politically! That means they are racist? She writes:

[T]he history of racism is directly implicated in conveying the vast majority of white evangelicals in their unabashed embrace of contemporary right-wing politics... [A] small but growing number of white evangelicals belong to churches and movements that robustly reject racism and right-wing politics.⁴³

³⁹ Butler 2021:60.

⁴⁰ Butler 2021:117-118

⁴¹ A. Lewis, “Shocking Racism,” *HuffPost*, Nov. 24, 2008. Available at https://www.huffpost.com/entry/shocking-racism-at-palin_b_137717

⁴² C. Haire, “White People Give Me the Creeps,” *Charleston City Paper*, Oct. 22, 2008, at <https://charlestoncitypaper.com/white-people-give-me-the-creeps/>

⁴³ Butler 2021:2-3.

For Butler then, to be right wing is to be racist. No argument. No nuance. Butler condemns white Evangelicals as racist because “in the 1970s as evangelical allegiances aligned with political activity, namely that of the Republican Party” this “made them politically white.”⁴⁴ This sort of narrow, wooden thinking, which makes black Republicans “politically white,” is precisely the sort that Glenn Loury, who neither identifies as Republican nor as a conservative, rejects. Loury, the black Professor of Social Sciences and Professor of Economics at Brown University, attending a 2019 public forum of “Why would any black person want to be a conservative?” (the question repeating the suspicion voiced in C. Bracey’s 2008 book *Saviors or Sellouts: the Promise and Peril of Black Conservatism*), responded:

Conservatism is intrinsically the enemy of black people? That sounds more like a partisan-Democratic trope than a defensible socio-politico position.... Black people have a vested interest in high taxes? Have a vested interest in abortion? ... in making it not so hard to get across the border and making it hard to deal with people who have illegally crossed the border? ... Sitting where I was sitting in ... Chicago ... Detroit ... watching what was happening to the African American family ... it is entirely possible that you might think, “Hmm, what the liberal Democrats are doing is not proving to be very good for my people. They’re fostering dependency.” Suppose I thought that dependency on the government was a bad thing and autonomy and self-reliance was a good thing. Have I betrayed black people by thinking that? Suppose I had some questions about affirmative action as a permanent institution to remedy the underrepresentation of black people at colleges and universities, worried, for example, that by creating a different dispensation for the African American students we were inviting a patronization of those students. That’s a conservative view. Is it somehow not black?⁴⁵

Glenn Loury 2019 Public Forum:



⁴⁴ Butler 2021:3-4

⁴⁵ “Truth, Justice and Racial Equality,” *St. Olaf College/The Glenn Show*, Oct. 2, 2019. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wURPweZ8xX4> (See the 8 min. mark forward).

Butler's "right-wing Republicans are racists" ignores both modern and ancient history. Ancient (for colonized America) history: It ignores the fact that it was Lincoln's Republican Party⁴⁶ that fought slavery against the Democrat-led South. It ignores middling-old history (civil rights legislation) in that it took the support of the Republican senators to overcome the opposition and filibuster by Southern Democrat senators to the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964—with 82% of Republican senators voting in favor (27 of 33) in contrast to only 69% (46 of 67) Democrat senators in favor⁴⁷—to pass the legislation. And equally it is to ignore more recent history. That is, Butler's equating Republican with racism neglects the fact that the first blacks (and one of these a black female) in the highest offices of American politics were not installed there by Democrats but by those very right-wing Republicans she deplors: the Secretary of State Colin Powell (2001) followed in 2005 by Condoleeza Rice in the same office, appointed by the Republican presidents Bush Sr. and Jr.

Moreover, Condoleeza Rice enjoyed large-scale approval from Evangelicals, with her race being largely irrelevant to them (Butler's hated "color-blindness"). It was not her race which triggered their standing ovations: It was her ideas and aims, her frankly expressed religious faith and her crystal-clear conservative politics. As the *Washington Post* noted:

But her celebrity obscures how unexceptional she is. Her ideas, work, and style place her in the absolute mainstream of Republican thought. She is Brent Scowcroft in the body of a black woman.⁴⁸

When she appeared in 2006 before the annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention in Greensboro, N.C., with 12,000 Evangelicals in attendance, the *Washington Post* reports, "Her speech was interrupted repeatedly by applause, including seven standing ovations."⁴⁹ A funny kind of racism!

Butler's "evidence" of Evangelicalism's racism based on the fact that so many vote with right-wing Republicans is simply no evidence at all.

Conclusion

Butler may be right that racism "lurked in their hearts" in the 40s, 50s, and 60s as Evangelical political activism began to take shape. That and other sins may have been there: gluttony, envy, resentment etc. I won't argue that these Evangelicals were saints through and through. What is not the case, however, is that race was a central motivating factor driving most of their efforts. And this is Butler's claim, a claim she has failed to prove.

The impression one gets from her book is that Butler is determined to see Evangelicals as racists no matter what they do or have done. So, for instance, she critiques Evangelicals for focusing on individual versus structural racism. But even when these Evangelicals do address structural issues, even here she dismisses it. For instance, Butler reports on the so-called "The Memphis

⁴⁶ For the 1864 election Lincoln's Republican party was temporarily renamed the National Union Party to attract some Democrats otherwise put off by the name.

⁴⁷ H. Enten, "Were Republicans really the party of civil rights in the 1960s?" *The Guardian*, Aug. 28, 2013. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/28/republicans-party-of-civil-rights>

⁴⁸ David Plotz, "Assessment, Condoleeza Rice," *Slate*, May 12, 2000. Available at: <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2000/05/condoleeza-rice.html>

⁴⁹ Glenn Kessler, "US Play Role in World, Rice Says," *Washington Post*, June 15, 2006. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2006/06/15/us-must-play-role-in-world-rice-says-span-classbankheadreligious-group-applauds-speechspan/2cd03150-216c-46a0-815f-0ee8846a287b/>

Miracle” of 1994. Here, a racial reconciliation meeting planned by 20 black leaders and 20 white leaders, with 1,000 leaders (3,000 at night) from around the nation in attendance, they formally dissolved the all-white Pentecostal Fellowship of North America (PFNA, which shamefully, when created in 1948, invited no black churches to join). At the same time, they also created a new multiracial organization called the Pentecostal and Charismatic Churches of North America (PCCNA) with an equal number of blacks and whites on the governing board.⁵⁰ This was unprecedented amongst Pentecostals.

Butler's response? She initially admits that indeed “the meeting led to a structural change and a new organization,” but then goes on to dismiss its significance on the grounds that “the event itself did not appreciably change the denomination's racial structure pattern.”⁵¹ It is unclear what she means by this—an entire organization was dismantled and a new one under multi-racial leadership set up!—as she never explains it.

It is this sort of “nothing is ever good enough” that firms up the impression that assessing evidence fairly is not Butler's real concern; getting a conviction is what she is after. My own impression is that she could do with a good dose of the generosity of spirit that we see, for instance, exercised between the two theologians Fr. Richard Neuhaus and Methodist Stanley Hauerwas. They were politically opposed, Neuhaus on the right and Hauerwas on the left, but Hauerwas could say:

Over the years, many friends have asked me how Richard and I could be friends. I would explain that I never doubted that if Richard was ever forced to choose between his loyalty to Church or America he would choose the Church. I just thought that choice should come sooner than Richard did.⁵²

This sort of generosity is nowhere to be found in Butler's book, and its lack marks her every analysis.

⁵⁰ Dr. Vinson Synan, “History: Memphis Miracle,” PCCNA. Available at: https://pccna.org/about_history.aspx

⁵¹ Butler 2021:91-92.

⁵² Stanley Hauerwas reviewing *American Babylon* in *First Things* April 2009, p. 71

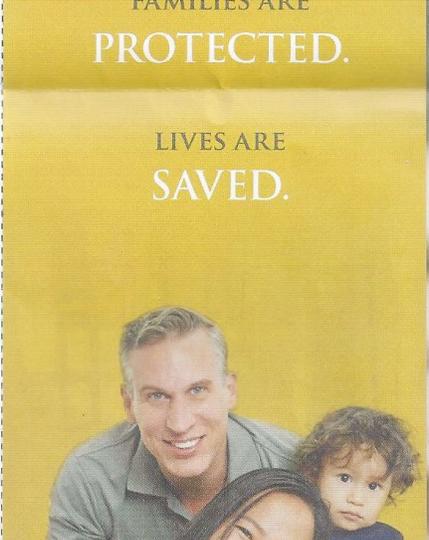
Appendix One

This is what Christian schools are battling in the second decade of the 21st century, just one example from the newsletter "Freedom Insider," *Alliance Defending Freedom*, March 2022, pp. 4-5.



**Gordon College
v. DeWeese-Boyd**

A decision by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court allows the government to interfere with who can teach the faith at Gordon College, a distinctly Christian institution of higher education.



**Court: Maryland Violated a
Christian School's Rights**

Maryland officials violated the First Amendment rights of a church-run grade school, Bethel Christian Academy, when they revoked the school's eligibility to participate in a voucher program to benefit low-income students because of the school's religious beliefs on marriage and sexuality. State officials even demanded that Bethel pay back more than \$100,000 in scholarships it received for its previous participation. The court ruled that the school did not engage in any discrimination that would disqualify it from the program and did not have to pay back any money — thanks be to God!