On June 1, 2020, the then president Donald J. Trump walked with administration officials from the White House to St. John’s Episcopal Church in Lafayette Square. Stopping in front of the church parish house, which had sustained damage during Black Lives Matter protests, Trump held a leather-bound Bible aloft in the air, posing for photographs. “Is that your Bible?” a journalist asked. “It’s a Bible,” Trump responded.

How do we make sense of this event? All American presidents thus far have placed their right hands on a Bible when swearing an oath of allegiance to “preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.” Thus, the office of the American president and the Bible have been historically intrinsically linked since 1789. But this event was something altogether different, not to be forgotten.

Devin C. Manzullo-Thomas, in his 2022 book, *Exhibiting Evangelicalism: Commemoration and Religion’s Presence of the Past*, gives readers a lens through which to understand how “evangelical heritage” has been “deployed” in American society (p. 3). These are words chosen by Manzullo-Thomas to indicate the determination of conservative Protestant Christians, called Evangelicals, to legitimize, elevate, and create cohesion for their movement and to do it through a form of public history practice that replicated developments in American society (p. 4). The book is centered on the mid-twentieth century and the reemergence of evangelicalism after World War II, crossing over into the early twenty-first century to touch on the New Christian Right. But this does not mean we cannot use the public history methodology modeled by Manzullo-Thomas to examine June 1, 2020, or any number of evangelical Christian-infused media materials that proliferate around us as we head toward 2026, the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States, for example, heritage museums—which is Manzullo-Thomas's subject matter—or a video of an American president making a political statement under the cloak of evangelical Christianity. It is not hard to see how Trump’s short pilgrimage-style walk and per-
formance in front of a historic sacred building, with a Bible in hand, was calling on evangelical heritage to legitimize him, his politics, and, by extension, his voters and their interests.

Manzullo-Thomas states in his introduction that for far too long historians and scholars have sidelined the study of religion causing a fracture that he wishes to mend through the practice of public history. Using public history—which privileges the use of historic sites, archives, objects, oral histories, and more—as a complementary examination method to the history of religion is appropriate says Manzullo-Thomas because an “interdisciplinary approach enables the examination of evangelical heritage from vantages beyond those typically taken by historians, resulting in a more layered reading of evangelical museums and their purposes” (p. 5). As noted, evangelical museums and their exhibits, historic sites, and libraries are the focus of this book. The author begins his story with an account of early fundamentalist beginnings in the 1920s, highlighting the role of women in the burgeoning application of heritage for evangelicals, despite rampant sexism and racism. As the book progresses, Manzullo-Thomas delineates how practitioners of evangelical heritage intersected with larger trends in society toward professionalization and identity building, in the use of cultural tools, such as commemoration.

The first historic house in the United States, George Washington’s Mount Vernon, was a project put together by a group of women who thought it important to commemorate the life of Washington and to spread their values through highly selective presentation and interpretation. So, too, was the case in the first evangelical historic house museum, Mount Hood, and the Billy Sunday Home in Winona Lake, Indiana, as Manzullo-Thomas shows us in chapter 1. With Helen Thompson Sunday at its helm—she was the widow of the early twentieth-century popular evangelist Billy Sunday, but also a major force in her own right—evangelical heritage was packaged “to convey a particular ideological message” for visitors from near and far (p. 41). The kind of upper-class needlepoint work done by Martha Washington was also done by Helen Sunday (who put her work on display), endeavoring in her house tours, according to Manzullo-Thomas, to position “Protestant revivalism as culturally mainstream and politically and socially influential” (p. 46). Helen Sunday carefully curated the home she shared with her husband before his death, telling a story of how evangelicalism could be all things to all people: elitist in its architecture and interior decorations yet populist in the stories Helen Sunday told to visitors. Sunday continually reinforced a connection with her husband’s legacy to younger, newer generations of evangelical leaders, establishing a past, present, and future for evangelical Christianity through the deployment of heritage.

Lest a reader think that the evangelical use of heritage was solely a product of the South, Manzullo-Thomas presents an example of the Park Street Church in Boston to balance out the rest of chapter 1. Here, on the Freedom Trail, urban development took hold in the late 1950s and 1960s, with Congregationalists—mainline Protestants—arguing for the placement of the church as the first stop on the trail. Pushing for recognition of the site as important during the revolutionary era, promoters argued it would connect “new evangelicals to national historical narratives—about abolitionism, military service, patriotism, and more—that civic-minded tourists, flocking to the Freedom Trail, would recognize and value” (p. 65). Park Street’s Christianity was evangelized by emphasizing certain aspects of theology. From Boston city boosterism to evangelical heritage, it all worked together because longtime pastor Harold John Ockenga found a way to marry theology with redevelopment, as “both a financial investment and a spiritual opportunity” (p. 57). Through this case study, Manzullo-Thomas shows that evangelicalism has been tainted with the concerns of contem-
emporary American society and economics, equal to any other enterprise.

In chapters 2, 3, and 4, Manzullo-Thomas goes on to work with the evangelical heritages centered on the figure of preacher Billy Graham and his son Franklin, which propel the narrative into the twenty-first century. Moving on from inventing to reviving, experiencing, and weaponizing evangelical heritage, Billy Graham became the face and voice of the new Evangelical. To preserve his personal archive, Graham and his cadre crafted a repository modeled after presidential libraries for his collections. The library was hagiographic in form, intending both to commemorate and to instill civic virtues, but further to become an active site for converting visitors to evangelicalism. Once “evangelical masculinity” wrested power from the site’s original female director, planning for the Billy Graham Center Museum at Wheaton College in Illinois, and later at the Billy Graham Library in Charlotte, North Carolina, coincided with American society's turn toward “immersive, emotional experiences ... intertwined with the experience economy” (pp. 83, 102). Evangelicals had the ability to capitalize on this turn in spades, due to Graham's particular preaching style and connection with his flock through wildly popular “crusades,” revivals, radio, and television appearances. Americans already felt nostalgia for the passing of the previous century, and in these new public spaces, the need to “turn back to conservative Protestant Christianity as the only possible panacea for the nation’s social and cultural ills” was reinforced time and again (p. 157). The usual suspects of patriarchy, racism, misogyny, hatred toward homosexuality, and celebration of the rural over the urban are part of this evangelical heritage work, which aimed to “cultivate new culture warriors” (p. 158).

Trump's mini-pilgrimage walk, in which the end goal was not a spiritual awakening but a photo-op, demonstrated how it is possible to deploy evangelical heritage, negotiating fine lines between religion, politics, and government.

*Exhibiting Evangelicalism* exists to uncover how heritage propped up the modern evangelical narrative, which all sorts of people—from church leaders to corporations to politicians—continue to use for their means and ends, affecting in real time not just the way we view the historical past but also the very laws that govern our lives. In other words, it is more than timely to understand the evangelical heritage project, which is, in essence, an ongoing project to achieve cultural, social, and political power. Manzullo-Thomas provides great insight into the workings of disparate evangelical faith traditions, writing in a clear, easily accessible style, building his case study from archival collections, and often using under-studied or newly acquired materials. The book functions well on at least two levels: as a key to understanding the evangelical use of heritage and as a great model for doing public history. Manzullo-Thomas, who teaches at Messiah University in Pennsylvania and directs an archival center there, offers readers a critical study of a timely and relevant subject for American society. He has deftly managed this feat by relying on the historian's skill of close readings of the materials at hand, knit within a larger narrative.
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