With both fanfare and scorn, the Creation Museum opened its doors in Kentucky in 2007. Built by Answers in Genesis (AiG), a leading young-Earth creationist group, the museum strives to persuade visitors that if one views both the Bible (a close, literal reading) and nature as sources of authority, then the Earth appears to be much younger (at approximately six to ten thousand years old) than conventionally understood. In *Righting America at the Creation Museum*, Susan and William Trollinger argue that the popularity and prominence of the museum in the media, in part due to its controversial claims, underscore why this unusual site deserves a closer look. As they argue, “the museum exists and thrives not because it is so preposterous—although some people are surely drawn to it precisely for this reason—but because it represents and speaks to the religious and political commitments of a large swath of the American population” (2). The Trollingers seek to identify the Museum’s central message, its communication strategy, and AiG’s subsequent vision for and actual role in the Christian community, along with the broader religious and political landscape. While the Trollingers explicitly state that their goal is not to assess the validity of the claims presented throughout the museum, they do consistently seek to distinguish between what the museum says and what it does in practice. They do so by drawing primarily from museum visits during which they closely examine its exhibits and the materials for sale on-site and online.

The authors’ commitment to providing both a “tour” and detailed analyses of the scientific, religious, and political implications of the Creation Museum’s arguments organizes the book. The first three chapters are labeled as such: “Museum,” “Science,” and “Bible.” In “Museum,” they address the thorny question whether the Creation Museum even has the right to call itself a museum. A highlight is the lucid discussion of how the Creation Museum’s “7 Cs,” a mnemonic device for framing historical eras presented within the Bible, is closely tied to the much earlier “7 Ds” of dispensationalism, a long-standing historical interpretation of the Bible for nineteenth-century fundamentalists. This parallel underscores the Trollingers’ larger claim that the museum aims to engage attendees with similar religious perspectives and their familiarity with this type of framing device for biblical understanding.

In “Science,” the Trollingers address the distinctions that AiG make between “observational” science (conventional scientific method, empirically falsifiable) and “historical” science (inferences or models about historical events). By underscoring this difference, the authors argue, AiG aim to question the basis for evolutionary models about human origins (69). The Trollingers offer a close reading of placards related to scientific claims throughout the museum and analyze the extent to which observational science is presented. Their painstaking analysis identifies the minimal amount of evidence the museum presents that would qualify as observational according to AiG’s own definition.

In “Bible,” the authors unpack what the Creation Museum has carefully selected for presentation. The authors find that many biblical passages are presented without much
context or are edited in a way that obscures common interpretations. This is an important finding in light of AiG’s stance that the Bible is without error and any misunderstandings of this sacred text are due to human error. The passages and the iteration of the Bible that AiG select matter greatly, and the Trollingers demonstrate how tricky such a “commonsensical” approach is when interpreting the Bible (112–13).

The final two chapters, “Politics” and “Judgment,” contextualize the museum’s message. In “Politics,” they focus on how AiG drive home their central message, “a radical binary in which the visitor is confronted with two sets of tightly linked terms … Bible-young Earth-Eden-truth-heaven versus human reason-evolution and old Earth-sin-corruption-hell” (149). In this view, public schools are secular sites of brainwashing, Christian America is under attack, and patriarchal family structures are God’s intention. The Trollingers underscore how this framing is not unique to the Creation Museum, and much scholarship exists on the subject. Beyond these points, however, the distinct contributions from this chapter are less clear. If the chapter’s purpose is to articulate the museum’s relationship with larger political traditions stemming from Christian America, it is surprising that the reader does not gain a better sense of how successful AiG are in brandishing their call against a “compromised” worldview (149).

In the chapter “Judgment,” the Trollingers offer a clearer sense of just how AiG engage with the public, namely local Christian colleges. Still, this exploration is largely one-sided. They write, “The Creation Museum is not an inexplicable anomaly precariously existing on the fringes of American life. Instead, it is a mainstream Christian Right institution” (234). While this may not be inaccurate, it is difficult for the reader to fully embrace this claim when the focus of the book has mostly rested on a close reading of the museum’s exhibits. They do not systematically address how others engage with the Creation Museum. Is it similar to or different from other Creation-oriented museums, publishing houses, research centers, and media empires so central to the power and efficacy of the Christian right? What were AiG’s intentions behind the museum in relation to the broader creationist movement? What about the museum do people find compelling and what do they ignore? Without this kind of bird’s-eye view of the museum’s reach, the reader is left without a clear answer to their underlying question about the broader religious and political implications of the museum.

Righting America at the Creation Museum does not draw on any data that are not available to the public. On one hand, this is a strength and the central goal of the book – to decipher for the public what the museum displays and what significance, if any, it holds for understanding creationism better. On the other hand, this limits the range of claims the authors are able to substantiate and much remains unexamined. In the end, however, the book certainly warrants the attention of those interested in creationism, the US fundamentalist movement, and museums. Its broader contribution to our understanding of the US religious right’s impact outside electoral politics (this is a museum, after all) or why alternatives to mainstream scientific authority remain compelling for so many has yet to be fully examined.

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