It is July 7, 2016, opening day at Ark Encounter. Some four thousand of us have descended on tiny Williamstown, Kentucky, where Amish construction workers hired by Answers in Genesis have built a 510-foot-long, multilevel wooden replica of Noah’s Ark. Up on level three we learn about the limits of natural selection, rival interpretations of the fossil record, and how many ice ages there were (one, in contradiction to modern science). But the main point is on level one, where visitors are reminded of why Noah’s family built the ark. God created a “Perfect World”; humanity became “extremely wicked”; and in his “Divine Judgement,” God slaughtered nineteen billion people with a worldwide flood. Quotes from scripture underline the point that we are once again living in the “days of Noah.” Our current sins signal the coming end times, when Jesus will return and redeem the Christian faithful. AiG’s population figures may contravene the conclusions of demographers, but they make a fundamentally political point, not a scientific one. If you dare to rebel against God’s word, the cost will be unthinkably high.
Compared to the Creation Museum, where the Graffiti Alley and Culture in Crisis exhibits were specific about “extremely wicked” behavior, Ark Encounter is more circumspect, with only indirect references to gay marriage and abortion. If the treatment of general culture-war politics was muted at Ark Encounter, the specific connection that George McCready Price had originally drawn nearly a century earlier between evolutionary thought and communism was absent. In the Ark Encounter bookstore, you could find AiG’s *Pocket Guide* to Noah’s Ark, but not Hodge’s volume on atheism that mathematically tallies up communism’s victims. It might seem as if the Red Dynamite tradition were dead and buried forever. But such a pronouncement is premature in light of the broader political currents in which Answers in Genesis swims. Ark Encounter opened its door less than two weeks before the Republican Party convention in Cleveland nominated Donald Trump for president. The 2016 presidential race and its aftermath revealed that socialism, the immorality of rebellion, and evolutionary ideas can still be linked in ways that resonate with American evangelicals.

The persistence of Red Dynamite politics emerged from a strategic alliance between conservative Christians and Donald Trump’s presidential campaign. Months before Ark Encounter opened its doors, AiG’s Ken Ham penned a positive appraisal of the “Donald Trump Phenomenon.” While he did not formally endorse the real estate mogul, Ham was “intrigued” by the mass support for Trump and felt impelled to offer his thoughts on how the candidate’s success offered positive lessons for Answers in Genesis. Acknowledging that Trump “does not promote the Christian worldview,” Ham still admired the way that Trump “comes across as genuine” and speaks “with conviction and authority.” Many Christians like Trump, Ham believed, because they “are sick of the political correctness in this nation, as well as the liberal, humanistic agenda of much of the secular media!”

Other prominent evangelicals jumped on the Trump bandwagon early. Like Ken Ham, they recognized that millions of rank-and-file evangelicals were drawn to Trump’s plainspoken calls for barring immigration from Mexico and the Middle East, his denunciation of trade deals, his “outsider” status, his nostalgia for a mythical American past, and his willingness to tell the truth about the miserable economic conditions facing
working people. The first to do so was Jerry Falwell Jr., then president of Liberty University and son of its esteemed founder. Trump addressed conservative Christian fears in his January 18, 2016, invited speech at Liberty, telling students they were “under siege” from secular political correctness.\(^3\)

With Falwell’s blessing, the candidate gained entrée into the larger evangelical world. At a June 2016 summit meeting with several hundred nationally known evangelical leaders in New York City, failed Republican presidential hopeful Governor Mike Huckabee of Arkansas and Focus on the Family founder James Dobson played prominent roles. Huckabee set the tone by making it clear the group would not challenge Trump’s Christian credentials. “I don’t think anybody here expects you to be theological today,” he said. What they did expect were answers to some key questions: if elected, would Trump appoint “pro-life” US Supreme Court justices? Would Trump protect the Second Amendment? Would Trump revoke the Johnson Amendment, prohibiting tax-exempt nonprofits, including churches, from endorsing candidates for public office?\(^4\) In an interview after the meeting, James Dobson put his theological seal of approval on the presidential hopeful. Trump was a “baby Christian” on the road to salvation.\(^5\)

It may seem inexplicable that antievolutionist Ken Ham and his conservative Christian counterparts positively entertained the prospect of a Trump presidency. Trump is “social Darwinism” incarnate. He built a career on ruthless competition. He boasted that he would recruit “Wall Street killers” to conduct trade negotiations. He was catapulted to reality TV fame by *The Apprentice*, in which job applicants engage in a battle for survival of the fittest (to work for Donald Trump).\(^6\) Trump grew up attending Norman Vincent Peale’s Presbyterian church.\(^7\) But from Trump’s reference to the Eucharist wafer as the “little cracker,” to his rendering of 2 Corinthians as “two Corinthians,” to his admission that he never asks forgiveness of God for his sins, he has difficulty convincing anyone that he is part of any Christian faith community.\(^8\)

Yet it would be a mistake to imagine that conservative evangelicals’ embrace of Trump is a radical departure from the norm. Politics—in the broad sense of who has power over whom in society—has always been intertwined with religious faith commitments.\(^9\) This fact explains how a freely cursing, nominally Christian Barry Goldwater, and Ronald Reagan,
the only divorced president, could become the darlings of the Christian Right. It also explains how antievolutionist and anticommunist J. Frank Norris could ever have become a hero to rank-and-file Baptists from Fort Worth to Detroit. Unlike Trump, Norris spoke the language of Christian faith fluently. But he also shot and killed a man in his office under questionable circumstances. He stood trial for murder, was suspected of arson, and was so unscrupulous and dictatorial in his dealings with his church associates that longtime Norris loyalist G. Beauchamp Vick left First Baptist and started his own non-Norris denomination. Norris reveled in his bad-boy persona and mixed it with a good dose of populism. Typical of his era’s Southern Baptists, Norris was a staunch segregationist and friend of the Klan. In his own way, he was as Trumpian as they come.

In the wake of the June 2016 New York meeting, despite Trump’s lowly “baby Christian” status, he created a twenty-six-member Evangelical Executive Advisory Board whose members included those with a live connection to Red Dynamite politics. Take former US Representative Michele Bachmann (R–MN). A graduate of the Oral Roberts University Law School, Bachmann learned about the law from John Eidsmoe, whose book *God and Caesar* continued the hallowed tradition of fabricated Bolshevik quotes to prove the immorality of communism. Oral Roberts employed John Whitehead, the Rushdoonian collaborator of Francis Schaeffer, whose *How Should We Then Live?* made a major impact on the young Bachmann. After she and her husband went through the experience of founding a charter school that taught creationism (but then lost a legal battle on this point), Bachmann became acquainted with the writings of David Noebel and soon joined the Summit board of directors. She spoke at Summit summer workshops, and as a Minnesota state senator listed on her website Noebel’s *Understanding the Times* as one of her nine favorite books. When D. James Kennedy’s Coral Ridge Ministries issued a new antisocialist (and anti-Obama) “documentary” film, *Socialism: A Clear and Present Danger* (2010), Bachmann appeared as one of the talking heads, along with David Noebel and Jay Richards, the pro-capitalist Discovery Institute staffer. Bachmann’s presence on Trump’s advisory board linked him to a deep legacy of conservative Christian activism.

That legacy runs even deeper in evangelical Trump adviser Rev. Robert Jeffress Jr. (1955–). Jeffress grew up attending First Baptist Church in
Dallas, Texas, where pastor W.A. Criswell (1909–2002) held forth every Sunday. A contemporary and admirer of J. Frank Norris, Criswell was a longtime fundamentalist Baptist leader (and fierce segregationist) who inherited Norris’s role after his death in 1952. Jeffress, now at the helm at First Baptist in Dallas, with a congregation of some 110,000, channels Norris by associating evolution with moral decline. In *Countdown to the Apocalypse* (2015), Jeffress decried the idea that human civilization is progressing—“the whole thesis of evolution.” Rather, the country has descended into “moral disorder” and “an orgy of self-gratification.” Jeffress has also lent his voice to “scientific” creationism. At the groundbreaking ceremony for the new ICR Discovery Center (a Dallas-based rival to AiG’s Creation Museum), Jeffress was a featured speaker.

Not only is he outspoken about politics, appearing regularly on Fox News to denounce gay marriage and Islam, but Jeffress also channels the Shooting Parson’s combativeness. Asked why he supported Trump, given the candidate’s abrasive tone, Jeffress replied that when a president is negotiating with Iran or at war with ISIS, “I couldn’t care less about that leader’s temperament or his tone or his vocabulary. Frankly, I want the meanest, toughest son of a gun I can find. And I think that’s the feeling of a lot of evangelicals. They don’t want a Caspar Milquetoast as the leader of the free world.” When it comes to US foreign policy, the ends justify the means. Anticommunists from Dan Gilbert to Ronald Reagan had consistently called attention to what Gilbert termed Marxism’s “wolf pack” ethics as a detestable alternative to Christian moralism. Reagan had paraphrased Lenin on this—that whatever is necessary to advance the march to socialism is moral. Today’s conservative Christians are no different. They are also determined to achieve their ends—to resist reformist and revolutionary social change—by any means necessary.

As Donald Trump moved toward Republican front-runner status, he began to gather around him a number of conservative Christians with solid antievolution credentials. They included Trump’s running mate Mike Pence (1959–), a Christian evangelical who had publicly attacked the validity of evolutionary science in 2002 as a Republican US representative from Indiana. Reacting to a newly published article in *Nature* that suggested that ideas about human evolution would need to be revised, Pence used the occasion to lambaste evolution as a “sincere theory” but not a “fact,” and called for schools to teach it as such. He affirmed his
own belief in creationism, backed up by the Declaration of Independence and the Bible, both of which spoke of a “creator.” 17

Whereas Mike Pence questioned evolution but stopped short of pinning social and political evils on Darwin, Ben Carson (1955–), the man Trump would pick as housing secretary, pointedly connected socialism and evolution with Satan. Born and raised in Detroit in a Seventh-day Adventist family, Carson became a world-famous Johns Hopkins University pediatric surgeon and entered national politics when he delivered a blistering attack on President Barack Obama at the 2013 National Prayer Breakfast. America the Beautiful (2012), coauthored with his wife, Candy Carson, gave a glimpse of the politics Ben Carson brought to the table. The authors paid tribute to the “Tea Party” revolt within the Republican Party, slammed “political correctness,” called for a return to traditional Judeo-Christian values, and, like Chad Hovind and Jay Richards, took on the challenge to defend “capitalism” from its critics. 18

Satan came into the picture in late 2015 when Carson was still considered a viable Republican front-runner. As attempts mounted to discredit Carson in the eyes of potential Republican voters, a video surfaced of a talk he gave to an Adventist audience in 2012. Asked about the status of evolution as a “theory” and not a fact, Carson answered, “I personally believe that this theory that Darwin came up with was something that was encouraged by the adversary, and it has become what is scientifically, politically correct.” 19 As that audience knew, the adversary was Satan. A writer for the New Yorker called Carson’s ideas “wild delusions.” 20 But no one should have been surprised. Satan plays a particularly active part in Adventist theology, as illustrated by Ellen G. White’s The Great Controversy, the book that the original flood geologist George McCready Price sold in the backwoods of Prince Edward Island a century earlier. ICR founder Henry Morris had explained for decades that the origin of evolutionary thought goes back to the Great Deceiver.

At the 2016 Republican National Convention, now firmly in the Trump camp, Carson elaborated further on the satanic connection. As he went off script before millions of television viewers, Carson pointed to the disturbing association between then-presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton and socialist “community organizer” Saul Alinsky. Carson accurately related that the young Hillary Rodham considered Alinsky one of her “heroes” and “mentors.” Then Carson
dropped his bomb: the epigraph to Alinsky’s book *Rules for Radicals* (1971) included the following line: “Lest we forget at least an over-the-shoulder acknowledgment to the very first radical... who rebelled against the establishment and did it so effectively that he at least won his own kingdom—Lucifer.” Reeling off examples of America’s public expressions of indebtedness to “God” and our “Creator,” Carson asked, “So, are we willing to elect someone as president, who has as their role model, somebody who acknowledged Lucifer?” “No!” the crowd thundered back. For the thousands who had passed through the ICR museum in Santee, California, and believed the authoritative-looking panel informing them that the pro-evolutionist Karl Marx was “(according to some) a Satanist in college,” Carson’s news about Alinsky and Clinton added credence to the charge.

Although she had not spoken publicly of Satan, the Trump cabinet appointee who most reliably could provide a transmission belt for creationist anticommunism was his choice for secretary of education, Betsy DeVos. A native of Holland, Michigan, who grew up in the conservative Christian Reformed Church, DeVos had made headlines campaigning for charter schools in Michigan. Her father-in-law was Richard DeVos Sr., the founder of the Amway empire and funder of many conservative causes, including D. James Kennedy’s Coral Ridge Ministries. The foundation he ran with his wife Helen, a onetime member of Kennedy’s congregation, gave Coral Ridge more than $15 million from 1998 to 2009. While Betsy DeVos generally kept mum in public on hot-button culture-war issues, she did share with a high-level Christian philanthropic meeting her Reformed desire to “advance God’s kingdom” on earth. That goal apparently included support for teaching intelligent design. Through the Dick and Betsy DeVos foundation, she helped fund the Thomas More Law Center just a few years before it represented the Dover, Pennsylvania, school board and its plan to introduce ID in local public schools.

There is no sign that DeVos was publicly boosting the creationist cause or denouncing socialism during the 2016 campaign. But conservative Christians saw their opportunity to lobby her, and they took it. Before DeVos was confirmed, she heard from leaders of the Council for National Policy (CNP). A high-level Christian conservative group founded by Tim
LaHaye in 1981, CNP has strong links to the DeVos family. The CNP Education Committee sent Betsy DeVos a report urging the “restoration” of education based on “Judeo-Christian principles.” Among their suggestions for the secretary nominee was that the White House forge relationships with “key pastoral networks”—prominently including Dave Welch’s US Pastor Council—to help Christian believers understand the stakes involved. The ultimate goal was to promote a “gradual, voluntary” shift from public “secular” education to private, church-based, and home schools.25

A clue to what the content of that nonpublic education might look like came from Dan Smithwick, the chair of the CNP Education Committee. A former AT&T executive who worked for Pat Robertson’s campaign (as did Welch), Smithwick comes out of the Reformed tradition and has been strongly influenced by the Reconstructionism of both R. J. Rushdoony and D. James Kennedy.26 In 1986, he founded the Nehemiah Institute, a conservative Christian worldview training organization that has worked closely with both the ICR and David Noebel’s Summit Ministries.27 Nehemiah is best known for a worldview opinion survey called PEERS (Politics, Economics, Education, Religion, Social Issues) that it has administered to more than 110,000 students since 1987. Based on ratings of a battery of seventy true-false statements—for example, “Human life came into existence less than 10 thousand years ago” (true)—Nehemiah classifies young people as holding worldviews ranging from “Christian Theism” (best) to “Moderate Christian” to “Secular Humanism” to “Socialism” (worst).

The results have been discouraging for Smithwick’s group. Based on responses to a different worldview survey, one group of Atlanta students were split into creationist and evolutionist cohorts. After administering the PEERS test to them, Smithwick found that a sizable minority of the creationists were in the secular humanist or socialist categories. As he reported to ICR members in *Acts & Facts*, the scores of the evolutionists were even “lower . . . well into the Socialism worldview category.”28 In 2001, Smithwick warned that if the decline continued, evangelical public school students would be lost to socialism by 2014.29 This nightmare prediction converged with a similar recognition by Answers in Genesis that they are losing young people on the critical culture war issues of gay marriage, abortion rights, and religious “freedom” laws. Thus Ken Ham’s jeremiad,
Donald Trump’s planned appointment of Betsy DeVos gave Smithwick and his fellow worldview warriors renewed hope.

In November 2016, conservative Christians celebrated as Donald Trump was elected forty-fifth president of the United States. Exit polls suggested that some 80 percent of white evangelicals voted for Trump. Ken Ham wasted no time using Trumpian themes to boost the creationist cause. On Inauguration Day, in a blog post titled “How to Make America Great Again,” Ham put a friendly twist on Trump’s campaign slogan. The only way to make America great, Ham explained, was to rely on God’s word as the “absolute authority in all areas.” Soon after, Ham took up the subject of “fake news,” originally a term referring to deliberately fabricated online news stories. Now embracing Donald Trump’s expanded definition and deploying it for creationist purposes, Ham wrote, “The two greatest fake news items permeating Western cultures are molecules-to-man evolution and millions of years.” Ham identified with Trump as a fellow fake news victim: “The left-wing secular media is doing to President Trump what they’ve done to us for years—spreading false accusations, lies, and misinformation.” In the wake of negative publicity about smaller-than-expected crowds at Ark Encounter, Ham warned Creation Museum visitors that the “media” was not to be trusted. “You can’t believe a thing they say,” Ham said. For visitors who accepted AiG’s claim that evolution was a satanic plot responsible for catastrophic moral decline, it made sense not to trust that plot’s promoters.

Four months after Trump’s inauguration, Ham sent a letter to AiG supporters spelling out the connection between evolution and moral decline, with a dash of Red Dynamite politics. For more than forty years, Ham wrote, he had been teaching about the link between “atheistic evolution and morality.” In a rare acknowledgment of the nonscientific character of ICR founder Henry Morris’s work, Ham noted that Morris, too, had connected evolution and morals. Invoking abortion and gay marriage as examples of growing immorality, Ham insisted that the evolution controversy was not just about science, but a clash of worldviews. In his debate with Bill Nye, he had highlighted the moral aspect of the subject and had been ridiculed. Now Bill Nye had proved Ham’s point, with his new Netflix show, *Bill Nye Saves the World*. As Ham related, in a recent
episode of this educational and scientific show, Crazy Ex-Girlfriend star Rachel Bloom performed a “lewd” song called “My Sex Junk” to promote transgender values. To drive home the point, Ham pointed to yet another example of how evolutionary thinking threatened the moral, social, and political order: the novel Brave New World by Aldous Huxley, onetime socialist, eugenicist, and grandson of Charles Darwin’s “bulldog.” Ham quoted Huxley about his youthful rebellion, which aimed at restraints on both “sexual freedom” and the “political and economic system.” As Huxley described it, he was engaged in “political and erotic revolt.”

In the summer of 2019, a group of people in Cumberland, Kentucky, engaged in a different kind of revolt and unwittingly illuminated the real stakes in the culture war over evolutionary science. Located about a four-hour drive southeast from the Creation Museum and about the same distance northeast from Dayton, Tennessee, of Scopes trial fame, Cumberland sits in Harlan County, also known as “Bloody Harlan,” after the famed coal-mining labor battles going back to the 1930s. Mining jobs are scarce today, and Harlan is Trump country, with nearly 85 percent of voters backing him in 2016. Faithful Christian visitors to tiny Cumberland (population 2,237) have their choice of at least four evangelical churches and can pay a visit to nearby Kingdom Come State Park, which draws hikers from miles around hoping to see a black bear.

What made Cumberland nationally known in July–August 2019 was a coal miners’ rebellion. Earlier that summer, the giant Blackjewel mining company had stopped production. Company owners declared bankruptcy, refused to pay miners, blocked access to their retirement funds, and even received permission from a judge to retroactively take back funds already deposited in employees’ bank accounts. Starting on July 29, a small group of Blackjewel miners set up a protest camp square in the middle of the railroad tracks, blocking a trainload of coal they had dug worth $1 million from leaving the Cloverlick number 3 mine. Their slogan: “No pay, we stay.” A month later, the miners, now joined by hundreds of community members and supporters from near and far, were still there waiting for their money.

Six days after the Cumberland miners began their protest, Ken Ham posted to the AiG blog. He did not mention the miners’ action, but his
message was all about labor activism and fit squarely in the Red Dynamite tradition of creationist politics. In “Teachers Union Endorses Killing Unborn Children,” Ham expressed alarm that delegates at the recent annual meeting of the National Education Association (NEA) in Houston had approved a resolution supporting a woman’s “fundamental” right to choose abortion. Ham devoted most of his post to answering the NEA’s pro-choice arguments with anti-choice talking points. But the key to Ham’s underlying worldview appeared in his summary of comments by fellow AiG speaker Bryan Osborne, who attended the Houston conference. As Ham summarized Osborne, “It’s a dark place. . . . [Osborne said that] a spirit of rebellion and the idea of ‘we won’t take this anymore’ was everywhere in the expo hall, in the imagery (such as the closed, raised fist) that was on display, and in many of the presentations given. Bryan also shared that socialist, Marxist philosophy—stemming from a secular, evolutionary worldview—permeated the convention.” The photo following these lines featured a large banner in the foreground that depicts a teacher, an African American woman, speaking into a megaphone, as a large crowd of people in the background hold aloft their closed fists.

As Ken Ham knew, over the previous three years, public school teachers and allied school workers had carried out strikes and protests in primarily “red” states like West Virginia, Arizona, Colorado, Oklahoma, North Carolina, and Kentucky. The “Red for Ed” teachers perfectly embodied the “spirit of rebellion,” including the raised fists, animating the 2019 NEA gathering. In the name of adequate funding for public education, the welfare of their students, and dignity on the job, teachers were saying, precisely, “we won’t take this anymore.” But as John R. Rice had written decades earlier, “the heart of all sin is rebellion against authority.” Ham did not need to tell his readers why Osborne had described the teachers’ convention as a “dark place.” Teachers who went on strike—and presumably coal miners who blocked coal trains—served Satan. Rebellious workers, channeling an evolutionary and communistic worldview, acted against the wishes of God.

More trouble was on the way. In 2020, the ranks of rebellious working people widened under the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the deepest economic crisis since the 1930s, and a giant movement against police brutality sparked by the police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis.
Although Senator Bernie Sanders failed to secure the Democratic presidential nomination and agreed to stump for the Democratic Joseph Biden–Kamala Harris ticket, his 2016 democratic socialist political campaign had irrevocably fractured the party and shifted its political center of gravity to the left. In mass mobilizations during the summer of 2020 in Portland, Chicago, Kenosha, Seattle, and elsewhere, prominent roles were played by activists associated with Antifa, a loose grouping of anarchist-influenced radicals who promoted “direct action” tactics under cover of dark that included setting fires, looting, and smashing windows.43

The improbable result thirty years after the end of the Cold War: red-baiting, antisocialist, anti-Marxist politics stood at the center of a Republican presidential campaign. As the 2020 election approached, Fox News warned about “modern-day Bolsheviks” like democratic socialist US Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D–NY) and her growing influence in the Democratic Party; President Trump tweeted denunciations of “Radical Left anarchists” and the “Marxist group” Black Lives Matter.44 Conspiracy theory has also made a significant comeback, with a nod from President Trump.45 QAnon conspiracy promoters do not invoke Darwin as part of the “deep state” plot they claim is unfolding. But their focus on a secret cabal of satanic pedophiles resonates with past imagined plots involving the devil, evolution, and sexual immorality going back a century.46 Adding billionaire investor George Soros to the mix lends credence to time-honored claims of Jewish conspiracy as well.47

While President Trump did not connect the communist threat with the dangers of Darwinism, D. James Kennedy Ministries was pleased to supply the missing link in The Coming Communist Wave: What Happens If the Left Captures All Three Branches of Government (2020). On the first page of this pamphlet, veteran journalist and conservative activist Robert H. Knight warned that socialism (embodied in the Democratic Party) was part of Marx’s evolutionary theory. Like Darwin, Marx believed that societies “naturally evolve toward higher stages” without any “divine direction.” Knight cited polling data showing that millennials increasingly embraced socialism and rejected capitalism. If the Democrats won the White House in 2020, Knight explained, America would become an evolved, socialist, atheist state dictating “sinister” social norms at odds with the Ten Commandments. Widespread acceptance of abortion rights,
gay rights, and transgender rights signaled to Knight that a satanic social evolution was already under way. These movements and their socialist promoters sinned by violating “God’s instructions.”

Nearly 130 years earlier, shortly before the birth of John Scopes, rebel coal miners in the hills of East Tennessee refused to follow the instructions of state political leaders and instead took up arms against the convict lease system. Defenders of the established order called them communists and anarchists. Within a few decades, conservative Christians pinned similar charges on John Scopes and his allies. Whether or not the Tennessee rebels or today’s Blackjewel miners or the “Red for Ed” teachers or fighters for gay and transgender rights or the millions of protesters against police brutality in the nation’s streets have given any thought to Charles Darwin, they have acted on the principle of social evolution. Their deeds convey the contention that social norms, morals, and institutions can change so that the world might become a better place for human beings to live and flourish. That contention lies at the heart of the political controversy over evolutionary science. It is through such battles over the state of this world that the conversation about both biological and social evolution can advance.