RESURRECTION & REDEMPTION: HOW THE SECOND COMING OF THE KU KLUX KLAN SHAPED AMERICAN RELIGION, POLITICS, AND CULTURE IN THE PROGRESSIVE ERA

BY SEAN PATTERSON

In 1915 *The New York Times* hailed David Wark Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* as "an impressive new illustration of the scope of the motion picture camera…" going on to explain how the film's best scenes are those that follow "the night riding of the men of the Ku Klux Klan, who look like a company of avenging spectral crusaders sweeping along the moonlit roads."[1] Griffith's motion picture achieved such success that he would be invited to a special screening of the film at the White House, one month before the *Times* published its review. Upon seeing the movie, President Wilson supposedly exclaimed "it is like writing history with lightning!"[2] Indeed, Griffith would incorporate Wilson's support for the film in title cards at later showings.[3] The motion picture is saturated in religious imagery, and includes the likeness of Christ partially descending from heaven, as well as numerous crucifixes, especially those painted on the robes of the Knights of the Klan.[4] It is only fitting that the son of a former Confederate officer would ignite a movement that would soon spread like wildfire across the Nation, far eclipsing the Klan's previous, postbellum incarnation.[5]

In truth, Griffith's watershed motion picture was not an original piece, but rather an adaption of a novel titled *The Clansman: An Historic Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*, written by the southern Baptist minister, Thomas Dixon. Dixon was one of the first entertainers to romanticize the first-generation Ku

---

[1] "The Birth of a Nation," *The New York Times*, March 4, 1915, https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1915/03/04/100144836.html?pageNumber=9.

[2] Marl E. Benbow, "Birth of a Quotation: Woodrow Wilson and 'Like Writing History with Lightning,'" *Journal of the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era*, no. 4 (October 2010): 529. It is uncertain whether Wilson said this, but we do know that he saw Griffith's film, and that he likely had a favorable opinion of the motion picture.

[3] Benbow, "Birth of a Quotation," 518.

[4] David W. Griffith, *The Birth of a Nation*, March 21, 1915 (New York: David W. Griffith Production Company), film.

[5] Richard Baudouin, ed., *Ku Klux Klan: A History of Racism and Violence*, (Montgomery, AL: Southern Poverty Law Center), 23.

Klux Klan in media.[6] Later in 1915, another southern minister, William Simmons, would give life to Griffith's and Dixon's ideas by reviving the white-clad cult. In the fall of 1915, Simmons and his first thirty-four disciples marched to the top of Stone Mountain, Georgia. There, they placed a torch at the foot of a cross and watched as the crucifix was engulfed in flames, marking the beginning of the KKK's rebirth.[7] The Klan was codified in Georgia statute by December of the same year, thus becoming a secret, yet formally recognized order.[8] Following these seminal events, the cult would increase in popularity, as ministers like Dixon and Simmons propagated their hateful rhetoric across the South and eventually all the United States. This reimagining of the Klan was notable in that it exclusively promoted Protestant Christianity while adamantly opposing other religious sects. This reincarnation of the Klan was not only racist, but xenophobic, violent, and distinctively sectarian, as the Klan portrayed themselves as champions of a militant wing of Protestant Christianity.

This paper sets out to analyze the purpose, extent, and consequences of the KKK's cooptation of Protestantism in early-20th Century America. Primary source evidence suggests that the Klan appropriated Protestant beliefs, using the religion as a vehicle through which to spread its ideologies. By marrying the KKK to mainstream Protestantism, Klan leaders were able to achieve unparalleled success as the most popular cult in American history. The KKK's hijacking of the Protestant faith is best exemplified in media publications, rituals, and the Klan's use of Protestant symbols. Lastly, this paper finds that through its use of religious discourse, the Klan's ideologies were able to transcend boundaries of gender and socioeconomic status. Indeed, while this paper's foremost concern is the thread of religion, it touches on a number of other threads that the Klan so cleverly wove together to form the troubled social

---

[6] Thomas Dixon, *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*, (New York, NY: Grosset & Dunlap, 1905). Available online at https://www.gutenberg.org/files/26240/26240-h/26240-h.htm.

[7] Kelly J. Baker, *Gospel According the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant America, 1915-1930*, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 4-5. Dixon also devotes a chapter of his *The Clansman* to the act of cross burning. On page 325 he refers to the act as the "old Scottish rite of the Fiery Cross," noting that the act was intended to "send a thrill of inspiration to every clansman in the hills." As with many of their titles and ranks, the Klan derived the practice of cross burning from the Scottish, who had traditionally done so to rally clansmen to war. A cross burning is used for a similar purpose in *The Birth of a Nation.*

[8] Ku Klux Klan Press Recruiting Pamphlet, "A, B, C of the Invisible Empire, the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan," dated 1917, ID Number 34715, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Tennessee Virtual Archive, TN (hereafter TVA): 7, https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15138coll4/id/223 (accessed January 25, 2020).This citation is credited to page 7 of the pamphlet, or page 13 in the digital catalog.

fabric of early-20th Century America, including the threads of Feminism, Populism, and even Progressivism.

Unfortunately, seminal works on the Klan, while thorough, tend to portray the KKK as a radical movement that operated along an ideological periphery. These works largely ignore the broad appeal that the KKK had to Anglo-Americans of the time. In truth, many of the Klan's ideals were nested neatly within broader, more widely held Progressive Era beliefs. Though, Kelly Baker's G*ospel According to the Klan* does recognize the true extent of the Klan's sociopolitical power in the 1920s, her work still fails to recognize the broad attraction of the ethnoreligious aspect of the group. This paper hopes to remedy these oversights.

The 2nd Generation Klan, while staunchly conservative in its ideas of domesticity and race was also paradoxically progressive in its efforts to incorporate women and exclude immigrants, drawing simultaneously from Victorian, Progressive, and Populist ideals. For these reasons, one must be wary of binomial labels when discussing movements like the Klan's. depictions of the Klan as a socially conservative group has become the *idée fixe* of American historiography, but in truth these labels are simply anthropomorphic conceptions; titles used by historians to ease their reader's cognitive burden. Using the term "conservative" in the pejorative only serves to strip the Klan's ideologies of nuance, therefore inhibiting our understanding of the group.

Above all, the Klan was and continues to be a parasite; an opportunistic organism that served to prolong the pains of Reconstruction and de jure segregation for much longer than necessary. This Klan subscribed to nearly every brand of nationalism: including civic; ethnic; religious; racial; and cultural. Because of the Klan's broad dogmas, any sufficient examination of the hate group must touch on all of these themes. While the 2nd Generation Klan was unique in many ways, its hateful legacy survives today. The spirit of the Klan is alive and well, having morphed and contorted itself into new shapes, fitting neatly within contemporary social discourse. Understanding the Klan is central to combatting its appeal. This article does not intend to restate familiar history, but rather aims to develop new schemas regarding the Klan's memory; in other words, this article seeks to sharpen our understanding of the Klan's impact on the social fabric of America, that when stretched forward into our time, will become unwound in a very distinct manner.

Periodically, these bigoted dictums reemerge in the form of derisive campaign slogans or controversial propaganda. In 1926 one Klan organizer argued that "the Invisible Empire is now placing stones and repairing the wall where enemies of the Cross and civil liberties have well-nigh wrecked it."[9] The significance of the metaphorical "wall" should not be lost on today's

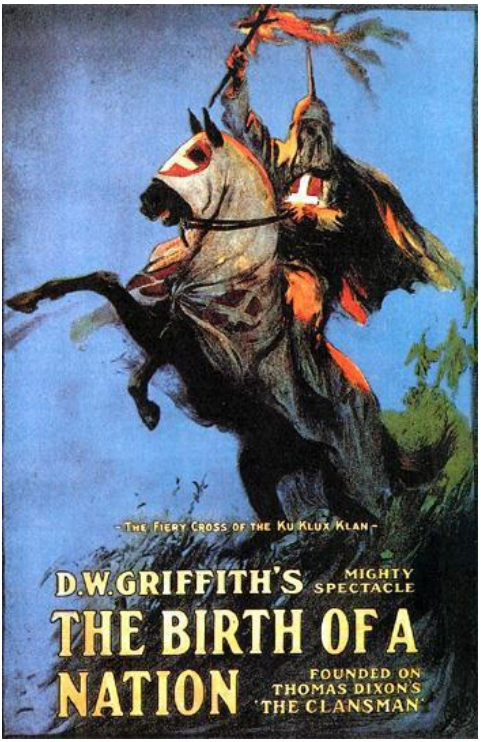


Figure 1: This advertisement is what a moviegoer of 1915 likely would have seen as they passed by a cinema.[10]

readers, as only a few pages later the same organizer wrote "our ports have been wide open to aliens of every caste and creed…millions have come to our shores from the slums of lower Europe…and among these are some of the worst criminals."[11] With the reemergence of identity politics and the gradual deterioration of the political center, the study of cults and hate groups is more

[9] Alma White, *Klansmen: Guardians of Liberty* (Zarephath, NJ: The Good Citizen, 1926), 16.
[10] Richard Schickel, *D.W. Griffith: an American Life*, (New York, NY: Limelight Editions, 1996), 281. Griffith's illustrative marketing techniques would help *The Birth of a Nation* generate more than $60 million in box-office business in its first run.
[11] White, *Klansmen*, 44-45.

important than ever. History is laden with politically inclined cults, often led by strong personalities, appealing to a bygone era.[12] Indeed, the Klan and its leaders harkened back to the cult's first incarnation; the guerrilla movement led by former Confederate cavalry general Nathan Bedford Forest, who fomented insurrection across the Post-Bellum South.[13] Griffith's film was the first of many attempts to romanticize and sanctify the Klan's first manifestation.

Drawing on the film's vivid imagery, Klan leaders and protestant leaders alike were quick to support *The Birth of a Nation,* along with the film's bigoted themes. In fact, many of them voiced their support by using religious prose or by swearing on sacred scripture. One Protestant minister, Thomas B. Gregory, declared that "the story as told by the picture is true…I am ready to swear on the Bible!"[14] Another Protestant reverend, Dr. Charles H. Parkhurst, supported the film as a "detailed scholarly study of history," giving the motion picture his "unqualified approval."[15] But clergymen like Gregory and Parkhurst did not support the film solely on their own accord; they were commissioned to support the film by Griffith and Dixon, who used valuable testimony from prominent figures in the rhetorical war surrounding the film. The film acted as a point of convergence for the Klan and white Protestants who felt like the enfranchisement of Black Americans had somehow lowered their relative social standing or political prominence. It is from this motion picture that the next generation of the Klan would emerge, along with its preferences for Christian rituals and symbology. In this way, *The Birth of a Nation* exemplified the KKK's efforts to coopt American Protestantism and marked the culmination of white backlash to Black enfranchisement, otherwise known as Redemption.

In 1925, Dr. Hiram Walker Evans rose to power as the Klan's Imperial Wizard, a title reserved for the most powerful Klansman in the nation. Only ten years after Simmons's march on Stone Mountain the Klan had risen to national

---

[12] Tyler Cline, "A Dragon, Bog Spawned, Is Now Stretched O'er This Land": The Ku Klux Klan's Patriotic Protestantism in the Northeastern Borderlands During the 1920s and 1930s," *Social History* 52, no. 106 (November 2019): 309-310.

[13] Ku Klux Klan Press Recruiting Pamphlet, "A, B, C of the Invisible Empire, the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan," dated 1917, ID Number 34715, TVA: 1, (page 7 in digital catalog). The 2nd Klan's tendency to romanticize the 1st Klan is integral to understanding a Klansman's identity in this era. The Klan of the Progressive Era venerated Forrest's guerilla movements as the "Great Idea of American Reconstruction," as "men of moral and social standing…social character" who defended the South from "adventurers that swarmed down from the North to use the negro for their own damnable, selfish ends."

[14] Schickel, *D.W. Griffith*, 278.

[15] "Griffith and Dixon Duel with Their Critics: A Mini-Symposium on The Birth of a Nation," *Lehigh University*, July 2010, http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/trial/reels/films/list/0_68_9_106 (accessed October 21, 2019).

prominence, having in excess of five million members.[16] In 1924, the rapidly expanding cult was aiming to add another four million adherents by the Presidential election in the fall.[17]

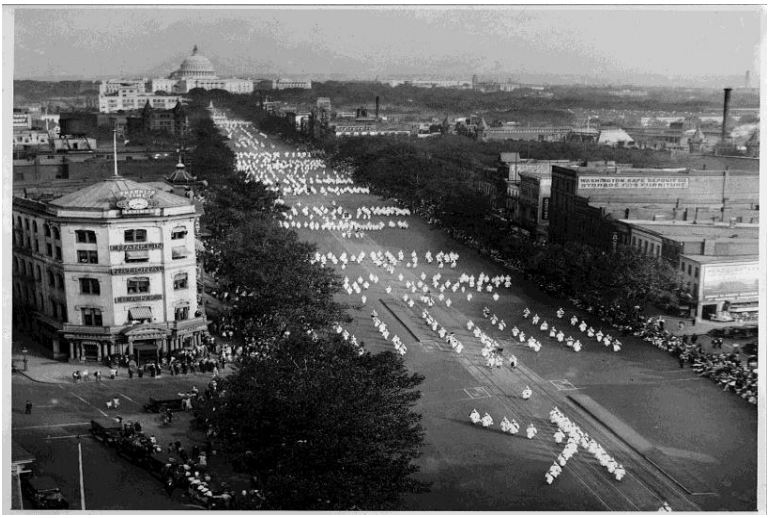


Figure 2: Library of Congress photo of the Klan marching on Washington, D.C. (1926) The Capitol Building can be seen in the background, along with tens of thousands of Klansmen.

Evans and his followers had rapidly established a footprint in all forty-eight states, using weekly periodicals to expand their influence across the American heartland. Many of the Klan's circulars were distributed in areas saturated with Protestants. Chief among these areas was the Midwest, specifically Indiana.[18] In total the Klan would influence dozens of local and

---

[16] William Rawlings, *The Second Coming of the Invisible Empire*, (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2016), 116-117. Historians rarely agree on the total size of the Klan. Rawlings runs through a handful of figures. He refers to estimates of one million members as being "clearly low," and estimates in excess of eight million as "based on speculation." Rawlings goes on to cite Hiram Evans's figure of five million. A CBS documentary *titled Ku Klux Klan: Invisible Empire* posits that at the time of the Klan's famous 1925 march on Washington D.C. its members included nearly six million Americans.

[17] "Power of Five Million Votes is Tremendous," *The Minnesota Fiery Cross*, (March 7, 1924), https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn90059391/1924-03-07/ed-1/seq-7/#date1=1789&index=1&rows=20&words=Klan+KLAN+Klans&searchType=basic&sequence=0&state=&date2=1963&proxtext=Klan&y=0&x=0&dateFilterType=yearRange&page=1.

[18] The Klan's precipitous rise in Indiana was caused by at least two factors. For one, the Great Migration of Black Americans northward bred tension between the races,

national elections. Between 1922 and 1925 the Ku Klux Klan helped to elected "seven governors, three US senators, and half of the 1924 Indiana state legislature."[19]

In one popular periodical, *Kourier Magazine*, Evans wrote "as the star of Bethlehem guided the wise men to Christ, so it is that the Klan is expected more and more to guide men to the right life under Christ's banner."[20] In another Klan publication, *The Imperial Night-Hawk*, Evans went on to write that his ultimate goal was to preserve "a Christian civilization in America," explaining that Klansmen had "obligations to the world…to purify America and make her impregnable…"[21] Allusions to white fraternity and racial prejudice flowed from Evan's pen, along with overt appeals to nationalism. But ultimately the most prevalent themes are those that appeal to Protestantism using religious imagery.

The Klan's use of traditional Protestantism is not only exemplified in their publications, but also in their ceremonies. In 1922 Henry Fry published *The Modern Ku Klux Klan*, in which he detailed the innerworkings of the cult. Fry was a member of the Klan for a brief time, but was appalled by the Klan's naturalization ceremony, or what he refers to as "a sacrilegious parody on the holy rite of baptism…"[22] The ceremony, administered by a senior Klansman, usually an Exalted Cyclops, was intended to initiate new members into the secret society.[23] The ritual was conducted behind closed doors at a sacred alter. On this alter rested an American flag adjacent to a Holy Bible, opened to the book of Romans, which encouraged the initiate to "present [their] bodies to God…let them be a living and holy sacrifice…" and to "not be conformed to

---

especially in the Hoosier state where vigilantism was an established practice. Moreover, the Indiana Klan owed its rapid growth to its charismatic Grand Dragon, D.C. Stephenson. For more information on Stephenson, see William Lutholtz's, *Grand Dragon: D.C. Stephenson and the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana,* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1991).

[19] David A. Horowitz, ed., *Inside the Klavern: The Secret Society of a Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s*, (Carbondale, Il: Southern Illinois University, 1999), 4.

[20] H.W. Evans, "A Message from the Imperial Wizard," *Kourier Magazine* 1, no. 3 (February 1925).

[21] H.W. Evans, "Dr. Evans, Imperial Wizard, Defines Klan Principles" *Imperial Night-Hawk*, 1 no. 43, (January 23, 1924).

[22] Henry Fry, *The Modern Ku Klux Klan*, (Boston, MA: Small, Maynard & Co., 1922), 89.

[23] Thomas Dixon, The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan, (New York, NY: Grosset & Dunlap, 1905), 375. In his seminal, but distorted analysis of the 1st Klan in *The Clansman*, Thomas Dixon describes the KKK's taxonomy. Dixon writes "the [Klan] was governed by the Grand Wizard Commander-in-Chief…The Grand Dragon commanded a state, the Grand Titan a Congressional District, and Grand Giant a County, and the Grand Cyclops a Township Den."

this world, but be transformed be the renewal of [their] mind…"[24] After reading the verse aloud, the Exalted Cyclops dedicated the initiate by pouring water "on his shoulder, his head, throws a few drops of water in the air, making his dedication 'in body…in mind…in spirit…[and] in life.'"[25] Fry finishes his description of this perverse baptism by explaining how a Klan chaplain, "very often a minister of the Gospel…" delivers a closing prayer.[26]

While the Klan used protestant rituals in its secret meetings, at times it would interact with Protestantism directly. In one collection of a Nebraska Klavern's meetings minutes, several Klan leaders attended an assembly at the First Christian Church at Havelock "in full regalia," where they gave a "brief address outlining the Christian and patriotic aims of [their] order."[27] The Klan was so determined on appealing to Protestants that in February of 1925, the *Kourier Magazine* published an article titled "Jesus the Protestant," in which the editor reimagines Jesus as an aggressive defender of Protestantism, arguing that Jesus was not an ethnic Jew.[28] Just as *The Birth of a Nation* had done a decade earlier, this *Kourier* article portrayed Jesus as a Protestant,


February, 1925 THE KOURIER MAGAZINE Page three

Jesus The Protestant

BY THE EDITOR

Figure 3: A headline from a 1925 issue of The Kourier. This Atlanta magazine was published monthly for nearly 12 years. In total, 146 issues went into circulation.

---

[24] Rom 12:2-4 ASV. Fry states that the ceremony required this verse from Romans be read aloud. It is unclear exactly how much of Romans was recited, so in order to provide clarity this citation from the American Standard Version Bible has been provided. In 1922, it is likely that the Klan would have read from an ASV translation of the Bible. The ASV was published in 1901 and quickly rose to prominence in America. Another cause to suspect that they used the ASV instead of the King James Bible was the ASV's ties to the predominantly white Anglican Church, along with the ASV's preference for "Jehovah," as opposed to the Jewish practice of using the term "Lord", which American exegetes disapproved of.

[25] Fry, *The Modern Ku Klux Klan*, 90.

[26] Fry, 90.

[27] "Klan Komment," *The Imperial Night-Hawk*, (May 9, 1923), https://history.hanover.edu/courses/excerpts/227kkknews.html. This digital archive from Hanover College seems to be under construction. The author, volume, and edition of this article are unknown.

[28] "Jesus The Protestant" *The Kourier*, (February 1, 1925): 3-6, https://kkknews.revealdigital.com/?a=d&d=KUR19250201-01.2.8&e=-------192-en-20-KUR-1--txt-txIN-Kourier----1925----------1 (accessed October 21, 2019).

white man.[29] This article goes on to conflate Protestantism with white ethnocentrism, as the magazine's editor illustrates the Klan's preference for nationalism and ethnoreligious homogeneity.

To attain legitimacy, Klansmen often called upon fallacious logic derived from antebellum arguments for race subordination. More often than not though, the Klan resorted to boldfaced racism. Allusions to religion or appeals to authority may add legitimacy to one's claim, especially in an era of religious resurgence, but the effectiveness and carnal appeal of unapologetic racism is timeless. In his play that would later inspire *Birth of a Nation,* Thomas Dixon explains the order of his desired ethnic hierarchy:

> For a Russian to rule a Pole…a Turk to rule a Greek, or an Austrian to dominate an Italian is hard enough, but for a thick-lipped, flat-nosed, spindle-shanked negro, exuding his nauseating animal odour, to shout in derision over the hearths and homes of white men and women is an atrocity too monstrous for belief. Our people are yet dazed by its horror. My God! when they realize its meaning, whose arm will be strong enough to hold them?[30]

Though perhaps the most resilient defense of racism relies on distorted readings of scripture, especially interpretation involving the book of Genesis and the story of the "Curse of Ham."[31] One of the Klan's identifying characteristics was not only its use of Protestant language and ceremonies, but its strong anti-Catholic rhetoric. It is important to note that the Klan defined by negation; the hate group excluded as much as it included. In two of the Klan's most popular publications, the *Protestant* and the *Searchlight,* the KKK's anti-Catholic attacks are vividly demonstrated. In fact, these circulars were equal parts racism, nativism, and anti-Catholicism. In the *Protestant*, the Klan made the ludicrous claim the Catholic Church was "arming negroes of the South" so that they could "join in an armed uprising to seize the country."[32] The *Searchlight* propagated much of the same rhetoric, but also spoke out against the

---

[29] Griffith, *The Birth of a Nation.*

[30] Dixon, *The Clansman,* 290.

[31] Stephen R. Haynes, *Noah's Curse: The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 8-9. In Genesis 9 Noah's son, Ham, is cursed for looking upon his father's nakedness. Haynes discusses the evolution of religious, proslavery rhetoric. Around 1700, minister John Saffin conflated Ham's descendants in Canaan with all Black Africans, asserting that all black people were subject to this curse. Haynes claims that by the 1830s "when the American antislavery movement became organized…the scriptural defense of slavery had evolved into the 'most elaborate and systematic' or proslavery theory…Noah's curse had become a stock weapon in the arsenal of slavery's apologists, and references to Genesis 9 appeared prominently in their publications." It has since been accepted that this sort of interpretation of Genesis is completely extrabiblical, as the passage has nothing to do with race.

[32] Fry, *The Modern Ku Klux Klan,* 119.

Jewish faith. In its July 30, 1921 issue, the Searchlight posited that "the Jew is interested in creating war between blacks and whites…to destroy our government …he [the Jew] is working to overthrow all the Gentile governments of the world."[33] A Chicago-based Klan newspaper titled the *Illinois Kourier* even ran the headline "Chicago's public schools controlled by Rome."[34]

Anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic sentiments were not just circulated at the national level, but also at local Klan meetings. One editor took the time to compile a robust collection of meetings minutes from a relatively small Klan chapter in La Grange, Oregon. In a meeting held on January 23, 1923, leaders of the Klavern implored their members to refrain from purchasing goods at a local grocery store, because its owners were "100% Jews."[35] In a special meeting held three days later, leaders of the same Klavern explained that the Klan aimed to oppose "the Catholic machine which controls our Nation."[36] We see now that the Klan not only favored Protestantism above other faiths, but that the KKK actively opposed other faiths, as it perceived them to be threats to Anglo-American Protestant hegemony. Moreover, the KKK was able to achieve a remarkable social continuity in its espoused beliefs and practices as klaverns, both large and small, were united in their hatred against outsiders. The orchestrators of Klan meetings in La Grange, Oregon agreed with national leaders in Indiana and Washington, D.C. By attempting to vilify other religions the Klan hoped to solidify its influence within mainstream Protestantism.

The Klan's anti-Catholic zeal is embodied in the works of female Klan organizer, Alma White. At the Klan's apogee, White was a prominent Methodist Bishop in New Jersey. Nearly all of White's thirty-five publications were of a religious nature, many being written in support of the KKK, or related groups.[37] As such, her most prolific work, *Klansmen: Guardians of Liberty*, is a compilation of her most impassioned sermons.[38] While White was a staunch believer in most of the Klan's planks, her sermons and speeches tended to focus on the Klan's exclusively Protestant nature.

The Klan made efforts to utilize every plank of its ideological platform

---

[33] Fry, 120.

[34] "Chicago's Public Schools Controlled by Rome," *The Illinois Kourier,* (September 19, 1924): 5, https://uhia.revealdigital.org/?a=d&d=IFC19240919-01.2.1&e= -----192-en-20-KUR-1--txt-txIN-Kourier----1925 ----------1.

[35] Horowitz, *Inside the Klavern*, 54.

[36] Horowitz, 61.

[37] "Bishop Alma White, Preacher, Author; Founder of Pillar of Fire Dies at 84—Established Several Schools and Colleges," *The New York Times*, (June 27, 1946), https://www.nytimes.com/1946/06/27/archives/bishop-alma-white-preacher-author-founder-of-pillar-of-fire-dies-at.html

[38] For an examination of Alma White's life story, see Kristin E. Kandt's "In the Name of God; an American Story of Feminism, Racism, and Religious Intolerance: The Story of Alma Bridwell White," *Journal of Gender, Social Policy, & the Law* 8, no. 3.

against the Catholic Church. The illustration depicted in Figure 4 represents the Klan's appeals to patriotism, Protestantism, Populism, and of course anti-Catholicism. The religious appeal here is obvious; a reference to Joshua's divinely sanctioned attack on Jericho, where his army tears down the mighty walls of the city with noise from their trumpets and assistance from the Almighty.

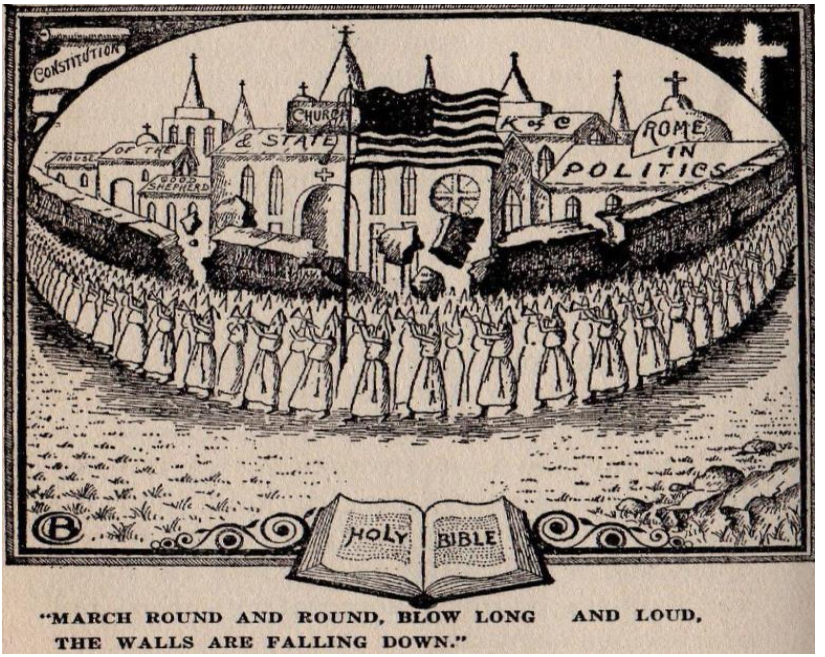


Figure 4: An illustration from Alma White's *Guardians of Liberty*.[39]

White's impassioned sermons implicitly tie together many of the threads previously discussed, with her strongest sentiments involving Catholicism. The Grand Dragon of New Jersey's Klan chapter, Arthur H. Bell, was one of White's most dedicated supporters. As White's Pillar of Fire church and Bell's klavern grew closer as a function of their shared beliefs, Bell would go on to write the forward to White's *Klansmen*, in which he explains "the

[39] White, *Klansmen*, 148. Note the "K of C" markings on the roofs. The Knights of Columbus was an exclusively Catholic labor union that, like other labor unions, advocated for collective bargaining, worker's rights, and would pay the salaries of its constituents during strikes. Therefore, not only did an exclusively Catholic group pose a threat to Klansmen's social and political power, but organized Catholic labor threatened the KKK's ability to control labor and capital.

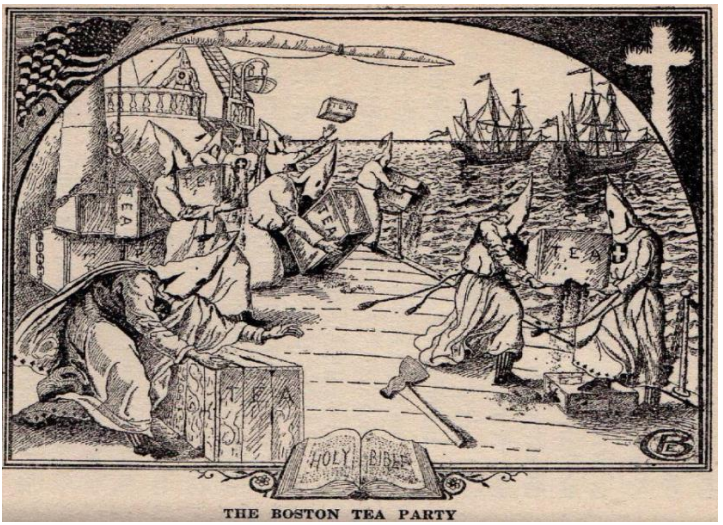
author of this book, Bishop Alma White…has a great ambition to bring forth to the public the true program which the Roman Catholic Hierarchy has developed to consummate its ambitious desire…"[40] White echoes these sentiments in her own writings, as she tells readers of the "autocratic system" that is the Roman Catholic Church, and of the Church's "religio-political machine…thirsting for world dominion and willing to pay any price to obtain it."[41] In truth, White's hate was not solely reserved for religious competitors like the Catholic Church. Several ideas converged to form these strong anti-Catholic sentiments, including a pervasive sense of post-war isolationism, populism, and perhaps even the idea that any growth in the Irish-Catholic sphere of influence may equate to a shrinking of White's own Protestant hegemon. To White and her colleagues, the two aforementioned faiths stood diametrically opposed to one another, as mutually exclusive belief systems; the two could not coexist.

Furthermore, White's Anti-Catholic zeal was rooted in racism; it was anti-Irish as much as it was anti-Catholic. While White is careful not to be overt in drawing attention to her vehement racism, her allusions to New York's Tammany Hall and George E. Brannan's Chicago-based political machine, both Irish organizations, more than suggest that she harbored strong anti-Irish sentiments.[42]

Figure 5: Illustration from Alma White's *Heroes of the Fiery Cross*, 1928.[43]

[40] White, *Klansmen*, 3.
[41] White, *Klansmen*, 23.
[42] White, *Klansmen*, 31.
[43] Depictions of the Irish as subhuman creatures harken back to a thread of Anglo-American racism predating White's works by centuries. Irish racism reached its apogee in Victorian America and Britain, where Irishmen were often depicted as violent,

Moreover, illustrations from White's works are indicative of anti-immigrant sentiments of the time, as the Catholic Church and its presumably Irish adherents are depicted as subhuman, apish characters. This paranoid, reactionary rhetoric seeks to proliferate through the masses by oversimplifying reality into a dichotomy, a black and white contest between good and evil. Such a blatantly hateful worldview requires a fundamental reimagining of history, and this is exactly what White does when she writes a chapter titled *Klansmen of the Revolution*. In this sermon, White reimagines the Founding Fathers as prodigious Klansmen, having written the nation's founding documents in accordance with Klan ideals. Indeed, the illustrations accompanying White's writing depicts the Boston Tea Party and Stamp Act protestors as having sported white robes and hoods, like the Klan of the 1920s. White goes as far as to use the term "colonial Klansmen" when referring to Revolutionary-era patriots.[44] White moves on, to reimagine the Monroe Doctrine as a presidential effort to protect America from Catholic and by extension, papal influence.[45]



THE BOSTON TEA PARTY

alcoholic, sub-human creatures. It is no coincidence that White's publications often depict Catholics and the Irish as apes. L.P. Curtis explores Victorian-era depictions of the Irish in his work *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1997). Anti-Irish sentiments of the era are perhaps best exemplified in historical photographs of the ubiquitous signs displayed outside of New York City shops, restaurants, and factories, that read "no Irish need apply."

[44] White, *Klansmen*, 50-58.

[45] White, *Klansmen*, 68.

Figure 6: A creative reimagining of the Boston Tea Party from White's *Klansmen*. Note the fiery cross and American flag in the background, along with the Holy Bible in the foreground.[46]

Evidence herein suggests that the Ku Klux Klan intentionally used Protestantism as a vehicle through which to diffuse across 1920s America. But surely, the typical Protestant would not have been inherently inclined to follow the Klan in its quest for sociopolitical dominance. Then, the question must be asked, why did the Klan become as popular as it did, and what truly compelled swaths of Americans to join the movement? As Alma White's sermons suggest, the KKK appealed to a substantial number of white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant women for different reasons than it appealed to their male counterparts. Sure, the Klan's espoused beliefs in white exceptionalism attracted female recruits, but most women were drawn in by benefits that the Klan did not overtly advertise. In many ways, women saw the Klan as a source of community, social mobility, and purpose.

The Klan overtly venerated the idea of Republican Motherhood and feminine virtue in much of its recruiting paraphernalia. Indeed, one of the group's espoused goals was to "shield the sanctity of the home and the chastity of womanhood…"[47] The Klan was Victorian in that it placed white women on a virtuous pedestal in the home, and also Progressive in that it gave women a tangible value inherent to their gender. Yet, the Klan was also subtly oppressive toward women, as its views against miscegenation reduced women "to a common function as political symbols – symbols of racial privilege or subordination…"[48] As part of the KKK, women, although confined to a specific stratum, were venerated in their status as embodiments of what the Klansmen considered to be "the noblest womanhood in all the annals of time…"[49]. Lynching statistics from the early-20th Century lend credence to the notion that Klansmen were acutely concerned with miscegenation and white feminine purity. Excluding charges of homicide, accusations of rape and attempted rape made up the largest proportion of allegations against persons being lynched, at 23%; far exceeding the number of lynchings regarding theft or "insult to white

---

[46] White, *Klansmen*, 54.
[47] "A, B, C of the Invisible Empire, the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan," TVA: 5, https://teva.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p15138coll4/id/229 (accessed January 25, 2020).
[48] Kathleen M. Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991), 15.
[49] S.E.F. Rose, *The Ku Klux Klan or Invisible Empire*, (New Orleans, LA: L. Graham Co., 1914), 73.

persons".[50]

Moreover, white men benefitted from the Klan's gender roles, as it ensured that women had to be completely dependent upon their husbands for protection against miscegenation in order to preserve what made women inherently valuable in a Klansman's eyes: sexual and racial purity. Yet, even the notion that women were confined to a specific social stratum was challenged by a handful of ambitious Klanswomen, mainly through a deft manipulation of religious discourse. As discussed earlier, Alma White's ministry demonstrated that a determined woman could pave her own path within the KKK community, despite structural and social obstacles to the contrary. Born around the onset of the Civil War, White described herself as "homely," which one can imagine was a source of disappointment and frustration for her, considering that she was one of eleven children, the rest of which were reportedly handsome.[51] Despite her parents initially refusing to send her to school, White eventually taught herself to read and quickly began her pursuit of the pulpit. White would eventually become "the first woman bishop in the history of the Christian Church," when she founded the Pillar of Fire Church, in New Jersey. [52] Once described as a "mannish-voiced gynotheocrat" by TIME Magazine, White would overcome many obstacles in her journey toward renown, including apparently, ridicule from the media.[53]

Despite breaking glass ceilings within the Protestant community, White remained a staunch advocate for what we today would consider oppressive Republican Motherhood, noting that the men at Stone Mountain, Georgia had nobly "pledged themselves to advocate the supremacy of the White race," and that these men stood for "purity of the home, for morality, for the protection of

---

[50] Gunnar Myrdal, American Dilemma: *The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1944), 561. Myrdal elaborates on his statistical findings to suggest that perhaps "lynching is a way for punishing Negroes for the white Southerners' own guilt feelings in violating Negro women," and that "the dullness and insecurity of rural Southern life, as well as the eminence of emotional puritanical religion, also create an emphasis upon sex…which especially effects adolescent, unmarried, and climacteric women…" It is no coincidence that a frequent feature of these lynchings was genital mutilation.

[51] Kandt, "In the Name of God: The Story of Alma Bridwell White," 758. White's biographer also notes that White was treated differently than her more attractive sisters, as her father found it "more profitable" to send her sisters off to school, while keeping White confined to the house. White felt "confined to prison walls," like a "bird in a cage." Despite these obstacles, she taught herself how to read, and would become an exceptionally skilled orator.

[52] "Bishop V. Drink," *TIME Magazine*, (December 18, 1939), https://web.archive.org/web/20070823233706/http:/www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0%2C9171%2C763099%2C00.html.

[53] "Bishop V. Drink," *TIME Magazine*, (December 18, 1939).

[their] sisters, wives, and daughters…"[54] It is important to recognize the effect of White's words above. By simultaneously empowering women through her example but constraining women to their subservient positions through her speech, Alma White was both a force for change and an instrument of the status quo. Ultimately though, White was the exception, not the norm. And while White's pursuit of the pulpit may seem socially liberal in that she was likely the first nationally recognized female pastor, it is important to note that her motivations were deeply rooted in a staunchly oppressive ethnoreligious system. White's example further supports the notion that many of the characters herein do not fit neatly within the political dichotomy that we too often use.

Undeniably, the Progressive era is saturated with examples of political activists with widely varying beliefs, many of whom were self-described "progressives."[55] The same progressivism that is represented by the Klan's treatment of women is the same progressivism that allowed the Klan garner nationwide support through nativist appeals. The point being that by no means was the Klan at odds with progressive ideals. In fact, one historian posits that progressives were fixated on "national purification" and "moral regeneration."[56] Like the larger Progressive movement, the Klan also believed in "positive statism" and the idea that it could affect positive change for the nation through electing race-conscious representatives.[57] Although, the KKK's brand of meliorism was rooted in ethnoreligious exclusion and prejudice, not government-led business reform or Jane Adams' Hull Houses.

Indeed, one of the era's most notable pieces of legislation is the 1924 Immigration Act, which set immigration quotas for foreign nations. These quotas are reflective of the Klan's preferences for White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant immigrants, as they allow greater throughput from countries like Great Britain, while nearly prohibiting immigrants from Slavic countries and Africa, or in the words of the author of the bill, the act was a response to the "general realization of the fact that the races of men who have been coming to us in recent years are wholly dissimilar to the native-born Americans…seventy

---

[54] White, *Klansmen*, 123, 159.

[55] For more information regarding the paradoxical and fragmented nature of the Progressive movement, see Daniel T. Rogers' "Capitalism and Politics in the Progressive Era and in Ours," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 13, no. 3 (July 2014): 379-86.

[56] Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877–1920* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2009), 200, 310.

[57] Glen Gendzel, "What the Progressives Had in Common," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 10, no. 3 (2011): 333. Gendzel asserts that Progressives, although part of a highly fragmented and disjointed movement, generally agreed upon the role of the state in stimulating reform on behalf of common citizens. If this is the case, the Klan was highly effective at politicking and filling state and federal seats with Klansmen and Klan sympathizers.

five percent of our immigration will hereafter come from Northwestern Europe."[58] Notable women of the Klan such as Alma White, and Progressive era legislation like the Immigration Act serve to reveal the similarities between the two camps, which are far too often distinguished from one another.

Alma White was not completely alone in her endeavors though, as many women became leaders within the Klan, especially as community organizers, magazine publishers, and perhaps most prolifically as producers and distributors of the Imperial Empire's ghostly white garments.[59] A gendered analysis of the Klan, both of its first postbellum incarnation and of its Progressive era form, helps us to understand how the role of women fundamentally changed in the half-century that passed between the two eras. In the first Klan, white women were revered for their purity and white men vaunted them in an effort to preserve exclusive access to white women.[60] In this way, white men, regardless of class, were expected to uphold a gendered *noblesse oblige*, predicated on the protection of the sanctity of white women and their racial purity. The passing of the 13th Amendment and the end of the Civil War threatened these rigidly defined values that white men held dear. Ironically though, while the preservation of womanly purity may seem to benefit women, or at least allow them to retain some sort of privilege, in reality this gendered social structure reduced all women to objects, symbols of political and racial power. As one historian posits, "the racial state of the slave South, like the racialist state that followed the Civil War, was built on a foundation that dictated a hierarchical division of male and female, as well as black and white."[61] Essentially, the social structure of the American South venerated women in language and tradition, but oppressed and subordinated them in practice. In this way, one could argue that the oppression of the Black slave and later the Black citizen,

---

[58] "America of the Melting Pot Comes to End; Effects of New Immigration Legislation Described by Senate Sponsor of Bill-Chief Aim, He States, Is to Preserve Racial Type as it Exists Today," *The New York Times* (April 27, 1924), https://www.nytimes.com/1924/04/27/archives/america-of-the-melting-pot-comes-to-end-effects-of-new-immigration.html.

[59] Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, *Catalogue of Official Robes and Banners* (Atlanta, GA: KKK Robe & Printing Plant of Buckhead, GA, 1925). In 1925 the Klan established an official textile and publishing plant in Atlanta. This was a pivotal moment in the Klan's history, as this allowed the group to distribute identical catalogues to each local leader, or exalted cyclops. According to the catalogue, the typical Klansman would spend $5.00 for his outfit, or about $70.00 in today's value. Assuming aforementioned membership figures are accurate, women of the Klan were responsible for producing hundreds of millions of dollars in Klan goods.

[60] Blee, *Women of the Klan*, 15.

[61] Blee, 15.

came at the expense of the white woman, albeit to a much lesser extent.[62]

Figure 7: Advertisement from the *Illinois Kourier*, urging women to join the Klan.[63]

In much the same way that the Klan exalted women for their supposed

[62] The same could be said of any minority groups that were labeled as the proverbial "other" by the Klan, including Greeks, Jews, Slavs, and Catholics. Though, the Black American felt the fullest effect of the Klan's hatred.

[63] For further information regarding Robbie Gill, see Kelli R. Kerbawy's "Knights in White Satin: Women of the Ku Klux Klan," *Marshall University Theses, Dissertations, and Capstones*, Paper 687 (2007): 63.

sexual purity, it also glorified the idea of the Victorian Cult of Domesticity.[64] This idea was critical to developing a uniform identity amongst women of the Klan. Klan leaders saw the American home as a battleground. Simmons writes "here, in the old-fashioned American home, we shall do battle…we shall fight the last fight...if we are to have a greater and better America, we must begin by breeding better Americans in larger number."[65] In the same breath, Simmons advocates for eugenics. In this way, white women were given utility and some measure of value amongst Klan communities; they were integral to accomplishing the Klan's mission of purifying the country, and perhaps to a broader, but more subtle Progressive mission of doing the same.

Gender dynamics of the Klan's second incarnation were quite different from those of Forrest's Klan though. The women's suffrage movement that had begun at the famed Seneca Falls convention of 1848 had gained traction across the rest of the United States by the turn of the century. By the height of Progressive Era, the Klan and the Suffrage Movement were destined to collide. Contrary to what one may expect, the two movements were able to amalgamate, at least to some degree. In the eyes of Klan leaders, suffrage was "considered a privilege, and not an 'inherent and unalienable right.'"[66] In Simmons's opinion, the "burden of proof" for attaining the right to vote rested upon the shoulders of the disenfranchised.[67] In the Klan's opinion, it was clear that white women had exonerated themselves of inferiority to the degree necessary to attain suffrage. In this way, the Klan was able to appear progressive on women's rights and suffrage, while still attempting to maintain social and political dominance of

---

[64] For a thorough examination of Victorian and Progressive gender culture, see Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 22, 57, & 80. In defining gender roles at the turn of the millennium, Bederman explains the White rationale behind the Cult of Domesticity by writing " 'savage'…races…had not yet evolved pronounced sexual differences…savage men had never evolved the chivalrous instinct to protect their women and children but instead forced their women into exhausting drudgery…overworked savage women had never evolved the refined delicacy of civilized women." Bederman's analysis is particularly astute, as she notices the continual importance of gender throughout American history, and notes that by 1911, race had become more crucial in defining "manliness." Bederman examines G. Stanley Hall, one of the psychologists who helped formulate the scientific underpinnings of emerging ideas on gender. Bederman's study of Hall's sexually oppressive childhood sees Hall's own sense of masculinity as representative of an entire generation's views on gender. See Chapter 2 of Bederman's work for another examination of how a sense of white sexual inferiority played into lynching.

[65] William J. Simmons, *The Klan Unmasked* (Atlanta, GA: Wm. E. Thompson Publishing Co., 1923), 279.

[66] Simmons, *The Klan Unmasked*, 251.

[67] Simmons, 251.

other disenfranchised people, especially Blacks and newly naturalized immigrants.[68] Women of the Klan were comfortable with this arrangement, as Alma White's biographer writes "White found it 'humiliating' that the black man gained the right to vote before the white woman, and blamed the black man, at least in part, for the 'oppression of women'."[69]

The Klan changed in another way between its first and second iterations, as the newest Klan actively preached prohibitionist ideals and temperance, in accordance with their aforementioned domestic values. Between the first and second Klan, prohibition had become a national issue, especially amongst politically active women. In fact, Frances Willard's Women's Christian Temperance Union was one of the most influential female political associations of the era.[70] In the eyes of female prohibitionists, male irresponsibility manifested itself in alcoholism, which adversely affected the ideal Victorian home. While the WCTU also endorsed suffrage and more extensive women's rights outside of the home, it also found common ground with bigoted organizations like the Klan. In areas like Indiana, where the Klan's influence was strongest, the WCTU worked with the KKK in pursuit of statewide dry laws, as both groups subscribed to nativist sentiments and often emphasized the supposed connection between immigrants, alcoholism, and immorality.[71]

In fact, the American Midwest was a center of convergence for religion and politics, and women of the KKK were often the binding agent that worked to unite the white community against its perceived threats. In one instance, an Indiana woman, Daisy Barr, rose to prominence as an evangelist, only to use her religious platform to promote temperance and nativism, bringing together multiple organizations, such as a female-version of the YMCA, the Klan, local churches, and even an Indiana chapter of the GOP.[72] Barr used her religious influence on behalf of the KKK for a number of reasons, most notable of which were her opposition to alcohol, her desire to end apparent political corruption,

---

[68] Simmons, 253. Here Simmons calls for new federal voting laws, that would restrict the vote to English speaking, "educated" citizens.

[69] Kandt, "In the Name of God: The Story of Alma Bridwell White," 786. Kandt quotes White as having said "they gave the black man the ballot sixty years in advance of white women [and thus the] colored man had a voice in making the laws of the land, while half of the white and black races remained in political bondage. When the black man received the franchise, the white women bore the sting of their humiliation for more than half a century, being placed in an inferior position to colored men in the use of the ballot and the rights of citizenship. Such reflections make one feel that man's delinquency has been almost unpardonable."

[70] Worth R. Miller, "The Lost World of Gilded Age Politics," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 1, no. 1 (January 2002): 58.

[71] Blee, *Women of the Klan*, 104.

[72] Blee, *Women of the Klan*, 105-107; Dwight W. Hoover, "Daisy Douglas Barr: From Quaker to Klan "Kluckeress," *Indiana Magazine of History* 87, no. 2 (June 1991): 177.

and finally, Barr's strong nativist stance. In these ways, Barr did not find it difficult to reconcile her personal beliefs with the philosophies of the Klan. In fact, more often than not each of these groups complimented one another. An excerpt from one of Barr's sermons demonstrates how women and the Klan could develop a symbiotic relationship:

> I am utterly disgusted that a man from the foreign land can come here and be made an American citizen in 12 months, when it takes an American born man 21 years with the public schools of our country back of him to become a franchised citizen…the New Patriotism is a patriotism that will take care of the womanhood and its young…no nation ever rises above its womanhood.[73]

Barr's fervent support of the Klan would become so successful that Indiana's chief Kleegle would permit her to form a woman's auxiliary to the Klan. Soon, Barr became an interstate icon, as her authority spanned across woman's chapters in West Virginia, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Michigan, Ohio, Minnesota, New Jersey, and Indiana.[74] Of course, prohibitionist sentiments would not be difficult to reconcile with Protestant Christianity either, thus allowing the Klan to secure another plank in its political platform, through which it could continue to appeal to middle-Americans.

Figure 8: WCTU matron and Klan "Kluckeress" Daisy Barr.[75]

[73] Blee, *Women of the Klan*, 108.
[74] Hoover, "Daisy Douglas Barr," 189.
[75] Jill Weiss Simins, "'America First:' The Ku Klux Klan Influence on Immigration Policy in the 1920s*", Hoosier State Chronicles*, June 20, 2019. Available online at https://blog.newspapers.library.in.gov/tag/ku-klux-klan/

But of course, a historian would be hard-pressed to argue that women were the primary determinants of a family's sociopolitical leanings in 1910s or 1920s America. While the role of women was not insignificant, men were attracted to the Klan for a variety of reasons, many of which diverged sharply from the motivations of white women. Men joined the Klan at higher frequencies, and more specifically, white, middle-class, semi-skilled laborers were called to the Klan more so than any other people group. Klan organizers, especially Simmons, used gendered prose to entice white men who felt that their racial dominance and exclusive rights to white, female sexuality had been challenged. Klan recruiting efforts often sold the Klan as a strictly fraternal organization, founded in an effort to save "the white women of the South," who had "become prey of the Negroes…"[76] As the Klan's senior-most Grand Dragon, Simmons spoke for Klaverns across American when he wrote on the Klan's legacy and its *raison d'être*:

> The white man's civilization that had been thousands of years in the building was imperiled…Tremendous forces leaped from the ashes of defeat and drove like the whirlwind throughout the land…An empire covering half a continent took form in an hour and more than a half million men were mobilized in a single day in defense of the white man, his home, his civilization, and his freedom, against the…assaults of an inferior race…[77]

Here we see Simmons again attempting to resurrect fantasized images of the past to fulfill his vision of "Klannish" socialization.

In the aggregate, it seems that the proliferation of the Klan served to diminish the impact of labor unions, despite the fact that most Klan members were white, lower-class, disaffected laborers. Intuitively, these men would have benefitted from union membership, but they were skeptical of organized labor for fear of immigrants and minorities. Although, this is not uncommon in American history, as the white labor-class periodically subscribes to political ideologies at odds with their economic interests.[78] The Klan's racism, and indeed America's racist tendencies were stoked by drastic changes in labor that occurred around the turn of the century. Industrialization worked to put unskilled labors in a precarious position in the job market, especially white unskilled workers, as their Black counterparts were often willing to take on the same jobs for lower wages. This relatively new Black labor force posed an existential threat to unskilled whites. In truth, the idea of "whiteness" was the only thing these men could fall back on. By maintaining an ethnically narrow standard of whiteness, the Klan and its members sought to diminish the

---

[76] Simmons, *The Klan Unmasked*, 19.
[77] Simmons, 19-20.
[78] Thomas Pegram, "The Ku Klux Klan, Labor, and the White Working Class during the 1920s," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 17, no. 2 (April 2018): 391.

bargaining power of competitors; primarily Blacks, but also Asians, Irishmen, and Eastern-European immigrants. Moreover, by opposing its competition, the Klan was able to reinforce a perceived, even if fabricated, class identity amongst its members.[79]

The threat that the new Black labor force posed to Whites is best illustrated in Booker T. Washington's Atlanta Convention Speech. Washington, in an attempt to advance racial equality, attempts to sell Black labor to the south's captains of industry by making a distinction between Black labor and immigrant labor. Washington likens Southern industry to a "ship lost at sea," its crew suffering of dehydration. He implores business owners to quench their thirst by "casting [their] buckets" into the water that is the Black labor force, sixteen million strong.[80] Washington even goes as far as to say that Black laborers will "lay down [their] lives" in order to protect the interest of white business owners.[81] Washington is often derided for his apparent toleration of white supremacy and his reluctance to pursue racial equality through litigation, but his ultimate goal was to bring economic, and eventual social parity between the two races. Unfortunately, the ideas that Washington expressed at the Atlanta Convention would only serve to increase tension between Black and white labor, as white men reeled against the imposing reality of an emerging Black working class. The threat of a growing Black labor force did more to mobilize whites against the Black community than nearly any other factor, perhaps with the notable exception of the Black community's disjointed involvement with fringe political movements, such as the Communist Party.[82]

If we consider Alma White's rhetoric as representative of the feelings of

---

[79] Pegram, "The Ku Klux Klan, Labor, and the White Working Class during the 1920s," 376. This is ironic considering that more than a handful of Klan leaders were either suspected of or found on charges of fraud and abuse, including Robbie Gill (mentioned herein) and D.C. Stephenson, Grand Dragon of the Indiana Klan through 1925. For a thorough analysis of Stephenson's impact on the Klan and how his downfall coincided the Invisible Empire's retrenchment, see William Lutholtz, *Grand Dragon: D.C. Stephenson and the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana,* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1991).

[80] Thomas Aiello, *The Battle for the Souls of Black Folk* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2016), 39.

[81] Aiello, 38.

[82] Matthew F. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 251 and John B. Kirby, *Black Americans in the Roosevelt Era* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1980), 10-11. Kirby argues that Communist support of racial equality may have hurt more moderate desegregationists, as support from the Communist party allowed racists to link the early-civil rights movement to fringe, radical politics. One leader of the Urban League was certain that Communist "agitation amongst Negroes [would] do serious harm to Negro workers and the whole interracial situation."

the Klan's female members, we can infer that labor was also a serious issue for women of the KKK. One historian quotes White in saying that the Klanswoman's views on Black people were cemented in her experience in Millersburg, Indiana, where White wrote that "[t]here were so many colored people that the white man who had to earn wages for a living could scarcely find anything to do…[t]he poor white man had no alternative but to raise [tobacco] to keep the wolf from the door."[83] Simmons expresses identical sentiment, but on a national scale, when he writes of the threats posed by the "denizens of the slums of Europe and Asia…because [they] sell themselves cheapest in the labor markets of the world."[84] Fluctuations in the labor market and periods of economic uncertainty tend to spur on nativist activity. By extension, more prejudiced policies are often adopted in these times, as in the case of aforementioned immigration legislation.[85] When combined with America's organic history of racism, these economic motivations for ethnocentrism make the Klan's brand of hate particularly potent, and inextricably connected to the KKK's identity.

Having already established that the Klan was not simply a far-right hate group, but rather that the KKK was more of an amorphous, opportunistic, ethnoreligious political entity that drew from Progressive as well as oppressive ideas, it is now worth our time to touch on the populist nature of the Klan. The Klan's mentality was indicative of what we today would call Populism, in that it shared traits organic to nearly all populist movements: an "us versus them" mentality, paired with the idea that nothing should constrain the will of the true people, in this case, white Protestants.[86] Like many other populist movements, the Klan needed to mobilize the masses to affect change, and directed its rhetoric toward a proverbial "other". In general, this "other" that was so often depicted in sermons, Klan rallies, and klavern propaganda was any people group that posed a threat to racial hegemony. Protestantism and patriotism were veneers for this vicious movement; facades used to make the Klan seem amenable with less radical political discourse. Religion was the perfect cover for the Klan, as religion is a uniquely sacred realm in American society, and nearly any action taken in accordance with one's espoused beliefs is tolerated, so long as it does not overtly rise to the level of armed violence. While the Klan used Protestantism, it would not be correct to suggest that the KKK became an integral faction of Protestant Christianity, just as it would not be proper to suggest that slaveholding was an inherently Christian practice. Commenting on

---

[83] Kandt, "In the Name of God: The Story of Alma Bridwell White," 760.
[84] Simmons, *The Klan Unmasked*, 169.
[85]Angelo N. Ancheta, *Race, Rights, and the Asian American Experience*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 85-87.
[86] Jordan Kyle, "Populists in Power Around the World," *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change* (November 2018): 12.

biblical justifications for slavery, Frederick Douglas once wrote "what I have said respecting and against religion, I mean strictly to apply to the slaveholding religion of this land, and with no possible reference to Christianity proper," as Douglas loved the "pure, peaceable, and impartial Christianity of Christ," and loathed the "corrupt, slaveholding, woman-whipping, cradle-plundering…hypocritical Christianity of [America]."[87] In the same way that antebellum slavery used Christianity to its benefit, the Klan of the next era hijacked Protestantism to suit its own needs. In fact, the Klan perverted Protestant ideals in much the same way that other cults muddle the precepts of various mainstream religions. At its core, the Klan was a politically motivated cult that used religion to suit its own narrative. As demonstrated earlier, one of the Klan's ends was to attain widespread political influence. Indeed, some Klansmen even had ambitions to become President of the United States.[88] In fact, other Klansmen claimed that the KKK had already put a member of the nefarious cult in the Oval Office.[89]

Throughout history, nationalist groups have used religious rhetoric to justify violence, hate, and bigotry, as demonstrated by the assertions of Klan organizers like Hiram Evans, Alma White, Daisy Barr, and William Simmons. By coopting Protestantism to suit its own needs, the second-generation Ku Klux Klan attained massive power in under a decade, precipitating the postbellum nadir of American race relations.[90] Moreover, the Klan was both able to exploit and subjugate women in a manner that allowed the Klan to pursue its ends. The modern reader should be weary of the underlying causes of the Klan and the manner in which the Imperial Empire pursued its ends. Between the first and second incarnations of the Klan, Booker T. Washington prematurely referred to the Klan as a bygone organization when he wrote in 1901:

I have referred to this unpleasant part of the history of the South simply for the

---

[87] Frederick Douglas, *Life of an American Slave*, (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845), 116-117. Available online at http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/abolitn/abaufda14t.html.

[88] William M. Lutholtz, *Grand Dragon: D.C. Stephenson and the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana*, (Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1991), xv.

[89] Horowitz, *Inside the Klavern*, 4. Here, Horowitz writes that "rumors even suggested that President Warren G. Harding had been inducted [into the Klan] in a White House Ceremony." Further research is needed to substantiate these rumors. Based on information presented herein, it is not unrealistic to insinuate that the Klan was able to influence the most powerful leaders in 1920s America, even the President of the United States. Indeed, the Klan took credit for defeating Catholic candidate Al Smith, in the 1928 presidential election.

[90] Dr. Rayford Logan is the father of this phrase "Nadir of American race relations." Logan placed the nadir at 1901 through analysis in his book *The Betrayal of the Negro, from Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson* (New York, NY: Da Capo Press, 1997), 62. Though, I tend to agree with more contemporary analyses that place the nadir at around 1923-1925, at the height of the Klan's influence.

> purpose of calling attention to the great change that has taken place since the days of the "Ku Klux." To-day there are no such organizations in the South, and the fact that such ever existed is almost forgotten by both races. There are few places in the South now where public sentiment would permit such organizations to exist.[91]

Unfortunately, Washington's eulogy of the Klan was given far too early. In truth, it is unlikely that he could have anticipated the reemergence of the Klan. Moreover, Washington would have been taken aback by the KKK's rapid proliferation, not only across genders, but also across the Mason-Dixon Line, as the Second Klan's popularity transcended state boundaries, and counterintuitively was most popular in the Midwest.[92] Conversely, readers today have the benefits of both historical hindsight and an increasingly robust volume of historical literature on the KKK and know that the Klan has reemerged at least two times, once in the Progressive Era, and again in the Civil Rights Era. By failing to acknowledge the pervasive, stubborn spirit of the Klan, we run the risk of falling prey to its reemergence; albeit, in a new, but equally evil manifestation.[93]

Moreover, the KKK's use of Protestantism should serve as a warning for people of all faiths, as quasi-religious nationalist movements reemerge across the globe. In an international atmosphere of increasing uncertainty, world leaders are likely to espouse hateful rhetoric in seeking the support of the majority, even at the detriment of the minority. Time and time again these

---

[91] Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* (New York, NY: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1907), 41.

[92] It is often assumed that the Klan was most prevalent in the South, but after the Great Migration that followed World War I, northern whites embraced the Klan with open arms. In truth, southern Whites had little need for the Klan, as racism was overt and much more prevalent than in northern states or the Midwest. Conversely, the Klan provided anonymity for its members in the North and Midwest, mainly through its regalia and communal protection. The Klan's move northward began around 1921, with Klan chapters eventually reaching past the U.S. border with Canada. The Klan's rapid expansion is discussed in John T. Kneebone's "Publicity and Prejudice: The New York World's Exposé of 1921 and the History of the Second Ku Klux Klan," in *Virginia Commonwealth University History Scholars Compass*, (Richmond, VA: Virginia Commonwealth University, 2015).

[93] In 1998, three White men from the Texas interior were charged with lynching a 49-year-old Black man and father of three, James Byrd Jr. Responding to questions from the press concerning white supremacists, Gwendolyn Chisholm, a resident of Jasper, Texas replied "they look like normal people, don't they? That's the way they are nowadays – they don't wear hoods anymore." For further information regarding more recent incarnations of hate such as the abovementioned, see Alison Kinney's *Hood* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2016), 29. Unfortunately, the spirit of the Klan is alive and well.

movements, much like the KKK, have coopted popular religions to suit their aims. Indeed, as long as ethnoreligious forces are able to reinforce an exclusive sense of American identity, the spirit of the Klan endures. Although distant in time, the history of the Invisible Empire is close in spirit, as stubborn strands of bigotry and hatred continue to occupy public discourse today.