

Providence College

DigitalCommons@Providence

History & Classics Undergraduate Theses

History & Classics

Fall 2019

Unheard Voices Against the Invisible Empire: Black and Catholic Responses to the Second Ku Klux Klan

William Hartl

Providence College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/history_undergrad_theses



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Hartl, William, "Unheard Voices Against the Invisible Empire: Black and Catholic Responses to the Second Ku Klux Klan" (2019). *History & Classics Undergraduate Theses*. 39.

https://digitalcommons.providence.edu/history_undergrad_theses/39

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the History & Classics at DigitalCommons@Providence. It has been accepted for inclusion in History & Classics Undergraduate Theses by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Providence. For more information, please contact dps@providence.edu.

**Unheard Voices Against the Invisible Empire:
Black and Catholic Responses to the Second Ku Klux Klan**

by
William Hartl
HIS 490 History Honors Thesis

**Department of History
Providence College
Fall 2019**

This paper is dedicated to all the victims of the Ku Klux Klan and to all those courageous individuals who risked their lives in order to bring to light the evils of the Invisible Empire.

“The condition of truth is to allow suffering to speak”

- Dr. Cornel West

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1. THE IDEOLOGY OF THE SECOND KLAN.....	10
The Klan's Worldview.....	11
The Role of the Klan.....	18
The Klan's Relationships with Jewish, Catholic and Black Americans.....	26
Establishing a New Reputation for the Klan.....	35
CHAPTER 2. CATHOLIC AMERICANS' RESPONSES TO THE KLAN.....	38
CHAPTER 3. BLACK AMERICANS' RESPONSES TO THE KLAN.....	55
CONCLUSION.....	72
EPILOGUE.....	77
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	83

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to everyone who contributed to the completion of this project. Thank you especially to my advisor Dr. Dara Mulderry for her constant support and encouragement as well as to Dr. Patrick Breen and Dr. Zophia Edwards for their guidance. Thank you as well to the researcher assistants at Phillips Memorial Library and to the staff of both the Providence College History and Philosophy Departments. Further, my thesis would not be nearly the quality it is if it was not for the infinite energies of Will Toner and the Providence College Writing Center. Studying the Ku Klux Klan is an intense and often disturbing journey; however, the tutors at PC's Writing Center ensured it was never a journey I had to take alone. A massive thank you especially to my friends and family who bore with me through sleepless nights and frantic days of research, writing and editing. To all of you – thank you.

INTRODUCTION

America was experiencing growing pains in the early 20th century. Waves of immigration, the increasing boldness of newly empowered Black veterans returning from World War I, the demographic shifts of the Great Migration, and a new and exciting Jazz Age culture were rapidly reshaping American mores and identity.¹ To many white Protestant Americans, these changes did not represent progress but rather an attack on socio-political institutions that were necessary for the survival of America. Black Americans and Irish, southern and eastern European immigrant workers seemed to threaten middle class white Protestants economically and politically while an increasingly secular culture challenged them socially.² For many of these white Americans, it felt as though the fabric of American society was being ripped apart.

White angst resulting from these tensions reached a boiling point in 1915 with the murder of 13-year-old Mary Phagan in Atlanta, Georgia. A Jewish man named Leo Frank, the superintendent of the factory where Phagan worked, was convicted for her death; however, the conviction was overturned. An outraged white mob saw Frank's acquittal as a failure of the justice system to defend an innocent white woman who seemed to stand as a proxy for an increasingly vulnerable white population. In response to this perceived failure of the justice system, the white

¹Carol Anderson, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of our Racial Divide* (New York: Bloomsbury, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2017), 38.

²Felix Harcourt, *Ku Klux Kulture: America and the Klan in the 1920s* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 7.

mob lynched Mr. Frank in Atlanta on August 17th, 1915.³ White Southerners' popular reception of the mob's vigilante justice – spurred on by the growing success of the film *A Birth of a Nation* that same year – inspired William J. Simmons, a struggling Baptist preacher and professional fraternal organizer, to establish the Second Ku Klux Klan with the aim of rescuing America from the dangers of *un-Americans* like Leo Frank.⁴

William J. Simmons founded The Second Ku Klux Klan (KKK) on Thanksgiving Day 1915, in Atlanta, Georgia. Built around the three symbols of the white robe (white supremacy), the American flag (100% Americanism) and the Cross (Protestant Christianity), the Klan aimed to educate and mobilize white, Protestant, “native” born Americans in their quest to rescue America.⁵ While inspired and modeled largely after its Reconstruction Era namesake, Simmons' Klan was intended to be a national rather than strictly southern operation and included white Protestant, native-born Americans throughout the United States.⁶

Whether because of organizational limitations or a lack of resources, Simmons' Klan struggled to expand in its first five years. In 1920, a frustrated Simmons turned to public relations gurus Elizabeth Tyler and Edward Clarke of the Southern Publicity Association in an attempt to break his Klan into the cultural mainstream. Simmons' investment paid off, and Klan membership exploded from the thousands to hundreds-of-thousands within a year and reached between five

³Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 12.

⁴Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 10.

⁵Gordon, 36.

⁶Glenn Feldman, *Politics, Society, and the Klan in Alabama 1915-1949* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1999), 8.

and seven million within five years.⁷ Tyler and Clarke formalized Simmons' message and published smaller pamphlets which described the Klan's basic tenets and activities as well as released several books that expounded in greater details the Klan's mission.⁸ Klan recruiters, armed with a consistent, formalized message and motivated by hefty financial incentives, brought a new skill and passion to the Klan's recruiting efforts. With Simmons claiming six million members at its peak, the Klan would dominate communities in the South and Midwest while having chapters in nearly every state by 1925.⁹ While the Klan exercised substantial influence throughout the 1920s, it would ultimately undermine its own success. Infighting, scandal, increasingly grotesque violence and corruption would erode public support by the end of the 1920s. Following these scandals, fewer white Protestant Americans trusted the Klan to uphold the organization's own professed ideals. The Second Klan, which dominated and terrified large swaths of American society, faded into the background of American history as rapidly as it had emerged.¹⁰

Mentions of the Klan likely invoke images of burning crosses and terror in the night, yet the Klan, while absolutely perpetrating these kinds of horrors, was far more. The Second Klan engaged in extensive community outreach, political activism and spread their nativist ideologies in numerous ways other than explicit violence and intimidation. The Klan as a political, fraternal, and popular organization has eluded the popular understanding. Initial scholars on the Klan presented a limited account of the Klan's influence which resulted in popular misunderstandings of the organization amongst historians and the American public. The first major scholarly

⁷Gordon, 14.

⁸Gordon, 15.

⁹"Mapping the Second Ku Klux Klan, 1915-1940," labs.library.vcu.edu, Virginia Commonwealth University, <https://labs.library.vcu.edu/klan/> (accessed December 29, 2019).

¹⁰Gordon, 193.

examination of the Klan (i.e. the traditional school) was established in 1924 by Dartmouth Sociologist John Mecklin who described the Second Klan as a direct rebirth of the “Reconstruction-Era Klan.” Historian Glenn Feldman interprets Mecklin’s portrayal of the Klan as “consisting of unsophisticated country folk [...] who fell prey to those impulses that ignorance breeds: fundamentalism, anti-intellectualism, anti-modernism, and bigotry.”¹¹ According to Feldman, this view of the Klan as socially and ideologically marginal, exclusively violent, and brutish in methodology has been embraced by numerous historians such as John Naffot and Frank Tannenbaum in 1924, Richard Hofstadter and William Leuchtenburg in the 1950s, and up through the 1970s with the works of William Randel and Arnold Rice.¹² The image of the Klan as being composed of violent, uneducated, bigoted “others” on the margin of society still greatly dominates popular understanding and presentation of the Klan today.

The traditional school has proven problematic for many contemporary scholars because it overlooks the vast political influence and social and cultural centrism of the Second Klan. To place members of the Klan as outcasts on the edge of the American populace may isolate greater America from the Klan’s sins; however, this view clashes with the substantial evidence proving that the Klan was a major player in American society and politics and was supported directly or indirectly by several million rather unexceptional Americans. In response to the traditional school, authors such as Glenn Feldman, Felix Harcourt and Nancy MacLean have begun to develop a revisionist account of the Klan. They argue that the Klan was not actually an uneducated hate group, separated culturally and ideologically from the rest of America. Instead, these historians argue that the Klan

¹¹Feldman, 4.

¹² Ibid.

was, for its time, culturally and politically central in its values, attracting the support and participation of America's "petite bourgeoisie," and thus consisted of lawyers, doctors, store owners and other middle class town and city leaders in addition to ruffians and thugs.¹³

What remains absent from the literature of both schools on the so-called Invisible Empire is an examination of the perspectives of the groups targeted by the Klan, despite the fact that these victimized groups suffered the most at the hands of the organization itself. Historians have analyzed the internal dialogue of the Klan in great detail; however, the public dialogue between the Klan and the broader American populace, especially targeted groups' responses to the Klan's physical and ideological attacks, has been essentially ignored. This project will contribute to the scholarship on the Second Klan through exploration of victimized groups' arguments against their oppressors to see if their own accounts of Klan ideology and activity support either of the major schools of thought on the Second Klan.

Historians are isolated by time and distance from the subjects they study, leading to misinterpretations, oversimplifications, and limited scopes of understanding. Therefore, while understanding the perspective of the Klan is important, it is equally, if not more important, to listen to the voices of the victimized groups themselves. Victims provide insight that can only be gained through lived experience, as well as a nuanced understanding of tangible threats and accusations. Historians can read about the Klan's conspiracies and acts of violence, but without an understanding of the responses of those targeted, they will be unable to truly understand the magnitude of the Klan's impact. The historian alone cannot determine how much power the Klan held. The groups the KKK targeted offer insight into the impact of the Klan message. Any study of the Ku Klux Klan that wishes to come to an authentic understanding of the role of the group

¹³ Feldman, 5.

within the broader historical and contemporary American context requires a deliberate examination of members of the Klan *and* the groups they victimized.

In order to understand the victims' responses, one must understand the Klan's stated ideology and actions. To establish the necessary background, I will utilize the writings of William J. Simmons, founder and first Grand Imperial Wizard of the Second Ku Klux Klan. As the ideological and structural founder of the Second Klan, Simmons spoke to the American people as the group's primary mind and voice between 1915 and 1922. While Simmons' publicly available works may appear to be little more than fear mongering and propaganda, they provide crucial insight into what types of ideological appeals the Klan believed would garner public support and increased membership.

In addition to Simmons' writings, this project examines Black and Catholic newspapers written between 1915 and 1922 – the period of leadership of William J. Simmons, which began with his founding of the Klan on Thanksgiving 1915 and ended with his replacement as Grand Imperial Wizard by Hiram Evans in 1922. While there is debate among scholars as to when the decline of the Klan began, there is universal acknowledgment that serious cracks in the Klan's organization began as a result of infighting between Simmons and Evans for control. Following Evans' appointment as leader of the Klan, a series of scandals rocked the organization. Because of these scandals, newspapers' critiques of the Klan post-1922 are more likely to focus on the hypocrisy and corruption of Klan leadership than the activity of its members. For this reason, I will limit my scope to the Klan under Simmons, in which average Klan members' ideology and activity, not only the leaders' hypocrisy, was publicly discussed and openly challenged.

My thesis will be divided into three chapters. The first engages with the Klan's self-description of its ideology, activities and mission. It will examine the writings of the Second Klan's

founder William J. Simmons, primarily examining his book *The Klan Unmasked* but also utilizing several other of his publications, namely his book *America's Menace or The Enemy Within* as well as several smaller publications such as *The Ku Klux Klan: Yesterday, Today and Forever*, and the *ABCs of the Invisible Empire*. While *The Klan Unmasked* was published after Simmons' time as leader of the Klan, it elucidates in greater detail the Klan's publicly stated ideology and accusations which existed in the form of smaller pamphlets and newspaper advertisements that were publicly available to the Klan's potential recruits, supporters, and victims.¹⁴ The purpose of this first chapter is to understand how the Klan described its own ideology and activity in relation to the American people in order to then contrast it against victims' depictions of the Klan.

The second and third chapters engage with Catholic and Black newspaper responses to the Klan accusations and ideology identified in the first chapter. While the sources I utilize are by no means representative of the attitudes of all Black and Catholic Americans, they none-the-less provide us access into the kinds of conversations which were occurring in Black and Catholic communities. The second chapter investigates the Catholic response to the Klan through a close analysis of editorials and news articles published in the Jesuit periodical *America* and the *Catholic News Service's (CNS)* news and editorial sheets. The *CNS* was a News Agency sponsored by the National Catholic Welfare Council intended to collect relevant news stories for distribution to various Catholic dioceses around the country. While primarily publishing news articles, producing its own and republishing other Catholic and non-Catholics' articles, the editors of the *CNS* also wrote brief editorials depicting their own attitudes on the Klan. While I will use the *CNS* primarily to describe Catholic awareness of Klan activity and non-Catholics' views on the Klan, I will use

¹⁴Gordon, 15.

editorials in the *CNS* and in the periodical *America* in order to better flesh out Catholic attitude regarding Klan accusations and ideology.

The third chapter explores Black newspapers' responses to the Klan. In order to do this, I will examine Black newspapers in midwestern urban centers, specifically Topeka, Wichita and Hutchinson, Kansas; Cleveland, Ohio; and Chicago, Illinois. Newspapers in the North, while interested in the Klan, came from regions with less Klan power and therefore less dialogue with the perpetrators and victims of Klan violence. Southern newspapers, too, were limited in their ability to portray the reality of the Klan's power because of the palpable likelihood of retaliatory violence against outspoken critics of the Klan. Because of these limitations to the utility of northern and southern newspapers, the Midwest provides a unique perspective. Black Americans in the Midwest lived in communities imbued with, but not dominated by, Klan ideology, giving them both the first-hand experience and relative freedom from censorship to address the Klan. I will include editorials, news articles and letters from the *Topeka Plaindealer*, the *Cleveland Gazette*, the *Broad Ax*, the *Negro Star*, the *Advocate*, and the *Hutchinson Blade* to hear the voices of the Klan's Black targets.

My ultimate aim is to examine how aware these victims were of the Klan's activities, how seriously they viewed the ideological commitments of its members, and how legitimate they considered the Klan's threats and accusations in comparison to revisionist historians' accounts of the Klan. In my conclusion, I will explore the question most pertinent to us as Americans today; how does the Klan fit within the broader American context? A comparison of Black and Catholic responses will prove particularly useful in engaging with this question because of the vastly different historical experiences of these groups with both the Klan and America more broadly.

How these groups identify Klan influence and popularity can help us to wrestle with the paradoxical existence of racism, intolerance, and freedom in the American identity.

CHAPTER ONE

THE IDEOLOGY OF THE SECOND KLAN

Although notorious for secrecy, the Klan did have a public face and voice. From 1915 to 1922, founder and first Imperial Wizard of the Second Ku Klux Klan, William J. Simmons, established Klan ideology and authored the Klan's public message.¹⁵ Simmons presented the mission of the Klan as one requiring national attention and the public's political and social support beyond the actual ranks of the Invisible Empire. At first, his ideology was presented only in brief form until the hiring of Elizabeth Tyler and Edward Clarke of the Southern Publicity Association, who formalized the organization's recruitment efforts by offering financial incentives for recruiters and consolidating Simmons' earlier writings, such as his first book *The Ku Klux Klan*, into more substantive works, most notably *The Klan Unmasked*.¹⁶ In this 1923 publication, Simmons explained in specific detail the allegedly historical grounding of Klan ideology, providing the organization with a unified message which Tyler, Clarke and their new army of recruiters distributed.

In his more mature publications, Simmons presents a provocative diagnosis of America's ills, which, alongside the allure of Klan secrecy and the need for social inclusion, motivated hordes

¹⁵MacLean, 7.

¹⁶William J. Simmons, *The Klan Unmasked* (Atlanta: Wm. E. Thompson publishing co, 1923).

of white, Protestant Americans to enter the Klan.¹⁷ Simmons' publicly available writings present Klan ideology in the way that Simmons wanted the American public, including the Klan's targeted victim populations, to receive his message. Despite being sodden with hypocrisy and factual errors, Simmons' works presented the Klan's members as champions of the white Protestant American public who dealt fairly with all, regardless of their race or religion.

The Klan's Worldview

The Klan Unmasked presents Simmons' vision of America's impending destruction in which "democracy is threatened from every side, by greedy and designing powers above, as by a great mass of incompetent, unprincipled voters from below."¹⁸ From above, titans of industry pushed a secular agenda on the American people, while expanding numbers of immigrants and voting Blacks and women allegedly threatened the democratic process from below. He attributes this decline to the fall of "authentic Americans" who, having lost their position of authority in American politics and society, can no longer facilitate a healthy democracy. He reflects with nostalgia upon American history, framing it as a story of achievement which he attributes to white, Protestant and 100% Americans committed to American ideals and institutions. Simmons' narrative of the United States is one in which cultural, political and spiritual breakdown is caused by the eroding quantity and quality of these "true Americans" who fail to adequately combat the external problem of immigration and the internal problems of consumerism (dubbed "cultural

¹⁷Gordon, 15.

¹⁸Simmons, 154.

giantism”), excessive suffrage and the general erosion of white supremacy.¹⁹ He prescribes his Klan as the only true solution to America’s problems, and in educating, inspiring, and mobilizing a supposedly passive white America against a host of anti-American socio-political developments, the Klan would pull the nation back from the brink of self-destruction.²⁰

Simmons utilizes both environmentalist and essentialist arguments in describing the erosion of the American populace. His environmentalist arguments appeal to conditioning – one’s education, cultural upbringing, life experiences, etc. – in order to describe inferiority and superiority between various groups within the same race. While groups Simmons deems inferior because of their conditioning can improve through changes to their environment, the same is not true for those he deems inherently inferior. Those he describes as essentially inferior, namely women and nonwhites, are allegedly biologically inferior and therefore only evolution can improve their status.

Simmons’ America is a nation facing both demographic and cultural erosion. Culturally, Simmons diagnoses America as suffering from a severe case of social and political “giantism,” a disease in which physical growth is not properly regulated by the body. A result of industrialism and consumerism, this metaphorical “giantism” erodes the American heart, weakens the nation’s soul, and corrupts the growth of “proper” Americans.²¹ Simmons attributes much of this giantism to the rise of consumerism. He argues that, as Americans, “We have amassed our wealth only to realize perhaps too late that our very food and drink are ashes and vinegar.”²² Caught up in the

¹⁹Simmons, 154.

²⁰William J. Simmons, *The Ku Klux Klan Yesterday, Today and Forever: The “Fiery” Summons*. (Texas State Library and Archives Commission).

²¹Simmons, *The Klan Unmasked*, 186.

splendor of their wealth, Americans failed to realize that they were sacrificing their moral and political quality in order to obtain quantity in products.²³

Simmons identifies industrialization as a major cause of the deterioration in the quality of the American populace because of the decrepit cities and factories that it necessarily develops. He claims that industrialization produces environments that stifle necessary personal growth as the factory “progressively selects those who are more and more unfit to be Americans.”²⁴ He describes how the repetitive and constricting nature of factory work does not create noble and courageous Americans, but rather mass-produces drones incapable of anything but obedience.²⁵

He argues that cities, the chief home of the new immigrants, smother personal growth of would-be Americans and that “the city simply cannot furnish the character-building elements which must needs go into the making of an American.”²⁶ Rather than the stifling city, Simmons argues that true Americans need room to grow properly. He writes that “every American child should be born to a vast heritage [...] include a fine healthy parentage, clean birth, gentle care, proper nourishment and opportunity for play and education in the open country.”²⁷ Rather than the obedient urban worker, Simmons’ true American develops in a bucolic setting, free of the corruptions of city life. Simmons laments the tragic fate of those raised in these cities, stating that, “The child of the city has no fair chance to grow. This mass of weaklings is fit only to be the

²²Simmons, 241.

²³Ibid., 183.

²⁴Ibid., 123.

²⁵Ibid., 124.

²⁶Ibid., 125.

²⁷Ibid., 125.

subject of a more or less absolute monarch. They cannot be citizens in a republic that is a reality.”²⁸ For democracy to function, citizens must learn how to think independently – a skill Simmons argues cannot be developed in the city.

Because these cities are full of morally and politically underdeveloped Americans and culturally inferior immigrants, Simmons labels them “the cancer on the body politic,” a breeding ground for dangerous political activity.²⁹ If one is to see the dangers of urbanization, one needs only, he writes, to “look upon New York with its seething millions, hear its babel of languages, feel its delirious fever [...] and then calmly announce that it is Petrograd in its rust and desolation.”³⁰ Simmons thus paints the hustle-bustle American city not as a place of opportunity and assimilation, but rather personal and political perversion.

Giantism therefore results in the private and public erosion of the American people. Privately, it leads to the corruption of priorities and morals – “the very soul of our American life” – by lust and greed, which then affects the public by flooding the democratic system with irresponsible voters.³¹ Because consumerism leads to factories and growing cities, it decreases the number *and* quality of the true Americans needed to maintain American democracy.

The next major problem Simmons discusses is universal suffrage. Simmons suggests that suffrage is mistakenly considered a right instead of a privilege – a fundamentally dangerous and perverse sentiment that enables those with undesirable traits (for women and non-whites biological

²⁸Simmons, 188.

²⁹Ibid., 124.

³⁰Ibid., 123.

³¹Ibid., 124; Ibid., 186.

and for immigrants cultural) a formal means to erode American democracy.³² He argues that not everyone is equipped to handle the responsibilities of the vote because “democracy in practice requires certain mental and moral qualities” which Simmons assumes non-whites and women lack and which many whites – immigrant and native born – fail to develop.³³ Immigrants present an especially severe threat when equipped with the vote because they constitute too diverse a mass to unite. Simmons argues that unity, born of homogeneity, is required for proper voting. He writes, “there must be a high degree of unity in both the thoughts and feelings of the people,” adding that, “if a population is seriously divided along lines of race, language, religion, or social classes, in just so far is a working democracy made difficult.”³⁴ The homogeneity he calls for requires immigrants to embrace “American” culture and for non-whites and women to surrender their political “privileges” all together.

While Simmons alleges that universal suffrage was born out of a love for democracy, it was taken to a dangerous excess and that “the ballot in the hands of the ignorant and untrained immigrants, of negroes, and of illiterate native whites, have proven to be a terrible flare-back, burning our hope of progress to ashes.”³⁵ Culturally inferior immigrants, racially inferior Black Americans and homebound women are all labeled by Simmons as unfit for the privilege of the vote.³⁶ Simmons’ overarching conclusion about universal suffrage is that its current inclusivity

³²Simmons, 257.

³³Ibid., 150.

³⁴Ibid., 151.

³⁵Ibid., 197.

³⁶Ibid., 151.

lowers the overall quality of the body politic while causing unmerited political participation to be concerningly high.

Simmons identifies the influx of eastern and southern European immigrants to the East Coast and Asian immigrants to the West as the major cause of the decline in the quantity of true Americans. Simmons argues that these immigrants are detrimental to America because of their poor political and cultural quality, high numbers, high rate of reproduction and resistance to assimilation. In arguing for restrictions on immigration, he appeals to both essentialist and environmentalist arguments. Simmons contends that groups who do not share a white heritage with the original American settlers are incapable of democracy. He appeals again to world politics to prove the special ability of certain whites to create democracy, saying, “are we to see now that Europe [referring to continental European countries] and Asia are torn from end to end by revolutions, a sudden adaptation of all these backward peoples to the democratic method?”³⁷ He describes how the plausibility of a democracy’s success depends upon a given group’s history and biology, stating, “The limitations of democracy are set by many considerations. These involve, first, the state of biological evolution in which a particular race finds itself; second, the particular history of the particular country under discussion.”³⁸ Simmons concludes that this is a biological and cultural evolution that many 20th century immigrants lack.

Simmons also posits that these immigrants are morally and politically underdeveloped. He distinguishes between the motives of new-wave immigrants and those of the Anglo founders, explaining how the new immigrants allegedly come to America fleeing the responsibilities of

³⁷Simmons, 148.

³⁸Ibid., 149.

improvement in their home countries. America's founders and previous waves of European immigrants, in contrast, according to Simmons, came with rugged dreams of self-determination and a love for freedom which he claims are absent in the hearts and minds of the new immigrants. Simmons argues that any foreigners worthy of being American are still in their native countries, fighting to improve their local conditions rather than leeching off American institutions.³⁹ Because these immigrants come from non-democratic nations, Simmons assumes that they will not be properly conditioned to handle democracy in the United States, will vote improperly, and will undermine the entire American democratic system.⁴⁰ "Broken away from their old moorings without binding themselves to the new," he argues that they will feel no loyalty to vote in the best interest of the nation and will be taken advantage of by nefarious politicians.⁴¹

Simmons believes that inherently lower cultural qualities compound immigrants' lack of loyalty to the United States. In bringing over "inferior" traditions, language and customs, immigrants lower the overall quality of the American populace while creating internal division through their inability and/or refusal to assimilate into "proper" Americanism. He describes in absolute terms how immigration threatens American national safety, stating,

The continued use of foreign languages [and] foreign customs, are things which should never have been tolerated on our soil. By herding together, they bring up their children in a foreign atmosphere, thus perpetuating and increasing the weaknesses and dangers which they have brought into our national life.⁴²

³⁹Simmons, 253.

⁴⁰Ibid., 138.

⁴¹Ibid., 233.

⁴²Ibid., 139.

According to Simmons, the United States' alleged cultural crisis was compounded by the fact that, as the immigrant population increased, the population of "authentic Americans" decreased. Simmons describes how, "in comparison with the colored and foreign elements our percentage is every year being reduced. In full view, within a few decades at most, lies the new America."⁴³ Simmons' new America was a nation that "will belong to the people who multiply most rapidly, imbeciles and the other feeble minded."⁴⁴ Simmons stresses that the rising immigrant population and declining "true American" population does not just weaken but severely threatens American institutions. With a morbid and serious tone, he describes that the immigrant could, if no action was taken, inevitably drag America down to "the pits of hell."⁴⁵

Simmons presents the overall consequence of these pressures as the death of American democracy and the extinction of "true Americans." He describes what America will look like if these "hazards" are not addressed, stating that, "If alien populations are permitted [...] to flood our land, colonize in our great cities, and propagate their kind with such amazing rapidity [...] then our country is lost and everything the fathers strove to build for posterity will sooner or later be wiped out."⁴⁶ This new America, a result of various pressures, will rapidly become, "a stench in the nostrils of the decent and intelligent minority."⁴⁷ Simmons presents America in such an

⁴³Simmons, 111.

⁴⁴Ibid., 248.

⁴⁵Ibid., 246.

⁴⁶Ibid., 126.

⁴⁷Ibid., 180.

obvious state of crisis that “only the ignorant can say that we have not fallen on times that are weak and evil and failing at every point.”⁴⁸

THE ROLE OF THE KLAN

To address these ills and restore America to its former glory, Simmons argues that “authentic Americans” with the racial, moral and mental caliber of the Founding Fathers must reclaim their place of authority in American democracy, while forcing others to fall into their place beneath them in the social and racial hierarchy of an “authentic America.”⁴⁹ Simmons describes his ideal citizen as not only having a proper education and upbringing but also having the biological and racial prerequisites needed for their education to be productive. He describes these ideal citizens as “free, honest, intelligent, informed, sportsmanlike, and willing to be always active in the performance of his political duties.”⁵⁰ He is careful, however, in emphasizing that “these qualities are not brought forth by the hocus pocus of wishing them upon anybody. They are the result of a long evolution.”⁵¹ This evolution is both biological and cultural: biological in the evolution of race, and cultural in the historical creation of Americanism and the personal development of that Americanism within each citizen, foreign or native born. Simmons argues that white Americans, because they inherently and environmentally possess the traits described above, are best suited for maintaining democracy. Racially superior, morally strengthened through

⁴⁸Simmons, 203.

⁴⁹Ibid., 267.

⁵⁰Ibid., 126; Ibid., 170.

⁵¹Ibid., 126; Ibid., 170.

Protestant faith, and with an integrity earned through the taming of North America, these Americans are described by Simmons as an elite citizenry.⁵²

Simmons argues that, unlike 20th century immigrants to the United States from non-Democratic countries in eastern and southern Europe, Anglo-Americans, “true Americans,” derive from countries with existing democracies. He attributes this difference to the biological and intellectual development of the white race in these nations and argues that this racial superiority created a culture which prepared the founders of America to form American democracy. He writes that, “One need only to observe world politics to recognize that democracy has been a slow, delicate and perishable growth among a specific group of European nations. These peoples have been much favored through a peculiar heritage.”⁵³ In deciding who should be trusted with democracy, Simmons maintains that history shows white Europeans and their ancestors have been the only successful architects of democracy, and that they should, therefore, be solely entrusted with preserving democracy in the future. Anglo-Americans not only benefit from this inherited racial sophistication but also benefit from their personal development earned through the trials of taming America and founding the nation. Thus, they are the pinnacle of both his essentialist and environmentalist arguments, earning them the title of a “peculiar people” with “infinite possibilities” who have “been prepared to become the ancestors of a glorious and ever folding race.”⁵⁴

⁵²Simmons, 175.

⁵³Ibid., 116.

⁵⁴Ibid., 176-177; Ibid., 178.

Simmons describes that true Americans, with their great ability and potential, can only be fostered in correct circumstances. The requisite environment teaches the absolute importance of loyalty to American institutions and Protestant values from birth and maintains them through adulthood. Simmons describes this specific cultivation, saying:

We believe that only one born on American soil, surrounded by American institutions, taught in American schools, harmonized from infancy with American ideals, can become fully conscious of what our peculiar democracy means and be adequately qualified for all the duties of citizenship in this republic.⁵⁵

This “100% American” upbringing forms the core of the Klan’s definition of authentic Americanism. Unsurprisingly, Simmons’ description of what makes a true American also exactly matches the prerequisites of membership for the Ku Klux Klan, mandating that the Klan consists of only “authentic Americans.” The Klan is therefore presented as the most adept at maintaining American democracy and the ideals that form its basis.

Simmons’ first solution to establish proper “authentic American” control is to decrease the population and socio-political influence of immigrants in four different ways: absorption, suppression, expulsion and rejection.⁵⁶ For people in America who can check the three boxes of Protestantism, whiteness, and patriotism, the best solution is absorption. Simmons describes this phenomenon, stating that, “He [a white immigrant] must come out an American with all of his distinct qualities and characteristics swallowed up and absorbed in American democracy.”⁵⁷ To be a true American, therefore requires sacrifice of all previous identity and loyalty in order to fully embrace a “100%” American identity.

⁵⁵Simmons, 54.

⁵⁶This categorization is my own.

⁵⁷Ibid., 274.

Simmons does not believe that all immigrants are capable of assimilation because of their racial and sometimes cultural evolution; therefore, his second means of addressing the immigrant problem – and the race problem in America more broadly – is through an essentialist argument in favor of suppression. Simmons describes how some people are simply not capable of being fully American, claiming, “It should go without saying that all men, without reference to origin and history, cannot be thrust into this country, and under restraint and repression, be forced into our ways of thinking and living and so attain the true value of American citizenship.”⁵⁸ Simmons argues that those who cannot be absorbed, primarily non-whites and certain immigrants, should be denied suffrage, relinquishing their political influence to “authentic Americans” who are better equipped to fulfill the duties of political participation.⁵⁹

While Simmons mentions expulsion only briefly, he explains that it could also be a potential way to purify America's racial composition. He argues that America should invest in land in Africa to which the nation can deport Black Americans.⁶⁰ He also encourages the Zionist cause in order to remove American Jews.⁶¹

The most immediate solution Simmons suggests is the stoppage of further immigrants for ten years. He argues that current immigrants must be fully assimilated before Americans should consider allowing a trickle of immigration:

If we can find some method by which after ten years of entire rejection, immigration can be narrowly and rigidly restricted, and by which the surplus population can be

⁵⁸Simmons, 52.

⁵⁹Ibid., 262.

⁶⁰Ibid., 236.

⁶¹Ibid., 67.

distributed [...] and slowly wrought into our social life, there is yet hope left for our country.⁶²

In order for America to be restored, Simmons claims that the immigrant population must be eliminated – either through embracing the qualities that make one authentically American (if racially qualified) or through outright removal, either physically or politically through demoting them to a second-class citizenship.

Simmons argues that a correction of the American socio-racial hierarchy requires a decrease in immigrant influence accompanied by an increase in the white American population. He stresses the fundamental importance of this simultaneous assault on heterogeneity, stating that, “We Americans can and must solve these peculiar [...] problems on the basis of a slowly increasing native population.”⁶³ He further stresses the crucial importance of reproduction, reminding white Americans that, “The millions of homes in which there are no children [...] are so many millions of tombs in which the nation's hopes and future lie buried.”⁶⁴ Simmons insists that increasing native white population and decreasing immigrant population would create the homogeneity necessary for a democracy to function. He argues that if Americans “stop immigration [...] a homogenous English-speaking nation will again be developed. Such a nation will solve every economic and social problem as it arrives.”⁶⁵ Simmons, therefore, presents correcting the influx of immigrants *and* the decline of white Americans as an absolute necessity in protecting America.

⁶²Simmons, 126.

⁶³Ibid., 255.

⁶⁴Ibid., 284.

⁶⁵Ibid., 135.

Having addressed the quantity problem concerning immigrants, Simmons then identifies another damaging force, the diminishing virtues in native born white Protestants. He argues that the lack of values and virtues in both immigrant and “native” white Americans can best be addressed through a drastic expansion of public education. He stresses the absolute necessity of public education “in the maintenance of a democracy,” equating “a state of free schooling [...] as absolutely necessary as the home or the church.”⁶⁶ Emphasizing the need for morally sound voters in a functioning democracy, he warns that “our democracy must be taught to think, and taught to think right, if it is to live.”⁶⁷ According to Simmons, public education is the means by which the nation can guarantee a homogenous mass of virtuous citizens who, otherwise, would be spoiled by mass consumption and the limitations of factory work. Simmons describes the need for education to create consistent and proper values, claiming:

So distinctly American must the public school system be that the young life of the nation, without respect to race, color or creed, shall be brought into it and subjected to its molding and developing process [...] A democracy must have uniformity and universality in the elementary training of its young life.⁶⁸

Simmons’ intended end result of this expansion and unification among public education is an increased absorption into Klan-defined Americanism. Simmons stresses that if immigrants are taught the same history and values as native born Americans, their foreign culture and language will be replaced by “American” culture and the English language. Thus, education will ultimately

⁶⁶Simmons, 269.

⁶⁷Ibid., 270.

⁶⁸Ibid., 272; Crucial in this education is that the students are taught “proper” American history, which ideally, is identical to the history Simmons himself presents in *The Klan Unmasked*.

create authentic Americans who are capable of maintaining democracy and resisting the materialist changes of the 20th century.

Simmons' third proposed solution to avoiding the inevitable destruction of the United States is to limit who can vote. Maintaining continuity with his analysis of universal suffrage as problematic, he argues that Americans must treat voting as a privilege rather than a right.⁶⁹ Because the vote is the most powerful force in a democracy, such privilege must be merited, not freely granted. Simmons contends that literacy in "English should be a prerequisite to be able to vote," something which he acknowledges would disenfranchise many immigrants, Blacks, and even poor whites who cannot speak, write, or read "proper" English.⁷⁰ Voters also must have received a proper American education that would enable them to intelligently vote. He suggests that such a rule should be formalized through the mandatory passage of a voter qualification exam in all public schools.⁷¹ Simmons describes that suffrage must be handled with the utmost carefulness, stating,

"Both our young people and our immigrants must be asked to fit themselves with the greatest care for the use of the ballot."⁷² He continues, claiming that, "A great many, native-born and foreigners alike, should be admitted to every other privilege and right of citizenship except that of the ballot."⁷³ Despite this supposed willingness to include immigrants in other facets of American society, Simmons stresses the importance of isolating the privilege of the vote from immigrants he

⁶⁹Simmons, 260.

⁷⁰Ibid., 261.

⁷¹Ibid., 262.

⁷²Ibid., 266.

⁷³Ibid.

deems are not adequately assimilated, stating, “Nothing should be denied these [immigrants] except the power to degrade and destroy our government through ignorance and incompetence.”⁷⁴ Limiting the vote to “true” Americans supposedly provides a political purification that will correct the political/moral degeneracy that immigration causes.⁷⁵

The ultimate end of Simmons’ proposed solutions is to reestablish a properly ordered hierarchy of political and social power in the United States through increasing the quantity and quality of authentic Americans while limiting the quantity of people who were supposedly not capable of becoming true Americans. It is only once Simmons identifies national threats and provides broad solutions that he introduces the Klan as a group capable of facilitating the necessary national changes and filling the demanded role of guarding democracy.⁷⁶ However, Simmons is deliberate in not presenting the Klan as the sole answer, but rather as a catalyst to motivate the greater American population to take action against the dangers he illuminates. He calls upon all true Americans to join the effort to solve the problems he identifies, stating, “You millions of the middle classes of America [...] upon your conscience is the greater burden placed [...] the future throughout your country and the world will hold you responsible!”⁷⁷ Simmons does not believe that if America is to be saved all Americans must join the ranks of the Invisible Empire; however, it is necessary that they support the Klan’s mission.

The Klan’s Relationships with Jewish, Catholic, and Black Americans.

⁷⁴Simmons, 266.

⁷⁵Ibid., 234.

⁷⁶Ibid., 204.

⁷⁷Ibid., 268; Ibid., 268.

Simmons argues that America requires a specific form of government, social structure and thought (i.e. values) to properly function.⁷⁸ He claims the form of government ought to be democracy (as he understands it), that the social organization ought to be a racial hierarchy built around white supremacy, and that the moral code ought to be derived from Protestant Christianity. Because Simmons presents the Ku Klux Klan as representing the most authentic form of Americanism, any group that challenges or refuses to conform to the social structure prescribed by the Klan does not just disrespect the Klan but also undermines the order and values integral to American society. Despite labeling non-conformists as dangerous to the foundations of the United States, Simmons adamantly maintains that the Klan is a defensive organization existing in support of “authentic Americans” rather than in opposition to any other groups. In describing the Klan’s mission, he writes, “The Klan will condemn no man or set of men so long as he, or they, are obedient to the law and uphold the principles of Americanism and the principles of Christian religion.” He therefore affirms the organizations commitment to respecting differences and maintaining peace and order in their quest.⁷⁹ Any groups acceptance of – or submission to – Simmons’ “proper” American hierarchy serves as a litmus test for determining Klan relationships with groups outside its ranks, namely Jews, Catholics and Black Americans.⁸⁰

Despite the fact that the lynching of a Jewish man was an important precursor to the founding of his Klan, Simmons insists that there is no Klan animosity towards the Jews.⁸¹ Rather,

⁷⁸Ku Klux Klan, *Questions Answered* (University of Pennsylvania Online Books Page), <https://archive.lib.msu.edu/DMC/AmRad/questionsansweredofficial.pdf/> (accessed May 16, 2020).

⁷⁹Ku Klux Klan, *Questions Answered*.

⁸⁰The Klan also targeted immigrants more broadly, as well as anti-war activists, members of the LGBTQ+ community and a host of other marginalized groups. However, Jews, Catholics and Black Americans received most of the Klan’s public attention.

Simmons writes, “The hard and fast racial organization of the Orthodox Jew does not permit him to go outside of prescribed boundaries in either his social or his religious life. We have not excluded the Jew. The Orthodox Jew has excluded himself.”⁸² He argues that the Klan does not disqualify the Jews, but rather the Jews disqualify themselves from both the Klan and Americanism by refusing to surrender their Jewishness – an identity Simmons argues is incompatible with Americanism. Simmons thus appeals to a typical anti-Semitic trope, claiming that the Jews’ racial particularism bars them from assimilation with the broader American community. Maintaining his claim that the Klan is not inherently maleficent towards any group, Simmons describes how he has no inherent problem with the Jews. His only expressed grievance with Orthodox Jews is that they allegedly isolate themselves and prioritize Judaism over Americanism.⁸³

While expressing agitation at Orthodox Jews’ resistance to assimilation, Simmons claims to have no issue with there being a small number of Jews in the United States, because, he argues, they will inevitably assimilate.⁸⁴ However, he does favor restriction of any further Jewish immigration because a large Jewish population could create a sub-state that would complicate their assimilation. The consistent and systematic approach to Klan ideology that Simmons so intentionally cultivates in *The Klan Unmasked* breaks down when describing the Jews. He appeals to contradictory environmentalist and essentialist arguments, applauding Jewish racial purity while also demanding that “in America the Jew must ultimately mix with the Gentile.”⁸⁵ Simmons

⁸¹Gordon, 12.

⁸²Simmons, 68; Simmons does not specify what he means by Orthodox. While this label could indeed align with contemporary definitions of Orthodox Judaism, Simmons could also be referring to practicing Jews more broadly.

⁸³Ibid., 63.

⁸⁴Ibid., 66-67.

seemingly struggles to define “Jewish” and refers to Jewishness in relation to lifestyle, culture, and religion as well as race. He writes, “Perhaps the Jew has understood for ages what some of our American sociologists will not learn from biology; that is, that the amalgamation of two distinctive race types may lose, in the offspring, much of the distinctive good of both.”⁸⁶ In suggesting that Jews could become American while also maintaining that they are a distinct race, Simmons’ claims imply the truth of one of two problematic conclusions. Firstly, racial homogeneity is not requisite for Jewish inclusion in Americanism. A second conclusion, equally as logically inconsistent with Simmons’ ideology, is that the Jews can sacrifice their race and be absorbed into whiteness, challenging the supposed biological existence of race. The Jews therefore do not fit neatly into either Simmons environmentalist or essentialist understandings of Americanism.

When describing Catholic Americans, Simmons appeals strictly to an environmentalist argument and must reconcile his critiques of Catholics with their historical contributions to the United States. Simmons divides Catholics into the old “American Catholics” and the new “Roman Catholics.” The early American Catholics Simmons refers to tended to be English as opposed to the 19th and 20th century Catholic immigrants who tended to be Irish.⁸⁷ He applauds old American Catholics for their participation and contribution to American history, specifically their heroism in the American Revolution.⁸⁸ Here, Simmons seems to present a religious tolerance so long as that religion does not challenge Protestant authority. This initially may seem surprising given his repeated stress of the need for homogeneity. He elaborates on this stance however, stating that

⁸⁵Simmons, 60.

⁸⁶Ibid., 65.

⁸⁷Although Simmons does not identify them as such, the “new wave Catholics” he refers to are likely the poor Irish farmers who fled to the United States during the Irish potato famine.

⁸⁸Ibid., 71.

while these Americans are Catholic in faith, they are still thoroughly American because, “Wherever we find such a Catholic church the American public school system is seen in the vicinity.”⁸⁹ Despite their faith, these American Catholics are properly assimilated and instilled with the necessary values through their participation in public schools, making them capable of absorption into Americanism. Simmons argues that, “When the [old wave] Catholic [...] goes to the ballot-box, he votes as an American citizen not being under ecclesiastical control.”⁹⁰ While Catholic, these old Americans’ loyalty is not questioned by Simmons because of their proper conditioning and historical resumé.

While showing a great reverence for revolutionary-era American-Catholics, Simmons offers no tolerance for 19th century Catholic immigrants who allegedly isolate themselves in parochial schools. These Catholics’ refusal to attend public schools compromises their loyalty and raises questions about their ideology.⁹¹ In refusing to send their children to public schools, these Roman Catholics resist assimilation and create division in the community. Educational isolation not only inhibits cultural assimilation but also allows the Catholic church to mobilize Catholic voters against the United States. Simmons describes this political threat of Catholic schools stating, “[Clerical teaching] has been used in our elections as a mass vote by those who exercise control over its votes through the political power of the church.”⁹² Because Catholics are supposedly not primarily loyal to America, but rather, to the Pope, “new” Roman Catholics represent a dangerous voting body. Simmons argues that voting Americans must be loyal first and foremost to America,

⁸⁹Simmons, 73.

⁹⁰Ibid., 73.

⁹¹Ibid., 75.

⁹²Ibid, 75.

claiming, “We cannot have a [...] Catholic party among us and still preserve the political system of our American nation which has been created by three centuries of democratic revolution.”⁹³ Before Catholics are to be allowed to vote, Simmons asks that they prove they are loyal to America, not Rome.

Simmons expresses respect for Catholics’ right to practice their faith; yet, to be trusted as authentic Americans, he argues they must embrace public education or, at least, allow complete transparency in their schools.⁹⁴ He argues that Americans must “seek by every means to make all Christianity ready for that more perfect unity of the entire Christian church which should ever be an ideal with all of us.”⁹⁵ He thus presents public education as the best way to produce the necessary homogeneity, even among Christians of different sects, needed to preserve America for both the Catholics and the Klan by conforming Catholic values to the values of proper Americans.⁹⁶

The Reconstruction-era Ku Klux Klan had little interaction with Jews and Catholics which gave Simmons the opportunity to define a primarily new Klan relationship with them. The same was not true for the Klan’s relationship with Black Americans. Given the notorious reputation that the Klan had earned itself through the violence committed towards Black Americans during Reconstruction, Simmons had to address a loaded historical relationship in order to salvage the

⁹³Simmons, 80.

⁹⁴Ibid., 276.

⁹⁵Ibid., 82.

⁹⁶While Simmons presents a rather limited list of accusations against Catholics, focusing nearly exclusively on their private education system and consistently maintaining their freedom to religion, there were far more, and far nastier claims made against Catholics in the privacy of Klan chapters. In private Klan lectures and newspapers, leaders condemned the Catholic church not just for their secrecy but accused the priests of being sexual predators, the nuns of being witches, and of Catholics being brain washed minions of the pope who is likened to the anti-Christ. See MacLean, 49.

Klan's public reputation and establish its legitimacy as a "benevolent organization." To address the negative connotations of the Klan among Black Americans and white Americans repulsed by the Klan's historical violence, Simmons turns to an apologist historiography of Reconstruction in order to reconcile his commitment to both the first Klan and to non-violent, legal means.⁹⁷ He contends that immediately following the Civil War there was no tension between white and Black Americans until Northern "carpetbaggers" and "scalawags" came to the South to incite unrest among the newly freed slaves at the expense of southern whites.⁹⁸ Simmons does not deny that violence between whites and Blacks occurred during Reconstruction; however, he defines the Klan as a mediating, not contributing, force in interracial violence in the South. Simmons attributes any apparent Black animosity towards the Klan not to the Klan's actions but to the fabricated accusations of anti-South powers in the North. Through this version of Reconstruction history, Simmons presents the relationship between the Klan and Black Americans not as one of terror and violence, but rather of compassion and paternalism in which the Klan defended Blacks in the past and will continue to do so in the future.

Having defined a positive relationship between the Klan and Black Americans, Simmons turns to what he believes should be their place in a proper American hierarchy – at the bottom. While Jews' and Catholics' acceptance as American is contingent upon their absorption into Americanism, Black Americans' acceptance is presented as contingent upon submission to authentic Americans' absolute authority because of their supposedly severe racial inferiority. While Simmons carefully describes the positive traits of the Jews and Catholics, he does not

⁹⁷His historical narrative falls in line with the Dunning school's account of Reconstruction.

⁹⁸Simmons, 19.

attempt to inflate the egos of Black Americans and presents an entirely essentialist argument writing, “Why should the simple truth give offense to anybody? The negro in Africa is a childish barbarian.”⁹⁹ Simmons immediately demands recognition of the supposedly fundamental truth of Black inferiority, stating that, “The African negro cannot realize democracy today because he is physically, and hence morally, unfitted for its responsibilities.”¹⁰⁰ As a result of their inferiority, Simmons argues that “the sooner the nation unites in looking upon our tens of millions of colored folk as tens of millions of children for whose protection and care we are morally responsible, the sooner we shall all be placed upon solid ground.”¹⁰¹ Just as caring parents look to facilitate the proper growth of their children, so too must white Americans act towards Black Americans. Simmons writes, “The great masses of the colored races [...] must be protected, civilized, educated and led onward and upward,” a duty which Simmons argues the Klan is willing to undertake.¹⁰²

Simmons laments that slavery was an evil for both Black and white Americans and that it is white Americans’ obligation as the facilitators of slavery to correct the consequences through a proper supervision of Black Americans.¹⁰³ He presents slavery as a great sin because Black Americans should have been left in Africa to “develop properly,” which, while Simmons argues would have taken thousands of years, would have happened eventually.¹⁰⁴ Because of slavery, Simmons writes that Black Americans act as a “millstone about its [the nation’s] neck,” which

⁹⁹Simmons, 156.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 149.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 164.

¹⁰²Ibid., 229.

¹⁰³Ibid., 155.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 234.

“still drags upon every natural aspiration of the southland.”¹⁰⁵ Black Americans, no longer contributing to the economy through slavery, instead are described as clogging avenues of American progress through their general deficiency. Because this “millstone” of Black presence in the United States is considered the result of an economic system in which the whole country participated and whose consequences equally affect the nation as a whole, the response to Black Americans must be equally as nationally involved.¹⁰⁶

Because Simmons identifies slavery as a tragic mistake, he argues that Black Americans must be addressed with “humility and Christian kindness.”¹⁰⁷ This means prioritizing the needs of Black Americans, which are *unequal* rights and education. He writes that because of his inferiority, “The negro is not yet prepared, mentally or morally, to share all the results of our civilization with us.”¹⁰⁸ Because of Blacks’ inherent inferiority, Simmons contends that those who fight for equality are misled and actually harm Black Americans by giving them responsibilities they are incapable of handling.¹⁰⁹ National policies that attempt to empower Black Americans are thus presented as harmful and causing “unfathomable suffering” among the Black community.¹¹⁰

Having described Black inferiority and the problem their continued presence poses to the United States, Simmons then turns to what to do about the so called “negro problem.” He emphasizes that the primary civil responsibility of Black Americans that must be revoked is the

¹⁰⁵Simmons, 239.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 161-162.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 156.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 167.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 165.

¹¹⁰Ibid., 165.

right to vote, which he describes as an “unmitigated curse to the negroes.”¹¹¹ Because of their supposedly inferior intellect, if Black Americans are able to vote, they are at risk of being taken advantage of by corrupt whites for nefarious political ends, something which he believes was evident during Reconstruction.¹¹² Simmons stresses that, because the Klan recognizes Black inferiority and keeps them in their safe and proper place at the bottom of the American hierarchy, that the Klan is “the best friends the Negro has, here or anywhere.”¹¹³ Simmons calls on Americans to acknowledge the supposedly obvious truth of Black inferiority, and in an ironic twist, to treat African Americans with the same Christian kindness and compassion as the Klan does.¹¹⁴

Establishing a New Reputation for the Klan

Through his explanation of the Klan worldview and its relationship with other Americans, Simmons attempts to cultivate a positive public image of the Klan as a legitimate, law-abiding organization composed of morally sound gentleman modeled after Christ and motivated by love for America and fellow man. Throughout *The Klan Unmasked*, Simmons maintains a positive and overtly respectful tone. Despite describing the inferiority of nearly every non-white and non-Protestant group, Simmons maintains a civil, nearly academic style, not resorting to slurs or severe insults, describing Klan ideology as a result of allegedly objective facts, not prejudices.¹¹⁵ His

¹¹¹Simmons, 166.

¹¹²Ibid., 167.

¹¹³Ibid., 17.

¹¹⁴Ibid., 167-168.

¹¹⁵Ibid., 119; Ibid., 138.

depiction of Klan ideology stresses that the Klan has benevolent ends and utilizes legal means to obtain them. Rather than usurping power, the Klan is presented as doing what is necessary and best for everyone in a way that preserves the law and integrity of America. Simmons argues that white Americans have no reason to be suspicious of the Klan because “the Klan is a purely American organization assembled around the Constitution of the United States, to safeguard its provisions, advance its purposes, and perpetuate its democracy.”¹¹⁶ Simmons simultaneously works to dismiss negative public connotations of the Klan, stressing that his organization condemns violence and lawlessness in all circumstances and acts not as a force of terror but rather of stability and progress.¹¹⁷

Contemporary historians’ accounts of Simmons’ Klan show a drastic tension between Simmons’ benign public description of the organization’s ideology and activity and the Klan’s privately described beliefs and methods. They note that private Klan documents present an explicit intolerance and bigotry that is absent in Simmons public works. Historians Felix Harcourt in *Ku Klux Kulture* and Nancy MacLean in *Behind the Mask of Chivalry* show that private Klan documents such as the Kloran and newspapers like the *Courier* and *Imperial Nighthawk*, as well as speeches given in private Klan meetings, reveal a visceral hatred for and mistrust of non-whites, non-Protestants and all immigrants, which far surpasses Simmons’ polite depictions in viciousness and scope.¹¹⁸ The tension between the Klan’s public description and private reality is further shown by contemporary historians who argue that the Klan participated extensively in the various

¹¹⁶Simmons., 51.

¹¹⁷Ibid., 14.

¹¹⁸Harcourt, 22.

kinds of illegal, bigoted and immoral activities that Simmons so adamantly condemns in the his writings. Linda Gordon in the *Second Coming of the KKK* and Glenn Feldman in *Politics, Society, and the Klan in Alabama 1915-1949* argue that lynching, murder, kidnapping and assault followed the Klan wherever its chapters sprung up. They describe further that there was often denouncement of this violence by Klan leadership, who hypocritically often ordered the violence in the first place and protected the Klan as an organization, while intimate relationships with law enforcement and judicial officials ensured that Klansmen who partook in violence were unlikely to be convicted.¹¹⁹

While Simmons argued that his Klan was legal, righteous and upstanding, it is the consensus of contemporary historians on the Klan that the organization often acted in blatant disregard of its publicly described ideals and limits. In the following chapters, I will examine Klan victims' responses to both the Klan's publicly available message and private and public activities. The responses of Black and Catholic Americans to the Klan show a strong correlation with the findings of contemporary historians on the Klan. My findings verify not just that the Klan's message was a façade behind which they hid intolerance and violence but also that the Klan faced little resistance from whites in the South or North leaving Klan victims feeling abandoned by both their local communities and the Federal Government.

¹¹⁹Gordon, 26.

CHAPTER TWO

CATHOLIC AMERICANS' RESPONSES TO THE KLAN

Although Simmons established the Second Klan in 1915, the Invisible Empire was not on the national Catholic radar until 1920. While many Catholics most definitely would have been aware of the film *Birth of a Nation*, the absence of articles in either the *CNS* or *America* suggests that the Ku Klux Klan, as an organization and ideology, did not yet merit a national Catholic response. The absence of a Catholic public statement is likely attributable to the Klan's initially small size and the fact that the first Klan hardly interacted with Catholics.¹²⁰ This is not to say though that Catholic Americans were not committed to observing and commenting on American society. The Jesuit periodical *America* shows that while the Klan is not mentioned until 1920, Catholic Americans (in this case Jesuit priests) noted similar issues as the Klan. The priests diagnose the same kinds of ills plaguing America: rising rates of corruption, divorce, crime and violence and a breakdown of religious and moral commitment are all addressed in detail in the periodical. While both the Catholics and the Klan blamed increased consumerism and the changing culture for worsening the quality of the Americans, they differ in that the Catholics viewed the Klan as exacerbating rather than mitigating these consequences.¹²¹

¹²⁰Gordon, 4.

¹²¹See for example, "The Elimination of Conscience," *America*, September 2, 1922; "The Freedom of the Seized," *America*, February 25, 1922; "Is the Worker a Machine?" *America*, April 15, 1922.

Both the *CNS* and Jesuits point a finger at the Klan as perpetuating the problematic cycles of intolerance, corruption and moral erosion which they identify as rampant in the United States in the early 20th century.¹²² Rather than the absorption, suppression and expulsion offered by the Klan, the Catholic newspapers plead for an authentic understanding of marginalized groups, assigning blame to environments rather than to individuals.¹²³ The solution the Catholics offer is not to blame immigrants or Black Americans, but rather to understand them in order to better help them. While the Catholics ultimately recognized that there were social and political ills requiring redress in America, they argued the Klan was wrong in both its diagnosis of the causes of these ills and in their solutions.

The Jesuits began discussing the Klan in 1920, with the editors of the *CNS* following suit in 1921. This initial commentary on the Klan roughly corresponds to the organization's drastic increase in membership under publicists Elizabeth Tyler and Edward Clarke.¹²⁴ The Klan's numerical strength, resulting in increased notoriety, created a political and social legitimacy that merited suspicion and surveillance from Catholic journalists. Both Catholic sources devoted substantial space in their publications to defenses against Klan accusations and provided scrupulous accounts of the Klan's activities and how that activity did or (more often) did not align with the Klan's publicly stated ideology.

¹²²See for example, "The impunity of the Klansman," *America*, July 15, 1922; "Ku Klux Klan," *America*, January 1, 1921; "The Ku Klux Comedians," *America*, January 29, 1921; "The Menace of Moral Idiocy," *Catholic News Service*, September 5, 1921; "Contempt for law," *Catholic News Service*, July 3, 1922.

¹²³See for example, "Full Measure for the Negro," *America*, December 17, 1921; "Negro Virtue," *America*, April 15, 1922.

¹²⁴Gordon, 15.

Both the editors of the *CNS* and the Jesuit publishers of *America* outright deny the Klan's claims that Catholics' loyalty to the United States was compromised by their faith or their private schooling. Catholic editors challenged Simmons' claim that the goal of the Catholic Church was "to politically dominate the Congress and diplomatic services of the United States," through editorials citing the blood spilled by Catholic Americans under the stars and stripes in every major conflict to date.¹²⁵ They emphasize in particular the most recent sacrifices that young Catholic men made on the killing fields of the First World War. These Catholic writers argue that Catholics' sacrifices in America's wars should be enough to merit dismissal of any claims that Catholics would intentionally undermine an American Democracy which they had fought and died to defend.¹²⁶

While Catholic newspapers affirmed their own loyalty through editorials, they also re-published public declarations of Catholic Americans' loyalty. Eugene J. Dwyer's speech given to the Knights of Columbus (KOC) and published in the *CNS* on October 23, 1922, provides one of the most eloquent defenses of Catholic-Americans loyalty to faith and nation. First citing Catholic military contributions, the speaker then directly affirms the simultaneous identities of the KOC stating, "We are here as Catholics, as Knights of Columbus and as Americans."¹²⁷ Dwyer concludes by stressing the compatibility of these various identities, arguing that a "man cannot at the same time be a good Knight of Columbus and a bad citizen. The two cannot exist at the same

¹²⁵"Catholic War Records Essential To Refute the K.K.K.," *Catholic News Service*, October 23, 1922.

¹²⁶See for example, "Ku Klux Organizer Admits Klan Fights 'a Certain Religion'," *Catholic News Service*, August 15, 1921; "Catholic War Records Essential To Refute the K.K.K.," *Catholic News Service*, October 23, 1922; "Control of Intolerance," *America*, August 26, 1922.

¹²⁷"Knowledge of Faith is their True Armor, Knights are Told," *Catholic News Service*, October 23, 1922.

time in the same person. We are here as Americans first, last and always.”¹²⁸ Using an argument similar to Simmons’ (that a good Klansmen is a good American), Dwyer describes the same necessary union between being a good Catholic and a good American. Dwyer writes, in what appears to be a direct rebuke to Simmons’ self-appointment of the Klan as the defenders of true Americanism, “This Order [KOC] will always be found sustaining our government in every crisis.”¹²⁹ In words nearly identical to those of Simmons, Dwyer thus identifies the KOC as the defenders of America and her democratic institutions against un-American threats like the Ku Klux Klan.

The *CNS* further rebuked Simmons’ critiques by publishing affirmations of Catholic loyalty and their contributions to American society written by non-Catholics.¹³⁰ One such affirmation, a reprint of a speech given by Protestant New York Representative Walter Chandler, presents the “contributions of Catholics to the cause of religious liberty and of American principles” stating that, “if the grand goblins and king klegle’s of the Ku Klux Klan could gather in Lafayette” then they would “be reminded that, of the four heroic figures [...] of this square, three of them - those of Lafayette, Rochambeau, and Kosciusko - are statues of Catholic heroes.”¹³¹ Having reminded his audience of Catholic military contributions, Chandler then turns to the moral quality of Catholics, writing, “The clergymen of the Catholic and Jewish faiths are [...] men of

¹²⁸“Knowledge of Faith is their True Armor, Knights are Told,” *Catholic News Service*, October 23, 1922.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*

¹³⁰See for example, “Ku Klux Klan is Grave Menace, Says Illinois Assembly,” *Catholic News Service*, June 20, 1921; “Council of Churches Condemns the Klan as Danger to Nation,” *Catholic News Service*, October 16, 1922; “Bar Association of Birmingham Leads Fight on Ku Klux,” *Catholic News Service*, June 5, 1922; “An Answer to the Klan,” *America*, September 3, 1921.

¹³¹“In Powerful Speech New York Representative, a Protestant, Upholds Americanism of Catholics,” *Catholic News Service*, September 25, 1922.

education, earnestness, and piety [...] sincere seekers after truth.”¹³² Chandler’s description of the moral legitimacy of Catholic priests reaffirmed the Catholics’ claims that they were legitimate, virtuous citizens who contribute rather than detract from the quality of the American populace. Having affirmed the personal quality of Catholics, Chandler continues to directly dismiss the accusations of “Rome in Congress,” affirming that, because Catholics had proven both their historical loyalty to the United States and their personal moral quality, there was no reason to believe that they were not authentically American and would not vote as such.¹³³

These Catholics’ responses to the Klan’s accusations against them reveal a fundamental disagreement over each group’s definition of what it means to be a true American. These papers revised the Klan’s definition of American to include not only Catholics but other non-whites and non-Protestants as well.¹³⁴ An article reposted by the *CNS* affirms their inclusion of all groups in Americanism, stating simply that, “This Nation includes Catholics and Jews, naturalized citizens and Negroes.”¹³⁵ Through publishing both Catholic and non-Catholic denunciations of the Klan, the editors of the *CNS* and *America* present the Klan’s attempts to limit the category of authentic Americans as unfounded and unrecognized by Americans regardless of religious and/or political creed.

Catholic newspapers do not just defend themselves from the Klan but respond in kind, challenging the Klan’s legitimacy and arguing that the organization was unlawful, immoral and

¹³²“In Powerful Speech New York Representative, a Protestant, Upholds Americanism of Catholics,” *Catholic News Service*, September 25, 1922.

¹³³*Ibid.*

¹³⁴See for example, “Suspicious Americanization,” *America*, August 14, 1920.

¹³⁵“Texas Taken to Task for Submission to Klan by Public Ledger,” *Catholic News Service*, July 31, 1922.

thoroughly un-American. These responses show a disgust with the Klan that often mirrors the hooded marauders' own intensity. One such statement from the American Irish-Catholic fraternal organization, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, re-published by the *CNS*, provides a searing account of the Klan's illegitimacy. The speech condemns "the rancorous bigotry of these secret political societies which is designed to disbar us from the rights guaranteed by the America we helped to found and build."¹³⁶ Having labeled the Klan as bigoted thieves of the Catholics' earned rights, the statement goes on to recognize the perverted causes and inimical consequences of the Klan, writing, "This malevolence is born of ignorance, and aims at the destruction of American institutions."¹³⁷ While many of the *CNS*' re-published articles show a similarly defiant tone, the formal response of Catholic clergy was more polite, although no less firm, in its stance on the Klan. A brief *CNS* editorial written by several American Bishops encapsulates the rejection articulated by the Catholic papers and the various groups whose condemnations of the Klan they featured, stating simply that "the Ku Klux Klan stands for all that is un-American."¹³⁸

Both the *CNS* and the editors of *America* identify the Klan as worsening the state of society, presenting a familiar depiction of a nation under attack. However, in the Catholics' depiction of America, it is the Klan, not the Catholics themselves, who are to blame for the country's impending downfall. These editorials, written on the harsh effects of the Klan and its bigoted ideology, show a strong Catholic indignation in defense of the United States. The *CNS* published one such editorial describing the alarming consequences of the Klan's poisonous presence, writing, "It manifests

¹³⁶"A.O.H Resolution Says Klan Would Divide the Nation," *Catholic News Service*, August 14, 1922.

¹³⁷*Ibid.*

¹³⁸"Bishops Declare Ku Klux Klan is Menace to Nation," *Catholic News Service*, September 26, 1921.

itself in its ultimate form in the mobs which burn and torture negroes in the South.”¹³⁹ The editorial continues on explaining the cause: “It is the spirit which usurps lawful authority, and, acting in the violated name of justice, is the negation of civilization, whose necessary and indispensable foundation is lawful authority.”¹⁴⁰ The article ends with a final lament that if the “government will carelessly or supinely permit self-elected groups of private individuals, held together by oaths of secrecy [...] to interfere with and to set aside the orderly processes of courts and legislatures, it is preparing the way for civil war and anarchical revolution.”¹⁴¹ Mirroring the language of Simmons, the editorial ends describing the Klan as sending America spiraling into chaos, writing that the American government, in tolerating the Klan, “is giving up democracy, and permitting Mobocracy.”¹⁴² The Catholic authors’ emphasis on the Klan’s lawlessness, secrecy, violence and chaotic membership redirect criticism away from Catholics and back toward the Klan. The editorial raises a fundamental disagreement between the two – who actually constitutes a threat to democracy? While the Klan argued that secrecy was necessary to regain “real” Americans’ control over America, the Catholics responded by identifying that same secrecy as threatening American democracy and enabling violence and a breakdown of proper justice.

A major target of Catholic inquiry was the moral hypocrisy of Klan leadership, specifically Simmons himself. The *CNS* also routinely mentions Simmons’ constituents, presenting the Klan as a group of thugs led by con-men and hypocrites.¹⁴³ As the founder and representative of the

¹³⁹“Contempt for Law,” *Catholic News Service*, July 3, 1922.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*

¹⁴²*Ibid.*

Klan, the Catholic papers repeatedly target Simmons, especially for describing the Klan as benevolent and non-maleficent even in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary.¹⁴⁴ An editorial written by the editors of the *CNS* on September 18, 1922, most accurately presents the ridiculousness of the Klan's claims to integrity. It reads:

Simmons [...] supreme commander of the white robed hosts whose boast it is that they are the guardians of all that is honorable, manly, and virtuous in America, has been formally accused by members of his own organization of dissipation through the use of intoxicating liquors and drugs to such an extent as to render him incapable of fulfilling his "imperial" duties.¹⁴⁵

The ironic intemperance described above is a recurring theme in Catholic accounts of Simmons. An article published several months later reads that Simmons was, "on a prolonged debauch, during which time it is believed he was under the effect of intoxicating liquors and drugs and hence not physically and mentally capable of the transaction of business of the Klan."¹⁴⁶ Such reports of Simmons' drunkenness cemented the *CNS*' depiction of the Imperial Wizard as a lying drunk who preached a moral righteousness to which he himself could not commit. The Catholic papers thus portray his organization as suspicious and manipulative on the top, idiotic on the bottom, and rotten all the way through.

Simmons was not the only leader that the *CNS* criticized for bad behavior. Catholic papers also identified Edward Clarke, the Imperial Kleagle, as falling short of the standards that Simmons had set for his organization. The *CNS* noted that Clarke had been arrested and found "guilty of

¹⁴³See for example, "Leader of Klan is Indicted by Federal Jury," *Catholic News Service*, October 9, 1922; "Klan's Promoters Pocketed Large Sums of Money," *Catholic News Service*, October 24, 1921; "Ku Klux Imperial Wizard Grilled by Rules Committee," *Catholic News Service*, October 17, 1921.

¹⁴⁴"The Menace of Moral Idiocy," *Catholic News Service*, September 5, 1921.

¹⁴⁵"Say Imperial Wizard Signed No Edict, as 'he was on debauch,'" *Catholic News Service*, September 18, 1922.

¹⁴⁶"Leader of Klan is Indicted by Federal Jury," *Catholic News Service*, October 9, 1922.

eight offenses, including lying, and that he was accused [...] of having falsified a statement of the assets of a corporation with which he was connected,” a record far from spotless and in blaring contrast to the Klan’s publicly stated obedience to the law.¹⁴⁷ Several months after the *CNS* exposed Clarke’s record, Clarke found himself in legal trouble again. The *CNS* took advantage of his relapse into criminality, reporting that he was under federal investigation for mail fraud.¹⁴⁸ Clarke’s business partner and the head of the Women’s Ku Klux Klan, Elizabeth Tyler, fared little better in the Catholic papers’ accounts of Klan leadership. The publications reminded its readers of her criminal record for disorderly conduct and adultery, which she committed with Clarke – ironically dismal legal records for leaders of a group that claimed to prioritize upholding American law and virtue.¹⁴⁹

The Catholic journalists’ complaints of the Klan were not limited to the personal failings of its leadership. They also cite Klan members’ violence, intimidation, and mob law as evidence of the discrepancy between Simmons’ presentation of the Klan and the Catholic experience of the organization. Despite Simmons’ attempt to establish a reputable, nonviolent image for the Klan, it is well noted by the Catholic papers, and many liberal newspapers at the time, that the Invisible Empire frequently used violence and intimidation to achieve its aims. Unsurprisingly, the *CNS* frequently posted news updates referring to violence against Catholics such as reports describing the flogging of a Catholic mayor and harassment of nuns.¹⁵⁰ While the *CNS* describes how individuals were often targeted by the Klan and then beaten, usually with whips or clubs, the paper

¹⁴⁷“Ku Klux Inquiry by Congress Now Believed Certain,” *Catholic News Service*, October 10, 1921.

¹⁴⁸“Imperial Kleagle Clarke Charged With Using Mail to Defraud,” *Catholic News Service*, October 9, 1922.

¹⁴⁹“Klan Leaders Exposed” *Catholic News Service*, October 9, 1922.

¹⁵⁰“Catholic Mayor, Flogged By Klan, Sues for \$100,000,” *Catholic News Service*, October 23, 1922.

also observes that the Klan used broader forms of intimidation when dealing with larger groups of Catholics. The newspapers report that this intimidation was typically instantiated in the form of a Klan parade. These parades would often end in the robed Klansmen leaving a warning nailed to the front of a Catholic home, church or schoolhouse. This message often condemned the Catholic vote and demanded that anyone who did not support public education leave town or face Klan punishment.¹⁵¹

While focusing primarily on Klan-on-Catholic violence, the *CNS* also noted Klan violence against other groups. They describe illegal Klan activity against non-Catholics ranging from minor accounts of harassment, such as the Klan's participation in the shaving of a Protestant preacher's head, to more major crimes, such as kidnapping, assault and murder.¹⁵² Catholic journalists report these acts of violence as frequent and brutal, with one *CNS* account describing "acts of violence occurring nearly daily."¹⁵³ *CNS* reports of large numbers of Klansmen on trial showed that these incidents were not isolated acts of personal marauding but were rather large scale violent operations conducted by numerous Klansmen in orchestra with one another against all demographics of the American population.¹⁵⁴

The violence described by the *CNS* was not constricted to secret acts conducted under the cover of darkness. Their accounts of Klan riots against dissenters, threats published in newspapers, and robed marches and parades in broad daylight showed the Klan had the confidence and

¹⁵¹"Ku Klux Klan's Threats in Texas," *Catholic News Service*, July 4, 1921.

¹⁵²See for example, "Protestant Preacher Mistreated by Ku Klux in Texas," *Catholic News Service*, April 3, 1922; "St. Louis Negroes Alarmed," *Catholic News Service*, October 10, 1921.

¹⁵³"Texas Commerce Chamber Wants Ku Klux Curbed," *Catholic News Service*, October 31, 1921.

¹⁵⁴"El Paso Bigots Gain Control of School Board," *Catholic News Service*, June 12, 1922.

authority to operate in the open without fear of major resistance or retribution.¹⁵⁵ The editors of the *CNS* attribute the boldness of Klan members to the organizations presence in local government.¹⁵⁶ One of the Agency's news articles, referring to an investigation of Klan influence in Sacramento, shows how deeply the Klan's influence ran in local institutions. The report reads:

The district attorney, his chief deputy, the sheriff and his deputy, the county clerk, a county supervisor, some of our grand jury, irrigation district officials, and members of our school boards and the principle candidates for most of these offices, including the sheriff and the district attorney have been listed as members of the Ku Klux Klan...¹⁵⁷

Considering California's moderate Klan presence compared to the South and Midwest, this account suggests even greater influence in other parts of the country. The *CNS* thus presents the Klan as having extensive influence and presence in established systems of government – the same institutions which were often ironically entrusted with protecting the community from the violence of the Klan.¹⁵⁸ The papers' depictions of the Klan's poisoning of local governments presents an overall bleak view of law authorities' ability and/or willingness to control the Klan. They ultimately present an unsettling presentation of the state of America in which the Klan is so thoroughly enmeshed in local institutions of law and order that Klansmen were able to conduct violent and illegal activity without fear.

¹⁵⁵See for example, "Candidates Opposed by Klan Face Near Riots in Two States," *Catholic News Service*, August 28, 1922; "Postal Department Gives Publicity to Ku Klux Klan," *Catholic News Service*, July 10, 1922; "Many Outrages and Threats Against Priest Arouse Many Communities," *Catholic News Service*, March 27, 1922.

¹⁵⁶See for example, "'Pull Hoods Off' Campaign puts Ku Klux to Rout," *Catholic News Service*, October 2, 1922; "Klan Wins First Skirmish in its Oregon Campaign," *Catholic News Service*, July 17, 1922.

¹⁵⁷"Taxpayers Appeal to Attorney General to Check Ku Klux Klan," *Catholic News Service*, July 24, 1922.

¹⁵⁸"Klan Wins First Skirmish In Its Oregon Campaign," *Catholic News Service*, July 17, 1922; Taxpayers Appeal to Attorney General to Check Ku Klux Klan," *Catholic News Service*, July 24, 1922.

The Klan took full advantage of their influence within the police and committed numerous acts of grotesque violence. A *New York World* article re-published in the *CNS* newsletter depicts the violence observed by American Catholics. The report reads that the Klan was officially deemed responsible for “four killings, one case of mutilation, one instance of branding with acid, 41 floggings, 27 cases of tarring and feathering and five kidnappings...”¹⁵⁹ The volume and ferocity of violence reported by the *CNS*, and the identification of the Klan’s structural influence which enabled it, shows a Catholic understanding of the Klan as a real and dangerous threat.

The *CNS*’ emphasis of systemic Klan political influence at the local, state and federal levels shows that, while Simmons argued that his Klan was a “non-political, strictly fraternal organization,” Catholics were unconvinced.¹⁶⁰ The *CNS* clearly recognized that throughout America, the Klan had substantial political influence and that the Klan vote was often a deciding factor in major elections.¹⁶¹ Oregon and Texas were of especially strong interest to Catholics because of the overwhelming presence of the Klan in these states as well as their frequent attacks on Catholic education. In these states, Catholics openly recognized that the “invisible government *literally* reigns.”¹⁶²

While the Klan vote proved decisive in several state primaries and local elections, the *CNS* recognized that the Klan would not settle with this limited influence, and that their ultimate goal was “to capture the Democratic State Central Committee,” a mere stepping stone before the

¹⁵⁹“Congress is Asked to Start a Probe of Ku Klux Klan,” *Catholic News Service*, September 26, 1921.

¹⁶⁰Ku Klux Klan, *Questions Answered*.

¹⁶¹See for example, “Mayfield’s Chances Improved,” *Catholic News Service*, October 30, 1922; “Culberson Will Fight Ku Klux Klan in Texas,” *Catholic News Service*, September 25, 1922; “Ku Klux Activity is Shown at Elections in Several States,” *Catholic News Services*, August 7, 1922.

¹⁶²“Klan Wins First Skirmish in its Oregon Campaign,” *Catholic News Service*, July 17, 1922.

ultimate goal of dominating Congress and then eventually all levels of government.¹⁶³ The domination of the Klan in local elections reflected a growing recognition of the Klan's influence in the Democratic party which, in Oregon and Texas, refused to denounce the Klan and drew nervous suspicion from Democrats in other parts of the country.¹⁶⁴ The National Commander for the American Legion best summarizes the growing fear of the Klan's political influence, especially within the Democratic party, in a re-published letter in the September 25th, 1922 edition of the *CNS* newsletter. It reads:

The Ku Klux issue is not State but national. If the Democratic Party does not purge itself of the influence of this organization, it may soon become the party of the mob. The result will be that voters will cast their ballots, not along Democratic and Republican lines, but along Klan and anti-Klan lines...¹⁶⁵

While in many northern states the Klan had a limited presence and political influence, the *CNS* recognized that the growing power of the Klan elsewhere nonetheless represented a severe threat to the political security of the nation.

While both the editors of the *CNS* and *America* describe the Klan as an unlawful, immoral and un-American organization founded on false belief and hate, their confidence begins to waver when attempting to explain how the Klan fit ideologically with the broader American public. The vast number of condemnations from respected Americans and the simultaneous explosion of Klan membership seems to have confused Catholics' understanding of the Klan's appeal throughout non-Catholic America. Despite the *CNS*' arguing that the Klan was rapidly growing in both influence and membership, the paper still maintained that the Klan was a culturally marginal

¹⁶³“Ku Klux Activity is Shown at Elections in Several States,” *Catholic News Service*, August 7, 1922.

¹⁶⁴“Texas Democrats Reject Resolution Disapproving Klan,” *Catholic News Service*, September 11, 1922.

¹⁶⁵“Texas Democrats Split by Activity of Ku Klux Klan,” *Catholic News Service*, September 25, 1922.

organization rejected by most non-Catholics. The *CNS*' presentation of overwhelming American rejection of the Klan by non-Catholics from across the American political and social landscape may be misleading because of Catholic leaders' need to secure Catholic confidence in the face of social pressure to desert the Church.¹⁶⁶ However, even among the Klan's dissenters, there is an important distinction that the *CNS* overlooked. While there certainly were large numbers of Klan denunciations, the reasons behind them vary significantly, with the majority emphasizing the lawlessness and violence (i.e. the methodology) rather than the ideology of the Klan.

Many non-Catholic responses to the Klan, which the *CNS* labeled as firm denunciations of Klan ideology, were mainly critiques of Klan secrecy and lawlessness. One such response was the Federal Council of Churches' statement which condemned the Klan for their secrecy and lawlessness while maintaining that their "motives [...] may be of the highest [quality]..."¹⁶⁷ Because the Catholics did not address the nuances of anti-Klan statements, it seems they miscategorized many of the groups formally against the Klan as independent from Klan ideology. However, a careful analysis of these responses shows that a universal and holistic rejection of the Klan amongst denouncers was not the case. The *CNS*' limited presentation of Klan support along with the absence of thorough identification of anti-Klan motivations makes it difficult to gauge how aware the Catholics were of other Americans' stances on the Klan.

Simmons' claim that the Klan was a fundamentally Protestant organization, grounded in the teachings of Christ, exacerbated the *CNS*' struggle to understand the Klan's place within the broader American context. The Catholic papers present a contradictory depiction of the Klan and

¹⁶⁶"Congress is Asked to Start a Probe of Ku Klux Klan," *Catholic News Service*, September 26, 1921.

¹⁶⁷"Council of Churches Condemns the Klan as Danger to Nation," *Catholic News Service*, October 16, 1922.

its relationship with religion, recognizing the existence of adamant support amongst Protestant communities, despite focusing heavily on Protestant condemnations of the Klan.¹⁶⁸ Catholic confusion is best presented in the Catholic News Service's newsheet published on October 16, 1922. This news article describes a bizarre scene in which a Methodist conference overwhelmingly condemned the Klan, only to renounce the condemnation through an equally significant margin at the end of a meeting a few days later.¹⁶⁹ The overwhelming rejection, then rapid renouncement of that condemnation, is a confusing, but telling example of why the Catholics were unable to pinpoint Protestant Americans' relationship with the Klan. The *CNS* thus provides an overall depiction of a Protestant America seemingly unable to take a firm stance either for or against the Klan despite the substantial condemnations by Protestant religious and political leadership which the Catholics identify.¹⁷⁰

Catholic accounts of the Klan note that Protestant ministers were some of the most active Klan recruiters. However, they present the Klan's use of religion as entirely opportunistic. The Catholic papers attributed the preachers' success to their utilization of Americans' pre-existing loyalty to their churches and their propensity for fraternity and intrigue. The Klan was therefore able to effectively recruit through inflaming Protestants' fears and then legitimizing them through their ministers' affirmations.¹⁷¹ This oversimplification of the effectiveness of the Klan's religious

¹⁶⁸See for example, "Atlanta Church Council brands Klan Big Bully," *Catholic News Service*, June 26, 1922; "Protestants Aid fight," *Catholic News Service*, October 16, 1922; "Episcopal Church Bishops Vote to Join Council of Churches," *Catholic News Service*, September 25, 1922.

¹⁶⁹"Illinois Methodists Soften Resolutions on Ku Klux Klan," *Catholic News Service*, October 16, 1922.

¹⁷⁰"Head of Southern Tariff Association Gives Reason For His Belief," *Catholic News Service*, September 26, 1921.

¹⁷¹See for example, "Washington Minister Says Many Protestant Pastors Joined Klan," *Catholic News Service*, March 13, 1922; "Ku Klux Efforts in Arkansas are Frowned Upon," *Catholic News Service*, October 3, 1921.

appeals seems to represent a failure of the *CNS* to recognize the vast ideological differences between and among the various American Protestant denominations and how that complicated Protestants' responses to the Klan. As a result, they are unable to explain the effective appeal of Klan religion to recruit Americans. The Catholics' failure to identify the complex ideological relationships among American Protestants therefore may help to account for their inability to identify the equally complicated relationship between Protestants and the Klan.

While these publications display a nuanced Catholic awareness of the Klan's private and public ideology and a vigilant attitude towards Klan activity on all levels of American society, they fail to confidently describe how the Klan fit into the broader American identity. They falter in attempting to describe how and why Americans did or did not support the Klan, overlooking the fact that the fundamental tenets of the Klan were often viewed as widely acceptable, even though their violent tendencies were not. While Catholic publications unanimously identified the Klan as morally corrupt and thoroughly un-American, they are unable to present a coherent reason as to why the clearly perverted ideology of the Klan was being embraced by so many Americans.

Ultimately, Catholic Americans recognized the Klan as a popular, although controversial, organization with substantial structural and cultural influence around the country. While they present a thorough denouncement of the Klan's ideology, they struggle to define the relationship between the Klan and the broader American public, attributing the Klan's expansion to manipulative recruitment methods that appropriated Christianity and patriotism in order to trick Americans into joining their ranks. The Catholics thus rationalize the Klan's popularity in a way similar to Mecklin. Mecklin explains that the Klan was successful because it mobilized biases and appealed to fraternalism, not because its members held any authentic commitment to its mission and ideals. Both Mecklin and the Catholic newspapers identify the Klan's success as resulting

from sophistry and marginally existent hate. They maintain that the Klan held tremendous influence but simultaneously claim that many Americans rejected the Klan. In subscribing to this convoluted stance on Klan popularity and condemnation, both Mecklin and the Catholics describe the Klan so that it can be easily marginalized and then dismissed, isolating America from the crimes and guilt of the KKK while preserving American pride in the great ideals of freedom, tolerance and self-determination. While Catholics show a clear understanding of what the Klan did and why, they are in the end unable to explain how an organization so obviously un-American became so popular amongst Americans.

CHAPTER THREE

BLACK AMERICANS' RESPONSES TO THE KLAN

Having already experienced slavery and Jim Crow, Black Americans were deeply aware of the effects of white supremacy. While the Catholics' story with the Klan largely began with the Second Klan, for Black Americans, it began with the first, born out of the rubble of the Reconstruction South and the collapse of slavery. This first Klan came into existence initially in 1865 as a Confederate veterans' social club but quickly escalated and was, by 1870, a terrorist organization committing violence and intimidation against freed Blacks and the northern whites who attempted to help them. Because Black southerners experienced grotesque violence at the hands of the Reconstruction-era Klan, many Black Americans were deeply suspicious of the Second Klan. Despite Simmons' repeated attempts to construct a benevolent narrative for his organization, Black Americans writing in African-American newspapers articulated an immediate suspicion of the motives, methods, and messages of the Invisible Empire. Considering that the two Klans shared an aim of re-establishing a white supremacy that they believed was threatened, Black Americans unsurprisingly and overwhelmingly labeled Simmons' Klan as fundamentally dangerous from the start.

The story of Black Americans' suspicion of the Second Klan began not on the rocky crest of Stone Mountain, but rather before then in the theater, with the release of the film *A Birth of a Nation*. The film brought a new depiction of Reconstruction to American audiences, romanticizing

the ideology and imagery of the Reconstruction-era Klan. Black newspaper editors across the nation argued unanimously that the historical narrative of the film was a gross misrepresentation of reality.¹⁷² While they sparingly mentioned Simmons' Klan itself between 1915 and 1919, Black newspapers consistent responses to the film show that they took seriously the Klan's appeal to white Americans. Black newspapers' condemnations of *A Birth of a Nation* were eventually replaced with articles attacking Simmons' Klan directly. These articles began in 1920 after Klan membership rose and Blacks' fears of the proliferation of the film's racial ideology became a reality. These newspapers labeled Simmons' historiography as an egregious lie that was, as the N.A.A.C.P Vice President decried, "not only vicious and defamatory but unjust and untrue."¹⁷³ Because Black Americans had survived the violence of the first Klan, this historical experience provided a lens through which they understood Simmons' group, which marched under the same banner.

Black newspapers not only feared the tangible threats spurred on by *A Birth of a Nation*, but also the ideological threats posed by the film's portrayal of the Black American. An editorial in the *Topeka Plaindealer* in 1915 described the film as intentionally damaging to white perceptions of Black Americans, writing that it aimed to "humiliate and vilify the colored American citizen."¹⁷⁴ The editorial argued that the film's depiction of Klan morality and Black immorality is inaccurate, claiming that, "It appears to have been most skillfully and deliberately

¹⁷²See for example, "'Birth of a Nation' Truth!" *Cleveland Gazette*, February 12, 1916; "Alderman Robert R. Jackson Scores a Point Against the Birth of a Race," *Broad Ax*, December 14, 1918; "Race Prejudice," *Topeka Plaindealer*, June 4, 1915.

¹⁷³"Another Fight Over Photo-Play Founded On Tom Dixon's Infamous Book, 'The Clansman,'" *Cleveland Gazette*, April 10, 1915.

¹⁷⁴"Race Prejudice," *Topeka Plaindealer*, June 4, 1915.

planned to arouse and widen that prejudice against the negro that has characterized the worst elements of the south.”¹⁷⁵ The editor lamented that the film incorrectly presented the first Klan as heroes rescuing a victimized American South. A similar editorial in the *Cleveland Gazette*, nearly four years later, attempted to correct *A Birth of a Nation*'s misrepresentation of the first Klan's motivations. It described the “white man's lust to regain power” as being the true cause for the original hooded marauders mobilization, rather than “the negroes lust for white women” as depicted in the film.¹⁷⁶ Black newspapers' comparisons of the old and new Klan were permeated with a suspicion grounded in historical oppression. An editorial in the *Chicago Broad Ax* portrayed this suspicion stating, “We look with suspicion and terror upon the revival in our country [...] of the ku klux klan [...] bringing to memory its nefarious and cruel outrages heaped upon loyal American citizens, defenseless and innocent, during the reconstruction period...”¹⁷⁷ Even before Simmons' Klan had the resources or membership to engage extensively with the American public, these Black newspapers presented substantial forewarning to their readers that the reintroduction of Klan ideology to the American public would likely result in a stoking of anti-Black sentiment and terror.

Black newspapers, in stressing the hazards of Simmons' founding of the second Klan, not only evoked memories of violence. They also presented direct challenges to the first and second Klan's claims of necessity. These newspapers explained how the first Klan existed for no reason other than to perpetuate unmerited white privilege and status and that the same illegitimate motives

¹⁷⁵Ibid.

¹⁷⁶“Nation's Sacred History Distorted,” *Cleveland Gazette*, January 22, 1916.

¹⁷⁷“N.a.a.c.p Advance Membership Drive on Englewood,” *Broad Ax*, April 23, 1921.

could be expected in the Second Klan. A *Cleveland Gazette* editorial, published August 27, 1921, describes this weak justification for the Klan's existence, frankly stating, "There never was any good excuse for the organization of the bands of criminals and assassins which operated under the name of the Ku Klux Klan [...] and there is no good excuse for the organization of the so-called 'new order' by the same name."¹⁷⁸ Black newspapers thus refuted the increasingly popular depiction of the Klan as heroes of Reconstruction, and attempted to inform the American public about the true nature of the first (and later Second) Klan and the falsity of their heroic narrative.¹⁷⁹

Just as they rejected the first Klan's stated reasons for its existence, Black newspapers rejected Simmons' personal motivation for founding the Second Klan. While Simmons claimed he experienced a near divine call to establish a new Klan and save America, Black newspapers argued that it was the violent lynching of Jewish laundromat owner Leo Frank, rather than some mystical call to rescue America, that spurred the Klan's re-creation. Black newspapers' recognition of the violent origins of the Second Klan affirmed their understanding of its mission as a continuation of the violent repression of Blacks that was carried out by the first Klan and the slave society that existed even earlier. An editorial in the *Broad Ax* aggressively depicts Simmons' Klan as picking up on the violent mission of the first, writing,

The spirit and method of the ku klux klan has once more triumphed in Georgia. Once more southern "gentility" and "chivalry" have revealed their true character in murder, secession and anarchy [...] for the same bestial spirit that sought to disrupt this union, the same spirit that lashed and ravished the helpless slave, the same southern spirit that even today is celebrating the blood-lust of the ku klux klan as a virtue, is living in the persecution and murder of Leo Frank.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸"The New Ku Klux Klan," *Cleveland Gazette*, August 27, 1921.

¹⁷⁹"Col. William Joseph Simmons, of Atlanta, Georgia, the Grand Dragon or Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, and His Cohorts are in the Saddle and They Are Successfully Riding through the Northern States and Cities and Unfurling Their Banners, Stained with Human Blood Throughout the Southland, on the Ramparts in all Sections of the North and West," *Broad Ax*, September 3, 1921.

¹⁸⁰"The South at the Bar," *Broad Ax*, September 4, 1915.

In describing the same corrupted spirit shared between the Klans, the editors of the *Broad Ax* depicted Simmons' Klan as inevitably leading to the same violence and oppression as the first. An editorial published in the *Cleveland Gazette* succinctly describes the opinion of most Black newspapers' rejection of Simmons' claims that the Klan had benevolent intentions, stating that, "Its purpose now is the same as when first organized [...] to maintain white supremacy."¹⁸¹ Despite Simmons' attempts to define a positive and peaceful relationship with Black Americans, many Black newspapers describe an absolute rejection of his organization's ideology and a deep suspicion of their methods.

Black newspapers emphasized not only a transfer of unlawful and immoral activities between the old and new Klan but also a transfer of perverted ideology. They offered passionate rejections of the three inherited pillars of Simmons' Klan: white supremacy, Klan-defined Americanism, and Klan-defined Protestantism. Unsurprisingly, Black Americans rejected the first pillar of the Klan, white supremacy, most adamantly. Black newspapers emphasized that white supremacy was unlawful and immoral on top of being factually incorrect. A 1920 editorial published in the *Cleveland Gazette* firmly denounced the South's unjust obsession with white supremacy, writing that, "Southern whites might as well learn now as later that this country owes them no more than it does any other citizens, unless it is another 'spanking' to bring it to its senses."¹⁸² In describing the government as equally responsible to all citizens, the editor disqualifies white supremacy from the core values of the United States defining white privilege as inherently un-American, rather than fundamentally American as Simmons argues.

¹⁸¹"Revival of the Ku Klux Klan," *Cleveland Gazette*, January 3, 1920.

¹⁸²"White Supremacy, the Cornerstone of Ku Kluxism," *Cleveland Gazette*, February 19, 1921.

Black newspapers specifically challenged Simmons' depiction of Blacks as being naturally passive and preferring menial labor and social subservience over equality and opportunities of economic mobility.¹⁸³ An editorial in the *Negro Star* passionately rejects Simmons' misguided belief that Black Americans would accept continued subservience, stating:

God is absolutely fair and never can the Negro of the present age be made to believe by any intellect that his race through the ages must labor under the curse of "hewers of wood and drawers of water;" the prescribed punishment of a just good [...] The eminent of white complexion who is advancing that time worn argument in the interest of the ku klux klan and its [...] horde, has guessed wrong.¹⁸⁴

Another editorial published in the *Cleveland Gazette* shows that the Black refusal to submit to white supremacy was not only ideological, but literal, as it urged its readers to "get a U.S. Army riot gun for their homes."¹⁸⁵ Having described the need for Blacks to protect themselves, the article ends with the anxious question being asked throughout the Black community— "Has the law ceased to have the power to protect peaceable citizens?"¹⁸⁶

Black newspapers consistently present an enduring and active resistance to the white supremacy preached by the Klan. This commitment to resistance was most powerfully depicted in a *Negro Star* editorial which reads, "For every Negro that will go crazy from fear of the Klan, there is a hundred praying and waiting for an opportunity to stand out in full force of their manhood [...] and eager to put the fear of God in the [...] hell born gang of masked cowards."¹⁸⁷ The article thus depicts Black Americans as committed to resisting the Klan's oppression both ideologically and,

¹⁸³Simmons, 151.

¹⁸⁴"God is Absolutely Fair," *Negro Star*, April 14, 1922.

¹⁸⁵"Another Warning," *Cleveland Gazette*, August 6, 1921.

¹⁸⁶*Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷"Newssheet," *Negro Star*, April 28, 1922.

if need be, physically. Black newspapers ultimately present a refusal to be oppressed, directly challenging Simmons' description of Black Americans as willing participants in the Klan's intended social-political domination.

In addition to white supremacy being contrary to the law of the land, Black newspapers describe white supremacy as having dangerous consequences. An editorial in the *Cleveland Gazette* describes the atrocious outcomes of the white supremacy already existing in the South, writing that, "Lynching, and mob violence have supplemented orderly government. The standard has been lowered to such an extent that white women, girls and boys will revel in the orgy of burning a human being and then fight for souvenirs of its charred bones..."¹⁸⁸ This chilling portrayal of the brutality created by white supremacy was a clear departure from the democratic utopia which Simmons predicted would result from the absolute control of the white race. This violence was not limited to individual acts; however, a similar editorial published in the *Advocate* describes that if the Klan went unchecked by American law then racial civil war would be inevitable.¹⁸⁹ The newspapers ominously predicted that the Klan's crusade to obtain absolute white supremacy would not result in just the spilled blood of Black Americans but white Americans as well. They thus associate social breakdown and chaos rather than restored peace and order to the Klan's expansion.

While white supremacy was the Klan tenet most frequently challenged by Black newspapers, the Klan's claims of true Americanism were also refuted. Black newspapers describe the Klan's definition of Americanism as excessively restricted. An editorial published in the *Broad*

¹⁸⁸Ibid.

¹⁸⁹"Kansas A.M.E Conference Met at Topeka," *Advocate*, September 30, 1921.

Ax describes the absurd inaccuracy of the Klan's claims to authentic Americanism, writing that, "The klan calls itself 100 percent American and says its object is to crush all un-Americans. What a joke when it announces as the subject of its persecution 'the Catholics, the Jew and the Negro' the three most truly 100 percent Americans in the nation."¹⁹⁰ The *Broad Ax* therefore defines not only an inclusive understanding of who is American but also describes a solidarity with other victims of the Klan. Black newspapers further reflect this solidarity by reporting not just on the violence and ideology wielded by the Klan against Blacks, but also through reporting the Klan's attacks on other Americans. An editorial published in the *Negro Star* presents an example of Black awareness of the Klan's views of other groups, describing that the Klan's aim was the "intimidation of [any dissenting] whites, and the elimination of the Catholic, Jew, and foreign born, with the ultimate goal being the complete annihilation of the Black man in America."¹⁹¹

Black newspapers described how the Klan's propensity for secrecy accentuated their un-American nature. A *Cleveland Gazette* editorial addresses the suspiciousness of the Klan writing that, "A 100 percent American needs no ghoulish uniform, no horrific oaths, no appeals to religious prejudice to keep his patriotism militant, if the klan really was American it would not hide but would operate proudly in the light."¹⁹² An article in the *Negro Star* similarly describes the need for transparency in a democracy, writing, "In this free country the message that cannot be proclaimed from the housetop ought not to be heard by a loyal American citizen. The ku klux klan believes in the whisper..."¹⁹³ According to these Black editors, a real American does not hide behind masks

¹⁹⁰"Against Catholics, Jews, and Negroes," *Broad Ax*, September 10, 1921.

¹⁹¹"Note and Comment," *Negro Star*, December 8, 1922.

¹⁹²"Under Fire," *Cleveland Gazette*, October 8, 1921.

¹⁹³"Strikes at Ku Klux Klan," *Negro Star*, May 6, 1920.

and robes terrorizing other citizens but operates in full view of their fellow citizens. Due to these Black newspapers' definition of transparent and inclusive Americanism, the Klan is depicted not just as cowardly but as *anti-American*.

Some of the most intense condemnations presented in Black newspapers were reserved for addressing the Klan's identification with Christian values. An editorial published in the *Negro Star* bluntly portrays the Klan's relationship with Protestants as one of Judas-like betrayal, not salvation, writing that, "They are trying to buy up the preachers, and they will buy up some of them. Ever since Judas sold Jesus there have been betrayers in the 'cloth.'"¹⁹⁴ In equating the Klan with Judas, the editor makes explicit that the Klan stood against, not with, Christ and his mission. The editorial continues on to condemn white Protestants who failed to speak up against the Klan because of either fear or bribery, writing, "The Ku Klux are making 'donations' to the village and small town churches, expecting to buy the preachers off from making the attacks which they should be making on this potential murder-gang."¹⁹⁵ A *Negro star* editorial presents a further condemnation of Christians who were passive to the Klan stating:

The Christian church must stand for the highest measures of law observance and enforcement; Therefore, no church [can] give the least encouragement to any organization which by its aggressive politics places itself outside the bounds of law as has the Ku Klux Klan.¹⁹⁶

While Black newspapers recognized that the Klan identified as Christian, they rejected any authentic compatibility between the ideology of the Klan and that of Christianity.

¹⁹⁴"The Ku Klux in the Church," *Negro Star*, June 2, 1922.

¹⁹⁵Ibid.

¹⁹⁶"Note and Comment," *Negro Star*, December 8, 1922.

Black newspapers identified the Klan's relationship with Christianity as inauthentic and grounded in practical necessity rather than true Christian faith. These papers nonetheless disappointedly observed the success of Simmons' appeal to white Protestant preachers and the positive receptions of Klan donations to white churches.¹⁹⁷ An editorial in the *Broad Ax* describes the perverted beliefs which were proclaimed by a Klan preacher and embraced by many in the white audience, writing, "The holy man of god intimated from his race prejudice pulpit that he firmly believed in mob and lynch law for colored men [...] And that the colored people should at all times be segregated in every possible way."¹⁹⁸ Having established that Klan Protestantism was violent and bigoted, the article ends with an eerie depiction of the Klan preacher's reception from the other white Protestants, stating that, "The white Baptist preachers view him as their 'white Baptist god.'"¹⁹⁹ The success of the Klan's appeals to white Protestants are therefore described by the Black newspapers not just as isolated instances, as they are by the *CNS*, but rather are described as a spreading corruption of white American faith.

Black newspapers identify acute discrepancies between the formal expectations of Klansmen as defined by Simmons and the members' observed behavior, describing an immorality that was rampant in the Klan from the leaders down to its lowest members. They note continuous stories of the indecency, intemperance and criminality of Klan leadership. A *Cleveland Gazette* news article reporting on the criminal activities of Elizabeth Tyler and Edward Clarke displays the cutting tone with which many Black newspapers addressed the Klan's moral hypocrisy, writing,

¹⁹⁷"Note and Comment," *Hutchinson Blade*, March 4, 1922.

¹⁹⁸"Almost Thirty Thousand Members of 'The Knights of The White Light,' or The Ku Klux Klan, Assembled at Ninety-Fifth Street and Seventy-First Avenue Last Saturday Night, and it is Said that Before They Dispersed that Plans were Laid to Wade into the Jewish and Roman Catholic Candidates at the Forth-coming Election in Cook Country," *Broad Ax*, August 26, 1922.

¹⁹⁹*Ibid.*

“Mrs. Elizabeth Tyler, [was] declared to have been convicted and fined as keeper of a disorderly resort, while Edward Young Clarke, Imperial Kleagle of the Ku Klux was arrested and fined with her in the place...”²⁰⁰ The editorial continues, drawing out the irony of this arrest, stating, “A high officer of the klan, which preaches a high order of morality and defense of the sanctity of the home [...] thus appears as a wife deserter and a fit subject for the activities of masked and gowned knights.”²⁰¹ Black newspapers therefore describe the Klan as so hypocritical as to merit condemnation based on its own standards. These Black writers’ cutting tone and awareness of Klan hypocrisy present an understanding of the Klan as a contributor to immoral and illegal activity – not a solution.

Black newspapers associated the moral corruption they observed in Klan leadership with the Klan’s average members as well. A reporter for the *Broad Ax*, in observing a Klan parade, described his assumptions about the character of the average Klansmen, stating, “We are curious to now [k]now just how many of those rascals in that parade had ravished some defenseless colored woman and become the father of her mulatto babies.”²⁰² An editorial in the *Cleveland Gazette* published in response to a Klan preacher’s speech on Klan righteousness best summarizes Black understanding of Klan integrity as unfathomable, writing that, “His ridiculously untrue statements certainly must have made the devil laugh, long and loud.”²⁰³ The Black newspapers ultimately present a uniform understanding that the Klan’s public image attempted to hide corruption and lawlessness and that the Klan’s masked secrecy hid the faces of criminals, not saints.

²⁰⁰“Ku Klux Klan Done in the North,” *Cleveland Gazette*, September 24, 1921.

²⁰¹*Ibid.*

²⁰²“Chips,” *Broad Ax*, August 20, 1921.

²⁰³“Should be ‘Unfrocked!’,” *Cleveland Gazette*, August 20, 1921.

Black rejections of the fundamental ideological tenets of the Klan are matched by equally passionate rejections of the Klan's stated methodology, with the newspapers presenting an awareness of the Klan's violent and political activities. In clear contrast to Simmons' condemnations of violence and lawbreaking, Black newspapers depict ample evidence of Klan violence and intimidation. The newspapers describe various accounts of harassment, performed both in secret and in public. The December 3rd edition of the *Hutchinson Blade* describes the cohesion between the Klan's overt and covert activities, writing that a demonstration of "two or three hundred automobiles" followed the sending of twenty anonymous letters of intimidation to the "disreputable loafing riff-raff people of Negro hollow..."²⁰⁴ The newspaper continues on to describe the effect of this dual display of private and public power on the Black community, writing that the presence of the Klansmen caused "dozens of negroes scattering and running like rats from the bottoms."²⁰⁵ Black newspapers report that while these Klan threats sometimes followed crimes which the Klan attributed to Blacks, attempts to vote or otherwise mobilize the Black community would frequently merit a Klan response as well. An editorial written by a Black Methodist preacher and published by the *Advocate* depicts explicit voter suppression and intimidation reading that "in some towns in Florida, in order to keep my people from voting [...] the Klan [...] paraded the streets with their guns ready to shoot [them] down."²⁰⁶ While the degree of violence and intimidation would differ by region, the Black papers describe how any activity in

²⁰⁴"Editor Flees," *Broad Ax*, June 11, 1921.

²⁰⁵"Klansmen Pay 'Two Street' a Night Visit," *Hutchinson Blade*, December 3, 1921.

²⁰⁶"Aged African Methodist Minister is Taken from Train in Florida and Badly Beaten," *Advocate*, March 11, 1920.

the Black community which seemed to threaten whites' status and security would likely receive some kind of response by the local Klan.

While hundreds of Black newspapers reported countless acts of Klan violence, the volume and ferocity of the Klan's activities were best captured in a *Cleveland Gazette* editorial that identified 135 accounts of violence attributed to the KKK in Georgia, many of which they claimed were committed with support from officers of the law.²⁰⁷ The 1921 article bitterly denounced the Klan's overwhelming authority in the South and the brutal violence which resulted, stating, "Negroes are treated as brutes. Their lives are not as sacred as the soil that opens its mouth to drink in their blood."²⁰⁸ The editors stressed that, "the loud mouth demagogues in congress are aiding the violence in the south," arguing that while the South was directly responsible for much of the violence, every white American who did not speak out against the Klan was responsible as a result of their passivity.²⁰⁹ Violence against Blacks in the South is described in the newspapers as a typical response to Black progress, and any Southern Black American's attempt to vote, publish newspapers, mobilize or otherwise challenge the racial hierarchy is depicted as meeting violent Klan resistance.²¹⁰ While the violence Black newspapers described occurred primarily in the South and Midwest, they portray a frustration with the silence and passivity of white Americans everywhere that they believed allowed the Klan to terrorize Black Americans. A special animosity was reserved for members of the Republican Party whose "weak answer to the challenge of the

²⁰⁷"'White Supremacy' Only a Part of 'the System' in the South - the Remedy for Miserable Conditions There," *Cleveland Gazette*, May 21, 1921.

²⁰⁸*Ibid.*

²⁰⁹*Ibid.*

²¹⁰"The Ku Klux Klan," *Cleveland Gazette*, January 8, 1921; 'Lynching Probe Asked of U.S. Government', *Broad Ax*, November 13, 1920.

Ku Klux Klan” is described in an editorial in the *Broad Ax* which reads, “How the mighty have fallen! The party of Lincoln and Grant and Roosevelt dares not defy a band of midnight assassins.”²¹¹ While the newspapers may have described Klan violence that was restricted to the South and Midwest they voiced that it was the federal government throughout the nation whose soft response to the Klan’s influence allowed the terror that Black Americans experienced.

Editorials and other articles published in Black newspapers portrayed the acts of violence and intimidation as neither subtle, nor secretive, and the papers consistently present public acts of Klan lawlessness. A news report in the *Hutchinson Blade* of Hutchinson Kansas describes the Klan's openly violent methodology, stating how, in “Beaumont, Texas, locals of the knights of the ku klux klan has sent long letters to both newspapers in which they assume full responsibility for the recent beating, tarring, and feathering of J.S Paul [...] and R. F. Scott...”²¹² The article depicts not only the violence of the Klan, but that they took responsibility for said violence, identifying *themselves* as dangerous individuals in direct contrast with Simmons’ crafted public image of Klan non-maleficence. An even more brazen form of Klan intimidation was described in a news article of a later edition of the *Hutchinson Blade*, which stated that, “Three hundred members of the Ku Klux Klan in official regalia paraded through the main streets of Shawnee and Tecumseh recently after kidnapping the night editor of a local newspaper and taking him on the journey.”²¹³ Black newspapers noted the Klan’s willingness not only to threaten, but to commit violence in clear view of the community, depicting a near invincibility of the Klan in the South and Midwest.

²¹¹“The Head Leaders Of The Republican Party At The Republican National Convention At Cleveland, Ohio,” *Broad Ax*, July 5, 1924.

²¹²“In All Lands Concise Review of the Week's News,” *Hutchinson Blade*, July 30, 1921.

²¹³“Dots and Dashes Wire News of the Week,” *Hutchinson Blade*, October 1, 1921.

Black newspapers attribute much of the Klan's confidence in committing violence in the South and Midwest to their intimate relationship with the criminal justice system in those regions. The *Cleveland Gazette* frankly reported that, "The Klan makes no public appearance without officers of the law in its ranks."²¹⁴ While accounts of the Klan's relationship with law enforcement often displayed police indifference towards the Klan, they also describe direct support of the Klan by police.²¹⁵ One account in the *Topeka Plaindealer* describes how the police in Alabama disarmed Black Americans standing against armed Klansmen who aimed "to exterminate all the Black people in Birmingham."²¹⁶ Therefore, while the police described in the papers did not always participate in the Klan's violence, they often ensured that Blacks could not resist and thus created an environment in which many whites in the community and in the justice system tolerated, and even facilitated, Klan violence. White Southerners' positive reception of Klan activity in the South is powerfully depicted in a *Topeka Plaindealer* article which describes that, "There seems to be sentiment predominant in the southland whereby the Ku Klux Klan is to be favored by law, that is, public sentiment, which is the dominant law of the south."²¹⁷ Whether white Americans were members of the Klan or not, the newspaper describes the Klan and its ideology as having enough widespread appeal to operate unabated throughout the South and Midwest.

While Black newspapers reported violence as the primary means of Klan oppression of Black Americans, Black newspapers also showed an awareness of Klan political activity in

²¹⁴"Reorganization of Ku Klux Klan a Part of Southern Democratic Policy-- Its Fight on Harding," *Cleveland Gazette*, January 22, 1921.

²¹⁵"Klansmen Parade Through Business District Of Muncie This March Without Being Molested by Police of City," *Broad Ax*, September 9, 1922.

²¹⁶"Armed Blacks Avert Horrible Massacre. Ku Klux Klan in Alabama had Planned to Exterminate the Race," *Topeka Plaindealer*, May 9, 1919.

²¹⁷"The Ku Klux Klan," *Topeka Plaindealer*, February 25, 1921.

contrast to Simmons' claims that the Klan was a non-political and strictly fraternal organization. Black newspapers in the early 1920s specifically opined that there was a close ideological relationship between the Klan and the Southern Democratic Party.²¹⁸ The *Cleveland Gazette* describes the cozy relationship between the ideals of the Southern Democratic Party and the Ku Klux Klan, explaining that, "The south is run solely for the benefit of the southern democratic party. 'White supremacy,' which has been and is a slogan of southern democrats, is the chief slogan of the ku klux klan."²¹⁹ A separate editorial by the same newspaper describes a similarity in methodology as well as ideology between the Klan and the Democrats, stating, "The ballot-box stuffing, lynch-murder, night-rider and ku klux klan methods invoked by the Democratic organization in Mississippi about election time, for many years, are too notorious to necessitate comment."²²⁰ The paper thus identifies the Klan's ideology and methods as being the rule rather than the exception in Southern politics. Editors of Black newspapers claim that the close affiliation between the Klan and the Democratic Party had an effect on the confidence of Black voters throughout the American South and Midwest. An editorial in the *Negro Star* from 1922 warned, "The continued activities of the Ku Klux Klan in Texas, Georgia [and] Oklahoma with its influence in the political world all bid a man think twice then vote against the Democratic party."²²¹ While the most explicit political oppression of Black Americans occurred in the South, these Black midwestern newspapers show that the Klan's intimidation that southern Blacks experienced

²¹⁸See for example, "A Deserved Tribute," *Cleveland Gazette*, December 29, 1917.

²¹⁹"For Miserable Treatment of Three of our Leading Women in Paris," *Cleveland Gazette*, February 26, 1921.

²²⁰"The South and Suffrage," *Cleveland Gazette*, May 27, 1922.

²²¹"Note and Comment," *Negro Star*, September 8, 1922.

resonated with and frightened Black Americans not only in the deep South but in the Midwest as well.

These Black newspapers ultimately show an awareness of the Klan's activities and influence that both aligns with the Catholic papers' accounts as well as supports revisionist conclusions about the Second Klan. These Black editors' claims that the Klan held pervasive influence and operated on multiple levels with hefty local support fits squarely with recent revisionist historiography on the Klan. However, a major difference exists between the Black and Catholic understandings of the Klan. While the Catholics struggled to identify the causes of the Klan's success, these Black newspapers placed the Klan on a broader timeline of white resistance to non-whites' progress, thus presenting an account of the Klan's power base in the South and Midwest that aligns with contemporary scholars understanding of the potency of white supremacy in these regions. By placing the Klan in a tradition of white supremacy in American history, Black editors define the Klan as *another* example of violent racism rather than an anomaly in the history of the United States.

Conclusion

In Chapter 1, I examined William J. Simmons' publications to discern how the Klan's founder described his organization's ideology and activities to the American public. He explained how his Klan was founded on white supremacy (in this case specifically Anglo-Saxon), 100% Americanism (native born and assimilated into Klan defined American culture) and Protestantism – the three pillars of an “authentic American.” Simmons further argued that the Klan's members swore to respect American law and protect American democracy which Simmons' defined as a fragile form of government that white Protestant men alone could sustain. His presentation of the Klan between 1915 and 1924 ultimately stressed that the organization's activities were non-violent, non-political, always legal and only aimed to correct the national ills brought on by the increased degradation of the American population by immigration, urban crowding, factory work, expanding voter rights and a slew of other changes which were reshaping American society at the supposed expense of white Protestants.

The Black newspapers and Catholic news and editorial sources that I examined in Chapters 2 and 3 show a clear tension between the portrait and purpose of the Klan that Simmons presented and my sources' impressions of it. These editors and reporters consistently described the Second Klan as violent, politically active and false in its accusations that non-whites were in essence inferior and that Catholics' faith undermined their ability to be committed Americans. In rejecting the ideology of the Klan, both the Black and Catholic newspapers present a far more inclusive definition of “American,” arguing that it was one's willingness to commit to American institutions

and ideals, not their religion or race, that made them “authentically American.” Overall, Catholic newspapers emphasized the political activity of the Klan more than the organizations’ violence while Black newspapers tended to present more accounts of Klan violence and editorials directly challenging Klan ideology. While each group emphasized the activities of the Klan that more directly impacted them, with Black newspapers reporting more frequently on violence and the Catholics more frequently on political activity, both ultimately showed an equal awareness of, and willingness to challenge, both the Klan’s ideology and activities.

These news sources not only argued that the Klan was dangerous to their respective communities but went even further to claim that the Klan was fundamentally dangerous to democracy. They argued that this was because Klan secrecy undermined confidence in the law and discouraged voter participation through intimidation and violence. Black and Catholic news editors’ and readers’ reports of the Klan’s public acts of violence suggests that many of the Klan’s violent activities in the South, Midwest and West were known and were tolerated by local communities. These sources’ awareness of violence occurring outside of their regions of publication shows that citizens in many northern and western regions, who did not likely directly witness the violence of the Klan, would nonetheless have had access to stories of the Klan’s criminality. While Simmons argued that his *Klan Unmasked* presented an honest account of the Klan, the newspapers I researched show that the reality of the Klan was far uglier than Simmons’ description.

Revisionist accounts and interpretations by scholars such as Felix Harcourt, Linda Gordon, and Glenn Feldman show that the Klan possessed a large number of so-called “typical whites” who, while not necessarily extremist, still felt pressure, fear and/or attraction to join the Klan

because of the changes of the late 19th and early 20th century that they perceived as threatening.²²² My research adds a nuance to this revisionist understanding of the consciousness of the Klan's members by showing that moderate whites in the Klan around the country would have been aware of the violence of the organization because much of it occurred in full view of communities in some regions but was then reported in *all* regions and was directly attributable to the Klan. Because of this awareness, we can more directly implicate moderate Klansmen in the larger Klan's crimes. Even if some Klan members did not participate in violent acts, their support, passive or direct, of the organization and its ideology encouraged and allowed the more extreme members' actions.²²³ Revisionist historians argue that the changes of the early 20th century presented an opportunity for leaders like Simmons to activate white identity amongst previously race-moderate whites. My research affirms this understanding while adding that the changes of the 20th century also seemed to increase moderate whites' tolerance for violence by more radical whites.

Understandably, Black and Catholic newspapers spent little time describing the Klan's many fraternal and cultural activities (especially prominent and expansive in Simmons' years) and thus presented a relatively selective account which attributes to the entire Klan the activities of the organization's most ardent members. While my research shows a near identical level of political and structural Klan influence (although limited in my study to the South and Midwest) as the revisionists describe, a consideration of Black and Catholic newspapers alone does not present a holistic account of the Klan's activities and its attractiveness to white Americans. Because of these

²²²Harcourt, 10: Gordon, 192: Feldman, 325.

²²³See for examples of increased violence in the 1920s, Danny Lewis, "This Map Shows Over a Century of Documented Lynchings in the United States: Mapping the history of racial terror," Smithsonianmag.org, January 24, 2017, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/map-shows-over-a-century-of-documented-lynchings-in-united-states-180961877/>.

newspapers' and news services' near exclusive emphasis on the Klan's violent and political activities, they overlook the full array of motivations of the Klan's very large membership by the late 1910s and early 1920s. While it is understandable why reports of Klan picnics and family-days would not make it into the pages of these newspapers in light of the more directly destructive and threatening activities of the Klan which Blacks and Catholics faced, they nonetheless overlook the motives of less extreme whites who also felt threatened by change but were not as radical as the most ardent Klansmen.

These newspapers also affirm the accounts of revisionist historians Gordon, Harcourt and Feldman's claims that Klan ideology was ensconced in mainstream American politics and culture and that both the Klan's presence and ideology were accepted, or at the least tolerated, in varying degrees throughout the country. The newspapers I researched described essentially no resistance to the Klan from white Protestants in the South and only limited condemnation of the Klan – condemnation of violence but rarely of presumptions and values – from white Protestants in the North. My sources ultimately present strong condemnations of Klan ideology, recognition of extensive Klan influence in the South and Midwest and a frustration that, despite the seemingly obvious criminality and bigotry of the Klan, the federal government was doing little to stop the Invisible Empire's expansion and operations. Recent revisionist accounts can help to explain what allowed for this frustration. The revisionists describe that the violence of the Klan in the South and Midwest was enabled by the Klan's influence in the federal government and sympathy in parts of the North, both of which stalled any federal action which might have challenged the Klan's influence. Despite these limitations, Black and Catholic accounts of the Second Ku Klux Klan should be considered as valuable sources in understanding the Klan in the 1920s. Their thorough understanding of the Second Klan's ideology, activity and influence, and their relative absence up

to this point in scholarship on the Klan, demands that historians re-consider the value of victim perspective in studying systems of oppression.

Epilogue

In 2016, Donald Trump won the presidential election of the United States. Many were shocked that Trump's explicit racialized-nativist platform, which denounced and degraded Latinx Americans and Muslims, was well received by segments of white America. This was especially surprising following the two-term presidency of the first Black American President, Barack Obama. After the celebration of the Obama presidency and the subsequent claims of a "post-racial America" many were left wondering how Trump was able to successfully use overt racial language and nativist appeals after decades of supposed racial progress.

An examination of the Second Klan can be helpful in answering this question. In the 1920s, Simmons took advantage of the drastic economic, social, political and demographic changes that threatened white Protestants' status and evoked white fear in order to encourage membership in his organization. Likewise, the United States today faces a set of changes which closely parallel those of the 1920s. Immigration from Central and South America, the election of a Black president, legalization of gay marriage and increasing numbers of Muslim Americans have all challenged the role of the straight white Protestant as the proto-typical American in ways similar to the early 20th century. While it is tempting to bury the horrors of the Second Klan under a hundred years of history, acknowledging the similarities between then and now can help us to understand the continued influence of nativism, intolerance and white supremacy in U.S society.

The Second Klan provides an explicit historical example of the political salience of white identity in American history as well as the consequences of what Dr. Carole Anderson describes as “White Rage,” the white backlash that has followed any non-white progress – the same white backlash that many contemporary scholars attribute Trump’s success to.²²⁴ Whites’ resistance to their slipping status, which Anderson notes is evident throughout U.S. history from its founding to the present, is made possible by the continued importance of race in American politics which, while shifting form and targeting different non-whites at different points, is always present.

Anderson demonstrates that explicit appeals to white identity and status remained effective and acceptable even after the collapse of the Ku Klux Klan in the late 1920s; Simmons’ message would survive long after his organization imploded. His claims that America belonged to the white Protestant and was being stolen by immigrants, Blacks and non-Protestants would be potently wielded by politicians up until the end of the Civil Rights Movement and the cultural shift which followed. With explicitly racial language that directly degraded Blacks and essentialist arguments about non-whites’ inferiority no longer acceptable to many whites, politicians appealing to white resentment of non-whites had to change their tactics. Rather than to specifically state, for instance, that Black citizens were wreaking havoc, Presidents Nixon (in the “Southern Strategy” used in the 1968 campaign) and Reagan effectively used coded language about the problems of “urban” crime, poverty, and drug abuse with “urban” being code for “Black.”²²⁵ The result of their success was a massive growth in the Black prison population and Black voter disenfranchisement. Any racial

²²⁴See, Anderson, *White Rage*.

²²⁵See, Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2020).

appeals made to white Americans would remain similarly covert for the next five decades after the Civil Rights Era.

Considering that intolerance remains deeply present in American society, and the similarities between the early 20th and early 21st centuries, it is less surprising that Trump's appeals to white Americans, like those of Simmons, were successful. Both were able to activate and mobilize white moderates' racial identity by stressing to them that their "rightful" place in American society was being taken from them. Although Simmons mainly blamed Blacks, Catholics and Jews for America's problems while Donald Trump has focused almost exclusively on Muslims and Hispanics, both made nativist appeals to an America under attack – the major difference being who the designated invader was. Trump's success should, therefore, not be viewed as anomalous, but rather consistent within a broader history of white identity politics in which many whites consistently respond to threats to their status, even if the demographic personifications of the threats change over time.

The similarity and success of the arguments put forth by Simmons and Trump show that, despite the successes of the Civil Rights Movement, appeals to white fear are still effective enough to win the presidency of the United States. My claim that white identity can be mobilized by evoking white fears is supported by scholars such as Ashley Jardina, who writes that, while "many whites may not identify with groups like the KKK [...] it is nevertheless the case that these aggrieved whites are a potentially untapped well, whose resentments are primed, ready to be stoked by politicians willing to go down a potentially very dark path."²²⁶ Just as the 1920s was an age of terror for many non-whites and non-Protestants, Jardina affirms that America may be set to experience a similar relapse into racial and cultural turmoil, this time with Mexicans and Muslims

²²⁶Ashley Jardina, *White Identity Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 278.

rather than Blacks and Catholics as the primary victims. There is evidence that this descent into violence may already be occurring. A national increase in hate group membership and hate crimes, with a 226% increase in hate crimes in cities where Trump gave campaign speeches, shows that the stoking of white fears is once again encouraging violence and emboldening extremists.²²⁷

The present day KKK and other alt-right white supremacist groups' public support of Trump further verifies my claim that moderate and extreme whites who support nativist appeals are on the same spectrum of responsibility. While not every white Trump supporter engages in violence, just like the moderate Klansmen of the 1920s, they still openly subscribe to the same limited notion of Americanism and share the same goals of maintaining "true Americans'" authority which causes this violence. The public awareness that Trump's language incites intolerance and the continued support of many moderate Americans regardless, again shows a continuation of the historical trend that appeals to white identity increases moderate whites' tolerance of violence carried out by the extremists in their ranks.

It is worth noting that, since the 1920s, the U.S. has experienced a large degree of progress towards equality. The formal end of segregation and the passing of the Voting Rights Act, increased tolerance for Catholics and rights for members of the LGBTQ+ community, and increased awareness of structural oppression and white privilege, shows that America is working, if slowly, towards a state of tolerance and racial equality. It is important to recognize, however, that such progress has faced resistance by many whites at every step. Continued inequality in political participation, gaps in wealth and education amongst whites and non-whites, de facto segregation in housing, and vast racial inequalities in arrests and imprisonments shows that there

²²⁷“Counties that hosted a 2016 Trump rally saw a 226 percent increase in hate crimes” *Washington Post*, March 22, 2019.

is still much more work to be done towards achieving racial equality. White resistance to the presidency of Barack Obama and support for Donald Trump further show we are still far from living in a “post-racial” America.²²⁸ The success of Trump’s election and its parallels to Simmons’ Ku Klux Klan shows that race and white identity are still greatly important in American politics. While Trump’s wariness to make racialized appeals against Black Americans suggests that American society is not as tolerant of anti-Blackness as it was in the 1920s, his success making similar kinds of appeals against Mexican-Americans shows that America has not entirely cleansed itself of white supremacy nor moved on from the belief that the white Protestant is the most “authentic American.”²²⁹ Therefore, anyone attempting to work towards racial equality has to recognize that despite the hard fought victories of American progressives, white supremacy and intolerance still remain deep rooted and alive in America.

Studying the Second Klan alongside President Trump places Americans in an alarming and recurring cycle of white defensiveness against encroachments to privilege. Studying the Klan can, however, also provide a way out of this cycle. In examining why Americans found the Klan’s message enticing in the 1920s and tolerated the organization’s violence, modern Americans can come to understand how to avoid a similar fate. By allowing victimized groups to speak for themselves, Americans can help to discern between lies and truths told by authority figures aiming

²²⁸Andra Gillespie, *Race and the Obama Administration: Substance, Symbols, and Hope* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

²²⁹Trump has, at times, been less hesitant to appeal to anti-Blackness. His condemnations and descriptions of the city of Baltimore as a “disgusting, rat and rodent infested mess” are alarmingly similar in tone to Nixon and Reagan’s veiled attacks on “urban” cities which were in actuality attacks on African-Americans. See “Trump attacks another African American lawmaker, and calls Baltimore a ‘disgusting, rat and rodent infested mess,’” *CNN News*, July 28, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/07/27/politics/elijah-cummings-trump-baltimore/index.html/> (accessed May 16, 2020).

to evoke white fear. This is something which historically Americans have consistently failed to do. Americans in the 1920s, both for and against the Klan, ignored the voices of the Klan's victims. Historians on the Klan also overlooked the value of victims' accounts. Contemporary American news and media agencies, liberal and conservative, still rarely allow opportunities for victimized groups to defend themselves.

My thesis shows that victims of white supremacy, nativism, and religious intolerance understood and spoke out against their oppressors, making their accounts an effective but underutilized tool in challenging ignorance and aiding in understanding the past, as well as the present. If victims of white supremacy and intolerance are given the chance to define their experience and defend themselves from their accusers, then we may begin to challenge bigotry and the violence and inequalities that it breeds. Studying the victims of white supremacy in the past and present will ultimately unearth a bitter but necessary truth—when America takes off the hood of the Klansman, it will not find an unfamiliar monster, but will instead look itself in the face. Understanding the Second Ku Klux Klan will help us to understand America, not as we wish to see it, but as it was *and as it continues to be*.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary sources

Books

Ku Klux Klan. *Questions Answered*. n.p. (University of Pennsylvania Online Books Page) <https://archive.lib.msu.edu/DMC/AmRad/questionsansweredofficial.pdf>. (accessed May 15, 2020).

Simmons, William J. *The Klan Unmasked*. Atlanta: Wm. E. Thompson publishing co, 1923.

Simmons, William J. *The Ku Klux Klan Yesterday, Today and Forever: The "Fiery" Summons*. n.p. (Texas State Library and Archives Commission).

Newspapers

Advocate

America

Broad Ax

Catholic News Service

Cleveland Gazette

Hutchinson Blade

Negro Star

Topeka Plaindealer

Secondary Sources

Books

Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press, 2020.

- Anderson, Carol. *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of our Racial Divide*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.
- Feldman, Glenn. *Politics, Society, and the Klan in Alabama: 1915-1949*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1999.
- Gillespie, Andra. *Race and the Obama Administration: Substance, Symbols, and Hope*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019.
- Gordon, Linda. *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017.
- Harcourt, Felix. *Ku Klux Kulture: America and the Klan in the 1920s*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017.
- Jardina, Ashley. *White Identity Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- MacLean, Nancy. *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Articles

- “Counties that hosted a 2016 Trump rally saw a 226 percent increase in hate crimes.” *The Washington Post*, March 22, 2019.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/03/22/trumps-rhetoric-does-inspire-more-hate-crimes/> (accessed May 15, 2020).
- “This Map Shows Over a Century of Documented Lynchings in the United States: Mapping the History of Racial Terror.” *The Smithsonianmag*, January 24, 2017.
<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/map-shows-over-a-century-of-documented-lynchings-in-united-states-180961877/> (accessed May 15, 2020).
- “Trump attacks another African American lawmaker, and calls Baltimore a 'disgusting, rat and rodent infested mess,’” *CNN News*, July 28, 2019,
<https://www.cnn.com/2019/07/27/politics/elijah-cummings-trump-baltimore/index.html/> (accessed May 16, 2020).

Website Content

- “Mapping the Second Ku Klux Klan: 1915-1940.” labs.library.vcu.edu.
 Virginia Commonwealth University. December 29, 2019.
<https://labs.library.vcu.edu/klan/> (accessed May 15, 2020).