

**Uniform Threat: Manufacturing the Ku Klux Klan's Visible Empire, 1866-1931**

**by**

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**For  
Susan Virginia Lennard,  
who loved history, social justice,  
and seeing the world from  
unexpected angles.  
(1961-2017)**

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## **Abstract**

This dissertation examines a symbol central to the racial consciousness of the contemporary United States: the white robe and hood worn by members of the modern Ku Klux Klan. In this cultural history of Ku Klux Klan regalia, I argue that the development of the idealized image of the uniformed Klansman shaped the formation, expansion, and decline of the infamous white supremacist fraternity in the early twentieth-century.

This project maps the relationship between images of uniformed Klansmen, the garments that made these images possible, and the ideological project that the Klan espoused. I approach the mutual constitution of images, objects, and ideology through the Klan's engagement with and emergence from institutions of the Progressive Era United States. Klan regalia, and the meaning that these garments conveyed, reflect the organization's development within the burgeoning institutions and industries of a national mass culture. Industrially-produced regalia facilitated a view of the Klan as a "uniform" organization that could act as a coordinated body across vast geographic distances. At the same time, processes of manufacturing and large-scale distribution helped the Klan to establish an ambivalent relationship to contemporary capitalism and the violence for which the organization was best known. Thus, the Klan's use of Klan regalia as a symbolic and material threat of violence was representative of larger processes of making meaning in a period of widespread industrialization and cultural transformation.

This project approaches the study of material and visual culture through archival history, using a mixture of documents, images, artifacts, and extant garments to show how the Klan used their iconic regalia in the early twentieth-century. At the core of this project is a concern with the ways that ideas about race, gender, and nationality were crafted and embodied in the early twentieth-century. Members, leaders, and critics of the organization used robes and hoods to grapple with whiteness, masculinity, American citizenship, and violence in their everyday lives. The embodied experience of making, participating in, and fighting the violent ideology that the Klan championed is thus illuminated through a study of the organization's material remains.

## Introduction: Object Lessons

In May of 1928, a young man by the name of Julius Moore was taken into police custody after he was found walking through a northern suburb of Atlanta. At this point, he was carrying a “suspicious” bundle of white fabric.<sup>1</sup> Upon inspection, the bundle was revealed to be twenty-two yards of white cotton drill, stolen from a nearby factory that used the fabric to make uniform robes for the era’s most notorious white supremacist fraternity: the Ku Klux Klan.

Moore’s specific motivations here are not easy to untangle a century later. This larceny charge was not Moore’s first experience with the law; six years earlier, a twelve year old, Moore was housed with other juvenile inmates at the Fulton County Industrial Farm in nearby Hapeville.<sup>2</sup> One of many such segregated industrial farms across Georgia, the institution’s goal was to “transform negro criminals into industrious men,” through hard agricultural labor.<sup>3</sup> Released to their own devices after farming staple cotton and vegetables for local prisons, many former inmates faced challenges finding work in

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<sup>1</sup> “Daring Black Steals KKK Robbing Cloth” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 4, 1928.

<sup>2</sup> Julius Moore; p. 5B [handwritten], line 73, Enumeration District 159, Adamsville, Fulton County, Georgia Census of Population, Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920 (National Archives Microfilm Publication T626, Roll 253); Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29; “Two Boys Run Away from Hapeville Farm,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Sept. 27, 1916.

<sup>3</sup> “On Juvenile Farm, Chatham Transforms Negro Criminals into Industrious Men,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 26, 1912. See also: “Well Indorsed is Reformatory,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 4, 1904; Lecraw, J. Walter, “Making a Man Ollie Taylor,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 6, 1913; “Two Boys Run Away from Hapeville Farm,” *Atlanta Constitution*, Sept. 27, 1916; “County Will Erect Boys’ Reformatory,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 8, 1919; “Display of Farm Products Planned In Fulton County,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 7, 1929.

Atlanta. Labor insecurity may have prompted Moore's trip by segregated streetcar, from his home in southwest Atlanta to the far reaches of the northern suburbs, all to steal a bundle of cloth.

Or perhaps Moore's target here was something larger than quick profit. Reporters for *The Atlanta Constitution* suggested that Moore's crime had a symbolic dimension in their headline about the theft: "Daring Black Steals KKK Robing Cloth." To be a young Black man carrying a bale of white fabric through a segregated suburb was already a risky act. The fact that Moore ventured near, perhaps even into, the so-called "sheet factory" owned and operated by Klan officials transformed the everyday danger of walking while Black in the Jim Crow South into a transgression potent with political meaning.<sup>4</sup> The humble commodity at the center of this story, a bolt of white fabric, was an unlikely medium for symbolic struggle. The plain weave material was probably produced at one of many nearby mills, which turned Georgia cotton into yardage for ready-to-wear clothing and household goods.<sup>5</sup> This material was already the product of a long and racialized history of agricultural production, urban migration, factory labor, and the rapid proliferation of consumer goods at the turn of the twentieth century. Why, then, did the newspaper represent Moore's theft as a pointed attack on the Klan? What damage did stealing enough fabric to make only seven or eight robes—a maximum of forty dollars profit, less the cost of labor—do to the infamous secret society?

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<sup>4</sup> Grace Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998); Stephen A. Berrey, *The Jim Crow Routine: Everyday Performances of Race, Civil Rights, and Segregation in Mississippi* (Durham, NC: UNC Press, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Douglas Flamming, *Creating the Modern South: Millhands and Managers in Dalton, Georgia, 1884-1984*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Clifford Kuhn, *Contesting the New South Order: The 1914-1915 Strike at Atlanta's Fulton Mills*. (University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

By 1928, the Klan's membership numbers were already in free-fall. The regalia factory, which had basically printed money in the form of cheaply made cotton robes just three years earlier, was now making overalls, "convict clothing," and other mass-produced garments simply to stay afloat.<sup>6</sup> (**Fig. 0.0**) In this sense, the fabric that Moore lifted was shot through with historical meanings. On the one hand, cotton cloth was a mundane consumer product that would fetch a profit on the black market, on the other, it was the material basis of two of the era's most powerful symbols: the white uniform robe and pointed hood. By their very nature, these explicitly political garments were intended to transform white, Protestant, native-born men from "aliens" (non-members) into representatives of the Ku Klux Klan. When stitched into these garments, the white fabric had meaning that emerged from but also exceeded its humble material properties.<sup>7</sup>

Contemporary Atlantans, it is important to note here, were well aware of these historical ironies. *The Constitution* gave readers enough clues to see both the symbolic and material dimensions of Moore's crime; and while their narrative injected a certain heroic swagger to his actions, its effects were not altogether benevolent. Atlanta residents might have chuckled at the moxie of the young man crowned "Fulton County's most daring

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<sup>6</sup> American Printing and Manufacturing Advertisement, *Kourier Magazine*, Vol 3. No 7, (June 1927). Crown Point, Indiana Klan Collection, Box 3 Folder 6, IHS.

<sup>7</sup> Anthropologist Daniel Miller, characterizes human-made objects as "humble" because their social role can never be entirely reduced to the meaning assigned to objects by the perceiving, meaning-making human subject. Material objects shape human behavior in frequently unnoticed ways, setting normative frameworks for activity. Miller, *Material Culture and Mass Consumption* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987); Miller, "Materiality: An Introduction" in *Materiality*, edited by Daniel Miller (Durham, NC: Duke University Libraries Press, 2005) 5. Webb Keane pushes this analysis further in light of semiological theory by calling attention to the contemporary tendency to detach the materiality of signs from the meaning they signify, a move that disregards the degree of contingency that materiality introduces into historical processes of signification. Keane, "Signs are not the Garb of Meaning: On the Social Analysis of Material Things." In *Materiality*, 182-205. See also Jules David Prown, "The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fact" in *American Artifacts: Essays in Material Culture*. Edited by Jules David, and Kenneth Haltman (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000); Fred R. Myers, *The Empire of Things: Regimes of Value and Material Culture*. (Santa Fe, N.M.: School of American Research Press, 2001).

prisoner,” who stole symbolically charged materials from this famously secret society.<sup>8</sup> But theft was still theft; and in celebrating Moore’s daring, the paper simultaneously described him in such a way that confirmed stereotypes of Black criminality. For our purposes, however, it may be useful to think about the longer histories that made this episode possible. Indeed, if we are to make any sense of this story, we will need to begin by denaturalizing the broader symbolics: this sense that white robe and conical hoods simply stood in for the KKK. Or to put it another way: How did a conical hat and long white robe become so suffused with historical meaning that they could operate as a metonym for not only the most infamous U.S. social movement of the entire twentieth century, but white supremacy writ large?

Studying Klan regalia poses a productive ontological puzzle. Klan robes and hoods transformed their wearers into representations of a distinctive ideological project, but like the ideas about race, gender, and nationalism the garments were to convey, the symbol could not be detached from the material form in which it was expressed.<sup>9</sup> The first

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<sup>8</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, May 4, 1928.

<sup>9</sup> For discussion of symbolic images as vehicles of shared cultural meaning, see Geertz “Religion as a Cultural System” in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, (New York: Basic Books, 1973) 89-90; . Stuart Hall defines *ideology* as “the mental frameworks—the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation—which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works.” For this reason, culture is always a site of ideological struggle, because it is through the production of a collective “common sense” that hierarchies are articulated and challenged. Critically, these frameworks are not simply “reflective of a pre-given reality in the mind,” instead they are contingent on their invention within particular material conditions. This aligns with Louis Althusser’s argument that “ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.” The various material forms in which ideology introduce unforeseen contingencies into that “imaginary relationship” Althusser is distinctly concerned with the role of ideology in class formation, but the way he deploys this term is equally useful for unraveling the production of race and gender. See: Barbara J. Fields, “Ideology and Race in American History” in J. Morgan Kousser and James McPherson eds, *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Barbara Fields, “Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America,” *New Left Review* 181 (May-June 1990): 101-8; Hall, Stuart. “Signification, Representation, Ideology: Althusser and Post-Structuralist Debates.” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 2(2) (June 1985): 91–114; Stuart Hall, “The Rediscovery of ‘Ideology:’ Return of the Repressed in Media Studies” in *Culture, Society, and the Media* ed. Michael Gurevitch, Tony Bennett, James Curran, and James Woollacott.

challenge lies in pinning robes and hoods into a single definitive form. Americans encountered Klan regalia through narrative descriptions, illustrations, movie costumes, order forms, line items in budgets, catalogs, photographs, and in some cases, the garments themselves. These sites are connected in what anthropologist Webb Keane calls a “representational economy,” a construction that makes visible the “dynamic interconnections among different modes of signification at play within a particular historical and social formation.”<sup>10</sup> The figure I call the “white robed Klansman,” was an iconic symbol developed within this representational economy, as white pointed hoods and uniform robes became visible to Americans in multiple media forms.

The compound nature of this symbol, not limited to any single medium, calls for a fuller assessment of the development of the iconic Klan robe over time, as it became a common-sense symbol of white supremacy.<sup>11</sup> Performance studies scholar Robin

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(London and New York: Routledge, 1982) 52-86 Hall, Stuart. “Notes on Deconstructing ‘the Popular.’” In *People’s History and Socialist Theory*, edited by Raphael Samuel. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981); Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” In L. Althusser (Ed.), *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971); Matthew Pratt Guterl, *Seeing Race in Modern America*. (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> In his application of the C. S. Peirce’s model of semiology to an analysis of the material world, Webb Keane calls for a particular attention to the ways that these shifting grounds force a renegotiation of relationships between representations, their referents, and the ways that viewers interpret these relationships. Keane, “Semiotics and the Social Analysis of Material Things.” *Language Communication* 23.3-4 (2003): 410.

<sup>11</sup> Throughout this dissertation, I use the term “icon” in two different ways. First, in the colloquial sense of a representative cultural figure recognizable to a broader American public, and second, drawing from Piercean semiology, in which the iconic sign bridges the realms of meaning and materiality, operating through conventions of resemblance. Webb Keane has addressed the use of Peirce’s language philosophy for understanding the relationship between material signs, As early twentieth-century Klan robes were manufactured expressly to convey a particular ideological meaning, and were distributed by the Klan itself, these garments, as well as other representations of the Klan figure produced by Klan leaders may also be characterized as “indexical” signs, connected through not only conventional resemblance but also direct physical or causal connection to one another. This term does not convey the scope of ways in which images of the Klan were produced and consumed, and therefore only applies to certain instances of this figure’s use in American popular culture. Keane, “Semiotics and the Social Analysis of Material Things.” 410; Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Writings Vol. 2* Ed. Charles Hartshorne, Paul Weiss & Arthur W Burks). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (1931-58) 306. For cultural icons, see: Nicole Fleetwood. *On Racial Icons Blackness and the Public Imagination*. (New Brunswick, New Jersey ; London: Rutgers

Bernstein has called scholars to look at *how* ideas about race and gender emerged through engagement with the material world.<sup>12</sup> Questions of “how” look beyond causal factors to see the product of the contingent and mutually constitutive relationship between imaginary construction and material forms, in short, the historical construction of a particular relationship between meaning and object. Examining Klan regalia as a symbolic form provides a point of entry for understanding how members of the Ku Klux Klan, their critics, and even dispassionate observers, used these garments in order to understand social difference and cultural change in the early twentieth century. How did the movement of all these Klan robes through U.S. culture (both as actual objects and idealized images) shape the way that contemporaries understood, experienced, and challenged the Ku Klux Klan? How did the relationship between the formal properties and meaning of these garments shape the operation and ideology of the organization they were designed to represent?

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**(Fig. 0.1)**

From the Reconstruction era onwards, the name *Ku Klux Klan* signaled an embodied ideological project expressed in the form of ritualized, collective violence.

Groups of vigilantes calling themselves Klans first formed in the South, during the

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University Press, 2015); Carolyn Kitch, *The Girl on the Magazine Cover: The Origins of Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001). Robert Hariman and John Lucaites conduct a useful study of American photographs that have achieved the status of a cultural icon in *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007)

<sup>12</sup> Robin Bernstein, “Dances with Things Material Culture and the Performance of Race.” *Social Text* 27, no. 4 101 (December 21, 2009): 67–94. Bernstein comes to this assessment through performance studies, and literary scholarship (more specifically Robyn Weigman’s reading of Toni Morrison, and their call to shift from questions of “why” to questions of “how”). Though she does not cite Barbara Fields’s “Ideology and Race in American History” (1982), these projects have a similar objective, if slightly different approaches to unraveling the historical development of racial imaginaries.



political Reconstruction of the region. Ku Kluxers used terrorist violence to subdue anyone they perceived as a threat to the antebellum social order they hoped to restore.<sup>13</sup> Following the cessation of major Klan activity by the early 1870's, the name continued to operate as shorthand for a regulatory mob, organized on a grassroots basis. After the Klan's revival in 1915, this commonplace understanding was complicated by the fact that the rate of lynching was decreasing nationwide, even as the Klan experienced massive national growth.<sup>14</sup> While the historical name and strange robes of the Klan evoked vigilante mob attacks of Reconstruction era Kluxers, and the "whitecaps" that followed in their wake, the newly revived Klan bore a more attenuated relationship to violent activity. Some Klaverns were responsible for violent floggings, murders, and ominous threats that also characterized their nineteenth century predecessors, but others behaved more like conventional fraternal orders, collecting dues, staging pageants, and arguing over bureaucratic minutia. The seeming distinction, between bureaucratic modernity anti-modern violence divided early twentieth-century Americans attempting to understand the Klan and the organization's relationship to contemporary American culture.

A symbolic image that I am calling *the uniformed Klansman* was a point at which divergent perspectives on the organization could converge. Not simply a reflection of

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<sup>13</sup> Eric Foner. *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*. (New York: Perennial Classics, 2002); Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror; the Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1971); Elaine Frantz Parsons. *Ku-Klux the Birth of the Klan during Reconstruction*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> On decline of lynching in early twentieth-century, see William Fitzhugh Brundage. *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930*. (University of Illinois Press, 1993); Stewart Emory Tolnay, and E. M. Beck. *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995); Ken Gonzales-Day. *Lynching in the West, 1850-1935*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006). Amy Kate Bailey, and Stewart E. Tolnay. *Lynched: The Victims of Southern Mob Violence*. (University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

popular perceptions, the Klan figure was a productive image that shaped ideas about what the organization was and what it could be, even after the organization's decline in the late 1920's. In this way, the Ku Klux Klan was very much a product of its own historical moment. At the turn-of-the-twentieth century was, as literary scholar Bill Brown explains, Americans turned en-mass to objects and representations of objects in expressive culture as "object lessons" that could illuminate the problems of contemporary life.<sup>15</sup> Americans were not the first cultural group to use material goods to sort and make sense of their rapidly expanding world, but the expanding availability of mass-produced goods made the creation of shared cultural meaning operate on new scales. Material goods not only expressed the ideas of their producers, their material properties often challenged or altered those ideas in unexpected ways. Material goods were generative forms that shaped the ways Americans understood their world. This framework can help us to understand how the development and use of Klan regalia in the early twentieth century was very much a product of its time, as consumer capitalism and demographic transformations remapped the landscape of American culture. For this reason, it is important to contextualize the Klan's emergence within these massive social, cultural, and economic changes, in order to see how the emergence of the Klan and its most powerful symbol were intertwined with broader cultural currents.

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At the turn of the twentieth century, Americans tried to make sense of the ways that changing national demographics and new technologies were transforming the world in

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<sup>15</sup> Bill Brown, *The Material Unconscious: American Amusement, Stephen Crane & the Economies of Play*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

which they lived.<sup>16</sup> Cultural media offered Americans ways to envision themselves as part of an ever-expanding set of *publics*, notional communities whose members were bound together by discourse.<sup>17</sup> The social formation of publics offered modes of understanding one's identity in terms of the contradictions and complications posed by the modern world. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, modernity was a self-conscious condition, not a fixed mark on an historical timeline. To experience modernity was to "register and negotiate the effects of historical fragmentation and loss, of rupture and change," a process that marked human subjects as participants in shaping the worlds in which they lived.<sup>18</sup> Self-conscious moderns had one foot in the past and one in the future, understanding their own subjectivity not simply through the endless churn of novelty, but as a product of change over time.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Historians have long understood the Progressive era, as a moment of flux between the fully-formed corporate rationalization of the mid-twentieth century, and the formation of a nascent mass culture in the antebellum period. Almost twenty years ago, historian Stephen Diner argued that the very term "defines the era by its politics," in his call for a history of the progressive era that could encompass both political transformation and the people who shaped, and were in turn shaped by, those changes (9). While Diner's assertion was well grounded, his plea to connect social to political history left out a contemporaneous methodological field: the new cultural history. Approaching the progressive era through not only politics, and people, but also an understanding of the way that the production of shared meaning shaped both law and everyday life, has characterized much of the most powerful scholarship on this period over the subsequent decades. Diner, Steven J. "Linking Politics and People: The Historiography of the Progressive Era." *OAH Magazine of History* 13, no. 3 (1999): 5–9.

<sup>17</sup> Literary theorist Michael Warner builds on philosopher Jurgen Habermas' definition of "the Public Sphere" to distinguish between "*The Public*...a kind of social totality," "a public" as in "a concrete audience," gathered together in a physical space, and a third kind of public that operates as a discursive community constructed through the circulation of texts. Unlike *the public*, any individual may be situated within any number of publics at once. A public is a kind of virtual "social space" that mediates a "relation among strangers" through the "reflexive circulation of discourse." Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics." *Public Culture* 14.1 (2002) 49-90; Berman, Marshall. *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. Reissue edition. (New York, N.Y., U.S.A: Penguin Books, 1988).

<sup>18</sup> Miriam Hansen, "Unstable Mixtures, Dilated Spheres: Negt and Kluge's *The Public Sphere and Experience*, Twenty Years Later" *Public Culture* Vol 5 No 2 (Winter 1993): 188.

<sup>19</sup> Historians continue to debate whether "modernity" is overused, and what utility this category has for historical scholarship. I am particularly attentive to critiques that deployment of this term to mark particular groups of historical subjects as culturally superior, but for these reasons am even more strongly convinced

If modernity was experienced as a relation between past and future, always in the process of renegotiation, the broad range of industrial transformations that heralded the new century suggested no such hesitancy. During the Progressive Era, cycles of social, political, and cultural change accelerated with the help of new communication, transportation and industrial technologies—the light bulb, the telephone, the phonograph, the movie camera, the radio, the automobile—but also new modes of industrial control, new models of institutional bureaucracy.<sup>20</sup> The transcontinental railroad (1869) not only signaled a new era in national transportation; it also marked a new era of corporate monopolization.<sup>21</sup> Cultural producers soon followed, locating their production and distribution networks under ever-larger, vertically-integrated corporations.<sup>22</sup>

Culture was inextricable from big business, a fact made evident by the railroads profiting from the sixty-five car circuses that reached greater audiences by traveling along those very tracks.<sup>23</sup> Rationalizing the production and distribution of popular entertainment through media-specific “industries” increased profits for cultural entrepreneurs, who sought

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that it is worth investigating the Klan’s own use of this term. “AHR Roundtable: Historians and the Question of ‘Modernity,’ Introduction.” *American Historical Review* 116, no. 3 (June 2011), 631-7.

<sup>20</sup> William R. Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture*. (New York: Knopf Doubleday, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Richard White, *Railroaded: the Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America*. (New York: WW Norton & Co, 2012); Edward Ayers also talks about the standardization of time across the South with the advent of “railroad time” in *Promise of the New South*, 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition (1992, repr., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3-13.

<sup>22</sup> Much of the progressive era historiography on corporate transformations is rooted in five foundational texts: Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877-1920*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967); Alfred D. Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1971); Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Society in the Gilded Age*. (New York, N.Y.: Hill and Wang, 1982); Naomi R Lamoreaux. *The Great Merger Movement in American Business: 1895-1904*. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985); Beniger, James R. *The Control Revolution Technological and Economic Origins of the Information Society*. (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1986).

<sup>23</sup> Janet Davis, *The Circus Age*, (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2002), 39.

to control the larger process.<sup>24</sup> “Cultural commodities,” or sites of expressive culture produced within these industrial settings must be understood in two registers, both spaces for the production and contention of collective understanding and as financial instruments.<sup>25</sup> These two modes of circulation, “the financial” and “the cultural” are not commensurable, but they were nonetheless linked as industrial production reached into all facets of everyday life. Analysis of the advertising and distribution systems that could reach increasingly large-scale publics, can thus help us to understand how and why cultural producers selected content destined for popular consumption, and yet also how cultural consumers received or challenged that content. During the Progressive era, channels through which shared meanings crystallized were increasingly streamlined—as multiple, media-specific industries into a larger global “culture industry.”<sup>26</sup>

The mass consumer marketplace facilitated moments of cultural reception, in which consumers engaged with, reproduced, and transformed the meaning produced along rationalized corporate lines. Historian Davarian Baldwin argues that the process of making meaning occurred not only within the sphere of artistic production, but also in “the mass consumer marketplace,” which also encompassed barbershops, department stores, and street

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<sup>24</sup> By the 1850’s, the postal service could transport images over great distances in the form of personal photographs, but also newspapers carrying stories, and sometimes illustrations of the farthest reaches of the nation, and even globe. (Spreading the News, Postal Age) Improvements in lithographic printing made the mechanical reproduction of images and texts increasingly simple, just as new ways of conceptualizing the link between cultural production and distribution, encouraged consolidations in publishing that made cheap books and the sheet music for popular songs available to broader class fractions. (Denning) While Americans had engaged in fraternal cultures prior to the Civil War, manufacturers that once produced military uniforms turned to the production of fraternal memorabilia to adorn participants in a national associational craze. National fraternities, sororities, and other secret societies used shared ritual practices to demonstrate the bond between geographically distant members. Touring theatrical productions, circuses, and eventually moving pictures not only created experiences that could be shared by Americans in far reaches of the nation, but the extensive advertising apparatuses generated by these industries helped Americans to know what was happening on stage, even if they hadn’t seen the show.

<sup>25</sup> John Fiske, “The Popular Economy” from *Television Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1987) 309-26.

<sup>26</sup> Cook, “The Culture Industry Revisited,” 301.

corners.<sup>27</sup> Less obviously commercial institutions like schools, churches, and fraternal orders could also be implicated in this market system through their use of goods, operational strategies, and perpetuation of values available for sale in commercial spaces. Baldwin's formula offers a useful structure for thinking about the production of meaning in a moment in which Americans could not operate outside of capitalism. In mass culture, the production of meaning was not simply a top-down affair, as some cultural critics charged, but at the same time, the "everyday folk" made meaning within parameters undeniably shaped by market logics.<sup>28</sup>

While these new modes of cultural production prompted convergences of social and regional perspectives, the experience of consuming cultural products was never entirely determined by corporate ambitions. Political and social challenges to the narrative of progress through industrial consolidation were an important fixture of this period. But even the most seemingly anti-industrial movements borrowed from and articulated their hopes for the future with tools developed within this mass cultural marketplace. Historian Charles Postel has shown that the Populists of the 1880's and '90's understood their political work

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<sup>27</sup> Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes*, 5. Baldwin identifies these spaces as sites in which Black intellectual life flourished in early twentieth century Chicago.

<sup>28</sup> Baldwin's 2007 book may be read as part of a critical mass of historical works that can be identified as engaging with a "new materialism" in U.S. History scholarship. Historians working along these lines have focused way that institutions, industries, and other forms of social organization situate the process of making cultural meaning within market economies. Understanding the production of cultural categories and shared meaning in these terms offers new perspectives on the various pressures and processes of negotiation that resulted in seemingly coherent cultural norms in the early twentieth century. While cultural historians have been working along these lines for decades, a 2016 conference convened by James W. Cook at the University of Michigan highlighted the range of work engaging this methodological approach. See: Nan Enstad, Seth Rockman, Nathan Connolly, Brenna Greer. The difference between this *new materialism* and the "new history of capitalism" is a focus on the production of categories (race, gender, nationality, class) in and through the operation of markets, rather than the histories of markets in and of themselves. " See: Rockman, "What Makes the History of Capitalism Noteworthy," *Journal of the American Republic*, Vol 34, no 3 (Fall 2014) 439-466); Jeffery Slansky, "Labor, Money, and the Financial Turn in the History of Capitalism." *Labor*. Vol 11, Issue 1 (2014) 23-46. Cook productively argues that a materially-minded cultural history makes space for tracing the production of meaning within capitalist markets.

in terms of the new kinds of connectivity that the modern world offered. Populism offered a way for rural people to understand their relationship to a modern world, and to assert their place in both society and the economy.<sup>29</sup> This was an exciting development for many people feeling marginalized by social transformation, but it was not without consequence.

This sense of possibility was, for many, also shaped by an increased vigilance to controlling the boundaries of citizenship. At the turn of the century, the cultural values of populism merged with a virulent nativism, borrowing from the new science of Eugenics on one hand, and tools of mass communication on the other. Tactics for hailing large publics were developed in the mass marketplace, and subsequently shaped the expression of politics and social movements, both radical and reactionary, as new technologies and organizational styles helped these organizations to coalesce and hail supporters on newly massive scales. In some parts of the nation, particularly the rural south, modernity arrived in the guise of antimodernism—the protestant revival movement—which explicitly decried urban, technoc cosmopolitanism as the site for moral disaster, and, like the lynch mob, imagines an idealized community of moral citizen subjects.<sup>30</sup> But even movements ostensibly oriented against the social transformations at work in the modern nation found their fullest

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<sup>29</sup> Postel’s argument in *The Populist Vision* (2009) revises the work of earlier scholars of populism, such as Lawrence Goodwyn, *The Populist Moment* (1978) and Stephen Hahn *The Roots of Southern Populism* (1983), who described the rural Populists as anti-modern figures, due to their “narrow materialist lens” on the world. The argument animating Postel’s work is close to the central claim of my own—chiefly that the desire to reinscribe traditional values found its fullest expression in relationships with new ways of understanding capital at the turn of the twentieth century. Other scholars have demonstrated that a broad range of Americans were turning to corporate capitalism during the twentieth century. Lizabeth Cohn shows this working for urban immigrants in *Making a New Deal* (1990), Cara Caddoo for early Black film exhibitors in *Exhibiting Freedom* (2014), N.D.B. Conolly for housing reformers in Jim Crow South Florida in *A World More Concrete* (2014), Bethany Moreton in her work on the formation of the Wal-Mart Corporation in *To Serve God and Wal-Mart* (2010). This re-appropriation of corporate capitalism had potential for workers, beyond the reclamation of identity through representations, but as each of these books demonstrate, the limitations imposed by the capitalist form could also be stifling and at times further entrench social divisions.

<sup>30</sup> Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*. (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 2009): 52. Postel’s *Populist Vision* is also excellent on the complicated ways that rural Americans understood themselves as modern subjects.

expression in collaboration with corporate and state interests. Articulating who was a legal political subject was an important way of controlling social hierarchies at flux during this period. Contests over enfranchisement for women, immigration, and the racial divisions codified by Jim Crow legislation made the stakes of these social concerns into legal battles.

The Progressive era was defined by the application of these new strategies for hailing publics to creating new ways of understanding political organization. When organizations like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) utilized tactics developed within the culture industry to get their message to a broader audience, it was not hard to see the progressive vision embedded in their aims.<sup>31</sup> Understanding the Klan in these terms, precisely because their vision of progress through industry was so internally contradictory, and virulently regressive towards large swaths of the American people, is a much greater challenge.<sup>32</sup> These political movements were never simply a show, as their involvement with mass culture may suggest, but the complicated way that spectacle, profit, and power played out in service of social change can help us to see what spectacular display did for the organization. For the Klan, as for other nativist movements at the time, the relationship between the organization's ideals, and the tools they used to enforce those ideals on a broader society is imperative to understanding the Klan's role in early twentieth century America. The Klan's development as Americans were moving away from spectacular violence in the form of lynchings and public executions, was no accident. The

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<sup>31</sup> Ramla M. Banele, *Black Star: African American Activism and International Political Economy* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008); Jenny Woodley, *Art for Equality: The NAACP's Cultural Campaign for Civil Rights*. (Louisville, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2016).

<sup>32</sup> Nancy MacLean has argued that the Klan's politics should be characterized as "Reactionary populism," emphasizing the violent racial politics of Tom Watson and other Populist leaders at the turn of the century. MacLean, Nancy. *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).



Klan's mobilization of tactics developed in the culture industry can help us to see the relationship between spectacular displays and brutal attacks during this period, in a new way.

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The Klan of the early twentieth-century was a mass cultural phenomenon in precisely these ways. (*Fig. 0.2*) Not only did this social movement utilize shared symbols to invite potential members into an expansive public it called "The Invisible Empire," but the Klan's most powerful symbols formed in and moved through the broader mass cultural marketplace, shaped by historical actors whose central motives were not solely the advertisement of violent white supremacy. Grappling with the emergence of an infamously exclusionary ideology in the seemingly expansive and fertile space of American mass culture has challenged the Klan's critics since the organization first emerged. This is particularly true as early twentieth century critics tried to understand the Klan's relationship to modernity. The organization was at once a "revival" of a nineteenth century social movement, but it also expressed these ideas with the language and institutions of the self-consciously modern culture industry.

In 1921, former Kleagle (professional recruiter) Henry Fry published a blistering indictment of what he called "the modern Klan," arguing that the group was just a scam that dressed a "political obligation" in the guise of fraternity, all for the personal gain of its leaders.<sup>33</sup> Fry's assessment was largely correct, though his sympathy for fraternal orders set up a false binary at the very crux of his argument. As Fry argued, it the Klan was

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<sup>33</sup> Fry's introduction includes a passionate disavowal of the organization on fourteen different grounds, including arguments that the Klan was a "historical fraud, not supported by the history and prescript of the old Klan," (7) and that the "sale of robes is a monopoly in the hands of the Gate City Manufacturing Company, a concern associated with the organization, and from this monopoly somebody is deriving an enormous revenue" (6). Fry, *The Modern Ku Klux Klan*, 5-7.

“merely [a] *fraternal* organization” committed to collective social improvement, then his expose was unjustified. If, on the other-hand, the order fomented nativist racism for the purposes of a “money-making scheme,” his revelations were utterly appropriate. “There is no middle ground” Fry announced dramatically, “I am either entirely right, or else I am entirely wrong.”<sup>34</sup>

But Fry’s unequivocal distinction between the cultural experience promoted by fraternities and the Klan was off base. Like other sites of cultural production, twentieth century fraternal orders frequently promoted social hierarchies and political candidates, while making money off of their members.<sup>35</sup> There was no pure social or political experience that did not employ the tools and logics of mass culture. They were, after all, part of the process of creating a shared national culture, one that was not necessarily *inclusive* but instead created clear lines through which social and political power could be consolidated.<sup>36</sup> The Klan made visible and explicit the themes underlying much of the

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<sup>34</sup> Fry, *The Modern Ku Klux Klan*, 10-11.

<sup>35</sup> Mary Ann Clawson. *Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender, and Fraternalism*. (Princeton University Press, 1989); Mark C. Carnes. *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Nicholas L. Syrett. *The Company He Keeps: A History of White College Fraternities*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009). William D. Moore. *Masonic Temples: Freemasonry, Ritual Architecture, and Masculine Archetypes*. (Chattanooga: University of Tennessee Press, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> The various industries in which a hegemonic mass culture emerged: news media, fiction, theater, and film, provided early twentieth century Americans with new ways to see the world, but these cultural works frequently reinforced existing models of social power even as they provided new opportunities for cultural participation. See: Philip Joseph Deloria. *Indians in Unexpected Places*. (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2004); *Playing Indian*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); John Kuo Wei Tchen. *New York Before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776-1882*. (Baltimore: JHU Press, 2001). Janet Davis. *The Circus Age Culture & Society under the American Big Top*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). Meer, Sarah. *Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelsy, and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850s*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005); Paul Starr. *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications*. (New York: Basic Books, 2005); Karl Hagstrom Miller. *Segregating Sound: Inventing Folk and Pop Music in the Age of Jim Crow*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Libraries Press, 2010); Monica L. Miller, *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity*. (Durham, NC: Duke University Libraries Press, 2010).

communal experience that comprised a national American culture in the early twentieth-century: a sense of community was most profitably achieved through the exclusion of others.

The Klan's emergence in a moment in which Americans understood themselves and relations to others through mass-produced entertainment and consumer goods was no accident. Klan leaders delivered ideological content to members, in part through the rented robes whose use advertised the group's project to other viewers. Roland Fryer and Stephen Levitt have argued: "no terrorist organization, the 1920s Klan is best described as social organization with a very successful multilevel marketing structure fueled by an army of highly incentivized sales agents selling hatred, religious intolerance, and fraternity in a time and place where there was tremendous demand."<sup>37</sup> Economists Fryer and Levitt, Historians Craig Fox and Charles Alexander, and early twentieth century critics Henry Fry and William G. Shepherd, have all looked to the Klan's commercial practices to understand how the organization repackaged exclusionary racial politics for popular consumption are correct that the Klan used exploitative commercial channels to make members feel a part of the Klan as a larger project.<sup>38</sup> But their analyses make a leap that misses an important part of this circuit. The Klan's ideological project emerged in a very particular form as it traveled through the mass cultural marketplace: uniform garments.

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<sup>37</sup> Roland G. Fryer, and Steven D. "Hatred and Profits: Under the Hood of the Ku Klux Klan." *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 127, no. 4 (November 1, 2012): 1883–1925.

<sup>38</sup> Fox's first chapter on advertising is particularly useful, as he considers the circulation of the Klan's brand. Craig Fox. *Everyday Klansfolk: White Protestant Life and the KKK in 1920's Michigan*. (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011). Alexander, Charles C. "Kleagles and Cash: The Ku Klux Klan as a Business Organization, 1915-1930." *The Business History Review* 39, no. 3 (October 1, 1965): 348–67; William G. Shepherd, "Ku Klux Koin" *Collier's Weekly*, July 21, 1928; Henry Peck Fry. *The Modern Ku Klux Klan*. Boston, MA: Small, Maynard, and Co., 1922.

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Analyzing the Klan's use of symbolically potent garments can help us to understand the most powerful tactic that its leaders deployed.<sup>39</sup> (**Fig. 0.3**) Klan leaders used standardized regalia to facilitate the massive scale of their organization—from individual Klansman to local Klans to the construction of a national “empire.”<sup>40</sup> Sometimes characterized as a reflection of the inflated egos of Klan leaders, this play with scale was also a strategic move that Klan leaders borrowed from the burgeoning consumer culture. During this period, newly minted marketers relied on advertisements that could help individuals understand their relationships to others by hailing segments of potential

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<sup>39</sup> A small cohort of scholars has moved beyond superficial mentions of Klan regalia to think more carefully about the material properties of these garments. Elaine Franz Parsons has extensively studied the social and material function of dress for the Reconstruction-era Klan in, *Ku Klux* (2014), Kelly J. Baker has examined the religious function of materiality for the Klan of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Judith Jackson Fossett, has looked at the racial ideology emerging in Dixon's design of Klan regalia. My study is the first to examine a broad range of material objects as primary source materials, and to think about the entire lifecycle of these garments—not just their symbolic use. Parsons, Elaine Frantz. *Ku-Klux the Birth of the Klan during Reconstruction*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015. Baker, Kelly. *Gospel according to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant America, 1915-1930*. Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2011; Judith Jackson Fossett. “[K]night Riders in [K]night Gowns.” In *Race Consciousness: Reinterpretations for the New Century*. Edited by Judith Jackson Fossett, and Jeffery A. Tucker. (New York: NYU Press, 1997).

<sup>40</sup> Historian Paul Kramer calls for an epistemic shift, from discussions of “empires” as *things*, to work that traces the development and deployment of “the imperial” as a category of analysis. Kramer defines the imperial as “a dimension of power in which asymmetries in the scale of political action, regimes of spatial ordering, and modes of exceptionalizing difference enable and produce relations of hierarchy, discipline, dispossession, extraction, and exploitation.” (1349) Under this model, the ideological motivations behind various imperial projects may be disaggregated to understand both continuities and changes across individual instantiations of this category; likewise, the many material forms in which imperial logics are envisioned and deployed may also be disentangled. In this spirit, I'm looking at Klan leaders' use of the word “empire” to trace the different ways that Klan leaders tried to extend control over geographically distant members. Amy Kaplan, and Donald E. Pease, eds. *Cultures of United States Imperialism*. 2nd Edition (Durham: Duke University Libraries Press Books, 1994); Kristin L. Hoganson *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920*. (University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. (London: Routledge, 1995).

consumers.<sup>41</sup> Consumer goods were thus objects that helped people through their daily lives, and symbols of the *kind* of person that one was, or better yet, wanted to be.

Never was this truer than through the marketing and sale of clothing, which promised to physically transform consumers into their ideal self-conceptions. The increasing availability of ready-made clothing in European and North American markets, starting in the 1820's and '30's, but accelerating dramatically in the late 1860's, made a broader selection of garments available for consumers across the class spectrum. Ready-made garments of the early nineteenth century were largely utilitarian, and often cheaply made—sailor's slops, uniforms, and garments for the working poor and enslaved—but the development of a vibrant global textile trade and a glut of cheap American cotton encouraged the growth of this market into new sectors.<sup>42</sup> The growth of garment

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<sup>41</sup> The turn-of-the twentieth century wasn't the first time that consumers used objects to articulate their relation to or hierarchy within larger communities, but new developments in advertising and mass-manufacturing made this tactic available to a much broader class fraction than ever before—including those working to produce these new consumer goods. For the relationship of artisans and factory workers to the goods they produced, see Leora Auslander, *Taste and Power*, (1996); Zakim, *Ready Made Democracy*, (2003); Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure* (1999); Monica Miller, *Slaves to Fashion* (2010); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, (1986). For histories of advertising and consumption practices, see Victoria De Grazia, and Ellen Furlough. *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (1996); William Leach, *Land of Desire*, (1993); T.J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance*, 1994, Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, (1986); Carolyn Kitch. *The Girl on the Magazine Cover* (2001).

<sup>42</sup> The production of ready-made garments is best understood in a global context, as the development of North American clothing production not only mimicked European models, but also resulted from global systems of trade in fabric, materials, and consumer goods. Daniel Roche presents the most complete picture of traditional trade and guild-based clothing production in Ancien Regime France, including a vibrant market for secondhand clothes, in the French context. Daniel Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, 293-363. Phillipe Perrot tracks the popularization of cheap ready-to-wear staple garments in the French context. Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie*, 36-57. Wendy Woolson traces secondhand goods in *In Hock: Pawning in America from Independence to the Great Depression* (2009), esp. Ch 3: "The Economies of Everyday Life." For the development of a ready-made garment industry in the nineteenth century U.S., see Michael Zakim, *Ready Made Democracy* (2003); Rob Schorman, *Selling Style* (2003), Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure* (1999). For global circuits of textile production and trade, see: Riello, Giorgio. *Cotton: The Fabric That Made the Modern World*, 2013; Beckert, Sven. *Empire of Cotton: A Global History*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014); Susan W. Greene, "From Indian Chintz to American Prints in *Wearable Prints* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2014) 21-74; Amy Bogansky, *The Interwoven Globe* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013); Lowe, Lisa. *The Intimacies of Four Continents*. Durham: Duke University Libraries Press, 2015; Jordanna Bailkin, "Indian Yellow Making and Breaking the Imperial

manufacturing sector was likewise bound up with the development of a new consumer culture, in which a broader class fraction of Americans could pursue their own personal expression, and often the social reform of others, through a broad array of commercially produced garments.<sup>43</sup>

At first glance, uniform Klan regalia suggested a stark divergence from most of the clothing bought by U.S. consumers at the turn of the twentieth century. And yet, the fundamental principles that governed Klan dress more closely resembled several turn-of-the-century sartorial practices than their form suggested. The shape of the long robe, pointed hood, and mask, was self-consciously strange and recalled the ritualistic costumes used for religious and fraternal ceremonies—occasions that marked the disruption of everyday life. The formal characteristics of these garments often signaled longer histories, even if most of these histories were traditions invented in the nineteenth century.<sup>44</sup> Ritual

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Palette.” *Empires of Vision* edited by Martin Jay and Sumathi Ramaswamy (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 2014) 91-110. Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers’ Imperium* (2010).

<sup>43</sup> Costume scholars distinguish between “dress,” a broad category of bodily adornment, and “fashion,” an ever-changing aesthetic system marked by a desire for novelty. Since the late nineteenth century, social theorists have argued that fashion is a pattern of accelerating consumption driven by the desire to display and thus maintain social divisions, primarily economic or class divisions, in a public way. Theorist Georg Simmel refined this theory in 1904, arguing that humans are driven by two divergent desires, for distinction as a “special, single element” and for belonging, “generalization and uniformity;” fashion soothes both urges. Uniform Klan dress must be understood not only outside the constant transformation of a fashion system, but designed distinctly in contrast to that system. Nonetheless, the way that bodily adornment can signal distinction from others, while also identifying one’s self as a member of a larger group was a defining characteristic of Klan regalia. Georg Simmel, “Fashion” 1904, Reprinted *American Journal of Sociology* 62, no. 6 (May 1957): 541-42. See also: Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure* (1999); Karen Haltunnen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, (1984).

<sup>44</sup> Uniform dress has long operated as a critical tool for inserting individuals into an institutional or state structure. School uniforms developed in the nineteenth century to “extend hegemony of imperialism” to students and “produce a certain kind of citizenry.” This method follows the model of the invention of tradition described by Hobsbawm and Ranger ed., *The Invention of Tradition*. (Cambridge, UK: University Press, 1983); Jennifer Craik *Uniforms Exposed: From Conformity to Transgression*. (London: Berg, 2005); John Synott and Colin Symes on British Colonial example in Queensland, “The Genealogy of the School: An Iconography of Badges and Mottoes.” *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 16, no. 2 (1995): 140; Inés Dussel on the use of uniforms in Spanish Colonial Argentina, Dussel, “The Shaping of Citizenship with Style: A History of Uniforms and Vestimentary Codes in Argentinean Public Schools.” In *Materialities of Schooling: Design, Technology, Objects, Routines*, edited by Martin Lawn and Ian Grosvenor. (Symposium

garments capitalized on nostalgic urges—a longing for that which no longer exists, or never existed in the first place, the same sentiment that propelled the myth of the Lost Cause. And yet these desires found their fullest expression in the consumer marketplace, in which sentiment could reach broader audiences through their expression in, and circulation as goods and media.<sup>45</sup> Fraternities, religious organizations, and honorific institutions all used this category of garments to consolidate power through invocations of these manufactured traditions.

Klan regalia also capitalized on the popular explosion of uniform dress in the early twentieth century. While the armies of Europe and its colonies pursued uniformity for a century prior to the American Revolution, using garments that distinguished soldiers from their enemies, and abstracted bodies of individuals into a representation of a larger political entity, uniforms went mainstream in the late nineteenth century, reaching a broad range of social sectors through newly invented styles of bureaucratic management.<sup>46</sup> By making their wearer a representative of a system of beliefs, and by extension, the institution that enforced or implemented those beliefs, uniforms could mark the wearer's social role, while also reinforcing the broader ideological project that the role represented. This rationale explains the rapid popularization of uniforms across a range of professional

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Books Ltd, 2005); Tammy Proctor on scout uniforms “Scouts, Guides, and the Fashioning of Empire, 1919-1939” in *Fashioning the Body Politic*, edited by Wendy Parkins, (London: Berg, 2002): 125-144.

<sup>45</sup> Svetlana Boym. *The Future of Nostalgia*. (New York: Basic Books, 2008); Jean-Christophe Agnew. *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

<sup>46</sup> French historian Daniel Roche argues that the “imposition” of uniforms emerged through the social transformation of European armies from feudal systems to something more closely resembling the citizen-soldier who was paid wages for his contribution. In December of 1666, French leaders created a “système de la masse,” in which material and components of uniform dress—shoes and stockings—could be purchased in bulk. The process of mass-manufacturing was not yet in place, but this system created a market for uniform garments commissioned by the state. Roche, *Culture of Clothing*, 224-228.

sectors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Styled in contrast to rapid cycles of changing sartorial aesthetics known as *fashion*, uniform garments highlighted the stability and fixity of the uniformed subject, as well as the social role he occupied.<sup>47</sup> Theorists have long described fashion as the essence of modernity, for the way that it illustrates and propels the constant churn of social transformation within capitalist economies by inflaming the desire for novelty. In contrast to the upheaval and uncertainty of fashion in the modern world, uniforms are more frequently aligned with the glacial bureaucracies of states and other large institutions. And yet, the widespread use of occupational uniforms in the early twentieth century suggests that this dichotomy is precisely the rationale that made uniforms such useful tools for social movements, institutions, and states attempting to claim legitimacy and stability amidst social and cultural transformation.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ulrich Lehman. *Tigersprung: Fashion in Modernity*. (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2000); Elizabeth Wilson. *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003, revision of 1985 edition) For work that de-centers consumers as engine of change, see: Regina Lee Blaszczyk, ed. *Producing Fashion: Commerce, Culture, and Consumers*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008.); Ellen Leopold. "The Manufacture of the Fashion System." In *Chic Thrills: A Fashion Reader*. Edited by Juliet Ash and Elizabeth Wilson. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 101-117.

<sup>48</sup> Military uniforms have played critical roles in black freedom struggles in the US, from the United States Colored Troops (USCT) of the Civil War, Buffalo Soldiers of the West, to the 1919 riots following the return of uniformed Black soldiers after WWI. In each case, uniforms offered a way for Black American men to articulate their relationship to a larger nation to which they were unwelcome in many ways. For this reason, uniforms have also played a crucial role in collective challenges to current state policies in service of more expansive civil rights. Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) not only instituted uniform garments, but also produced those garments in their own Negro Factories Corporation. For changing role of uniform in early twentieth century, see: Nina Edwards, *Dressed for War: Uniform, Civilian Clothing and Trappings 1914-1918*. (London: I.B.Tauris, 2014). For Black Soldiers, see: Sara Jones Weiksel, "To Look Like Men of War: Visual Transformation Narratives of African American Union Soldiers," Translated as: "Quand l'uniforme fait l'homme libre: Les soldats noirs dans la Guerre civile américaine (1861-1865)" in *Clio: Femmes, Genre, Histoire*, vol. 40, no. 2 (2014): 137-152. Deborah Willis, "The Black Civil War Soldier: Conflict and Citizenship." *Journal of American Studies* 51, no. 2 (May 2017): 285-323. Kevin Hardwick has also noted that government-issued uniform garments provided more than symbolic assistance to Black families during the Civil War. Many soldiers gave or sent government-issued garments home to clothe their families. Hardwick, Kevin R. "'Your Old Father Abe Lincoln Is Dead and Damned': Black Soldiers and the Memphis Race Riot of 1866." *Journal of Social History* 27, no. 1 (1993): 113. On U.N.I.A. uniforms, see Martin Summers, *Manliness and Its Discontents: The Black Middle*



At the same time, uniforms were technologies of control that scripted the wearers' behavior by visually marking them as the representative of their particular office. This scripting was not deterministic—as we know well, police may act in corrupt ways while wearing the uniform of their office—but nonetheless provided a way for the wearer to engage with the world while wearing a garment.<sup>49</sup> These scripts could be explicit, as in the lists of regulations provided for the use of Klan regalia, or implicit in the material properties of the uniform itself. This was particularly true for armies, as the shape of a jacket could drastically affect a soldier's ability to fight, but also for Klansmen whose use of regalia for disguise was often thwarted by the flimsy construction of their face-mask.

The apparent meaning of these garments within the social context in which they emerged, and their explicit goal of disciplining the wearer's body has made uniforms critical sites of transgression since the institution of this category of garments in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century. Because uniforms suggest continuity and collective order, these garments may at once conceal inappropriate behavior behind the veneer or propriety that they suggest, or further enhance the departure from the cultural norm that the uniform ostensibly enforces. In the early twentieth century, a narrowing of the aesthetic range of

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*Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005): 94-101; Winston James, "Being Red and Black in Jim Crow America" *Time Longer Than Rope: A Century of African American Activism, 1850-1950*. Ed. Charles M. Payne, and Adam Green. (New York: NYU Press, 2003). 377-378. Later twentieth century examples including Black Panther Party and Brown Berets, see Jeffery O.G. Ogbar, "Brown Power to Brown People" in *In Search of the Black Panther Party: New Perspectives on a Revolutionary Movement*. Ed. Jama Lazerow, and Yohuru Williams. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) 252-288. Tanisha C. Ford. *Liberated Threads: Black Women, Style, and the Global Politics of Soul*. (Chapel Hill: UNC Press Books, 2015).

<sup>49</sup> Bill Brown distinguishes between objects (material forms) and *things*, which script social engagement in a range of implicit and explicit ways. Brown's construction is based on a Hegelian model of subject-object relations in which this relationship is mutually-constitutive. Robin Bernstein develops this concept further by incorporating performance studies and African American studies theory in order to posit that individuals experience and reproduce historically contingent racial ideologies through encounters with scriptive things, and the subsequent choices they make regarding their engagement of those scripts. Bill Brown. "Thing Theory." *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (Autumn 2001): 1-22.

dress occurred—particularly men’s dress—even as consumers had access to more goods than ever before. Under these conditions, the disruption of aesthetic norms was a political act.<sup>50</sup>

The Klan’s use of regalia spanned these different *sartorial strategies*, and as the following chapters will show, uniform regalia performed a range of important work for the organization. Individual members wore uniform garments that intentionally concealed their faces, emphasizing the degree to which individuals were submitting to a larger social project, thus transforming individuals into representations of the idealized category of “Klansmen.”<sup>51</sup> These garments connected wearers to other representations of the Klan, constructing a powerful organization that brought local chapters into a broader national project and helped concretize a trans-historical idea of the Klan in popular memory and cultural production.

Klan robes were also material objects produced and accessed within a historically contingent commodity chain.<sup>52</sup> Popular perception of the Klan as a mass cultural organization relied on the factory production and national distribution of uniform regalia

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<sup>50</sup> Jennifer Craik. *Uniforms Exposed: From Conformity to Transgression*. (London: Berg, 2005).

<sup>51</sup> Drawing on scholars who have illuminated the ways that material objects “script,” or suggest guidelines that shape if not govern human behaviors in certain ways. Bernstein, Robin. *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights*. New York: New York University Press, 2011. Brown, Bill. “Objects, Others, and Us (The Refabrication of Things).” *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 2 (2010): 183–217. Brown, Bill. “Reification, Reanimation, and the American Uncanny.” *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 2 (January 1, 2006): 175–207.

<sup>52</sup> This approach was modeled by anthropologists who theorized systems of exchange, particularly Arjun Appadurai’s 1981 edited collection, *The Social Life of Things*, which called for scholars to attend to the entire lifespan of a commodity, through phases of production and consumption. Essays by Appadurai and Igor Kopytoff in that volume use these processes to demonstrate how goods move through different value regimes. Studies of staple commodities have used this strategy extensively. See. Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, (1985); Giorgio Riello, *Cotton: The Fabric That Made the Modern World*, (2013); Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History*, (2014). Studies of goods and artwork that move beyond the realm of staple commodities include: Zara Anishanslin, *Portrait of a Woman in Silk*, (2016); Jennifer Roberts, *Transporting Visions*, (2014), David Jaffee, *A New Nation of Goods*, (2012); Pietra Rivoli, *Travels of a T-Shirt in a Global Economy*, (2005).

on a large scale. Following this process helps illuminate the imbrication of the Klan within the main currents of commercial culture in the early twentieth century, as the Klan relied on the same innovations in manufacturing, advertising, transportation, and communication that transformed the commodity and entertainment industries. The rationalization and consolidation that enabled corporations to hail mass publics during this period also shaped the way that Klan leaders understood the process of manufacturing a mass social movement that could operate within the nation and yet exclude the majority of Americans from participation.

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This study builds on an impressive catalog of existing work detailing the Klan's operations and role in early twentieth century society. One major challenge of studying the Klan is the popular tendency to collapse its various historical iterations into a single, monolithic organization—*the Klan*—rather than the multiple klans that emerged in particular contexts over the past hundred and fifty years. To make matters more complicated, the Klan of any single period can be hard to understand as a single organization, given the specific conditions of each location. The broad temporal and geographic reach of the concept of the Klan has made such generalizations not only possible, but hard to avoid. Historians studying the early twentieth century Klan have countered this popular impulse through careful efforts at contextualization, not only distinguishing the early twentieth century order from Klans in other periods, but in most cases looking closely at Klaverns in a particular state or region.<sup>53</sup> Even the broadest

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<sup>53</sup> Works such as Emerson Loucks' *The Ku Klux Klan in Pennsylvania: A Study in Nativism* (1936); M. William Lutholtz's *Grand Dragon: D.C. Stephenson and the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana*; Alexander C. Charles' *Crusade for Conformity: the Ku Klux Klan in Texas, 1920-1930* (1962) and *The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest* (1965); Robert Alan Goldberg's *Hooded Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Colorado* (1981),

national histories of the organization have been forced to grapple with the early twentieth century Klan's uneven geographical development, and the very different political and social circumstances in which local Klaverns recruited members.<sup>54</sup> The result of this scholarly move is an increasingly wide gap between popular characterizations of the Klan as violent and ideologically driven, and a scholarly literature that understands the order very much as a product of the period populated by ordinary Americans.

The ongoing debate at the heart of any study of the early twentieth century Klan is the ever-widening gap between these popular and scholarly depictions of the order, a problem that sociologist John Moffatt Mecklin had already framed in 1924:

“the student of the Klan finds some curious paradoxes in the solution...to read newspaper accounts of alleged Klan outrages, such as the Mer Rouge murders, the whippings of Texas, the secret proscription of American citizens, the un-Christian arraignment of Catholics and Jews by Klan preachers, the childish mummeries of hood and gown, the spectacular initiations in the light of blazing torches, and the solemn nightly parades in the presence of gaping thousands of mystery loving Americans...inclines one to feel that the members of this order are a curious combination of ferocious cruelty, cowardly vindictiveness, superstitious ignorance, and

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Kenneth T. Jackson's *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (1967); Larry Gerlach's *Blazing Crosses in Zion: The Ku Klux Klan in Utah* (1982); William Jenkins' *Steel Valley Klan: The Ku Klux Klan in Ohio's Mahoning Valley* (1990); Shaun Lay's *War, Revolution and the Ku Klux Klan: A Study of Intolerance in a Border City* (1985) and *The Invisible Empire in the West: Towards a New Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920's* (1992); and Leonard J. Moore's *Citizen Klansmen: The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana 1921-1928* (1991); Glen Feldman's *Politics and Society, and the Klan in Alabama 1915-1949* (1999), comprise an incomplete list of the regional style of Klan scholarship.

<sup>54</sup> Several national approaches to the study of the Klan have attempted to synthesize the multiple regional experiences of local Klans. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism* (1965) provides a portrait of the Klan as a whole, through short case studies and brief thematic chapters. Rory McVeigh uses a national approach to argue that the Klan's political efficacy has been far overstated in *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan* (2009). Kelly J. Baker focuses on the Klan's religious practices in *The Gospel According to the Klan*, arguing that Protestantism was the driving factor of the Klan's ideological design. David Mark Chalmers. *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987); Rory McVeigh. *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-Wing Movements and National Politics*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Kelly J. Baker. *Gospel according to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant America, 1915-1930*. (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2011).

religious bigotry. On the other hand, when one converses with the Klan...he finds them to be conventional Americans, thoroughly human, kind fathers and husbands, hospitable to the stranger, devout in their worship of God, loyal to state and nation, and including in many instances the best citizens of the community. What is the explanation of the apparent contradiction?”<sup>55</sup>

Mecklin’s observation fueled his characterization of Klan members as “old-stock” anti-moderns, grappling with the social and economic transformations of the new century.

Ironically, this psychological portrait guided the birth of the “civic-populist school” of Klan scholarship in the 1960’s, as historians attempted to correct the representation of an isolated, anti-modern Klan.<sup>56</sup> But while later scholars may have disagreed with Mecklin’s answer, the question he raised has continued to drive scholarship on the order. How do we understand the way that the Klan’s cultural power emerged from a visual juxtaposition of the spectacular and the mundane?

Klan leaders were self conscious of their organization’s use of visual imagery to consolidate the organization’s power—but the Klan was not all show. The tension between these two modes—spectacular performance and the mundane structures that facilitated, complicated, and tested the strength of those visual displays make up the core

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<sup>55</sup> John Moffatt Mecklin. *The Ku Klux Klan: A Study of the American Mind*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1924).

<sup>56</sup> This issue has captivated scholars of the organization since the earliest studies of its operations. Early critiques of the order raised this issue, including Henry Fry’s 1924 Exposé of the Klan from his perspective as a former Kleagle (recruiter). Fry was one of many former members who denounced the order as an opportunist scam, preying on members’ real feelings of fear over their place in a changing world. This perspective shaped the analysis of sociologist John Moffatt Mecklin, whose 1924 study of the Klan argued that Klansmen were social “losers” and easily manipulated “joiners,” who represented the response of rural traditionalists railing against cosmopolitan modernity. Mecklin’s perspective was dominant in studies of the Klan until the 1960’s, when historians began to argue that this motivation did not address the regional variation of the organization, and the prevalence of urban Klan members in the organization as a whole. By the mid 1980’s, most scholars of the organization took a stance that dramatically countered Mecklin’s analysis by arguing that the Klan borrowed from populist organizing structures. The “Populist-civic school” of Klan scholarship (Kenneth Jackson, Charles Alexander, Shawn Lay, Leonard Moore, David Horowitz, and others) argued that Klansmen were not angry outsiders, but rather everyday Americans who were drawn to the organization because it closely resembled other cultural institutions and social movements that already populated their daily lives.

of this project. Building on previous studies of the order, this project shifts from questions of whether or not Klan members were more ideologically driven to commit violence than the rest of the population, to understanding how this paradigm came to be. In particular, I am concerned with the ways that the strategic use of Klansmen's uniformed bodies negotiated the Klan's complex relationship to violence. How did portrayals of the Klan as singular and violent shape the organization's development in the early twentieth century, and enable the group's ongoing cultural relevance into the present? Prior studies have worked to challenge the Klan's own logic, which encouraged the confusion of individual citizens of the Invisible Empire into "the mass," as Imperial Wizard William J. Simmons put it in 1921, as well as the conflation of Simmons's revived Klan with that of the Reconstruction era.<sup>57</sup> Rather than discounting the collapse of past and present, or local Klaverns into an "empire," it is more useful to understand these moves as part of a self-conscious strategy through which Klan leaders helped members understand themselves as part of a collective effort that could transcend temporal and spatial limitations. Both "material and metaphor for the social question," uniform regalia made this possible.<sup>58</sup> The development and use of Klan regalia—as both an iconic symbol of the organization and a category of material objects—provides a useful point of entry into grasping the relationship between individual members and the broader idea of *the Klan*.

The Ku Klux Klan was at once a social organization that reflected broader social, cultural, and political concerns of its own historical moment, as well as a medium for the reproduction of a distinctly violent ideology rooted in social exclusion. This characteristic,

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<sup>57</sup> William Joseph Simmons. "The Ku Klux Klan: Yesterday, Today, Forever," (1921), 12. Ku Klux Klan Items 1920-1950 Folder 2 Box 1. Keenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

<sup>58</sup> Zakim, *Ready Made Democracy*, 1.

both mundane and spectacular played out on the surface of the Klan's uniform regalia. Klan regalia, and the complex history it signified kept the *threat* of violence in sight for early twentieth century Americans. At the same time, these garments help us to see that threat in terms of institutions, practices and systems of racial logic that existed outside the "Invisible Empire". The Klan was not an aberrant phenomenon, but it was a singular organization that can help us to better understand the ways that a broad fraction of Americans were complicit in the reproduction of the social divisions that shaped the remainder of the twentieth century.

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**(Fig. 0.5)**

At base, then, my goal is to understand the "modern Klan" of the early twentieth century through an examination of the organization's sartorial practices. In doing so, I make three central arguments. First, I want to suggest how the *uniform* mattered. Throughout this dissertation, I argue that the formal properties of Klan regalia shaped the way that Klan leaders, members, and the organization's critics understood its ideological project. Putting on a Klan robe demonstrated the wearers' participation in a common cultural and political language articulated by the organization's leaders in Atlanta. These garments transformed the Klan into an embodied identity that members could assume, and eventually discard. Uniforms made the Klan visible, in turn displaying the ideological project that leaders wanted to convey to both members and non-members. Focusing on robes helps us to understand what Klan leaders wanted Americans to see, and how they hoped to use members' bodies to achieve that vision.

Second, the design, production, distribution, and use of Klan regalia shaped the development of the organization, from its rapid growth in the early 1920's through its functional collapse less than a decade later. This is not to say that uniform regalia itself made the Klan, though, in a way it did. Robe rental fees helped propel national expansion, and images of uniformed masses made the organization visible as a unified, national body. At the same time, these isolated moments in the longer lives of these garments were only part of the story. This dissertation illuminates the ways that the *process* of producing these distinctive goods shaped the Klan's formation and decline. At each point along the commodity chain producing these garments, the meaning of this symbolic object further developed, through the operations of the organization it represented, and the early-twentieth century systems and institutions that made the Klan's mass expansion possible on a material level.

Finally, I argue that the white uniformed Klansman became a *portable icon* that operated as a metonym for both the national organization and its violently exclusionary ideological project. As representations of uniform regalia appeared in different media through early twentieth century pop culture, the abstracted figure of the Klansman took on a life of its own, beyond the material life of any particular garment.<sup>59</sup> Forged in mass media, this iconic figure can help us to trace the Klan's development of lasting cultural power, which rested in its use of rhetoric and symbols that could operate in multiple registers at once. This quality facilitated the organization's revival in 1915, and shaped the ongoing life of the idea of the Klan after the early twentieth century organization

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<sup>59</sup> Kelly J. Baker makes a similar argument in the final chapter of *The Gospel According to the Klan*, where she says "The robe becomes a material connection to the order's sordid past. Moreover, the robe becomes a symbol for fear and terror in the American imagination" (249). While I agree with Baker's assessment, my project goes further to argue that the long history of this symbol's development is what makes this continued deployment possible.



collapsed in 1939. Understanding this dynamic through a study of Klan documents is challenging because these texts were authored by individuals, and therefore reflect a particular context that may not be applicable to the larger organization for which they spoke. But robes were different. While the white robe and hood was designed by a series of self-promoting men, the execution of this design, its manufacture, distribution, and use required the labor of networks of historical actors, some of whom had no explicit investment in the success of the Klan. Circulating representations of Klan robes incorporated even a larger web of collaborators, some of whom reproduced images that fixed the relationship of this image to the Klan as part of explicit critiques of the group and its politics. This project draws seamstresses, theatrical advertising agents, Catholic postmasters, and NAACP lawyers into the story of the Klan's creation. In doing so we can see how this process of collective authorship supported the creation of a figure that could support the weight of the Klan's ideology.

The story that follows here is roughly chronological, and moves thematically along the commodity chain, exploring the design, publicity, manufacture, distribution, display, and use of Klan regalia in the early twentieth century. **(Fig: 0.6)** The first section *Birth of an Icon (1866-1915)* is comprised of two chapters that illuminate the invention and popular adoption of the white uniform Klan robe as symbol, a process that facilitated perceptions of the Klan as a monolithic phenomenon operating outside of time. The second section, *Visible Empire (1915-1939)* includes three chapters that situate Klan's rapid growth in the early twentieth century alongside processes of manufacturing and distribution, focusing on the ways that its ideological project was both shaped and shaped by the historically contingent movement of objects through an increasingly national and

market-based economy. The photo essay explores the production of a uniform organization in large scale ritual and photographic representations, while the final chapter illuminates the ways that these garments suggested a strategy for critics working to dismantle the organization. This project concludes by considering the enduring career of the white robed Klan figure in American culture, beyond the early twentieth century. In each of these ways, this project works to demystify and contextualize one of the most potent symbols of violence in American culture, in order to understand how the Klan was able to operate both at the center of and as a foil to the idea of a uniform American mass culture.

**Note on Method:**

“Artifacts constitute the only category of historical events that occurred in the past but survive into the present. They can be re-experienced; they are authentic, primary historical material available for firsthand study. Artifacts are historical evidence.”

-Jules David Prown <sup>60</sup>

This project emerged from the study of extant Ku Klux Klan regalia over a period of seven years. (*Fig. 0.7*) This endeavor led to a methodological question that extends beyond the specific problem of studying these artifacts, to address a key issue with the study of mass-produced consumer goods as a whole: what can a small sample representing a much larger category of manufactured goods teach us about the production and use of goods in the broader category? Over this period, I’ve located 226 garments, and examined 156 of these garments in person, through visits to 16 states.

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<sup>60</sup> Prown, “The Truth of Material Culture: History or Fiction” 12.

The purpose of each examination was the practice of minute observation of what costume scholar Lou Taylor calls “the actuality of clothing.”<sup>61</sup> Since each Klan garment was supposed to be a manufactured copy of all the other garments in its category, much of my work lay in determining whether or not particular garments fit into the category. The more egregious examples demonstrated that Klan robes are a capacious category, even for some museums; during this search I found mislabeled garments whose real identity ranged from a niqab to an early twentieth-century Halloween costume, none of which fit the specifications of Klan regalia in the slightest. Far more interesting were the subtle differences between garments produced in the same three factories, or even within the same factory. Robes revealed alterations, attempts at mending, or pink shadows of brilliant red insignia stitched to a white robe that was worn in a rainstorm.

Working with these garments directed my attention towards what was at first a startling omission. Of the robes I’ve examined in person or in images, only one includes anything that could possibly be characterized as a bloodstain. Instead of this macabre spectacle, I found endlessly mundane signs of life-as-usual: sweat pooled around collars or combined with greasy slicks of hair cream to leave telltale rings around the linings of pointed helmets. (*Fig 0.8*) In retrospect, this finding was not surprising, particularly given that the Klan’s attempts to publicly disavow violent behavior during the early twentieth century meant that few violent crimes were actually committed by robed men, a point I address in the final chapter of this dissertation. Members of the Klan were certainly involved in violence during this period, but as scholars of lynching have demonstrated, disguise was not necessary for mob violence to occur. Instead, the Klan of this period

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<sup>61</sup> Lou Taylor, *The Study of Dress History*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 98.

most frequently used regalia in public and private ceremonies, displays that conveyed threat even without the violent action they suggested.

When Klansmen did participate in attacks while wearing their regalia, there were several important reasons why there would be no trace of those encounters for me to find. First, the collective nature of Klan activity meant that Klan attacks were also collective endeavors; Klansmen were not the solitary terrorists familiar in our contemporary world. As a result, the intimate contact of attacker and victim was diffused throughout a mob. One particular individual may have led the attack, but another may have actually yielded the instrument used to flog the victim, another may have held his body in place. In these cases, any physical traces of an attack would be diffuse, dispersed among a whole group of individuals. Second Klan attacks generally stopped short of murdering a victim, and frequently comprised floggings or other encounters with the surface, not interior, of victims' bodies. These attacks would produce physical traces on their own garments that may not be readily apparent. Finally, and most importantly, the Klan's public disavowal of violence also meant that the use of robes for unsanctioned activities was carefully regulated by both imperial and local Klan officials, any garment that exhibited signs of an attack would be bleached clean or destroyed. Since Klan robes were rented, they were not the property of the Klansmen who wore them; local leaders likely destroyed much of the regalia in their possession as the organization's membership declined in the late 1920's.

Overall, a tiny fraction of the hundreds of thousands of factory-made Klan garments remain extant. My access to those that remain reflects the still-infamous nature of the Klan's most powerful symbol, since several hundred of these garments were

donated to or purchased by museums, libraries, and archival collections over the past century.<sup>62</sup>

If the majority of Klan garments do not index violent attacks, what can an examination of these garments reveal? The material properties of these garments have provided insights about the production, distribution, and use of these garments that I could find by no other means, the information that the robes and hoods can provide is limited. Robes often included coded identifying marks in the form of a member's number handwritten in pencil, pen, or stamped in color-fast ink, but in no instance have I found a set of corresponding internal Klavern documents that would identify garments as belonging to any particular member. This disconnect is reinforced by the intentionally obfuscated provenance of most Klan robes in museum or private collections, as most donors have not wanted their names to be identified with such ignominious items—particularly as these items sometimes evidence shameful family histories. As a result, most robes cannot be connected with a particular wearer, or even a particular Klavern. There are several significant outliers, mostly garments worn by higher-level officials but the majority of data collected from Klan robes available for examination are thus more useful when viewed in aggregate.

The inchoate information that robes provide have led me to amass an large and varied archive of materials that trace the longer career of Klan robes through the commodity chain in which these garments were designed, advertised, produced, distributed, used, and discarded. Material objects index multiple temporalities at once, with marks of production, use, re-use, and current archival life, often found in layers that

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<sup>62</sup> While I have located a number of garments in private collections, a survey of privately held Klan regalia was outside the scope of research for this dissertation.

are not always disaggregated. As a result, this materially minded project is concerned with questions of what it means to study the history of a consumer good designed to situate its user in an anonymous mass. How did the material life of Klan regalia, not only through the actuality of robes themselves, but the attendant set of physical and commercial processes, shape the ideological formation of the Klan? How is this question complicated by the interrelationship among the various media through which we may encounter Klan robes in this archive—as illustrations, descriptions, rental agreements, raw materials, theatrical costumes, ritual directions, staged or candid photographs of robed Klansmen, or extant robes in contemporary collections? The resulting dissertation is as much about what I found when I went looking for Klan robes as it is about the information I was able to obtain from the study of any particular garment.

## **Part One:**

### **The Birth of an Icon (1866-1915)**

#### **Chapter 1: Designing a Uniform Klan**

When William J. Simmons revived the Ku Klux Klan in 1915, he dressed the members of his new organization in long-sleeved robes of white cotton fabric with a short ulster cape extending to roughly the wearer's elbows, which was bound into the collarless neckline of the garment. (*Fig. 1.1*) The cape made Klansmen's bodies seem larger than they were, providing an appearance of fullness even though the body of the robe was cut straight, with a short vent at the back of the hem to facilitate movement near the shins. The goal of magnifying the scale of Klansmen's bodies was aided by the "helmet," a conical hat whose crown was tipped with a red wool tassel, rising over a foot above the wearer's head. Two small aprons of white fabric hung from the bottom edge of the crown, covering the wearer's face and neck, save for a pair of eyeholes whose oval shapes were encircled by a figure eight of zigzag stitches. Tacked alongside the mother-of-pearl buttons that held the robe closed at the body's midline, an embroidered patch boasted the Klansman's affiliation through a blunt black and white cross, rendered in a field of smooth, satin stitches in a lurid shade of red.

The details mattered, since these factory-made garments were a strategic tool for Simmons and other Klan leaders who needed to transform individuals into a single political

bloc: the Ku Klux Klan, a national fraternal organization with a long-reaching political goal.<sup>63</sup> Klan uniforms were intentionally symbolic, conveying the organization's commitment to hierarchical order, discipline, and an uncanny "weird[ness]" intended to unsettle "aliens," anyone who wasn't "naturalized" (initiated) into their "mystic rituals."<sup>64</sup> In reality, the coordinated, unselfconscious mass that Klansmen depicted with their uniformed bodies rarely worked as leaders intended, just as the actions of Klansmen often diverged from the social philosophy, elaborate ritual, and bureaucratic apparatus laid out in the official documents of the order. Images of assembled Klansmen appeared uniform, but a quick glance at the grimy hem or sweat-stained neckline of any individual Klan robe belied the sense of propriety and order that the organization's leaders wanted to convey.

This disjuncture between the ideal image of the Klan, where crisp white robes represented the basic tenets of the order's moral and social philosophy, and the men who committed violent attacks, presented an increasingly large problem for Klan leaders over the lifespan of the organization. Before the Klan reached a point of self-destruction in the late 1920s, it thrived thanks to a savvy marketing campaign and a capacious ideological project that could speak to a broad range of prejudices and anxieties. The image of the Klan's singular body, unified against a wide range of societal ills—miscegenation, bootlegging, immigration, religious tyranny, and sexual misconduct—was a powerful tool for Klan leaders, even if the order's internal politics were much messier than they appeared.

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<sup>63</sup> Note on terminology: throughout this chapter, I use period-appropriate terms to refer to members of the Klan, both in order to be consistent with sources, and for the sake of clarity. Ku Klux or Kluxers refers to perpetrators of violence categorized as the work of the Ku Klux Klan during Reconstruction, 1866-1872. "Clansman" refers to the fictional creation of Thomas Dixon Jr. in his novels, and Klansman/ Klansmen refers to the members of the second Ku Klux Klan, which operated between 1915 and 1939. See Elaine Parsons, *Ku Klux* (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2015), 19.

<sup>64</sup> William J. Simmons, "ABC's Knights of the Ku Klux Klan" (Atlanta, GA: Ku Klux Klan Press, 1917). Pamphlet in collection of Joyner Library, East Carolina University.



So too was the historical connection that these garments were designed to evoke, as the strange silhouette of these garments supposedly connected members with their predecessors, the Ku Kluxers of the Reconstruction era. Simmons described his new Klan as a “living, lasting memorial” to Reconstruction era Kluxers, and the “principles, traditions, and institutions which they risked their lives to preserve.”<sup>65</sup> This “enduring monument to the valor and patriotic achievements” of the historic Klan reflected its own turn-of-the-century moment, when former Confederates and their descendants created material tributes to what they called “The Lost Cause.”<sup>66</sup> Like the plinths and statues installed en masse by Confederate memorial associations during this period, the idealized figure that Klansmen rallied around was not an actual relic of the past, but an invention of its own time that contained some visible traces of the history it was used to evoke.<sup>67</sup> Simmons recognized the relationship of this project to other such “commemorative crusades” of the period, but his

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<sup>65</sup> William Joseph Simmons, “The Ku Klux Klan: Yesterday, Today, Forever,” 1921. Ku Klux Klan Items 1920-1950 Folder 2 Box 1. AHC. “ABC’s of Ku Klux Klan,” also uses the language of monuments. Historian Christopher Dingwall writes about what he calls the “Ultra-Modern Old Plantation,” and the production of memories of an antebellum South in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century popular memory. These relationships were, Dingwall argues, invented in the capitalist marketplace. See: Dingwall, “The Sale of Slavery: Memory, Culture, and the Renewal of America, 1877, 1920” Ph.D. Diss, (University of Chicago, 2015): 6.

<sup>66</sup> This term was first used in Edward Alfred Pollard’s *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates* (New York: E.B Treat & Co., 1867). Pollard, the former editor of the Richmond Examiner newspaper, proudly announced that his highly partisan history was “drawn from official sources and approved by the most distinguished Confederate leaders.” As Alan Nolan has argued, the Lost Cause myth was “expressly a rationalization, a cover-up” that became *the* interpretation of the Civil War for many historians, cultural producers, and average Southern Americans during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (14). Central points of the Lost Cause included celebrations of antebellum society and confederate bravery; minimizing the importance of slavery to the conflict; overemphasizing the role of abolitionist and Northern agitators; and finally blaming the failure of the war on an imbalance of resources and manpower. See: Alan Nolan “The Anatomy of the Myth” in Gary W. Gallagher, and Alan T. Nolan. *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History*. (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 11-34.

<sup>67</sup> For perspectives on the evolution of Lost-Cause monuments during the mid-nineteenth century, see: Cynthia Mills and Pamela Hemenway Simpson eds. *Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art, and the Landscapes of Southern Memory*. (Knoxville, TN: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 2003); Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in Nineteenth-Century America*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

slippery language reveals the instability of the goals at the heart of his project.<sup>68</sup> How could Simmons create a “living” rather than a static memorial to the past? How could the Klan face in two directions at once, both towards the past it sought to commemorate, and the modern future it hoped to transform?

The origins of the now-iconic white robe and hood were, in fact, far more complicated than Simmons and his colleagues let on, and closer analysis of this symbol’s development reveals how the second Klan mined historical imagery to invent a singular image that could be deployed in surprisingly flexible ways. As was frequently the case in the fraternal orders whose rituals Simmons cannibalized, the “weird” mysticism of the early twentieth-century Klan derived from a combination of historical sources and “invented traditions.”<sup>69</sup> Simmons’s image of the idealized Klansman developed through the synthesis of multiple diasporic customs and popular cultural forms: uniform robes presented Klansmen as orderly and disciplined, even as formal properties borrowed from the anarchic costumes of nineteenth-century Klansmen also suggested chaotic threat. The resulting image—a figure dressed in a long white robe, pointed hood, and small embroidered patch—became the symbol of the Klan, a unified body whose political goals were as contradictory and divergent as the symbol itself.

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<sup>68</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage uses “commemorative crusades” to discuss the role of white women in the construction of Confederate monuments at the turn of the century in “Woman’s Hand and Heart and Deathless Love” in *Monuments to the Lost Cause*, 64-82.

<sup>69</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terrance Ranger define the “invented tradition” as “a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.” (1) The invocation of historically significant symbols in a fraternal ceremony thus can begin to function as an “invented tradition” when these rituals are institutionalized into replicable patterns. Invented traditions occur more frequently in periods of rapid social transformation (4). The political Reconstruction of the South, combined with innovations in communication, transformation technologies, and the development of new culture industries in the last quarter of the nineteenth century helps to explain the popularity of associational life during this period, and the ritualized invocation of the past that these organizations promoted. Hobsbawm and Ranger ed., *The Invention of Tradition*. (Cambridge, UK: University Press, 1983).

Recent work by scholars investigating the operations of the nineteenth-century Klan has presented us with opportunities to study the transmission of cultural forms between the first and second Klans, and in particular, the aesthetic roots of the white robes and helmets adopted by Klansmen in the early twentieth century.<sup>70</sup> This is, by nature, a more speculative enterprise than the subsequent chapters of this project, but in order to understand how twentieth-century Klansmen used uniform regalia, we need to know where the strangely shaped garments they adopted came from. I thus draw on an wide-ranging of textual, visual, and material primary sources: extant garments; textual representations of nineteenth-century Ku Kluxers in testimony of victims, witnesses, and participants; photographs of alleged Ku Klux garments; descriptions and illustrations of nineteenth-century Ku Klux in early twentieth-century novels; and the visual and material culture of turn-of-the-century fraternities. Through these materials, a complex portrait of cultural exchange emerges as the birthplace of the idealized image of a newly uniform Klan. Simmons's "living monument" to the Reconstruction Klan incorporated the memories and traditions of those that twentieth-century Klansmen sought to disempower into a seemingly straightforward representation of the organization's political platform.

By reinterpreting the chaotic costumes worn by members of the original Klan with the help of an aesthetic sensibility popular among turn-of-the-century fraternities, Simmons

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<sup>70</sup> New studies of the nineteenth-century Klan have begun to revise longstanding interpretations of the Klan's organization, cultural influences, and politics as articulated most completely in Allen W. Trelease's *White Terror* (1971). While regional histories of the organization have complicated the portrait that Trelease narrates My interpretation of the nineteenth century Klan's use of dress largely aligns with the work of Elaine Parsons, who contends that Trelease's focus on the Klan's structure comes at the expense of analyzing the Klan as a cultural phenomenon comprised of individuals and small organizations operating in concert through the use of shared cultural forms. See: Allen W. Trelease. *White Terror*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1971); Parsons, "Midnight Rangers: Costume and Performance in the Reconstruction-Era Ku Klux Klan." *The Journal of American History* 92, no. 3 (December 1, 2005): 811–36; and in her 2015 book, *Ku Klux*). Among other contributions of my project, I extend Parsons's foundational groundwork on the discourse of Klan dress through close material analysis of Reconstruction-era garment sources. The stories seamed into these garments enhance in crucial ways our understanding of the twentieth-century transformation of the Reconstruction Klan.

and other cultural producers developed the singular image of a uniformed Ku Klux Klansman. The enduring power of this image is rooted in its adoption as a metonym for the politics it was designed to represent: nativist Anglo-Saxonism. This fusion of form and content was made possible at once by the complicated process through which this living monument to the past was invented, and at the same time by the material properties of the image itself. The question here is how material traces of this backward-facing symbol's development endured in ways that made it an appealing choice for Simmons as he created a newly "modern" Ku Klux Klan.<sup>71</sup>

### ***Section 1: Dressing up Ku Klux, 1866-1872***

One day in 1871, Lucy McMillan got a warning that the Klan was coming for her.<sup>72</sup> Anticipating an attack, she spent several nights sleeping in a hiding spot in the woods, and from this vantage she watched as a group of strangely dressed Klansmen arrived and burned down her house. The pile of stones and charred timber they left behind didn't belong to Lucy McMillan, exactly; the ruin was technically the property of the man who had once counted her as his property, Robert (Bob) McMillan. After claiming her emancipation, Lucy adopted

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<sup>71</sup> Former Klan recruiter Henry Peck Fry wrote a scathing expose of the Klan, first published in the *New York World* in 1921. Fry charged that the organization was not living up to the ideals of the Reconstruction era order, but was instead a scam preying on men across the country. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of this dissertation address the relationship between the Klan's belief system and the modern business practices that Klan leaders utilized. Fry *The Modern Ku Klux Klan*, (Boston, MA: Small, Maynard, and Co., 1922).

<sup>72</sup> Testimony of Lucy McMillan, 42<sup>nd</sup> congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, House Report 22: Testimony Taken by the Joint Committee to Enquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States (Henceforth "KKK Hearings") vol 3, South Carolina, 606-612. The Joint Select Committee was appointed by Congress to "Inquire into the State of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States," but the title page of the subsequent documents refers to the "Ku Klux Conspiracy." The transcripts of the committee's 1870-71 investigation of extralegal violence in South Carolina, North Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, and Florida filled twelve volumes and thousands of pages, and comprises the most complete record of testimony from victims, witnesses, and possible Klan members. Despite the limitations of this source, as outlined in Parsons, these documents provide useful information about patterns of Klan dress, and offer a rare opportunity to hear the accounts of Klan victims. Though these accounts were decidedly shaped by the complex social dynamics of the congressional inquiry, reading these accounts demonstrates some discernable patterns of Klan behavior, as well as patterns in the ways that victims chose to represent their encounters with the organization. See also K. Stephen Prince, *Stories of the South*, (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014) 72-79; Kidada Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me*, (New York: NYU Press, 2012) 1-15.

the McMillan name, and took up residence in a small but neat cabin on his property just outside Spartanburg, South Carolina.<sup>73</sup>

Lucy recounted the attack to the congressional investigators gathering evidence of Ku Klux violence late in 1870. The Ku Klux Klan was a large-scale political project organized to challenge the incursion of Republican politics into the operation of the South, but the men who dressed up in strange costumes to ride under the name of the Klan generally attacked their neighbors, or sometimes their own families, a phenomenon which made the distinction between national politics and personal grievances hard to disentangle.

The men who burned Lucy's house were Bob McMillan's sons and nephews, some of whom Lucy raised during the period that she was enslaved by the McMillan family. Lucy's young daughter Caroline was born five years after her husband was "carried off," and at several points in her testimony, investigators intimated that Caroline may have been the product of a sexual encounter between Lucy and her former owner. In her accounting for the possible reasons for the attack, Lucy suggests that the McMillan boys may have been motivated by both personal and larger political concerns. One young man was angry about a labor dispute after he refused to pay Lucy's son for work he had already performed, others were concerned that Lucy was going to make a claim on the McMillan land, following her attendance at a Freedman's Bureau Lecture. While not explicitly addressed by the Congressional panel, it is also possible that some members of the group may have disliked the fact that Lucy sometimes "neighborhood" at Bob McMillan's house following her emancipation. Lucy's relationship with the McMillan family was (unsurprisingly) complicated, and reflected a series of local dynamics specific to this particular family.

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<sup>73</sup> I've made the decision to refer to Lucy McMillan by her first name for clarity, due to the multiplicity of McMillans in this story, but also in deference to her identity beyond that of the family that treated her as a possession.

And yet, Lucy's testimony suggests that this attack was also the product of larger dynamics that extended beyond this particular domestic conflict. Underlying each of these conflicts was a dramatic transformation of the social order that the McMillan men understood to be natural. Their conflict was not only with the behavior of Lucy, as an individual, but with changes in the category that she occupied. "They always pretended to like us... while I was a slave, but never afterward," Lucy explained.<sup>74</sup> Lucy's new status, as a as an emancipated woman, potential property-owner, and single mother living alone with her daughter disturbed these men enough to destroy a house that actually belonged to their own father and uncle.

The clothing that Lucy's attackers wore reflected the complicated mixture of local and national dynamics at play. The men wore "such cloth as this white cotton frock made into old gowns; and some had black faces and some red, and some had horns on their heads that... looked like rags stuffed with cotton."<sup>75</sup> These garments ostensibly disguised their identities, though Lucy was quick to remind the Congressional committee that no amount of disguise could override her intimate knowledge of their bodies, mannerisms, and voices. Lucy found as many ways as possible to name her attackers and highlight the miscarriage of justice that had occurred. Bob McMillan refused to build Lucy another house following the attack, so she moved to Spartanburg and took up washing to feed her children. "I didn't think they treated me right about it, burning me out in that way," Lucy explained, with the same force that she pursued justice against the former neighbors and employers who so wronged her. Lucy's refusal to be intimidated out of seeking justice demonstrates why it has been challenging for scholars to think carefully about the aesthetic properties of Klan dress.

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<sup>74</sup> Testimony of Lucy McMillan, *KKK Hearings*, vol 3, South Carolina, 607.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 606.

Reading this testimony, and that of the thousands of other women and men across the South attacked by mobs of Ku Klux between 1866 and 1872, it's hard to see these garments as anything but a distraction to the real damage that these attacks inflicted. But what if we could see the intentionally bizarre forms of Reconstruction-era Klan dress the way that so many nineteenth-century Americans did?

The strange costumes worn by Ku Kluxers provided a material connection between attacks committed by mobs across the South. The Reconstruction Klan developed unevenly across a large geographic area. First founded in 1866 by a group of young, college-educated professionals in Pulaski, Tennessee, the Ku Klux Klan could be found in every former Confederate state and Kentucky by 1868.<sup>76</sup> Over the next four years, the name “Ku Klux” became a powerful symbol of a particular form of collective violence. From Mississippi to South Carolina, Black Southerners and Republicans, both Black and white, reported a catalog of brutal attacks. Black men and women were threatened with notes or menacing encounters, whipped with switches and straps, or murdered, all for possessing guns, for supporting the Republican party in local elections, for seeking education for themselves or their children, or for having the misfortune of being confined to the county jail at the wrong time. White Republicans, whether representatives of the Reconstruction administration or less official supporters, were similarly mistreated. Labeled Ku Klux by the popular press, the men who comprised these night-riding mobs of six to fifty or more people may not have referred to themselves by that name. Still, whether calling themselves the “Pale Faces,” the “Constitutional Union Guard,” or the “Invisible Circle,” the vigilantes of the Reconstruction South shared a political goal: the restoration of the Democratic party to power, and the

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<sup>76</sup> Trelease, *White Terror*, 1971.

removal of the Reconstruction administration, and the troops used to enforce it, from the South.<sup>77</sup>

Costume was not ancillary to this process. Kluxers committed illegal attacks, and had good reason to conceal their identities from local authorities. But the use of strange dress served another purpose. As Historian Elaine Franz Parsons has shown that these garments made the political nature of these attacks *visible*, demonstrating motivations that extended beyond local conflicts.<sup>78</sup> Costume enlarged the stakes of encounters between attackers and victims, highlighting the degree to which such encounters were brutal performances of domination in addition to the more tangible damage they inflicted upon victims and their homes. When Lucy told her story to the congressional committee investigating Ku Klux violence across the South, her story became one of thousands of similar reports. The details were specific to Lucy's life, or as one of several formerly enslaved people attacked by the same band that night, particular to a set of local conditions. And yet some of the most seemingly idiosyncratic details were already familiar to the investigators on the committee. The horns made of cotton stuffed with rags, blackened faces, and old clothes transformed into long robes were almost certainly produced near the location of their use, and yet these

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<sup>77</sup> Trelease and Eric Foner both argue that the Klan institutionalized an existing strain of racialized vigilantism. Foner describes the Klan as "a military force serving the interests of the Democratic Party, the planter class, and all those who desired the restoration of white supremacy." Eric Foner, *Reconstruction*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1988), 425.

<sup>78</sup> Elaine Franz Parsons has written extensively on the ways that nineteenth century Kluxers used costume as a political tool. Her research on and insights into the way that the Reconstruction Klan used costume form a critical foundation for this project. The following analysis of the form and content of costumed performance by members of the nineteenth century Klan is informed by and, through my own examination of visual and material evidence, further confirms findings in her work regarding the basic function of these garments and their aesthetic roots. Parsons, "Midnight Rangers: Costume and Performance in the Reconstruction-Era Ku Klux Klan." *The Journal of American History* 92, no. 3 (December 1, 2005): 811–36; Parsons, *Ku-Klux the Birth of the Klan during Reconstruction*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015).



garments were also part of a coalescing category of Ku Klux costume that extended beyond any particular locale.

### **The Klan's Sartorial Repertoire**

Reconstruction-era Kluxers wore garments that diverged significantly from the white uniform robes worn by members of the early twentieth-century Klan. The variety that these garments exhibited was in part a product of circumstance and the varying degree to which nineteenth-century Kluxers understood themselves as members of a unified organization. Congressional investigators working in 1870-71 were concerned with the mounting "Ku-Klux Conspiracy," as they called it, but could not agree on whether or not Kluxers were centrally organized. On the one hand, Ku Klux violence largely occurred on what Eric Foner has called a "grassroots" basis, with small bands or mobs intervening in local conflicts.<sup>79</sup> The attack on Lucy McMillan's home was likely not organized to send a message to federal authorities---it was an outgrowth of local frustrations and concerns about McMillan's role in this particular community. At the same time, McMillan's attackers chose to conduct their attack in garments that loosely resembled the costumes that other mobs wore to conduct similar attacks under similar circumstances across the South. As Franz Parsons has shown, the circulation of representations of costumed violence in the popular press suggests a kind of viral transmission of these images. Kluxers drew on "free-floating" aesthetic tropes to produce garments that fit the broader project of social disruption, rather than replicating a specific sartorial marker. Costume was thus one of a coalescing collection of shared tactics that made their local violence politically legible as the work of *the* Ku Klux Klan. The Klan was a virtual construction comprised of grassroots mobs, whose violence was politicized by their use of visual symbols that connected individual attacks to a larger political cause.

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<sup>79</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1988), 425.

The variety of clothing adopted by Kluxers makes sense in the context of this diffuse organizational structure. Kluxers procured garments in a range of ways that reflected both this structure and the economic disruption of Southern manufacturing and commerce during the war. The more elaborate garments came from tailors, relatives, or Kluxers with sewing skills. Other garments were more haphazard, made from repurposed garments, household materials, or even everyday clothes worn in unexpected ways. Some Klansmen turned to store-bought garments, described by one as the “false faces you see in a store,” but the overall aesthetic was rough and homemade in a way that amplified the political disruptions that these garments helped Klansmen to stage.

As a result, identifying a costumed Kluxer as a member of that category did not lie in the ability to recognize a specific symbol. Instead, recognizing the Klan was more contextual. It relied on an observer’s ability to synthesize individual sartorial components into a broader *repertoire* of Ku Klux costume.<sup>80</sup> A brief survey of garments worn by Kluxers can help us to better illuminate the contours of this repertoire, though conducting such an operation is not as simple as it may seem. Finding images or artifacts of actual Kluxers’ costumes, as opposed to descriptions or later representations of these artifacts, poses a particular challenge for contemporary researchers. Few of these garments made their way to archival collections, which is not particularly surprising given the secret, illegal nature of this work. Extant examples were largely confiscated from captured Kluxers, though several were saved as souvenirs for sentimental reasons. While there are several dozen contemporary

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<sup>80</sup> I argue that these tropes were organized into a “repertoire,” a term used by theatrical and musical performers of the day to refer to the range of pieces that a performer or group of performers is ready to perform at any given time. These texts could be shared by multiple artists, but were frequently recombined, or adapted to take advantage of a particular company’s strengths. For more on the “repertory” theatrical model in the nineteenth century, see Benjamin McArthur, *Actors and American Culture 1800-1920*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 8; Sara Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania*; Eric Lott, *Love and Theft*; See also, Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*.

images of Kluxers produced during Reconstruction, many are illustrations that show artist's representation of garments, rather than actual garments themselves. These complications help to illustrate the broader problem that Parsons has depicted in her study of Klan dress—Kluxers drew on existing aesthetic tropes in order to position their actions within a broader category of *the* Klan. As a result, these garments were themselves products of layers of cultural mediation, and once represented in cultural media, further folded into the repertoire of sartorial elements that other Kluxers drew upon to create their own garments.

Rather than surveying extant Klan regalia broadly, it may be useful to trace a chain of cultural influence, starting with one particular object. This is not a genealogy in any concrete way, but rather an associative trail to help us understand how the movement of Ku Klux costume through a shared expressive culture may have shaped the reinvention of these garments in the early twentieth century. In 1870, John Campbell Van Hook Jr. wore a strange mask to ride with a den of self-proclaimed Klansmen in Roxboro, North Carolina. **(Fig 1.2)** With pointed horns more than a foot long, dramatic dark patches in lieu of eyebrows, rabbit fur sideburns, dangling oilcloth teeth, and a long red nose, Van Hook's mask rendered his body dramatically inhuman. The horns on Van Hook's mask recall those described by Lucy McMillan in South Carolina, as well as by her neighbor, Jacob Montgomery, a man who told investigators that some of the men who pistol-whipped him wore "white gowns" and "white horns stuffed with cotton" on their heads.<sup>81</sup>

These accounts also align with descriptions of horned Klansmen operating in other states during the same period, suggesting that certain sartorial tropes were appearing on Kluxers across the South. Cotton horns were also visible in this image of garments captured

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<sup>81</sup> Testimony of Jacob Montgomery, *KKK Hearings*, vol. 3, South Carolina, 696.

from a Klansman a hundred miles from Van Hook, in Moore County, just a couple of months after the attack on Montgomery.<sup>82</sup> (*Fig 1.3*) Both the headpiece in the photo and Van Hook's mask were made primarily of white fabric, and featured pointed horns extending horizontally from the wearer's ears. Each had a similar conically shaped nose, made out of a darker, contrasting fabric. Both hoods have colored piping around eyeholes made in the mask's surface, and some dark patches suggesting eyebrows. But this is where the similarities between the objects end. The crown of the Van Hook mask is shaped more like a skullcap, with curving seams following the contour of the wearer's head. It features a far more elaborate decorative scheme, black and red leather binding wrapped around each of the three horns, and patches of rabbit fur simulating sideburns and a beard. Just below the long red nose, the mouth is outlined in leather and three jagged white forms suggesting teeth hang from the top. Cotton strings, likely used to keep the mask in place, hang from several points at the bottom edge of the mask. In contrast, second headpiece has a simpler construction. Rather than a third horn placed on a rounded crown, the top of this hat is actually cone-shaped, with a tassel hanging from its drooping tip. The facemask is a flat piece of fabric stitched to the curving headband of the conical crown. Another matching piece is likely stitched to the back, concealing the back of the wearer's neck. The elaborate nature of these masks suggests the degree of construction skill that went into their production; these were not haphazard garments, but instead show thoughtful construction and ingenuity. In the photographed headpiece, the long cotton nose stands firmly away from the loose fabric that

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<sup>82</sup> All extant photos of nineteenth century Klan dress were necessarily taken outside of the context of the Klan's violent, often nighttime raids, due primarily to photographic technology of the day. These photographs fall into three categories. 1) Photos documenting garments that Ku Klux were wearing at the time of their arrest. Taken largely in photo studios, these images give some hint of the violent circumstances of these arrests. This category includes at least one photo I will later discuss at length that was described as a re-enactment of an attempted murder, with volunteers posing in confiscated Ku Klux garments. 2) Photos of individuals wearing Ku Klux garments later in the nineteenth or early twentieth century. 3) Unknown circumstances, but nonetheless conform to conventions of popular portraiture of the day.

supports it, without buckling or torquing the fabric, actions that would skew the eyeholes and render the disguise function of the mask ineffective.

Returning to the photograph of men gathered in North Carolina (*Fig: 1.3*) can help us to see how uniformity and aesthetic chaos both had a place in the Klan's sartorial repertoire.<sup>83</sup> This photograph shows the garments taken from a group of men charged with the attempted murder of John Campbell (no relation to Van Hook) in Moore County, North Carolina in August of 1871.<sup>84</sup> As reported in Frank Leslie's weekly several months later, US Deputy Marshall Joseph G. Hester "captured the villains with the full paraphernalia of their order."<sup>85</sup> These "masks and dominos [cloaks] were carefully preserved, and after being submitted to the jury, arranged on a party of gentlemen who posed in the positions occupied by the prisoners at the time of the attempted murder."

In the photograph, a group of men gather around an un-costumed man bound with a rope, simulating the attempted execution.<sup>86</sup> The setting of the photograph is far more

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<sup>83</sup> "Plan of the Contemplated Murder of John Campbell" (1871) [Photographer possibly John O. Johnson], Albumen Print, Nelson Atkins Museum, Kansas City, MO.

<sup>84</sup> What Campbell, a "cripple" who ran "a little grog shop" near the Moore County line, had done to upset local Klansmen is unclear, but he was caught up in the surge of Klan violence in the state following the murder of North Carolina senator John Stephens in nearby Caswell County, two months prior.<sup>84</sup> While Campbell was injured in the attack, he escaped Stephens' fate, perhaps due to variations in the political affiliations of law enforcement agents in Moore and Caswell counties. Unlike Caswell county, where as a reporter for the *Raleigh Weekly Standard* wrote: "there are but a few peace officers left in that county who seem disposed to try to enforce the law," U.S. Deputy Marshall was undercover with the Moore county Klan, and managed to stop the attack before Campbell was hanged.<sup>84</sup> Even though only ten of the sixty men indicted for Klan activities in that state were actually sentenced by the jury, the capture of Campbell's attackers yielded a surprising find. "Testimony of Elias Bryan" KKK Trials, Vol 2, North Carolina, 75. Some secondary sources describe John Campbell as a freedman, but I have found no definitive source on this. For more background on Campbell and the violence in Moore County, see: Wellman, Manly Wade. *The County of Moore, 1847-1947: A North Carolina Region's Second Hundred Years*. Moore County Historical Association, 1962.

<sup>85</sup> *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Jul 10, 1871.

<sup>86</sup> Thanks to curators Keith Davis and Stephanie Knappe for helping me to locate this photo. The accession file at the Nelson Atkins Museum contains the scintillating claim that the assembled volunteers dressed in Klan robes were African American. The hue of the visible hands of some of the men shown, particularly the third from the left, suggests that this may in fact be the case, but the claim remains unconfirmed. See Keith

banal than the men's costumes suggest—a storeroom or even classroom complete with a blackboard off to one side of the room. The story of the capture of these garments was told in both the Northern and Southern press, and at least three versions of two distinct engravings based on the photograph appeared for public consumption over the next month—a third would emerge a decade later.<sup>87</sup> The first image appeared in an 1871 broadside by Philadelphia engravers Van Ingen and Snyder, the background of the image was removed, leaving only a shadowy haze, and the story of the attempted murder and arrest of the Klansmen was printed beneath.<sup>88</sup> (*Fig. 1.4-1.5*) The second engraving was printed in two different newspapers in October of 1871, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly* (Oct 7), and the more salacious *The Day's Doings* (Oct 28), an easy feat since both newspapers were located in New York and owned by newspaperman Frank Leslie.<sup>89</sup> This second engraving clearly used the photograph as a reference, but offered a much more dramatic image of the scene. The engraver translated the assembly of re-enactors gathered in a classroom to a shadowy wood. He re-arranged the figures, and transformed the long loose coats worn by some of the Klansmen in the original image into more dramatic cloaks—the dominos described in the narrative account printed with the engravings. Reports of the capture of these garments also made the Southern press, though without illustrations and under far more critical terms of condemning US Marshall Hester for his

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Davis and the Hallmark Collection. *An American Century of Photography*, (New York: Harry Abrahms, 1995).

<sup>87</sup> For a discussion on the differing pictorial conventions of various illustrated weekly newspapers, see Joshua Brown, *Beyond the Lines*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 123-126.

<sup>88</sup> “Plan of the Contemplated Murder of John Campbell” (1871) Broadside, Wood Engraving by Van Ingen and Snyder, Philadelphia, Joyner Library, East Carolina University.

<sup>89</sup> “Ku Klux Again— Planning the Contemplated Murder of John Campbell in North Carolina” *The Day's Doings*, Oct 28, 1871.

duplicity.<sup>90</sup> In March of 1876 the story was revived in newspapers thanks to a syndicated story from the democratic *New York World*, under the headline of “secret service corruption.”<sup>91</sup> The circulation of these images offers us some useful information about how images of the Klan reached nineteenth century Americans, but they also provide an important explanation of how examples of Klan garments reached the historic record.

The dramatization of the Klansmen’s garments in the newspaper engravings is surprising upon closer examination of the original photograph, which reveals costumes that are elaborate enough in their own right. The formal similarities between Van Hook’s mask and the second mask pictured here suggest some kind of traffic in aesthetic tropes across North Carolina, but the group of gathered Klansmen dressed in identical robes provides a more concrete suggestion of a hierarchically designed “order” that counters reports of chaotic and motley crews in other states. A close look at the photograph of the garments captured in Moore County shows that this horned headpiece differs dramatically from the capuchon style headpieces worn by members of this Klan cell. Of the nine gathered costumes, seven are close copies of one another, tall conical headdresses, dark robes with two rows of appliqued spots of lighter fabric, stitched like buttons down each side of piping of the same fabric, several inches wide. Their headdresses feature matching crosses and appliqued letters stating “KKK,” and the masks include bulbous noses, and elaborate beards of goat or horsehair. Some of the masks feature horns near the wearer’s ears, while others do not. Made of what looks like polished cotton, the similarity of these robes contrasts with the man wearing the headdress with the conical nose. His robe is a pattered calico, similar to the man standing at the far left of the image, who is likewise

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<sup>90</sup> *Wilmington (NC) Journal*, Aug 25, 1871.

<sup>91</sup> *New Orleans Daily Democrat*, Mar. 23, 1876; *Daily Gazette* (Wilmington, DE), Mar. 25, 1876

dressed in a conical helmet of calico, with some facial details, but no horns or nose. The printed calico robes nonetheless feature some of the same aesthetic features—circular appliques in lighter fabric and wide piping down the center seam and around the hem of each robe.

It is not challenging to see a relationship between the garments pictured here and the horned hood worn by Van Hook. The group of assembled Klansmen wore garments that are similar enough to suggest aesthetic intentionality—or perhaps even the work of the same craftsman. Given that the garments were from counties not so far apart, the coordination between groups of Klansmen the garments suggest is not so difficult to believe.<sup>92</sup> The North Carolina Klan was not as consistent in appearance as this chain of garments may suggest, nor was Klan dress in this state representative of the entire region. The kind of aesthetic variety that Lucy McMillan reported in her testimony occurred even within individual Klans. The range of garments worn by Klansmen in Tishomingo, Mississippi during 1871 alone can help illuminate this range. U.S. District Attorney G. Wiley Wells, and two U.S. Marshalls captured the Klansman shown below in 1871.<sup>93</sup> (**Fig. 1.6**) Featuring few decorative details—an appliquéd cross, a light cotton sash, and a rudimentary face mask with a light cotton cloth, perhaps even a handkerchief, tied across the back of his head—this Klansman’s garments exhibit less aesthetic attention, and more

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<sup>92</sup> Historian Bradley Proctor has located compelling interpersonal connections between local dens of North Carolina Klans that challenge Parsons’ assertion that the primary link between Klan groups was the deployment of a shared tactical language. Bradley Proctor, “Whip, Pistol and Hood: Ku Klux Klan Violence in the Carolinas During Reconstruction.” Ph.D. Diss, University of North Carolina, 2013.

<sup>93</sup> Museum of Law Enforcement, Washington DC. Verso of the image reads that this Klansman was captured by G. Wiley Wells, US District Attorney for northern Mississippi, in Tishomingo, Mississippi in September of 1871. Three of the costumes confiscated by Wells now comprise one of the most famous portraits of dressed Klansmen. Wells’s testimony is the opening interview of the Joint Select Committee Hearings in Mississippi, and he recounts this capture in detail. Wells, brought confiscated costumes before the Congressional committee investigating the Klan as evidence of Klan activity. According to Wells, some of these garments were well made, “some of them show a great degree of skill.” Testimony of G. Wiley Wells, *KKK Hearings*, vol 12, Mississippi, (Feb. 10, 1872), 1158.



signs that he had simply repurposed existing garments. This same garment, or one very similar, may have appeared again in an engraving printed in *Harper's Magazine* in 1870. Standing alongside the man also seen in the photograph, the other Kluxers wear similarly repurposed clothes—but their garments include more elaborate trimmings. Appliqués, and patches in the shapes of small men, hearts, and flowers, adorn the fronts of their trousers and jackets.<sup>94</sup> (**Fig. 1.7**) These characteristics were by no means regional signatures; when Wells testified before the Joint Select Committee on Ku Klux violence in his area, he described a broader range of garments: Men wearing “pantaloons and bodies made in red and yellow” to whip and rob several men, a group of sixty wearing “long white gowns; some...trimmed with red” responsible for the whipping and “disgraceful” abuse of a woman, and a “party of disguised men dressed in black and white gowns, with high peaked caps” who whipped and beat Andy Graham, a railroad worker.<sup>95</sup>

Read alongside testimony by victims and eyewitnesses, the portrait of the Klan that emerges is a chaotic, associative one, rather than a clear picture of the relationship between the political message that Kluxers intended to convey and the aesthetic forms through which they chose to convey it. But perhaps associative chaos was precisely the point. This chain of garments (or photographs of garments now lost) illustrates a key structural feature of this mass movement. Rather than adhering to a single organizing principle, local Klans demonstrated their loose association with one another by accessing a shared repertoire of bodily techniques. Franz Parsons argues that the aesthetic range of garments that Kluxers

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<sup>94</sup> *Harper's Weekly*, Jan. 27, 1872; This detail recalls another garment, a robe and headpiece worn by Joseph Boyce Steward in Lincoln County TN during this same period. The flannel surface of this robe is appliqued with creeping roses cut from a soft flannel. Garment now held in the collection of the Chicago History Museum.

<sup>95</sup> Testimony of G. Wiley Wells, *KKK Hearings*, vol 12, Mississippi, (Feb 10, 1872), 1151-54.

adopted suggests that many southern men understood that strange clothing was one way to position their actions within a larger cultural framework of regulatory violence.<sup>96</sup> Costumes transformed localized attacks on southern freedmen and Republicans into highly visible protests against the Reconstruction government. Kluxers' used their dressed bodies to reinforce a natural social hierarchy organized around patriarchal white supremacy. Men identified with the Klan amplified this campaign of terror through their dressed bodies, effectively weaponizing their appearance by transforming intelligible attacks between political foes into something more unsettling and chaotic. "The alchemy of this Klan attack was to transmute a specific violent act inflicted by a group of white men on the body of an individual victim into an attack by abstract men on an abstract body."<sup>97</sup> The specificity of Kluxers brutality did not leave their victims, as Lucy McMillan's testimony demonstrated to the congressional committee, but the strategic use of dress also made the assault on her and her home visible as part of a collective political project. If McMillan understood her attack as the work of the Ku Klux, she also recognized that the Ku Klux was comprised of her neighbors, and maybe even relatives. These two realities, the abstraction of Klan violence as a cultural phenomenon and the lived experience, were not mutually exclusive.

The tension between the abstraction of the Klan as a cultural phenomenon and the lived realities of Klansmen played out on the surface of Klansmen's bodies. *The Klan* actually comprised many different local Klans, which themselves comprised individuals whose political and social agendas may have varied dramatically. The garments that Klansmen adopted during Reconstruction reflected that range of experiences and motivations that may have led men to violent action, while also situating those experiences within

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<sup>96</sup> Parsons, *Ku Klux*, 73-108.

<sup>97</sup> Parsons, *Ku Klux*, 73.

discernable aesthetic patterns that could be recognizable as part of the greater whole. Klan dress in this period borrowed from the most fundamental theories of sartorial style in the modern world: namely, the tension between individuality and belonging. Klansmen articulated their cohesion through the shared use of an aesthetic repertoire of familiar sartorial elements, which were organized to elicit certain effects. The repetition of these components indicated the operation of a group that could be entered simply by adopting the appearance of its members. Klan dress made it possible to claim membership to the group by imitation alone. This rationale, what one of the original members of the Pulaski Klan would later call “styled Ku Klux,” was already used by 1871 to explain a difference between the “original” Klan and a mass of motley imitators that came afterwards, usurping elements from the Klan’s sartorial repertoire to commit ignoble violence.<sup>98</sup> This claim allowed Klan apologists later in the century to articulate several different “phases” of Klan activity, and subsequently assign a playful purpose to the first phase, a moral imperative to the second, and a disruptive chaos to the continued proliferation of Klan dress after the organization was “officially disbanded.” The argument underlying these claims was that Klansmen organized according to a moral purpose; even if the group’s distinctive aesthetic was later adopted by usurpers, the cause was a necessary response to Reconstruction-era violence.

The obvious problem in this logic is that the strange garments that Klansmen adopted frequently indexed long histories of violent cultural exchange. Klansmen did not simply adopt strange garments to commit violence, but much of the sartorial repertoire of Klan dress emerged from performance customs used to demarcate, intervene into, and comment upon cultural difference and existing social hierarchy. Most importantly, these visual arguments

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<sup>98</sup> Testimony of Daniel Coleman, *KKK Hearings*, vol. 9, Alabama, 559-60. For “Styled Ku Klux,” Lester and Wilson, 1888.

about what the Klan was and was not were always bound up with the violent actions of the Klansmen wearing these costumes. Floggings, whippings, rapes, murders, and psychological forms of harassment still provided the final word on what the Klan was organized to do. The chaotic aesthetic of Ku Klux clothing performed several important kinds of work: it obscured the power structure and organization of the Klan on both local and national levels, while also broadcasting and shaping the organization's ideological orientation against the consolidation of Republican power. From ad-hoc bags over their heads to elaborately appliquéd robes, Ku Klux clothing operated along four key sartorial strategies in order to attach a violent threat to the dressed bodies of Klansmen: *disguise*, *costume*, *uniform*, and *regalia*. Not every garment served every function, and the hierarchy in which they were organized changed depending on the local conditions in which they were deployed. Despite these micro-currents, this schema is helpful in mapping the shift between the Reconstruction-era Klans and the use of dress as a “living monument” by the early twentieth-century revival.

### **Disguise and Costume**

Kluxers chose garments that disrupted contemporary sartorial conventions. Whether through the adoption of a horned helmet or the choice to wear one's jacket inside out, the sartorial repertoire of Ku Kluxing alerted viewers of their entry into a carnivalesque social space.<sup>99</sup> Invoking a tactic defined as the subversion of the dominant mode of social

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<sup>99</sup> Russian linguist Mikhail Bakhtin argues that early modern and medieval traditions of Lenten Carnival celebrations offered collective social release through the performance of social taboos, sexualized behavior, comedic representations of violence, or the parody of authority figures—a group of behaviors that together comprise the “carnavalesque.” Frequently, these public demonstrations erupted when simulated violence turned real—as was common in the practice of “charivari,” performed across multiple regions of Europe. This public ritual shaming often followed sexual behavior perceived as inappropriate, in which an individual or couple was subjected to “rough parody” by members of their own community to describe the underlying impulse behind this category of collectively performed social disruption, in which the simulation of an alternate social order provides a release from the frustrations of everyday life. Participants in these collective performances often engaged in visual and auditory demonstrations that the expected social order was being disrupted, with shouted insults, strange instruments, masks, costumes that changed the size and shape of the wearer's body, or garments whose elaborate design or bright colors defied sumptuary laws or the social role of the individual wearing it.

organization through darkly humorous performance, Kluxers not only attacked victims, but used their garments to call attention to the insult.<sup>100</sup> While many Ku Klux made a concerted effort to conceal their identity with elaborate headpieces, masks, and long gowns, many others wore only haphazard costumes, “coats turned inside out,” or handkerchiefs covering their faces; others made no effort to change their appearance at all. “Disguise” was the word that victims, witnesses, and law enforcement agents most frequently used to describe these garments, a choice that referenced the long history of vigilantes using garments to evade prosecution for violent attacks in the U.S. South.<sup>101</sup> Vigilantes sometimes, though not always, disguised their faces to avoid identification and legal action. Given the frequency

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Participants in a charivari were less likely to wear costumes than carnival revelers, but “cross dressing, veiling, false faces, and wicked masks” all turn up in accounts of these events. Initially directed at the wealthy landowners and religious apparatus that governed feudal society, these practices proliferated, with “peasants imitating kings...and women parading around in armor,” but as these practices developed over subsequent centuries, participants continued to use elaborate dress to temporarily discard their identity, or highlight an ironic gap between their real and chosen identities. Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 97; Crane, *Performance of Self*, 143-145; Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Trans. Helene Iswolsky (1984) 4-27; Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 97, 106-111; Natalie Zemon Davis, “The Reasons of Misrule: Youth Groups and Charivaris in Sixteenth- Century France.” (*Past and Present* 50, 1971): 41-75. Robert Allen follows Terry Eagleton in arguing that the carnivalesque is less a space of actual disruption, but “instrument of social control...carnival allows subordinate groups to ‘blow off steam’ in a ritual, and therefore politically ineffectual space.” *Horrible Prettiness*, 35-36.

<sup>100</sup> Eric Lott and David Roediger both identify blackface theatrical performance in terms of social inversion, whereby the caricatured performance of the racial other offered white men ways to express not only their mastery of racial hierarchies, but also to work out tensions within the white working class. During the mid-nineteenth century, such performances could channel very real aggressions into the realm of representation. As Roediger puts it, “to black up was an act of wildness in the Antebellum U.S.” Roediger, *Wages of Whiteness*, 118. Lott, *Love and Theft*.

<sup>101</sup> Van Hook’s actions positioned him within American vigilantism, whereby individuals or groups instituted self-authorizing tribunals, enacting retribution outside the existing legal apparatus since the British colonial period. A subset of the larger practice of vigilantism, lynching is most broadly defined as an attack committed by a group of three or more people. In the American context, lynching has typically connoted a type of politicized violence—not simply random action but a semi-coordinated attack motivated by dynamics in local politics, or the broader politics of social hierarchies rendered through some mix of identity categories: race, gender, class, nationality. As Fitzhugh Brundage has argued, white Southerners embraced lynching violence in order to protect the racial hierarchy that underpinned slavery, but the practice also has roots in political unrest among British loyalists and white laborers in eighteenth-century North Carolina. In addition to the more familiar racialized violence of the Jim Crow era, “anti-labor violence of wealthy elites, the righteous revenge of the common man, and the efforts of ordinary frontier dwellers to assert the rule of law.” Kathleen Belew, “Lynching and Power in the United States: Southern, Western, and National Vigilante Violence.” *History Compass* 12, no. 1 (January 1, 2014): 84–99; Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 3-4.

with which victims and witnesses described Ku Klux dress as disguise in their accounts of encounters with these men, it is clear that some Ku Klux followed this pragmatic convention when they selected their own garments.<sup>102</sup> Many victims of attacks attributed to the Klan reported encounters with criminals who wore only rough bags or scraps of cloth to cover their faces—not elaborate decorative garments. These utilitarian garments make sense as criminal disguise, but only insofar as they successfully helped Kluxers to avoid detection.<sup>103</sup>

The frequency with which masked vigilantes used elaborately designed garments rather than ad-hoc disguises suggests that something more complicated was afoot. Kluxers did not need to adopt horns, beards of squirrel skin, or tall pasteboard hats in order to conceal their faces, nor did the adoption of an inhuman or ghostly appearance confuse victims who, like Lucy McMillan, frequently knew their attackers well. Lucy’s attackers may not have realized that she could recognize them, but it’s likely that they didn’t really care. Their attack was far more powerful if Lucy knew precisely who was burning her house, and why. Rather than successfully concealing their appearance through disguise, these Spartanburg men chose to adopt elaborate costumes for their collective performance of dominance over a poor, single mother living on the land of the man who had purchased her years before. While these

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<sup>102</sup> Eric Hobsbawm argues that there is an inverse relationship between ritualized traditions and “pragmatic conventions.” *Invention of Tradition*, 4.

<sup>103</sup> Col. A. P. Huggins, a school superintendent in Columbus, Missouri who was whipped by members of a local den remarked: “Their face pieces were very defective. If I had known the men personally, I could have recognized nearly all of them.” (Testimony of Col. A. P. Huggins, Vol 11, Mississippi, 273, 274, qtd. in Tourgee, 79. Neither Huggins or Dawkins knew all of the attackers personally, yet these and many other accounts emphasized the intimacy of proximity between attacker and victim. As Dawkins’s recognition of two of the Klansmen illustrated, Klansmen generally operated within their own communities where an individual Klansmen could easily be recognized. The ability to recognize such physical idiosyncrasies could distinguish local community members from any recently transplants from the north. See Hannah Rosen. *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*. (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2009); Steven Hahn. *A Nation Under our Feet*, (Cambridge and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003).

garments did conceal their wearer's faces to some degree, both of these masks operated more powerfully as costume.

Most simply, costume is the practice of the transformation of an individual's physical appearance so as to indicate the disruption of social conventions, or to convey a particular idea or impression through that new appearance. If a disguise is intended to conceal the identity of the person wearing it without alerting the viewer to this transformation, then costume can be understood as a kind of disguise that winks back at the viewer. Costume announces itself by engaging the viewer's imagination in order to envision the gap between the actual identity of the costumed individual and her appearance.<sup>104</sup> Under this definition, many of the disguises used by nineteenth-century Ku Kluxers fall under the rubric of costume, in that this disguise often signaled a significant gap between the costumed man's appearance and the victim or observer's awareness of his identity. Explicitly theatrical features underscored the gap between Van Hook's identity as a farmer and former Confederate soldier, and his adoption of a disturbing, theatrically inhuman form. For victims this gap was not so large; Lucy McMillan understood that there was no distinction between the boy she raised and the boy who set fire to her house while wearing a mask, just as she knew that that same boy would have harmed her had they been able to "catch her," as she explained to investigators.<sup>105</sup>

Like the connection between immediacy and abstraction that these garments rendered visible, costumes also animated a careful play on identity that aided Kluxers on two other registers. Some Ku Klux costumes did function as disguises that gave members actual, or at

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<sup>104</sup> Susan Davis writes about parades of Christmas mummers in Antebellum Philadelphia. There, paraders sometimes attacked Black Philadelphians and new German immigrants while wearing costumes that represented their victims, incorporating blackface and caricatures of German dress. *Parades and Power*, 145-155.

<sup>105</sup> Testimony of Lucy McMillan, Vol 3, South Carolina, 606.

least plausible deniability for their actions, while the frequent failures—intentional or accidental—of disguise meant that a Kluxer’s real identity was revealed to the individuals over whom they wanted to exert power. Similarly, the dramatic appearance of some of these costumes let their wearers highlight the degree of indignity to which the new social order was forcing them to stoop, and yet at the same time offered the excuse that these garments were just playful cultural expression.

### **Global Circuits of Aesthetic Exchange**

Practices of cultural appropriation accessed through contemporary popular culture made the political character of Klan dress legible on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line. Lucy McMillan’s attackers may have incorporated elements from contemporary popular culture into their garments, as suggested by her claim that some had “black faces and some had red.” There are other documented accounts of Kluxers blacking up with burnt cork, mimicking the popular technique from the minstrel stage. Kluxers sometimes dressed in women’s clothes, or garments that viewers compared to the costumes of circus clowns.<sup>106</sup> Combining features from garments associated with entertainment with violent action linked Klan activities with longstanding customs of Carnival or Mardi Gras. As celebrated in the nineteenth-century U.S., these folk traditions synthesized European, African, and Indigenous practices in the Caribbean and coastal American regions, forming what performance scholar Joseph Roach has called practices of “circum-Atlantic” performance.<sup>107</sup> These practices

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<sup>106</sup> Testimony of Mary Ann Norvill, North Carolina, 473-474; Testimony of James M. Justice, North Carolina, 116. For the incorporation of sartorial tropes from blackface minstrel traditions in Klan practice, see: Elaine Franz Parsons “Midnight Rangers: Costume and Performance in the Reconstruction-Era Ku Klux Klan.” *The Journal of American History* 92, no. 3 (December 1, 2005): 811–36.

<sup>107</sup> The circum-Atlantic is defined by performance studies scholar Joseph Roach as a “geohistorical matrix...bounded by Africa and the Americas, North and South, this economic and cultural system entailed vast movements of people and commodities to experimental destinations.” *Cities of the Dead*, xi.



often operated as important spaces of collective meaning-making, whereby groups could forge and contest collective social visions, “to challenge the distinction between what counts as noise, and what counts as sensibly apprehensible, and politically legible, shared forms of meaning,” as Elizabeth Dillon has argued.<sup>108</sup> In this sense, both informal and formal performance traditions offered the costumed body as a political tool, a space where ideas about race, gender, citizenship, and in some cases, the constitution of humanity, could be articulated, particularly when those performances blurred lines between artistry, collective celebration, and real life. The dressed body could offer a way to envision social change, even if the transformation was imperfect or temporary.<sup>109</sup>

John Van Hook’s horned mask (**Fig. 2**) demonstrates the operation of circum-Atlantic performance traditions in action, while also showing how the Ku Kluxer’s appropriation of vernacular performance traditions materialized on the ground.<sup>110</sup> As Parsons has argued, the bizarre costumes adopted by nineteenth-century Klansmen were not a residue of the past, they were thoroughly contemporary weapons that incorporated historical influences through the familiar circuits of American popular culture. Looking more closely at the operation of these circuits will help us to better understand the cultural

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<sup>108</sup> Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, *New World Drama* (Durham: Duke University Libraries Press, 2014), 13.

<sup>109</sup> Marjorie Garber argues that cross-dressing can undermine, and at times undo gender categories. *Vested Interests* (1992); Eric Lott discusses cross-dressing practices in minstrelsy in the mid-nineteenth century in *Love and Theft*, 165-67. Parsons points out that Gender play likely magnified the threat of sexual violence that accompanied the Klan’s nighttime raids. Parsons explores the accounts of cross-dressing Klansmen in “Midnight Rangers,” 824-827. Threats of sexual violence were used to control the behavior of not only Black men and women, but also poor women whose sexual morals were generally viewed as suspect. See: Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*, 194-221; Lisa Cardyn, “Sexualized Racism/Gendered Violence: Outraging the Body Politic in the Reconstruction South.” *Michigan Law Review* 100, no. 4 (2002): 675–867; Martha Hodes, “The Sexualization of Reconstruction Politics: White Women and Black Men in the South after the Civil War on JSTOR.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 3, no. 3 (January 1993): 402–17.

<sup>110</sup> Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 24.

genealogy of twentieth-century Klan dress. The strange form of the mask not only demonstrated a gap between Van Hook's identity and his theatrical appearance, but the formal properties of the mask allow us to speculate on several possible routes of Atlantic cultural exchange. The long horns and leather bindings on Van Hook's mask were similar to decorative techniques used for Igbo ceremonies on the west coast of Africa, the root of the carnivalesque Junkanoo (or John Canoe) festival, celebrated on New Year's Day across much of the Caribbean. Slave shipping routes led to a large concentration of enslaved people with diasporic ties to Igboland (modern Nigeria) and the Caribbean in Van Hook's home state of North Carolina, and as a result, Junkanoo was celebrated in multiple parts of North Carolina during the nineteenth century.<sup>111</sup>

Similarly, the exaggerated nose and facial features of the masks worn by Van Hook and the men in the North Carolina photograph of captured Klan costumes also suggest the possible influence of more local traditions. (**Fig. 3**) Throughout the nineteenth century, bands of Cherokee performed the Booger/Bugah Dance, or mask dance, which increasingly referenced contact with Euro-Americans as the century progressed.<sup>112</sup> Combining racialized caricatures with overt sexuality, Cherokee men would don masks carved from gourds to

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<sup>111</sup> William Dillon Pierson, "The Mixed Bloodlines of the Early Ku Klux Klan" *Black Legacy: America's Hidden Heritage*. (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993); M. E. Lasseter, "Jonkonnu, Jankunu, Junkanoo, John Canoe: Reorienting North Carolina's Practice in the American Mediterranean." *Doc South: Commemorative Landscapes of North Carolina* (2014) <http://docsouth.unc.edu/commland/features/essays/johnkonnu-1/>

<sup>112</sup> Gregory D. Smithers, *The Cherokee Diaspora*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 76. The most detailed account of the Booger Dance is Frank G. Speck's 1930 ethnography of the practice. Most extant masks were used in North Carolina, but after the turn of the twentieth century (National Museum of the American Indian ca. 1910, North Carolina Museum of History ca. 1916, Museum of the Cherokee Indian, nd.) For critical analysis of this practice, and other Indian "false face" dances and ceremonies, see Raymond D. Fogleson and Amelia R. Bell, "Cherokee Booger Mask Tradition" in *The Power of Symbols: Masks and Masquerade in the Americas*. Ross Crumrine and Marjorie Halpin eds. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1983), 48-69; See also Carolyn Johnston, *Cherokee Women in Crisis*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2003), 16-18.

portray outsiders as absurd in both actions and appearance. Cherokee masks used for this dance at the turn of the twentieth century include bulbous noses and fur used as facial hair, much like the Van Hook mask, and the other whiskered Kluxers in the photograph of captured Klan dress. (**Fig. 1.8**) While there are no known extant artifacts or illustrations of these gourd masks from the nineteenth century, a narrative account of this dance as it was performed in North Carolina in 1835 references a similar construction.<sup>113</sup> The presence of these aesthetic practices in North Carolina in the mid-nineteenth century does not necessarily mean that Van Hook encountered them firsthand, or even saw his mask as a product of cross-cultural exchange. The possibility that these aesthetic features were part of a contemporary vocabulary of “savage,” “inhuman,” or “exotic” appearance in mid-nineteenth-century North Carolina is likely, as is the chance that Van Hook, or whomever made this object for Van Hook to wear, understood that this was part of the joke.

Other Ku Klux garments evidence these longer circuits of cultural exchange, such as the appearance of the capirote, a tall conical hat placed on the heads of prisoners during the Spanish Inquisition (1480-1834), in 1860s Tennessee. (**Fig. 1.9, 1.10**) The hat, as depicted by Goya in an etching from 1798, bears a strong resemblance to the striped cone worn by a member of the Pulaski Tennessee Klan some time between 1866 and 1872.<sup>114</sup> Writer Miguel de Zarraga noted the resemblance between Klan hoods and Sevillian capirotes in 1921, describing a group of Klansmen as “something like a caricature of the mystic Christians of

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<sup>113</sup> J. P Evans “Sketches of Cherokee Characteristics,” reprinted in *Journal of Cherokee Studies* 4 No 1 (1979): 16-20.

<sup>114</sup> 1901 Photo included in Stanley Horn, *The Invisible Empire* (1939), Photo Insert. This garment is also likely shown in a postcard made by the United Daughters of the Confederacy, Florence, AL.

our Sevillian processions.”<sup>115</sup> Several Spanish religious fraternities adopted the capirote as a symbol of penitence and humiliation for the wearer. The capirote entered the lexicon of dress for carnival revelers across Europe in the eighteenth century, likely through parodic appropriation. The style likely traveled with French colonists, who called it a “capuchon,” to what is now Canada, and moved south along fur trading routes to Acadia, in southern Louisiana.<sup>116</sup> Tennessee Ku Klux may have encountered this hat through connections with Mardi Gras celebrations in rural Louisiana, the Mississippi coast, or even New Orleans.<sup>117</sup> Alternately, the use of this pointed hat in Caribbean carnivals may have led to its northern migration into central Tennessee.

While the Mardi Gras Carnival connection is likely, as Parsons has demonstrated, there are other possible routes of contact. Starting two decades prior to the Klan’s formation, Americans eagerly devoured Charles Dickens’s 1840 novel *The Old Curiosity Shop*, which featured a young boy being forced to wear a tall paper cone as a punishment for acting out in school.<sup>118</sup> A fixture of British culture since the early twentieth century, the “dunce cap” reached the height of popularity in the US at the end of the nineteenth century, but it

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<sup>115</sup> Poet Langston Hughes found Zarraga’s letter in a Mexican Newspaper, and sent it to W. E. B. Du Bois for publication in *The Crisis*. “Mexico Marvels.” Trans. John S. Brown *The Crisis*, Vol 22, No. 4 (Aug. 1921), 171.

<sup>116</sup> Mardi Gras in Rural Southern Louisiana likely results from a particular kind of cultural mixing, as Acadians migrated south from the French Canada in the seventeenth century. The “Corrir du Mardi Gras” seems more closely tied to a later migration Acadians with roots in Western France. That practice was first documented in the nineteenth century. Sam Kinser, *Carnival American Style*, 6; Sexton, ‘Cajun Mardi Gras,’ *Ethnology* 38, no. 4 (October 1, 1999): 297-99. For more on the garments worn by Spanish confraternities, see Webster. *Art and Ritual in Golden-Age Spain*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), 14-56.

<sup>117</sup> Parsons has convincingly demonstrated that Klansmen drew aesthetic inspiration from Mardi Gras, *Ku Klux*, 87-88; 207.

<sup>118</sup> For more on the serialization of popular British texts in the nineteenth century US, see Meredith McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting* (2003).

appeared regularly in American newspapers by the 1860s.<sup>119</sup> References to a dunce cap even appeared in an 1868 issue of *The Pulaski Citizen*, the newspaper published by one of the Tennessee founders of the Reconstruction Klan.<sup>120</sup> It's also possible, though less likely, that Klansmen encountered stories or images of Carnival revelers or Spanish penitents dressed in pointed caps to designate their public humiliation as part of a classical education. Goya's paintings and etchings of Spaniards wearing the *capiroto* were made over half a century before the 1860s, though there is no record of their exhibition in the United States during that period. These multiple currents are not mutually exclusive; rather they suggest that would-be Kluxers could have encountered this garment in several places at once.

The incorporation of aesthetic elements from traditions of racial and, increasingly, ethnic others, opens up a complicated question about what Klansmen were doing when they created a sartorial repertoire that incorporated such varied influences. The degree to which Kluxers saw their garments as a kind of cruel mimicry likely depended on the way that they encountered the sartorial traditions that they appropriated. It's unlikely that Kluxers intended to dress up like Spanish penitents, but they may have consciously borrowed aesthetic elements from nearby Carnival celebrations without realizing the long genealogy of the images that they reproduced.

When Kluxers accessed these images through contemporary popular culture—whether Mardi Gras parades or minstrel shows—they did not receive citations for the circuits of

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<sup>119</sup> Dunce caps appeared in the British media widely during the early nineteenth century, including a children's behavior manual from 1828 and British satirical illustrations from the 1840s by John Leech. A dunce cap is used in Dickens's novel 1840 *The Old Curiosity Shop*, which reached the US first in serial form to much popular interest, and subsequently as a book in 1841. Over the next 50 years, Americans adopted the garment as a symbol of discipline and pedagogical tool, but the term appears to have been in wide circulation since at least the 1840's. *Pulaski (TN) Citizen*, Oct 9, 1868; Henry Sharpe Horsely, *The Affectionate Parent's Gift and Good Child's Reward* (London: T. Kelley, 1828), University of California Los Angeles Libraries.

<sup>120</sup> *Pulaski Citizen*, Oct 9, 1868.

cultural exchange that produced these particular images. Some of the sartorial techniques that Kluxers adopted from popular culture conveyed a clear meaning, beyond any cultural context. White men painting their faces black in order to attack Black southerners certainly referenced a tradition of racial caricature on the contemporary stage, but this move also accessed a fundamental strategy of buffoonish imitation. Kluxers did not need to know the history of blackface to understand why it worked in this circumstance. Attacking someone while dressed in a way that lampooned their fundamental appearance, be it blackface, or women's clothes, signaled an insult to the disruption of the South's antebellum racial and gender hierarchies, in addition to the actual physical blows that Kluxers meted out.

### **Uniform**

The repertoire of garments worn by Kluxers had capacious boundaries, since the act of wearing a strange costume to commit a mob attack in the Reconstruction South would mark that garment as Ku Klux costume, no matter what it looked like. Still, viewed in aggregate, this collection of garments suggested aesthetic influences that extended beyond the arena of popular performance, as Kluxers drew on other familiar sartorial practices common at the time: military uniforms and fraternal regalia.

Uniform military dress emerged within global circuits of political and commercial exchange. The use of western-style military uniforms resulted from a large-scale "social transformation of armies" in Northern Europe during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, resulting from changes to the organization and technology of battle.<sup>121</sup> During this period, increasing numbers of working-class men joined armies in order to receive wages. At the same time, the evolution of gunpowder and artillery technology led to an increase in

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<sup>121</sup> Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, 225.

physical distance between combatants.<sup>122</sup> These changes necessitated the development of ways to identify soldiers from a distance, institute organizational hierarchies, and demonstrate the power of the state for citizens and non-citizens alike. Prior to this point, soldiers largely wore whatever clothing they already possessed. The turn towards formalized uniforms, particularly those distributed by a centralized bureaucracy within the structure of that army, hailed a newly visible regime of discipline, hierarchical structure, and collective action for militaries around the world. The invention of military uniforms offered a sartorial solution to a problem of national organization: how would modern states display power outside of a feudal system?

Symbolic insignia was not new to battle, but the invention of military uniforms marked the start of a path towards a useful abstraction of state violence—from the immediacy of hand-to-hand combat, to a kind of visible threat enacted on the level of representation. Over the next two centuries, the practice of dressing soldiers in uniform garments became a signature of developing nation-states across Europe and its colonial outposts, reaching its fullest expression in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>123</sup> Uniforms in the European military tradition borrowed their basic silhouettes from contemporary men's fashion in order to highlight the masculinity, athleticism, and distinctive identity of each army's soldiers—particularly in relation to the appearance of indigenous people newly dubbed colonial subjects. These displays of power operated on multiple scales, creating visible distinctions between soldiers and their enemies, powerful subjects and colonial

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<sup>122</sup> Abler, *Hinterland Warriors*, 11-12.

<sup>123</sup> Roche, *The Culture of Clothing*, 224.

objects, men and women.<sup>124</sup> While the political goals of each particular nation-state or self-organized militia varied, costume historian James Laver argues that nineteenth-century armies shared a general approach to the use of military dress. Uniforms prompted individual pride, negatively impacted the morale of enemies, supported identification of affiliation on the battlefield, increased a sense of shared pride among members of a unit, made an individual's rank within the organization evident, and offered protection from elements and battle without impeding a soldier's movement.<sup>125</sup> Through uniforms, soldiers could be disciplined into the hierarchical structure that their commanders desired, and yet, also act as a representation of an abstraction such as a state or institution.<sup>126</sup> In theory, uniforms transformed soldiers into representations of collective strength and power, but in practice, the development of uniform dress was only as good as the development of manufacturing practices that could produce uniforms on a scale that could outfit large nineteenth-century armies.

Thus, the advent of uniform dress necessitated new modes of garment production that would allow armies to issue garments to soldiers and thus protect the disciplinary function of these garments.<sup>127</sup> At the turn of the nineteenth century, "slop shops" sold roughly made

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<sup>124</sup> Joseph, *Uniform and Nonuniform*, 83.

<sup>125</sup> James Laver, "The Special Case of Military Uniforms," in *Modesty in Dress* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1969), 63; Abler, *Hinterland Warriors*, 13-15.

<sup>126</sup> Michel Foucault uses the eighteenth-century soldier as his example of the "docile body," which may be "subjected, used, transformed, and improved." *Discipline and Punish*, Alan Sheridan trans, 1977 (New York: Random House, 1995), 135-169.

<sup>127</sup> Historian Michael Zakim argues the shift from custom, artisanal garment production to the standardized production of ready-made garments offered a powerful metaphor for the economic and social changes of the Industrial Revolution, even if the reality was somewhat more complicated. Prior to the institution of industrially produced garments, no longer needed clothes were rarely discarded outright. Instead, they made their way to new owners by way of gift economies, vernacular customs, or more formalized second-hand markets, all of which meant that many lower-class Europeans and North Americans dressed in garments that were "already made," though sometimes altered or repurposed to fit a new body. Zakim, *Ready-Made*



pants, shirts, and jackets to sailors at urban ports along the Atlantic, and over the next two decades, New York's tailors introduced Army uniforms, and civilian garments, and rough "slave clothes" into slop production.<sup>128</sup> By 1820, the slops trade was established as a year-round business in New York, and less than half a century later, at the start of the Civil War, clothing production was one of America's largest industries.<sup>129</sup>

The production of military garments was a large part of this economy, particularly at the start of the Civil War, when both Union and Confederate armies produced clear uniform regulations that soldiers were expected to follow.<sup>130</sup> Despite the impressive quartermaster system, particularly on the Union side, the proliferation of the clothing trade created private alternatives to the top-down distribution of army uniforms. Soldiers took advantage of private outfitters, if they could afford it, buying extra underwear and even body armor to

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*Democracy*, 69. For American consumption practices in the colonial and early republican period, see Peter N. Stearns, "Stages of Consumerism: Recent Work on the Issues of Periodization." *The Journal of Modern History* 69, no. 1 (1997): 102–17; Brewer, John, and Roy Porter. *Consumption and the World of Goods*. (London: Routledge, 1994); Hartigan-O'Connor, Ellen. *The Ties That Buy*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); John Styles and Amanda Vickery. *Gender, Taste, and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830*. (New Haven, CT : London : New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2006); T.H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). For the European rag trade and fabric re-use in seventeenth through nineteenth-century Europe, see Roche, *The Culture of Clothing* 330-363; Perrot, *Fashioning the Bourgeoisie*, 36-52.

<sup>128</sup> Christine Stansell, "The Origins of the Sweatshop," in *Working Class America* (1983), 83-84; Seth Rockman, "Innovation, Alienation, and the Russet Brogan: Plantation Provisioning and New England's Industrial Revolution" Unpublished Paper presented at New Materialisms Conference, University of Michigan, April 1, 2016.

<sup>129</sup> Zakim, *Ready-Made Democracy*, 38-40.

<sup>130</sup> Blanton Duncan, "Uniform and Dress of the Army of the Confederate States" (Richmond, VA: Adjutant and Inspector General's Office) Sept 12, 1862; Wilson details the institution of "stringent regulations governing Southern manufacturers" and the institution of a Confederate "Quartermaster General" in the wake of the Union economic blockade following secession in 1861. The Confederate war department used imported goods to supplement industrial shortfalls as the war reached its end. Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, Harold Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2002), 4; 154.

protect them from their enemies—bullets and the elements.<sup>131</sup> Confederate soldiers were generally less well dressed, particularly as the war encouraged the growth of Northern garment industries, but stifled the passage of much needed goods—like woolen cloth—into the region.<sup>132</sup>

Reconstruction-era Kluxers looked nothing like Confederate soldiers—though one of the most popular stories told about Klan violence recounted a “practical joke” in which a Kluxer on stilts claimed to be the ghost of a soldier who died at the battle of Chickamauga.<sup>133</sup> In fact, Ku Klux costume demonstrated a disruption of not only conventional social order, but the contest between North and South itself. Kluxers used elaborate costumes to demonstrate their extra-legal status, as arbiters of violence on their own terms. Some Ku Kluxers clearly turned to the vocabulary of military dress as they developed a new sartorial repertoire, through the use of repurposed Confederate Uniforms. Jackets, similar to those shown in a manual of Confederate uniforms, appeared in an 1872 illustration of Mississippi Kluxers (**Figs. 1.6**) The men dressed in clothes captured from North Carolina Kluxers in 1872 (**Fig. 1.3**) demonstrate the incorporation of uniform principles into garments that still remain strange and inhuman. Instead of dark or neutral-

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<sup>131</sup> Sarah Jones Weicksel, “Armor, Manhood, And the Politics of Morality” in *Astride Two Worlds* Barton Hacker ed., (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Scholarly Press, 2016): Drew Faust, *This Republic of Suffering* (2008).

<sup>132</sup> Confederate States of America. Adjutant and Inspector-General’s Office, Samuel Cooper, E. Crehen, Blanton Duncan, and Confederate States of America. War Dept. *Uniform and Dress of the Army of the Confederate States*. Richmond [Va.]: C.H. Wynne, printer, (1861); See also, Harold S. Wilson, *Confederate Industry* (2005); James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (1988).

<sup>133</sup> John C. Lester and Daniel Love Wilson’s firsthand account of the Klan’s formation included descriptions of this and other “pranks” played by Klansmen, the continued circulation of that text, thanks in part to Walter L. Fleming’s 1905 reprinted edition, propelled this claim into the popular imaginary in the early twentieth century. Lester, John C., and Daniel Love Wilson. *Ku Klux Klan: Its Origin, Growth and Disbandment*. Wheeler, Osborn & Duckworth Manufacturing Company, 1884) Reprinted with Commentary by Walter L. Fleming (New York: Neale Publishing, 1905). For continued use of this trope, see Herbert, Col. Hilary A. “How We Redeemed Alabama.” *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, Vol LXXXV New Series Vol LXIII (New York: The Century Co.) November 1912-April 1913.

colored wool trousers and jackets, these Klansmen wore long robes and conical headdresses. Some formal conventions of the military uniform were echoed here—applied dots marching down each side of the robes like buttons on a double-breasted jacket—but the overall effect offered a visual counterpoint to the uniforms of Union soldiers that occupied parts of the South until 1877.

### **Regalia**

While some formal elements of military uniforms entered Kluxers aesthetic vocabulary, they also drew on the principles governing *fraternal regalia*, a capacious category of ceremonial dress used to designate authority and the wearer's position within a social hierarchy.<sup>134</sup> Unlike costume, which signaled a gap between performed and authentic identity, regalia externalized internal characteristics through the use of symbols that would be intelligible to informed viewers.

Originally coined to designate the symbolic accouterments of royalty, nineteenth-century Americans used the *regalia* to refer to the ceremonial garments worn by members of social fraternities. Associations between medieval rulers and the clerks who joined fraternal orders by the thousands in the mid-nineteenth century was no accident. By this time, the most popular fraternal organizations shared an aesthetic first developed in the Masonic tradition, which claimed a direct lineage from ancient forefathers. Such a project required a good measure of willful imagination, as when the Knights of Pythias claimed Pythagoras as the first member of an order that was founded in 1864.<sup>135</sup> These impossible lineages underpinned the invented traditions of the most popular nineteenth-century fraternities—the

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<sup>134</sup> Regalia was also a common word used to describe Klan dress both during and immediately after the period of major Klan activity, see Beard, *KKK Sketches* (1877) 35.

<sup>135</sup> Mark Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America*, 22; Joseph D. Weeks, *History of the Knights of Pythias* (Pittsburgh, PA: Joseph D. Weeks and Co., 1874).

Masons, the Odd Fellows, the Woodsmen of the World, and the Knights of Pythias—all of which envisioned their most sacred teachings to be passed down through many generations of brothers. Fraternities relied on ceremonial regalia, symbolic imagery, code words, and significant gestures to connect brothers across geographic and temporal divides.<sup>136</sup>

The popular embrace of literary and aesthetic romanticism that gripped Americans in the early to mid-nineteenth century fueled this ahistorical aesthetic. Antebellum readers devoured the novels and poems of Scottish writer Sir Walter Scott, whose poetic representation of medieval Britain in works like *Ivanhoe: A Romance* (1820) emphasized heraldry, chivalry, and dutiful submission to a hierarchical social order.<sup>137</sup> Southern readers particularly found solace in the descriptions of highland battles pitting Scottish knights against tyrannical British kings, despite the fact that the heroic “highlander” was a “retrospective invention” by an author of the romantic period.<sup>138</sup> Combining Scott’s romantic medievalism with fraternal ritual was not a hard jump to make, given that Scott was initiated into the Scottish Rite branch of Freemasonry in Edinburgh in 1801, prior to writing his most famous works.<sup>139</sup> Scott’s medieval romanticism fit well into the nostalgic pastiche that comprised so much of fraternal iconography in the nineteenth century, perhaps because Scott was himself involved with Freemasonry while he was writing these works. The use of costumes representing biblical figures, medieval knights, Orientalized high priests, or even

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<sup>136</sup> On the construction of a ritual aesthetic for American fraternities, see C. Lance Brockman, ed. *Theatre of the Fraternity* (Minneapolis, Minn.; Jackson, Miss., Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, University of Minnesota ; Distributed by University Press of Mississippi, 1996).

<sup>137</sup> “Discussion of Sir. Walter Scott Publications, Including Sales Numbers.” *American Masonic Register and Literary Companion* (Albany, NY) Vol 1 No. 26 (February 29, 1840) 267. New York Public Library.

<sup>138</sup> Cobb, *Away Down South*, 45. For discussion of Scott’s own creation of the Highlander as a heroic figure, see Hugh Trevor-Roper “The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland” in *The Invention of Tradition*, 15.

<sup>139</sup> “Sir Walter Scott Obituary.” *Freemasons’ Quarterly Magazine* vol 2 (March 31, 1846).

devils for fraternal rituals would not be ubiquitous until after the end of major Klan activity in 1872, but many fraternities in the Masonic model did dress members in long robes for degree ceremonies by midcentury.<sup>140</sup> Vaguely resembling the robes worn by novice knights and members of religious orders, these garments helped fraternity members to signal a distinction between the space of everyday life and the ritual space of the fraternal temple.<sup>141</sup>

The Reconstruction era Klan's use of and relationship to the tradition of fraternalism was hazy, and Klan costume departed from mid nineteenth-century fraternal regalia in crucial ways in terms of aesthetics and form. But the coexistence of fraternalism alongside these other sartorial strategies in the mid-late nineteenth century made this an appealing explanation for Klan dress after the decline of the organization.<sup>142</sup> Evidence of attempts to organize the Klan in a fraternal model can be found in some members' use of familiar conventions, including codes for meeting times, and elaborate ceremonial practices. Congressional investigators looking for evidence of the Ku Klux conspiracy likewise asked about hand signals and initiation rituals in an attempt to figure out not only the current practices of Kluxers, but also the degree to which groups like "The Invisible Circle," an organization connected to several Klan attacks in South Carolina, were organized in a

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<sup>140</sup> Harriet Wain McBride, "Fraternal Regalia in America," Ph.D. Diss. Ohio State University, 2000. 217-221.

<sup>141</sup> Moore, William D. *Masonic Temples: Freemasonry, Ritual Architecture, and Masculine Archetypes*. (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 2006) 3-64.

<sup>142</sup> In 1939, Stanley Horn claimed that original Klansmen described the group's initiation ceremony as something drawn from a college fraternity. "The preliminaries consisted of leading a blindfolded candidate around from one officer to another where he was heaped with solemn admonitions and subjected to the rough buffoonery common to such proceedings. The big moment came when the Grand Cyclops in a deep voice gave the order: 'Let his head be adorned with the regal crown, after which place him before the royal altar and remove his hoodwink.' The regal crown was an oversized hat ornamented with two donkey's ears, and the royal altar was a large mirror." While Horn describes this process in detail, he offers no citation for this material. *Invisible Empire*, 14.

coherent way.<sup>143</sup> It is important not to overstate the fraternal character of Reconstruction-era Klans, particularly in comparison to the twentieth-century Klan revival, which drew directly on fraternal practice to structure the organizations and its symbolic language. Still, ritualistic dress clearly influenced some Kluxers, and shaped their use of regalia to symbolically challenge federal authority.

These aesthetic variations in Ku Klux costumes thus, not only reflected the underlying politics, but also indexed the conditions in which these garments were produced and used: currents of aesthetic exchange and the operation of commercial markets. Accounts of Ku Klux costume production during this period are sparse, but nonetheless range from family members crafting garments by hand to a farmer and former tailor finding a bag of materials and instructions on his gate with a note saying that the fee would be left when the garments were complete.<sup>144</sup> One Black seamstress in South Carolina testified that she was part of a team that used a sewing machine to make six or seven matching dominos (cloaks, a common term used to describe a category of Klux garments) worn at “domino parties” at the homes of several local men. While the seamstress remained firm that these garments were used for masquerades—she even made some for ladies—the names of the men throwing the parties appear in other parts of the South Carolina testimony as suspected Kluxers.<sup>145</sup> Some

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<sup>143</sup> John Tomlinson, a South Carolina druggist tried to play coy with investigators, arguing that a pledge attributed to that order sounded familiar, but it also sounded a bit like the masonic pledge, and he had foresworn any discussion of that pledge under oath. After more questioning, he admitted that he had in fact been initiated into a Ku Klux organization in 1868, but “the thing died out, and it was never what it was. I went to Philadelphia immediately after and stayed there and never attended another meeting after I was initiated.” Tomlinson both argued that he had abandoned the order, but also that “the thing died out,” a familiar refrain among Klan apologists. Claiming that the Klan was in fact centrally organized, but that its members put a stop to their involvement when they saw that the organization was getting out of control became a refrain throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Testimony of John W. Tomlinson, vol. 4, South Carolina, 1270.

<sup>144</sup> Testimony of Samuel J. Gholson, Vol 12, Mississippi, 854-55.

<sup>145</sup> Testimony of Christina Page, Vol 4. South Carolina, 1142-1144.

garments may even have been purchased commercial costumes, as suggested by James Gaffney's account of seeing Kluxers with "dough-faces like you see in the stores" in South Carolina, or the captured Klansman photographed wearing a mask that closely resembles a commercially produced fraternal hoodwink.<sup>146</sup> (*Fig 1.11-1.12*) The slippage between costumes for popular entertainment, military dress, and fraternal regalia is emblematic of the popular cultural world that Southern men inhabited just after the Civil War.

The white, pointed helmet, hanging facemask, and long robe adopted by twentieth-century Klansmen distilled this complicated history into a singular, metonymic image. In constructing the idealized uniform Klansman, a "monument" to the nineteenth-century Klan, Simmons selected elements from the existing repertoire of Klan dress in order to use the figure of the idealized Klansman to make a visual claim about the relationship between his new fraternal order and the past. But in order for Simmons to produce his composite figure, he needed to access historical representations of the Reconstruction Klan in the moment when he was developing his idea.

### ***Section 2: Recuperating the Ku Klux in Fiction (1905-1915)***

Between the end of major Klan activity in 1872 and the Klan's revival in 1915, there was a dramatic surge in mob violence, leading this period to be classified by sociologists E. M. Beck and Stewart Tolnay as "the lynching era."<sup>147</sup> The normalization of collective violence during this period, combined with the success of southern "Redeemers" alleviated

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<sup>146</sup> Testimony of James Gaffney, Vol 2 South Carolina, 617.

<sup>147</sup> Their periodization extends from 1882-1930. Stewart Tolnay, and E. M. Beck. *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995).

the need for anti-government violence in dramatic costume.<sup>148</sup> Redeemers recognized that the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments were legal facts, but successfully weakened the measures through a lack of enforcement. By the time William Simmons dressed his new Klansmen in white uniform robes in 1915, costumes were rarely used in racially motivated attacks.<sup>149</sup> During this period, representations of the Reconstruction Klan became a regular fixture of popular culture. Cast variously as villain and tragic figure, depending on the politics of the person making the representation, images of costumed Klansmen appeared in various cultural media, both fiction and nonfiction, with increasing frequency throughout this period. At least forty-seven novels, plays, short stories, poems, and dime novels referenced the Klan between 1877 and 1915, and just under half of these texts included descriptions of Ku Klux costumes. These texts depicted Kluxers in a range of ways that reflected the actual heterogeneity of Kluxer costume during Reconstruction. Fictional Klansmen of the late nineteenth century wore black robes with pointed hoods, white masks with flannel outlines on the face, red devil costumes, or cone-shaped hats decorated in whichever way the wearer chose.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> For a classic account of the Redemption period, in which Reconstruction political structures were dismantled by an unlikely political/social coalition—spanning Southern Democrats and Northern Industrialists, see C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 1-22; Eric Foner traces a granular account of the political mechanics leading to Redemption, including a long account of the “electoral crisis” of 1876-77, which “marked a decisive retreat from the idea born during the Civil War, of a powerful nation state protecting the fundamental rights of American citizens.” *Reconstruction*, 582; 587-601. For a compelling account of the role that Northern class struggle and the formation of a white middle class played in the dissolution of Reconstruction, see Heather Cox Richardson, *The Death of Reconstruction*, 2009.

<sup>149</sup> For accounts of unmasked violence in the period between Klans, see Williams, *They Left Great Marks on Me*, 55-99; Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*.

<sup>150</sup> Joseph E. Badger Jr. "Sweet William, The Trapper Detective; or The Chief of the Crimson Clan." *Beadle's New York Dime Library* Vol XIV No. 170. January 25, 1882; Brinsley Matthews (W. S. Pearson). *Well Nigh Reconstructed: A Political Novel*. New York: E.J. Hale and Son, 1882; William Haworth. *On the Mississippi*, 1894; Thomas Jefferson Jerome. *KKK #40* 1895.



Fictional representations of the Reconstruction Klan operated as political commentary in even popular entertainment. Critics claimed that Ku Klux violence was symptomatic of widespread moral depravity among southern whites, while Lost Cause sympathizers argued that Kluxers were simply responding to difficult political and social circumstances. One 1884 account by a former member stated that: “the Ku Klux Klan was the outgrowth of peculiar conditions, social, civil and political, which prevailed at the South from 1865 to 1869. It was as much a product of those conditions as malaria is of a swamp and sun heat.”<sup>151</sup> The logic of this argument operated as follows: former Confederates were driven to extra-legal violence by the failures of law enforcement and the judicial system under Reconstruction administrators. The destruction of the Confederacy by the Union army likewise destroyed the infrastructure of the South, meaning that Southern men were forced to turn to vernacular cultural practices for tools to challenge the national political body of the newly re-United States of America. This narrative emphasized the necessity of the violence that Klansmen enacted, and that the strange forms of Klansmen’s garments, like Van Hook’s mask, emerged naturally from the frustration of individual Klansmen on a local basis. By suggesting that Klan activity and dress were natural phenomena, like malaria, nineteenth-century supporters of the organization emphasized the haphazard, local, and anti-modern character of Klan activity.

The image of a Klansman that emerged from this representational stew was a historical reference refracted through contemporary pop culture. White-robed Kluxers or groups of uniformed Klansmen sometimes appeared in popular fiction of this era, but the white uniformed Klan did not appear consistently until the proliferation of works by Thomas

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<sup>151</sup> Lester and Wilson, *Ku Klux Klan*, 50.

Dixon Jr. As a multi-media cultural phenomenon, Dixon's work offered a new "mythology" of the South.<sup>152</sup> Though his work borrowed liberally from existing representations, sometimes bordering on plagiarism, the imagery that he developed in these texts became shorthand for transmitting the racial politics Dixon espoused.<sup>153</sup> His trilogy of Klan novels, along with their theatrical and cinematic adaptations, and the media frenzy surrounding these works, transformed how Americans saw the Reconstruction Klan.

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In his first two Klan novels, *The Leopard's Spots* and *The Clansman*, Dixon used the Ku Klux Klan to challenge the dramatic social changes that political Reconstruction brought to the Piedmont region of South Carolina. In *The Leopard's Spots*, Dixon describes the Klan as "a spontaneous and resistless racial uprising of clansmen of highland origin living along the Appalachian mountains and foothills of the South, [which] appeared almost simultaneously in every Southern state produced by the same terrible conditions."<sup>154</sup> In this novel, the Klan is a temporary measure, whose actions consist of driving Republicans from the state and avenging the assault of a young white woman; following these events, the order is disbanded by its leader, the fictional Major Stuart Dameron.<sup>155</sup>

When the titular heroes of the book arrive in Dixon's next novel, *The Clansman*, they appear in the form of the romantic hero, Ben Cameron, who has assumed the position of

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<sup>152</sup> Davenport, F. Garvin. "Thomas Dixon's Mythology of Southern History." *The Journal of Southern History* 36, no. 3 (1970): 350-67.

<sup>153</sup> Dixon lifted entire sections of Walt Whitman's *Specimen Days and Collect* (1882-83) for use in *The Clansman*. See, Slide, *American Racist*, 6.

<sup>154</sup> Dixon, *The Leopard's Spots*, 150.

<sup>155</sup> This follows Lester and Wilson's formulation that the 19th century Klan was succeeded by less noble men who wanted to use the organization's methods for personal gain. In *The Leopard's Spots*, Dameron is succeeded by Allen McLeod, a scalawag whose re-organized Klan is called "fool later day Ku Klux Marauders" in Dixon's text (171).

Grand Dragon of the order. Cameron joins the Klan in order to protect his family and town from the familiar mixture of “carpet-bagging” politicians and freedmen whose political and social aspirations lead them to a violent sexual assault at the climax of the book. In both novels, these uniformed Klansmen provide a dramatic catalyst for social transformation, but appear only briefly in the action of the text.<sup>156</sup> Both books use the Klan’s brief appearance to demonstrate the operation of a moral code that exists beyond the structures of the characters’ everyday lives. The brevity of the Klan’s tenure in these texts also reproduces one of the most frequently repeated claims that subscribers to the Lost Cause myth used to justify the existence of the Reconstruction-era Klan. In the mind of Dixon and other devotees of the lost cause, the Klan was a short-lived, but necessary response to the specific historical conditions of this period.

Writing over three decades after the end of Reconstruction, Dixon argued that the most chilling effect of the political transformations of Reconstruction hinged less on Southern autonomy than the violation of clear divisions between racial groups. In *The Leopard’s Spots*, the Klan appears to commit violent retribution against a black education commissioner who makes a sexual advance towards a young white woman. Mollie Graham is looking for work in order to care for her blind mother and young siblings following the death of her Confederate father in the war. After speaking favorably of racial equality, and proclaiming that “the supreme law of the land has broken down every barrier of race and we are henceforth to be one people,” Tim Shelby tries to kiss Mollie and she runs away in

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<sup>156</sup> Klansmen appear in *The Leopard’s Spots* 150 pages into the action and disappear again twenty pages later. Robed Klansmen played an even smaller role in *The Clansman*, as they are present on only four of that book’s 465 pages.

tears.<sup>157</sup> His advocacy for racial equality is thus revealed as a disguise for his more lascivious goal: miscegenation. Following this attack, “two hundred white-robed silent men” surround the home where Shelby is sleeping. The next day his body is found hanging from the courthouse balcony. While Dixon spares the reader the details of the assault, his description of its aftermath is still brutal. “His thick lips had been split with a sharp knife and from his teeth hung this placard: “The answer of the Anglo-Saxon race to Negro lips that dare pollute with words the womanhood of the South. K. K. K.”<sup>158</sup> This scene of violence and racial “pollution” is in stark contrast to the disciplined nobility that Dixon attributed to the perpetrators of this attack, whose “closefitting hood disguises looked like the mail helmets of ancient knights.”<sup>159</sup> Dixon’s redemption of the organization not only stems from his justification of the reasons behind the murder of Tim Shelby, who not only disrupts the bodily autonomy of a white woman, but also does so after explicitly endorsing racial parity. The villains of *The Clansman*, Austin Stoneman, the “Radical leader of Congress,” and Gus, a Black soldier, are similarly preoccupied with and damaged by their pursuit of sex across racial divisions. In the last pages of the novel, Stoneman admits that his attempts at political over-reach were due to his own greed, ambition, and the influence of the mulatto woman with whom he was romantically involved. Gus’s offense is the sexual assault of Marion Lenoire and her mother, an event that resulted in their double suicide in order to escape the shame of these circumstances.<sup>160</sup> In no uncertain terms, Dixon argued that miscegenation led to violence, and that the emergence of the Klan was necessary to correct the injustice.

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<sup>157</sup> Dixon, *The Leopard’s Spots*, 150.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 149.

<sup>160</sup> Dixon, *The Clansman*, 305-308.

Dixon uses descriptions of his characters' dressed bodies to support didactic political speeches that appear through each novel. Just before Marion Lenoire leaps to her death in *The Clansman*, she removes the clothes torn in her assault, and puts on a "dress of spotless white."<sup>161</sup> Prior to assaulting Marion, the formerly enslaved Gus appears in a Union officer's dress uniform that "accentuated his coarse bestiality."<sup>162</sup> The heroes are beautiful, "athletic," "bronzed," and clear-eyed, whereas the villains, both Black and white, have "thick lips" and "dirty hands" or "lame" figures with "massive jaws."<sup>163</sup> Tellingly, Dixon turned to the kinds of animalistic adjectives frequently used to describe Black characters in this period in order to portray "carpet-bagging" white Northerners, a phenomenon Dixon called "the most cruel and awful vengeance in human history."<sup>164</sup> His choice to dress Klansmen in white uniform robes makes sense in order to provide obvious contrast between these uniformed knights and the excessive bodies of the "black apes" and physically disabled politicians whose greed and ambition translated into violence against the bodies of white women.<sup>165</sup>

### **White Uniformed Clansmen**

These ideological characterizations laid the groundwork for Dixon's most enduring legacy, the invention of the white uniformed Klansman. This figure signified a radically

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid, 305.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 294.

<sup>163</sup> Dixon, "thick lips" and "dirty hands" describes two black soldiers. Both Gus and Austin Stoneman, the "lame," elderly white Republican official, are described as having massive jaws. "The old Commoner paused, pursed his lips, and fumbled his hands a moment, the nostrils of his eagle-beaked nose breathing rapacity, sensuality throbbing in his massive jaws, and despotism frowning from his heavy brows," *Ibid*, 61, 99, 314, 355.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>165</sup> Captain of Guard in *The Clansman*, 327. Those who critiqued Dixon's work on moral grounds argued that these representations inflamed racial sentiments and would have dangerous implications.

different set of social and political priorities than the sartorially disruptive Klansmen of the Reconstruction era, though Dixon was also emphatic that his portrait of the Reconstruction Klan was based on verifiable fact. In press interviews and private correspondence, Dixon touted the primary source research that underpinned his work, as well as his own personal authority to tell the story—thanks to his own father’s participation in the Klan.<sup>166</sup> A “historical note” that prefaced *The Leopard’s Spots*, went so far as to claim that: “the only serious liberty I have taken with history is to tone down the facts to make them credible in fiction.”<sup>167</sup>

There is little evidence that Dixon’s dramatic prose took any steps to edit out any of the details that he felt gave his story veracity, as is evident in the most extensive description of Klan dress, found near the end of *The Clansman* as a group of Ku Klux gathered to prepare for a raid.

The men, who gathered in the woods, dismounted, removed their saddles, and from the folds of the blankets took a white disguise for horse and man. In a moment it was fitted on each horse, with buckles at the throat, breast, and tail, and the saddles replaced. The white robe for the man was made in the form of an ulster overcoat with cape, the skirt extending to the top of the shoes. From the red belt at the waist were swung two revolvers, which had been concealed in their pockets. On each man's breast was a scarlet circle within which shone a white cross. The same scarlet circle and cross appeared on the horse's breast, while on his flanks flamed the three red mystic letters, K. K. K. Each man wore a white cap, from the edges of which fell a piece of cloth extending to the shoulders. Beneath the visor was an opening for the eyes and lower down one for the mouth. On the front of the caps of two of the men appeared the red wings of a hawk as the ensign of rank. From the top of each cap rose eighteen inches high a single spike held erect by a twisted wire. The disguises for man and horse were made of cheap unbleached domestic and weighed less than

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<sup>166</sup> *Billboard*. Vol 16, Issue 3 (January 16, 1904); In a 1904 letter to his publisher, Dixon said he was consulting the North Carolina Volume of the 1870 Ku Klux Klan Inquiry transcripts as research for *The Clansman*, Thomas Dixon, Letter to Walter Hines Page. “Report on Progress of Clansman Novel,” February 7, 1904. Thomas Dixon Papers Folder 1. Emory University Manuscript and Rare Book Library; “Knowledge of the Ku Klux” *Atlanta Constitution* (Oct. 24, 1905); “Thomas Dixon and His Work.” *Omaha Daily Bee* (January 29, 1905); *Laurens Advertiser* November 5, 1913; See also, Slide, *American Racist*, 74.

<sup>167</sup> Dixon, *The Leopard’s Spots*, “Historical note,” preface.

three pounds. They were easily folded within a blanket and kept under the saddle in a crowd without discovery. It required less than two minutes to remove the saddles, place the disguises, and remount.

At the signal of a whistle, the men and horses arrayed in white and scarlet swung into double-file cavalry formation and stood awaiting orders. The moon was now shining brightly, and its light shimmering on the silent horses and men with their tall spiked caps made a picture such as the world had not seen since the Knights of the Middle Ages rode on their Holy Crusades.<sup>168</sup>

There were multiple visual vocabularies in play with the Klan uniform that Dixon described here. First, the overall appearance is enough to make this a credible representation of the Reconstruction Klan. Several sartorial components—the robe, the mask, strange headgear, the dramatic use of color, were familiar from garments worn by some nineteenth-century Klansmen. The self-consciously ghostly effect also speaks to the popularity of the explanation that Klan costume was simply a joke played on less-intelligent freedmen, which was regularly used by scholars, journalists, and members of the public alike as a justification for the Klan's bizarre appearance. Dixon also uses material details like the “cheap unbleached domestic” fabric used to produce the lightweight disguises to give his picture of the Klan more credibility.

The second current is the temporary nature of this costume; both reader and Klansman alike are regularly reminded that these garments are tools that Klansmen must use to perform their social duty. Rather than using the gap between the real and performed identity of his Klan characters to poke fun at the Klan's victims, Dixon uses this device to garner sympathy for the men who were “forced” into this task by the corruption and violence of Republican officials and some easily misled freedmen. Social inversion is still at play, as Klansmen are forced to don elaborate garments to perform a social role beyond the bounds

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<sup>168</sup> Dixon, *The Clansman*, 315-16.

of their daily lives, but the violence is dutiful, not playful. In fact, all of the social inversions in *The Clansman* have deadly consequences, as when Gus appears in a Union military uniform. The strange form of the costumes that Klansmen had to adopt, thus demonstrated how dramatically Reconstruction damaged the South.

This also relates to the third quality, which is Dixon's amplification of the uniformity of his Klansmen through the incorporation of military imagery. Here Dixon made a visual argument, through textual description, that the reader subsequently imagines. If the familiar imagery of the woolen soldier's uniform was negated by Gus's use of these clothes, then Klansmen needed to turn to historical images to find a better model for their garments. This was more or less historically accurate, but rather than demonstrating Klansmen who then turned to appropriation and mockery of those they sought to subjugate, Dixon reached much farther back in history to incorporate imagery of crusading Christian Knights.

### ***Section 3: Fraternal Associations (1866-1915)***

Representing the chaotic and disruptive Klan as a noble fraternal order was a dog-whistle that many early twentieth-century Americans were likely to understand. The Klan first emerged in a moment of transformation for America's secret societies, which experienced a tremendous boom following the end of the Civil War. The popular interest in fraternities just as Ku Klux vigilantes terrorized the South was in part driven by some of the same social transformations that drove the proliferation of Klans. Veterans associations like the Grand Army of the Republic were resources for soldiers returning to civilian life. More importantly, groups like the Grand Army of the Republic, the Masons, the Woodsmen of the World, and the number of ethnocentric, regional, and occupational brother- and sisterhoods that proliferated after the war offered not only fellowship and membership in an effective



political bloc, but material comforts like insurance.<sup>169</sup> In turn, fraternities embraced increasingly elaborate, theatrical rituals to distinguish their order, many of which were incorporated into the creation of an ever-expanding catalog of “degrees” that fraternal men could earn through service, and often a certain title to their order.<sup>170</sup> Theatrical rituals were prescribed and even trademarked, in order to make it possible for members across the country to have shared experiences that substantiated a national brotherhood.

Similar market logic underpinned a third reason for the American embrace of secret societies during and after Reconstruction: the garment factories that had expanded to produce military uniforms were now without a market for their product. As a result, they turned to producing regalia, props, and decorative features for the more lavish ceremonies that the degree system necessitated.<sup>171</sup> By the end of the century, regalia manufacturers like the W. E. Floding Company of Atlanta, Georgia; the DeMoulin Bros. and Co. of Greenville, Illinois; the M.C. Lilley company of Columbus, Ohio; and the W. H. Johnson Company of Atlanta, GA made what Johnson called “Regalias and Paraphernalia: for all lodges and societies.”<sup>172</sup> Many of these companies also published lavish catalogs, peddling ceremonial regalia, as well

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<sup>169</sup> Gannon, Barbara A. *The Won Cause: Black and White Comradeship in the Grand Army of the Republic*. (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2011); Harland-Jacobs, Jessica. *Builders of Empire: Freemasons and British Imperialism, 1717-1927*. (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 2007); Hannah, Eleanor L. *Manhood, Citizenship, and the National Guard: Illinois, 1870-1917*. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007). McConnell, Stuart. *Glorious Contentment: The Grand Army of the Republic, 1865-1900*. (Chapel Hill, UNC Press, 2000); Kaufman, Jason Andrew. *For the Common Good?: American Civic Life and the Golden Age of Fraternity*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Clawson, Mary Ann. *Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender, and Fraternalism*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989).

<sup>170</sup> McBride, “Fraternal Regalia in America,” 212.

<sup>171</sup> McBride, “Fraternal Regalia in America,” 293-333.

<sup>172</sup> “W.H. Johnson Company” Advertisement,” *Atlanta City Directory*, 1913.

as costumes and ephemera for secret rituals to fraternities nationwide.<sup>173</sup> As a result, members of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century fraternities overwhelmingly utilized mass-produced garments to demonstrate their participation in a disciplined, standardized order.

Dixon's books appeared at the height of associational mania around the turn of the century, as the performance of these new rituals with new elaborate costumes worked to consolidate existing political and social capital for modern men using the common language of fraternal symbolism. In what he claimed was an earnest attempt to portray a "historical Klan," Dixon used the strange costumes of degree rituals, not the more common ceremonial garb of fraternal practice. The shape and decorative trimmings of the uniform regalia that Dixon chose to represent a uniform Klan was textbook nostalgia, a longing for a land that never existed in the first place. In Dixon's shining South, the horses wore pristine robes whose insignia perfectly matched that of their rider.<sup>174</sup> (**Fig. 1.13**) The radiant white of the Klansmen's voluminous robes mirrored their tragic nobility, while the deadly "rough play" that characterized so much of Reconstruction Klan activity was erased altogether. The cultural mixing that characterized so much of the first Klan's dress was evident here too, but from a strictly Saxon angle. Dixon combined medieval robes with spiked helmets that more closely resemble the pickelhaube, a spiked helmet popularized by mid-nineteenth-century

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<sup>173</sup> The most extensive collection of these catalogs—from Masonic and non-masonic orders is held at the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum and Library in Lexington, MA. DeMoulin Brothers Catalog, DeMoulin Museum; The M.C. Lilley & Co., *List No. 35 Descriptive Catalogue of Masonic Supplies for Lodges* (Columbus, Ohio 1879). Another large group of catalogs is held at The Southern Tailors Flag and Banner Company in Atlanta.

<sup>174</sup> While there is some evidence of Klan horses in costume during Reconstruction, these garments were rudimentary and more utilitarian in appearance.

officers of the Prussian military.<sup>175</sup> These helmets further emphasized a uniform character and therefore coherence and strictness of purpose, as opposed to the flowing robes and capes, which highlighted the romantic drama of Dixon's prose.

These uniforms de-emphasized the individual, causing members' bodies to become symbols of ideology; they result in the "impersonal objectification of the group." The Klan that these uniformed figures stood for was powerful and proud, but violent only out of necessity; in short a total transformation of the inhuman horns and jeering blackface worn by Lucy McMillan's attackers in Spartanburg. The cultural citation that Dixon was making through this accumulation of aesthetic references was so familiar to readers that he didn't need to insert the carnivalesque "rough play" of Klan violence. The scores of Americans who had spent time in fraternities could add that element for him.

### **Dixon's Fraternal Memories**

Buried in Thomas Dixon Jr.'s overstuffed resume—North Carolina State Representative, Baptist Minister, Chautauqua Circuit Lecturer, Novelist—was his title of proud fraternal man. In 1881, Dixon was one of five charter members of the Tau chapter of the Kappa Alpha fraternity at Wake Forest University, despite the school's clear prohibition against the formation of secret societies on campus.<sup>176</sup> Dixon's time in Kappa Alpha, and his continued relationship with the organization following his graduation from Wake Forest provides context for his choice to represent the chaotic Reconstruction-era Ku Klux Klan as a noble fraternal order. This decision reflected his own experiences in the fraternity, and

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<sup>175</sup> KKK Hearings, Alabama, 120; John Mollo, *Military Fashion* (New York: Putnam, 1972), 86, 133.

<sup>176</sup> "The Review of a Decade," *Kappa Alpha Journal* (vol 10, No. 1, October 1892): 8.

increasing attention to the “ritual” aspects of Klan practice—a phenomenon that Dixon’s work strongly encouraged.

Dixon’s own Kappa Alpha was a “semi-military” order of “Christian Knights” that “aimed for the cultivation of virtues and graces conceived to be distinctly Southern.”<sup>177</sup> As an organization founded in the South that was “caucasian in its sympathies,” as one member described it in 1891, Kappa Alpha’s brothers were explicitly concerned with the maintenance of racial hierarchies under the guise of patriotic Christianity.<sup>178</sup> Like other university fraternities at this time, Kappa Alpha experienced rapid expansion and a centralization of its governing structure during the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>179</sup> The group formed Alumni chapters, held annual conventions, and circulated various iterations of a quarterly magazine in order to help organize its members around a central cause. Members hoped to create lasting interpersonal bonds, but also to uphold a social structure based on a particular moral code. According to an 1891 history of the order, Dixon’s Wake Forest “chapter was in constant danger of discovery and suppression” by faculty. Members faced these conditions with strict secrecy, requiring “meetings held irregularly and at unpropitious hours in byways and secret places.”<sup>180</sup> The historian of this chapter made clear that this need for discretion—not only from faculty but also from fellow students suspicious of the order—was in some way beneficial to the members. “They say there is a certain charm about the sub-rosa existence and that they are

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<sup>177</sup> Originally founded at Washington and Lee University in Virginia, the organization coalesced around the refinement of its ritual in 1867. *History and Catalogue of the Kappa Alpha Fraternity*, (Nashville, TN: Kappa Alpha Order, 1891), 1891.

<sup>178</sup> *History and Catalogue of the Kappa Alpha Fraternity*, xxiv.

<sup>179</sup> *Baird’s Manual of American College Fraternities*, 17.

<sup>180</sup> *History and Catalogue of the Kappa Alpha Fraternity*, 229.

more firmly united than when they are known to the world.”<sup>181</sup> Dixon graduated with highest honors in 1883, just a year before the chapter he founded “succumbed to faculty hostility,” at which point the members were called to forsake their membership to the organization or leave the school.<sup>182</sup> A select group of men, including Dixon’s younger brother Frank, chose the latter, and founded a chapter of the fraternity at the University of North Carolina during the next school year. This fraternal experience, complete with repressive administrators, influenced Dixon’s portrayal of beleaguered Klansmen who needed to hide their actions and identities from authority figures.

Dixon also used the symbolic imagery of Kappa Alpha as a basis for the iconography of his novels. Members of Kappa Alpha referred to one another as Knights of the Crimson Cross, with the crimson cross as the organization’s key symbol.<sup>183</sup> Issues of the Kappa Alpha Journal from 1885 include an advertisement for fraternity pins featuring this symbol, and several updates on the careers of both Dixon and his younger brother Frank.<sup>184</sup> (**Fig. 1.14**) Dixon even went so far as to send the journal press clippings to reprint, each of which featured a reporter describing Dixon’s strengths in oration and character to great length.<sup>185</sup> As time passed, there is no sign that Dixon’s feeling of connection towards his fraternity lessened; in fact, he visually linked Kappa Alpha and the Klan by drawing a version of the fraternity’s crest to be printed as the frontispiece of *The Leopard’s Spots*.<sup>186</sup> (**Fig. 1.15**)

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> “The Fraternity World.” *The Kappa Alpha Journal* 3, no. 8 (June 1886): 39, 48.

<sup>183</sup> *The Kappa Alpha Journal* 3, no. 2 (November 1885): 17.

<sup>184</sup> *The Kappa Alpha Journal* 2, no. 2 (April 1885): 61.

<sup>185</sup> *The Kappa Alpha Journal* 3, no. 3 (December 1885): 36.

<sup>186</sup> Dixon, Thomas, and H Cathcart. “Original Sketch of Title Page, Dedication, and Kappa Alpha Crest for Leopard’s Spots,” October 29, 1901. Thomas Dixon Papers Box 1 Folder 1. Emory University MARBL.

Viewing these signs together, links between the Kappa Alpha insignia and Dixon's representation of the Klan become much clearer. As designed in 1866, the original badge worn by Kappa Alpha members took the form of a gold shield featuring a black enamel circle with a small Latin cross at its center.<sup>187</sup> In 1885, the fraternity's convention chose crimson red as one of the fraternity's colors, in order to demonstrate respect for "the blood...spent by our forefathers in defense of our country."<sup>188</sup> In 1893, that same body adopted a flag that featured the shield and cross at its center, but rather than gold and black, they chose a red cross placed on a white shield. There is strong evidence that Dixon kept up with the changing insignia for his organization. His illustration for *The Leopard's Spots* included a series of dots around the edge of the insignia—elements not incorporated until the adoption of Kappa Alpha's official coat of arms in 1897.<sup>189</sup>

By appropriating symbolic imagery from his own fraternity, Dixon reinforced a common mistake that linked Pi Kappa Alpha, the fraternity formed in Virginia 1865, with the Reconstruction era Klan, through Kuklos Adelphon, or "old Kappa Alpha," a college fraternity formed in North Carolina in 1812.<sup>190</sup> References to Kuklos Adelphon as a model for the Ku Klux Klan started with the first history of the order in 1884, when John Lester recounted the Klan's 1866 formation in Pulaski, Tennessee. In Lester's account, the nascent Klan happened across their name in a "trivial and apparently accidental incident."<sup>191</sup> The

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<sup>187</sup> This badge was designed by Kappa Alpha's founder in 1866. For more on Kappa Alpha insignia see the Jesse S. Lyons and Brent W. Fellows Eds. *Varlet of the Kappa Alpha Order* 13<sup>th</sup> Edition (Lexington, VA: Kappa Alpha Order National Administrative Office, 2015) 23-4.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>190</sup> Lyons and Fellows eds, *Varlet of the Kappa Alpha Order*, 18.

<sup>191</sup> Lester and Wilson, *The Ku Klux Klan*, 55.

committee appointed to select a name suggested the term “kukloi,” from the Greek work *Kuklos*, “meaning band or circle.” In a subsequent discussion, another member suggested “Ku Klux”—a term that Lester described as “absolutely meaningless.” Despite this account of happenstance, Lester’s narrative was the earliest firsthand record of the Klan’s formation, and thus became the basis of subsequent accounts of the Klan. As one Kappa Alpha member complained in 1886, the linguistic ties between the organizations made it easy to confuse the contemporary KA with the pre-war Kuklos Adelphon, and even worse, to suggest that their order had anything to do with the Klan.<sup>192</sup>

Reinforcement for claims of the Klan’s fraternal origins occurred at the turn of the century, just as Dixon started to write *The Leopard’s Spots*. Between 1901 and 1903, newspapers reported the “discovery” of a copy of “Revised and Amended Prescript” of the Reconstruction-era Klan in the Columbia University Library. Articles detailing the discovery, offering a short history of the organization, and reprinting much of the prescript were syndicated in newspapers nationwide, from the Richmond Climax (VA) to the Brownsville Daily Herald (TX).<sup>193</sup> This discovery made some impact on Dixon, since he mentioned the prescript and told detailed stories about its production, and current location to reporters during interviews to publicize his Klan novels.<sup>194</sup> Meanwhile, audiences attending

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<sup>192</sup> S. Z. A. “Kuklos Adelphon.” *The Kappa Alpha Journal* 3, no. 8 (June 1886): 17.

<sup>193</sup> “Ritual of the Ku Klux Found at Columbia,” *Saint Paul Globe* (St. Paul MN) Oct. 11, 1903; “About the Kukluk” *Richmond Climax* (Richmond VA) March 27, 1901; “Ritual of the Ku Klux Klan,” *Times* (Washington DC) March 12, 1901; “Kuklux Secrets: Revealed in a Pamphlet Containing the Ritual of the Klan” *Brownsville (TX) Daily Herald*, March 20, 1901; “Discovery of Ku Klux Klan ritual reveals historical facts that have long been secret” *St Louis Republic*, Dec. 27, 1903.

<sup>194</sup> Chronicle and Comment: Thomas Dixon, " *Bookman*, (Feb. 1905), 499-500.

performances of Dixon's theatrical adaptation of *The Clansman* were even treated to a copy of the prescript in their souvenir programs printed in the fall of that same year.<sup>195</sup>

The glut of reports about the prescript, including detailed accounts of its provenance, revealed popular interest in the structure and operations of the Reconstruction Klan. While the booklet does not mention the Klan by name, choosing instead to refer to "The order of the \*\*\*,", the hierarchical structure and rituals detailed in the booklet match other accounts by former members of the group, as well as nineteenth-century documentation of Klan activities. Historian Walter Lynwood Fleming included a copy of the prescript in his 1905 critical edition of Lester and Wilson's text, and reinforced the relationship between Ku Klux and Kuklos in his marginal comments. While subsequent historians made the direct connection between Kuklos Adelphon and the Klan, Fleming instead suggested that the Klan's rituals were closely based on those of a well-known college fraternity, Alpha Sigma Sigma."<sup>196</sup> A year later, Fleming repeated the same statement more coyly in his annotation of Lester and Wilson's text.<sup>197</sup> "In the Southern Colleges of today, the peculiar Greek letter fraternity known as Alpha Sigma Sigma, and the institution of "snipe hunting" most nearly resemble the Klan in its early stages," he explained. But despite Fleming's repetition of this same story in multiple sources, Alpha Sigma Sigma is a dead end. Neither the exhaustive *Cyclopaedia of Fraternities* (1899 and 1907 editions) nor the more collegiate Baird's *Manual of College Fraternities* (1879 and 1912) includes Alpha Sigma Sigma in their lists of current

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<sup>195</sup> "The Clansman Theatrical Program," (1905) Ku Klux Klan Collection, Emory University Manuscript and Rare Book Library.

<sup>196</sup> Walter L. Fleming, "Ku Klux Klan" *Documents Relating to Reconstruction*, Walter L. Fleming ed. (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University, 1904) 3.

<sup>197</sup> Walter L. Fleming, in John C. Lester and Daniel Love Wilson, *The Ku Klux Klan*. orig publication, 1885 (New York and Washington: Neale Publishing Co., 1905) 61, note 1.



or defunct fraternities.<sup>198</sup> The reference to snipe hunting, a popular practical joke that resulted in a fool's errand, suggests that Fleming's misattribution may actually have been an intentional misdirection from a historian with clear sympathies for the lost cause.<sup>199</sup>

Contemporary historians have largely agreed that the term "Ku Klux" emerged from an association with Kuklos Adelpthon, though the actual relationship between the orders remains murky.<sup>200</sup> Before Kuklos Adelpthon was entirely disbanded in 1866, there were at least fourteen chapters across the South, including one at Union University in Murfreesborough, TN, which operated until 1861, only 80 miles from Pulaski where the Klan was first founded. Outside of the state, but even closer to Pulaski, Centre College in Danville, KY; and Howard College in Marion, AL boasted Kuklos Adelpthon chapters. Members of the first Klan studied at these very institutions just prior to the disbandment of the southern secret society at the start of the war.<sup>201</sup> Even without these potentially direct ties, the men who founded the first Ku Klux Klan were college educated in the South, and the likelihood that they had some familiarity with the social rituals of college fraternities is high.

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<sup>198</sup> Stevens, Albert Clark. *Cyclopaedia of Fraternities*, 416–18. New York, NY: Hamilton Printing and Publishing, 1899; 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, (New York: E. B. Treat and Co, 1907) *Baird's Manual of American College Fraternities*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & co., 1879); 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Alcolm Company, 1905).

<sup>199</sup> While this sense of a snipe hunt predates Fleming's usage, Detroit resident Ernest Marshall (b.1908) gave a particularly cogent description of the most common kind of "snipe hunt" in 1937. "You take the boys out in the woods, and we'd tell them about this snipe. It's a wild animal out there. You go out, and two boys have to hold the bag and a flashlight. The snipe would appear and go into the bag. What you would do is leave them out there. You'd take them way out into the woods, and you'd leave them. We always had a snipe hunt with every group. We'd make sure nothing happened to them, but they would think they were lost." Elaine Latzman Moon, *Untold Tales, Unsung Heroes: An Oral History of Detroit's African American Community, 1918-1967*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994) 147.

<sup>200</sup> Alan Trelease, *White Terror* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 4. Trelease's claim that Kuklos Adelpthon "Almost certainly provided the model for the early Klan" has been cited without the equivocation in many subsequent texts.

<sup>201</sup> According to linguist William Mockler, John B. Kennedy was a student at Centre College, and James R. Crowe was studying law in Marion, AL in 1860-61 while Kuklos societies were active in each of these spaces. Both Mockler and Parsons track biographical details of early-twentieth century Klansmen in primary sources and verify the proximity of the Klan's founders and college fraternities. See: Mockler, "The Source of Ku Klux," *Names* 3, no. 1 (March 1, 1955): 16; Parsons, *Ku Klux*, 30-31.

Detailing the fraternal character of Reconstruction Klan activity can be dangerous, if we let the “playful tricks” that Lester and Wilson recounted take precedence over the regime of violent terror that Klansmen initiated. Lester and Wilson themselves argued for such a position, claiming a periodization of Klan activity that distinguishes the early fraternity who dressed in elaborate costumes for “play,” from the hordes who borrowed the Klan’s use of costume to commit violent acts. As Elaine Parsons and others have argued, this was a powerful strategy for using elaborate costume to excuse Klan violence. Dixon’s strategy introduced a different kind of justification, rather than focusing on carnivalesque play, he created noble uniforms that highlighted the solemn and ritualistic components of Klan activity. Dixon subsequently argued that some individuals used the Klan’s methods for criminal means, as when a group of so-called Klansmen attacks one of the book’s heroes in his novel *The Traitor*. These “bad” Klansmen are distinguished from the authentic Klan by their red robes—a stark contrast to the uniform white garments worn by the noble Klansmen in Dixon’s work. This distinction is made possible by the coherence of Dixon’s sartorial vision of white uniformed Klansmen.

While fraternal practice helped Dixon to whitewash and justify Klan violence, analysis of gilded-age fraternal imagery demonstrates that fraternal affiliations may demonstrate a continuity, rather than distinctions between these interpretations. Accounts of nineteenth-century fraternities suggest that the distinction between fun and violence was often a blurry one. The racial and gender ideologies that these organizations promoted was supported by the communal performance of simulated, and sometimes actual violence. Dixon’s involvement in a fraternity that supported the maintenance of racial hierarchy in the South through militant Christianity shaped the appearance and actions of his fictionalized

Klan and laid important groundwork for the Klan's revival as a modernized fraternal order in 1915.

### **Fraternal Violence**

Dixon's choice to draw on fraternal imagery for his image of the Klan winkingly reasserted the violence of nineteenth-century Klan practice while still claiming noble identity for his Christian Knights. Many turn-of-the-century secret societies involved simulated or actual violence in their initiation practices. By 1874, fraternal supply company E.A. Armstrong of Detroit sold "realistic" papier-mâché skulls for Odd Fellows rituals.<sup>202</sup> When the Klan was revived in 1915, fraternal supply companies like DeMoulin Brothers sold a "perfectly safe and harmless" "guillotine" which could scare a blindfolded initiate until the end of a ceremony with the help of a drop cloth "spattered with blood" and a papier-mâché "decapitated head."<sup>203</sup> Such tricks were common, and lodge supply companies made a brisk living with a range of particularly menacing practical jokes: exploding pie tables, collapsing benches, and vision-obscuring goggles known as "hoodwinks." While these tricks did not have the lasting horror of the lynch mobs gathering across the nation during this period, they reinforced the power structure of fraternal societies, and by extension the nation at large, all while winking at the history of real violence against racialized others, both past and present. The play violence of bonding rituals thus incorporated imagery, actions, and even its rationale from both historical and contemporary mob violence.

This quality was magnified for the fraternities on college campuses, where these groups first emerged to provide young men a way to resist faculty control of their social and

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<sup>202</sup> E. A. Anderson, *International Order of Odd Fellows Catalog* (1874), Scottish Rite Museum, Lexington, MA.

<sup>203</sup> DeMoulin Brothers *Catalog* (1915), Scottish Rite Museum

academic lives, but quickly became sites for the consolidation of social capital.<sup>204</sup> Explicitly violent imagery became a way for fraternities later in the century to amplify their secrecy, and by extension their exclusivity, which was often determined along lines of race and class. Since campus fraternities comprised men who were otherwise embedded within the daily life of a college, fraternities needed ways to abstract the mystery of their order from its members. In fact, it behooved fraternal orders to represent themselves as a mysterious collective in opposition to or positioned above the student body at large, no matter what internal disputes may have occurred between individual chapters. This attempt to assert a collective identity is evident in many college yearbooks for the decades surrounding the turn of the century. In particular, many yearbooks employed a convention of setting off each new category of entries—classes, clubs, musical societies, fraternities, etc.—with a frontispiece announcing what would come next. Often these pages illustrated some key theme of the section, occasionally naming the fraternities contained within. An examination of several of these yearbook pages can help us to understand how turn of the century college fraternities represented themselves as both upstanding members of the university and dangerous threats to non-members, all at the same time. (*Fig. 1.18*)

It is hard for contemporary viewers not to notice how remarkably Klan-like these figures look, as our eyes are accustomed to seeing Klan regalia of the twentieth century. The garments shown here are within the repertoire of nineteenth-century Klan costume, but the image was produced in 1900, almost thirty years after the end of major Klan activity. This is not to suggest that occasional attempts to organize Klans did not occur during this period, but the Klan was much more of a sensational abstraction than a lived reality. And yet, in this image, a group of robed and masked figures cluster in a macabre scene around a cheerful

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<sup>204</sup> Nicholas Syrett, *The Company He Keeps*, (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2009), 13-17.

skeleton posed on a rock decorated with another skull and crossbones. The presumed initiate faces the bones with a knife pointed at his head; the robed figure with a large snake wielded by another fraternal brother so that the reptile's flicking tongue is directed towards the rock as well. This and other related illustrations capitalized on the shocking or scary reputations of secret societies and featured such symbolic imagery as snakes, skulls, and terrified initiates. Lithographs from yearbooks in the 1890s show hooded figures carrying knives, snakes, and torches. They often surround initiates who are blindfolded, bound, chained, or placed in dire circumstances. As in other representations of fraternal ritual from this period, these images worked hard to convey a sinister tone through the repetition of motifs, like skeletons and disembodied skulls, which suggested the organizations' proximity and mastery over the mysteries of death.

The dramatic robes, masks, oddly-shaped headgear, and garments that altered the size or shape of turn-of-the-century fraternity members for initiation rituals also enabled members of these men to temporarily adopt otherworldly and sometimes frightening personas. Positioned next to a list of the fraternities shown on the following pages, this image contains significant contradictions. The smiling skeleton welcomes viewers with open arms, even as the fraternity's initiate faces the blade of a knife. The costumes referenced historical violence in service of sectional divisions, but this image was in the yearbook of Pennsylvania College, in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. (**Fig 1.16**) While Gettysburg was the site of a particularly deadly battle, it could hardly be understood as a stronghold of secessionist feeling, much less at the site of a school affiliated with the Quaker faith.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Pennsylvania College, *Yearbook 1900*, Gettysburg College Library Special Collections.

The appearance of this image is less surprising when we recognize that other fraternities were using the image and name of the Klan during this period, likely to capitalize on the mysterious terror that the remembered organization invoked after the end of major Klan activity. Images featuring familiar tropes were placed in yearbooks at schools like Lehigh (Bethlehem, PA), MIT (Cambridge, MA), and the University of Rochester (NY), all in the decades bookending the turn of the century. Similarly, the name “Ku Klux” was used by a number of college societies during this period, including Yale University, the University of Michigan, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.<sup>206</sup> But the titles of the group’s officers at Yale: “Die-jester,” “Inveterate Joker,” and “Yankee Sage,” and the largely northern hometowns of these young men do not suggest that these young men were motivated by sectional fervor. If these groups were knowingly associating themselves with the Ku Klux Klan, it is likely that they did so as a way to emphasize the danger and mystery of the organization—the same way these images use skulls and daggers as symbolic forms. Illustrations in this category can also be found in yearbooks of schools in states where the Klan was once active, such as the University of Virginia (1895), but the sectional rage was by then abstracted into a mixture of nostalgia for the past, and violent play in the present.<sup>207</sup> If sectionalism was abstracted, violence was not—as in in this image from the University of Maine yearbook that features a spectral hanged man. In fraternal imagery of this period, the violence of lynched bodies was always nearby, sometimes even in the foreground of the image. (*Fig. 1.17*)

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<sup>206</sup> *Yale Potpourri: Yale College Yearbook*. (New Haven CT: Yale College, 1868-69). Thanks to Elaine Frantz Parsons. Similarly, a Ku Klux Klan operated at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign between 1906 and 1923. *UIUC Yearbook* 1906. University of Illinois Special Collections.

<sup>207</sup> University of Virginia, *Corks and Curls Yearbook*, 1895. Courtesy of Mike Raymond and University of Virginia Library.

Dixon likely encountered the popular imagery used to depict college fraternities during this period, which merged the salacious threat of danger for the uninitiated with organized and regimented ritual. Given the secret nature of Dixon's own chapter of Kappa Alpha at Wake Forest, there are no extant images of this variety from the university's yearbooks at this time, but he clearly understood his fraternity in relation to secret orders at other colleges. Dixon's familiarity with this representational trope, and his personal experience of fraternal culture as a fight against authoritarian suppression anchored his approach to representing Reconstruction, and provided a personal impetus to view the past through this lens.

The ongoing relationship between fraternities and American popular culture suggests that the circuits of influence were moving in multiple directions. (*Fig 1.18*) An 1888 drawing of "white caps" on the cover of *Puck* magazine showed an ongoing link between the use of pointed hoods, face-masks, and violent political dissent. While lampooning political debates over a spot in President Harrison's cabinet, this image was part of the aesthetic world that educated white men occupied. Their use of elaborate disguises to signal the threat of violence not only reached back to the nineteenth century Klan, but also reflected popular representations of dissent in the present.

When Dixon borrowed from popular fraternal imagery to invent a moral, uniformed Klan, he transposed the Ku Klux threat of violence into a middlebrow fantasy of bureaucratic structure and uniform discipline. Dixon's Klansmen were fiercely sectional, but they were rendered in a progressive-era visual language, one in which the threat of sectional violence could be viewed nostalgically as an artifact in the distant past. Ironically, this combination of historical artifact dressed in contemporary language was precisely what enabled Dixon's

image of white uniformed Klansmen to become such a pervasive cultural phenomenon. The ready adoption of Dixon's uniformed Klansman was the direct result of the way that this image dressed historical racial politics in the guise of contemporary collegiate fraternal practice.

### **Fashioning a Monument**

The white uniform robes that Klansmen wore after William Simmons revived the order in 1915 stitched this strange relationship between past and present into every seam. *(Fig 1.1)* As a fraternal recruiter, Simmons understood that fraternal imagery played on the ambivalent relationship between violence and play; nobility and terror; history and future. It comes as no surprise, then, that Dixon's newly sanitized image of the uniformed Klan provided an appealing basis for the uniforms he designed. Simmons's aesthetic choice also reflected the ubiquity of Dixon's image by 1915, thanks to the mobilization of a publicity machine initiated by Dixon's own tireless self-promotion. The next chapter follows the remediation of the idealized Klan figure through multiple media forms, not only Dixon's novels, but illustrations, theatrical adaptations, advertisements, journalism, and most famously D.W. Griffith's 1915 blockbuster film, *The Birth of a Nation*. Simmons's appropriation of that film's advertising campaign has been well documented, but scholars have not yet examined the accumulation of this image in the popular consciousness for a full decade prior to this event.

The ambivalences that characterized Dixon's fraternally inflected design for Klan regalia provide an instructive model for what Simmons meant when he said that his new organization was a "living monument" to the Reconstruction Klan. Simmons conceived his organization through the experience of watching Americans consume an increasingly



coherent image of the Klan. By adopting the white uniformed figure as the symbol of his new Klan, Simmons built on the accumulated cultural capital produced during this process. But at the same time, this image suggested that any memorial to the lost cause, however nostalgic, had to have been reinterpreted in the terms of progressive-era America if it was to attract the kind of following that Simmons hoped to rally. By 1915, newly chartered Klans eschewed economically dubious sectional politics in favor of patriotism and calls for national order through adherence to “natural” racial hierarchies—though the violent threats to perceived enemies never really went away.

Uniform robes performed this balancing act in a visual register, at once showing Klansmen’s adherence to a disciplined patriotism, and yet also gesturing towards historic terror against the organization’s enemies. The trick was that these Klan robes were such spectacular objects, in their whiteness, in their uniformity, in their dramatic silhouette, that the complex genealogy of cultural exchange that marked nineteenth-century Klan dress was obscured. Instead, Simmons’s newly uniform Klan wore garments based on a representation of an abstraction. These garments would be powerful too, but for precisely the reasons that the process of their invention has been so difficult for scholars to sort out. By the time Simmons adopted Dixon’s image of a uniform, noble Klan, it was an iconic image that represented an idea, and transformed its wearers into abstractions themselves. Klansmen of the twentieth century would commit their own violent acts in these garments, but by adopting Dixon’s fictionalized character as the model, Simmons could reference the past without acknowledging the violence that made this form possible.

## Chapter 2: Selling the Picture

“The theater presented a ghostly appearance, with hooded and masked members acting as ushers, and the stage covered with silent hooded figures, against which, as a background, the speaker stood out prominently in his dark robe. Col. Simmons unmasked for his address, but the other members upon the stage and in the aisles wore their complete regalia through the meeting...So loud and frequent was the cheering and hand-clapping that a casual observer might have mistaken the lecture for a popular entertainment act on a theater program, rather than a serious and dramatic explanatory address by the head of a secret order of world renown.”

-*Atlanta Constitution*, Nov 8, 1920

When a billboard asking “What Does Ku Klux Mean?” appeared in San Antonio, Texas early in 1909, the advertisement had Howard Herrick’s fingerprints all over it.<sup>208</sup> Herrick was the tour manager for *The Traitor*, a theatrical adaptation of Thomas Dixon Jr.’s melodramatic novel with the same name. The savvy marketer accompanied his coy question with a drawing of a white-robed Klansman on horseback, a figure that Americans were rapidly coming to identify as an image of the Ku Klux Klan. Six years later, the same figure became the centerpiece of D.W. Griffith’s groundbreaking movie, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). Dixon’s image of the Klan was just one of many produced at the turn of the twentieth century, but the 1909 billboard suggested that Texans would readily recognize the white-robed Klansman and associate his image with Dixon’s broader

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<sup>208</sup> “What Does Ku Klux Mean?” *San Antonio Light* (TX). January 7, 1909.

oeuvre. The dramatic climax of *The Traitor* featured a battle between “authentic” white-robed Klansmen and their evil imitators who were readily identified by their use of red robes. This design choice amplified the message that Dixon wanted to present, namely that his works featuring white-robed Klansmen were authentic representations of the Reconstruction-era Ku Klux Klan. White uniform robes, a significant feature of Dixon’s image of the Klan, were critical to this process of authentication. The billboard made this connection clear to even the most casual viewer. So when Herrick’s billboard asked “What does Ku Klux Mean?” the marketer wasn’t signaling the threat of violence so much as he was promising a night of family-friendly entertainment.

Indeed, thanks to the white-robed figure, the billboard promised a multimedia phenomenon whose reputation was backed up by the scope and visibility of Dixon’s ever-growing popular-entertainment franchise. Before the ascent of Dixon’s image, representations of the Klan ranged widely, a fact that reflected the clothes worn by the nineteenth century Ku Kluxers. Both sympathetic and critical depictions of the Klan included extensive depictions of Klan dress, most frequently including gowns of various colors, and a variety of masks. One 1892 recollection of the Klan gave a first-hand account of the founding of the group, describing Kluxers wearing black calico robes divided into pantaloons, black masks, and homemade but “fantastic head dresses” on top of their masks, a far cry from the uniformed “white knights” rendered by Dixon a decade later.<sup>209</sup> Striking a tenuous balance between nostalgic reminiscence of a more innocent time and salacious details of now-tamed threats, stories like this show how contests over

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<sup>209</sup> “The Raids of the Ku Klux,” *Anderson (SC) Intelligencer*, Sept. 21, 1892.

the terms of representing of the nineteenth-century Klan continued into the early twentieth century.<sup>210</sup>

Cultural producers generally relied on strange costume to let viewers know that they were looking at a representation of the Klan, but how those costumes looked, and what that appearance meant, was by no means a fixed relation. After Dixon wrote his Klan novels, that all changed. The ascent of Dixon's singular image overwrote a more historically correct cacophony of representations found in popular media since the organization's popular decline with the end of Reconstruction.

Dixon's creative depictions on the Klan together created composite image; its parts could be separated and analyzed individually, but the overall effect was something not reducible to any individual component.<sup>211</sup> Analysis of this image can help us understand

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<sup>210</sup> Dixon's Klan novels also capitalized on a market for stories of the South that extended beyond literary cultural production. In the period between organized Klan activity, newspaper columns frequently printed reminiscences of the Reconstruction-era Klan. As these stories traveled the country, so too did these representations of the Klan. One origin story was first printed in *The Atlantic Monthly*, and made its way across the country in a series of newspapers through the first few decades of the twentieth century David Blight, "The Lost Cause and Causes Not Lost" in *Race and Reunion*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 253-299. Prince, K. Stephen, *Stories of the South: Race and the Reconstruction of Southern Identity, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014). "The Kuklux Klan," *Peninsula Enterprise* (Accomac, VA) Aug. 24, 1901; This story is called "The Raids of the Ku Klux" when published in the *Anderson Intelligencer* (SC) September 21, 1892, and "The Ku Klux Klan: An ex-member tells the story of its Formation in Tennessee," when published in the *Pittsburgh Dispatch* (PA) Aug. 28, 1892. Walter Fleming was the worst offender, thanks to his engagement with John C. Lester and Daniel L. Wilson's *Ku Klux Klan: Its Origin, Growth and Disbandment* (1884), but Fleming's "Dunning School" colleagues trafficked in similar ideas. A new, edited volume assessing that work provides essays arguing that there is value in the historical scholarship of these historians, Fleming included, though as Elaine Parsons points out in her review of that volume, that "despite" suggests that racism and misogyny were not somehow folded into the structure of the entire endeavor. Given the degree to which these scholars championed a fraternal explanation for Klan behavior, Parsons's analysis seems particularly important. See: John David Smith, John David, and J. Vincent Lowery. *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction*, 2013; Elaine Frantz Parsons. Review of Smith, John David; Lowery, J. Vincent, eds, *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction*. H-SHGAPE, H-Net Reviews. April, 2014.

<sup>211</sup> Anthropologist Webb Keane utilizes the Semiological concept of the "quali-sign" to discuss the way that perception of signs is shaped by the "bundling" of qualisigns (qualities) in the sign vehicle when that vehicle is a material object. This process offers a useful model for untangling the composite image of the Klan figure, which is comprised of elements that produce their own effects, though the composite image is not reducible only to the sum of its parts. Keane, Webb. "Semiotics and the Social Analysis of Material Things."

how Dixon's fictional representation of the Klan entered the popular imagination in the early twentieth-century. Through Dixon's work, turn-of-the-century Americans encountered this figure in novels, illustrations, plays, films, and advertisements, all in service of popular entertainment—despite the lingering threat of violence that those images conveyed. As he adapted his Klan figure for presentation in a succession of media forms, from page to stage to screen, in a search for ever-increasing audiences, Dixon's work coincided with the continued expansion of new media *markets*, thanks to improvements in communication, transportation, and advertising technologies. Over a dozen years, from 1902 to 1915, Dixon produced three novels, three theatrical adaptations of those novels, and one film, in addition to several works that were not about the Klan. Each of these versions of his work continued to find audiences well into the 1920s, with revival tours of *The Clansman* and special showings of *The Birth of a Nation* both prompting ticket sales and controversy.<sup>212</sup>

The white-robed Klan figure reached Americans through circulation in cultural forms that tracked alongside the development of mass media in the United States. In his body of Klan works, Dixon rendered a political cause in terms that would be legible to the broadest audience possible—even if parts of that audience would not agree with the politics that his representations conveyed. This was the process of hailing a mass public

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*Language & Communication*, Words and Beyond: Linguistic and Semiotic Studies of Sociocultural Order, 23, no. 3 (July 1, 2003): 421-22. For an application of Keane's model of "bundling" see: Meneley, Anne. "Oleo-Signs and Quali-Signs: The Qualities of Olive Oil." *Ethnos* 73, no. 3 (September 1, 2008): 303-26.

<sup>212</sup> Media scholars David Bolter and Richard Grusin write about media reform with particular attention to the invention of virtual, computer-based technologies of the twenty-first century. Nonetheless, their argument highlights the way that advocates of new media forms often create markets for their product by promising to transcend the limitations of a previous form. They point particularly to the introduction of photography as "the reform of illusionistic painting." *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1999). 59-62.

through cultural production, in short, the formation of a mass culture. Historian Richard Ohmann defines mass culture as the result of “voluntary experiences [of consuming goods or media], produced by a relatively small number of specialists, for millions across the nation to share in similar or identical form, either simultaneously, or nearly so.”<sup>213</sup> This process, which is designed to make a profit for the cultural producers, “shapes habitual audiences, around common needs or interests.” Ohmann’s definition was developed in the context of his study of turn-of-the-century magazines, so it makes sense for his emphasis to land on the presentation of information in a “similar or identical form.” But how does the reproduction of Dixon’s imagery across multiple media enrich this definition of mass culture and help us to better understand why this image appealed to American cultural consumers? What if the “similar form” here is not the medium through which the image was presented, but the increasingly iconic figure of the white-robed Klansman as it appeared in multiple settings? How did the traffic of this image across media industries habituate consumers to a new common-sense way of representing the Klan?

A study of the popularization of the white-robed Klan figure requires an analytical framework that more closely resembles Dixon’s career than a study of the way that that figure emerged in any particular medium. The turn of the twentieth century was a moment of expanded consumer choice, and yet also resulted in a concentration of power within the structures that made those choices available. Dixon was able to work across these

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<sup>213</sup> Ohmann, *Selling Culture*, 14-16. Ohman’s definition, first written in 1996, lacks some of the conceptual nuance of subsequent formations, which challenge the requirement of “millions” accessing goods or images simultaneously. As Jay Cook has argued, limiting mass culture to a post twentieth-century, or even post WWII phenomenon, as Michael Kamen has suggested, leaves out the complicated ways that nineteenth century cultural producers could access global audiences that extended beyond their local communities. Cook, “Return of the Culture Industry,” 295-298.

multiple, medium-specific industries because of their integration into a larger cultural system.

Dixon's strategy for reaching a mass audience relied on the major structural transformations in the way that Americans produced and consumed media that marked his lifetime. During the Progressive Era, mergers in manufacturing, finance, infrastructure, and entertainment sectors all promised a welcoming combination of higher efficiency and the consolidation of profits for business owners.<sup>214</sup> This impulse to standardize production practices reached cultural production as well. *Massification*, or the process by which cultural producers used technological and organizational innovations to reach larger audiences, resulted in the rationalization of distribution mechanisms.<sup>215</sup>

If changes in the way cultural producers made their work reflected their attention to market forces, the resulting mass cultural production also challenged and shaped the formation of shared cultural representations and values. Cultural theorist Bill Brown describes the integration of news, entertainment, and advertising industries in the late nineteenth century as a rupture in divisions between individuals' private lives and a shared public sphere. These new communicative routes, which merged commerce and sentiment, entertainment and labor, were a "mode through which daily life had become public."<sup>216</sup>

This co-mingling signaled that while top-down cultural production was rapidly

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<sup>214</sup> For the consolidation of the manufacturing sector see, Naomi R. Lamoreaux. *The Great Merger Movement in American Business, 1895-1904*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>215</sup> Cook, "Return of the Culture Industry," 298-304. Historians have explored this issue in each of the industries that Dixon's work traversed. See: Joshua Brown. *Beyond the Lines: Pictorial Reporting, Everyday Life, and the Crisis of Gilded Age America*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2006); Carl F. Kaestle, and Janice A. Radway. *A History of the Book in America: Volume 4: Print in Motion: The Expansion of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880-1940*. (Chapel Hill, UNC Press Books, 2015); Don B. Wilmet, and Christopher Bigsby. *The Cambridge History of American Theatre*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Cara Caddoo. *Envisioning Freedom: Cinema and the Building of Modern Black Life*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

<sup>216</sup> Brown, *The Material Unconscious*, 7.

consolidating, consumers also found new ways to intervene into the process of consuming culture. Their patterns of consumption called for a more responsive relationship between audience demand and the production of future cultural work and the shape of representations contained within those projects.

Viewing the white-robed Klansman as the product of not only a single industry or cultural producer, but instead as an iconic form that developed within a multi-dimensional *culture industry* makes this movement more visible. Exceeding any singular medium, the term culture industry refers here to a massive, global system of commercial and cultural exchange, or as James W. Cook calls it, a “self-conscious...non-localized yet interconnected system of capital,” which developed in the nineteenth century but came to its full expression in the early twentieth.<sup>217</sup> Building on Theodor Adorno’s writings, which further developed the term that he coined with Max Horkheimer in 1944, Cook argues that the term “*culture industry*” (emphasis, mine) calls our attention to both “micro-level sites of production and macro-level systems of circulation.”<sup>218</sup> This analytic calls our attention to both the material conditions of labor across medium-specific industries and towards a broader framework that considers the way that various industries came together through the process of massification, in search of profit and cultural influence.

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<sup>217</sup> Cook, “Culture Industry Reconsidered,” 301. In this essay, Cook argues that Adorno’s term, generally read as an indictment of the commoditization of culture, usefully juxtaposes the aesthetic and formal elements of cultural media with their traffic through multiple phases in a commodity chain. The dialectical relationship between dominant and dominated classes that emerges within this schema provides new ways to challenge binary relationships of manipulation and co-optation, or simplistic top down or bottom-up schema of cultural transmission. This is especially useful in considering the case of the Klan, which, though comprised of a large body of white, protestant, native born, and otherwise culturally dominant men, nonetheless portrayed themselves as a marginalized population.

<sup>218</sup> Cook, “Culture Industry Reconsidered,” 297.



So how did the cultivation of a broad viewing public for Dixon's work over the course of a decade pave the way for a Klan that could make a mass cultural appeal?<sup>219</sup> Dixon's work did not have the global reach of some of his contemporaries, but understanding his project in terms of a mass cultural construction can help us look beyond individual instances of cultural reception on a local level and follow the traffic of Dixon's imagery through its engagement with an ever-increasing viewing public. Thus, historical changes in the financial, aesthetic, and labor conditions of each medium are important for understanding how these conditions shaped Dixon's image, but so too are the connections across industries, and the broader currents that informed the development of a mass public of cultural consumers during this period.

When William Simmons revived the Klan in 1915, the work of these cultural producers made his new Klan recognizable to Americans nationwide. Howard Herrick didn't mean to bring the Klan back to life, but his work, along with that of an unlikely group of collaborators, popularized and publicized an image that became the centerpiece of the Klan's revival. How did this new image of the Klan run roughshod over a complicated history, to the point that Americans started to view it as a kind of common

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<sup>219</sup> Cultural critic Stuart Hall has argued that trans-historical definitions of terms like "mass" and "popular" can get in the way of understanding the contextually contingent ways that these terms are deployed in any historical moment. Thus, it's useful to take a second and define these terms in the context of this chapter. Dixon's work was circulated through media aimed at the widest possible segment of American consumers. It presented a viewpoint that reinforced the primacy of the dominant social fraction (white men), and engaged with consumers who possessed various cultural literacies, through its presentation in multiple media forms. More importantly, both criticism and appropriation reinforced the importance of Dixon's perspective. Whether or not Dixon's work was "popular" in the sense of being "liked," it was discussed extensively in a range of contexts. Stuart, Hall. "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular.'" In *People's History and Socialist Theory*, edited by Raphael Samuel. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981). Simon Frith's call for scholars to pursue an "aesthetics of popular culture" is also an excellent reminder that "popular" assesses the circulation of a text without providing a value judgment about the quality of the work—as Frankfurt School work on the standardization of culture has sometimes suggested Frith, Simon. "The Good, the Bad, and the Indifferent: Defending Popular Culture from the Populists." *Diacritics* 21, no. 4 (1991): 102-15.

sense? Unraveling the tangled mess of settings in which Dixon's white-robed Klansman appeared can help us answer that very question.

### **Selling Dixon, Inventing a Brand**

The man who created the image of the white-robed Klan figure, Thomas Dixon Jr., was nothing if not an opportunist, and his approach to building a career offers some suggestion as to how the iconic figure of the Klan took root in U.S. popular culture. Dixon's career traversed various vocational settings as he searched for an audience that could provide him the accolades he desired. This search for an audience in a range of settings did not go unnoticed. One journalist referred to him as "Thomas Dixon, lawyer, legislator, lecturer, minister of the gospel, author, artist, dramatist, in each of these vocations he has made notable successes."<sup>220</sup> While recognizing Dixon's achievements, this article went on to argue that Dixon's career path was undoubtedly a sign of megalomania. Others were even less complimentary, calling Dixon "the versatile Thomas who so readily exchanged a Blackstone for a pulpit, a bible for a novel, and a novel for the play...others cannot shed their callings so readily as their coats."<sup>221</sup> Though he fought back against critiques of dilettantism, Dixon operated as if all press was good press. His career was a process of accumulating both supporters and detractors, all of whom could draw even more attention to Dixon's favorite topic: himself.

A willingness to work in multiple media to advance his own celebrity characterized Dixon's prodigious creative output in the early twentieth century. Between 1903 and 1939, Dixon wrote twenty-two novels, gave countless sermons and speeches,

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<sup>220</sup> "Detailed Account of Dixon's Multiple Careers" *St Landry Clarion*, Feb 21, 1914. For a sympathetic treatment of Dixon's career trajectory that neglects the racist dimensions of Dixon's work, see Raymond Allen Cook, *Fire from the Flint: The Amazing Careers of Thomas Dixon* (1959).

<sup>221</sup> "Dixon to Gonzales" and "Gonzales to Dixon" *Watchman and Southron*. October 25, 1905.

adapted his own work for the stage, and was in some way responsible for eighteen feature films produced between 1914 and 1937.<sup>222</sup> These works traded on and enhanced the cultural visibility he accrued during prior iterations of his career, particularly during his turn on the Chautauqua lecture circuit. Dixon folded the themes that preoccupied him as a lecturer—populist politics, social hierarchy, racial purity—into the frequently didactic creative projects that would attract the same audiences who flocked to his lectures.<sup>223</sup> Dixon had what historian Fitzhugh Brundage describes as “a keen appreciation for contemporary appetites and tastes,” a quality that allowed him to speak to the “opportunities and anxieties of his era.”<sup>224</sup> In these terms, Dixon was not only an strategic entertainer, he was also skilled at diagnosing social concerns and finding ways to insert himself into broader cultural debates.

This context helps us to better understand Dixon’s approach to his fictional works about the Klan, which were conceived almost from the start as a compound cultural project, comprised of several parts. He wrote three novels, *The Leopard’s Spots*, *The Clansman*, and *The Traitor*, which he subsequently adapted for theatrical performance in 1913, 1905, and 1908, respectively. The theatrical script for *The Clansman* became the basis of two different attempts to create a motion picture, the second of which was eventually renamed *The Birth of a Nation*. His willingness to present the same story in a new form demonstrates the same kind of flexible approach to communication media that

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<sup>222</sup> Slide, *American Racist*, 4. Slide writes extensively about Dixon’s relationship with the film industry.

<sup>223</sup> “Dixon Lectures on ‘The Almighty Dollar.’” *State Chronicle Volume*. September 27, 1891; “Dixon Lecturing in Henderson and Wilmington NC.” *Gold Leaf Volume*. October 1, 1891; “Dixon in NY.” *Topeka State Journal*. April 29, 1893; *Stark County Democrat*. October 26, 1893; “Rev. Dixon Favors Govt. Ownership.” *Advocate*. July 18, 1894. “Dixon Lectures on Necessity of Political Participation.” *Process*. April 16, 1898; “Dixon Preaching.” *Virginian-Pilot*. June 13, 1899.

<sup>224</sup> Fitzhugh Brundage. “Thomas Dixon: American Proteus” in *Making the Modern South* edited by Michelle Gillespie and Randall K. Hall (Baton Rouge, LA: University of Louisiana Press, 2006).

Dixon applied to his own career. Dixon's body of Klan works can be complicated to untangle for this very reason. While each of the three Klan novels tells a different story, with a discrete group of characters, the overarching political themes and Dixon's own framing presented these works as part of a larger cultural project.

### **Stowe as Foil and Model**

Dixon understood the contemporary political stakes of representing the Lost Cause, just as he understood the commercial potential of such a charged issue. While Dixon's cultural output was politically polemical, it was also shamelessly commercial. In contemporary popular culture, Dixon used political sentiment to make his work available to the widest popular audience. The popular visibility of his frequently identified political target, Harriet Beecher Stowe, may have provided inspiration for Dixon's work in more ways than one.

Most reports about the production of any of Dixon's three Klan works found a way to mention Dixon's self-identified feud with the most popular cultural work of the nineteenth century. Dixon often explained that his desire to write a novel stemmed from an encounter with Stowe's abolitionist text *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). *The Leopard's Spots* and Dixon's subsequent Klan novels were attempts to correct Stowe's portrayal of the antebellum South.<sup>225</sup> Dixon's Klan novels countered Stowe's sympathetic renderings of runaway slaves and radical Republicans in transparent ways. He even went so far as to name a character in his book after Simon Legree, the villain of Stowe's book, making the political relationship between the two works evident to even the most casual readers of Dixon's work. His publisher (Doubleday, Page and Company) also made the comparison

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<sup>225</sup> Dixon claimed he would tell the South's "True Story." Raymond Allen Cook, *Fire From the Flint*, 105.

explicit in advertisements for the novel that called *The Leopard's Spots*, "as remarkable as *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" before announcing that Dixon was presenting the southern correction to Stowe's northern perspective.<sup>226</sup>

Dixon's choice of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a political foil was smart because Stowe's work was so ubiquitous by the time Dixon chose to pick his fight in 1901, even if his critique of Stowe wasn't particularly new. Along with other authors romanticizing the Lost Cause, Dixon was determined to re-author popular sentiments about the past. Meanwhile Stowe's work continued to be a touchstone of American cultural memory, even half a century after its initial publication. Placing his work in direct conflict with the best-selling novel of the nineteenth century provided Dixon's novels with a ready-made reputation. But *Uncle Tom's Cabin* offered Dixon more than a political counterpoint. The longer career of this work as it circulated through American popular culture modeled a multi-dimensional media strategy, one that Dixon utilized to full effect over the next decade.

Though politically radical, Stowe's novel drew on existing popular cultural tropes, including formal elements from blackface minstrelsy, resulting in a work whose structure suggested a more ambivalent racial politic.<sup>227</sup> In fact, as Sarah Meer argues, "Stowe's antislavery message was couched in a form so ambiguous about race, and at times so explicitly demeaning in its representation of Black people, that it both advocated emancipation and licensed a plethora of racist imitators."<sup>228</sup> This resulted in an

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<sup>226</sup> "Ad for *The Leopard's Spots*" *Dial* (March 16, 1902); Stephen Railton, "Uncle Tom's Cabin in American Culture" Website, University of Virginia, 1998. <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/sitemap.html>

<sup>227</sup> Sarah Meer. *Uncle Tom Mania: Slavery, Minstrelsy, and Transatlantic Culture in the 1850s* (University of Georgia Press, 2005) 23.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid*, 12-13.

“ideologically flexible” text that could be readily appropriated by cultural producers working in a range of media.

The cultural work that so angered Dixon was not Stowe’s novel, but a theatrical adaptation of that novel. Originally presented in a forty-part serial run starting in 1851, Stowe planned for her text to enter readers’ lives in at least two ways. She published the serial in book form in March of 1852, and her publisher printed some 300,000 copies of the novel under his imprint over the next two years.<sup>229</sup> By Dixon’s encounter with Stowe’s work in 1900, at least 25 different publishers had released copies of the novel for American and British audiences.<sup>230</sup> Stowe’s refusal to grant permission for an official stage adaptation in 1852 and the lack of copyright law restricting dramatic work created an opportunity for commercial companies to do what they wanted with the text.<sup>231</sup> In 1851, a minstrel company performed components of Stowe’s text using the familiar tools of theatrical melodrama and blackface—three months prior to the serial’s publication in book form. Two competing adaptations, by George Aiken and H.J. Conway, subsequently dominated the theatrical market. Dixon attended a production of Aiken’s adaptation while

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<sup>229</sup> The most extensive print history of the book is Claire Parfait’s *The Publishing History of Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007). Stowe was directly involved in the production of new editions of her novel until 1879, and expressed her “great satisfaction” at an 1885 “popular edition.” (144).

<sup>230</sup> Parfait, *The Publishing History*, 215-222.

<sup>231</sup> Stowe’s refusal to give permission for a theatrical adaptation stemmed from a moral objection to theater. Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania*, 23; According to Birdoff, Stowe wrote the following to Asa Hutchinson, a temperance concert singer: “with the present state of theatrical performances in this country...any attempt on the part of Christians to identify with them will be productive of danger to the individual character, and the general cause. Birdoff, *World’s Greatest Hit*, 23; Eric Lott “Uncle Tomitudes” *Love and Theft* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. Reprint, 2013) 218-241. For the effect of copyright law on theatrical productions of see: John W. Frick, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin on the American Stage and Screen*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) 31.

on a lecture tour in the North.<sup>232</sup> Known for its fidelity to the spirit, if not text, of Stowe's novel, Aiken's script "watered down" Stowe's abolitionist message, but did not invert the politics of the novel completely as some other productions did.<sup>233</sup> For this reason, the Aiken script was popular in the North, and Dixon's encounter with this sensationally melodramatic adaptation of Stowe's novel set the tone for his own creative critique.<sup>234</sup>

Dixon described his own engagement with Stowe's work entirely in terms of the political content of her narrative, but the trajectory of his career suggests that this connection was only part of the story. The adaptation of literary works into other media was a common practice in the mid-nineteenth century, and global circuits of commercial exchange provided ready-made routes for enterprising artists to find "new material" for American audiences.<sup>235</sup>

After the publication of Stowe's novel, the characters and story became reproducible tropes that traveled into multiple cultural realms. In addition to the minstrel companies that performed countless productions borrowing from parts of Stowe's narrative during the 1850's, multiple types of theatrical companies performed "Tom Shows" for willing publics in subsequent decades. Productions for the vaudeville stage

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<sup>232</sup> Slide, *American Racist*, 26-26. Anthony Slide has done significant research into the literary influences on Dixon that resulted in his Reconstruction Trilogy. See also Raymond Allen, *Fire From the Flint*.

<sup>233</sup> Frick, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 55-62.

<sup>234</sup> Meer also argues that the melodramatic components of theatrical versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were not original to Stowe's novel. Theatrical conventions from moral reform drama and melodrama were added to adaptations of the novel for the stage. Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania*, 106.

<sup>235</sup> Meredith McGill describes a transnational circulation of cultural works along commercial routes in a period just prior to the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Reprinted literary texts helped nineteenth century Americans occupy a national identity that was "at once colonial and imperial" (23). The ability of these texts to mediate such diametrically opposed identities resulted from their unique "commodity situation," outside the control of the original authors or their publishers. Envisioned as a kind of collective property, these texts created a shared discursive framework around nation and ownership for the reading public. McGill, *American Literature and the Culture of Reprinting, 1834-1853*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

used scripts like those written by Aiken and Conway, while touring “mammoth” companies traveled with companies of performers, animals, and support staff in a scale that rivaled a circus.<sup>236</sup> Beyond page and stage, consumers on both sides of the Atlantic could purchase Uncle Tom-themed sheet music, children’s toys, sculptures, ceramics, household goods and artistic renderings.<sup>237</sup> In many instances, Stowe’s story and characters were appropriated to serve other political means, or adapted well beyond the circumstances that the author intended.

Through their traffic in these media, Stowe’s characters became cultural archetypes, moving through the world of performance and advertising culture as “stock characters.” These figures were a generic convention that used elements of a character’s appearance to signal a set of linked behavioral characteristics. Particularly popular in mid-nineteenth-century minstrel and popular performance, intertextual characters could encourage audience investment in unfamiliar stories.<sup>238</sup> Stock characters could make the seemingly passive process of viewing a play into an active experience, as theatergoers drew on their own cultural literacy to interpret the action on stage, and predict what would come next. Because stock characters took on the form of familiar archetypes, they generally lacked the dimensionality of the more realistic characters that traveled across the

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<sup>236</sup> Frick, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, 141.

<sup>237</sup> For the most extensive treatment of merchandising Stowe’s work, see Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania*, (2005). On material culture, see: Robin Bernstein. *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights*. (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Frick, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin on the American Stage and Screen*, 20-24.

<sup>238</sup> Post-structuralist theorists borrowed “intertextuality” from Russian language theorists, most notably Vladimir Volosinov and Mikhail Bakhtin, to explain how texts gain meaning through references (oblique or explicit) to other texts. While this term is used primarily in literary studies, it is useful for tracking changes in the evolution of a mobile image or trope, like the Klan robe, as it develops in time. Because Volosinov and Bakhtin approached the philosophy of language through Marxism, their theories engage with a change over time, and therefore may be helpful for historical scholarship. For an overview of the term and its uses, see Graham Allen. *Intertextuality*. 2000, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (London: Routledge, 2011), 1-58.



Atlantic towards the end of the nineteenth century. The particular set of behaviors and appearances was not always fixed in a direct proportion, and instead existed in a shifting relation between “constants and variables,” since the characters needed to be familiar enough for audiences to recognize them.<sup>239</sup> Stock characters like “Uncle Tom,” theatrical techniques like blackface, and generic conventions like those governing melodrama, all made it possible to repurpose Stowe’s narrative to create new cultural works.

Ironically, the appropriation and adaptation of Stowe’s work, under circumstances outside of her control, only made the author more famous. Despite significant formal and ideological distinctions between the various cultural works that played on *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, cultural producers understood that hitching their product to the phenomenon of “Tom Mania” could lead to commercial success. The production of intertexts created a dense network of cultural references and a kind of mutual advertisement—even when productions were in direct competition with one another. Dixon may have claimed to encounter Stowe’s work in a theater in 1901, but there is little chance that this was his first introduction to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Even if we take Dixon at his often-embellished word, the cultural ubiquity of Stowe’s story was so great that he was likely familiar with the conventions of the work, even if he had never seen an adaptation of the novel. Meer argues that Stowe introduced conventions of blackface minstrelsy into her novel, without having ever seen a performance.<sup>240</sup> Her ability to do so hinged on the degree to which the

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<sup>239</sup> Kimberly Wallace Sanders uses the stock characters to explain the phenomenon of the “mammy,” a figure that developed over a century, between 1820 and the early twentieth century, through her appearance in multiple media forms. Kimberly Wallace Sanders, *Mammy*. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

<sup>240</sup> “Stowe “almost certainly never saw a minstrel show. She famously disapproved of theater” and “it would seem all the more likely that she would countenance minstrelsy’s rowdier style of performance.” Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania*, 23.

conventions of minstrel performance shaped American cultural life in the mid-nineteenth century.

If Dixon wasn't already familiar with the abolitionist narrative of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, he'd certainly digested the formal convention of a single text that could be spun into an intertextual web. His approach to his planned trilogy of novels romanticizing the Klan reflected this cultural knowledge, but suggested a more savvy commercial approach. Rather than creating a work that would bring him to fame through its proliferation in popular culture, Dixon would create his own intertextual collection of works that spanned multiple media.

### **Proliferation and Profit**

The rationale behind this approach was simple: more output on the same theme offered him the potential to reach a broader public and increased profits. Dixon's critics were not shy about pointing out his commercial aspirations, but the author responded to such charges with indignation. In the early twentieth-century, the distinction between commercial entertainment (like burlesque and vaudeville) and the "legitimate stage" mirrored the relationship between popular fiction and great literature. These categories were always moving targets, used to demonstrate distinctions between social groups, but the label of "commercial" separated a work from the kind of artistry to which Dixon claimed to aspire.<sup>241</sup> His motivation to write emerged from an undeniable impulse, or so he claimed. Dixon began a project only when, in his words, "at last I have become so full of a great dramatic idea I feel I shall die unless it is uttered, that others might know the might of its truth, and the glory of its beauty, I write the story—write it simply, sincerely,

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<sup>241</sup> Mark Hodin. "The Disavowal of Ethnicity: Legitimate Theatre and the Social Construction of Literary Value in Turn-of-the-Century America." *Theatre Journal* 52, no. 2 (May 2000): 211–26.

boldly, passionately.”<sup>242</sup> Criticisms of the artistic merit of his work were thus subsumed to the author’s immense satisfaction in their production. But, what was the harm if the artistic spirit also brought the author financial successes? “This may not be ‘Literature’” he crowed, “but I have my reward—and it is large financially, and larger spiritually.”<sup>243</sup> This slippery relationship between personal/spiritual reward, and Dixon’s financial health, was apparent in other depictions of the author in the popular press. One syndicated profile of Dixon included descriptions of the author at work in a bucolic writing studio on the grounds of his Virginia plantation home, while other admiring writers praised his Southern roots and genteel manners.<sup>244</sup> These lifestyle choices reinforced the romantic view of traditional Southern values that his work promoted, but nonetheless provided a stark contrast from his earlier successes as a populist lecturer.

In true form, Dixon’s explanation of his turn to the theatrical stage left out key details of his own biography. He described his encounter with Stowe’s play as a transformative, not only in terms of the content of her work driving him to produce his own, but also as a moment in which he recognized the possibility of this new medium. He claimed to have experienced the “stunning shock to find that drama is so much more powerful a form of expression” than a novel. With each performance of a play, he argued, the production could reach “great masses of people,” beyond those who “read books.”<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> Thomas Dixon, “The Clansman: Its Author... Replies with Spirit and Good Humor to Some of His Critics.” *New York Times*. Feb. 25, 1905.

<sup>243</sup> “One of my critics accuses me of buying a house and yacht out of the royalties of my books. It seems a pity to destroy this fairytale, but it may ease his pain. I have a beautiful home and a modest yacht, but I bought and paid for them before I had written a book. Yachting is a means of economy and health with me, not luxury.” Thomas Dixon, “The Clansman” *New York Times*. Feb. 25, 1905.

<sup>244</sup> “Thomas Dixon and His Work.” *Omaha Daily Bee*. Jan. 29, 1905; “Thomas Dixon Author and How He Works.” *Times Dispatch*. Jan. 29, 1905.

<sup>245</sup> Thomas Dixon, “Why I wrote the Clansman,” *Theatre*, Vol 6, No. 59, January 1906, 20-22.

Again, Dixon's desire to reach the masses is couched in terms of the reach of his content, and yet, he also knew those masses would buy tickets. To confuse matters further, his chronology was disingenuous. If Dixon realized that plays were more powerful than books through an encounter with Stowe's work, he still wrote two novels prior to producing a theatrical adaptation. It was also unlikely that the publicity-conscious Dixon did not have any experience of one of the most widely circulated narratives of the late nineteenth century, until after its end. Moreover, Dixon's trip to see *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1901 was by no means his first night at the theater. As a young man, Dixon briefly entertained a theatrical career before turning to the pulpit.<sup>246</sup> Dixon's sense of self narrative was strong enough to recognize that a theatrical encounter with Stowe's work made a good story—but he also understood that translating his work across multiple media could offer him more profits than any single media form ever would.

Dixon's private correspondence reveals a far more commercial version of the potential benefits of doing cultural work, as he readily admitted the desire for profit that motivated him. In the fall of 1901, Dixon bragged that his still-unpublished manuscript, *The Leopard's Spots*, had been accepted within 48 hours of the publisher's initial receipt of the text. The publisher was "expecting big things of it," he crowed, speculating wildly about the book sales he thought the work would solicit.<sup>247</sup> Dixon's estimation of what one book could do was already magnified by three. In interviews publicizing *The Leopard's Spots*, he announced that the book was part of a trilogy, and that he was already doing

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<sup>246</sup> Untangling Dixon's different self-narratives is a task unto itself. In some accounts he simply joined a ner-do-well troupe of actors performing Richard III, in others, Dixon actually attended drama school. See: "Chronicle and Comment: Thomas Dixon," *Bookman*, (February 1905), 498-500.

<sup>247</sup> Thomas Dixon, to Henry Cathcart, October 29, 1901. Thomas Dixon Papers Box 1 Folder 1. Emory University Manuscript and Rare Book Library.

historical research for the next installment.<sup>248</sup> Only months after *The Clansman* reached booksellers early in 1905, Dixon revealed to the public that his experience of watching Stowe's novel on stage convinced him that he should adapt *The Clansman* for theatrical performance, and was already at work on the production. During that time, Dixon started a theatrical production company, The Southern Amusement Company, and hired a famous Broadway "play doctor" or dramaturge to help him with the adaptation.<sup>249</sup>

Dixon sought to emulate the impact of Stowe's work on popular American culture, while also using Stowe as a cautionary tale of what could happen if he didn't control the narrative. As playwright George Middleton announced to readers in 1908, Stowe originally sold her story as a serial to the magazine *Era* for \$300 an installment, and eventually agreed to a \$20,000 settlement for the work in total, a fee that included royalties from reprinting the story.<sup>250</sup> While an enormous fee at the time, playwright George Middleton later argued that Stowe would have received more than \$2,000,000 of royalties had she made a savvier deal with the theatrical companies that adapted the

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<sup>248</sup> "Theatrical: Dramatic," *The Billboard* (Vol 16, Issue 3) January 16, 1904. Dixon's research for *The Clansman* was a regular part of press coverage for both book and film, though it was most explicit in a 1905 profile. "The writing of [Dixon's] books has been preceded by the most careful research among the legal records and the newspaper files of the scenes he described. The tragic story... was drawn literally from events which took place in Mr. Dixon's native town and which were, in a measure, responsible for the organization of the Ku-Klux-Klan." *The Bookman*, (Feb. 1905) 500.

<sup>249</sup> Slide, *American Racist*, 53. William Thompson Price was a former journalist who founded the American School of Playwriting in 1901. He wrote a series of instructional books on the theory of dramatic narratives between 1892 and 1912, along with several biographies of famous performers.

<sup>250</sup> Stowe filed for copyright before the novel's serialization in *The National Era*, suggesting that she planned to publish the work in full once the serial was complete. *The National Era*, Sep. 4, 1851; Parfait, *The Publishing History of Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 33. Middleton's numbers for Stowe's work (see note 28) were likely based on widely circulated 1853 figures, but Stowe received some compensation for subsequent editions, including the promise of a \$10,000 payment in 1896. For disputes over Stowe's compensation, see Parfait, *Publication History of Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 104, 145-47.

work.<sup>251</sup> Dixon, Middleton noted, had not made the same mistake. By September of 1908, six years after the initial publication of *The Leopard's Spots*, and three years after the publication of *The Clansman* and the initial tour of its theatrical adaptation, Dixon's financial gains were impressive. According to Middleton, Dixon earned \$60,000 from the more than 300,000 copies of *The Leopard's Spots*. Primed by this success, Americans bought 65,000 copies of *The Clansman* in its first four weeks on the market, Dixon reported to a publisher friend.<sup>252</sup> By 1908, the publisher had sold 200,000 additional copies of the book, earning Dixon another \$40,000 in royalties.<sup>253</sup> Adapting his own book into a play let Dixon maintain ownership over his narrative while also offering him a more generous share of the profits. With four touring companies traveling nationwide, the play earned Dixon \$90,000 in royalties alone in the first three years of production. Moreover, since he owned half of the of the Southern Amusement production company, Dixon earned another \$115,000 in that time.<sup>254</sup> When D.W. Griffith approached Dixon in order to buy the cinematic rights to *The Clansman* in 1911, Dixon was fully aware of the financial potential at stake.<sup>255</sup> As film historian David Mayer puts it, Dixon bargained

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<sup>251</sup> George Middleton. "The Earnings of the Dramatized Novel." *The Bookman* (September 1908) 133-139. For more on Middleton's advocacy for the rights of playwrights, and his role in the formation of The Dramatist's Guild, the playwright's union, see T. J. Walsh, "Playwrights and Power." In *Art, Glitter, and Glitz: Mainstream Playwrights and Popular Theatre in 1920s America*. Edited by ed. Arthur Gewirtz; James J. Kolb. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2004), 107-117.

<sup>252</sup> Thomas Dixon, Letter to H. Cathcart. "Letter to Cathcart Mentioning Early Reception of Clansman," February 20, 1905. Thomas Dixon Papers Box 1 Folder 1. Emory University Manuscript and Rare Book Library.

<sup>253</sup> George Middleton. "The Earnings of the Dramatized Novel," *The Bookman*, (September 1908) 137.

<sup>254</sup> Middleton. "The Earnings of the Dramatized Novel," 138.

<sup>255</sup> Anthony Slide discusses Dixon's close attention to the potential to translate his work across media, noting in 1919 that the novelist told a gossip columnist that he'd written his third novel, *The One Woman*, with a cinematic adaptation in mind. Slide, *American Racist*, 114.

“relentlessly,” a tactic that led Griffith to seek a new funding model of selling shares to investors, which he would employ for future productions.<sup>256</sup>

Sales figures suggested that audiences were willing to follow Dixon’s career across media, and perhaps more importantly, that the fame of a text could accumulate through its movement through U.S. culture. Dixon used tactics developed by early mass cultural producers, such as serialization, and the use of familiar generic tropes to encourage customers to view him as a reliable source of entertainment. Dixon serialized *The Leopard’s Spots* between February and March of 1903, *after* the novel’s publication in book form.<sup>257</sup> He also approached his Klan novels as a trilogy, which linked all three texts despite differences in their plots and characters. The books accrued even more popular attention as touring companies presented the theatrical adaptation across the country. In each instance, the white-robed Klan figure offered audiences an assurance of continuity between the texts.

### **Dixon’s Uniform Clansmen**

Dixon needed not only the force of his own personality, but also the assistance of a much broader set of collaborators whose efforts went into to the process of producing and selling images of white-robed Klansmen to Americans. Illustrations brought Dixon’s descriptive prose to life, and provided his readers with a consistent experience of how the Klan looked. It’s possible that Dixon did not yet realize that his Klan image would become a centerpiece of his brand over the next decade, for there were no illustrations of

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<sup>256</sup> Mayer, *Stagestruck Filmmaker*, 145. The precise amount that Griffith paid Dixon is unclear. Griffith offered Dixon an initial down-payment of \$2500, and subsequently paid him either \$10,000 in total or 10% of the film’s net profit. See: Bowser, “The Birth of a Nation: Production” in *The Griffith Project vol. 8*, edited by Paolo Usai, (London: British Film Institute, 2008), 60; Gish, *The Movies, Mr. Griffith, and Me* 132.

<sup>257</sup> *San Francisco Call*. February 15, 1903; Feb 22, 1903; Mar. 8, 1903; Mar. 15, 1903.

the Klan in *The Leopard's Spots*. While the Klan played an important role, robed Klansmen only appeared once in the novel. The majority of the book's action was set two decades after the North Carolina Klan disbanded, and it operates more as a foil than an active institution. Even without picturing the Klan, illustrations by C. D. Williams amplified the racial politics of Dixon's novel—subtitled, “a romance of the white man's burden.” Half of the illustrations included in the novel's first edition (1902) depicted important scenes, including several confrontations between Black soldiers in uniform and the book's white heroes.<sup>258</sup> Alongside those images of the narrative in action, Williams provided four portraits of central characters in the book: Sallie, “a dazzling vision of beauty,” was portrayed as a “Gibson Girl” fashion plate. (**Fig. 2.1**) Williams took care to depict her long dress and sidelong glance at the viewer. For the other three portraits, Williams took a notably different approach. Each image was captioned with the name of the character, and the words “Portrait from Life.” This group of illustrations more closely resembled photographs than the painterly renderings, in particular the two portraits of Black characters—“Dick,” a former slave whose lynching is presented sympathetically, and the “Honorable Tom Shelby” a corrupt judge. (**Fig. 2.2**) The photo-realistic portrayal of these characters stood in stark contrast to the romantic portrait of Sallie, offering images that closely resembled those used by eugenicists to support scientific racism.<sup>259</sup>

Dixon corrected the Klan's minimal presence in his first book with *The Clansman*, where a drawing of a costumed Klansman foreshadowed the most dramatic passages in the

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<sup>258</sup> Thomas Dixon, *The Leopard's Spots* (New York: Doubleday, Page, and Co., 1902).

<sup>259</sup> These images were removed from subsequent editions. Stephen Railton, “Uncle Tom's Cabin in American Culture” Website, University of Virginia, 1998. <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/sitemap.html> For the use of images as eugenic surveillance devices, see Allan Sekula. “The Body and the Archive.” *October* 39 (1986): 3–64.



text. Illustrator Arthur I. Keller faithfully rendered Dixon's ekphrastic prose, bringing extensive descriptive passages into a single frame.<sup>260</sup> The frontispiece portrayed a young white woman looking into the distance while seated on horseback next to a white robed man, also astride a horse. The Clansman's regalia included a draped mask across his face, two circular medallions on his breast, and a white helmet with a tall pointed spike at its center; his horse was similarly decorated with two circular medallions with white crosses at their center on top of a white robe. The couple was positioned on a hillside, with a dusky sky and the glint of one star just over her left shoulder. If the star is in the North, this illustration suggests, the young woman's hopeful face is turned resolutely south. "Do you not fear my betrayal of your secret?" the caption asked, though readers would not yet have the narrative context to know the relationship of the characters, or the secrets they held. The Clansman's masked face and the angle of his body as he turned towards the young woman suggested to readers that the intimation of a secret and the disguise were likely related. This image worked with the book's subtitle—"a historical romance of the Ku Klux Klan"—to prepare readers for a certain kind of portrayal of the Reconstruction-era order.

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<sup>260</sup> Unlike Dixon, whose politics were clear throughout the text, neither Williams nor Keller's biographies suggest a particular affection for the Lost Cause. Both men were born in New York, and trained at the National Academy of Design. Keller was known for his beautiful renderings of the wealthy and fashionable, and for his commitment to faithfully translating text into image. Working in a similar milieu, Williams made his name in magazine and book illustration. Keller frequently created studies of costumed models in appropriate poses, in order to prepare his composition for each illustration. By 1903, when *The Leopard's Spots* was published, Keller was at the height of his career, elected president of the American Society of Illustrators, and he was producing an enormous amount of work. There is no evidence that Keller took the job for ideological reasons, but whether or not Keller was ambivalent about the politics he faithfully depicted was beyond the point. Keller's production of the frontispiece for *The Clansman* was the first illustration in Dixon's books to feature the Klan, and it had enormous consequences for the representation of nativist Anglo-Saxonism over the next century. Arthur I. Keller *An Artist's Sketchbook: Master Drawings from the Model*, Introduction by William Steven Kloepfer Jr. (New York: Dover, 2012).

The book's second illustration of the Klan did similarly important work. In this painting, a group of identically dressed Klansmen gathered around two unmasked men in the midst of a dramatic ceremony. The younger of the two, the novel's hero Ben Cameron, holds a flaming cross over his head, while the older man holds a cup in a prayer-like gesture. The entire image takes on the effect of a medieval Christian rite, highlighted by the illustration's caption evoking "old Scotland." But near the Klansmen's feet, readers can see a shadowy, bound body. From the surrounding text, readers knew that the "ceremonial" aspects of this moment were a precursor to the figure's violent death by hanging. Choosing to focus on this moment helped Keller to avoid having to show an attack in action, but the juxtaposition of prisoner and his "noble" captors was unmistakable.

Dixon's text made these arguments about the relationship between the Klan's appearance and the violent actions its members performed explicit, but these images concretized Dixon's work in a new way. Throughout each Klan book, Dixon reinforced a popular defense of the Klan, arguing that it was an order of noble men who were forced to commit violent acts because the new social and political order of Reconstruction was inherently unjust.<sup>261</sup> Never subtle, Dixon was always verbose, and grasping this argument still required readers to wade through hundreds of pages of text. Keller's illustrations

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<sup>261</sup> This argument was central to Lester and Wilson's 1877 account of the Klan's formation, early fictional narratives of the Klan such as the following all fall back on a similar logic. S.L. Harmon. *Ptocowa : a strange, sad story of fifteen years in Dixie as told in a single night*. (Rochester, NY: Publishing House of John P. Smith, 1887); James Melville Beard. *K.K.K. Sketches, Humorous and Didactic, Treating the More Important Events of the Ku-Klux-Klan Movement in the South, Etc.* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen & Haffelfinger, 1877); Thomas Jefferson Jerome's *KKK no. 40* (Raleigh, NC: Edwards and Broughton, 1895) William Haworth. *On the Mississippi [a Melodrama]*. (New York, 1895); Thomas Nelson Page, *Red Rock a Chronicle of Reconstruction*. (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1898); Charles Waller Tyler, *The K.K.K.* (Abby Press, 1902).

distilled Dixon's work into a visible shorthand, a white-robed figure who was at once noble, and yet also a terrible threat. (**Fig. 2.3**) These images became the basis for Williams's illustrations for *The Traitor* (1907), which includes another gathering of identically dressed Klansmen—now featured in color.<sup>262</sup> By this point, Dixon and Keller's collaborative image of the Klan offered an important visual reference for cultural producers, who were, in turn, offering audiences an increasingly homogenous representation.

### **Continuity from Page to Stage**

The broader collection of Dixon's work was influential in helping consumers to picture the Klan, but *The Clansman* played a particularly important role thanks to its adaptation into other media, especially the theater (**Fig. 2.4**) Since Dixon was already a known commodity, "The Clansman" immediately began to tour the country after opening in Norfolk, Virginia on September 22, 1905.<sup>263</sup> The process of adaptation demonstrated that the boundaries separating Dixon's Klan works were more porous than their distinct narratives would suggest. Though he did at one point adapt *The Leopard's Spots* for theater, Dixon's script for *The Clansman* also borrowed from the former for key plot points.<sup>264</sup> His script for "The Clansman" made an appeal to audiences through the

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<sup>262</sup> This image featured a group of Klansmen as they disbanded the organization.

<sup>263</sup> *The Clansman*, Play Souvenir, (Southern Amusement Company, New York, New York, n.d.), Ku Klux Klan Collection, Folder 30, Box 1, MARBL.

<sup>264</sup> Dixon's theatrical version of *The Leopard's Spots* doesn't reach audiences until 1913. "Promotion for Leopard's Spots Play Including Dixon's Desire for Artistic Control." *Herald and News*. November 11, 1913. Theatre historian Stephen Johnson addresses differences between the various versions of novel and play in his essay, 'Re-Stirring an Old Pot: Adaptation, Reception and the Search for an Audience in Thomas Dixon's Performance Text(s) of *The Clansman*', *Nineteenth Century Theatre & Film*, 34 (2007), 4–46.

conventions of theatrical melodramas popular at the time.<sup>265</sup> He added comic characters to blunt the polemical nature of his argument, and amplified the danger that Freedmen posed to white women. Despite these transformations, the appearance of the Klan remained consistent in both novel and play, likely because the Klan scenes in the novel were already described in vivid, spectacular detail.

As with syndicated newspaper columns or mass-market novels, touring theater productions offered a way for turn-of-the-century Americans to experience a shared cultural experience. This feeling of continuity was carefully produced by networks of theatrical producers, advertisers, and performers; all of whom worked together in what music historian Nicholas Gebhardt calls “a new corporate form.”<sup>266</sup> Taking entertainment on tour called for a new exercise of continuity; not only was it important for audiences to recognize the faithful translation of book to play, there was also pressure for the company to deliver a somewhat consistent performance as it traveled around the country. In part this question of consistency emerged from the development of two different modes of theatrical performance in the nineteenth century. The dominant model—the joint-stock company—emerged in the 1790s, consolidating the two systems that dominated American theatre in the eighteenth century: urban troupes catering primarily to elites, and itinerant theatrical “families” that brought entertainment beyond the eastern seaboard.<sup>267</sup> Joint-

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<sup>265</sup> Johnson, “Re-stirring an old Pot,” 13; Bruce McConachie argues that theatrical melodrama was the central paradigm of American drama from 1820-1870, while the form endured into the early twentieth century, melodramatic conventions were familiar, and noticeably antiquated to American audiences. Bruce McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations*, (1992); Christopher Bigsby, Don B. Wilmet, “Introduction,” *Cambridge History of American Drama*, Vol II, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 3-4.

<sup>266</sup> J.L. Stylan, *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 2-5., 21-27.

<sup>267</sup> Benjamin McArthur. *Actors and American Culture 1800-1920*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 3-5. Sara Lampert, “Performing Women,” (2012) PhD Dissertation, 51.

stock companies hired actors to perform a particular type of stock character for a large season of plays performed in repertory. For budgetary reasons, as well as practical storage concerns, costumes and scenery were often multi-purpose, resulting in an aesthetic that was more closely linked to a particular company than a singular artistic work. The stock-company model was popular through the entire nineteenth century, as it allowed local audiences access to a range of theatrical experiences while also providing company owners with a steady stream of ticket sales. Companies like the The Peruchi-Gypzene Stock Company continued to operate under this model into the twentieth century, performing a show called *The Ku Klux Klan* alongside shows of *Rip Van Winkle*, *In the Bishop's Carriage*, and *Monte Cristo* to packed houses in the company's theater in Tampa, Florida during the first half of 1909.<sup>268</sup>

In contrast, touring combination companies embarked on regional or national tours with a single production. With longer runs of a particular play, and shorter performance bookings in any particular locality, the emergence of the “combination company” in the 1870s and '80s offered audiences access to an explicitly national model of entertainment.<sup>269</sup> Usually based in New York, though occasionally in Philadelphia or Chicago, the combination company brought urban aesthetic sensibilities to smaller regional markets.<sup>270</sup> Combination companies brought their show to town in chains of

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<sup>268</sup> “News from Metropolitan Centers: Tampa Florida” *Billboard* 21: 30 (July 24, 1909): 11.

<sup>269</sup> Alfred L. Bernheim calls this period the “Industrial Revolution in theater” see Bernheim and Actors' Equity Association. *The Business of the Theatre: An Economic History of the American Theatre, 1750-1932*. (New York: B. Blom, 1964), 35-35.

<sup>270</sup> Benjamin McArthur. *Actors and American Culture*, 9.

railroad cars filled with elaborate scenery, costumes, and many kinds of laborers.<sup>271</sup> These companies also brought increasingly professionalized actors trained in the “naturalistic” style that was becoming popular in the last decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>272</sup> The combination company is best known for facilitating the further development of a “star system,” whereby audiences in the so-called hinterlands could see performances by the most famous actors of the European and American stage. While stock companies began to engage “star” performers as early as 1820, tours by combination companies enabled Americans to see the same performer in the very same role as their geographically distant relatives. Aided by the emergence of syndicated news media, theatrical managers could drum up audiences on the basis of the scale of a national tour, and the prior audience reception of any given show.<sup>273</sup>

These structural changes to the organization and management of theatrical productions had real effects on the ways that audiences experienced live theater in the early-twentieth century. At this historical moment, live performances of this scale were mediated through a flurry of media attention—publicity, reviews, and informational stories about actors, costumes, or horses in the local press. The development of a national publicity machine for such productions was invented by circus promoters, but quickly

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<sup>271</sup> Combination companies borrowed significantly from innovations of the traveling circus of the mid-nineteenth century. Janet M. Davis. *The Circus Age Culture & Society under the American Big Top*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

<sup>272</sup> Theatrical naturalism was a European import, thanks the popularization of works by Ibsen, Strindberg, and Shaw between 1877 and 1906. These works consciously rebelled against the romanticism of early nineteenth century drama and the commercial spectacles produced for working-class audiences on the vaudeville stage. J.L. Stylan, *Modern Drama in Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 2-5.

<sup>273</sup> McArthur, *Actors and American Culture*, 10.

adopted by theatrical producers who sought to make the plays traveling on their “circuit” as profitable as possible.<sup>274</sup>

Unlike productions by local stock companies, which could offer very different interpretations of any given play, a touring combination company could claim to offer roughly the same production to audiences in Atlanta and Des Moines. In reality, the degree of consistency between any two performances varied significantly, particularly in a moment when companies regularly adjusted their performances and even scripts to appeal to local audiences.<sup>275</sup> Still, the increasing availability of national media during this time helped to create a market for repeatable performances. Consumers in geographically distant spaces could read reviews of a production and have the chance to see that same production without leaving their hometown. In this way, the actual consistency of performances was perhaps far less important than the appearance of similarity.<sup>276</sup> Without sophisticated recording technology, nineteenth century audiences relied on journalist’s descriptions of performances to anticipate what they were to see onstage, and newspapers readily provided extensive descriptions of production aesthetics, as well as glimpses into the lives of actors as publicity for touring shows. This kind of reporting was crucial to the creation of a national market for touring theatre.

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<sup>274</sup> Janet Davis, *The Circus Age Culture & Society under the American Big Top* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

<sup>275</sup> Mayer, *Stagestruck Filmmaker*, 263.

<sup>276</sup> Nicholas Gebhardt argues that that the constant process of revision in vaudeville performance also produced this effect, as audiences and performers worked together to create shows that would appeal to a crowd. Gebhardt, *Vaudeville Melodies*, 92.

When “The Clansman” went on the road in 1905, it met a willing audience, thanks to the inventive producers of the Klaw and Erlanger theatrical circuit.<sup>277</sup> After starting the tour with a single company, the show’s producers decided the market could bear more. Between 1905 and 1906, the Northern, Southern, and Western companies of the Klansman traveled from Upstate New York to Arkansas, while a fourth “Far West” company formed in 1908. According to widely syndicated news reports, all of the productions were large-scale spectacles with large casts, “magnificent scenic and electrical effects” and a full compliment of horses “acting” as the Klan’s cavalry.<sup>278</sup> These large elements of visual spectacle lent themselves to a slightly old-fashioned theatrical aesthetic. As turn-of-the-century theaters turned towards a naturalist aesthetic, the florid and romantic excess of Dixon’s prose offered a stagey theatricality reminiscent of the previous century.

### **Costume Dramas**

In order to show continuity with Dixon’s novels, and reinforce his claims to have based those books on careful historical research, production staff commissioned costumes that brought descriptions from the novel to life.<sup>279</sup> (**Fig. 2.6**) Production photographs from a 1905 souvenir program show just how closely the new costumes resembled Dixon’s original designs. The key distinctions between the uniforms described in the novel and the uniforms produced as costumes for the play were relatively practical. In the novel, each Klansman had two small medallions embroidered with white crosses on each breast.

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<sup>277</sup> “The Clansman Produced” *The Billboard* 17:40 (Oct. 7, 1905): 2.

<sup>278</sup> “Squadron of Horses to be in *The Clansman*,” *Los Angeles Herald*, 24 November 1908; “What to See This Week at Local Theaters,” *Los Angeles Herald*. November 29, 1908.

<sup>279</sup> Stage directions on various extant scripts for the play only mention Klan costume in brief handwritten additions to the printed text. See: Thomas Dixon “*The Clansman: An American Drama*,” *Nineteenth Century Theatre & Film* (Vol. 34 Issue 2, Dec. 2007): 135, note 149.



Production photographs of the Northern touring company show a total of sixteen men dressed in matching robes, with minor decorative variations to demonstrate the wearer's rank.<sup>280</sup> All but one of these characters wore a single large medallion—approximately the size of the entire chest—with two medallions placed on the robes of only one actor, presumably to designate the rank of Klan leader and romantic hero Ben Cameron.<sup>281</sup> This kind of aesthetic change was likely a concession to the enormous scale of the theatrical houses that the touring companies were to play. Amplifying the symbolic details of these garments made them visible to audience members in the farthest reaches of the gallery. A 1909 review from a Los Angeles newspaper claimed that 2,000 audience members leapt to their feet at the end of one show, and that the show's total audience exceeded four million viewers.<sup>282</sup> Even if we do not take *The Clansman's* publicists at their always-embellished word, each of the touring companies regularly played theaters with a capacity of 1,000 or more. Such large houses necessitated the deployment of an exaggerated visual style.

The argument that Dixon made about Klan regalia, that its whiteness and uniformity could convey these very characteristics to any Reconstruction-era Southerner who saw the Klan, was also crucial to its successful deployment in multiple touring productions at once. Uniformity was to be maintained throughout—between the actors of any given cast, by the costumes worn by a particular actor over a long tour, and across the various companies of the production that toured simultaneously. The white uniform robes described in Dixon's text were highly practical as far as costuming was concerned. On

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<sup>280</sup> *The Clansman*, Play Souvenir, Klan Collection, Folder 30, Box 1. Emory, MARBL.

<sup>281</sup> The other differences between the imaginary and dimensional instantiations of these garments seem more like a construction problem than a design choice; for example, the spikes on the helmets of the actors are slightly shorter and squatter than those drawn in Keller's illustrations.

<sup>282</sup> "Author of *The Clansman* Likes Southern California," *Los Angeles Herald* (Nov. 8, 1908) 3.

stage, the whiteness of the robes was not only symbolically significant, but provided a blinding spectacle when lit with stage lights in the large theatrical houses that the tours played.<sup>283</sup> Likewise, these garments were relatively simple in shape—nothing more than a T-shaped garment with only a couple of seams, and could readily be produced en-masse by any of the large theatrical costume houses already serving the touring market during this period. The masks that Dixon depicted on Klansmen in his in his novel was in fact ideal for theatrical touring companies who needed to disguise actors in the company who were playing multiple roles.

Adopting Dixon's signature garments also served the useful purpose of distinguishing this production from prior representations of the Klan on the American stage. In plays like William Haworth's *On the Mississippi* (toured the U.S., 1894-1900) and Kate Mortimer's *The Power of Truth* (1901), Klansmen appeared on stage as figures whose disguises demonstrated their villainy to popular audiences. There are no surviving records of how Haworth's Klansmen were dressed, beyond the fact that they were masked and appeared appropriately disheveled as indicated in the script.<sup>284</sup> Mortimer depicted Klansmen dashing around Shelbyville, Missouri dressed in black crepe masks or black hoods and capes with skull and crossbones. Notably, neither script gave audiences an image of dressed Klansmen that remotely resemble the white uniform robes that distinguish Dixon's characters. These varied representations were consistent with previous fictional depictions of the Klan, but they also help us to see why it would be useful for Dixon to develop a consistent brand. White uniform robes made Dixon's work

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<sup>283</sup> *Billboard*, Oct. 7, 1905; *Kansas City (MO) Star*, Feb. 21, 1906; *Wilkes Barre (PA) Times*, Mar. 27, 1906; *Rock Island (IL) Argus*, Apr. 17, 1906; *Los Angeles Herald*, Nov. 8, 1908.

<sup>284</sup> Kate Mortimer, "The Power of Truth: The Sensational comedy melo-drama in four acts," September 9, 1901.

immediately identifiable, while simultaneously enabling a kind of cross-promotion. Any advertisement for *The Clansman*, the book, could also be an advertisement for the play, and vice versa.

Curiously, the obvious artifice of Dixon's theatrical representation did not seem to dislodge the increasingly coherent image of the white uniformed Klansman as a historically accurate representation of the Reconstruction-era Klan. In fact, real life Ku Kluxers of the Reconstruction-era wore elaborate costumes that borrowed from contemporary theater and performance of the day.<sup>285</sup> Given the wide availability of the book, and regular debates over the historical and artistic merit of the production in the popular press, audiences had developed their own expectations of how a "historically accurate" Klansmen should look.<sup>286</sup> The aesthetic coherence between page and stage bolstered Dixon's claims of historical accuracy, even while press materials for the touring production also discussed the labor that went into producing the show's spectacular effects in order to attract audiences. (*Fig 2.7*)

Judging by the volume of press coverage that discussed the stagecraft required to mount these productions, turn-of-the-century audiences were fascinated with the labor that went into making Dixon's vision of uniformity visible on stage.<sup>287</sup> While far fewer Klansmen appeared on stage than in the pages of Dixon's novel, the costumes shown in

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<sup>285</sup> *Billboard*, (June 30, 1906), 13.

<sup>286</sup> "Reveal Secrets of the Ku Klux Klan," *Times Dispatch* (Richmond, VA), Sept. 17, 1905; *East Oregonian* (Pendleton), Oct. 17, 1908.

<sup>287</sup> *Rock Island (IL) Argus*, Apr. 17, 1906; *St. Landry Clarion*. (Opelousas, LA) Oct. 26, 1907; *Bee* (Earlington, KY), Jan. 30, 1908; *East Oregonian* (Pendleton) Oct. 8, 1908 Evening Ed.; *Arizona Republican* (Phoenix) Dec. 2, 1908. Newspapers printed similar coverage of Dixon's theatrical adaptation of *The Traitor* just a few years later. See: "The Costumes and the Traitor" *The Lafayette Advertiser* (Lafayette LA) Jan. 5, 1909. Also printed in *The Pensacola Journal* Oct. 25, 1908.

production photos demonstrate the work of skilled costume artisans.<sup>288</sup> One article found in multiple newspapers cited the hard work of the “equine actors” who had to be carefully trained so as not to “bolt at the sight of the weird Ku Klux costumes.”<sup>289</sup> Still others called attention to the “large force of dressmakers and tailors who worked three months to complete these [‘several hundred costumes’] after the costumer had made designs...cosmetic and black cork are bought at wholesale; not only the principles but the humblest supers make up nightly.”<sup>290</sup> Such reports often called attention to the historical accuracy of these productions, and yet simultaneously they showed the amount of artifice necessary to achieve such accuracy.<sup>291</sup> This was not a question of “tricking” audiences, or even the suspension of their disbelief, instead, understanding how the production worked helped to make the imagery that was presented more impressive for audiences.

Thanks to these widely circulating accounts, Americans knew when Dixon’s image of the Klan was being implemented correctly. Dixon’s claims that the book was a truthful representation of the past created an additional imperative for aesthetic coherence

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<sup>288</sup> “Details of the ‘Clansman’” *St. Landry Clarion*. (Opelousas, LA), Oct. 26, 1907; “See the Clansman: Greatest Historical Play in Farewell Engagement.” *Hopkinsville Kentuckian*. Jan. 30, 1908. “New Costumes for Stage Klan.” *Arizona Republican*. December 2, 1908.

<sup>289</sup> “Squadron of Horses to be in *The Clansman*,” *Los Angeles Herald*, Nov. 28, 1908.

<sup>290</sup> “Details of the ‘Clansman’” *St. Landry Clarion*. (Opelousas, LA) Oct. 26, 1907.

<sup>291</sup> While the first scholars of mass culture represented early twentieth-century audiences as uncritical consumers, more recent scholarship has challenged such characterizations. Late nineteenth-century entertainers and impresarios like P.T. Barnum, Buffalo Bill Cody, and Charles Gunther all engaged in what Barnum called the “humbug,” deceptions that engaged the audience’s willing participation. Jay Cook has argued that such audiences can hardly be understood as “uncritical,” rather these viewers sought entertainment in the play between truth and fiction. In performances and exhibitions, Barnum, Cody, and Gunther treated audiences to fantastical, hyperbolic visions of both past and present, using audiences’ own sensory perceptions to “see” the truth for themselves. Cook describes this as an “epistemological shift in the meaning of ‘curiosity,’” as Barnum’s audiences started to debate not only the “trick” but the way in which advertising and the structure of their encounter with the trick interpellated the viewer into the process of being tricked. Cook, “The Culture Industry Revisited” 308; James W. Cook. *The Arts of Deception*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Clement Silvestro. “The Candyman’s Mixed Bag.” *Chicago History* 2.2 (Spring 1972): 86–99.

between novel and play. The play's producers used a line drawing of Keller's illustration from the novel's frontispiece in newspaper ads, and directly reproduced the illustration on the cover of souvenir programs. (**Figs: 2.6, 2.7**) This continuity not only linked novel and play, but also operated as an authenticating device. If both book and novel were advertised as re-creations of history, then those creating costumes for the play could not take artistic liberties with the production of these garments.

This visual continuity between novel and play also served to reflexively demonstrate the veracity of the historical interpretation Dixon presented. (**Fig 2.7**) Dixon used Williams and Keller's illustrations from his novels to illustrate a history of the Klan that he published in *Metropolitan Magazine* in February of 1905, just a month after the novel's publication. Alongside photographic portraits of men Dixon named as proud members of the Reconstruction Klan, Dixon again included the frontispiece image from *The Clansman*, and the portrait of Dick, the character who was lynched in *The Leopard's Spots*. The former image was printed with reference to the novel, while the latter received a new caption, perhaps in light of its removal from the novel.

(**Fig 2.8**) News reports about Dixon's story, likely written by Dixon or a publicist from his publisher, claims authenticity for the history that the author presented in his magazine article, on the basis of the popularity of his fiction.<sup>292</sup> Dixon was using history to lend authenticity to his fiction and fiction to lend authenticity to his history. Critics expressed skepticism at this circular logic, but audiences continued to buy copies of Dixon's books and tickets to his play, even if they were more invested in these works as entertainment, rather than historical truth.

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<sup>292</sup> *Bismark* (ND) *Daily Tribune*, Aug 26, 1905. Speaking about Dixon's widely reprinted article "The Story of the Ku Klux Klan" *Metropolitan Magazine*. Vol XXII, No VI (Sept 1905) 657-699.

## Putting *The Clansman* on Screen

The new medium of moving pictures provided an opportunity for Dixon's work to extend beyond the limits of existing media. Where theatrical productions had to work to provide a continuity of presentation to audiences across multiple tour stops, film promised the opportunity to provide a consistent viewing experience to all audiences. Between 1906 and 1915, several attempts were made to adapt *The Clansman* to film. The Kinemacolor Corporation's attempt to film twenty-five minutes of the play on color film on a set in New Orleans ended in bankruptcy in 1912, after which D. W. Griffith purchased the cinematic rights for the play.<sup>293</sup> Epic in terms of both historical scope and its 190-minute running time, *The Birth of a Nation* was a modern technical achievement that masked contemporary cultural criticism as objective historical documentation. Griffith's cinematic adaptation of *The Clansman*, eventually re-named *The Birth of a Nation*, was based more closely on the script of Dixon's theatrical adaptation than the original novel.<sup>294</sup> Still, Griffith did not rely on Dixon's research alone to construct the historically accurate film he wished to make; he instead used archival materials in an attempt to produce painstakingly realistic copies of mid-nineteenth-century costumes, scenery, and props. In fact, Griffith went so far as to visually reconstruct scenes from photographs and illustrations of the Civil War period.<sup>295</sup>

Griffith's film synthesized Dixon's novel with several other popular texts on Reconstruction, including works by members of the "Dunning School"—a group of

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<sup>293</sup> Mayer, *Stagestruck Filmmaker*, 144-145, Name changed after initial previews of the film in Los Angeles in 1915.

<sup>294</sup> Mayer, *Stagestruck Filmmaker*, 147.

<sup>295</sup> Stokes, *The Birth of a Nation*, 91.

historians sympathetic to the plight of former Confederates who used both legal and extralegal methods to resist national rule of the South following the Civil War. While scholars of the Dunning School were later critiqued for the obvious bias of its historical analysis, Griffith used these texts as factual sources for his film.<sup>296</sup> Griffith's obsession with historical "accuracy" included not only his own research, but the labor of numerous assistants who pored over battlefield maps and other archival materials in order to portray "objective" historical truth.<sup>297</sup> According to several of Griffith's biographers, understanding himself as a historian allowed Griffith to insulate himself from critiques of the film that challenged the film's profoundly racist plot. In public responses to such criticism, Griffith responded with shock that his work could be understood as racist, much less revisionist, arguing that instead, cinema allowed for an "objective" portrayal of the past.<sup>298</sup> In the near future, Griffith argued, "...you will merely seat yourself at a properly adjusted window, in a scientifically prepared room, press the button, and actually see what happened. There will be no opinions expressed. You will merely be present at the making of history."<sup>299</sup> This desire for scientific objectivity is characteristic of modernist thought at the turn of the century, yet Griffith's articulation of such a method reveals the ways in which his film naturalized nostalgic sentiment as historical truth. Implicit in Griffith's argument was the notion that image could offer a more "complete expression" of the past than language, which was automatically mired in subjective opinion.

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Gish, 138; Schickel, 238. Actress Grace Kingsley reports buying her own clothes for films in "Clothes" *Photoplay Magazine*. Vol VII no 6 (May 1915) 104.

<sup>298</sup> Robert Lang, "The Birth of a Nation: History, Ideology, Narrative form" (in Lang 1994) 4

<sup>299</sup> "D.W. Griffith, "Five Dollar 'Movies' Prophesied." *The Editor*, April 24, 1915. Reprinted in *Focus on DW Griffith*, ed. Harry M. Geluld (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971) 34-35. Also quoted in Lang, "The Birth of a Nation," 4.

But when it came to the design for Klan regalia, Griffith's commitment to the presentation of "objective" historical fact was tempered by his appreciation for visual drama. Film scholar Melvyn Stokes has demonstrated that Griffith's use of Dixon's design for Klan robes was a choice made in the face of a significant volume of historical evidence suggesting the breadth of costumes worn by Klansmen in the Reconstruction period. The historical source materials used by Griffith included multiple eyewitness accounts of Klan dress in use: a lithograph of men in confiscated Klan dress produced during the KKK Hearings in 1872, and even a photograph of an extant Klan costume found in Elizabeth Howe's as of yet unpublished pamphlet on the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>300</sup> In the end, however, the Klansmen in *The Birth of a Nation* were clad in uniform robes that almost precisely replicated those worn by the actors of *The Clansman*. The reason for this fell somewhere between Griffith's appreciation for spectacular visuals, and the practical limitations of his medium. Uniform white robes made a dramatic visual statement that was particularly impressive on the large-scale cinematic screen, and the promise of this image may have motivated Griffith to select this particular work for adaptation. Griffith later claimed that while Dixon's novel "I could just see these Klansmen in the movie with their white robes flying."<sup>301</sup> Likewise, white robes stood out particularly well in the half-tone universe of black and white film.

Though the designs reflected the totality of Griffith's vision, these costumes revealed the still-unstable divisions between theatrical and cinematic performance in this period. The Klansmen of Griffith's film wear costumes closely linked to those worn in the

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<sup>300</sup> Stokes, *The Birth of a Nation*, 195.

<sup>301</sup> Stokes, *The Birth of a Nation*, 201. Quoting Griffith, originally found in Hart, *The Man Who Invented Hollywood*, 88.



theatrical adaptation *The Clansman*, with some key differences. (**Fig 2.9**) The rationale behind Griffith's aesthetic decisions was likely linked to the strength of his vision and the inspiration that he found in Dixon's work.

Along with Griffith's will, some elements of the business of costume production in this period may also be useful in helping us understand why the film looked the way that it did. Griffith was the first director to commission costumes explicitly for a particular film, and two costume designers are known to have worked on the project. Clare West was a Missouri native who went on to become a well-known designer in the decades following the success of *The Birth of a Nation*.<sup>302</sup> Robert Goldstein was the son of a German immigrant who opened a multi-pronged business selling costumes, wholesale novelties, and human hair goods in San Francisco in the 1880's. Goldstein was already working in his father's business at the age of 16, and by the 1910's the family expanded to publishing play-scripts as well as selling costumes.<sup>303</sup> Goldstein invested in *The Birth of a Nation*, and his costume house produced the military uniforms for the film. *The Birth of a Nation* was made in a transitional moment when costume departments were still a very new aspect of a film's production team.

Leading actress Lillian Gish recalled a tremendous amount of control over her garments, some of which were even made by her mother.<sup>304</sup> It is unclear precisely who made the

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<sup>302</sup> West later claimed a dramatic biography for herself, one that likely embellished the story of the actual "Clare Smith"

<sup>303</sup> Simon Goldstein, 1900 US Census, San Francisco California, Roll 105, Pg. 6A Enumeration District 0207. FHL Microfilm 1240105. San Francisco City Directory (1912), 722; Robert Goldstein Passport Application (1923), Ancestry.com, Accessed Jan. 5, 2015.

<sup>304</sup> In her memoir, actress Lillian Gish noted that Klansmen wore "white and scarlet robes" as dictated by Dixon. The robes in *The Clansman* are all white with scarlet trim, but it is possible that the dark robes in the film are entirely scarlet, like the robes worn by the traitorous Klansmen in Dixon's novel and play *The Traitor* (1907). Lillian Gish with Ann Pinchot. *Mr. Griffith, The Movies, and Me*. (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 138; *Pensacola (FL) Journal*, Oct. 25, 1908.

Klan costumes worn in *Birth*, though their standard appearance suggests an organized project on the scale of Goldstein's shop.

If the business of film costuming was still nascent, the medium itself presented new logistical challenges. While production photos of the Northern touring company of *The Clansman* showed scenes with up to sixteen actors dressed as Klansmen, the crowd scenes in the film were much larger, and scenes like the famous “ride of the Klansmen” on galloping horses included groups of extras two or three times that number. The majority of the actors portraying Klan characters still wore garments that closely resembled the theatrical costumes from *The Clansman*, but the background characters wore more varied garments.<sup>305</sup> (**Fig 2.10**) Multiple background actors were dressed in dark robes and hoods, and in large crowd scenes, some of the of the background actors wore tall conical hats, rather than the white hoods topped with a central spike, as depicted in Dixon's novels. This crucial adaptation foreshadowed the uniforms adopted by the second Klan. Some witnesses of nineteenth-century Klan activity reported Kluxers wearing conical hats, but this shape of garment was not mentioned by Dixon in his novel.<sup>306</sup> Likely supported by a cone of buckram (horsehair canvas fortified with glue), it would be significantly easier to mass-produce than the pointed helmets worn by the featured Klansman, and thus would make sense for dressing extras in crowd scenes. Since the business of film costuming was

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<sup>305</sup> “Old Purpose, ‘New Body’: *The Birth of a Nation* and the Revival of the Ku Klux Klan,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 14 (Fall 2015): 616-620.

<sup>306</sup> Tall conical hats appear in images of Klans in North Carolina, Tennessee, and Alabama. See Chapter 1 of this dissertation. Albumen Print, “Plan of the Contemplated Murder of John Campbell” (1871), Nelson Atkins Museum; Tintype, “Anonymous Klansman” (ca. 1869), Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of The Howard Gilman Foundation, 2005; United Daughter of the Confederacy, “Regalia of the Grand Cyclops of the KKK,” Postcard (ca. 1907) Walter L. Fleming papers, 1685-1932, bulk (ca. 1845-1932), Photographs, New York Public Library—a copy of this postcard is also housed at the Alabama Department of Archives and History.

still in development, extras were frequently tasked with finding or making their own costumes, though it is unclear whether the specialized garments worn by Clansmen would have fallen under this rubric.<sup>307</sup> It's also possible that such variations could have resulted from Griffith's much-touted historical research, which would have shown that Klansmen of the Reconstruction era rarely appeared in identical uniforms—much less the identical white robes that Dixon designed. More likely, given Griffith's obvious appropriation of Dixon's design for the lead actors, the need to dress a large volume of actors before the advent of studio costume shops and designers resulted in Klansmen with a less uniform appearance than depicted in Dixon's play.<sup>308</sup>

Perhaps most curious of these changes was one that Griffith and his designers chose not to make. Klansmen in Griffith's film wore one enormous medallion that filled the entire space of their chest, closely approximating the costumes worn by actors in the play rather than the smaller medallions on each breast of the characters in the novels.<sup>309</sup> Film allowed for a new kind of intimacy between audiences and actors, and while audiences were still far from the screen, characters could be magnified and presented larger than life. The concession of enlarging the Klan's insignia, while necessary for large theatrical houses, actually performed a kind of hyperbolic theatricality when viewed in the

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<sup>307</sup> Deborah Nadoolman Landis, *Dressed* (New York: Harper Collins, 2011), 4.

<sup>308</sup> Precisely who made the Klan costumes for the film is up for debate. The most likely candidate is the Los Angeles office of Goldstein and Co., the newly founded branch of the San Francisco based Theatrical Costume and Wig Shop first founded by German immigrant Simon Goldstein under the name Goldstein and Cohen, some time before 1880. (Theatrical Program "Merchant of Venice" at the Baldwin Theater, San Francisco, December 1880; Library of Congress Theater Collection. Simon's son Robert was already working as a "costumer" at age 16 (1900 US Census), and he moved to Los Angeles some time around 1912, and reportedly became involved with *Birth* when Griffith invited him to invest in the film. Some reports suggest that Goldstein Co. made the military uniforms for the film, but others have claimed that actors wore real military surplus. Costume Designer Clare West is credited for her work on the film, but she was not yet affiliated with a studio or shop to actually produce the robes. The most direct account of the film's costume is from star Lillian Gish, who claimed that her mother made some of the costumes.

<sup>309</sup> "Author of The Clansman Likes Southern California" *Los Angeles Herald* (November 8, 1908) 3.

film. This is particularly apparent in light of the frequently naturalistic design choices that Griffiths makes throughout the movie. This decision paralleled his choice to have white actors perform characters in blackface, alongside Black actors who appeared in the film in background roles. While its possible that this was simply another instance of industrial growing pains, the theatricality of the Klansmen's appearance in this film was useful for the kind of argument Griffith was making about the temporary nature of the Reconstruction-era Klan. This move was a slight pivot away from the polished and uniformed Klansmen seen in the theatrical and textual versions of *The Clansman*. Yet this distinction was largely lost on audiences, likely because the media campaign for the film focused heavily on familiar images, which bound all three versions of the story together, across media.

### **Flooding the Market**

While Dixon, Griffith, and their many collaborators created dramatic images for popular consumption, the real project of getting audiences to buy into Dixon's image of the Klan was left to advertising agents like Howard Herrick, who were tasked with making the connections between this collection of works visible to broader audiences. This transformation of the popular iconography of the Klan emerged in the midst of the development of the advertising industry, which helped consumers distinguish between the products of a rapidly expanding consumer landscape during what historian Susan Strasser has termed the "ad era."<sup>310</sup> The proliferation of new transportation and communication technologies in the late nineteenth century resulted in the rapid expansion of national commercial networks through which cultural symbols were transmitted; meanwhile,

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<sup>310</sup> Strasser, *Satisfaction Guaranteed*, 6, 17-20.

armies of advertisers sought to help Americans articulate newfound desires, which could in turn be satisfied through the consumption of goods and images. The rise of modern mass culture in this period depended not only on widespread public access to a given event, but also on the creation of a new semiotic vocabulary, shared symbols that helped such audiences interpret and communicate these experiences with others in their social worlds. At the same time, the development of the nascent culture of mass marketing enabled the creation of new publics through shared cultural experiences of branded goods.

Scholars have long highlighted the role of professional advertisers in the rapid expansion of the early twentieth-century Klan.<sup>311</sup> Edward Young Clarke and Elizabeth Tyler of the Southern Publicity Association each played important roles in creating a national system of paid recruiters for William J. Simmons's newly revived Klan by trying to raise the profile of the organization in the public view. But Clarke and Tyler's publicity campaign relied on the image of uniformed Klansmen to amplify the order's visibility. Their 1920 campaign drew on the circulation of the Klan's visual trademark in popular culture for a full decade prior to the Klan's revival. The Klan's success in the early twentieth century was in part reliant on the organization's popular visibility through the group's use of an already recognizable trademark.

Professional advertising men like Howard Herrick, creator of the billboard in San Antonio, were thus central to the creation of an audience for the works that Dixon,

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<sup>311</sup> While not a scholarly account, Henry Peck Fry's expose of the Klan focused heavily on its publicity apparatus, a fact that has led many scholars to reach this conclusion. *The Modern Ku Klux Klan*. (Boston, MA: Small, Maynard, and Co., 1922). The popular reception of Fry's claims about the Klan not only suggest that he was not exaggerating the role of Young Clarke and Tyler, but also that Americans were familiar with this kind of advertising strategy. Cutlip, Scott M. *The Unseen Power: Public Relations, a History*. (Hillsdale, N.J.: Erlbaum Associates, 1994). Other foundational accounts of the Klan's use of publicity include Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, (1965), Craig Fox. *Everyday Klansfolk* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011) 1-32.

Griffith, and their collaborators created.<sup>312</sup> When Howard Herrick made a billboard advertising Dixon's image of the Klan, he was intimately familiar with the ways each of these industries were changing. Though Herrick may not have thought of it this way when he hired men to paste notices for a traveling production of *The Clansman* in towns all over the country, he was selling the Ku Klux Klan. Herrick, like many of the freelance cultural workers in this period, did not develop his expertise in one media, but worked across several: newspapers, theatrical and cinematic advertising. He made money on the side writing songs for sheet music—another mass-market item at the time—and eventually moved into advertising for both government and commerce. Herrick's job was to organize the logistics for the touring theatrical company, and to administrate a publicity campaign that would sell tickets in all the towns along the way. When touring shows profited, so did their press representatives, and some agents did so well that they moved up through the industry, becoming tour managers, or moving into film, or advertising for other industries.<sup>313</sup> Herrick was the quintessential press agent in this regard; he did all of these things, transforming his job with *The Clansman* into a tour manager position, and then press jobs with an adaptation of Thomas Dixon Jr.'s third Klan novel, *The Traitor*, before

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<sup>312</sup> Advance publicity agents, sometimes called advance men, played crucial roles in the project of creating a national culture in the mid-nineteenth through early twentieth centuries. They were to be, in the words of legendary nineteenth century theatrical manager Robert Grau, "business [men] in the amusement world," whose "hustle" translated into profit for their bosses. (Legendary theatrical manager Robert Grau described the job in these terms in *The Business Man in the Amusement World; a Volume of Progress in the Field of the Theatre*. New York, [c1910]. 298.) Veteran theatrical managers like Charles Frohman and Robert Grau learned their trade through practice, joining touring stock companies as young men, working their way up through company management to become operators of large scale touring companies like the "mammoth minstrel shows" that Frohman managed in the 1880's. These shows, massive spectacles that utilized some combination of musicians, comedians, blackface minstrelsy, dancers, and performing animals, and required significant bureaucratic apparatuses to make sure that everyone was paid, fed, and the costumes made it to the next town. Mishaps were frequent, as Frohman described in his self-aggrandizing memoirs, sometimes innkeepers would hold costumes and props until the company's bills were paid.

<sup>313</sup> Pendexter, Hugh. "On the Trail of the Press Agent." *The Green Book Album: A Magazine of the Passing Show*, January 1910.

making his way into film to sell *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915. For these reasons, Herrick's, career was bound to the trajectory of this constellation of texts, which together transformed how white Americans saw and talked about the Klan.<sup>314</sup> Herrick's role lacked the fanfare of Dixon's work promoting this image of the Klan, but his job was no less important in getting these images to connect with consumers.

When Herrick went on the road to promote *The Clansman's* first touring company in the fall of 1905, the advance man's role was well established in the commercial structure of the combination company. Though he started his career as a theater columnist for a Virginia newspaper, Herrick soon parlayed that work into a busy career as an advance man, though he also published a novel and worked as a composer and lyricist for sheet music companies on the side for a little extra income.<sup>315</sup> Some of the most famous theatrical producers of the day started their careers as advance-agents, since the job was seen as a step towards more lucrative management positions.<sup>316</sup> While he made some

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<sup>314</sup> While he notably promoted theatrical productions of both *The Clansman* and *The Traitor*, Herrick also went on the road promoting performers like Bertha Kalich (the first Yiddish actress to make the transition to the English stage), German actor and director Ernst Von Possart, and Broadway plays like *The Shepherd King*, a 1904 biblical spectacular set in Ancient Egypt that was later made into a silent film. ("Herrick Exploits Kinemacolor." *Motography*, August 1911; "Motion Picture News: Herrick to Exploit Kinemacolor." *The Billboard*, August 5, 1911.) This diversity of interests, or perhaps more aptly, Herrick's ability to follow the available work suggests that his time working for the Southern Amusements Company was part of a much longer career. And yet, a couple of interesting confluences suggest that there is more of a tie between Herrick's employment and the Klan's revival than we might otherwise suspect. Herrick's work on not only *The Clansman*, and the traitor, but his subsequent entry into film publicity, including stints as a tour manager for cinematic presentations of D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, his subsequent film *Intolerance*. Herrick's first film project was presenting films at the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Reunion of Confederate Veterans in 1911. ("Confederate Pictures Please." *The Billboard*, Aug. 19, 1911).

<sup>315</sup> "Items of Interest Concerning Plays and the Players." *The Washington Post*, Feb. 16, 1908; "Herrick Exploits Kinemacolor." *Motography*, Aug. 1911; "Motion Picture News: Herrick to Exploit Kinemacolor." *The Billboard*, Aug. 5, 1911.

<sup>316</sup> Memoirs and biographies of nineteenth century press agents relay the kind of bootstraps ingenuity that was to mark the career of a successful ad-man. See: Grau, Robert. *The Business Man in the Amusement World; a Volume of Progress in the Field of the Theatre*. New York, 1910; Robert Grau. *The Theatre of Science; a Volume of Progress and Achievement in the Motion Picture Industry*. (New York, 1914); Marcossou, Isaac Frederick, and Daniel Frohman. *Charles Frohman: Manager and Man*. (New York: Harper Brothers, 1916).

effort to be known as a composer or literary man, Herrick consistently took jobs offered by theatrical producers who needed a man on the ground to secure audiences for productions touring regional or national circuits of theaters. Whether he was canvassing Marshalltown, Iowa or Pensacola, Florida, Herrick generally traveled a week ahead of the company in order to drum up publicity, excitement, and even controversy over an upcoming local engagement. Upon arriving in a town, Herrick met with local newspaper staff, placing paid advertisements and encouraging the production of “news stories” based on press releases produced by Herrick and his colleagues. He also worked with members of the local bill-posters unions that were responsible for pasting advertisements for the touring show around town. Posting bills was only one of many tricks in Herrick’s repertoire. He wrote public notices, bought advertisements, planted (or even entirely faked) news stories, solicited celebrity endorsements, reported box office numbers, and initiated local contests.<sup>317</sup> If Herrick did his job right, tickets would move briskly and he could move on to the next town and start the process all over again. All this work was to make a melodramatic spectacle of the Lost Cause appear exciting for audiences across the country, which meant that he was selling the show to a range of audiences at once.

Like other popular shows at the time, *The Clansman* was organized by producers in New York, and then sent to tour a circuit of towns that boasted theaters and potential audiences large enough to warrant a stop. Theatrical producers used industrial consolidation to maximize profits and audiences. Larger shows—circuses and “mammoth” spectacle productions featuring large casts, live animals, and often

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<sup>317</sup> Herrick’s tour scrapbook includes examples of his use of each of these techniques. Working as part of a team, there is often no way to tell which strategies were Herrick’s own, and which were used across the Clansman Tour, but the repetition of language between tour notices and press clippings suggest that Herrick and his colleagues shared some information. Howard Herrick Scrapbook, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin.



spectacular effects—were made possible by the consolidation of funding streams, while the scale of these productions necessitated the development of publicity apparatuses that could sell enough tickets to make a touring show profitable. Theatrical productions of Dixon’s work traveled to theaters controlled by Marc Klaw and Abraham Erlanger, managers of the powerful “Theatrical Syndicate” founded by powerful manager Charles Frohman and several partners.<sup>318</sup> This job benefitted from the increasing visibility of Dixon’s entire media empire. Herrick was one of three press agents traveling with productions of *The Clansman*, all under the auspices of their boss in New York, George Brennan. Dixon’s publisher, Doubleday, Page and Co., was still busy promoting Dixon’s novels, and as touring companies of *The Traitor*, as well as showings of *The Birth of a Nation*, entered the media landscape, these companies boasted advertising agents and company managers of their own. Herrick’s career helps to demonstrate that the ties between these groups of advertisers were often quite intimate—Herrick himself worked on tours of *The Clansman*, *The Traitor*, and *The Birth of a Nation* over the course of a decade. For this reason, building connections between these cultural works was not only good for business, it actually made less work for the ad-men.

Posters and other promotional materials for *The Birth of a Nation* echoed and in many cases simply reproduced publicity materials for the theatrical tour of *The Clansman*. One poster (**Fig. 2.11**) combined features from Keller’s two most familiar illustrations

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<sup>318</sup> Marcossou, Isaac Frederick and Frohman, Daniel. "Birth of the Syndicate" *Charles Frohman: manager and man* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1916) 186-187; Though the syndicate’s monopoly rapidly declined in the 1910’s, following a series of tragedies and legal challenges, other managers were happy to take their place. In 1928, the Albee-Keith circuit, a network of theaters that merged with the western “Orpheum” circuit to create the largest theatrical monopoly in American history. This new reach also created possibilities for new methods of control over cultural workers. Albee and Keith’s chief innovation was their creation of the United Booking Office, a clearinghouse for performers and theatrical laborers trying to find jobs, a feature that consolidated not only the funding streams and performance venues, but also the labor force both on stage and off.

from the novel, combining a robed man on horseback, wielding a flaming cross.

Marketing for early cinema drew on techniques developed in the process of marketing circuses and traveling theatrical productions, as early films toured the country much in the same fashion. Theatrical circuits created useful models for early cinema, as moving pictures first reached audiences through limited-term presentations in theatrical houses. These “road shows” often utilized the same bookers and agents who’d traveled those routes with theatrical productions.<sup>319</sup> Though the business of theater was easily adapted for the screen, the medium caused endless challenges for theatrical artists and directors trying to make their way on screen. These methods stressed “local implementation for national campaigns,” deploying advertising that either spoke directly to an individual group of consumers, or created an intimate relation between customer and product.<sup>320</sup> While the novelty of what was just becoming known as the “movie” already prompted a kind of intimacy by positioning viewers in close proximity to historical events that could only be imagined up until this point, Griffith’s team sought multiple ways to provoke such a relationship. Their promotion of Southern nostalgia went so far as dressing ushers and usherettes as Confederate soldiers and southern belles for the film’s March 1915 premier

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<sup>319</sup> Hollywood, as we now know it resulted from industrial consolidation just after the turn of the twentieth century, and vertical integration of film production, distribution, and marketing under the auspices of powerful movie studios. Prior to the invention of the studio, networks of “film entrepreneurs” helped audiences see moving pictures, first in nickelodeons... legitimate theaters, and finally emporia built specifically for movies.” The American “road show,” a traveling, multi-reel cinematic presentation marked the birth of American feature films. Some scholars point to *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) as the first road show, but film historian Kim Holston argues that several prior films were presented in this manner. Kim R. Holston, *Movie Roadshows* Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2013), 9-10; Cara Caddoo, *Envisioning Freedom* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); Sheldon Hall, and Steve Neale. *Epics, Spectacles, and Blockbusters: A Hollywood History*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010) 21-40.

<sup>320</sup> Veteran theatrical manager Robert Grau wrote extensively about the translation of theater advertising techniques for the nascent cinema. He was particularly concerned with the business of creating a national market for moving pictures. *The Theatre of Science: A Volume of Progress and Achievement in the Motion Picture Industry*, (New York: Broadway Publishing Company, 1914).

at the Liberty Theater in Los Angeles.<sup>321</sup> But Americans of the 1910s were not only familiar with stories of the Reconstruction South, or even the Ku Klux Klan; the popularity of Dixon's novel and play meant that many Americans were familiar with Dixon's vision of the Reconstruction Klan.

Cinematic showings of *The Birth of a Nation* did not supersede the novel, as in a teleological progression of media forms. Instead, the marketing materials for that movie often mentioned the novel as a source text, drawing a clear connection between novel, play, and film. At the same time, a new movie-tie in edition of the novel included printed stills from the film, completing the circuit between media. Marketing materials, and the slippery space between journalistic reportage and advertisements that marketing men like Howard Herrick were quick to exploit, constantly underscored these genealogies.

### **Casting Controversy**

While Herrick realized that his job was to sell tickets, he knew that demonstrating connections between the various components of Dixon's media empire would only go so far. The controversial position of representing the Klan as a noble uniform body would do the rest of the work for him, as long as he helped audiences see that controversy at work. The touring production attracted vigorous criticism from groups like the NAACP almost immediately, a fact that only further encouraged audiences to see Dixon's dramatic representation of history.<sup>322</sup> As one theater critic argued in 1906, "*The Clansman* is the sort of sensational melodrama that is certain to arouse acrimonious discussion. Discussion means interest. Interest means a profitable run. No other play of the year has so profitably

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<sup>321</sup> "Griffith Film Scores: Birth of a Nation is enthusiastically received by capacity audience at the Liberty Theater" *The Moving Picture World* (March 13, 1915), 1587.

<sup>322</sup> "Another Avalanche of Criticism," *Greenville Times*. Nov. 11, 1905.

leaped into popularity.<sup>323</sup>” But Herrick, like Dixon, understood that both discussion and interest needed to be cultivated.

In December of 1905 Black pastors across New York City received notices that *The Clansman* would premiere in New York the next month. While the pastors dedicated their Christmas Eve sermons to denouncing the play, members of the “Colored Citizens Protective League” called for a mass meeting on December 26 to plan their response.<sup>324</sup> The CCPL came together in August of that year, in the wake of a violent uprising known as the “Battle of San Juan Hill.” Drawing on networks of Black business owners, religious authorities, and civic leaders, members of the CCPL worked to protect Black New Yorkers from police brutality and other civil rights violations in the city.<sup>325</sup> This imperative made the group an obvious tool for organizing against representations of anti-Black violence on the New York stage as well as its streets. The test for the CCPL’s efficacy in political organizing along cultural lines was their coordinated effort to halt the presentation of *The Clansman*.

The most useful tool for CCPL organizers was a small packet of Thomas Dixon Jr.’s most racist writings, which had been helpfully collected in a small pamphlet and delivered to the homes of ministers and Black civic leaders, members of the CCPL included. Originally attributed to members of the Black community, the authorship of that pamphlet was much more insidious. The CCPL’s protest of *The Clansman* was called off with frustration and embarrassment when a press agent for Dixon’s play, likely Herrick,

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<sup>323</sup> “Pat Chats” *Billboard* 18.26 (June 30, 1906) 13.

<sup>324</sup> *New York Times*, Dec. 25, 1905.

<sup>325</sup> Marilynn Johnson, *Street Justice*, 80-84. CCPL was never really effective, but “established an important precedent in the history of anti-brutality organizing.”

called protest organizers to thank them for their assistance in advertising the play.<sup>326</sup> Or at least that's what a reporter for the *Charlotte Observer* claimed in his January 7<sup>th</sup> story on the aborted protest. Whether or not the CCPL protest was actually fomented by the press agent, or whether the press agent was claiming responsibility for negative responses to the play mattered far less than the degree to which *The Clansman's* publicity campaign embraced the negative press that the controversial play elicited.

Using the outrage of clergy and other public figures to promote a controversial play was just one of the strategies that twentieth-century press agents utilized in order to make a production a commercial success.<sup>327</sup> Agents were known for pursuing “any means to the end,” as author Hugh Pendexter put it, seeking to appreciate “how we are advertised by our enemies as well as by our loving friends.” For press agents, the “end” was profit, but profit was garnered through the creation of sustained popular attention towards a production.<sup>328</sup> Writing in 1910, Pendexter argued that “the truly successful press agent is he who can excite a controversy, a discussion, or an argument involving his company, and then step aside and leave the debate to be settled by a certain portion of the public.”<sup>329</sup> To see themselves portrayed as instruments that enhanced sales for the production that they wanted to squelch was undoubtedly infuriating for the members of the CCPL, but the public expression of that rage would likewise fuel public interest in the play. Rather than

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<sup>326</sup> Russell, Charles Phillips. “Work of A Press Agent: Clansmen Agitation Off.” *Charlotte Observer*. Jan. 7, 1906.

<sup>327</sup> Pendexter, Hugh. “On the Trail of the Press Agent.” *The Green Book Album: A Magazine of the Passing Show* (January 1910) 217-224.

<sup>328</sup> Pendexter, “On the Trail,” 218.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid*, 221.

calling further attention to the play, the members of the CCPL chose another strategy—dropping their protest and ignoring the production altogether.

Subsequent protests against *The Clansman* in Philadelphia, Indianapolis and Chicago met with greater success, and in some cases local officials ordered a halt to the play.<sup>330</sup> But the continued popularity of the touring production suggests that the strategy pursued by Dixon, the Southern Amusement Company, and press agents like Howard Herrick was already working. Americans were talking about *The Clansman*, and whether that conversation was praise or criticism, they reinforced the visibility of the play and the story that it told about the Ku Klux Klan. By the release of *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915, both NAACP and the film's supporters had a strategy prepared. *The Crisis* reported extensively on attempts to “suppress the photoplay based on *The Clansman*” in various parts of the country, including Boston, and St. Paul Minnesota.<sup>331</sup>

### **Re-enactment**

Challenges to the legitimacy of these representations of the Klan had the effect that critics of the play most feared. The Klan's visibility in popular culture soared, as cultural producers used the organization's name and use of costumes for salacious entertainment. Washington, D.C. society pages reported a hostess throwing a “Cotillion of the Confederacy,” early in 1906.<sup>332</sup> Along with a re-enactment of secession and surrender, one

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<sup>330</sup> “The Clansman Denounced in Indianapolis.” *The Freeman*, Jan. 6, 1906; “Clansman Suppressed” *New York Times*. October 24, 1906; “Seek to Suppress a Play,” *New York Times*. Nov. 25, 1906; “Afro-Americans Protest,” *Afro-American* (Baltimore MD), Feb. 23, 1907; “Afro-Americans Will Make Public Protest First Night of ‘The Clansman.’” *Detroit Free Press*, Apr. 22, 1907; “Negroes File Protest Against the Clansman.” *Los Angeles Herald*. Nov. 23, 1908; “Negroes Protest (the Clansman).” *Cairo (IL) Bulletin*. Jan. 18, 1907; “Negroes Threaten to Boycott Play (Clansman).” *Clarksburg Telegram* (WV), April 6, 1906; “Towns Protest Against Production of ‘Clansman.’” *St. Louis Post – Dispatch*, Dec. 10, 1906; “Protesting Performance of the Clansman.” *New York Clipper*, May 20, 1911.

<sup>331</sup> *The Crisis*, (July 1915) 147-8.

<sup>332</sup> “Society,” *Washington Post*, Mar. 4, 1906.

sensational tableaux featured “the Ku Klux Klan, with all their weird mystery.” Again, costume became a way to authenticate the performance, as “each member of the party was dressed exactly as the real Klansmen were forty years ago, the leader bearing a death head with green eyes and an original Banner of the Empire of the Invisible, tattered and torn.” A month later, the Baltimore *Afro-American* reported on a mask party held by a middle-class hostess in a primarily Black neighborhood of the city. Along with a Fortune Teller and a Puritan Maid, a young Mulatto mail carrier arrived dressed as a “member of ku-klux clan.”<sup>333</sup> Having been successfully translated into entertainment, the Ku-Kluxer was a useful cultural boogey-man, identifiable to viewers at costume parties and offering a frisson of playful danger at a ball.

These playful performances were not necessarily new, but there was some suggestion that Dixon’s particular image was influencing the way that Americans saw the Klan. Though Klan-like representations of collegiate fraternal life likely affected Dixon’s design of the white-robed Klan figure, Dixon’s model started to shape the ways that college societies represented themselves. (**Fig 2.12**) The 1913 yearbook for Wesleyan College, a private religious school for women in Macon, GA was not only titled “Ku Klux,” but also included an illustration of a white robed figure on horseback on its title page.<sup>334</sup> Dixon’s image also threatened to shape more violent imitations, as in 1906, when a group of young men in Augusta GA, formed a “Ku Klux Klan” and hired “a local tailor”

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<sup>333</sup> “Klansman at Mask Party of Mulatto Baltimore Residents.” *Afro-American*, Apr. 21, 1906.

<sup>334</sup> “For more than a century, the nation’s oldest college chartered for women has had historical links to the Ku Klux Klan that have never been formally acknowledged. Its class names in 1909, 1913 and 1917 were the Ku Klux Klan. The 1913 yearbook is named the “Ku Klux.” “Macon Women’s College Seeks to Atone for Ku Klux Klan’s Legacy.” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, June 22, 2017. <http://www.myajc.com/news/state--regional/macon-women-college-seeks-atone-for-klux-klan-legacy/g7C2fxlEtmV7ge4f7znCK/>.

to “mak[e] the costumes, according to the approved Dixon model.”<sup>335</sup> This reflexive imitation of art was precisely what worried Dixon’s critics, and while the initiative was quickly stifled by local law enforcement, it showed that this image could make its way from popular culture into everyday life.

Dixon’s uniformed Klan figure reached cultural consumers through multiple avenues, and through a process of mutual validation, each instance of its reproduction was mutually constitutive, reinforcing the validity of presenting the Reconstruction Klan in that particular form. This representational exchange at once served cultural producers who profited from the circulation of the image, but should not be viewed only as a top-down process of cultural control. Consumers seeking to challenge romantic memories of the Klan and those hoping to reinforce visions of a noble order both found Dixon’s representation useful as a space to contest and confirm their understanding of what the organization meant. Curiously, Klan critics did not contest the white-robed representation of the Klansman, or assert representations of the more ragged, anarchic dress that Reconstruction Klansmen actually wore. Instead they tried to suppress the image altogether, arguing that no positive representation of the Klan was appropriate. Dixon’s representation provided a useful point of contact, a shared language between supporters and critics, even as critics argued that it should never have existed in the first place.

### **Strengthening the Brand through Imitation**

Dixon and Griffith both hoped to transform the nation’s cultural landscape, even as their creations were taking on lives that they could not control. Dixon left no written remarks that indicate that he saw his white uniformed Klansman as a proprietary image,

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<sup>335</sup> “Police Broke up would-be Ku Klux” *Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle*, Sept. 26, 1906; “Ku Klux Found in Augusta” *Charlotte (North Carolina) Observer*, Sept. 26, 1906.



but several reports of his legal actions against rival theatrical producers suggest that he wished to retain control of his creative property, even as he attempted to flood the market with his particular representation of the Klan. In at least two instances in 1906 and 1907, Dixon charged theatrical companies in Durham, North Carolina and Fort Worth, Texas with theatrical piracy. This legal charge manifested itself slightly differently in each instance. The first case was more straightforward, as the author admitted the influence of Dixon's material. In Durham, he called for the cessation of a play, "In Reconstruction Days," whose author argued that he'd written his script using Dixon's novel as source material, at least forty days prior the first production of Dixon's own theatrical adaptation.<sup>336</sup> The language of Dixon's complaint is particularly interesting because one of his concerns is that the Corrine Runkle Stock Company was performing a "cheap" imitation of his work. In addition to the company manager, Dixon also brought his copyright suit against the company manager, theater owner, and each individual actor in the company. The next year he had John Harris and the all-male members of the Bailey Rucker Company arrested mid-performance on misdemeanor charges of theatrical piracy. Reports of this event do not explain which parts of the Runkle Company's "cheap" imitation violated the copyright of Dixon's work, or whether his aggressive prosecution of either companies was indeed merited. Nonetheless, Dixon pursued charges against theatrical producers who he saw as stealing his work and ideas, even as he argued that he was simply presenting historical fact.

By the first screenings of *The Birth of a Nation*, Dixon's creative work was being viewed as historical fact, thanks in part to Griffith's own publicity department. This shift

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<sup>336</sup> "Clansman's Author Charges Infringement. Rev. Thomas Dixon Attaches Property of Stock Company Appearing." *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. Jan. 5, 1906; "Dixon Stops Play." *Augusta Chronicle*. Jan. 5, 1906.

was easy to make because of several important properties of the image that Dixon, Griffith, Herrick, and their collaborators developed. First, as Dixon's attempts to control the dissemination of his image demonstrated, his creation quickly left his control through the process of remediation. Second, the multiple actors that made the widespread dissemination of the image possible relied on properties of the image itself. The icon of the white-robed Klansman was formally portable due to its simple but distinctive silhouette, white color, uniformity across multiple figures, and the way that the garment concealed distinctive—and difficult to render—features of any individual face or body. These factors make it possible for errors in continuity to actually strengthen the seeming coherence of the image, just as controversy only called more attention to this particular way of seeing the Klan.

### **Revival**

William J. Simmons revived the Ku Klux Klan by marching a group of thirty shivering men up a mountain just outside Atlanta on Thanksgiving in 1915. Arriving at the base of the privately owned mountain on a chartered bus, Simmons's Klansmen gathered to bring something old back to life. Their ceremonial journey culminated in a ritual cross-burning at their destination; an event that some Atlanta residents speculated was a stunt to publicize the upcoming premiere of *The Birth of a Nation*, which was to open in Atlanta just a few weeks later. Just a few months after the Klan was ceremonially revived on the side of the mountain, the property owner who let the Klan use the land also hired sculptor Gupton Borglum to carve a massive Confederate war memorial on the mountain's side.<sup>337</sup>

While placing a burning cross on the side of Stone Mountain made it possible that some

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<sup>337</sup> Borglum was also an active Klan member. David B. Freeman. *Carved in Stone: The History of Stone Mountain*. (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1997).

Atlantans could see that the ritual was taking place above the tree line, this location was really useful for the mythos-laden stories that could be told about the trip after the fact. Simmons's goal for the stunt was to alert Atlantans to the existence of his order, at least in published reports after the fact. But Simmons also used this event to stress that his order was, in fact, a "revival," which brought the Reconstruction-era Klan back to life. What Simmons's invocation of this term made less clear was the degree to which his newly revived order was, as he would later explain, "reconstructed, remodeled, refined and expanded," a phenomenon that filtered historical images of the Reconstruction Klan through the perspectives and imagery of the present.<sup>338</sup>

There is no record of what Simmons's Klansmen wore as they stumbled up the mountain to revive the Klan, but an Atlanta regalia factory started manufacturing their uniforms less than two weeks after this event. When Simmons published an advertisement in *The Atlanta Journal*, two weeks after the Stone Mountain event, he used a line drawing that closely resembles posters used to advertise *The Birth of a Nation* to illustrate his appeal for men to join his "High Class Order for Men of Intelligence and Character."<sup>339</sup> During the Klan's national expansion over the next five years, similar advertisements could be found in newspapers nationwide. (**Fig 2.13**) This relationship between film and newly revived order was apparent right from the start, with critics of both decrying the obvious connection between representations that glorified racial violence, and the revival of an organization depicted as enacting violence in those representations. White-robed

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<sup>338</sup> William J. Simmons, "The Ku Klux Klan: Yesterday, Today, Forever" (Atlanta: Ku Klux Klan Press, 1916), 1. The Labadie Collection, Special Collections Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>339</sup> *Atlanta Journal*, Dec. 6, 1915.

Klansmen riding through the streets of Atlanta in order to advertise the film brought the obvious connection between cultural text and real-life revival full circle.<sup>340</sup>

But it really wasn't a circle at all. Images of the Klan in popular culture helped contemporary Americans to categorize and articulate their current experiences in service of creating a new organization that would dominate the landscape of racial relations in the twentieth century. Simmons understood that he had appropriated a powerful image, and knowingly embarked on what film scholar Melvyn Stokes has called a "marriage of mutual convenience" with all these fictional representations of the Klan. When white-robed Klansmen rode through Atlanta, they advertised their organization and the film, all at the same time because the image of the white-robed Klansman was a cultural icon before Simmons gathered men on Stone Mountain. Simmons knew this, and though he later denied it, this was precisely why he chose to dress his men in white robes and pointed helmets.

The process of inventing a new common sense for how the Klan looked could not be impressed on Americans from above, though cultural producers certainly played their part. In fact, the image of the Klan that Dixon invented was so powerful because it became a coherent site from which the organization could be debated. These debates, in turn, reinforced the power and meaning of the white uniformed Klansman. Ironically, the self-aggrandizing author who started all this, who went to court to protect his representation, received little credit for his work. Simmons, a self-promoter rivaled only by Dixon and Griffith, claimed to have seen the design for his Klan's costumes in a dream, some fifteen

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<sup>340</sup> Stokes, *The Birth of a Nation*, 233; Wade, *The Fiery Cross*, 144-45.

years prior to his revival.<sup>341</sup> Conveniently, this timeline suggested that Simmons designed a white-robed, uniformed Klan while Dixon was writing his first Klan novel. Given that Simmons was already picturing his order as a fraternal organization that could bring him a significant windfall of cash, avoiding any potential conflict with the litigious novelist and playwright was a sound decision.

For Dixon and Griffith both, this was just as well. While both men clearly supported the politics of racial separation that the new Klan espoused, they publicly repudiated the new Klan, each taking refuge in claims that the Reconstruction Klan was more “noble” and “principled” than the modern order.<sup>342</sup> Both men claimed, in turn, artistic privilege and historical accuracy, choosing to conceal their racial prejudice under a veneer of professionalism. This was true for Howard Herrick as well. Though Herrick started his career as a delegate to the Democratic Party Convention of 1896, where Populist candidate William Jennings Bryan won the presidential nomination, his life on the road may have proven too tumultuous for the kind of lodge commitments that a Klan membership required. Or perhaps Herrick had other plans in mind. In 1917, straight from an engagement as tour manager of Griffith’s *Intolerance*, Herrick was appointed to a new government post. As the advertising manager for the Committee on Public Information, Herrick was charged with selling World War I to the American public.<sup>343</sup> Luckily, the advertising man was more than well equipped for the job.

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<sup>341</sup> Charles O. Jackson. “William J. Simmons: A Career in Ku Kluxism” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*. Vol 50. No 4. (Dec. 1966) 352.

<sup>342</sup> Michele Gillespie and Randal L. Hall, *Thomas Dixon, Jr. and the Birth of Modern America, Making the Modern South*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

<sup>343</sup> Correspondence of the Division of Films, Telegrams dated April 29, 1918, printed in David H. Mould, *American Newsfilm 1914-1919*, 261

## **Part Two: Visible Empire (1915-1931)**

In 1925 the Ku Klux Klan Incorporated printed a 34-page booklet to advertise the items produced at the organization's Atlanta regalia factory. (*Fig 2.15*) The "Catalog of Official Robes and Banners" presented an aspirational vision of the Klan as part of the national commercial economy—even as the goods pictured were ideologically exclusionary. Looking through this booklet shows a uniform system of garments that used increasingly elaborate trim and more luxurious fabrics to present the group's internal hierarchy in visual form. The catalog employed descriptions of fabrics, trims, and pricing structure that were utterly banal, indistinguishable from other catalogs at the time. The watercolor illustrations of the garments for sale featured the same blandly posed figure repeated page after page. But no amount of mundane commercial framing erased the ideological character of these garments, whose design illustrated various characteristics of the Klan's worldview, and worked to position all those who wore these garments within that context. Klan leaders didn't need ideological text to convey a message to members, the only viewers who ever had access to the catalog—the spectacle of robed Klansmen already did this work for them.

In reality, this catalog was a dramatic fiction. Klansmen did not purchase robes from mail-order catalogs, they instead rented robes from local recruiters (Kleagles) or secretaries (Kilgrapps) of their local chapter. These garments were not theirs to own, the fee was to have the privilege of using the garment during their time with the organization.

The catalog's framing suggested that uniform regalia could transform men into the organization's ideal, but of course the Klan was itself a mess of contradictions. How did the process of transforming idealized image into actual garments contribute to the invention of a new Klan? How did practices of marketing, manufacturing, and distribution shape the process of recruitment and the ways that Klansmen understood the organization to which they belonged? The following chapters untangle the answers to these questions through the process of producing and consuming Klan robes.

### Chapter 3: Made in Atlanta: Manufacturing Uniformity

“Atlanta is all of new men, new industries, new buildings, and the new spirit which is making a New South.”<sup>344</sup>

On August 1, 1912, the Atlanta Manufacturers’ exhibition opened to the public with the high hopes of “showing Atlantans” what “their city [could] make.”<sup>345</sup> At 3:32 pm, Georgia Governor Joseph Brown pushed a small button initiating a cacophony of whirring gears and a band playing the southern anthem “Dixie,” which competed with the din of a reported 7,000 spectators.<sup>346</sup> This crowd flooded an auditorium packed with displays of “Atlanta made clothes,” and other goods manufactured within a few miles of Atlanta’s city center. The crowd was a harbinger of the South’s resurgence and newfound status as a national, and even global manufacturing center. Thus, for the assembled firms, this exhibition was a display of what Atlanta could *be*, just as much as it was a demonstration of what the city could manufacture.

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<sup>344</sup> *San Jose (CA) Evening News*, April 28, 1906.

<sup>345</sup> “Atlanta Goods Will be Shown at Auditorium” *Atlanta Constitution* July 28, 1912. “Atlanta made Clothes will be worn by the exhibitors” *Atlanta Constitution* May 31, 1912; “Plans for Great Show of Atlanta Goods in August are Rounding into Shape” *Atlanta Constitution* Jul 14, 1912. “Governor opens Atlanta Show” *Atlanta Constitution* Aug 1, 1912. “Atlanta Made Goods on Show.” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 24, 1912.

<sup>346</sup> Unfortunately for spectators, the governor did not wear the “Atlanta made overalls which he wears on his farm up country” as commenters hoped he would. “Atlanta Goods on Exhibition” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul 31, 1912.



Setting gears in motion was more than a decorative flourish. Alongside booths packed with ready-made goods, factory owners brought more than \$250,000 worth of machinery into the hall to show visitors how their factories really worked.<sup>347</sup> Building on the prior displays of regional triumphalism, such as the much larger Cotton States International Expos of 1881 and 1895, this show sought to shed the South's strong association with agriculture.<sup>348</sup> Industrialism championed systems for "producing goods for market exchange from a centralized productive space, equipped with labor saving technology actuated by an innate power source."<sup>349</sup> This exhibition argued for the centrality of industry to Atlanta, and in turn the role of their city in the economic life of the nation. Atlanta's boosters signaled a rebranding of the "Gate City," a name first coined to demonstrate their city's role connecting North and South.

Three years after the Manufacturer's exhibition, a very different demonstration of the city's potential occurred when William J. Simmons revived the Ku Klux Klan by marching a group of men up the city's famed Stone Mountain to burn a cross. Despite the obvious gap between the self-consciously medieval ritual of this revival and the industrial demonstrations at the exhibition, these two events were not as distant as we might imagine. In a large booth on the 1912 exhibition's floor, the W.E. Floding Company showed flags, costumes, and fraternal "lodge supplies." Like others in his industry, Floding utilized a national network of suppliers to supplement the goods made by his own

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<sup>347</sup> William A. Link, *Atlanta, Cradle of the New South: Race and Remembering in the Civil War's Aftermath* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013) Introduction.

<sup>348</sup> Theda Perdue, *Race and the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition of 1895*. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011) 7-52.

<sup>349</sup> Gagnon, *Transition to an Industrial South*, (Baton Rouge, LA: LSU Press, 2012), 8-9.

workers at his small factory, located in the industrial core of Atlanta.<sup>350</sup> Thanks to these commercial ties, Floding's catalogs could boast that the company offered a "full line of regalia for every recognized fraternity."<sup>351</sup> In 1915 that range of fraternal goods expanded to include white robes and pointed hoods.

When Atlanta's industrialists celebrated their ability to make "anything," they also gestured towards the creation of a different kind of Southern product: the modern Ku Klux Klan.<sup>352</sup> Seeing the modern Klan in this light is not to ignore the national scope of the organization during this period, which is crucial for understanding the development of the Klan in this period.<sup>353</sup> Nor does this move exceptionalize the region, again consigning the Klan to a particularly Southern phenomenon, as in early studies of the order.<sup>354</sup> Situating

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<sup>350</sup> W. E. Floding Co. Lodge Paraphernalia Catalog No. 75 (1915), Floding Company Archive, Southern Tailors Flag and Banner, The Floding Company. The extensive regalia catalog collection of the Southern Tailors Flag and Banner, Floding Company spans the turn of the century to the 1970s. This collection of a hundred or so trade catalogs reveals that this kind of dense commercial network of manufacturing and resale extended well into the 20th century. Letters between F. O. Brooks, Floding's successor and son-in-law and staff members at De Moulin Bros. requesting goods to be sent for resale demonstrates this practice in the late 1940s. The exact replication of images from DeMoulin's catalogs in Floding Co. catalogs from 1913 onwards, as well as competitor's catalogs with images carefully cut out, suggest that this mid-century practice was ubiquitous much earlier. An image of the "Rough Rider" goat seen in both Floding's catalog and the DeMoulin Catalogs can also be seen in a photo accompanying an article about the Gate City Mfg. Co. booth at the 1922 Atlanta Manufacturer's exhibition: "Thousands Who Attended Manufacturers' Show Admired Booth of Gate City Manufacturing Co." *Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 1, 1922.

<sup>351</sup> "Regalia House Changes Hands" *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 24, 1909.

<sup>352</sup> U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Rules. *The Ku-Klux Klan: Hearings Before the Committee on Rules, House of Representatives*, 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session. (U.S. Government Printing Office, October 11-17, 1921); See also, Wade, *The Fiery Cross*, 147.

<sup>353</sup> The challenge of writing a national history of the Klan highlights the degree to which the organization cannot be characterized by its operation in any particular region alone. This dissertation contributes to a recent wave of cultural histories of the Klan, which argue that its dependence on national culture industries position make it impossible to view the Klan as merely a regional aberration. See: Parsons, *Ku-Klux* (2016) and Felix Harcourt, *Ku Klux Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

<sup>354</sup> John Moffitt Mecklin's 1924 description of Klansmen as anti-modern losers fit well with perceptions of the South as backwards. James Cobb argues that the "controversial labor system; archaic social customs; and staple-crop economy" made the South a productive internal foil for the idealized vision of America that developed shortly after the Revolutionary War. *Away Down South*, 4. The lasting impact of this distinction meant that many Americans, both North and South, have continued to see the region as set apart from national concerns. Historians Matt Lassiter and Joe Crespino challenge southern exceptionalism "not to absolve the South but to implicate the nation." While their work is on the late twentieth century sun-belt,

the Klan's development within the social and economic landscape of early-twentieth century Atlanta shows the role that this, the birthplace of the "New South," played in the production of this mass cultural phenomenon.<sup>355</sup>

If manufacturing could bring a city from virtual destruction to bustling metropolis in just half a century, what could modern manufacturing do for the Klan? Between 1915 and 1920, the W. E. Floding Co. was the official supplier of the regalia worn by Klansmen nationwide. The white uniform robes and hoods made in that factory, as well as those produced in its successors, the Gate City Manufacturing Company (1920-1923) and the Klan's own industrial plant, sometimes called the American Printing and Manufacturing Company (1923-1937), made Simmons and his successors' shared vision of a uniform organization into a material reality. Simmons wanted Klan regalia to stand for the organization's principles: white supremacy, patriarchy, nationalism, and Protestantism, but the garments also symbolized an affiliation between Atlanta's economic aspirations and the social politics that the Klan espoused. Manufacturing uniforms for members of the

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they are part of a long line of Southern historians, from C. Vann Woodward's *Strange Career of Jim Crow* (1955) to Natalie Ring's *The Problem South* (2012) which argue that the racial climate and poverty of the region resulted from *national* social, political, and economic dynamics, many of which originated in the North. Lassiter and Crespino, *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Larry Griffin and Don H. Doyle eds. *The South as an American Problem* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995); Shafer, Byron E, and Richard Johnston, *The End of Southern Exceptionalism Class, Race, and Partisan Change in the Postwar South* (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2009).

<sup>355</sup> For scholarship on the invention of the South in national cultural production of the mid-nineteenth through early twentieth centuries, see Karen L. Cox, "The South and Mass Culture." *The Journal of Southern History* 75, no. 3 (2009): 677-90; Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture*. UNC Press, 2011; Stephen Whitfield, "Is it True What they Sing about Dixie?" *Southern Cultures* 8, (Summer 2002), 8-37; Prince, K. Stephen. *Stories of the South: Race and the Reconstruction of Southern Identity, 1865-1915*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2014. Hillyer, Reiko. *Designing Dixie: Tourism, Memory, and Urban Space in the New South*. University of Virginia Press, 2014. For the role of representations of the South in transnational cultural production, see Meers, *Uncle Tom Mania*, (2005); Helen Taylor. *Circling Dixie: Contemporary Southern Culture Through a Transatlantic Lens*. (Rutgers University Press, 2001).

Klan was, from the very start, wrapped up with creating an organization that aspired to remake the nation in Atlanta's image. Atlanta manufacturers transformed an idealized representation of the Klan into actual garments used to identify members of a burgeoning mass cultural phenomenon. Simmons and his deputies saw an opportunity in Atlanta's industrial rebirth.

Simmons's development of the Klan in a city consciously reinventing itself through industry and commerce was not coincidental; the manufacturing model that drove the invention of the New South was necessarily a way of understanding and organizing racial division as a modern, not antiquated, phenomenon.<sup>356</sup> Both Klan and New South were based upon the slippery, if not contradictory, tension between an imagined, illustrious past and the changing economic conditions of modernity, tensions that come to light not just in the rhetoric that describe the New South and the New Klan, but through the production of the material goods that defined them. While Floding's workers transformed bolts of fabric into white uniform garments, Klan leaders used these garments to manufacture an entire organization

### **New South, New Klan**

Atlanta first emerged in the nineteenth century as a commercial hub and point of access to the agricultural resources of the Deep South, but by the turn of the twentieth century, its boosters envisioned the city as a productive space in its own right. Under the guidance of the city's Chamber of Commerce, the Manufacturer's Exhibition positioned

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<sup>356</sup> The factories that produced Klan regalia demonstrate how the ideological and material components of industrial manufacturing helped craft the Klan's more extreme vision of social division. Excavating operations on these factory floors is tricky because the source base is relatively thin. No business records remain from either the Gate City or Floding operations, and any statistics from the Klan's own regalia factory are self-reported numbers announced at large Klan conventions. The factory's owners left no records of their own motivations or experiences, much less the few workers that can be identified from local demographic data. Likely due to this archival gap, scholars as a whole have paid relatively little attention to these businesses, beyond the fact of their existence.

industry as a regional asset that was central to attempts to reimagine the South. Exhibition chairman J. K. Orr announced that the show was “a demonstration that anything can be manufactured here just as well as in the East or the West.” Atlanta’s new factories meant “the southern people [could] soon free themselves from the habit of sending millions of dollars to the East each year for the products of the factories of New England, New York, and other eastern and northern manufacturing states.”<sup>357</sup> Calling for Atlantans to “free themselves” was likely not a winking reference to the bonded labor regime that once funded the region. Instead, he followed other members of his cohort to argue that financial autonomy from Northern industry was a critical step in inventing a newly modern region.<sup>358</sup> This exhibition was billed as a demonstration that this project was well underway. While seeking economic growth at the expense of Northern industry, Atlanta’s boosters borrowed national discourses of modernity and progress to define their project. Not only were Atlanta’s boosters living in an urban, modern space, but they wanted to be viewed as active participants in the work of remaking their city and region.

Klan leaders envisioned themselves to be part of national narratives about progress during this period, and the design of the new Klan reflected these concerns in transparent ways. If the spectacular revival of the Klan was signaled by a march up Stone Mountain in

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<sup>357</sup> Orr’s attempts to define regional identity were bound up with the bottom line of his own business. In addition to being the chairman of the exhibition, J. K. Orr was also the chairman of Atlanta’s Chamber of Commerce, and the owner of the Red Seal Shoe factory, which was featured prominently in the exhibition. “Plans for Great Show of Atlanta Goods in August are Rounding into Shape” *Atlanta Constitution* Jul 14, 1912.

<sup>358</sup> Michael Gagnon traces the South’s industrial development from the 1830’s-70’s, arguing that industrialization prior to the war developed along ideological lines, and that the force of sectionalism was rooted in Southerner’s recognition of their region’s economic advantage as compared to the North. *Transition to an Industrial South*, (2016). Starting immediately after the war, Confederate sympathizers started to explain the Confederacy’s failure in terms of an insurmountable asymmetry of resources. This argument frequently bolstered the Lost Cause narrative, but the resource problem was certainly a real issue during the war, though these claims tended to overstate the limited capacity of Confederate manufacturing. Harold Wilson argues that the South did not lack industrial capacity during the war, but instead that capacity was mismanaged. *Confederate Industry* (2005).

November of 1915, the real birth of the order was in its application for a state charter a week later. The geographic scope of the newly revived Klan was small at first: the charter members hailed from the city of Atlanta, and a couple of smaller municipalities within a hundred-mile radius.<sup>359</sup> Despite this, the actual scope of Simmons's reach should not be equated with the scale of his aspirations for the group's expansion. According to its charter, the Ku Klux Klan Incorporated had "the power to issue decrees, edicts and certificates of organization to subordinate branches of the corporation in this or other States of the United States and elsewhere, whenever the same shall be deemed desirable in the conduct of its business." Among the charter's ten clauses, which outlined the basic structure for a bureaucracy that could be easily scaled up to fit a growing organization, clause nine stated that like other societies of "like character," the Klan could hold real-estate, make business transactions, and notably, "control the sale of all paraphernalia, stationary, jewelry, and such other materials needed by the subordinate branches of the order."<sup>360</sup> From the very start, Simmons understood that monopolistic control of regalia manufacturing would provide the group with an important revenue stream.

Simmons's embrace of the corporate form was no surprise, given his prior work as a recruiter for another national fraternity, The Woodsmen of the World. Like other popular fraternities of the time, the Woodsmen reflected larger currents of industrial consolidation that were remapping the landscape of American business at the turn of the century. The rise of corporate capitalism resulted several interconnected factors—the emergence of a new class of financiers in the mid nineteenth century, a demand for massive infrastructure

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<sup>359</sup> McIntosh, Ned. "Capitol Gossip: New Ku Klux Klan gets Charter from the State" *Atlanta Constitution*, Dec. 7, 1915.

<sup>360</sup> Klan Charter 1915, Reprinted in Fry *The Modern Ku Klux Klan*, 34-35.

projects (such as the transcontinental railroad) that required a massive outlay of credit from those financiers over the next half-century, and the transformation of legal regulations to enable corporate consolidation.<sup>361</sup> These changes in business not only changed how goods were bought and sold, they resulted in cultural shifts, or what Alan Trachtenburg called a “more comprehensive pattern of change,” as Americans grappled with “a more tightly structured society with new hierarchies of control.”<sup>362</sup> Associational life, such as that provided by national fraternities, offered turn of the century Americans a way to navigate the increasing scale of their worldview. Since at least the eighteenth century, fraternities had encouraged intimate local bonds while connecting members with geographically distant “brothers” through shared ritual practices and imagery.<sup>363</sup> The corporate form provided a way to realize this project on a far more massive scale—following the lead of other cultural producers whose vertical integration of production and distribution systems enabled them to hail mass audiences.<sup>364</sup> Groups like the Woodsmen

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<sup>361</sup> Martin Sklar explains that what he calls the “corporate reconstruction of capitalism... occurred not merely in a few notable firms, or a sector of the economy... but pervasively, and hence involve[ed] a change in the broader economy from price-competitive to administered... markets” *Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism*, 4-14. See also Daniel Crane “The Dissociation of Incorporation and Regulation in the Progressive Era and the New Deal” in *Corporations and American Democracy*. Lamoreaux and Novak eds. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017). For a detailed account of the role of financiers in corporate consolidation see, Sven Beckert, *The Monied Metropolis*, 20-30. Foundational views of the relationship between the development of the corporate form and social transformation in this period can be found in Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order: 1877-1920* (1967); Richard Hoffstader. *The Age of Reform*, (1955), Alan Trachtenberg, *Incorporation of America*, (1982). More recent work includes Noam Maggor, *Brahmin Capitalism* (2017); Rowena Olegario, *The Engine of Enterprise* (2016); Jonathan Levy *Freaks of Fortune* (2014); Michael Zakim, *Capitalism takes Command* (2011); Richard White, *Railroaded* For international dimensions of this story, see Peter James Hudson, *Bankers and Empire* (2017).

<sup>362</sup> Trachtenberg, *Incorporation of America*, 3-4.

<sup>363</sup> Syrett, *The Company He Keeps*, 105-119.

<sup>364</sup> Mary Ann Clawson, “The Business of Brotherhood” in *Constructing Brotherhood* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989) 211-242. A history of the development of the corporate form necessarily requires analysis of industrial cultural production, which was central to the development of finance capital and corporate regulation during this period. See: Cook, “Return of the Culture Industry;” Gomery, *Hollywood Studio System* (1986); Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque in American Culture* (1991); Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents* (1987); Janice Radway, *A Feeling for Books* (1997); Marlis

had charters that circumscribed the organization's leadership structure, goals, operational procedures, and revenue streams.<sup>365</sup> Simmons borrowed this structure in order to develop his new "patriotic, secret, social, and benevolent order" in 1915.

The Klan's chief political aim, policing social hierarchies in terms of race and gender, was conspicuously absent from the charter's legal language. The only hint of the Klan's exclusionary politics was a short line explaining that the organization was limited to "white male persons of sound health, good morals, and high character," a stipulation familiar from charters of other less controversial fraternities in operation at the time.<sup>366</sup> This elision was not surprising; Simmons had a slippery way with facts and characterized the group in different ways for different audiences. Simmons was building on the name and reputation of the Reconstruction-era order, which meant that the name "Ku Klux Klan" already signaled a certain kind of race and gender politics. Just as important, however, was the Klan's political goals were in many ways unexceptional in early-

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Schweitzer, *When Broadway was the Runway* (2009); David Gilbert, *The Product of Our Souls* (2015), Nicholas Gebhardt, *Vaudeville Melodies*, (2015); Timothy Taylor, *Sounds of Capitalism: Advertising, Music, and the Conquest of Culture* (2012).

<sup>365</sup> The articles of incorporation for Simmons's Klan resembled those of the Woodsmen of the World, the "secret fraternal, charitable, and benevolent association for which Simmons worked as a professional recruiter prior to his decision to revive the Klan. The significant difference between these documents is that Simmons's charter gives the Klan the power to "control the sale" of all regalia and paraphernalia related to the order, while the Woodsmen charter states that "It may contract for and procure supplies regalia emblems of the order and all necessaries and transact any other business necessary to carry the objects for which the order is instituted and such as is usually may be transacted by orders instituted for similar objects and purposes." See: "Articles of Incorporation, Sovereign Camp, Woodsmen of the World" Jan 2, 1891. Printed in Woodsmen of the World Life Insurance Society Inc. *Proceedings, Sovereign Camp and Executive Council, Woodmen of the World, 1890-96*. (Omaha, NE: Order of the Sovereign Camp, February 1897). Woodmen of the World Life Insurance Society. *Proceedings of the Eighth Regular Biennial Session of the Sovereign Camp of Woodmen of the World*. Woodmen of the World Life Insurance Society, 1909.

<sup>366</sup> In 1909, candidates for the Woodsmen of the World must be "white male[s] over eighteen years of age and under fifty two years of age of good health sound mind exemplary habits moral character and not engaged in an unlawful business." Woodsmen of the World, *Proceedings*, 133. The stipulation for good health reflected the group's role as an insurance society. While the Klan was not designed to include insurance, Simmons likely included this clause with that possibility in mind.



twentieth century Atlanta. The quintessential city of the New South was perfectly calibrated to dish up old ideas in the antiseptic language of modern business.

Atlanta newspaperman Henry Grady first used the term “New South,” to describe his social and economic progress in the South in a speech to a group of Northerners in 1886. In that talk, Grady described a newly modern region in opposition to the economic and social isolation that characterized the war years. In Grady’s estimation, cotton was still the key to Southern development, but only through an embrace of industrial manufacturing, whereby the region’s most famous product was turned into fabric, a consumer commodity.<sup>367</sup> By 1881, this process was already underway, as Southern cotton mills—destroyed by Union artillery and the panic of 1873—boasted increasingly large numbers of looms and spindles, eventually reaching 2/3 of the nation’s textile mill capacity in 1926.<sup>368</sup> Flourishing industry invited northern manufacturers and northern capital into the region, suggesting that cultural reunification could be accomplished through the pursuit of greater profit.<sup>369</sup>

Despite the language of progress and growth used by the 1912 exhibition’s organizers, the model of regional growth through industrial production that characterized the “New South” relied on a commitment to social division along racial lines not so

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<sup>367</sup> Henry Grady, “Cotton and its Kingdom,” *Harper’s Magazine* (Oct 1881); Beckert, Sven. *Empire of Cotton: A Global History*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014).

<sup>368</sup> Richard H. Edmonds, *Blue Book of Southern Progress*. (Baltimore, MD: Manufacturers’ Record Publishing Company, 1926); Edmonds, *The Southern Redemption: From Poverty to Prosperity*, (Baltimore, MD: Manufacturers’ Record Publishing Company, 1890); Harold Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2002), 281-285.

<sup>369</sup> Ferald Joseph Bryan. *Henry Grady or Tom Watson?: The Rhetorical Struggle for the New South, 1880-1890*. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1994; Gagnon, Michael J. *Transition to an Industrial South: Athens, Georgia, 1830-1870*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012); William A. Link, *Atlanta, Cradle of the New South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

different from that of the so-called “old” South.<sup>370</sup> Factory managers frequently assigned roles based on workers’ identities, practices that reinforced notions of raced and gendered hierarchies as “natural” phenomenon. In fact, Atlanta’s boosters argued, the New South could demonstrate the successful culmination of industrial evolution, as social divisions on the factory floor could stave off violent conflict. As J.K. Orr, chairman of both Atlanta’s Chamber of Commerce and the 1912 Manufacturing Exhibition crowed: “In Atlanta capital and labor work harmoniously, hand in hand for the development of our city and section, and we have never experienced the ill effects of the strikes which have so frequently upset other manufacturing centers.”<sup>371</sup> With this characterization, Orr minimized the violence used to maintain social divisions in Southern labor. Strikes were no less common in Southern factories than in the North, the most violent of which were sparked by white laborers’ concerns about Black workers, mirroring worries about immigrant labor in the North.<sup>372</sup> These conflicts often hinged on arguments about who was capable of doing what kind of work; not only were there questions of whether white and Black women should be working alongside one another, but concerns about unsafe work environments created by cessation of management duties to individuals deemed unworthy of their position.<sup>373</sup> Such justifications rarely accounted for the actual skill of workers

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<sup>370</sup> C. Vann Woodward claimed that the New South represented a significant departure from antebellum business as usual, and that advocates “were preaching a new philosophy and way of life and a new set of values,” as the middle class attempted to dislodge the planter elite. James Cobb challenges Woodward, arguing that “the plantation remained at the center of the New South’s political and economic order.” (17) New South’s boosters made “promises of social continuity” between old and new south, “that reflected not only enduring planter influence but the desires of those who would manage the region’s new factories and commercial enterprises.” *Industrialization and Southern Society*, 16-17.

<sup>371</sup> JK Orr quoted in *Atlanta Constitution*, Aug. 1, 1912.

<sup>372</sup> Cliff Kuhn, *Contesting the New South Order*, (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2001).

<sup>373</sup> Populist agitator Tom Watson used the Atlanta lynching of factory manager Leo Frank in 1913 to call for a revival of the Klan. “The Celebrated Case of the State of Georgia vs. Leo Frank,” *Watson’s Magazine*, Vol

involved, instead, managers slotted workers into categories defined by immutable characteristics of race and gender.

The racial logic underpinning the industrial future Grady celebrated facilitated an important point of agreement between white Northerners and Southerners. Many of the South's white residents actively rejected the civil rights gains and attempts to institute social equality for freedmen, an attitude that led to both the initial emergence of the Klan and the repeal of most of the progressive legislative and judicial gains following the end of Reconstruction.<sup>374</sup> The majority of white residents across the North responded to these losses with ambivalence, at best, and often actively supported the repeal of Reconstruction in favor of reunification strategies. This plan for a "new" South offered a solution to lingering concerns about sectional violence through economic and cultural partnership, and underlying concerns about insurrection along the lines of race and class that haunted northern factories and the rural South alike. The answer to both of these problems was

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XXI, No. 4 (August 1915) 182-226. Frank's murder resulted from a charges that he'd raped and murdered a young worker at the American Pencil Factory that he managed. The lynching was referendum on changing labor practices in Atlanta, and in particular the potential for racial mixing if factory floors like that of the Pencil Company were unmanaged. Critics of Phagan's murder cited the prevalence of exploitative child labor, like that of Phagan, in Jewish-run factories in Atlanta. At home among the largest Jewish population in the South, Atlanta's Jews were better integrated into city life than in many other parts of the region. Yet, Phagan's murder brought up underlying concerns about the moral failings and corruption of what anti-Semitic commentaries referred to as the "Jewish race" as a whole. The successful management of a factory was not only the key to the production of profit, it was, as Phagan's murder portended, a matter of maintaining a healthy and moral society. Thus, even if Frank's murder raised questions about the violence of Southern mobs that were unsettling to sympathetic commentators, ultimately his lynching underscored the importance of popular adherence to social hierarchies. See Melnick, *Black-Jewish Relations on Trial* (2012); Dinnerstein, *The Leo Frank Case* (1968).

<sup>374</sup> Eric Foner, takes up the charge of W.E.B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* (1935), in order to show how white Americans (both Northern and Southern) actively dismantled Reconstruction administrative and social practices in favor of economic gains and the restoration of racial hierarchies. The ensuing period of "Redemption" was marked by white southerners "enjoying a free hand in managing the region's domestic affairs" (585)—a sharp retraction of civil rights gains Black southerners gained during the prior period. *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*. New York: Perennial Classics, 2002; W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880*. 1935 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999); Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 1-22.

adherence to a clear social hierarchy, a solution embraced by the wealthy in both the North and South alike. Society could still be organized according to clearly defined categories of race, gender, nationality, and to some degree class—Grady’s position slyly suggested, though, that Southerners just needed to learn how to articulate their vision in the sanitized language of progress.

Historian C. Vann Woodward called this the “divided mind” of the South, as white Southerners pitted rural traditionalism against the social and economic demands of modernity.<sup>375</sup> But framing these two systems of thought in opposition neglects the degree to which Grady’s model of the New South relied on innovative technologies and organizational methods to reinforce and reinstitute the very set of social hierarchies that characterized the plantation economy of the Old South. In the eyes of Southern industrialists and Klan leaders alike, the region’s modernity, and eventually the transformation of the nation, would be achieved through the revitalization of white supremacy. Economic success in the South would mean moving beyond social unrest and reinstituting order along lines of race, gender, and religion that Atlanta’s industrialists deemed “natural.” This seeming contradiction at the center of the New South was one of its strongest assets, a strategy that the Klan’s architects adopted as they developed their own way of bringing old ideologies into the present.

Atlanta was an exemplary testing ground for both New South industrialists and Klan organizers, because the city’s population explosion at the turn of the century required

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<sup>375</sup> Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 142-145.

civic leaders to rearticulate what the city could and should be.<sup>376</sup> From a population of less than 3,000 in 1850, the census bureau reported almost 90,000 residents by 1900, and 154,839 by 1910. Atlanta became a destination for rural migrants for several crucial reasons: first, poor Black and white Southerners alike faced exploitive labor conditions and low cotton prices while sharecropping in many parts of the rural south.<sup>377</sup> Urban migration was thus fueled by the promise of different kinds of work, including factory labor, and new kinds of social organization, particularly for single young men of both races and white women. Urban migration likewise transformed the lives of Southern Black women, but the range of work outside the home that they could access was increasingly circumscribed by the ever-hardening set of laws and conventions that shaped racial divisions in the Jim Crow South.<sup>378</sup> Second, Atlanta's growth suggested seemingly limitless business opportunities for entrepreneurs who found their way to Atlanta from points outside the region. Atlanta's new residents could be both a labor resource and also consumers of the goods and services the produced. Meanwhile, the city's prominence as a commercial center—the wholesale capital of the South—made the case that goods manufactured in Atlanta could quickly reach markets outside the region in a matter of days.<sup>379</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> Harold Davis has argued that Grady's new South was, in actuality entirely about Atlanta, and that Grady spent far less time considering how his claims about industrialization would translate to the rest of the South. *Henry Grady's New South*, 18.

<sup>377</sup> David Fort Godshalk, *Veiled Visions: The 1906 Atlanta Race Riot and the Reshaping of American Race Relations* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 21; Gilbert Fite, *Cotton Fields No More* (1984).

<sup>378</sup> Tera W. Hunter *To "Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War.* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997) Ch 5.

<sup>379</sup> Scott Reynolds Nelson examines the management of Southern Railways from Reconstruction into the Progressive era in *Iron Confederacies*, (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 1999).

As in other parts of the country, the transformation of Atlanta's social and economic geography resulted in sometimes-violent clashes over access to resources, political franchise, and the right to work. Racial tensions led to a four-day long massacre of at least 10 Black Atlantans in 1906; two years later, a successful 1908 campaign that took the right to vote away from the city's Black male residents.<sup>380</sup> Atlanta's famously partisan newspapers often rendered these battles as the effect of modernity itself—and in particular a noxious effect of the social transformations that Atlanta's new focus on industry demanded. By 1915, critics of Grady's model argued convincingly that that industrial manufacturing did not cure the "persistent poverty" and what was often described as "cultural backwardness" that marked life in much of the rural South, but rather that these structures further entrenched the social divisions that a newly remade region claimed to have eliminated.<sup>381</sup>

Under the right circumstances, then, industrial modernization could bring opposing sides together. One early president of Atlanta's Chamber of Commerce was Rufus Bullock, a controversial Republican who served as Georgia's governor between 1868-71. Despite his unpopular promotion of civil rights and public education for formerly enslaved people and a public embezzlement trial, Bullock restored his reputation among white

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<sup>380</sup> The instigating event for the massacre was a series of newspaper reports that four white women had been raped in separate incidents, leading to public calls for vigilante violence Godshalk, *Veiled Visions*, (2005); Gregory Mixon, *Atlanta Riot: Race, Class, and Violence in a New South City* (Gainesville: University Press Of Florida, 2008). In 1908, Georgia became the last southern state to adopt an elaborate set of tests as a precondition to voting. Designed specifically to disenfranchise Black voters, this amendment to the state constitution included an exemption clause recusing any veterans or the descendants of veterans of wars from the Revolution to the Spanish-American War from testing. Amendment reprinted in Robert Preston Brooks, *History of Georgia* (1913) 358, 380.

<sup>381</sup> Natalie J. Ring *The Problem South: Region, Empire, and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012).

southerners by embracing industrial growth as president of Atlanta's Cotton Mill.<sup>382</sup> At the time of the Klan's revival, the threat of recurring violence led Atlanta's boosters to argue that interracial cooperation was the secret of their city's success in the face of such violent outbursts.<sup>383</sup> This position seemed diametrically opposed to Simmons' folksy populist self-presentation, and yet the Chamber of Commerce and the Klan would converge in surprising ways, thanks to paternalist language that framed economic development as a moral duty. Understanding the revival of the Klan in 1915 requires this context of the city in which its agenda and the most powerful external signs of that ideology were manufactured.

### **Manufacturing White Supremacy**

In order to see how contradictory and complementary dynamics between the Klan and Atlanta's manufacturers played out on the ground, let's turn to the life of William E. Floding, owner of his family's regalia factory and charter member of the Klan. Floding's biography shows just how closely the social worlds of Klan leadership and Atlanta's New South boosters were intertwined through the manufacture of Klan regalia in 1915. In the absence of any first-person accounts of Floding's participation in the order, what can juxtaposing Floding's engagement with the Klan in the New South tell us about his negotiation of these seemingly conflicting projects?

Floding precisely fit the model of the kind of new Southern capitalist that Grady envisioned populating the New South. His uncle George first founded the company in

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<sup>382</sup> Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 16; Russell Duncan, "A Georgia Governor Battles Racism" in *Georgia in Black and White*. Ed. John C. Inscoe (Athens, GA: UGA Press, 1994) 38-64.

<sup>383</sup> Godschalk, *Veiled Visions*, 135-162.

1875 while working as an agent selling sewing machines in Huntington, West Virginia.<sup>384</sup> After emigrating from Germany, George Floding lived in Ohio, and fought for the Union Army prior to his entry to the lodge supply business. George's turn to lodge supplies was a savvy business move, as he capitalized on the rapid expansion of national fraternities following the war.<sup>385</sup> He moved the company to Atlanta in 1905, likely in response to the encouragement of the city's civic leaders who proclaimed their city to be the commercial capital of the South.<sup>386</sup> George sold his now "well-known" regalia business to his nephew William E. Floding in 1909, shortly after W. E. moved his family to Atlanta from his birthplace in rural northwest Ohio.<sup>387</sup> Renamed the W. E. Floding company, the lodge supply company's owner aspired to participate in the civic and commercial life of his new hometown, all the while demonstrating that the Floding company was part of a rapidly expanding national, and even global economy.

Six years prior to the Klan's revival, Floding explained to a reporter for the *Atlanta Constitution* that he wanted to improve the quality of the company's product range and extend distribution of those goods. In addition to his claims to be hiring "skilled help of the highest class and likewise the highest price," Floding suggested that an expanded

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<sup>384</sup> George A. Floding, Agent Howe and Singer sewing Machines and manufacturer Regalias for all Societies" *West Virginia State Gazetteer and Business Directory*, 1877-78.

<sup>385</sup> *West Virginia State Gazetteer and Business Directory*, 1877-78; "A New enterprise" *Atlanta Constitution* Sept 3, 1905.

<sup>386</sup> "A New Enterprise" *Atlanta Constitution* Sep. 3, 1905.

<sup>387</sup> The Floding company alerted customers to the management transition with a pair of letters printed on the back of a 1909 catalog. George announced "I expect to give him [W. E.] the benefit of my THIRTY FOUR YEARS OF EXPERIENCE in the business" Floding Business Archive, Southern Tailors Flag and Banners. 1900 U.S. Census, Van Wert County, Ohio, Population Schedule, Delphos, Enumeration District 96, pg. 268 [stamped], line 34, William E. Floding; National Archives Microfilm Publication T623 Roll 1329; Records of Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29.; 1910 U.S. Census, Fulton County, Georgia, Population Schedule, Atlanta Ward 2, Enumeration District 0053, pg. 13 A [handwritten], line 4, Will E. Floding; National Archives Microfilm Publication T624 Roll 190; Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29.



market for his company's wares could benefit the city at large. As the reporter noted, the company recently sent out 20,000 catalogues to "advertise Atlanta," as well as to drum up more business for Floding's company. His vision extended beyond the region as well, as the article explained: "The house of Floding ships regalias all over the United States, and into many foreign countries... [they] recently they shipped a large order to South Africa and another into the Russian Empire."<sup>388</sup> Beyond these grandiose claims, there is no evidence that the Floding Co. had any success in creating an international market for the company's goods, but the scope of Floding's ambition was clear. The continued expansion of the business, eventually housed in a large building in Atlanta's industrial and commercial district suggests that Floding also had the business acumen to make good on these dreams.<sup>389</sup>

**(Fig: 3.1)**

Floding was also the kind of man that that William J. Simmons approached when he decided to revive the Ku Klux Klan in 1915. Simmons initially advertised the Klan as a "High Class Order for Men of Intelligence and Character," and borrowed liberally from the organizational structure and recruiting models of popular fraternal orders like the Masons, Odd Fellows, and Woodsmen of the World.<sup>390</sup> These groups sought influential businessmen as members because these men could provide the organization with more social and political influence, not to mention their financial resources. The charter that

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<sup>388</sup> There is no further information on what Floding shipped, or whether these shipments were real. Dramatic pronouncements of widespread distribution were common in advertisements of this period, and help us to see Floding's aspirations, if not the actual receipts of his business. "Regalia House Changes Hands" *The Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 24, 1909.

<sup>389</sup> Map of Atlanta, Atlanta, GA: Foote and Davies Co., 1919. Library of Congress.

<sup>390</sup> *Atlanta Journal*, Dec. 6, 1915.

Simmons filed with the state of Georgia on December 4, 1915, included a list of the new Klan's founding members.<sup>391</sup> In later publications, Simmons trumpeted the "authentic" credentials of James V. F. Saul, the nineteenth century Klansman turned chaplain of the new Klan, whose link to the Reconstruction-era order offered an explicit connection with historical organization. But even while Simmons demonstrated the authenticity of his new Klan by gesturing towards the past, the rest of the charter members suggested that the order was taking a new direction. The rest of Simmons's charter members were mostly businessmen and professionals, all living in Fulton County: W. C. Bennett was the proprietor of an eponymous Printing and Rubber Stamp Company, Henry D. Shackelford was the manager of a paint store, Albert G. Dallas ran a real estate firm with his brother-in-law, Eugene R. Clarkson was a lawyer, Robert C. Ramspeck was the deputy clerk for the Superior Court, and W. E. Floding owned "the South's Largest" Lodge Supply House.<sup>392</sup> These men aspired to take their place among the Atlanta's "civic-commercial elite," if they weren't already recognized as such.<sup>393</sup> The desire to present themselves among the city's elite made fraternity membership a good business decision for Atlanta's middling businessmen, who could achieve business and social connections through such means. This logic was magnified for W. E. Floding, who not only sought entry to more elite social and political circles, but also worked in an industry where fraternity membership was a necessity.

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<sup>391</sup> Klan charter reprinted in Ned McIntosh, "Capitol Gossip" *Atlanta Constitution*, Dec. 7, 1915.

<sup>392</sup> All professional information about charter members gleaned from Atlanta City Directory 1915-17, and confirmed through U.S. Census of 1910 and 1920.

<sup>393</sup> Tellingly, none of the Klan's charter members were among the hundred or so entries in *Men of Atlanta*, a 1924 portfolio of Atlanta civic leaders. *Men of Atlanta*. Dudley Glass ed. (Atlanta: Blosser-Williams, 1924).

To encourage the expansion of markets for their goods, the men who owned and operated lodge supply companies during this period were inevitably members of multiple fraternities themselves, a business practice that reflexively helped the fraternities heighten the profile of their own membership rolls as they attracted popular industrialists to participate in their public and private ceremonies. By 1909 Floding was already “a consistent member and regular attendant of many of the prominent secret orders, including the Masons, Odd Fellows, [and] Knights of Pythias” according to an Atlanta report of his takeover of the company.<sup>394</sup> Floding and Simmons likely met through their work with Woodsmen of the World.<sup>395</sup> While Floding may have maintained personal reasons for these affiliations, the professional benefits were undoubtedly part of his decision to be so involved in these orders. Members of fraternities were encouraged to support businesses owned and operated by their “brothers,” and thus, personal affiliation with a fraternity could establish a manufacturer as a worthy source of the goods that facilitated sacred fraternal ceremonies. If the buttons, flags, banners, ceremonial regalia, and set pieces sold by the Floding Company mediated intangible aspects of collective feeling that fraternities promoted by providing a standard set of reproducible symbols and forms around which members could be organized, the design of any given item could be slightly adjusted and marketed for use by another order.

Unlike most of the other new recruits to Simmons’s “secret society,” W. E. Floding was a charter member of the order, and thus his name was publicly affiliated with

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<sup>394</sup> “Regalia House Changes Hands” *Atlanta Constitution* Nov.24, 1909; “Odd fellows to form pilgrim knight’s body” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 5, 1921.

<sup>395</sup> Simmons was a recruiter in the period during which he conceptualized the Klan, while Floding took on a leadership role for the group’s national convention in 1917. “Woodsmen of Nation are Atlanta’s Guests” *The Atlanta Constitution*, Jul 10, 1917; *Atlanta Constitution* Jul. 45, 1921; *Atlanta Constitution*, Jun 11, 1917.

this explicitly white supremacist organization. It is difficult to tell the degree to which Floding's participation related to his personal investment in Klan ideology. Floding's public affiliation was a departure from the ideals of New South industrialists, who generally masked racial animus with rhetoric of progress and economic growth—no matter what their private views may have revealed. Though Floding never took on a role in the Klan beyond its factory operations, he was involved in the social network of aspiring civic elites who populated Simmons's new order. As in the photograph above, Floding was photographed smiling alongside other charter members and Klan officials on multiple occasions.<sup>396</sup> After all, both Simmons and Floding had good reasons for promoting the expansion of the Klan that had nothing to do with the content of the organization's racial ideology. Each man would profit financially from the development of the order: Simmons as the founder who would draw a salary for his service and have access to cash from membership fees, and Floding as the manufacturer of the order's required regalia. Floding's participation in the imperial project of expanding what Simmons called "the Invisible Empire" was consistent with his prior efforts to grow the business. Effectively, Floding and Simmons created a brand new market for a new category of consumer goods: Ku Klux Klan regalia. All they needed to do was find new customers to buy what they were selling.

### **Selling the Klan in Atlanta**

Floding's profile enables a better understanding of the ways that paternalism enabled the reconciliation of the seeming conflict between a desire to reinstate clear racial hierarchy and the kind of harmonious coexistence between racial groups that the New South order was to produce. Simmons sought out native-born, white Protestant men with

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<sup>396</sup> William J. Simmons Photograph Album, Alabama Department of Archives and History

high morals and big ambitions, roughly the same qualifications that shaped entrance to a more amorphously bounded but nonetheless powerful group: Atlanta's civic elites. (Though the "high morals" were always a subjective claim, at best.) Simmons borrowed the rituals and hierarchy of his new order from existing fraternities, but the model of white supremacy that bound it together could have been cribbed directly from the promotional literature of Atlanta's Chamber of Commerce. The "inspiring public spirit, which never fails to respond when the interests of the city are at stake," that Chamber of Commerce leaders celebrated could easily be read a threat.<sup>397</sup> These publications rarely mentioned race, certainly not in the way that the founding documents of Simmons's Klan placed white supremacy at the center of his new order's mission.<sup>398</sup> His "Ku Klux Creed" reflected Simmons's own racial prejudices, and required Klansmen to protect "differences between the races of mankind" and to "ever be true in the maintenance of white supremacy."<sup>399</sup> The vision of progress that Grady, Simmons, and Atlanta's Chamber of Commerce shared was one in which cooperation between business interests and "the people" could result in harmony, as long as everyone involved understood their place in the natural social order.

The most important tenet of Simmons's order was "clannishness" (later called Klannishness) the attitude that Klansmen were to direct towards all those around them, members and non-members alike. Klansmen were tasked with recruiting others who could be educated into a more full awareness of their social duty, and guiding and leading those

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<sup>397</sup> *Atlanta, A Twentieth Century City*, (1904), 9. Library of Congress.

<sup>398</sup> Representative publications of this category include: *Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, Souvenir Album*, Atlanta GA, 1911; See also Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 22-23.

<sup>399</sup> Shepherd, William G., "The Fiery Double-Cross," *Collier's Weekly*, July 28, 1928 Knights of the KKK Inc. *Kloran* (Jun. 26, 1916), 2.

who could not. The Klan was to be a militant fraternal order, defending “our country, our race, our homes, each other,” but this defense was to be achieved through methods other than violent action.<sup>400</sup> Moreover, Simmons argued, “humanity is the paramount ideal of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan—a great institution composed of men of character and intelligence, men who aspire to that which is noble for themselves and humanity.”<sup>401</sup> Thus, the protection of white supremacy was portrayed as the noble and humane pursuit of men who recognized the importance of social hierarchies. Faculty for such characteristics was not the same as actually possessing them, thus Klansmen were required to embark on a course of study leading to the order’s first “degree.”<sup>402</sup> Simmons then went further, arguing that this quality was precisely the purview of “manly men,” a move that emphasized the gendered and racialized quality of this logic. In the cosmology of the Klan’s white supremacy, “manliness,” as well as “character and intelligence,” were natural faculties that were possible only for American-born men of Anglo-Saxon descent.<sup>403</sup> While this premise was more fully sketched out over the next couple of year by both Simmons and his successor, Hiram W. Evans, the fundamental logic of what would become “Klanishness” was already in place by 1916.<sup>404</sup>

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<sup>400</sup> William J. Simmons, “The Ku Klux Klan, Yesterday, Today, Forever” (1916?) 4. Ku Klux Klan Collection, Atlanta History Center, Brochures, Folder 2 Box 1.

<sup>401</sup> William J. Simmons, “The Ku Klux Klan, Yesterday, Today, Forever” (1916?) 4-6. Atlanta History Center, Brochures, Folder 2 Box 1.

<sup>402</sup> Knights of the KKK Inc. *Kloran* (June 26, 1916).

<sup>403</sup> This argument is unpacked in depth in Gail Bederman’s *Manliness and Civilization* (1995). While the book does not address the Klan’s Anglo-Saxonism, due to the temporal constraints of her study (1880-1917), Bederman does address the development of the gender and race ideologies that underpinned the Klan’s claims.

<sup>404</sup> Evans “The Practice of Klannishness,” 1924.

Simmons's vision of a society ordered around white supremacy was not so different from the model put forth by Atlanta's elites. Atlanta's strength as a city, its boosters argued, was in the range and variety of its industrial, commercial, and business interests. This diversity of interests could work together if properly organized by men of purpose and character. Simmons's notion of white supremacy was not about the removal of Black Americans from the city of Atlanta, rather, he hoped to explicitly articulate the model of social order that already existed in much of the city. In 1916, he argued that other racial, ethnic, and religious groups could develop in their own institutional spaces, with Klansmen acting as their "safest councilors."<sup>405</sup> The men of the Klan were to be local, regional, and national leaders by performing the fundamental principles of Klanishness. In doing so, they could demonstrate that society functioned best if everyone stayed in their naturally ordained place. Being a Klansman was, thus, not only assuming a position within the elaborate internal hierarchy of the order itself, but also recognizing hierarchy as an organizational mode, and stressing the careful selection of those who were to be in charge.

The Klan's patriarchal goals were also at the heart of Atlanta's economic rebirth, as white business elites argued that racial cooperation could be achieved when Atlanta's residents peacefully submitted to existing social hierarchies. Black leader Booker T. Washington made a version of this argument in a speech at Atlanta's International Cotton States Exposition in 1895.<sup>406</sup> Later known as the "Atlanta Compromise" speech,

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<sup>405</sup> Simmons, "KKK Yesterday, Today Forever," 1916, 2.

<sup>406</sup> For more extensive analysis of Washington's speech, and its context within the environment of the Cotton States Exposition, see Perdue, Theda. *Race and the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition of 1895*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011); Mabel O. Wilson, *Negro Building: Black Americans in the World of Fairs and Museums*. (Berkeley: Univ of California Press, 2012) 19-29.

Washington spoke of racial uplift to a largely white audience arguing that racial cooperation would “awaken among us a new era of industrial progress.”<sup>407</sup> Throughout this talk, Washington depicted an incremental process that recognized the dignity and productive potential of Black labor. “Our greatest danger is that in the great leap from slavery to freedom we may overlook the fact that the masses of us are to live by the productions of our hands, and fail to keep in mind that we shall prosper in proportion as we learn to dignify and glorify common labor.” This pragmatic approach to racial uplift was rooted in concern about the very real danger posed by disrupting social hierarchies too quickly, and yet Washington’s claim aligned so neatly with Grady’s call for interracial cooperation that Atlanta’s white boosters saw this as confirmation of their position. Atlanta’s Black residents recognized that they inhabited a double bind. None wished for more violence, but it was easy to see that the inter-racial cooperation that the Chamber of Commerce championed served white Atlantans more than their Black counterparts. Washington’s model of growth suggested that racial uplift would new kinds of opportunity—such as industrial work, but the price of those opportunities would be submission to existing racial order. Washington’s incremental approach appealed to industrialists who viewed themselves as benevolent caretakers of a disadvantaged population.<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> Text of Washington’s speech can be found in *The Booker T. Washington Papers*, Vol. 3, Louis R. Harlan, ed., (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 583–587.

<sup>408</sup> Washington’s work also inspired German cotton planters who hoped to optimize production in their colonial holdings in Togo. Zimmerman, *Alabama in Africa*, (2010).



But in the wake of Atlanta's 1906 riot, Washington privately worried that this coordinated attack on the city's Black residents would be a force for radicalization.<sup>409</sup> He was right. Black Atlantans pursued a range of collective strategies to navigate the physical danger, and social inequities of daily life in their city. Groups like the NAACP, which pursued "confrontational civil rights tactics of litigation and federal legislation," offered an outlet for members of the concerned Black elite.<sup>410</sup> At the same time, the formation of local mutual aid societies like the Neighborhood Union, organized in 1908 to provide social welfare services, offered more grassroots models of protection from more daily indignities.<sup>411</sup> The continued disenfranchisement of Black southerners as voters, and the continued segmentation of the labor force along lines of race and gender, served the white working classes of the city while contributing to increasing economic disparities across the region.<sup>412</sup> Fighting back was always dangerous, but so was continuing to reproduce the fiction of racial subordination favored by Klansmen and industrialists alike.

Simmons's Klan occupied a slippery position. On the one hand they called for a radical transformation of society in the image of white supremacy, and on the other, they were calling to protect existing power structures already in place. In fact one of the most prominent national leaders, President Woodrow Wilson, espoused similar views in his two

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<sup>409</sup> The Neighborhood Union developed from the existing Gate City Free Kindergarten Association, and operated along the model of Settlement Houses. It encouraged self-help, but also pushing for municipal and policy change. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 130-144.

<sup>410</sup> Godschalk, *Veiled Visions*, 119-120

<sup>411</sup> *Ibid*, 207.

<sup>412</sup> Ring, Natalie J. *The Problem South: Region, Empire, and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*. Politics and Culture in the Twentieth-Century South, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012); Stephanie Cole, Natalie J. Ring, and Peter. Wallenstein. *The Folly of Jim Crow: Rethinking the Segregated South*. Walter Prescott Webb Memorial Lectures no. 43, (Arlington: University of Texas, 2012).

volume *History of the American People*, published in 1902.<sup>413</sup> When Simmons revived the Klan in 1915, the civic-commercial elite who touted the rebirth of Atlanta through industry were already adopting the stance of benevolent patriarchs, advising the population of the city and its governing bodies on how to best care for those they characterized as having less natural capacity for citizenship. The key to this model of hierarchical social organization was an unshakable faith that phenotypical characteristics were linked to cognitive capabilities. The work of paternal protection occurred at multiple scales, by fathers, factory foremen, company owners, and city leaders; at each level this task was framed as both religious and civic duty. The patriarchal approach to business had precedent in the plantation economy, but also likely drew from the practice of fraternal membership, which constructed social networks that consolidated the social, financial, and political power of their members and typically directed benevolence towards the less fortunate.<sup>414</sup> Given this, it was the responsibility of white male elites to protect the less fortunate placed under their care. Following the lead of major industrial, commercial, and transportation magnates across the North—Henry Ford, Nelson Rockefeller, Henry DuPont, Andrew Carnegie, eventually Henry Ford and others—Atlanta’s industrialists argued that business success would help to concentrate fortunes, or in their words “surplus wealth,” in the hands of responsible elites who could then determine how such funds were

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<sup>413</sup> Woodrow Wilson, *A History of the American People*, by Woodrow Wilson (New York and London : Harper & Bros., 1902).

<sup>414</sup> Jacqueline Dowd Hall, Robert Korstad, and Lu Ann Jones. note that the paternalism experienced by workers at Southern factories was distinct from that of the agricultural plantation in *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World*. (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2000). For paternalism, see also: Mary A. Renda, *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Culture of U.S. Imperialism, 1915-1940*. (Chapel Hill, NC: UNC Press, 2004); Eugene D. Genovese, and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese. (*Fatal Self-Deception: Slaveholding Paternalism in the Old South*. Cambridge University Press, 2011).

best spent.<sup>415</sup> This language came directly from the appeals of Henry Grady, who frequently spoke about the importance of northern capital in the South, and Booker T. Washington whose “Atlanta compromise” speech included the following deferential remark:

“While we take pride in what we exhibit as a result of our independent efforts, we do not for a moment forget that our part in this exhibition would fall far short of your expectations but for the constant help that has come to our educational life, not only from the Southern states, but especially from Northern philanthropists, who have made their gifts a constant stream of blessing and encouragement”.<sup>416</sup>

Washington’s statement was made to a group of largely white Southerners, but was immediately transmitted nationwide along newspaper wire services, and as a result, his speech could be understood as an appeal for the North to support both Black southerners, and the South as a whole. These appeals to Northern philanthropy likewise shaped the way that Atlanta’s aspiring elites performed benevolence. Floding and other Atlanta industrialists saw their civic leadership as part of the overall project of uplifting their city and region, endowing social welfare, cultural, and educational institutions, such as Atlanta’s first library, built with funding from Andrew Carnegie in 1902.<sup>417</sup> Tellingly, that library was one of the city’s many segregated cultural institutions.

W. E. Floding’s record of public engagement suggests that he used such paternalist logic to position himself among Atlanta’s civic and commercial elite. These men, often with the help of their philanthropically minded wives, saw urban improvement and the

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<sup>415</sup> Sven Beckert, “The Culture of Capital” *Monied Metropolis*, 237- 272.

<sup>416</sup> Northern industrialists were at this very moment developing the legal foundations of modern philanthropic giving, designed to manage the “surplus wealth” accrued by Rockefeller et. al. Elizabeth Harmon, “The Transformation of American Philanthropy: From Public Trust to Private Foundation, 1785-1917” Ph.D. Diss, University of Michigan, 2017.

<sup>417</sup> *Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, Atlanta, A Twentieth Century City*, 1904. Library of Congress.

protection of less fortunate residents as good business. Flooding likely drew from national examples, as well as more local models—men like Asa Candler, founder of Coca Cola, and Hamilton Carhartt of the Carhartt Overall Factory, who increased their profits by framing themselves as benevolent employers and good members of the community—more Henry Ford than the strikebreaking Nelson Rockefeller.<sup>418</sup> Flooding’s civic concerns ranged from the promotion of patriotism, as with his donation of prize flags for a “patriotic concert” in 1918; religious instruction, as he taught bible study classes for young men; public education, as when called a school bond issue a “conscientious duty” in 1921; and the support of higher education, as demonstrated by his donations to Oglethorpe University, Georgia Technical Institute, and Agnes Scott College, the all-women’s school that his two daughters attended.<sup>419</sup> Following the lead of other society wives in the region, Flooding’s wife Mary was active as the director of the “Buckeye Women’s Club,” an organization for former Ohioans living in Atlanta, whose regular club meetings were organized around the appreciation of arts, social relief, and intellectual edification on topics like “Americanization.”<sup>420</sup> More than simply ways to keep busy, these activities were critical sites for the formation of collective identity, and for the integration of the Flooding family into Atlanta society.

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<sup>418</sup> On Carhartt: Gretchen Maclachlan, “Women’s Work: Atlanta’s Industrialization and Urbanization, 1879-1929.” Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1992. On Candler: Bartow J. Elmore, *Citizen Coke: the making of Coca-Cola capitalism*, 2015). Laura Hymson argues that Candler’s relationship with his brother, a Protestant missionary, laid the groundwork for his international view of social betterment through industrial growth. “The Company that Taught the World to Sing: Coca-Cola, Globalization, and the Cultural Politics of Branding in the Twentieth Century” Ph.D. Diss, University of Michigan, 2011.

<sup>419</sup> “Patriotic Concert to be Given Friday for the Red Cross” *The Atlanta Constitution*, May 15, 1918; “Embery is Injured in Truck Accident on way to Picnic” *The Atlanta Constitution*, Jun 27, 1924; “Supports Bond Issue as Conscientious Duty” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 8, 1921.

<sup>420</sup> “Club to Feature Americanization” *Atlanta Constitution*, Sep 26, 1920.

The causes Floding chose to support also suggest the seamless integration of paternalism in terms of race and class into models of the New South civic leader, the class to which Floding aspired to belong. In the spring of 1914, the city proved to be less than responsive to complaints by manufacturers in the blocks surrounding Floding's factory, all of whom claimed that a refusal to complete road repair work in their area diminished labor conditions. Accumulated garbage on the streets, pools of stagnant water, and accumulating dust made the area into a muddy pit that challenged the movement of both consumers and workers alike. In addition to spending more time cleaning public commercial spaces, the workers in Floding's factory—located on the floors above his retail space—were forced to sew flags and regalia amidst increasingly murky air. Floding himself complained to *The Atlanta Constitution* that his own health was compromised by a respiratory ailment, thanks to the “appalling” conditions surrounding his business.<sup>421</sup> The infrastructural problems that Floding complained about disproportionately affected the parts of the city populated by Black Atlantans and white migrants from more rural parts of the region. Admittedly, the bad conditions in 1914 also affected Floding personally and commercially, but Floding nonetheless supported causes with less of a clear impact on his business or even his own health.

Paternalism enabled Atlanta's industrialists to envision harmonious coexistence of racial groups through the reinforcement of “natural” racial divisions. When Atlanta industrialists like Floding called for the protection of the less fortunate, they were also exerting power through a display of benevolence.<sup>422</sup> In addition to donating to educational causes for white students, Floding was a “friend” or donor of The Holmes Institute, a trade

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<sup>421</sup> “Merchants Urge City to Complete Whitehall Work” *Atlanta Constitution*, June 8, 1914.

<sup>422</sup> For displays of benevolence as an exercise of power, see: Susan J. Pearson, *The Rights of the Defenseless: Protecting Children and Animals in Gilded Age America* (2011).

school for young African American men and women from low-income families.

According to one newspaper report, the school trained over 200 students a term in subjects like “English, printing, dressmaking, laundering, cooking, tailoring, and carpentry.”

Floding was one of the many prominent Atlantans, both Black and white, who supported the institution’s mission of helping “poor boys and girls of the state” who “cannot attend the public school” to “learn a trade.”<sup>423</sup> Training students to excel in trades that would not explicitly challenge the articulation of power along racial lines was a controversial position within Atlanta’s African American community, precisely because this position could be used to reinforce the existing social divisions that Floding and Atlanta’s other civic elites strove to protect.

One might infer that Floding’s choices to call for social welfare and education across lines of race and gender were disingenuous modes of self promotion, or that his Klan membership was simply a business decision not rooted in deeply held views about racial hierarchies. (**Fig 3.3**) But this makes Floding’s 1917 letter to *The Atlanta Constitution*, which called for more public relief for the Black families displaced by the fire that ravaged some of the poorest regions of the city that year, into something more than an inconsistent position when related to his company’s production of Klan regalia at the same time.<sup>424</sup> Instead, Floding’s negotiation of these factors, his simultaneous pursuit of civic improvement, personal profit, and Klan growth, was a model example of the intersection of industrial and racial logic in the New South. While Floding’s workers made Klan robes, they also produced campaign buttons for the city’s NAACP chapter, an

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<sup>423</sup> “\$415 Is Subscribed for Holmes Institute.” *Atlanta Constitution*, Jan 18, 1914. “Holmes Institute Will Open Monday;” *Atlanta Constitution*, Sep. 12, 1914.

<sup>424</sup> “Seems to be a very Just and Reasonable Request” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 29, 1917.

organization that was only six years old at the time.<sup>425</sup> Floding's multi-purpose lodge supply catalog featured both Black and white models wearing regalia. The use of Black models, in some cases, even included images on the catalog cover, and at least one 1919 catalog advertised "service uniforms" with a Black model dressed in fatigues. The harmonious presentation of these two figures, used to sell goods, did not contradict the kind of racial order that New South industrialists wanted to produce: in fact this image may be its clearest representation.

The Klan's vision of white supremacy aspired to a model of racial harmony in which Black Americans could be both producers and consumers, as long as they did so under the direction of benevolent, well-informed white men. The social network that produced the Klan was also the one in which ideas about the utility of racial division to capitalist development were modernized and reinvented for the twentieth century. This model was the basis of the worldview of the industrialists who were responsible for remaking the South through renewed attention to industry and commerce in the region. An isolationist white supremacy wouldn't have served the needs of the region's growing economy in 1915. Rather, at this time, Atlanta's civic leaders envisioned themselves to be social managers, both dictating and enforcing an increasingly unruly public's adherence to their predefined position in the economic and cultural landscape of the city. As Simmons pursued efforts to expand his order, this industrial logic, as well as the goods produced through that logic, became increasingly central to the operations of the organization.

### **Capturing a Larger Share of the Market**

The ideological inconsistencies that emerged in the earliest version of the Klan became ever more evident as the organization started to pursue a vigorous recruitment

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<sup>425</sup> W.E. Floding Company Catalog #84, 1917. Southern Flag and Tailors Company Archives.

strategy to move beyond the South. As the Klan began to grow, these ideological inconsistencies became more of a liability, and one that needed the increased uniformity of the regalia to cohere. The “New South” began to show its ideological cracks when it grew into a global, national force, thanks to increasing demands for production, and the continued economic struggles of the region. So too, the Klan’s expansion required an external tool that members could use to mask the contradictions that national expansion laid bare.

In the first years of the Klan’s operation, the organization remained relatively localized, despite the apparent ambitions of its leaders and boosters. But by May of 1918, the Klan reached twelve states beyond Georgia.<sup>426</sup> This growth, and the increasing recruitment of Klansmen beyond the South, resulted from two significant changes in both the form and content of the Klan’s ideological project. First, this growth was linked to an expansion of Simmons’ initial vision of white supremacy, which was fundamentally an anti-Black vision of social hierarchy. At the behest of one of the group’s charter members, Simmons decided to incorporate more nativist principles into Klan doctrine in late 1917, a move that attracted Klansmen in spaces less racially contentious than Atlanta. Second, Simmons turned the business management of the order over to a professional advertising agency, which developed a new “propagation department,” and a secondary hierarchy of professional recruiters who answered directly to Atlanta officials. The Southern Publicity Association consisted of two staff members, Edward Young Clarke and his business partner Elizabeth (Bessie) Tyler, and the influence of this tiny firm is generally credited with the national expansion of the Klan. Formerly charged with advertising campaigns for

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<sup>426</sup> “The Ku Klux Klan for Law and Order” *Atlanta Constitution*. May 12, 1918.



organizations like the Red Cross and the Anti-Saloon League, Clarke was experienced at monetizing sentiment.<sup>427</sup> Shifting away from Simmons's passion for mystical brotherhood towards politically polarizing issues required that Clarke help brand the organization—identifiable by the strange costumes members wore for public demonstrations—as something more than a historical anachronism.

The Klan's income stream flowed up an elaborate pyramid to fund the Klan's Imperial administration in Atlanta, and the pockets of its leaders, particularly the Imperial Wizard. When Simmons hired Edgar Young Clarke and Bessie Tyler of the Southern Publicity organization to pursue the Klan's expansion in 1921, that pyramid was split into two halves: the propagation department or "business side," which recruited new members under the direction of Young Clarke, and the ongoing organizational structure of the order, the "fraternal side," which Simmons continued to direct.<sup>428</sup> The propagation department was in charge of two main funding mechanisms, convincing new members to join the Klan initiation fees and robe rentals from new members. Organizational officers collected regular dues—imperial taxes, state level or "realm" taxes, and the assorted dues, fees, and needs of local Klaverns. Under this model, money flowed up the pyramid, not down; local Klans were in charge of funding their own operations, in addition to making regular tithes to Realm and Imperial coffers.<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> Wade, *The Fiery Cross*, 147; 151-157.

<sup>428</sup> Business side and fraternal side described in these terms by Rowland Thomas, member of editorial staff of New York World newspaper that conducted a three month investigation into the Klan, following charges by former recruiter Henry Fry. U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Rules. *The Ku-Klux Klan: Hearings Before the Committee on Rules, House of Representatives, 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session.* (U.S. Government Printing Office, October 11-17, 1921), 13.

<sup>429</sup> Alexander, Charles C. "Kleagles and Cash: The Ku Klux Klan as a Business Organization, 1915-1930." *The Business History Review* 39, no. 3 (October 1, 1965): 348-67.

During this period, Floding's factory became increasingly important to the order, with robes functioning as both a money-making strategy and visual marker of unity across the Klan's empire. If Klansmen in Montana, Mississippi, and Maine were to appear as a unified front, regalia could offer a physical demonstration of the ideological unity of Klansmen in these spaces. The language that Clarke used to describe the Klan's expansion was consistent with the kind of modern industrial vision of Floding and other Atlanta city boosters; Clarke tellingly referred to the "organizational force" necessary for expanding the Klan as "machinery."<sup>430</sup> Such an apparatus would require capital investment, and thus an income stream, in order to hire the necessary recruiters ("Kleagles," in Klan parlance). Clarke quickly determined that regalia could be an increasingly important income stream as the organization expanded nationally and membership exploded from 3,000 members at the beginning of 1920 to almost 100,000 during the summer of 1921.<sup>431</sup> The rapid entry of the Klan into new markets called national attention to the Klan's finances, both because the organization was making so much more money, but also because those finances were subjected to new forms of scrutiny. Outside of Atlanta, the juxtaposition of a populist message of strength through collective enforcement of traditional morals, and huge capital gains did not make quite as much sense.

### **Internal Politics**

In late October of 1921, Imperial Wizard William J. Simmons testified before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Rules, in order to respond to charges that the Klan was committing mail fraud. This charge was one of two that led the committee to

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<sup>430</sup> KKK Hearings (1921), 87.

<sup>431</sup> KKK Hearings (1921) 87; *New York Times*, Sept. 23, 1937; Alexander, *Kleagles and Cash*, 353.

conduct a “wide field of discovery” into the organization. Had the Klan “used the mail in such a way as to, or for the purpose of defrauding, a violation of federal statutes,” and was the Klan’s use of masks facilitating violent activity that would not be conducted by unmasked men?<sup>432</sup> In other words, was the Klan a scam, and was it inciting violence? Both of these questions hinged on the Klan’s use of regalia, and what kind of work these garments were doing. I’ll address the question of masking and violence in the final chapter of this project, so for the time being we’ll stick with the complicated question of profit.

Simmons’s testimony during the hearing exemplified the Imperial Wizard’s rhetorical style—grandiose, obfuscatory, and often contradictory. During his testimony, Simmons grandly announced that the Klan was distinct from other contemporary fraternities because “we are steering it as far from any sentiment of commercialism as possible.”<sup>433</sup> This claim countered the charges made by Klan critics Henry Fry during his 1921 expose in the *New York World*, later published as *The Modern Ku Klux Klan*. As a former Klan recruiter, Fry was particularly concerned with the organization’s financial practices, since he had witnessed the process of recruitment firsthand. While Simmons argued that the Klan was intentionally non-commercial, minutes later he also announced that religious and fraternal orders needed to be on “sound financial basis to earn the respect of the community” in which they operated.<sup>434</sup> Characteristically slippery, Simmons’s at once disavowed and yet also triumphed the Klan’s imbrication in the contemporary commercial economy.

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<sup>432</sup> Charges described by chairman of the committee, Hon. Phillip P. Campbell during 1921 congressional hearings. U.S. Congress, House, Committee, *Ku-Klux*, 3.

<sup>433</sup> U.S. Congress, House, Committee, *Ku-Klux*, Testimony of William J. Simmons, 134.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid*, 137; Alexander, *Kleagles and Cash*, 353,136.

The congressional trial of 1921 created free publicity for the order, but also exposed Simmons's weakness as a leader. In particular, Klan members became increasingly dissatisfied with the "corrupting" influences of Clarke and Tyler, described as money leeches in Henry Fry's exposé. Amidst this internal turmoil, the Klan continued to expand, but Simmons, Clarke, and Tyler soon found themselves pushed out of the order by an internal coup at the Klan's national convention or Klonvocation in 1922.<sup>435</sup> When Hiram W. Evans took over as the new Imperial Wizard of the order, Clarke's commercial approach merged more fully with the ideological functions of the order, thus remaking the Klan by using modernist industrial language to materialize nativist ideology as a driving force in national politics.

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<sup>435</sup> Wade, *The Fiery Cross*, 188.

## Chapter 4: Manufacturing White Supremacy

One morning in 1921, a group of garment workers assembled to have their photo taken at the factory in Atlanta's industrial district. (*Fig 4.1*) The room was crowded with staff from all sides of the business—draftsmen, clerks, secretaries, managers, salesmen, janitors, and the sewing machine operators—as well as the factory's manager and owner, Claude B. Davis, seated in the rear of the room. The photographer stood on a ladder to capture an aerial view of the factory in action. Staff members arranged around the edges of the room stared directly at the camera, but many of the women seated at the long table of sewing machines didn't bother stopping their work long enough to pose.

Unless you are looking carefully, it would be easy to miss the point of this photograph: the piles of white fabric mounded on surfaces all around the room, the knot of thick cotton cording near the right-hand side of the frame, and the unmistakable shape of a robe with long sleeves emerging from the machine of the woman closest to the photographer at the center of the frame. This photo precisely captured the conditions of Klan regalia production in the 1920's, documenting a factory in action and at the same time, a scene of ideological reproduction.

The factory pictured in this photograph was The Gate City Manufacturing Company, a small regalia and novelty firm that made Klan regalia from 1920 to 1923. Owner Claude B. Davis was a former superintendent at the Floding Co. who struck off to

form his own regalia and novelty firm in 1917.<sup>436</sup> The company's small factory, which specialized in the production of flags and ready to wear clothing, was located just up the street from Floding Co, in Atlanta's central warehouse district.<sup>437</sup> When Floding tried to raise the wholesale price of the Klan's regalia by four dollars, citing cotton shortages during WWI, Davis seized the opportunity. Using his connections in both the Klan and the regalia industry, Davis offered to provide the garments for a dollar less than Floding would, finally agreeing to sell the garments to Klansmen for \$6.50 a set. This figure was based on an actual manufacturing cost of somewhere between \$4 and \$4.50 a robe.<sup>438</sup> Lowballing the Floding Company was a good move for Davis, whose fraternal supply company was relatively small in size, but it was also beneficial for Klan leaders who could then make a show of lowering the price of these garments for members.<sup>439</sup> More affordable garments facilitated the Klan's goal of dressing as many members as possible in its uniform regalia.<sup>440</sup>

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<sup>436</sup> Scott Cutlip's *The Unseen Power*, makes the incorrect assertion that the Gate City Manufacturing Company's owners, Claude B. and Lottie Davis were fronts for Tyler and Clarke. This is entirely incorrect. Davis, a Georgian by birth, started his career as an engraver at the Atlanta Lodge Supply Company of his brother in law, W. H. Johnson, in 1909. After nine years working in the lodge supply and ready-to-wear garment industry, including the incorporation of his own eponymous firm in 1915, Davis founded the Gate City Manufacturing Company with his wife Lottie. The Gate City Mfg Co. was making ready-to-wear garments and flags by 1919. Commissioner of Commerce and Labor of the State of Georgia, *Seventh Annual Report, Fiscal Year Ending December 31, 1918*. (Atlanta, GA: Byrd Printing Co, 1919); R.J. Polk and Co. *Atlanta City Directory*, 1919; Claude B. Davis, US Census, 1910; Census Place: Atlanta Ward 3, Fulton, Georgia; Roll: T624\_191; Page: 16B; Enumeration District: 0061; FHL microfilm: 1374204. Evidence of Davis Manufacturing Co. can be found in a short article about Davis suffering an epileptic fit after hearing the news that his wife moved out of their home. "Husband's Illness Causes Wife to forget Quarrel, *Atlanta Constitution*, Aug 9, 1915.

<sup>438</sup> U.S. Congress, House, Committee *Ku-Klux*, Testimony of William J. Simmons, 132-134.

<sup>439</sup> "New Economies Affect Every Klansman: Klectokon, Imperial Tax and Robe Cost Cut." *Imperial Night-Hawk*, Aug. 15, 1923.

<sup>440</sup> Charter for Gate City Mfg. Co. filed June 9, 1920, with C.B. Davis and Lottie B. Davis as incorporators. It shows a capital stock of \$25,000 and states that "more than \$5,000 has been paid in" Henry Fry, *The Modern Ku Klux Klan* (1922) Simmons's later depiction of the Klan's involvement with Gate City was more sweeping. In 1928 he claimed that Gate City was entirely funded by the Klan, and founded by Davis in 1923, at Simmons's request. His narrative entirely elided Floding's participation, and suggested that the

Housed on the second floor of a small industrial building, the Gate City Factory seems like an unlikely space for the construction of one of the nation's most reviled symbols. Closer analysis of the factory photograph yields more questions than answers—particularly about the workers shown here in the midst of their workday. What motivated these workers to construct the Klan's most powerful symbol?

A study of Klan regalia manufacturing provides a useful supplement to existing histories of women's involvement in racialized violence in the New South. While the sanctity of white womanhood provided a ready justification for racially motivated attacks, women were rarely considered active participants in these processes.<sup>441</sup> Historian Thavolia Glymph has argued that “white women's violence is rarely analyzed as a central facet of their existence.”<sup>442</sup> Instead, in histories of the South, legacies of the Lost Cause myth have resulted in histories of collective oppression, in which both Black and white women are cast under the same patriarchal oppression—a move that more often than not elides Black women's histories altogether. Glymph's approach to locating the violent character of Southern white womanhood is to view the antebellum plantation as a site of production. This chapter follows Glymph in using the analysis of white women's labor to understand the relationship between a group of workers and the violent ideology they helped

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Gate City Factory was solely invested in Klan production. Whether Simmons's mischaracterization was intentional or not, this depiction of Klan regalia manufacturing as integral to the organization, and therefore distinct from other manufacturing projects, is consistent with Klan propaganda about regalia manufacturing after 1923. See: Shepherd, “Ku Klux Koin,” William G. Shepherd, ““Ku Klux Koin,” *Collier's Weekly*, Jul. 21, 1928), 38.

<sup>441</sup> On white Southern women whose anti-rape activism makes them advocates for, and sometimes participants in, extra-legal mob violence, and the role that racial logics play in that shift, see Feimster “New Southern Women and the Triumph of White Supremacy,” in *Southern Horrors*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 138-157;

<sup>442</sup> Thavolia Glymph, “The Gender of Violence” *Out of the House of Bondage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 25.

reproduce. Unlike other studies tracking the relationship of women to the Klan, the women investigated here were not members of an auxiliary organization such as the Women of the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>443</sup> So what did the Klan mean to this group of women? How can an analysis of their movements through the city of Atlanta help us to understand their complicity and contribution to Klan violence?

### **On the Factory Floor**

There is little question that these workers knew what they were making. By 1921, images of the Klan were ubiquitous in popular culture, as fictionalized images of the Reconstruction order continued to circulate in films, plays, and advertisements. Renderings of imagined Klans were interspersed with increasing press coverage of the revived Klan of the early twentieth century. As residents of Atlanta, these workers didn't need mass cultural representations to be familiar with the Klan, since the group had convened public demonstrations, marches, and other displays in that city since the Klan's 1915 revival. Klan regalia connected representations of the Klan with the activities of contemporary Klansmen, as Klan leaders tried to bring their ideal to life.

Uniform regalia was the Klan's most powerful symbol, and by making uniform robes these workers were undoubtedly contributing to the reproduction and national expansion of the Klan. And yet, assuming that these workers were motivated by their

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<sup>443</sup> While organized to work alongside men's Klans, the WKKK had an entirely separate hierarchical structure with a headquarters located in Little Rock, AR. Women's Klan regalia maintained a similar silhouette, though women's robes had a cape only on one side of the body. Women's robes were also shorter and included a different patch, shaped like a stylized shield with a cross in the middle. There is some evidence that WKKK regalia was mass produced. Sociologist Kathleen Blee includes an image of a WKKK regalia catalog closely resembling the one printed for the men's Klan, though Blee no longer knows the source of this illustration. The correspondence of Klanswoman Lorena Senter of Denver Colorado includes the complaint that the Double Kuff Shirt Company has lost business because they are not getting enough robe orders from Klanswomen. Miller, Walter. "Letter to Lorena Senter about Robe Mfg.," April 14, 1925. Senter Collection. Denver Public Library. Blee, Kathleen M. *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s*. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008).



commitment to the organization or its ideological project, at the very least, belies the complexity of the historical record—fragmentary though it may be in this case. The workers assembled here, as well as several employees from the W. E. Floding Company factory, which made Klan regalia between 1915 and 1920, have demographic profiles that suggest a constellation of possible motives for their participation that are worth unspooling through an account Klan regalia manufacturing.<sup>444</sup>

The first step in making a Klan robe was pulling the end of a roll of plain-weave white cotton fabric down a long table running the length of the factory. The apparatus holding the fabric helped to smooth out wrinkles from the surface, making it easy for Earnest Thompson, the factory's draughtsman, to layout the simple pattern of the robe and cut each piece with a pair of long shears.<sup>445</sup> The threads Thompson cut were likely spun at one of the textile mills surrounding the city—the Exposition Cotton Mill just northwest of the city, the Atlanta Cotton Bag Company, or the Fulton Bag and Cotton Mill on the

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<sup>444</sup> Scholars have not focused much attention on Atlanta's garment industry, and have instead chosen to study garment production districts of the northeast, or labor struggles in Atlanta's textile mills. Thus, mapping operations in the Klan regalia factories during this period requires some extrapolation from works that discuss garment manufacturing in other regions, works that look at the operation of factories in Atlanta, and fragments of primary source evidence that offer clues about who was making Klan regalia during this time. Douglas Flamming, *Creating the Modern South: Millhands and Managers in Dalton, Georgia, 1884-1984*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992); Daniel Nelson, *Managers and Workers: Origins of the Twentieth-Century Factory System in the United States, 1880-1920*. (Madison, WI: Univ of Wisconsin Press, 1996); Timothy J. Minchin, *Hiring the Black Worker* (1999); Gagnon, *Transition to an Industrial South*, (2012).

<sup>445</sup> Mapping operations in the Klan regalia factories during this period requires some extrapolation from works that discuss garment manufacturing in other regions, works that look at the operation of factories in Atlanta, and fragments of primary source evidence that offer clues about who was making Klan regalia during this time. The only extant image of early twentieth-century Klan regalia manufacturing is also a critical piece of this detective work. In addition to offering a conceptual frame for this dissertation as a whole, this image of manufacturing in action provides critical details about the mundane operations of the factory that would be addressed in missing factory records. Along with examinations of extant garments and catalogs from these factories, biographical details about workers garnered from city directories, census records and newspaper reports, as well as occasional mentions of manufacturing in Klan publications, are central to mapping how the process of manufacturing both reinforced and shaped the organization's model of white supremacy. There are no existing business records from any of the Klan regalia factories, all workers from the Floding and Gate City factories have been identified through R.J. Polk's Atlanta City Directories, 1920-1922.

southeast side of town. Atlanta's textile industry facilitated the transition between the economies of the Old and New South, as the rapid growth of the textile industry in the region became the key engine of economic progress by the end of the century.<sup>446</sup>

None of the fabric made in these mills was particularly high quality, and the material stitched in the Gate City factory was rough stuff, particularly since Davis, the owner, won his contract by promising to produce garments for a lower cost. This decision meant that Davis needed to reduce his own profit, or his overhead, a decision that likely led to the use of lower quality materials for the Klan robes made in his factory. A survey of garments made in this factory reveals inconsistencies in fabrics even between garments made by this company, suggesting that Davis may have shopped around for the lowest cost fabric, shifting suppliers when necessary.<sup>447</sup>

The draftsman was responsible for creating patterns for the garments and other fabric items made in the Gate City factory, but cutting Klan robes was not his only job. None of the three factories that produced these garments focused entirely on robe production. In 1922, the Gate City booth at another Manufacturers' exhibition of Atlanta-made goods showed "masquerade costumes, false faces, and grotesque figures, lodge

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<sup>446</sup> Mildred Gwin Andrews, *The Men and the Mills: A History of the Southern Textile Industry* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1987); Clifford Kuhn. *Contesting the New South Order: The 1914-1915 Strike at Atlanta's Fulton Mills*. (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 2001); Douglas Flamming. *Creating the Modern South*, (1992). For cotton production in the South, see: Andrew Zimmerman. *Alabama in Africa: Booker T. Washington, the German Empire, and the Globalization of the New South*. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 23-37.

<sup>447</sup> The author's analysis of two hundred and forty two extant robes and hoods reveals that several different fabrics were used for these garments: lightweight denim, lighter muslin and mid-weight muslin, all in tones of white ranging from bright white to a deep cream. Color variations likely stem from the storage conditions for any particular garment—making it challenging to determine the precise tone of the original garments. In a 1928 interview, Simmons elided Floding's robes, and discussed the robes made by the Gate City Manufacturing co. According to Simmons, these robes were made from heavier material, but that he later requested "a soft white cloth that would blow in the breeze." Simmons's account is only marginally reliable, however, in that he states that Gate City started making Klan regalia in 1923, rather than the actual date of 1920 as demonstrated in Congressional testimony from 1921. William G. Shepherd, "Ku Klux Koin," *Collier's Weekly*, Jul. 21, 1928) 38; U.S. Congress, House, Committee *Ku-Klux Klan*, 29-31.

supplies, celluloid buttons, and many hundreds of other accessories.”<sup>448</sup> Though Gate City workers were the sole producers of Klan regalia in 1922, there is no mention of this particular category of specialized goods.<sup>449</sup> Like other regalia factories nationwide, the Gate City factory was categorized as a novelty, or specialty manufacturer, which produced a flexible, ever-changing range of consumer goods based on customer demand.<sup>450</sup> These factories generally worked on a small-batch basis, filling orders from specific fraternities, associations, or providing seasonal costumes for masquerade. While necessarily in competition, the flexibility of this industry meant that regalia suppliers often worked together as part of a loose network in order to provide the widest range of goods possible.<sup>451</sup> The Gate City factory could provide fraternities with wigs made by a New York manufacturer, or lodge furniture made by a local cabinet-maker, without ever revealing to customers that these goods originated somewhere beyond the factory.<sup>452</sup> Klan

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<sup>448</sup> “Thousands Who Attended Manufacturers’ Show Admired Booth of Gate City Manufacturing Co.” *The Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 1, 1922; “Thousands See Novel Exhibits At Auditorium.” *Atlanta Constitution*, Sep. 20, 1922.

<sup>449</sup> In 1923, Gate City opens a new “costume division,” in their factory at 82 Broad St, likely in an attempt to replace the Klan business. “Halloween Costumes for Rent” *Atlanta Constitution*, Oct. 24, 1923.

<sup>450</sup> Business historian Phillip J. Scranton tracks the growth of “specialty” manufacturers operations that valued the flexibility to constantly shift their output in order to provide goods that could be responsive to both market fluctuations and consumer desires. Scranton has described the operations of responsive “batch” manufacturing, whereby a single manufacturer could produce a range of goods whose aesthetic details and “novelty” could differentiate the work of one firm from another. *Endless Novelty*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997), 8-18.

<sup>451</sup> The W.E. Floding Company Archives at the Southern Flag and Tailors Office in Atlanta Georgia demonstrate that the Floding Company possessed the catalogs of competitors, and sometimes included images in their own catalogs that appear to have been borrowed wholesale from the catalogs of other suppliers. The presence of competitors’ catalogs with images cut from the booklet further confirms this suspicion. Whether Floding Co. was simply borrowing the representation of an item, and producing that item in its own factory, or buying items from other companies and reselling them under the Floding name is unknown.

<sup>452</sup> By the early-twentieth century, firms like the Truen Manufacturing Company of Hoboken, NJ, and its successor, the American Mask Manufacturing firm of Findlay, Ohio, produced strange ranges of goods. The 1915 catalog for the American Mask Co. offers up combination of Theatrical and Masquerade costumes—including wigs, false noses, as well as specialty goods like Christmas Tree ornaments and tinsel fringe.

regalia fit in well with the range of regalia made at the Floding and Gate City factories, but these goods were by no means the only objects that the factories produced.

Once Thompson cut the fabric, he handed it to one of the twenty some “machine operators” who sat at a long table on the factory floor. Retrofitted from an existing facility, the Gate City factory could not compare to Ford’s assembly line, where buildings were constructed according to the particular specifications of efficiency experts.<sup>453</sup> The facilities of the Gate City Manufacturing Company were similar to those of other small novelty factories at the time; beyond the time clock along the back wall, the factory boasted few technological innovations. Large open windows provided ventilation, aided by dark, waxed-canvas shades, and large standing fans, but work in the second-story room was undoubtedly hot during Atlanta’s summers.

From these stations the workers stitched a simple shape: a long-sleeved, collarless coat that opened down the front with seven buttons, stopping at the wearer’s knees. The robe was to be put on over the Klansman’s everyday clothes—trousers and a stiffly collared shirt—and thus the robe had no collar of its own. Instead, an elbow-length cape was stitched into the bias binding at the neck of each robe. The helmet was a cone made of

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Made of paper, painted gauze stiffened with glue, paper maché, the masks that this company sold wholesale were of the type, if not the very masks that fraternal supply companies sold in their own catalogs. These catalogs are included in the Floding Archive at Southern Flag and Tailors.

<sup>453</sup> Ford’s assembly lines first emerged in 1914, prior to this, Ford’s workers operated in the “craft” or trade tradition, with significant discretion over the manufacturing process. The advent of the assembly line, and eventually the automated assembly line, atomized the various steps of factory work, enabling these positions to be routinized into discrete tasks that could be repeatedly performed by unskilled or low-skill workers. Stephen Meyer, *The Five-Dollar Day: Labor Management and Social Control in the Ford Motor Company*. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981), 12. See also David Montgomery, *Workers' Control*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 11 and 12 27; and Daniel Nelson, *Managers and Workers* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 17 54; H. L. Arnold, "Ford Methods and the Ford Shops: The Stock System and Employment Methods," *Engineering Magazine*, 47 (May 1914) For more on the construction of factory spaces in this period, see: Betsy H. Bradley, *The Works: The Industrial Architecture of the United States*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

two flat pieces with a long seam reaching a point into which the workers stitched a red tassel—one made of red wool for the robes of most Klansmen, and specialty tassels made of silk for higher-ranking officials. Two flaps of fabric were stitched into the headband of the cone, in order to covered the wearer’s face and neck, and a cone of glue stiffened canvas—buckram, was bound with brown bias tape before being stuffed into the pointed helmet to provide it with shape. These garments were sometimes, but not always, marked with sizes—a violet stamp indicating the size of the helmet, or one of a number of labels indicating either a size or manufacturer’s mark. (**Fig 4.2**) Uniform regalia was designed to de-emphasize the individual identity of the wearer, by situating him as a representative token of the category of Klansmen. Thus, the most crucial quality of any given Klan robe was how closely it appeared to be identical to the other garments of the same type.

Though the goal of factory owners was the production of uniform garments, workers tried to make the robes as quickly as possible. Stitching on a piecework basis, these women were assigned to a particular part of the construction process.<sup>454</sup> The majority of the women, seated at standard industrial Singer sewing machines, performed the bulk of the labor in producing a garment.<sup>455</sup> Transforming flat pieces into dimensional

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<sup>454</sup> Though there are no extant business records from the Floding or Gate City factories, piecework was the customary compensation structure for small garment manufacturers at this time, including the Klan’s own robe plant after it opened in 1923. Other accounts of piecework labor in this period include: "The Story of a Sweatshop Girl," *Independent (New York)*, Sept. 25, 1902), and Clara Lemlich, "Life in the Shop." *New York Evening Journal*, (November 28, 1909), reprinted in Leon Stein, ed., *Out of the Sweatshop: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy* (New York: Quadrangle/New Times Book Company, 1977), 60-61; Green, Nancy L, *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work: A Century of Industry and Immigrants in Paris and New York* (Durham: Duke University Libraries Press, 1997).

<sup>455</sup> Isaac Singer’s sewing machine company had a near-monopoly on the industrial sewing machine market at the turn of the century. These machines transformed both industrial and home sewing, and created new possibilities for industrialized women’s labor on a global scale. See: David Hounshell, "The sewing Machine and the American system of manufactures" *From the American System to Mass Production, 1800-1932: The Development of Manufacturing Technology in the United States*. (Baltimore, MD: JHU Press, 1985), 67-124; Mona Domosh. "The Great Equalizer: Gender, Race, and Civilization in Singer Advertising." in *American Commodities in an Age of Empire*. (London: Routledge, 2013) 55-94.

garments was a rote activity for these workers, particularly because there was so little variation in the garments. The piles of robes piled near each machine operator was an index of her skill and speed—two characteristics essential for laborers in a piecework system, in which compensation was based on the number of garments she completed. Piecework systems made workers responsible for maintaining standards of production. If a garment did not match up to that of others, they were not compensated for their time. In a common practice during this period, piecework garment laborers were often charged for the fabric and thread used when they “ruined” a garment. While piecework encouraged consistency, this system also demanded speed, as workers were only paid by the “piece” for completed garments. Thus, the workers at the Floding factory and other similar garment operations during this time worked to achieve a delicate balance between speed and accuracy. The photograph from the Gate City factory underscores this point. Unlike the other staff members posed around the edges of the room, the “machine operators” were shown at work, sewing long white garments with rope belts that are identifiable as Klan robes. While some of these women looked up at the photographer, most did not turn away from their work. It is possible that the image was staged to show the production of Klan robes in action, but the machine operators were not simply posed with work in hand. In fact, some of these women, particularly in the rear of the room, appear only as a blur, suggesting that some of the operators, likely paid on a piecework basis were unwilling to sacrifice the loss of wages that would have resulted from such a pause.

## Women in Industry

Garment work was an important source of income for white women across Atlanta, though city's demographics produced a different labor force than that of other garment manufacturing centers, like factories on New York's Lower East Side.<sup>456</sup> There, many companies hired recent immigrants to perform semi-skilled or even skilled labor, in order to produce higher-end ready-made garments for both men and women. Despite the role of manufacturing as the savior of the New South, Atlanta's garment factories could have come out of the prior century. Working with rough local fabric, the craftsmanship at these factories tended towards the utilitarian garments that initiated fashion's industrial revolution. Many of Atlanta's garment factories produced work clothes and other staple garments for men, a legacy stemming from factories producing uniforms for the Confederacy.<sup>457</sup> Atlanta's garment workers were also migrants, though these Southern-born white women generally reached the city from rural parts of the state or region, a pattern more closely resembling that of workers in the mills of Lowell, MA, and Atlanta.

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<sup>456</sup> For canonical accounts of garment labor in the Lower East Side, see Nan Enstad. *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Nancy Green. *Ready-to-Wear and Ready-to-Work: A Century of Industry and Immigrants in Paris and New York*. (Durham: Duke University Libraries Press, 1997); Christine Stansell, "The Origins of the Sweatshop: Women and Early Industrialization in New York City," in Michael H. Frisch and Daniel J. Walkowitz, *Working-Class America: Essays on Labor, Community, and American Society*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983) 78-103; Roger D. Waldinger, *Through the Eye of the Needle: Immigrants and Enterprise in New York's Garment Trades*. (New York: NYU Press, 1986).

<sup>457</sup> Atlanta's garment industry prior to the 1930's has been under-studied, in part because the majority of garments produced in the city's factories were largely quotidian work-wear, particularly garments like overalls produced for men, and in part because garment production was far overshadowed by textile production. But Atlanta's garment workers were connected with national networks of garment laborers through their participation in unions, as recounted in *The Garment Worker*, a trade publication produced by New York's United Garment Workers Union in the 1910's. The most complete account of this industry is an unpublished dissertation. Gretchen Ehrmann Maclachlan. "Women's Work: Atlanta's Industrialization and Urbanization, 1879-1929." Ph.D. dissertation, (Emory University, 1992). In her 2015 study of garment labor in the South, Michelle Haberland argues that southern garment labor has largely been ignored in prior studies of Southern industrialization *Striking Beauties: Women Apparel Workers in the U.S. South, 1930-2000*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015).

Where many garment workers in the Northeast were young single women, Atlanta's ranged in age, though the role of sewing machine operator was an improvement over the unskilled labor performed by mill-hands—many of whom started this work at a young age. Nor were Atlanta's garment workers overwhelmingly single; married women were likely to enter and exit the workforce in relation to domestic or economic demands. As a result, workers in the Gate City factory would have understood their employment as temporary, if even precarious.<sup>458</sup>

Durell Kennedy was one such employee. Born in 1899, she was just over twenty years old when she took a job at the Gate City Factory, likely after working with her sisters as a winding hand at a cotton mill in nearby Gwinnett County. Kennedy was single when she started working at Gate City, living in a nearby boarding house until her marriage in 1924. Without a high school education, Kennedy continued to work after her marriage, moving between jobs in the garment industry as her husband took on a range of work: clerk, dyer at a hat company, and laborer in a dye mill. Neither Kennedy nor her husband remained in a job for more than a decade at a time.<sup>459</sup> This pattern is consistent for the machine operators who worked in Floding's factory as well, a mixture of single and married women who made modest livings by finding jobs in a range of industries tied to garment production.

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<sup>458</sup> Cynthia Amneus "Women in the Workplace" in *A Separate Sphere*, (Lubbock, TX: Cincinnati Art Museum ; Texas Tech University Press, 2003), 42.

<sup>459</sup> *Atlanta City Directory*, (1922) 969; *Atlanta City Directory* (1923) 709; Kennedy's work history includes time as a winding hand in an Atlanta cotton mill, work as a stitcher at Gate City, and work as a stitcher at the Carhart Overall Factory outside the city. Durrell Kennedy, 1930 Census, Line 81 Cedartown District Polk County GA Enumeration District 159 Sheet no 4 B (handwritten) Durell Kennedy, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940 U.S. Censuses. R.J. Polk and Co., *Atlanta City Directory*, 1922, 1924, 1933, 1952.



Machine operator Dollie Donehoo started stitching Klan regalia at the Floding factory in 1915, when she was 30 years old. At that time, Donehoo lived at home with her widowed father—a former farm laborer—and five of her nine siblings in Atlanta’s Third Ward, a mostly white, working class neighborhood southeast of the city center.<sup>460</sup> Her father was the son of a farmer, and worked as a farm laborer himself in nearby DeKalb, Georgia, prior to moving to the city with his wife and children just before the turn of the century. The Donehoo children attended school until they entered the workforce in their teens. In 1915 the five Donehoo sisters living at home ranged in age from their mid to their late 30s; all single they worked at small garment and millinery manufactories across the city.

Neither Kennedy nor Donehoo’s profiles suggest that they started stitching robes and hoods—at the Gate City and Floding factories, respectively— out of an ideological commitment to the Klan. Both women entered the garment manufacturing industry out of financial necessity, and both did work in this sector before and after they helped to manufacture the Klan. In many ways, the photograph of the Gate City factory floor could be an image of any other specialty manufacturer at the time, where a rotating cast of workers produced an ever-changing array of goods.

But neither do the portraits of these machine operators suggest that they found their work particularly troubling. White women in the garment industry occupied a complicated social position within the city’s social hierarchy. Women laborers almost

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<sup>460</sup> Cora Donehoo 1920 Census, Line 19 Atlanta Ward 3 (Southwest side of city) 14<sup>th</sup> census Enumeration district 71 Ward 3 Sheet no 17 A (handwritten); Frank M. Donehoo 1880 census, line 43 Georgia Pantherville District DeKalb Enumeration district 49 Pg 18 (handwritten); 1900 Census Franklin M. Donehoo line 93, Cora line 97 Enumeration district 58 Atlanta Fulton Ward 3 Sheet no 29 handwritten; The Donehoo family was at least partially Irish in origin, but only one of Dollie Donehoo’s grandparents was foreign born, and the rest of the family claimed several generations of Georgia residency.

always made less than men in similar jobs, likewise Black laborers made less than whites. These divisions were further attenuated by the fact that racial and gender tracking meant that workers of different demographics rarely had access to the same types of jobs anyway.<sup>461</sup> White women entered the workforce in rapid numbers nationwide during the Progressive era, but the growth of this workforce was particularly dramatic in Atlanta. In 1890, 2,381 white women worked outside the home in the city, by 1910, that number skyrocketed to 9,352, comprising more than 18 percent of this demographic category.<sup>462</sup> Starting in the 1880's, married women entered the workforce in large numbers nationwide, across class sectors. For wealthy and middle class women, particularly in urban areas this shift resulted from an expansion of educational opportunities and occupational professionalization, as well as improvements in domestic technologies that made housework more efficient.<sup>463</sup> Working class women, like Donehoo and Kennedy were less likely to benefit from these changes. Instead, the burgeoning consumer economy meant that families purchased more goods that were previously homemade, necessitating increased income to participate in this market. "To keep families economically viable demanded the financial contribution of daughters as well as sons, and sometimes of wives

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<sup>461</sup> For race on Georgia textile factory floors, see: Michelle Brattain, *The Politics of Whiteness: Race, Workers, and Culture in the Modern South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); Kuhn, *Contesting the New South Order* (2001); Flammig, *Creating the Modern South* (1992); For "race management in early twentieth century factories, see: David R. Roediger, and Elizabeth D Esch, *The Production of Difference: Race and the Management of Labor in U.S. History*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); For primary accounts, see recollections of Arthur Raper in Cliff Kuhn, Harlon Joye, Bernard West, and Radio Free Georgia Broadcasting Foundation, *Living Atlanta: An Oral History of the City, 1914-1948* (Atlanta; Athens: Atlanta Historical Society ; University of Georgia Press, 1990) 44.

<sup>462</sup> Godschalk, *Veiled Visions*, 21.

<sup>463</sup> See Alice Kessler Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) 109-120.

and mothers too.”<sup>464</sup> In Atlanta’s ever-shifting labor market, these women understood that they were afforded certain opportunities unavailable to others, particularly Black women.

As Durell Kennedy stitched the Klan’s regalia, a woman seated in the farthest reaches of the room—near the left-hand corner of the frame— was likely sweeping up the clipped threads and fabric scraps that fell to the floor as the stitchers worked. (*Fig 4.3*) The presence of this middle-aged Black woman, in a factory where women are visibly at work reproducing the Klan’s most powerful symbol, should not be a surprise. Her inclusion in this photo of the factory floor demonstrates that her presence was part of business as usual for everyone in the room. Though slightly set apart from the other workers, and seated behind a bolt of white fabric, she was in fact posed for the photograph and looked directly at the camera. Her soft cap also distinguished her from the other workers—both the machine operators, bare-headed and dressed in aprons or house dresses designed to protect their street clothes from dust and grease, and from the young secretary leaning over the cutting table while wearing a smart hat.<sup>465</sup>

This woman was undoubtedly the lowest-paid worker in the room. Factory owner Claude Davis would not have offered this middle-aged Black woman a job stitching, regardless of the ideological symbolism of the garments that Gate City workers sewed. As white women entered the workforce in Atlanta in great numbers at the turn of the century, the range of occupations available to African American women increased far more slowly. Many were still constrained to a narrow range of options: washing, cleaning, and other

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<sup>464</sup> Kessler Harris, *Out to Work*, 120.

<sup>465</sup> There is no evidence that these women used their own garments to develop politicized senses of self through their dress, as Nan Enstad has identified in the young immigrant women working in garment factories on New York’s Lower East Side. Nonetheless, Enstad’s workers show that the use of smocks and aprons to protect more precious clothing was common for women working in factories at this time. Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure*, 67-68; "Fashioning Political Identities: Cultural Studies and the Historical Construction of Political Subjects" *American Quarterly* 50:4 (December 1998): 745-782.

domestic duties. Some of Atlanta's Black working women pursued employment in mills, but the textile industry was almost entirely closed to Black workers.

In contrast to well-established garment production centers of the northeast, the garment industry in Atlanta was still developing at the turn of the century. Atlanta's garment factories primarily focused on rough goods and work clothes, operating as an extension of the textile mills across the Southeast that transformed white bolls of Southern cotton into bolts of fabric. Atlanta's garment industry likewise adopted the culture of strict racial segregation that characterized Southern textile mills until the 1960s. In 1915, the South Carolina legislature passed a law making it illegal for cotton textile workers of different races to work in the same room.<sup>466</sup> Georgia had no such laws on the books, but defacto segregation ruled these workplaces nonetheless. Black laborers were understood to be responsible for much of the agricultural labor of cotton production—often through exploitive practices of sharecropping. They were not, however, welcome in the industrial spaces where cotton was processed. Prior to the 1960s Black men were occasionally hired as janitors and maintenance men, whereas textile companies rarely hired African American women at all. Garment factories in Atlanta drew on these conventions, though Atlanta garment factories rarely operated on the same scale as the massive mills on the outskirts of the city. Janitorial labor was one of the only ways for Black women to find work in Atlanta's manufacturing sector.

### **Industrial Threats**

Dangers lingered alongside the promise of money for factory workers, and Atlanta's garment industry was no exception. During the Progressive era, federal

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<sup>466</sup> Minchin, Timothy J, *Hiring the Black Worker: The Racial Integration of the Southern Textile Industry, 1960-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 12.

regulations around worker health and safety increased significantly, as states started to track numbers of workplace incidents following a series of high-profile tragedies. The one hundred and forty six men and women who died at New York's Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in 1911 were casualties of an accidental fire exacerbated by managerial neglect—exits were locked to prevent workers from stealing the garments they made.<sup>467</sup> The Triangle Factory Fire led to greater labor protections, as workers organized in the wake of the tragedy, but labor unions did not take hold in the smaller, flexible workplaces of Atlanta's specialty goods manufacturers—including the Floding and Gate City factories. While unions provided better health and safety protections in larger factories, like workers of the Garment Workers Local 29 at the Hamilton Carhartt overall factory on the northeast side of town, the women at the Floding and Gate city companies needed to watch out for their own health and safety.<sup>468</sup>

Beyond mass catastrophe, work in the Floding and Gate City factories required laborers to be attentive to more mundane threats. For this reason, one characteristic of a successful garment worker was having enough skill to avoid injury, a particular challenge given the tremendous power of the all-steel industrial sewing machines that these women operated. While most working-class women in this period were at least nominally familiar with the operations of a sewing machine, industrial machines used during this period had

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<sup>467</sup> After the Triangle factory fire, survivors, former employees, and other garment workers immediately organized in service of better workplace fire protections. See: *Ladies' Garment Worker*, April 1911; "Men and Girls Die in Waist Factory Fire; Trapped High Up in Washington Place Building; Street Strewn with Bodies; Piles of Dead Inside," *New York Times*, March 26, 1911; "Stories of Survivors" *New York Times*, Mar 26, 1911. For the most complete secondary account of the event, see Leon Stein, *The Triangle Fire*, (1962).

<sup>468</sup> The Carhartt Co. was popular union shop after the company opened an Atlanta factory in 1914. Carhartt started out as a manufacturer of ready-to-wear men's clothing, but opened a range of factories and cotton mills by 1916. *Atlanta Constitution*, Dec. 11, 1913; "The Atlanta Garment Workers." *Garment Worker* XVII, no. 32 (May 24, 1918): 2. Leonard, John William, and Albert Nelson Marquis. *Who's Who in America*. Chicago: A. N. Marquis and Co. 1916), 396.

powerful engines and needles driven by heavy leather belts.<sup>469</sup> Like the ones used at home, industrial sewing machines had small metal teeth that helped pull the fabric through the machine at an even pace. The operator controlled the speed of these feeds and the vertical motion of the needle with a foot-operated pedal. While the operator ostensibly had total control of her own pace, external factors, like low visibility due to dust stirred up by constant motion of machines and piles of fabric surrounding each closely situated work station, made reports of sewing machine needles stitched right through the operators' fingers all too frequent during this time.<sup>470</sup> Managers knew these concerns, but their compensation system encouraged workers to speed up production, regardless of the cost.

Other dangers of factory work emerged from the social space of the factory, rather than its technologies. In 1922, Della Warr, the former secretary of the Gate City factory filed a civil suit charging Claude B. Davis, her former boss with sexual harassment.<sup>471</sup> The young widow in her early thirties alleged that she was forced to quit her job when Davis reduced her salary in retaliation for refusing his sexual advances. Warr argued that her salary was crucial to "support herself and her young son." For his part, Davis charged that Warr was actually dismissed for incompetence. A newspaper headline announced that the

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<sup>469</sup> Sewing machine construction from the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries is catalogued in Grace Rogers Cooper, *The Sewing Machine: Its Invention and Development* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1976).

<sup>470</sup> The hazards in Georgia manufacturing in 1922 included poor lighting, ventilation, proper sanitation, and the potential for fire. These increased dramatically in the textile mill trade, though garment workers at smaller garment factories like the Floding co. nonetheless faced these dangers at this and other workplaces. U. S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, *Women in Georgia Industries: a Study of Hours, Wages, and Working Conditions*. Bulletin of the Women's Bureau #22 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1922) 33-51; Leon Stein, ed., *Out of the Sweatshop* (1977).

<sup>471</sup> "Woman's Charges Denied by Davis: Mrs. Warr Claimed She had to Quit Job Because of his Attention" *Atlanta Constitution*, Dec. 10, 1922.

charges were “Denied by Davis,” and there is no record of the eventual outcome of the suit—he continued to run the Gate City factory for some years after.

Davis’s harassment of his employee demonstrated a common practice of management culture during this period, and yet also illustrated the kind of threat that the Klan claimed it was trying to prevent by instituting clear social divisions. The apparent lack of censure for Davis demonstrated this complicated double standard at the heart of the Klan’s logic. Women were idealized within Klan doctrine, and within the broader culture in which the organization formed.<sup>472</sup> This idealization did not protect women from violence enacted by white men, even Klansmen, nor did it mean that women themselves were not frequently charged with fault in their own harassment. The majority of Klan violence in this period was around issues of moral indiscretion, but more often than Klan leaders themselves evaded punishment.<sup>473</sup>

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<sup>472</sup> That rape charges were a regular justification for lynchings in this period should not negate the degree to which sexual violence was a regular part of the lives of both Black and white women in the New South. White women were significantly more likely to seek legal action for attacks, though as Warr’s case proves, justice was not always served. MacLean, “Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Lynching: The Leo Frank Case Revisited,” in *Under Sentence of Death, Lynching in the South*. 166-167. Sexual violence against black women was even more common, thanks to a “double standard that allowed southern white men to abuse black women with impunity.” Feimster, *Southern Horrors*, 65.

<sup>473</sup> On Klan violence in relation to charges of immorality, see Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 22. The Klan had an elaborate internal review system, in which members accused of violating the organization’s principles could be banished from the organization. The majority of “banishments” regarded violations within the Klan itself: embezzlement or secession attempts. One significant exception was the public trial of former Indiana Grand Dragon D.C. Stephenson, for the assault and kidnapping of white teacher in Indiana, Madge Olberholtzer. Following the attack, the young woman took poison tablets that eventually led to her death. Olberholtzer’s dramatic deathbed testimony, recorded a month after the initial attack, recounted how Stephenson forced her on a train to Chicago, and into a cabin where she was alone with him and one of his associates. “Stephenson took hold of the bottom of my dress and pulled it up over my head. I tried to fight but was weak and unsteady. Stephenson took hold of my two hands and held them. I had not the strength to move. What I had drunk was affecting me. Stephenson took all my clothes off and pushed me into the lower berth. After the train had started, Stephenson got in with me and attacked me. He held me so I could not move. I did not know and do not remember all that happened. He chewed me all over my body, bit my neck and face, chewing my tongue, chewed my breasts until they bled, my back, my legs, my ankles and mutilated me all over my body.” At the time of the attack, Stephenson was no longer affiliated with the Klan, but the brutality of Olberholtzer’s charge led Atlanta Klan leaders to quickly denounce Stephenson and his actions. Olberholtzer’s testimony Quoted in Irving Leibowitz, *My Indiana*, 195-203; Moore, *Citizen Klansman*. For Banishments, see, Evans, Hiram W. Edict. “Banishment of G.C. Minor.” Edict, July 28,

This move could easily be characterized as a moral failing of Klan doctrine, but in actuality, it reflected a larger problem for Progressive era Americans struggling to make sense of the rapid changes happening all around them. Warr's charge against Davis was representative of the kind of concerns that moral reformers raised about women's entry into the workforce, even as these women's labor and consumer power enabled economic growth. Atlantans saw industry as an engine for social progress in their city, but they also experienced firsthand the violent clashes that this new social world could bring. These concerns came to an awful light in in 1913, when a teenager named Mary Phagan was found dead in the basement of the National Pencil Company, the Atlanta factory where she worked. The factory's superintendent, Leo Frank, was found guilty of the murder, first in a well-publicized trial, and subsequently in a series of appeals, despite mounting evidence that Frank was, in fact, innocent of the crime. One judge went so far as to admit that he thought Frank was innocent, but was unwilling to unleash the force of the mob lathered into a fury by populist leader Tom Watson and Atlantans still fuming from the city's 1906 racial pogrom.<sup>474</sup> Two years after Phagan's death, Frank was removed from jail by an enraged mob angry about the Governor's commutation of his sentence from death to life imprisonment, and hanged in a dramatic public spectacle.

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1925, Box 1, Folder 8, Kontinental Klan Collection, EWSHS; "Official Banishment of Bishop C.W. Bridewell," August 10, 1925. Bayfield, CO Ku Klux Klan Records Box 2 Folder 12. FLC; "Official Banishment of Charles Brock," August 10, 1925. Bayfield, CO Ku Klux Klan Records Box 2 Folder 12. FLC; Forrest, Nathan Bedford. Letter to J. P. McCall. "J. O. Wood and Volney Jones Banished from Klan," June 28, 1927. Ku Klux Klan Athens Chapter No. 5 Papers Box 1 Folder 14. UGA; Letter to R. L. Bramblett. "On Tribunal of Former Athens Klansman," Sept. 4, 1925. Ku Klux Klan Athens Chapter No. 5 Papers Box 1 Folder 6. UGA; Hoffman, H.C. "List of Banishments of CO Klansmen," August 25, 1925. Bayfield, CO Ku Klux Klan Records Box 2 Folder 12. FLC; McCall, J. P. Letter to Nathan Bedford Forrest. "J. M. Head Banished from Athens Klan," January 25, 1927. Ku Klux Klan Athens Chapter No. 5 Papers Box 1 Folder 13. UGA.

<sup>474</sup> Judge Leonard Roan, quoted in Dinnerstein, *The Leo Frank Case*, 80; Godschalk, *Veiled Visions*, 261.



Throughout the duration of Frank's ordeal, the case was covered with breathless intensity by Atlanta newspapers, quickly becoming national news with the help of the wire services.<sup>475</sup> National coverage of Frank's trial transformed a local tragedy into a national debate over the failures of industrial modernity in the South. Populist leader Tom Watson played on this tension, calling for Southerners to correct the wrongs done by industrial capitalists preying on young women of the region. Meanwhile, Frank's large base of support outside the South frustrated Georgians, who saw the case as a censure of the New South order. Ivy League educated Frank "evoked a history of Yankee oppression in the South and symbolized an exploitative, alien, urban, capitalism."<sup>476</sup> While uncomfortably aware that Frank's lynching reinforced stereotypes of an anti-modern and "savage" South, Frank's case enacted a popular referendum on changing labor practices in Atlanta, and in particular the potential for new sexual and racial mixing that industrial work enabled. The *Atlanta Journal* and *The Atlanta Georgian* both included cut-away plan drawings of the factory with their coverage of Frank's trial so that readers could better understand the industrial setting of the crime.<sup>477</sup>

This critique of industrial modernity also carried a racial dimension. Coverage of Phagan's murder cited the prevalence of exploitative child labor, in Jewish-run factories in Atlanta. At home among the largest Jewish population in the South, Atlanta's Jews were better integrated into city life than in many other parts of the region.<sup>478</sup> But for many

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<sup>475</sup> Dinnerstein, *The Leo Frank Case*, 36.

<sup>476</sup> Kuhn, *Contesting the New South Order*, 54.

<sup>477</sup> *Atlanta Journal*, Aug 10, 1913; *Atlanta Georgian*, May 23, 1913. Both reprinted in Dinnerstein, *The Leo Frank Case*, 38-39.

<sup>478</sup> Atlanta's Jewish population became an established demographic in the city in the mid nineteenth-century, as Polish and Germanic immigrants became involved in the commercial and political life of the city.

Atlanta residents, Phagan's murder brought up underlying concerns about the moral failings and corruption of what anti-Semitic commentaries referred to as the "Jewish race" as a whole.<sup>479</sup> In describing Phagan's murder as at once a failure of successful industrial management, and yet also an example of racial weakness, Atlanta's residents brought together several important threads of social conflict in the New South: concerns about the danger of women's working outside the home, the consequences of disrupting racial hierarchies, and the new threats of urban life.

While Frank's lynching brought these concerns into the public eye, the racial landscape of Atlanta more often reflected the enforcement of social hierarchies—racialized, gendered, religious—in more quotidian ways. Klan leaders saw their organization as a vehicle for protecting white womanhood, and instituting harmony in the city of Atlanta, and eventually the nation, through the kind of racial cooperation that Atlanta's business leaders touted. This cooperation meant a shared understanding of social hierarchies, and Atlanta's peaceful adherence to these rules. In 1919, Imperial Wizard Simmons announced that the Klan "stand[s] for the rightful settling of the races and a due respect for racial barriers erected by the Creator of the races of men."<sup>480</sup> With such due respect, he argued, terrible events like the Frank lynching could be avoided. And yet, the very conditions that brought about the murders of Mary Phagan and Leo Frank, the

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Bauman, Mark K. Bauman, "Factionalism and Ethnic Politics in Atlanta: The German Jews from the Civil War through the Progressive Era." *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 82, no. 3 (1998): 534-35. The centrality of Atlanta's Jewish communities in these arenas is also discussed extensively in Steven Hertzberg's social history of this population. *Strangers Within the Gate City The Jews of Atlanta, 1845-1945* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1978).

<sup>479</sup> Frank's case plays a critical role in studies of relationships between Black and Jewish communities in Atlanta. See: Jeffrey Paul Melnick, *Black-Jewish Relations on Trial: Leo Frank and Jim Conley in the New South*. (Jackson: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 2012); Hertzberg, *Strangers Within the Gate City*, 202-216.

<sup>480</sup> "Ku Klux Klan Parade Streets of Atlanta" *Chicago Defender*, May 24, 1919.

transformation of Atlanta through industry, also enabled the national expansion of the Klan. The knot could not be undone.

### **Workers Navigating the City**

There is no way of definitively stating the degree to which the workers at the Floding and Gate City factories understood their work as ideological in nature, though some workers were clearly closer to the organization's project than others. Sophronia (Fronia) Whitlow, initially worked as a sewing machine operator at the W. E. Floding factory, and later took the position of forelady at the Gate City factory soon after Davis took over leadership of the company.<sup>481</sup> Whitlow's life and career in Atlanta illustrates several important ways that race, geography, and gender shaped life for Atlanta's industrial workers, even as they made garments for an organization that explicitly celebrated traditional gender roles. Whitlow's job as forelady was to motivate her staff to meet production deadlines, and to mediate relationships between the office managers and the laborers who staffed the factory. This significant promotion, upon joining the staff of the Gate City factory positioned thirty-six-year-old Whitlow as the manager of roughly twenty garment workers. More than her colleagues, Klan regalia suggested an opportunity for economic advancement for Whitlow—particularly as she worked at two different factories making Klan regalia during this period.

Whitlow's work in these factories coincided with a period of great change in her personal life. During Whitlow's tenure as a machine operator at the Floding factory, her husband James died in 1917, at the age of 43.<sup>482</sup> The Spanish-American War Veteran had

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<sup>481</sup> R.J. Polk and Co, Atlanta City Directory, (1912) 1577; R. J. Polk and Co, ATL City Directory, 1922.

<sup>482</sup> *Atlanta Constitution*, July 21, 1917.

only ever worked odd jobs, but the loss of his income meant that Whitlow's work at the factory was more important than ever—particularly as she was now solely responsible for housing her elderly mother who moved to the city from rural Georgia around the same time. The emergence of a labor force of white women was one of the factors driving Atlanta into the progressive future that the city's boosters so desired.<sup>483</sup> But the occupational options available to women, even white women, were still limited by the expectation that they perform domestic labor upon returning home to their families. Whitlow's promotion to forelady was likely aided by the fact that she had no children, and could hire cheap domestic help, since Black women were not afforded the same occupational opportunities as white women.

At the same time, Whitlow's neighborhood, formerly populated by white working-class families, became a stronghold of Black working class families who were being priced out of the wealthier areas.<sup>484</sup> A major fire in 1917 and a depression in the price of cotton between 1915 and 1920 effectively stopped new construction, leading the working class to find more creative housing solutions.<sup>485</sup> To make ends meet, Whitlow divided the home she rented in Atlanta's First Ward, just southwest of the city center, into two apartments. She subleased the back apartment to a Black washerwoman named Mary, who lived there with a boarder of her own, an elderly wagon driver.<sup>486</sup> Like the upwardly

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<sup>483</sup> Gilligan, Maureen Carroll, *Female Corporate Culture and the New South: Women in Business between the World Wars* (New York: Garland Pub. 1999) 3.

<sup>484</sup> Fronia Whitlow, 1920 U.S. Census. Line 60, Georgia, Fulton County, Atlanta City, Ward 1, ED 44 Pg 6B (handwritten). Roll: T625\_250.

<sup>485</sup> Kuhn et al., *Living Atlanta*, 40.

<sup>486</sup> Young Mary, 1920 U.S. Census, line 62 Enumeration district 44 Sheet 6 Hand Written); David Alex, (David Alex 1920 Census Enumeration district 44 Sheet 6 Hand Written).

mobile working class whites they replaced, almost all these recent arrivals to the neighborhood were born in Georgia or other Southern states, but economic and educational limitations solidified by strategic limits placed on the physical and social mobility of African Americans by Jim Crow laws made these new arrivals to the neighborhood unlikely to achieve the middle class aspirations that preoccupied the former occupants. Many of Whitlow's Black neighbors subsided on work more frequently relegated to unskilled laborers, such as the entire families who worked at the Dixie Cardboard Box Company, just a few blocks away. Some of the African American women of the neighborhood traveled, likely by streetcar to tonier, and whiter, neighborhoods on the East side of Atlanta to clean houses, cook meals, and care for the burgeoning upper-middle class.<sup>487</sup> Unlike in many other large American cities, housing patterns in Atlanta were more frequently racially mixed than they would be later in the century. Despite the frequently close proximity of such living arrangements in neighborhoods like Whitlow's 1<sup>st</sup> ward, ethnic, racial and class divisions often resulted in a particularly territorial vision of neighborhoods that continued to shape the movement of Atlantans—particularly those of visible ethnic and racial minorities—well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>488</sup>

Whitlow continued to stitch, and eventually manage the manufacture of Ku Klux Klan regalia while her neighborhood transformed, even as she collected rent from Black boarders and lived with her own Black maid. The robes she made dressed Klansmen for demonstrations in which they tried to scare the new Black residents away from this and

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<sup>487</sup> Lori Eriksen Rush. *House Proud: A Social History of Atlanta Interiors, 1880-1919*. (Macon, GA.: Mercer Univ. Press, 2014).

<sup>488</sup> Kuhn, et. al. *Living Atlanta*, 36-37.; Hunter. *To 'Joy My Freedom*.

other formerly all-white neighborhoods, challenging the demographic changes in which Whitlow played two conflicting roles.<sup>489</sup>

### **Vertical Integration**

The Klan's continued growth through the mid-1920's impacted the material and geographic conditions of regalia manufacturing as demand for regalia increased. In 1923, Hiram Evans assumed the role of Imperial Wizard, following an internal coup over corruption within the organization under Simmons, Young Clarke, and Tyler.<sup>490</sup> As a former Imperial Kilgrapp (secretary) of the organization, Imperial Wizard Evans took pride in his further perfection of this machinery, launching initiatives after his rise to power in 1923 that attempted to reduce redundancies and corruption within the organization. Perfection of the Klan's operational hierarchy was intended to further promote "uniform methods and unified operations" between local Klans across the order's entire empire.<sup>491</sup>

Evans described these changes as a "new economies," which would "affect every Klansman," making the claim that the Klan was entering a new era of fiscal responsibility

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<sup>489</sup> Kuhn, et. al. *Living Atlanta*, 42.

<sup>490</sup> The highly publicized removal of Edgar Young Clarke, and eventually William J. Simmons, from their positions of organizational control, were touted as successes for the Klan's "internal review process." The problem with such claims is that the removal of these officials actually required an injunction by the Georgia Superior Court, and Evans promptly re-hired some of the very officials convicted during this process. See: "Warrants Issued for Klan Officials," *New York Times*, Apr. 5, 1923; "Backed by Court, Simmons Assumes Control of Klan," *Atlanta Constitution*, Apr. 4, 1923; "Commission Takes Control of K. K. K. By Court's Order," *Atlanta Constitution*, Apr. 8, 1923; "Three Direct Klan Affairs," *Salt Lake Tribune*, Apr. 8, 1923; "Triumvirate Will Rule Ku Klux Klan," *Boston Daily Globe*, Apr. 8, 1923; "Klan Funds Tied Up by An Injunction," *New York Times*, June 1, 1923; "Simmons Staff Chief Secures Peace Warrants for Wizard Evans and Aids of Ku Klux Klan," *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 7, 1923; "Warrant out for Wizard," *Boston Daily Globe*, Nov. 7, 1923.

<sup>491</sup> Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Incorporated. "The Klansman's Manual." (Atlanta: Ku Klux Klan Inc, 1924) 12. Michigan State University Library.

under his leadership.<sup>492</sup> A new, economizing Klan offered a significant departure from the fiscal decadence of the order under Simmons and Young Clarke. Where Simmons publicly celebrated the money he made from the order through the purchase of a lavish “palace,” Evans was more discrete—though the money continued to pour in during his first several years of leadership.<sup>493</sup>

As part of this change in leadership, Evans announced that the Klan’s regalia manufacturing operation would shift from the Gate City Manufacturing Company to a small factory in Buckhead, on Atlanta’s north side. Along with cuts in both the imperial tax and tithes placed on local Klans to sustain the national organization, Imperial Wizard Evans promised to reduce the price of robe rental by \$1.50. Workers at the Klan’s new regalia plant would make the uniform robes and hoods with less overhead cost, allowing for the Klan to rent robes to members at a lower price. By making robes in-house, Evans argued, the Klan would be able to avoid involving a middleman, and therefore the Klan could benevolently lower the price of regalia for the organization’s new members.

The Klan’s decision to take over production of its own regalia in 1923 was the result of several interrelated factors. Like the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce’s campaigns to sell their cities to investors a decade earlier, Klan leaders fused the association with modern industrial manufacturing to demonstrate the organization’s commitment to American social progress. This was particularly important for Imperial Wizard Evans because the Klan’s internal power struggles had manifested themselves in a very messy,

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<sup>492</sup> “Regalia Factory and Printing Plant Will Save Much Money For Klans of Nation” *Imperial Night-Hawk*. July 18, 1923; “New Economies Affect Every Klansman; Klectokon, Imperial Tax and Robe Cost Cut” *The Imperial Night-Hawk*. August 15, 1923; T.J. McKinnon, “Report from the Industrial Plant,” in *Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Inc. Official Department Reports Made to the Second Imperial Klownvokation*, (1924) 49-50. Ku Klux Klan Collection, Atlanta History Center.

<sup>493</sup> Testimony of William J. Simmons, KKK Trial (1921).

very public, battle for control of the organization.<sup>494</sup> While local Klans captured electoral and social power with violent force, Klan leaders—housed in Atlanta and, between 1924 and 1926, in Washington D.C.—chose to pursue respectability in the manner of many chagrined industry titans; that is, with bureaucratic transparency, admitting past missteps, and claiming to embrace a new approach.

Emphasizing the modernity, efficiency, and altruistic dimensions of Klan bureaucracy let Evans demonstrate to members their financial and personal investment in the company. Simultaneously this new rhetorical emphasis was accompanied by an ideological shift, whereby the semi-religious, mystical vision of the organization was supplanted by an investment in what Evans called “practical patriotism,” a nativist political project that amplified the Klan’s existing ideology of “klannishness.”<sup>495</sup> This kind of sociability emphasized the uniformity of Klansmen nationwide even more than it had under Simmons.

The infrastructure that enabled this formation was critical to the continued viability of the Klan. Focusing on organizational uniformity—and organizational ownership—put the industrial apparatuses that produced the actual uniforms at the center of Klan leaders’ vision of political relevance. The bureaucratic, industrial aspects of Klan practice also amplified the respectability politics that Evans and his deputies espoused. Due to the difficulty of such a prospect, centralizing regalia manufacture became a way for Klan leaders to maintain control over the uniformity of the order, in the most literal sense. As the new leader of the organization, Evans was tasked with convincing current and would-be members that the organization was moving away from rumors of corruption.

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<sup>494</sup> Wade, *The Fiery Cross*, 187-192.

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid*, 193.



Integrating robe manufacturing into the structure of the organization itself was an attempt to demonstrate to members that Klan leaders were on their side.

Along with cuts in both the imperial tax and tithes placed on local Klans to sustain the national organization, Imperial Wizard Hiram W. Evans promised to reduce the price of robe rental by \$1.50.<sup>496</sup> Relocating robe manufacture within the organization itself, Evans argued, enabled the Klan to provide robes to members at cost, and speed up the delivery of robe orders to Klans across the country. The robes were to be built by “skilled workers” using “advantageously” purchased machinery in a new building constructed expressly to house the robe factory and the new printing plant that the organization established at the same time. These and other reports to Klansmen announced that the new robe plant was “saving of thousands of dollars annually to the individual Klans, turning back into the local Klan treasuries money which had heretofore gone to the national treasury or which under the old propagation contract...had gone into the pockets of private individuals.”<sup>497</sup> That old contract, benefiting Claude B. Davis of the Gate City Co. and W. E. Floding respectively, was repeatedly presented to Klansmen as an inefficient business model, given that “the firms made a reasonable profit on their labor,” despite the fact that these firms employed—and indeed were run by—men who held high positions in the local and national Atlanta Klan.<sup>498</sup>

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<sup>496</sup> “Regalia Factory and Printing Plant Will Save Much Money For Klans of Nation” *Imperial Night-Hawk*. (July, 18, 1923), 5; Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Incorporated. *Official and Department Reports Made to the Second Imperial Klonvokation*, 1924.

<sup>497</sup> “New Economies Affect Every Klansman; Klektokon, Imperial Tax and Robe Cost Cut” *The Imperial Night-Hawk*. (Aug. 15, 1923): 5.

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

## Back to Atlanta

The operations of the Klan's new "robe plant" became a space for Klan leaders to work out the relationship of their organization to the process of manufacturing its most powerful symbol. The Klan's new regalia factory was located in Atlanta's northern suburbs, roughly eight miles north of the Floding factory. This shift was likely practical, since it enabled easier oversight of industrial operations. Still, this move had symbolic dimensions as well. Once a small town adjacent to Atlanta, Buckhead was soon to become a crucial symbol of segregation, as white residents of the city moved away from the city center towards the ever-expanding suburbs of the city's metropolis. Known for its grand mansions, including the Klan's own "Imperial Palace," just a mile down Peachtree street from the robe plant, Buckhead not only represented impending white flight, it was also a bastion of gentility and ostentatious wealth. The Buckhead regalia factory quickly grew from a "one-story metal building, 50 by 150 feet" that housed the order's regalia and printing operations, to its own "modern three story brick building" of the same dimensions, in just over a year. The new building "housed the robe plant, shipping department, and stock rooms," while the printing operation stayed in the original metal building.<sup>499</sup>

In 1929, Imperial Wizard Hiram W. Evans moved the organization's headquarters back to Atlanta following an unsuccessful two-year stint of political lobbying in Washington D.C., subsequently, the factory building was renovated to make room for the organization's offices.<sup>500</sup> The robe plant that once occupied a floor or more of the three-

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<sup>499</sup> T.J. McKinnon, "Report from the Industrial Plant," in Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Inc. *Official Department Reports Made to the Second Imperial Kloukation*, (1924) 49. Ku Klux Klan Collection, Atlanta History Center.

<sup>500</sup> Williams, Gladstone. "Ku Klux Klan to Transfer Headquarters to Atlanta, Washington Report Says" *Atlanta Constitution*. Apr. 25, 1929. The 1929 gut renovation was intended to make the building fireproof.

story building was now relegated to half the second floor. This move was pragmatic, as profits from membership dues and initiation fees were quickly shrinking. Still, the symbolism of this relocation was hard to miss. After a decade and a half of increasing proximity to the organization, the newly configured factory finally placed the Klan's leaders and manufacturing staff in the same space. The organization was now vertically integrated, in the most literal sense of the management jargon that had become popular during the period of its operation.<sup>501</sup>

Imperial Wizard Evans used the Klan's regalia factory to demonstrate that the Klan had moved away from the profit-hungry and corruption-ridden model of Simmons's reign, but the operations of the factory show us that this claim was overstated. The manager of that factory, T. J. McKinnon, was appointed to his position *after* being charged with larceny from the organization.<sup>502</sup> In April of 1923, McKinnon, then chief investigator for the order, and N. N. Furney, the imperial treasurer, were both charged in municipal court for allegedly removing \$20,000 and \$100,000, respectively, from the treasury of the Ku Klux Klan Inc. Evans appointed McKinnon to be manager of the factory only months after this scandal, suggesting that the "larceny" was performed with the blessing of the new Imperial Wizard.

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During this remodel, the entrance of the building was relocated and the exterior of the building was given more decorative flourishes as befit the Klan's national headquarters.

<sup>501</sup> Jesse O. Thomas, "Former KKK Factory Soon to Be Converted into Apartment House." *Atlanta Daily World*. July 27, 1937; "Old Ku Klux Plant to Be Apartment," *Atlanta Constitution*, Jul. 25, 1937.

<sup>502</sup> "Backed by Court, Simmons Assumes Control of Klan." *Atlanta Constitution*, April 4, 1923; "Commission Takes Control of K. K. K. By Court's Order." *Atlanta Constitution*, April 8, 1923; "Klan Funds Tied Up by An Injunction." *New York Times*. June 1, 1923; "Nathan Bedford Forest Klan Backs Simmons." *The Atlanta Constitution*. April 6, 1923; "Police Seek Klan Agents and \$107,000 Fund." *Atlanta Constitution*, April 5, 1923; "Rival Officials Head Board to Operate Klan." *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 8, 1923; "Three Direct Klan Affairs." *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 8, 1923; "Warrants Issued for Klan Officials." *New York Times*. April 5, 1923; "Triumvirate Will Rule Ku Klux Klan." *Boston Daily Globe*, April 8, 1923.

In 1924, Evans announced that the financial scandals that had plagued the organization under Simmons and Young Clark were now over. “The Klan is no longer a conglomerate, misconceived partnership. It is now on the same basis as that of a well organized great and growing corporation.”<sup>503</sup> While Evans meant for the Klan’s corporate aspirations to demonstrate the order’s modern respectability through its association with business, for many critics of the order it demonstrated precisely the opposite, a point I will discuss further in Chapter 5.

The Klan’s decision to move their manufacturing operation to Buckhead, away from the urban center of the city further demonstrated the connection between the development of the Klan and municipal growth during this period. The new regalia factory also demonstrated the Klan’s attempt to incorporate regalia manufacturing more fully into internal narratives about the organization, as industrial reports and images of efficient factory workers became another tool used to demonstrate the Klan’s modernity.

### **Ideological Sloppiness**

The only photo of workers at the Klan’s Buckhead factory shows a different kind of industrial portrait than the image of the Gate City factory floor. **(Fig 4.5)** Printed in the Klan’s Catalog of Official Robes and Banners, the image showed a group of workers standing in front of an outbuilding, just to the right of the three-story brick building that held the factory. The workers in this image were uniformly white, and dressed in uniforms that indicate an operational hierarchy. In a later speech before a body of assembled Klan leaders, factory manager T.J. McKinnon announced that all of the factory’s workers were either members of the KKK or the WKKK—and thus white, native-born Protestants.

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<sup>503</sup> Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Incorporated. *Official and Department Reports Made to the Second Imperial Klonykation* (1924): 28. Atlanta History Center.

Reassurances that workers were members of the Klan could have a couple of different implications. First, such hiring practices demonstrated Klan leaders' commitment to the group's members; by paying Klansmen and women for the work of garment production, the organization was in a sense providing materially for its own members on multiple levels. Second, Klan leaders could demonstrate their commitment to the organization's members by exhibiting fair labor practices and compensation—the staff members “regularly employed” by the organization were paid on a piecework basis, as was standard in the industry, and their wages were relatively good, averaging from fifteen to forty dollars per week. Finally, this language suggested that the productive capacity of the “lady operators” stitching these garments was conceptually tied not only to their skill, but also could be seen as an expression of passion for the cause.<sup>504</sup>

In many ways this trope repackaged the most romantic stories about the production of Klan regalia in the Reconstruction era. Klan leaders echoed stories circulated in both popular novels and sympathetic histories of the organization that characterized the production of robes as a “labor of love” undertaken en-mass by the wives and daughters of Klansmen. Primary accounts of Klan activities from this period do attribute the production of some robes to family members, but they also claim that other robes were made by professional seamstresses and tailors, in other cases, nineteenth century Klansmen simply wore improvised disguises made by their own hands.<sup>505</sup> These origins are much more in

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<sup>504</sup> T.J. McKinnon, “Report from the Industrial Plant,” in Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Inc. *Official Department Reports Made to the Second Imperial Klonvokation*, (1924) 50. Ku Klux Klan Collection, Atlanta History Center; T.J. McKinnon, “Report from the Industrial Plant” Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, *Proceedings of the Third Biennial Klonvokation*, 1926, KK #30 Box 2 Folder 142, EWSHS.

<sup>505</sup> Mr. And Mrs. W. B. Romine *A Story of the Original Ku Klux Klan*. (Pulaski, TN: The Pulaski Citizen, 1924) University of Texas; John A. Minnis, Address, “Ku Klux in Alabama,” Montgomery AL, July 1, 1872, 22. KKK report Mississippi, 855

keeping with the piecemeal nature of the Reconstruction era Klan's organization, but lack the romantic fervor of robes stitched by candlelight. Such accounts, produced up to half a century *after* the end of Reconstruction, used the sentimental trope of sewing to authorize violent terror as the work of otherwise noble men. While some clothes worn by nineteenth century Kluxers were homemade, these garments often included store bought elements, like a commercially available hoodwink used by fraternal orders, or garments made by tailors especially for the occasion. Still other accounts, and contemporary images include costumes that were so rudimentary that they lacked any overtones of romantic labor, no matter who made them. In describing "lady operators" sympathetic to the Klan's cause, Klan leaders sought to evoke this older stereotype, again deploying nineteenth century ideals, even in the context of modern manufacturing.

A closer examination of garments made in all three of the regalia factories reveals anything but the kind of personalized garments made with love that Klan leaders wanted to evoke. Some robes produced at the Floding factory suggest workers took slightly more care with these garments, perhaps reflecting their higher unit cost per item. Garments produced at the two subsequent factories reflected cost-cutting measures in obvious ways. Extant robes produced in these spaces show evidence of sloppy construction, unfinished details, and little care and attention to finishing details that the romanticized character of this labor would suggest.<sup>506</sup> Small details like threads left unclipped, or seams improperly started or finished without a backstitch to keep the seam from unraveling over time are apparent on many of the garments made at the Roswell Road factory. (*Fig 4.5*) On many robes, several, but not all, of the five buttons on the front of the regulation robe worn by

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<sup>506</sup> Poor construction found on robes now housed in: the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi; The Clatsop County Historical Society, Astoria, Oregon; New York State Museum, Albany, New York; Michigan State Museum, East Lansing, MI.

Klansmen—the lowest ranking members of the organization—were sewn on backwards. All of these construction elements suggest that these garments were sewn quickly with little of the attention to detail that their status as ritual garments would otherwise suggest.

Workers making robes at the first two regalia plants were not hired on an ideological basis—particularly since Klan garments were only one of the many items these workers were hired to produce—but the Klan’s own regalia factory argued that its all-Klan workforce was a real asset. Despite these claims, the quality of the robes produced at the Klan’s new factory were similar to those produced by piecework operators at the other regalia factories, but the materials were even cheaper. Where early robes featured mother-of-pearl buttons, robes produced at the Klan’s Buckhead plant were made of rough-hewn animal bone. In the end workers characterized by, and even hired due to their devotion to the cause of white supremacy, nonetheless constructed mass-produced garments. This kind of material sloppiness was, in many ways a necessity for an organization that was trying to produce clothes for a mass organization at a fairly low cost. True to form, both Klan leaders and factory managers were similarly committed to quality control in name more than in action.

### **Threading the Needle**

In high-end garment manufacturing, “finishing” was often saved for the most skilled workers, those who could produce tiny hand stitches that would seem invisible on the finished garment. The final steps of making Klan robes were not nearly so delicate. To finish a Klan robe, workers stitched belts of white cotton cording cotton cord belts onto the back of the waist, where they lay under the cape so that the stitching was invisible. They finished buttonholes and stitched the buttons in place with heavy-duty thread.

Finally, they turned the robes over to the one machine threaded with red thread, to sew the round embroidered patch onto the left breast of the robe. While the Klan's robes were distinctive in shape—particularly with their short ulster cape—this final detail made the white cotton robe into an undeniable symbol of the Klan.

While the meaning of the symbols they produced is clear, the degree to which the regalia factory workers intentionally contributed to this system can only ever be a matter for speculation. More clear, however, is that the white women working in the regalia factories producing Klan regalia were able to translate that work into a paycheck. For some, like Fronia Whitlow and Durell Kennedy, work at the regalia factory led to better paying, union-protected jobs down the road. Though Whitlow worked at the first two factories that manufactured Klan regalia, she did not follow the work north to the Klan's robe plant in Buckhead in 1925. Nevertheless, the remainder of Whitlow's life, and the social mobility she experienced, was a triumph of the kind of naturalized social inequalities that the Klan championed in Atlanta. Her work as a forewoman led to a position as a saleswoman at a department store, and when she returned to factory work a decade later, it was as a seamstress at the well-regarded (and union-protected) Carhartt overall factory.<sup>507</sup> This work enabled Whitlow to buy her own home for the first time. Between 1930 and 1940 she moved from the First Ward to an all white neighborhood in De Kalb County. There, Whitlow lived among blue-collar professionals and small business owners—mechanics, truck drivers, telephone operators, butchers, and city employees, and continued to supplement her income with the help of a white woman

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<sup>507</sup> Sophronia Whitlow, U.S. Census, 1930, 1940 census.



lodger.<sup>508</sup> Whitlow's move to the suburbs may have reflected the commute of her new job, but this new situation was representative of the similar moves that working-class white Atlantans were making in the late 1930's and early 1940's as the mechanisms for maintaining racial separation became increasingly fortified by the city's infrastructure.

Amidst all the puffed-up rhetoric of Atlanta's industrialists, it could be easy to forget that idealized visions of both region and Klan materialized in the form of real objects made by real workers. The process of producing Klan regalia was not ancillary to the invention of the Klan, it was a site of ideological reproduction critical to the national expansion of the organization. But what exactly was being stitched into the seams of the pointed white hoods? These garments were material objects that not only symbolically stood for the Klan, as it struggled for coherence in a widening national context, but bore and exhibited all the contradictions that their terms of manufacture suggested. These contradictions emerged through the processes of translating an ideological vision of uniformity into actual garments whose material properties, like the workers who made them, never quite measured up to the ideal.

And yet, despite all the backwards buttons, these garments were still remarkably effective. From a distance, Klan regalia conveyed a kind of uniformity and ideological cohesion that would never hold under close scrutiny. The distant view was what mattered anyway, at least for the men making decisions from a suburban imperial palace, detached from the crises of urban life. Produced within a manufacturing system that calcified social hierarchies along lines of race and gender, in a city where attempts to cross these divisions could be deadly, Klan regalia emerged within a context in which violence was naturalized into everyday life. Ironically, there were few reports of Atlanta's Klansmen committing

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<sup>508</sup> Sophronia Whitlow, U.S. Census, 1940 census.

violent acts while wearing these symbolic garments. The most publicized cases were internal politics, embezzlement, infighting, and the murder of the Klan's head lawyer by a Klan publicist in 1923. This wasn't to say that the robe and hood were not a harbinger of threat, but the threat they posed was not so different from many of the other challenges that members of Atlanta's Black community faced as they navigated the city. The robe and hood did not portend new violence; instead these garments made visible the threat that was already there. Thanks to this metonymic function, uniform robes made it possible to transport that threat to new settings, even well outside the New South.

## Chapter 5: Distributing Agency

After attending their Memorial Day picnics in 1922, Klansmen across Pennsylvania stole away to wrap large wooden crosses in cotton ticking and douse the structures in gasoline to set them alight. Just after dark, residents of Oil City, Pittsburgh, Greenville, and Indiana, PA—just to name a few—reported seeing the Klan’s sign in their communities. For some this wasn’t their first sighting of the terrifying symbol, but the appearance of these burning emblems was notable nonetheless. The cross in Greenville was sixteen feet high, and when spectators approached, they found recruitment literature scattered around its base.<sup>509</sup> The white-robed men who had assembled these displays joined the Klan for a range of personal reasons. Some hoped to intervene in local dynamics, particularly regarding the influx of recent immigrants and large proportion of Catholics on the west side of the state.<sup>510</sup> Others were excited by the Klan’s national profile, which was steadily rising thanks to recent accounts of mass demonstrations and the group’s aggressive recruitment efforts nationwide. Pennsylvania was one of any states where the Klan’s recruitment campaign engaged in similar visual tactics to demonstrate the scope of their organization’s power.

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<sup>509</sup> John Craig, *The Ku Klux Klan in Western Pennsylvania* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2015), 19-21; Emerson Hunsberger Loucks. *The Ku Klux Klan in Pennsylvania; a Study in Nativism* (New York, Harrisburg, PA: The Telegraph Press, 1936), 57-61.

<sup>510</sup> Emerson Louckes, *The Ku Klux Klan in Pennsylvania*, (Harrisburg, PA: The Telegraph Press, 1936), 58-59, citing testimony of J.A. Kelley, Kilgrapp of Scottdale Klan No 37.

The rash of cross burnings in Pennsylvania was a planned event, likely at the behest of Sam D. Rich, the Grand Dragon who managed the state's Western Province. The threat posed by this coordinated assault on Pennsylvania communities was decidedly intimate, as Pennsylvanians found crosses ablaze on local landmarks, but once news broke of the appearance of multiple fiery talismans across the state, the symbolic nature of the event became clear. The Pennsylvania Klan was not trying to send a message to any particular individual through these displays, as it did with more targeted threats or attacks. This was, instead, a visual demonstration of the Klan's collective power, a way of speaking to the whole state at once. When crosses burned on the western half of Pennsylvania, publicized reports of other cross burnings linked these individual events together, suggesting that the scope of the Klan's reach was really as impressive as its leaders claimed.

White fabric did not pose the same kind of threat as fire, but once stitched into robes and pointed hoods, the Klan's garments were no less potent symbols than the burning crosses. As Klansmen put the uniform regalia onto their own bodies to demonstrate their adherence to the group's larger political agenda, the symbol they embodied became even more widely visible. Uniform regalia enabled the performance of coordination through Klansmen's own bodies, which imperial leaders used to convey the organization's strength to members and non-members alike.

These events could take the form of public demonstrations, as when Klansmen marched in a 1922 Fourth of July parade in Muncie, Indiana, where the Klan was recognized as one of the many fraternal orders in the area and members participated

openly in civic life.<sup>511</sup> The Klan also staged semi-public events, such as a mass initiation held in a prune orchard just outside Colfax, Washington, in 1923. During that event, cars entering the farm grounds were asked to identify themselves as Klan members, initiates, or spectators. Klansmen and their 125 initiates were sent to the center of the field, where they donned their robes and assembled around a ninety-foot-tall cross. The five thousand assembled spectators were allowed to be present, but watched from a distance.<sup>512</sup> In addition to these large-scale events, Klans also staged private ceremonies, such as the initiation of two new members during a regular Klavern meeting of the Mecosta Michigan Klan in May of 1926.<sup>513</sup>

The relationship between the organization's local presence within a community and the broader concerns of the *invisible empire* operated as a critical source of power for the organization. Robes and hoods transformed a gathering of men into an experience outside the scope of their everyday lives. Regardless of a member's personal reasons for participating, uniform regalia marked each robed Klansman as a representative of the organization's broader national agenda—even as he also appeared in his own local context. Public ceremonies demonstrated the Klan's scale and power to outside observers, but they also helped Klansmen to see themselves as part of the organization. Thanks to the uniformity of Klan regalia, the use of these symbolic garments could evoke the larger political concerns of the order on a local scale. At the same time, the excitement with

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<sup>511</sup> Photographer W. A. Swift documented public Klan demonstrations in Muncie, Indiana, as part of his larger project of documenting life in the town. Swift's photographs are available for viewing at the Ball State University Archives.

<sup>512</sup> "Flaming Cross Burned Near Colfax Friday." *Pullman Herald*. Oct. 5, 1923. University of Washington, Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies.

<sup>513</sup> Mecosta Co. Klan. "Summary of Upcoming Events for Mecosta Klan," May 1926. Ku Klux Klan (Mecosta County, MI) Collection Box 1 Folder 10. Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University.

which Klansmen approached mass demonstrations suggested that seeing oneself as part of the Klan was a powerful experience. Uniform regalia ensured that this experience was not only a visual spectacle, but also a dramatic, sensory encounter.

Thanks to the centralized production of uniform regalia in Atlanta, the matching robes and hoods worn by Klansmen could have a similar effect on all wearers, but only if Klan leaders could get those garments to Klansmen across the country. Synchronized displays of power worked because the Klan's attempts to achieve uniformity across the empire were supported by a system of communication and distribution that could direct the performance of those demonstrations. When new members joined the Klan, they rented a robe from the Kleagle (recruiter) who brought them into the organization. The Kleagle acted as mediator between the new member's local Klavern (lodge), the staff of the robe factory in Atlanta, and Imperial officials. Several weeks later, the robe would arrive in the new Klansman's hometown by mail, where it would be put into the possession of the Exalted Cyclops, his local Klavern president.<sup>514</sup>

Sometimes this ideal system broke down, as when the Catholic Postmaster in Butte, Montana lost packages containing Klan regalia, possibly on purpose.<sup>515</sup> Part of this chapter will primarily focus on a limit case: the Kontinental Klan of Butte, Montana, whose members were largely unable to participate in the violent activities and public spectacle that made their organization famous. If the public display of these symbols was

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<sup>514</sup> This procedure gathered from examination of the operational records of Klans in Butte, MT, (Eastern Washington Historical Society); Kelford, NC (East Carolina University); LaGrande, OR (Davies Family Research Library, Oregon Historical Society, also reprinted in Horowitz, *Inside the Klavern*. (Carbondale, SIU Press, 1999); Mecosta, MI (Central Michigan University); Athens, GA (Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia); Bayfield, CO (John F. Reed Library, Fort Lewis College), and Carlock, IL (Emory University Rare Book and Manuscript Library).

<sup>515</sup> Albert Jones to Lewis Terwilliger, Feb. 13, 1928; Oct. 10, 1924. Kontinental Klan Records, Butte 1916, 1921-31, Box 1, Folder 7. EWSHS.

central to the reproduction of Klan ideology, what was in it for people who couldn't display Klan symbols publically? Though the Klan found some foothold in the western mining town, Butte's large Catholic and immigrant populations made the organization's goals unpopular. While the Klan in Athens, Georgia could string banners announcing the time of meetings across main streets, Butte's Klan could not even set a fixed meeting place, or be seen wearing robes in public, thanks to a particularly unwelcoming sheriff. As one Klansman complained, Butte was "the worst place in the state of Montana, so far as alienism and Catholicism are concerned."<sup>516</sup> Thanks to this unwelcome climate, Klansmen in Butte struggled to demonstrate their Klavern's relationship to the broader empire. Tracking attempts to coordinate the operation of this hinterland outpost with the regulations and dictates of the imperial administration in Atlanta can help us better see how the practice of creating this connection put stress on the inherent contradictions of the Klan's promise of uniformity, and show the limits of what the robes themselves could do.

### **Ideological Rituals**

Before we look at the obstacles for Butte Klan members, it is worthwhile to take a step back to see how Klan leaders envisioned the relationship between ideology and rituals like initiation ceremonies and burning crosses. The guiding logic of all Klan ritual was that external structures, both the display of symbolic forms like robes, crosses, and flags, as well as the animation of those symbols through the uniform coordination of ceremony, could prompt internal change.<sup>517</sup> The Klan's motto, "Not for Self but for Others"

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<sup>516</sup> Montana Klan, and Mrs. D. Cohn. "Response to Mrs. Cohn's Report on Conditions in Butte," January 23, 1929. Kontinental Klan Records, Butte 1916, 1921-31, Box 1 Folder 13. EWSHS.

<sup>517</sup> This distinctly performative approach to social change was a key technique of Progressive-era reformers and nineteenth century fraternal orders, both of which believed in social transformation through individual improvement. For nineteenth century fraternal orders, ritualized behaviors linked the work of the lodge to the ceremony and values of Christian churches. Carnes, *Secret Ritual*, 63. Performance theorist Shannon

emphasized the degree to which Klan actions were oriented towards service to a broader public, both the collective body of Klansmen, and the nation as a whole. The white-robed figure represented the idealized Klansman, a citizen committed to protecting a patriotic, Protestant nation organized around the principles of clearly defined gender roles, adherence to a strict moral code, and the veneration of white supremacy—with whiteness limited to American-born people of primarily Anglo descent.<sup>518</sup> This civic orientation called on Klansmen to work on “cultivating and promoting real patriotism toward our Civil Government” and more grandly, to “protect the States and the people thereof from all invasions of their rights.”<sup>519</sup> This patriotic vision was rooted in a narrow view of political franchise, since Imperial Wizard Simmons’s promotion of participatory democracy was in service of white supremacy. America was “the land of the white race,” he announced, and thus “the white race cannot be expected to surrender to any other race, either in whole or in part, the control of its vital and fundamental governmental affairs.”<sup>520</sup> This sense of separation was crucial to the kind of society that Simmons wanted to create. In his view, other racial, ethnic, and religious groups could develop in their own, separate

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Jackson argues that Progressive era Reformers made ritualized behavior a centerpiece of what she calls “reformance,” the act of attempting to remake the world through material acts, often used external practices—cleanliness, orderliness—as ways to prompt, and subsequently evidence real internal or spiritual transformations. Shannon Jackson, *Lines of Activity: Performance, Historiography, Hull-House Domesticity*. (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 13.

<sup>518</sup> This nativist vision of whiteness understood nationality as a key component of race. Many Klansmen outside the South were the sons and grandsons of European immigrants, as the Butte Klan records demonstrate. The process of ethnic and national assimilation in the construction of “whiteness” as a category in the mid-late nineteenth-century is tracked in David R. Roediger. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. London; New York: Verso, 1998; Matthew Frye Jacobson. *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998. For the role of whiteness in the construction of nativist ideology, see John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2008.

<sup>519</sup> Simmons, “KKK Yesterday, Today Forever,” 1916, 2.

<sup>520</sup> *Ibid*, 7.



institutional spaces, with Klansmen acting as their “safest councilors.” Simmons borrowed a term from contemporaneous nativist movements to cast Klan members as “100% Americans,” the only political subjects capable of making decisions to protect the nation.<sup>521</sup> For Klansmen, the sometimes-violent promotion of white, Protestant, native-born masculinity was a moral mandate with nothing less than the fate of the democratic republic hanging in the balance.

Though Klan leaders regularly claimed that their organization was mobilized in favor of positive change, not to challenge any particular group, Klansmen nonetheless organized against a frequently moving set of targets: African-Americans, “miscegenators,” “Bolsheviks,” Indians, “unionists,” “Mexican Jesuits,” Catholics, Jews, bootleggers, Anarchists, Immigrants, and “the most despicable of all form of human kind, the repeater” (votes twice in an election).<sup>522</sup> The character of the threat that the Klan faced often changed based on the location of any particular Klavern, the local social climate in which it was organized, and even internally over the lifespan of the organization. Changes in the focus of Klan leaders’ ire over time also reflected geographic concerns—the initial birth of the Klan in Georgia led to a focus on Black and white relations, but with the advent of WWI, nativist and religious concerns became more central to the national project of the organization. With the start of Prohibition in January of 1920, Klansmen found a moral

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<sup>521</sup> What John Hingham calls “racial nativism” was a mid nineteenth century phenomenon that rose to greater prominence towards the end of the century. This movement drew on Anglo-Saxonism to justify American expansion as a vehicle for an exceptional American culture. See Higham, *Strangers in the Land* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 10-12.

<sup>522</sup> Johnson, Floyd F. Personal Letter. “Long Letter to Casper Discussing MK Newspaper Subscriptions and Elections.” Personal Letter, November 11, 1924. MS 131 Box 1 Folder 7. EWSHS. National Enterprises, Omaha NE. “Double Kidnapping of Linn A. E. Gale,” ca. ’s 1920. Bayfield, CO Ku Klux Klan Records Box 1 Folder 8. John F. Reed Library, Fort Lewis College. Terwilliger, Lewis, and Albert Jones. Business Letter. “Letter on Racial Membership Requirements.” Business Letter, November 15, 1927. Kontinental Klan Records, Butte 1916, 1921-31 Box 1 Folder 10. EWSHS.

issue that could be pursued on a national scale.<sup>523</sup> Enforcing Prohibition regulations also supported the increasingly important goal of demonstrating the Klan's cooperation with law enforcement and overall patriotic aims. When Hiram Evans assumed the Wizardship in 1923, the organization redoubled its recruitment efforts and focused increasingly on political participation. By the early 1930s, with the arrival of a third Imperial Wizard, James Colescott, Klansmen were increasingly instructed to return to "the negro question," and the explicit racism that had gone second to other concerns in the mid-1920s resurfaced with vigor as "the battle for white supremacy."<sup>524</sup>

Despite this shifting landscape, the symbolic forms that conveyed the Klan's ideology made the moving target that they represented appear more stable than it really was. Ritual practice animated these symbols, helping Klansmen to engage with ideology in a material way. Each Klansman was supposed to regularly participate in three rituals: the opening and closing rituals of each meeting, and the initiation rituals that active Klans were to perform regularly since they were to constantly recruit new members. Simmons designed other rituals as well, such as funerals, ceremonies for installing officers, and various rituals for the "advanced degrees" of the order.<sup>525</sup> The rituals were semi-religious in character, partly led by the Exalted Cyclops, or president of the local Klan, and partly

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<sup>523</sup> Lisa McGirr argues that Prohibition turned the Klan from a niche group into a dynamic social movement, and that the national scale of the organization was due in part to Klansmen's role in extralegal enforcement of this issue. McGirr, *The War on Alcohol* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016), 133-155.

<sup>524</sup> Colescott, James A. Bulletin. "Bulletin Including Reference To 'battle for White Supremacy' in Springfield Oh." Bulletin, December 7, 1931. Ku Klux Klan Crown Point, Indiana (Lake County) Records, 1913 – 1932 Box 1 Folder 5. William Henry Smith Memorial Library, IHS.

<sup>525</sup> Cleaton, E. D. "Installation Ceremony Ritual Script," nd. William Carlyle Hatcher Collection Folder 1.b. East Carolina University, Joyner Library. Evans, Hiram W. "Announcement of Creation of New Degree--Ritual for the House of Mirth," November 26, 1928. Bayfield, CO Ku Klux Klan Records, Box 2 Folder 1. John F. Reed Library, Fort Lewis College; Simmons, William Joseph. *Kloran*. Atlanta, GA: Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Incorporated, 1916.

led by the Kludd or chaplain of each order.<sup>526</sup> The opening, closing, and naturalization ceremonies were offered in the Kloran, a text that also included a diagram of the way that the Klavern was to be organized to facilitate the creation of an appropriately solemn atmosphere. During rituals, local Klan officials were to read illuminating texts aloud to members (often sent directly from the Imperial Palace in Atlanta), and lead members in synchronized speech, songs, and gestures that reinforced the tenants of Klannishness. Songs like the following set new words to familiar tunes; the stanzas were sung to the tune of “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains,” and the chorus, “Home Sweet Home.”

“We meet with cordial greetings  
In this our sacred cave  
To pledge anew our compact  
With hearts sincere and brave  
A band of faithful Klansmen,  
Knights of the K.K.K.  
We all will stand together  
Forever and for aye.”

Chorus

“Home, home, country and home,  
Klansmen we’ll live and die  
For our country and home.”

This song was a typical rehearsal of Klan’s power through ritual. It emphasized the noble characteristics of Klansmen—“hearts sincere and brave”—and the importance of collective action—“a band,” “we will stand together,” “we’ll live and die.” Through collective performance, Klan texts argued, Klansmen would embody the organization’s most sacred beliefs. Ritual thus facilitated two processes of transformation: internal, as Klansmen brought these beliefs to life through their own actions, and external, as the

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<sup>526</sup> Kelly J. Baker argues that Klan ritual borrowed from Protestant devotional practices, defined in opposition to remnants of Catholic ritualism in mainstream Protestant culture. *Gospel According to the Klan*, 39, 46-63.

coordinated, and sometimes public performance of these practices could amplify the Klan's goals to observers.

In order to demonstrate the various ways that ritual could support the goals of the Klan, Simmons coined the terms *klannishness* and *klankraft*, which comprised the content and form of the order's ritualism. Klannishness was a set of four morally freighted dictates operated as the "creed and faith" of every Klansman.<sup>527</sup> The four central aspects of Klannishness were articulated differently in various internal publications—and sometimes in the same publication. Read across these texts, the basic principles were 1) patriotic klanishness, 2) social, or domestic, klanishness, 3) moral, or racial klanishness, and 4) imperial, or vocational klanishness.<sup>528</sup> Viewed together, these components called on Klansmen to be responsible in both their private and public lives, as citizens of both the United States *and* the Invisible Empire.<sup>529</sup>

Klankraft was "the motive power embodying the divine and cardinal principles," meaning that the attitudes of klannishness needed to be animated through some kind of physical power. Klannishness was the feeling of being moved, but klankraft was the actual motion. The most basic instantiation of klankraft was the performance of ritual, in which the Klan's most powerful symbols were venerated, and through the uniform regalia, brought to life in a collective ceremony. But Klankraft had another dimension. The term consisted of five different "phases" of action: "spiritual, educational, political, vocational,

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<sup>527</sup> Hiram W. Evans, *The Practice of Klanishness*. Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Incorporated, 1924.

<sup>528</sup> Hiram W. Evans, *The Practice of Klanishness* (Atlanta: Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Incorporated, 1924. Michigan State University Library; Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Incorporated. "The Klansman's Manual." 1924. Michigan State University Library.

<sup>529</sup> Paul S. Etheridge, Imperial Klonsel "An Interpretation of the Constitution and Laws of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan" *Papers read at the Meeting of the Grand Dragons, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, at their First Annual Meeting Held at Asheville, North Carolina, (July 1923)*, 34. UMLC.

and practical.”<sup>530</sup> Each phase encompassed some aspect of Klan belief, and a coordinating set of concrete behaviors that would help bring that aspect of Klan belief to fruition. For example, vocational Klankraft called members “to always favor a Klansman in the commercial world, whether it be in buying, selling, advertising, employment, political, social, or in any way wherein a Klansman is affected.”<sup>531</sup> Disseminating educational klankraft could include the “promulgation of constructive, educational topics, pertaining to the principles of klankraft, edited by competent writers, censored and distributed through properly controlled and loyal newspapers.”<sup>532</sup> These concrete strategies were offered alongside the very specific guides to ceremonial practice, business meeting format, and appropriate methods of correspondence that would shape the daily activities of Klan leaders on a local level. Lodging divine principles in practical gestures helped Klan leaders to bridge what critics sometimes argued were antithetical parts of their organization: the “pure” ideological component and the various ways in which those ideals were brought into daily life. Rather than setting up a dichotomy between these two modes, Simmons designed the organization in such a way that the practical work of recruitment, filling out meeting minutes, and making money for the Klan was also a way to animate its most sacred principles. Routinized behavior helped Klansmen to get closer to the perfect vision of coordination with other Klansmen, and the organization’s ideals.

Rendering the mundane tasks of bureaucratic practice as sacred ritual lacked some of the grandiosity of ritual speech—but it also offered a way for the middling clerks and managers who made up much of the organization’s membership to fold the dramatic

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<sup>530</sup> “First Annual Meeting of the Grand Dragons,” (1923), 45-46. UMLC.

<sup>531</sup> “First Annual Meeting of the Grand Dragons,” (1923), 49. UMLC.

<sup>532</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

practices of the Klan into their existing worldview. Whether or not they were drawn to the Klan for ideological or social reasons, members were frequently inundated with reminders of the Imperial agenda. Weekly or bi-weekly Klavern meetings largely comprised of rote procedural activities not unlike those of other lodges meeting during the same period: dues payments, attendance, discussion of the budget, planning future meetings, and ordering supplies.<sup>533</sup> While some Klansmen were frustrated that they had to spend time away from the dramatic ritual that had drawn them to the organization, for others, the more prosaic dimensions of Klankraft offered a way to contribute to the Klan's ideological goals in a concrete way. At the same time, rendering bureaucracy as a sacred duty helped leaders to administrate their political project across a large, socially diverse organization whose members were not united on why they had joined in the first place.

The rote nature of these activities did not in fact mean that the “rough stuff,” as Imperial Wizard Evans euphemistically called Klan violence, was absent from the agenda.<sup>534</sup> Though these actions rarely made it into meeting minutes many Klansmen—including Evans himself—did threaten, flog, or even murder members of the communities in which

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<sup>533</sup> This issue has captivated scholars of the organization since the earliest studies of its operations. Early critiques of the order raised this issue, including Henry Fry's 1924 *Exposé of the Klan* from his perspective as a former Kleagle (recruiter). Fry was one of many former members who denounced the order as an opportunist scam, preying on members' real feelings of fear over their place in a changing world. This perspective shaped the analysis of sociologist John Moffatt Mecklin, whose 1924 study of the Klan argued that Klansmen were social “losers” and easily manipulated “joiners,” who represented the response of rural traditionalists railing against cosmopolitan modernity. Mecklin's perspective was dominant in studies of the Klan until the 1960's, when historians began to argue that this motivation did not address the regional variation of the organization, and the prevalence of urban Klan members in the organization as a whole. By the mid 1980's, most scholars of the organization took a stance that dramatically countered Mecklin's analysis by arguing that the Klan borrowed from populist organizing structures. The “Populist-civic school” of Klan scholarship (Kenneth Jackson, Charles Alexander, Shawn Lay, Leonard Moore, David Horowitz, and others) argued that Klansmen were not angry outsiders, but rather everyday Americans who were drawn to the organization because it closely resembled other cultural institutions and social movements that already populated their daily lives.

<sup>534</sup> Charles Alexander argues that Klans of the Southwest were particularly violent, and that Evans's political aspirations concealed the brutality of his early days in the organization. Alexander, *The Klan in the Southwest*, 63-79; Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 45.

they lived. The ceremonies that Klansmen performed rarely included explicitly hateful speech—they tended towards idealistic descriptions of collective solidarity, not unlike other fraternal orders operating at the time. The difference was that Klansmen performed these ceremonies while dressed in white robes and pointed hoods that were definitively bound up with the threat of violence through their representation in popular culture.

Ironically, Klan regalia was as ill-suited for violent attacks as the strange garments worn by nineteenth-century Klansmen. These garments afforded some disguise, as this regalia was intended to make members into anonymous representations of the larger mass, but pointed helmets and white garments drew attention to the Klan that its leaders strongly discouraged. Regalia was useful when its appearance threatened violence, but actual violent actions were a liability that leaders of the Ku Klux Klan Inc. publically disavowed. For ritual purposes, Klan regalia was more manageable, though white robes were still not an ideal choice for long public demonstrations in the hot sun. Rather than accumulating blood stains from violent attacks, Klan these garments were more likely to show stains of use wear. Pointed helmets accumulated yellow-brown rings of sweat around the wearer's forehead, robes gathered similar stains around armpits and collars. Hems gathered mud splashes from ceremonies in the muddy field of a prune orchard or county fairground. These patterns of wear provide a slightly different way of thinking about Klan violence, beyond the obvious drama of bloodstains. Though Klan regalia was not very practical for enacting physical violence—they were too long, too voluminous, and far too white—they were excellent for evoking other representations of the Klan, many of which highlighted the dangerous threat that these figures posed.

The Klan pursued the appearance of a coordinated mass through three different kinds of ritual practice: the first, collective acts of violence that supported the ideological project of the group; second, ceremonial gatherings on a range of scales in which members performed the same actions; and third, bureaucratic activities whose repetition facilitated ceremonial practice and in turn constituted the hierarchical internal power of the organization. Because of the tremendous local variation in social climates, personal motivations, and personnel, each Klavern approached these three modes of ritual in varying degrees; some Pennsylvania Klans were known for carrying concealed weapons under their robes, while the leaders of a Klavern in Carlock, Illinois spent far more time fretting about their adherence to bureaucratic procedures.<sup>535</sup> Nonetheless, each of these modes of ritual accomplished the critical goal of connecting local Klans with the organization's broader national agenda.

The relationship between ceremonial practice and the routinized rituals of bureaucracy can help us to see how the members of the Kontinental Klan of Butte, Montana used regalia to connect their actions to those of the broader empire to which they aspired to belong. Simmons's own favorite word for describing the uniform coordination of Klan practice was *ritualism*. During the nineteenth century, this term was used to designate the performance of ritual, sometimes to excess. By the mid-twentieth century, it described "rigid adherence to ritual, rules, *and* bureaucratic procedures."<sup>536</sup> Enacting ceremonial rites was the moment in which the ideal vision of ritual portrayed in the Kloran

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<sup>535</sup> Louckes, *Ku Klux Klan in Pennsylvania*, 50, 57, 193. Correspondence about the Carlock, IL Klan having problems with following procedures can be found through the organizational records of that Klan. In one 1924 letter, Carlock Exalted Cyclops, Seward Bristow, apologizes to a superior officer about canceling a planned meeting in a field, because of poor weather. Seward Bristow, Letter to O.W. Frederich. "Apology for Incorrect Form of Meeting," July 11, 1924. Ku Klux Klan Carlock Unit No. 71 records Box 1 Folder 1. Emory University Manuscript and Rare Book Library.

<sup>536</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, 3rd Ed. First usage in this category cited in 1938.



faced the constraints of real life. While a desire for utopic world-creation ran throughout Klan literature, and likewise reemerged in crucial moments of correspondence between its officials, these documents more frequently reflected the practical constraints that Klansmen faced in implementing their worldview. Turning to a limit case like Butte helps us to see the different kinds of work that the robe was doing for the Klan. In mass demonstrations, the relationship of robed Klansman to the message of collective power that these objects were to convey is easy to see. Limit cases allow us to see when the ideal performance of ritual is frustrated. Robes could only prop up a flawed ideology so far.

### **The Trouble with Butte**

Situated at the geographic margins of the Invisible Empire, Butte, Montana seemed a world away from the dramatic public demonstrations that Pennsylvania Klansmen were staging in the mid 1920s. Organized over two thousand miles by rail from the Imperial Headquarters in Atlanta, Butte's tiny Klan demonstrated the empire's impressive reach. The emergence and growth of Butte's Klan followed a similar pattern to other Klans in the region, and national trends more broadly, though even at its height, Butte's Klan was small. A traveling Kleagle (paid recruiter) first placed an ad in the *Butte Miner Newspaper* in mid-July 1921, though no reports of Klan activity occurred until just under two years later when Butte men began to attend Klan "naturalization ceremonies" in spaces rented from other local fraternities.<sup>537</sup> Butte's local Klan leaders navigated the problem of having to canvass for new members in a place where current members did not want to reveal themselves, and by December of 1923, Butte's "Kontinental Klan" was large enough to

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<sup>537</sup> "Ku Klux Is Organizing." *Butte Miner*. July 17, 1921; "Ku Klux Klan Is Organizing and TBON Advertisement." *Butte Miner*. July 19, 1921. Butte Silver Bow Archives. First meeting of Butte Klan held in April of 1923. "Butte Konklave Minutes," April 29, 1923. Kontinental Klan Records, Butte 1916, 1921-31 Box 2 Folder 104. EWSHS.

become the thirtieth Klan chartered in the state.<sup>538</sup> Just a few months earlier, Imperial Wizard Hiram W. Evans signed an executive order that organized the Realm of Montana, the Klan's term for the statewide division.<sup>539</sup> Only the thirty-ninth largest state in the union in 1920, Montana was not a high priority for Imperial officials in Atlanta who were primarily concerned with large-scale recruitment. Still, the creation of what Klan leaders called an "empire" demanded territorial expansion, and the recruitment of active members in every state was crucial on this score. Despite its relatively small population, Montana was the eighteenth state to be organized through the realm organizational form.<sup>540</sup>

At the same time, local hostility towards the very existence of Butte's Klan stretched Klankraft to its very limits. After the town's residents reported seeing a cross burning on a hill in the fall of 1923, Silver Bow County Sheriff and Butte undertaker Larry Duggan gave orders to "Shoot any Ku Kluxer who appear[ed] in Butte," prompting a dramatic newspaper headline announcing that the County Police would "Meet [the]

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<sup>538</sup> "Bylaws and Amendments of Butte Klan," December 26, 1923. Kontinental Klan Records, Butte 1916, 1921-31, Box 2 Folder 89. EWSHS. Bray, James A. Business Letter. "Danger of Canvassing in Butte." Business Letter, March 3, 1925. MS 131 Box 1 Folder 8. EWSHS. New Klans were organized by visiting recruiters, Kleagles, or by men who reached out to Klans in neighboring areas seeking information about starting their own unit. These newly organized groups were given provisional status until they met the conditions to receive the approval of realm leaders, and subsequently request a charter from Imperial authorities in Atlanta. These conditions were not consistent across realms: in highly populated areas, multiple chartered groups could be organized in one county, whereas in other areas, like the Realm of Illinois, officials limited the number of Klan charters arguing that combining several local units under one charter "unifie[d] the operation of the Klan in that county." Grand Dragon Illinois, and L. V. Kinzinger, 'On the Organization of Klan Charters', 20 December 1924, Ku Klux Klan Carlock Unit No. 71 records Box 1 Folder 1, Emory University Manuscript and Rare Book Library.

<sup>539</sup> The Realm of Montana was further subdivided into four provinces, each covering somewhere between ten and seventeen counties. Terwilliger, Lewis. "Butte Klan Official Document No. 1." July 1923. MS 131 Box 1 Folder 1. KK #30 Collection, EWSHS; 'Bylawas and Amendments of Butte Klan', 1923, Kontinental Klan Records, Butte 1916, 1921-31 Box 2 Folder 89, EWSHS  
Evans, Hiram W. Official Edict, 'Executive Order Setting up Realm of Montana', 16 September 1923, MS 131 Box 1 Folder 4, EWSHS.

<sup>540</sup> Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Incorporated. *Official and Department Reports Made to the Second Imperial Klonvokation* (1924), 38; 46. Ku Klux Klan and Related Materials. Keenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

Fiery Cross with a Volley of Death.”<sup>541</sup> While Duggan’s bombast was at least partially prompted by the Klan’s attitudes towards his own Irish-Catholic heritage, his sentiments were shared by many of Butte’s residents, who strongly opposed the organization of a Klan in their town earlier that year.<sup>542</sup> It is tempting to view the Butte Klan’s sense of victimization as solely an instantiation of the alarmist persecution complex that fueled much nativist thought during this time, but there was some danger to being a Klansman in Butte—though likely not as much as its most dramatic members imagined, as I will discuss shortly.

Given the unpopularity of the organization in Butte, it comes as no surprise that the Klan there was small in comparison to Klaverns in more active Klan states like Indiana or Pennsylvania.<sup>543</sup> From a peak of ninety-three active members in the spring of 1924, Butte’s number of Klansmen in good standing (i.e. with appropriately paid dues) gradually declined. By the fall of 1929, Butte’s Klan had only nine members; it ceased operations later that year.<sup>544</sup> All in all, Butte’s Klan claimed at least 181 distinct members over its lifespan, a mere fraction of the Montana Klan’s membership during the same period, which followed a similar arc of growth, and peaked at just over 5,000 distinct members in

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<sup>541</sup> *Spokane Chronicle*, Oct. 23, 1923. Duggan was elected sheriff in 1917. For more on Larry Duggan’s bombast, see the WPA Federal Writers’ Program (Mont.). *Copper Camp; Stories of the World’s Greatest Mining Town, Butte, Montana*, New York: Hastings House, 1943). 56, 64, 162, and 267.

<sup>542</sup> R.J. Polk and Co. *Butte, MT City Directory*, (1925), entry for Larry Duggan, 121. Larry Duggan, 1920 U.S. Census.

<sup>543</sup> Some Klaverns in Western Pennsylvania boasted membership rolls of more than five hundred members at one time. See: Ku Klux Klan Kleagle Robe Reports, 1924-1925, RG 30-19, Pennsylvania State Archive.

<sup>544</sup> Membership averaging in the mid-eighties for 1924, and then the mid-seventies between 1925 and 1926, with one major drop to only thirty-three active members in the first quarter of the latter. By 1927, the average dipped to fifty-five active members each quarter, with only thirty-four members in the fourth quarter of 1928. This data compiled from Butte Klan Quarterly Reports, KK #30 Box 1, Folders 69-74, EWSHS.

1925 alone.<sup>545</sup> So what drove men to join a ridiculed organization that claimed less than 0.2 percent of the town's population at its most active?

Butte's Klansmen were acutely aware of their marginal status within their community at large, particularly because their membership numbers were so abysmal. The potential social fallout, not to mention danger that accompanied joining Butte's Klan raises questions about why members wanted to be part of the order in the first place. In order to understand this we need to look more closely at the social dynamics in Butte. Butte was a mining town that boomed with the discovery of an impressive array of metals and minerals under the surface of the earth. A deep vein of silver was discovered just north of what became the center of Butte, and subsequently an unprecedented amount of copper was discovered in 1875, just one year before the invention of the telephone, and four before the electric light. Butte's population followed the ebb and flow of these mining operations, as the market for the metal grew steadily until WWI, at which point began a long decline. The city of Butte's population increased exponentially during the copper mining era, expanding over 1200 percent between 1870 and 1880—from 241 to 3,363 residents—and continued to grow until peaking in 1920 at just over 40,000 residents,<sup>546</sup> with more than another 20,000 in surrounding towns within the county.

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<sup>545</sup> In its first year of operations, the Realm of Montana boasted roughly 4,034 members (Sept. 1924), that number increased by over a thousand by September of 1925, and began to diminish quickly thereafter, with only 1,493 members between Sept. 1927 and 1928, and 1,359 the next year. Estimations based on amount of taxes paid to Realm of Montana (.083 per Klansman, per month, as determined by the Klan constitution, article 15, section 3). Montana Klan Financial Reports 1923-1929, KKC Box 1 Folders 32; EWSHS Realm Tax Statements, Box 2 Folder 97, EWSHS Realm Tax Statements, Box 2 Folder 97) Both the Butte Klan and the Realm of Montana as a whole follow the typical arc of growth exhibited by most Klans across the county.

<sup>546</sup> US Census Statistical Abstracts, 1910, 1920.

While most of Butte's Klansmen left no record explaining their reasons for joining the order, comments in their meeting minutes and correspondence suggest that members were at least in part motivated by concerns about race, religion, and morality in their town, and Montana more generally. The town's rapid growth occurred in a moment of unrestricted European immigration, and most of the men who staffed the town's mining operations were either immigrants or the sons of immigrants. By 1910, 70.2 percent of Butte residents were either immigrants or the children of immigrants, with Irish immigrants accounting for over 25 percent of the city's population by 1900, though Butte also had a small but significant population of ethnically Eastern European, Lebanese, and Chinese residents.<sup>547</sup> Montana as a whole had roughly 1,658 residents listed as "negro" on the 1920 US Census, and as one of the largest population centers in the state, Butte boasted the second highest concentration of Black residents in 1920: just 214 people.<sup>548</sup> Despite the small size of this community, Black-owned businesses were well known around town, including a mine, an interracial barber-shop, social and nightclubs, and a weekly newspaper, *The New Age*, which operated between 1902 and 1903.<sup>549</sup> There was some public tension between the city's Black and white residents in the first decades of the twentieth century, including a lawsuit brought by members of the Autumn Leaf Club, an all-Black organization, against a white policeman who assaulted a member of the club in 1914. Still, perhaps due to the small population of Black residents in the city overall,

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<sup>547</sup> Murphy, *Mining Cultures*, 10.

<sup>548</sup> US Census Statistical Abstracts, 1910, 1920. this number is a decrease from the number of Black residents in the state in 1910.

<sup>549</sup> A run of the *New Age* is in the Montana Historical Society Library. See also 1970 Bibliography of Black life in Montana at the Butte Silver Bow Historical Society.

racial violence along the color line was more of an exception than a rule.<sup>550</sup> Instead, Butte's residents more frequently clashed along social divisions articulated in terms of ethnic heritage, national affiliation, religion, or sometimes all three. The wealthy men who owned the city's largest mining operations fueled such disputes, often basing hiring decisions on such identity characteristics.<sup>551</sup> William A. Clark's Elm-Orlu Mine was known for hiring miners of Scottish and English descent, while Marcus Daly relied primarily on Irish Catholics to staff his Anaconda Mining Co.<sup>552</sup>

Less clearly articulated but no less contentious were social battles rendered on moral terms. Thanks to the centrality of mining to the town's economy, Butte became a magnet for single men hoping to make their fortunes, and as a result, gender norms changed quickly following World War I. Butte had an active vice district, and a significant number of women working outside the home by 1920.<sup>553</sup> To make matters worse for the pro-18<sup>th</sup> amendment Klan, the citizens of Butte were known for their flagrant rejection of Prohibition laws despite the efforts of law enforcement. The 1923 city directory listed over 200 establishments under the euphemism of "soft drink and cigar" shops, many of which still contained the title "bar," "saloon," or even "liquor house" in their title, a full six years after Prohibition went into effect.<sup>554</sup> Being anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant, and anti-alcohol in Butte was not a popular viewpoint in 1923. Operating any organization, even a secret

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<sup>550</sup> "Negroes Demand that Cop be Bounced" *Butte Miner*, March 25, 1914.

<sup>551</sup> Erickson, "Kluxer Blues," 46-48.

<sup>552</sup> Erickson, "Kluxer Blues," 46-48.

<sup>553</sup> Murphy, "Manners and Morals," in *Mining Cultures*, 71-105.

<sup>554</sup> 1923 *Butte City Directory*, 546-47. Prohibition in Butte, Vertical File, Butte Silver Bow Archives. See also Murphy, "Habits of Drink," in *Mining Cultures*, 42-70.

one, under these conditions, was a challenge for Butte's Klan leaders, who were most concerned with the political and social influence of Catholics and "wets" in the city. Unlike Klans in regions where an anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic, and anti-prohibition position would be more common—as in Athens, GA, where the Klan was listed in the phonebook and placed banners over streets announcing upcoming meetings—Butte's Klan really was as besieged as its members imagined it to be.<sup>555</sup>

### Secrecy

Persecution was not such a bad thing for a self-proclaimed secret society, particularly given that undercover activities gave the members of Butte's Klan a sense of importance that many may have lacked in their daily lives. This characteristic was not unique to the Butte Klan, as the Klan's status as a "secret society" was not only a constant topic of discussion for leaders at all levels of the organization, but was frequently cited by critics as an enticement for potential members.<sup>556</sup> Imperial publications warned local officials across the country to protect the secrets of the order, including the names of members, officials, and frequently the location of the Klavern itself.<sup>557</sup> Klansmen could only enter the Klavern after responding to the man guarding the door with the appropriate "countersign" if presented with the current password.<sup>558</sup> These passwords and countersigns changed frequently through coded letters from Imperial officials that

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<sup>555</sup> One such banner, produced by the local "Dixie Sign Co." is in the papers of the Ku Klux Klan Athens Chapter No. 5 at the Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia.

<sup>556</sup> William G. Shepherd, "How I Put Over the Klan," *Collier's Weekly*, Jul. 14, 1928.

<sup>557</sup> Floyd F. Johnson, "Certifying That Official Circular Read at Local Meetings." Business Letter, July 17, 1924. MS 131 Box 1 Folder 7. EWSHS; Nathan Bedford Forrest, Letter to J. P. McCall. "Against the Rules to Send out Names of EC's in the Province," November 11, 1925. Ku Klux Klan Athens Chapter No. 5 Papers Box 1 Folder 7. Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia.

<sup>558</sup> "Countersign and Password," July 1, 1926. William Carlyle Hatcher Collection Folder 1.b. ECU.

included instructions that “the above must be destroyed by fire” after the Klavern secretary returned the receipt designating the secure arrival of the message.<sup>559</sup> As one Colorado Klansman scrawled on the top of a bulletin about elections within the state, the letter contained “Important confidential information. Destroy by burning when it has served its purpose.”<sup>560</sup> The Klansman’s manual included particularly strict instructions on the occasion that an alien entered the Klavern. Panicked letters from a Michigan Exalted Cyclops to the Grand Dragon of his realm narrated the accidental admission of a Catholic priest to his Klan’s meeting space in the summer of 1927, which suggests that these Imperial dictates about secrecy had real weight for local officials.<sup>561</sup> Klaverns stronger and larger than Butte’s wrote to state leaders with concerns about “illegitimate Klansmen” entering the Klavern.<sup>562</sup>

Still, the Butte Klan’s concern with secrecy offers an example of a Klan that tended towards paranoia, perhaps due to the sheriff’s outspoken commitment to stopping the growth of the order in his town. Since Butte Klansmen wanted to avoid recognition, they could not appear in public while wearing regalia. Simmons designed the Klan’s uniform robes to transform an individual into a Klansman, a figure who represented an

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<sup>559</sup> Henry A. Grady, “Bulletin on Various NC State Klan Business,” May 28, 1925. William Carlyle Hatcher Collection Folder 1.a. East Carolina University, Joyner Library. Hiram W. Evans, “Transmitting New Kode,” July 1, 1926. William Carlyle Hatcher Collection Folder 1.b. East Carolina University, Joyner Library. J. MacQuinn, “New Countersign and Password Code for 1927,” April 15, 1927. Ku Klux Klan Collection, Box 1 Folder 1. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

<sup>560</sup> M.S. Belser, ‘Voting Instructions for CO Klansmen’, 30 August 1928, Bayfield, CO Ku Klux Klan Records Box 2 Folder 4, John F. Reed Library, Fort Lewis College.

<sup>561</sup> Lewis D. Capen, Letter to George E. Carr. June 15, 1927. Ku Klux Klan (Mecosta County, MI) Collection Box 2 Folder 1. Central Michigan University, Clark Historical Library; Lewis D. Capen, “Narrative of Rev. Faucher Accidentally Seeing inside of Klavern,” June 15, 1927. Ku Klux Klan (Mecosta County, MI) Collection Box 2 Folder 1. Central Michigan University, Clark Historical Library.

<sup>562</sup> H. C. Hoffman, ‘Letter to Colorado Klans on Illegitimate Members and Secrecy’, 30 July 1925, Bayfield, CO Ku Klux Klan Records Box 2 Folder 1, John F. Reed Library, Fort Lewis College.



entire system of coordinated belief and action. Hypothetically, the Klan's regalia design would quite literally mask its wearer from identification, but in practice, Butte's Klansmen would have been easy to identify if they could muster the courage to defy their sheriff's orders and wear their garments outside of the Klavern. The white cotton masks that hung from the pointed crown of each Klansman's helmet would easily be disturbed by Montana winds. Less dramatically, the hem lengths of these garments were variable, often showing a Klansman's feet and legs from the knees down, as well as his wrists and hands.

Klansmen were to wear their everyday clothes underneath these ritual garments, which meant that a Klansman could easily be identified by a distinctive watch, trousers, or pair of shoes. Even more dangerous was the threat of being identified simply by one's own body—not only by the sight of uncovered hands, but through the idiosyncratic qualities of an individual's gait, stance, or simply his particular dimensions. Photographs of robed Klansmen, as well as extant robes found in museum collections demonstrate that Klansmen had an array of body types.<sup>563</sup> While not all Klansmen were physically distinctive enough to be recognized, it is likely that in particularly contentious locations, like Butte, the fear of recognition likely curbed Klansmen's willingness to appear robed in public more than actual instances of identification.

Limiting the use of robes to inside a Klavern was not necessarily a guarantee that a Klansman would not be identified. The Butte Klan lacked a permanent meeting space, and therefore met in a series of spaces rented from other fraternal organizations, including a

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<sup>563</sup> E.H. Galloway's robe in the Mississippi Department of Archives and History is a good example of a Klan garment in an atypical size. The muslin scrap featuring Galloway's measurements that is stitched into the center back of the garment is unusual and suggests that Galloway may have looked outside the Atlanta factory to find a robe, despite his high rank as an Exalted Cyclops of a local Klan. Whether this was because Galloway was intentionally flaunting the rules, or he could not receive a custom robe from the Atlanta factory that was large enough to fit his body is unclear.

Masonic Hall in Walkerville, the tiny town just north of the city.<sup>564</sup> Butte's Klansmen referred to their organization by a number of code names: "The Protestant Men's Community Club," "The Magian Society," "The Kishma Improvement Assn.," and, most comically, "The Butte Men's Literary Club."<sup>565</sup> The Butte Klan's elaborate subterfuge unintentionally cited the arcane and sometimes theatrical ritualism of fraternal practice from the organization's origin, but these extra precautions had real consequences for the way that they enacted dictates from imperial officials. The lack of a dedicated Klavern meant that Butte Klansmen often needed to improvise within the space of a rented hall to create an appropriate setting for ritual purposes.

The lack of a fixed meeting space made it harder for Klavern officials to provide robes for regular meetings. As rented items, robes were a kind of collective property. The Kloran prescribed that a Klavern should include three rooms, one of which was a dedicated cloakroom for members' robes. As designated by the order's constitution, no member was to possess his own robe for any length of time without the written permission of the Exalted Cyclops, who, in turn, required the written permission of the Grand Dragon of his realm. Without a permanent Klavern, Butte's Klansmen needed to switch meeting locations regularly, and could not leave supplies in their rented spaces. The well-appointed Klan in Athens, GA, had three robe cabinets, a rack, and hangers in a 1925 inventory of

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<sup>564</sup> Receipts and Rental agreements indicate that the Butte Klan rented meeting space from the Pythian Castle Association, The Royal Order of the Moose, and The Walkerville Masonic Temple Association between 1924 and 1925. "Butte Hall Rental Invoices," October 23, 1924. Kontinental Klan Records, Butte 1916, 1921-31 Box 1 Folder 36. EWSHS. "Butte Klan Invoices for Hall Rental," June 1925. Kontinental Klan Records, Butte 1916, 1921-31 Box 1 Folder 37. EWSHS. James A. Bray. Business Letter to Pythian Temple Association. "Space Rental Payment for Pythian Castle Hall in Butte." Sept. 16, 1925. MS 131 Box 1 Folder 8. EWSHS. Charles Steele, "Butte Klan Space Rental Agreement." Personal Letter, April 30, 1924. MS 131 Box 1 Folder 1. EWSHS.

<sup>565</sup> "Butte Klonskave Minutes," May 7, Nov. 2, 1923; March 26, Jul. 15, 19, 1924; March 9, 1926; May 22, 1929. KK#30, Box 2, Folder 104; James A. Bray, Letter to Pythian Temple Association, Sept. 16, 1925. KK#30, Box 1 Folder 8; "Butte Klan Invoices for Hall Rental," June 1925. KK#30, Box 1 Folder 37, EWSHS.

their Klavern.<sup>566</sup> In stark contrast, the members of the Kontinental Klan's robe committee had to bring a trunk of robes to every meeting—and Klansmen had to dress in those robes in the central space of the temporary "Klavern." One member of the Butte Klan was asked to keep this trunk in his own home, because there was no safe public space to keep these garments.<sup>567</sup> Many Klans implemented the organization's clearly delineated prohibition of unauthorized use of robes to legally protect members of the Klavern, as when the E.C. of the Athens Klan requested dispensations from the Grand Dragon of Georgia in order to wear robes while doing charity work.<sup>568</sup> Imperial regulation of robe use and storage presented a tricky concern for local Klan leaders who wanted to successfully implement imperial dictates while also navigating the complexities of local conditions. The challenge of enacting ritual within these parameters underscores just how hard the Klansmen of Butte, and places like Carlock, Illinois, worked to create appropriate conditions for ritual performance.

### **Getting Robes to Butte**

Since the threat of wearing robes in public was very real, the lengths to which Butte's Klan officials went to secure robes for their members is noteworthy. Placing an order for a robe called for nine distinct acts of communication between officials at different levels of the organization, as records from the Kontinental Klan #30 of Butte,

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<sup>566</sup> Ku Klux Klan, Athens GA, 'Athens Klan Inventory' 1925, KK#5, Box 3 Folder 11, UGA.

<sup>567</sup> Butte Klavern Minutes, June 17, 1924. KK#30 Box 2, Folder 105, EWSHS.

<sup>568</sup> Nathan Bedford Forrest, and J. P. McCall, 'Granting Permission for Athens Klansmen to Wear Robes While Doing Charity Work', 11 November 1925, K#5 Box 1, Folder 7; J. P. McCall and Nathan Bedford Forrest, 'Requesting Permission to Wear Robes in Public', 29 November 1925, K#5, 1 Folder 8; Nathan Bedford Forrest, Letter to J. P. McCall, 'Granting Athens Klan Permission to Wear Robes for Charity Donation', 19 April 1926, K#5, Box 1, Folder 11; Nathan Bedford Forrest Letter to J. P. McCall, 'Klansmen to Deliver Charity Donation in Robes', 3 May 1926, K#5, Box 1 Folder 10; Nathan Bedford Forrest Letter to J. P. McCall, 'Granting Permission for Klansmen to Deliver Donation in Robes', 31 May 1926, K#5, Box 1, Folder 12, UGA.

Montana reveal. These networks of communication help us to envision the routes traveled by both Klan doctrine and supplies, as well as to better understand how the institutional hierarchy of the Invisible Empire structured these relationships. Watching the movement of Klan regalia is also a way of envisioning how Klan members in the hinterlands conceived of the empire's power and their relationship to Klan leaders in Atlanta.

**(Fig: 4.5)**

By 1923, requesting robes for new members required Butte's Klan to procure a pad of blank order forms from the Imperial Kilgrapp in Atlanta.<sup>569</sup> Newly naturalized or existing members that were not yet properly outfitted filled out one of these forms for the proper sizing of each robe. The measurements were so rudimentary that they could be taken easily by another Klansman, as the basic instructions on the order form used visual cues, and labeled each point on the body by number. In this format the center back seam of the robe was described only as number three, and measuring from that point to the tip of his bent elbow (number five) was described as "3-5," rather than using tailoring terminology.<sup>570</sup> A 1925 inventory of the Butte Klavern's supplies included a tailor's measuring tape, suggesting that these forms were filled out in the context of a meeting, ideally just after a new member's induction into the order.<sup>571</sup> Once the form was completed, the Butte Kilgrapp then collected these forms and sent an official request for the garments to the office of Montana's Grand Dragon Lewis Terwilliger, who governed the realm from his office in Livingston, MT. From the "executive-administrative

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<sup>569</sup> James A Bray, Business Letter. "Supply Order." March 3, 1925. MS 131 Box 1 Folder 8. EWSHS.

<sup>570</sup> Butte KKK, 'Butte Robe Orders,' 1924. KK#30, Box 1, Folder 44, EWSHS.

<sup>571</sup> "Inventory of Office Items," Jun. 30, 1925. KK#30, Box 1, Folder 34, EWSHS.

headquarters”<sup>572</sup> of Montana’s Klan, Terwilliger and his staff organized state-wide meetings, facilitated communication about planning regional gatherings between local Klan groups, helped to vet potential members by sending requests for character references to distant Klans, and conveyed reports about the financial and ideological strength of the Klans under his care to Imperial officials. This office also “dispens[ed] service to the Klans located within the realm,” and served as a clearinghouse for communication about “robes and helmets, blank forms, supplies, seals, reports, etc. and in fact all matters of an administrative nature.” Thus the Exalted Cyclops (president) or Kilgrapp (secretary) of any given Klavern would contact the office of the Grand Dragon rather than communicating directly with Imperial officials,<sup>573</sup> and much of the communication between local Klans traveled through this office as well.

As a result, Klan communication had a distinctly recursive quality. Upon receiving the initial order form, a member of Terwilliger’s staff next sent a receipt to the Butte Klavern, and forwarded the order to the Imperial headquarters in Atlanta. The Imperial Kilgrapp, H. H. Ramsey, collected orders from Klans nationwide and forwarded them on to the Klan’s industrial division, which housed both regalia factory and the printing plant where the order forms were originally made. Upon submitting the order to the factory, the Imperial Kilgrapp then sent an invoice to the Klavern, and the Butte Kilgrapp collected a robe rental fee from the new member, and sent that money to the Realm treasurer, who then remitted these funds to the Imperial Treasury. The finished robe was sent directly to

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<sup>572</sup> Lewis Terwilliger, “Butte Klan Official Document No. 1,” July 1923. KK#30 Box 1 Folder 1, EWSHS.

<sup>573</sup> A Klan in Mecosta Michigan asked members to serve on committees concerned with “public health,” “civic betterment,” and “Klan relations.” Lewis D. Capen, ‘Klan Offices and Committees (realm of MI’, July 1925, Ku Klux Klan (Mecosta County, MI) Collection Box 1 Folder 10, Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University.

the Butte Kilgrapp by U.S. mail, or American Railway Express service, if it was a rush order. (Forms sometimes included the date of an upcoming public demonstration, and encouraged Imperial administrators to send the robe in enough time.)<sup>574</sup> The Kilgrapp then detached the return receipt from the bottom of the invoice and mail it back to the Imperial Palace. This entire process could be completed in less than twenty days for Klans whose correspondence did not have to travel long distances, as one North Carolina Klaliff explained.<sup>575</sup> Located in some of the farthest reaches of the empire, however, Butte Klansmen experienced something akin to their brothers in LaGrande, Oregon, who complained that it took “a long time” to get their robes from “HQ.”<sup>576</sup>

This standard process of getting mail and packages from the Imperial Palace was further complicated for Butte Kilgrapps, who routinely complained that the town’s Catholic Postmasters were losing shipments to the Klan on purpose. Klansmen saw the potential interception of packages shipped from the Klan headquarters in Atlanta as a material impediment to the work of Klankraft. Thus, discussions of postal protocols occupied significant attention in the correspondence of several of the Kontinental Klan’s Kilgrapps (secretaries), who worked hard to ensure that the instructions and packages of robes and other supplies sent from the Klan’s headquarters in Atlanta, and later an outpost

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<sup>574</sup> For example: this note accompanying three robe orders for the Carlock, Illinois Klan; "Joe, Please Rush these orders as much as you possibly can for it at all possible we want to get these fellows into the parade." Seward Bristow Letter to Joseph R. Hallett. "Kilgrapp’s report—Carlock Klan," August 28, 1924. Ku Klux Klan Carlock Unit No. 71 records Box 1 Folder 2. Emory University Manuscript and Rare Book Library.

<sup>575</sup> H. H. Ramsey, “Report of the Imperial Kilgrapp” (36-40) and N. N. Furney, Report of the Accounting Department,” (42-43) in Knights of the KKK Inc. *Official and Departmental Reports made to the Second Imperial Klonyokation*” 1924. C. C. McIlwain and NC Klans, ‘Bulletin about State Klan Celebration in NC’, 6 April 1925, William Carlyle Hatcher Collection Folder 1.a, East Carolina University, Joyner Library; “Butte Robe Order,” March 4, 1924; “Butte Robe Orders,” December 3, 1924. Kontinental Klan Records, Butte 1916, 1921-31, Box 1 Folder 45. EWSHS.

<sup>576</sup> Transcript of LaGrande Klan #14 (Oregon) Minutes, Dec. 19, 1922. Reprinted in *Inside the Klavern*, ed. David A Horowitz (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999).

of the Imperial Palace in Washington D.C., reached the group's members. In order to do this, officers of the Butte Klan developed complicated instructions for mailing that extended beyond the request made by many Klans for the envelopes or packages "to have no mark of any kind" that would suggest a relationship with the organization.<sup>577</sup> Problems with the mail continued into the last years of the Klan's operation in Butte. Kilgrapp Albert Jones reported to the Grand Dragon in 1928 that he received a series of letters from the realm office where "the envelope was torn on the end," leading to further concern about surveillance by the postmaster.<sup>578</sup>

In order to deal with these concerns, Kontinental Klan officials began to develop elaborate instructions for Realm and Imperial officials attempting to get "100% American" mail to Butte. Kilgrapp Floyd Johnson made up code names like "Knut Karl Knuteson, a genuine nordic name," and "August Wilhelm," or requested that Klan mail be sent to his home directed to the "Secretary of the D.O.K.K.," with no return address.<sup>579</sup> Bray went so far as to ask that packages sent from the Klan's Atlanta regalia factory be sent to the Realm office in Lewiston, MT, and forwarded to the Butte Klan via American Railway Express, a more expensive, but apparently more trustworthy method that would avoid the prying eyes of Butte's postmaster.<sup>580</sup>

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<sup>577</sup> Floyd F. Johnson, Business Letter to Lewis Terwilliger. "Various Business, Including Mailing Instructions for Robe Orders." Oct. 10, 1924. KK #30, Box 1, Folder 7. EWSHS.

<sup>578</sup> Albert Jones to Lewis Terwilliger, Feb. 13, 1928. Also see, Erickson, "Kluxer Blues," 50-51.

<sup>579</sup> Lewis Terwilliger letter to Floyd Johnson Nov. 29, 1924; Johnson to Terwilliger, Oct. 10, 1924. KK #30, Box 1 Folder 7. EWSHS; "Butte Supply Order," Jan. 10, 1925, KK #30 Box 1, Folder 43, EWSHS.

<sup>580</sup> James A. Bray letter to Lewis Terwilliger, February 9, 1925; Bray to Terwilliger, February 10, 1925; Terwilliger to Bray, Feb. 13, 1925; Terwilliger to Bray, July 16, 1925. KK #30, Box 1, Folder 8, EWSHS.

Requesting and implementing these new procedures generated more correspondence, and thus more labor, for the lower-level officials in Butte's Klan charged with enacting imperial instructions. The lengths that Butte's Klan officials went to procure robes strengthened the ritualistic aspect of the garments. If getting regalia was hard work, the garments were all the more precious once they finally arrived. Regalia was not simply a symbol of an abstracted ideological goal, it was the tangible product of sustained contact with the Klan's imperial headquarters, and thus, proof that Butte's Klansmen were not quite as bad at their ritualistic work as they feared.

This complicated structure of communication facilitated the sale and distribution of goods from a central authority to an ever-increasing number of imperial outposts across the country. It allowed information from local branches of the organization to reach various bureaus of the imperial administration—such as the offices of the Imperial Kilgrapp (secretary), the Imperial Kludd (treasurer), and the industrial plant that produced and shipped the robes from its Atlanta factory and warehouse—without requiring direct contact between the various branches.<sup>581</sup> At the same time it allowed members to foster sustained relationship with individuals far beyond their everyday social realm.

### **Building Robe Strength**

Some of the most pointed critiques of the Klan were those that portrayed Klan leaders as the perpetrators of a massive scam. This characterization was, in many ways correct. Klan membership was not cheap, roughly \$23.30 for the first year of membership (based on fees from from 1923), and \$6.80 for each subsequent year.<sup>582</sup> Many members

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<sup>581</sup> Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Incorporated. *Official and Department Reports Made to the Second Imperial Klonvokation*, 1924.

<sup>582</sup> Fryer and Leavitt, "Hatred and Profits," 1891.



could afford to pay these fees, but only with significant prodding from their local leaders who were constantly worrying about whether or not members' dues were up to date. Their worries were not a reflection of the amount that local Klan leaders were skimming off the top, as I will discuss below, but instead resulted from constant haranguing from imperial officials who were receiving a cut. The amount of money that these leaders were making is hard to pin down, in part because the fragmentary nature of Klan records means that estimations of membership numbers are speculative at best, though most scholars estimate roughly 3 million members at the organization's peak (1924-25).<sup>583</sup>

Thanks to early critiques by Henry Fry and others, critics and scholars alike have described robes as a major source of income for the Klan, but these numbers do not necessarily hold up.<sup>584</sup> Issues with robe distribution were not limited to Butte. The Klan struggled to distribute robes widely and efficiently across the empire, despite the elaborate bureaucratic apparatus meant to keep the system working. Built into the process was a series of checks and balances to guard against corruption within the administration at each level by requiring receipts at various steps in the process, which provided a mechanism for local Klansmen to appeal if the goods they ordered did not appear as planned. Much of the Klan's bureaucracy was created to facilitate not only the distribution of robes across the empire, but to funnel funds from robes, membership dues, initiation fees, and "imperial taxes" collected at imperial outposts into the coffers of the Imperial Palace. A small fraction of this money returned to local Klan accounts, as the imperial treasurer returned a

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<sup>583</sup> For estimates of Klan finances see Roland G. Fryer, and Steven D. Levitt. "Hatred and Profits," (2012); Alexander "Kleagles and Cash, (1965); William G. Shepherd, "How I Put Over the Klan," July 14, 1928; "Ku Klux Koin," Saturday, July 21st, 1928: "The Fiery Double-Cross," *Collier's Weekly*, July 28, 1928.

<sup>584</sup> Henry Peck Fry, *The Modern Ku Klux Klan*. (Boston, MA: Small, Maynard, and Co., 1922); William G. Shepherd, "Ku Klux Koin," *Collier's Weekly*, July 21, 1928.

percentage of each realm's imperial tax on a quarterly basis in order to fund regional improvements and expansion efforts. Still, the correspondence that occupied so much of the Kilgrapps' time, at every level, concerned the need to direct goods and doctrinal information outwards, and send money inward towards the order's leaders. For this reason, anti-corruption measures were crucial to the continued relationship between the imperial administration and local Klaverns. Several high-profile attempted schisms called attention to the need for imperial administrators to strengthen the chain of command—and in turn keep track of the money moving up the pyramid.<sup>585</sup>

Anti-corruption measures increased following the coup that displaced Imperial Wizard Simmons and propagation manager Edward Young Clarke in 1923. Concerns about the Klan's shady financial practices had led to the inconclusive 1921 investigation by the U.S. House of Representatives, in which the Klan was investigated for mail fraud and questions about Klan finances.<sup>586</sup> Robe rental fees played a significant role in these debates, though robes never proved to be quite as lucrative as the Klan's critics charged. Unlike initiation fees, robes were objects. Where the \$10 that Klansmen provided to enter the organization was simply an influx of cash, the payment of a robe rental fee required that the Klan give something back to the new member. The production of robes produced overhead costs, and the changing configuration of manufacturing in Atlanta suggests that Klan leaders were constantly trying to control overhead and increase their profits.

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<sup>585</sup> Internal scandals occupied significant time for imperial officials seeking to keep their empire under control. Attempted schisms by Gano Senter of Colorado; D.C. Stephenson, of Indiana; Sam D. Rich of Pennsylvania, and Jonathan Frost, of Alabama, all demonstrated the corruptibility of the order's local leaders and the potential to divide the mass strength of the organization. For more on attempted schisms, see Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, (1965).

<sup>586</sup> U.S. Congress House Committee on Rules. *The Ku-Klux Klan: Hearings Before the Committee on Rules, House of Representatives, 67<sup>th</sup> Congress, 1<sup>st</sup> Session*. (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1921).

Once the Klan integrated robe production into its own factory, that factory needed to produce enough regalia to justify its existence. According to a 1924 report by the factory's manager, the 120 workers who staffed this operation shipped 211,410 robes in the first year of operation and maintained a stock of "20,000 complete Klansmen's robes in 24 different sizes ready for immediate shipment...all orders for plain robes are shipped the same date orders are received at the plant." With the capacity to make roughly 1,800 robes per day, the factory's manager portrayed a workforce racing to supply the demand for robes generated by a massive organization at the height of its power.

The production numbers at the regalia factory may have seemed inflated, but in fact the number of Klansmen who rented official robes was never particularly high. In 1921, Simmons announced that only 30% of the group's membership had regalia. While this number may have increased with Evans' push for members to obtain robes in 1924, the overall estimates for Klan members during this period far exceed number of robes that the factory produced. Scholars can only estimate the precise number of Klan members during this period, though most have arrived at a figure of 3 million nationwide in 1924, at the height of the organization's power. If we take McKinnon at his word, the Klan's factory made a total of 432,452 robes between 1923 and 1926. The impressive manufacturing capacity he indicated, 1,800 robes per day, was unrealized. At that pace, the Buckhead robe plant could have produced roughly 1.9 million robes over that three-year period, meaning that the factory was operating at only 20% of its capacity. Touted as a cost-saving measure for Klansmen, the factory's managers turned to other business to make a profit as the demand for regalia decreased along with the Klan's national membership in the late 1920s. Advertised in the Klan's national magazine as the

“American Printing and Manufacturing Company,” the Klan’s own robe plant was touted as a manufacturer of “lodge, regalia, and hospital supplies” that could work on the basis of large or small commissions. (*Fig 4.4*) “We manufacture...convict clothing,” they announced, and, in a euphemistic understatement, “white garments of all kinds.”<sup>587</sup> While Klan regalia held great financial promise, these garments were never as lucrative as the robe rental fees, in part because the Klan needed to produce actual objects to correspond with new members’ payments.

These figures meant that the Klan’s factory was not as productive as leaders hoped, and thus recruiters focused ever-more attention on the work of getting members to rent robes. At the end of 1923, Nathan Bedford Forrest, the Grand Dragon of GA announced that “The robe strength of the realm of Georgia is not what it should be, and it is the duty of each and every Klansman to provide himself with a Robe and Helmet.”<sup>588</sup> In 1924 calls for better adherence to robe regulations appeared in the correspondence of multiple Klans. Local leaders reminded Klansmen of Mecosta, Michigan that they could attend no further meetings without a robe, in October of 1924. Meanwhile, Klansmen across North Carolina were told that they needed robes and helmets to participate in a “huge celebration” for Klans in their realm, featuring “business meetings, ritual training, national lecturers, fireworks, social time, and a parade.”<sup>589</sup> These public events often

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<sup>587</sup> American Printing and Manufacturing Company Advertisement, Kourier Magazine, Vol 3. No 7, (June 1927). Crown Point, Indiana Klan Collection, Box 3 Folder 6, IHS.

<sup>588</sup> Forrest, Nathan Bedford, “Realm of GA Bulletin No. 5 with comment on Klan Robe Sales,” Dec. 1, 1923, K#5 Papers Box 2 Folder 3, UGA.

<sup>589</sup> W. S. Powers, Letter to Mecosta Co. Klan, ‘Announcing Joint Meeting of Mecosta and Osceola Co. Klans’, 23 October 1924, Ku Klux Klan (Mecosta County, MI) Collection Box 1 Folder 10, Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University; C. C. McIlwain, and NC Klans, ‘Bulletin about State Klan Celebration in NC’, 6 April 1925, William Carlyle Hatcher Collection Folder 1.a, East Carolina University, Joyner Library.

required robes, and regularly used images of robed Klansmen as part of their advertisements. In December of 1924, Evans announced robes were now mandatory for members. In an edict directed at all local officials, he called on Klavern officials to develop a “strategic plan” to make this a reality.<sup>590</sup>

Records of robe rentals in Pennsylvania make clear that even during periods of sustained organizational growth, the Klan struggled to ensure orders commensurate with their recruitment numbers. Over a period of nineteen months, between July of 1924 and December of 1925, Pennsylvania Klansmen ordered an impressive 16,712 Klan robes and hoods from the Klan’s Atlanta factory. These orders were sometimes submitted by local Klavern officials—as was the procedure in Butte—but many more were logged on particularly busy days, suggesting that Kleagles were collecting robe orders at large initiation ceremonies. Pennsylvania Grand Dragon Sam Rich was often busy managing other recruiters, but he still managed to log 2,361 of these robe orders himself. These numbers demonstrate an impressive recruitment apparatus, with at least 9 professional recruiters in the state of Pennsylvania alone. These details, compiled from 1,847 order-forms suggest that the Imperial effort to bulk up the “robe strength” of the empire was not lost on Pennsylvania.<sup>591</sup>

Though these are large recruitment numbers, these forms shows that the Klan’s bureaucratic procedures had not necessarily worked as well as leaders claimed. Though the process of recruiting members and ordering robes was described as a single task in

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<sup>590</sup> Hiram W. Evans, Edict, “All Members Need to Order Robes,” Dec. 1, 1924, MS 131 Box 1 Folder 7, EWSHS.

<sup>591</sup> These order forms were saved by the Pennsylvania State Police, who collected the administrative records of the Western PA Klan, and the robe order forms (July 1924 through Dec. of 1925) as part of an investigation into the organization. All data compiled by the author from these records. Ku Klux Klan Kleagle Robe Reports, 1924-1924, Records of the Pennsylvania State Police, RG 30, Microfilm rolls 6662-6668, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg.

Klan literature, robe orders reveal that these two projects did not always occur at the same time.<sup>592</sup> If Klan leaders saw regalia as a key symbolic vehicle for the organization, members did not always see it the same way. Robe orders were organized by Klavern and generally listed the name and member numbers of Klansmen for whom the garments were being ordered. Order forms often listed a series of sequential member numbers, which indicated the order in which members were initiated into the organization. Some order forms would request robes for numbers 1-25, and included the robe of an Exalted Cyclops who would be the president of the new chapter. Others ordered robes for a group clearly admitted long after the Klavern's formation, numbers 345-366, but also stray rental fees for numbers 24 and 65. These new orders, while suggesting that recruiters were in fact getting lax Klansmen to rent robes after all, also demonstrate the tremendous amount of work that went into the process of getting Klansmen to fully buy into the order. The mythic strength of the robe in Klan propaganda did not necessarily come to bear in the organizational apparatus of the Klan. These calls for robe strength, even more than the financial ramifications, point to a strain in the national network of ideology that the Klan's uniformity represented.

There is some suggestion that Klan leaders recognized that the appearance of "robe strength" could be more important than the robe rental fees themselves. In December of 1924, Imperial Wizard Evans sent a notice to Klans nationwide, calling for members to

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<sup>592</sup> Department of Realms, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Pamphlet. "Klan Building: An Outline of Proven Klan Methods for Successfully Applying the Art of Klankraft in Building and Operating Local Klans." Pamphlet, August 28, 1923. Labadie Collection. University of Michigan; Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Incorporated. "The Klansman's Manual." Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Incorporated, 1924, Central Michigan University Library.

take a new “degree” of ritual work that Simmons had designed.<sup>593</sup> Developed in the Masonic tradition, new degrees provided fraternal members with an increasingly complex understanding of the symbolic and intellectual work that shaped the fraternity’s core principles.<sup>594</sup> Similar to other contemporary fraternities, the new degree, *k-duo*, was an opportunity for the Klan to suggest new forms of regalia, and subsequently new fees for members to pay. The token marking members who had attained the new degree was a red silk-satin baldric, adorned with a white satin camellia applique on the front, and finished with gold bullion trim.<sup>595</sup> **(Fig: 4.5)** Worn over the simple and increasingly cheaply made white cotton robes issued to the majority of Klansmen, this crimson satin was a welcome piece of flair for the many men who had joined the organization to seek distinction from their neighbors. And yet, provided to members for only \$1.50, the rental fee for this garment was remarkably low, particularly given the quality of the materials that went into it. Rather than suggesting a total transformation or new regalia, Evans used the new degree as an opportunity to encourage members to rent regalia in the first place. Without a set of regulation regalia, Klansmen could not achieve the K-duo degree.<sup>596</sup> Prior to this announcement, the Klan’s constitution stipulated that regalia was necessary to participate

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<sup>593</sup> Simmons announced the development of three new degrees in 1922, but these were not put into effect until Evans’ rise to power in 1924. James A. Hollomon, “Higher Orders in Klan Ritual Being Prepared.” *The Atlanta Constitution*, Dec 10, 1922; Nathan Bedford Forrest, “Georgia K Duo Bulletin #9,” March 15, 1924. Ku Klux Klan Athens Chapter No. 5 Papers Box 2 Folder 4. University of Georgia, Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscript Library; Capen, Lewis D. “Inviting Klansmen to Participate in K-Trio Ceremony,” January 22, 1927. Ku Klux Klan (Mecosta County, MI) Collection Box 2 Folder 1. Central Michigan University, Clark Historical Library.

<sup>594</sup> Mark A. Tabbert, *American Freemasons* (Lexington, MA and New York: National Heritage Museum and NYU Press, 2006), 7.

<sup>595</sup> Hiram W. Evans. “Announces New Baldric and Dues Card for K Duo Members.” Edict, Dec. 8, 1924. MS 131 Box 1 Folder 7. EWSHS.

<sup>596</sup> “To join [k-duo] you must have an accredited robe.” Nathan Bedford Forrest, “Georgia K Duo Bulletin #9,” March 15, 1924. Ku Klux Klan Athens Chapter No. 5 Papers Box 2 Folder 4. UGA.

in initiation ceremonies, but the day-to-day business of citizenship in the Invisible Empire did not require elaborate robes.<sup>597</sup> The new stress on regalia rentals suggested that Evans was having a harder time coordinating, and perhaps funding, the massive organization than he cared to admit.

Evans' approach to garments for the new degree suggested that the Klan's regulations surrounding the use of regalia extended beyond the desire to increase the group's profit margin. New regalia would have made more money for Klan leaders, and produced more work for the Klan's factory. But continuing along with the existing aesthetic for these garments had significant advantages for the order. Introducing new regalia when many Klan members had not yet rented robes would disrupt the impression of national uniformity that the organization was trying to project. Evans not only needed men to rent robes, he needed those robes to be worn in both public and private demonstrations, to impress both outside observers and members of the local Klan. The introduction of scarlet baldrics offered a productive compromise—members who had achieved the new degree were immediately identifiable from a distance, but the sashes were not large enough to disrupt the image of assembled figures dressed in white. The Klan needed uniformity, both for income and for the idea about the organization's coordination and power that it represented.

If the actual practice of ordering robes was less widespread than critics suggested, then the trouble taken by Butte's Klan to get regalia is all the more significant.<sup>598</sup> When

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<sup>597</sup> Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. *Constitution and Laws of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Incorporated*. Atlanta, GA, 1921. Ku Klux Klan Items 1920-1950, Box 1, Folder 2, Keenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center.

<sup>598</sup> Critics built on accusations made by Henry Fry in his 1921 expose of the order, and Simmons himself in a series of 1928 interviews with William Shepherd of *Colliers' Magazine*.



Evans called for closer adherence to robe regulations across the empire, Butte's Klan responded with vigor; Kilgrapp Floyd Johnson sent a detailed letter to Grand Dragon Terwilliger explaining that the Butte Klan's deficiencies in this area were the responsibility of a "lax" prior administration. The matter was now being pursued with a "vengeance," for, in Johnson's words "Our soul (sic) and only aim is to try for perfection." Between September of 1923 and September of 1924, Klansmen across the state of Montana paid for approximately 621 robes, yielding somewhere around \$3,105 of profit, \$2,759 of which was sent to the Imperial treasury. The next year, the population of the realm grew by approximately 1,100 members between 1924 and 1925, reaching a total membership close to 5,165 in September of 1925.<sup>599</sup> Subsequently, an order of 421 robes resulted in Montana's Klan collecting \$2,184, of which \$2,000 was sent to Atlanta. Butte's Klan only contributed a small fraction of these fees, remitting to the realm only \$305 to pay for sixty-one robes between November of 1923 and late July of 1925.<sup>600</sup> Yet proportional to the number of members, Butte's realm had an impressive rate of robe acquisition, particularly after 1923. Of the seventy-five Klansmen who joined the Butte order during this period, sixty-one paid for robes.<sup>601</sup>

Butte's Klansmen underwent significant stress and bureaucratic labor to obtain robes that they could only wear under very limited circumstances. Since these garments

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<sup>599</sup> All calculations by the author, using Montana Klan Financial Reports, EWSHS. unclear how many members were new, rather this is a calculation of the net growth of the org.

<sup>600</sup> This figure is compiled from the Klonslave minutes 1923-1925 Box 2 Folders 104-106, and Robe order forms in box 1 Folders 44 and 45, KKC EWSHS.

<sup>601</sup> At least 19 of the 78 men who joined before November 1923 also purchased robes during this period, and it is likely that many of the existing members already had their own robes. This figure is compiled from the Klonslave minutes 1923-1925 Box 2 Folders 104-106, and Robe order forms in box 1 Folders 44 and 45, KKC EWSHS.

were rented property of the Imperial Administration, and only belonged to the Klansman for the duration of their participation in the order, Butte's Klansmen were not allowed to keep their robes at home. The Klavern's inability to locate a permanent ritual space meant that robes could not be kept safely in a lodge either. The robes that Klansmen worked so hard to rent were, more often than not, out of their reach.

### **Bureaucracy as Ritual**

For Klans like the one in Butte, public displays of coordinated symbols were replaced by daily labor of trying to fulfill the expectations of Klan leaders in Atlanta. While less spectacular, the work of facilitating ceremonial work constituted a kind of ritual practice in its own right. Described as "Klan building," a multitude of bureaucratic procedural work occupied the time of low-level officials, particularly in locations where things were constantly going wrong.<sup>602</sup> These men spent their time filling out forms, remitting funds, requesting more supplies, and most of all, ordering robes.

Compensation for this work at the local level did not compare to that of officials higher up the chain of command. Imperial officials, Grand Dragons, and the staff of the Klan's Propagation Department were paid regular salaries for their services, and some, like Indiana's D. C. Stephenson, transformed this relatively modest stipend into enormous profits.<sup>603</sup> Stephenson's gains resulted from his impressive recruiting structure, his posting in a state very receptive to the Klan's mission and activities, and unscrupulous business practices. Between 1923 and 1925, Stephenson earned approximately \$143,229 in his role as Grand Dragon, with almost \$9,000 of that income generated from robes. In the same

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<sup>602</sup> Department of Realms, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Pamphlet. "Klan Building: An Outline of Proven Klan Methods for Successfully Applying the Art of Klankraft in Building and Operating Local Klans." Pamphlet, Aug. 28, 1923. Labadie Collection. University of Michigan.

<sup>603</sup> Fryer and Leavitt, "Hatred and Profits," 32.

period, Kleagles from the Propagation Department, and the head Kleagle of Indiana each earned approximately the same amount from robe fees.

As the only Grand Dragon for the lifespan of Montana's Klan, Terwilliger worked hard to make the organization more powerful, and thus profitable. His recorded compensation varied depending on the strength of the organization, \$100 per month in 1924, \$200 a month in 1925, and all the way down to \$48 for 16 months in 1928 and 1929, as the organization's efforts in Montana slowed to a halt. This record does not tell us whether Terwilliger was entirely scrupulous in his accounting practices, or even if this was his only income from Klan work. Still, this base salary was significantly less than what Terwilliger would likely have made in his pre-Klan post as a self-employed insurance adjuster; men in comparable positions in the insurance industry made somewhere between \$150 and \$250 per month in 1920.<sup>604</sup> Whether it was for additional salary or keeping up appearances, Terwilliger continued to advertise his services as an adjustor throughout his tenure in the Klan.<sup>605</sup>

The issue of compensation was a particular concern for lower-ranking Klan officials, who were paid only an honorarium for the considerable amount of work they performed for the organization. Throughout the empire, local Klan officials made significantly less than those at the realm level, with most positions entirely uncompensated. The organization's official stance made compensation practices a decision to be made at the Klavern level, though imperial officials suggested paying the Kilgrapp,

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<sup>604</sup> US Congress, Joint Commission on Postal Salaries *Postal Salaries: Hearings, Sixty-sixth Congress, First Session*. (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1920) 1439.

<sup>605</sup> R.J. Polk Co., *Livingston (MT) City Directories*, 1921-29.

if funds were available.<sup>606</sup> In the case of the Butte Klan, this pay only amounted to nine dollars a month in 1925 (in contrast, the “lady operators” working at the Klan’s regalia factory in Atlanta earned wages ranging from \$15 and \$40 per week).<sup>607</sup> In Butte as in other Klans across the country, men nominated to fill the role of Kilgrapp were to be drawn from a pool of Klansmen who, like Floyd Johnson, already had successful careers as professional bureaucrats—in either the public or private sector. Thus, the men who performed this role in Butte had a range of jobs outside of their Klan duties. They were, variously, an accountant, a government worker, a mechanical engineer, a bookkeeper, and several small business owners. All would have been characterized as middle class during this period—though they spanned the relatively new distinction of the independent entrepreneurial workers and the newer category of the bureaucratic middle class.<sup>608</sup> Butte’s Kilgrapps were already professional managers before they took on this role within the Klan.<sup>609</sup>

Despite the small size of the Kontinental Klan, working as a Kilgrapp in Butte was clearly hard work. Seven men occupied this position between 1923 and 1929, with Floyd Johnson, a particularly challenged Kilgrapp, leaving his post because it was “impossible”

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<sup>606</sup> Department of Realms, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan “Klan Building: An Outline of Proven Klan methods for Successfully Applying the Art of Klankraft in Building and Operating Local Klans” (Aug 28, 1923) 4. Labadie Collection, University of Michigan.

<sup>607</sup> Butte Klan Financial Records, Ledger Page, (May 1925) KK #30, EWSHS; T.J. McKinnon, “Report from the Industrial Plant,” in Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Inc. *Official Department Reports Made to the Second Imperial Klonvokation*, (1924): 48-49. Ku Klux Klan Collection, Keenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center. Payment of \$9 a month was actually an improvement for Butte’s Kilgrapps. In 1923, the Butte Klan voted that the Kilgrapp would get 10c. per member, per month, until further notice.” Butte Klankave Minutes,” Dec. 26, 1923, KK #30, Box 2 Folder 104, EWSHS.

<sup>608</sup> This distinction is articulated by C. Wright Mills in *White Collar*, (1951) and further developed by Oliver Zunz in *Making America Corporate*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 8-9.

<sup>609</sup> Zunz, *Making America Corporate*, 38. on social position of managers and role in bureaucracy.

for the “boys in Butte to work in harmony.”<sup>610</sup> The majority of the extant correspondence in the Kontinental Klan records relay messages written to officials of the Butte Klan—primarily from Grand Dragon Terwilliger. Still, through study of meeting minutes recorded by these Kilgrapps and the messages we do have, we can see that these men did a lot of bureaucratic labor for the organization, for relatively little compensation. Moreover, as part of the secretaries of their Klaverns, Kilgrapps had a careful record of all of the money that the organization received, and what was being sent to the Realm office. They were part of the money-making structure, but nonetheless did not receive the financial benefits that men higher up the organizational structure enjoyed.

Butte’s local Klan officials were deeply engaged in the process of commodity exchange, but received little to no monetary compensation for their time and efforts. Their ritualistic practice of bureaucracy, with its repetitive gestures and prescribed behaviors reinforced the hierarchical structure of the invisible empire. In his discussion of clerks in the early nineteenth-century, Historian Michael Zakim argues “the market was not a living system that needed to be regulated and regularized by means of artificial information technologies. It was itself an artifice. Business, it could be said, administered the market by inventing it.”<sup>611</sup> The same could be said of the Klan and the men doing the labor to make it great, again. The labor that went into making the Klan seem uniform, even at the farthest reaches of the empire, was deeply bound up with the principles that the

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<sup>610</sup> Terwilliger, Lewis. Business Letter. “Remarks on Johnson’s Resignation from Kilgrapp Post and Receipt of Robe Orders, Dues, Quarterly Report.” Business Letter, January 14, 1925. MS 131 Box 1 Folder 7. EWSHS.

<sup>611</sup> Michael Zakim, “Producing Capitalism” in *Capitalism takes Command*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 233.

organization championed, as profit, spectacle, and social division were mutually constituted by the middling Klansmen that did this labor.

### **Following Procedures**

While much of the work of maintaining the Klan was done by local officials, the procedural quality of Klavern meetings meant that Klansmen were constantly aware of, and frequently bored by, the mundane nature of these meetings. New degree work was designed to combat bureaucratic fatigue. North Carolina Grand Dragon Henry A. Grady told Klaverns in his state to hold “K-duo meetings be held immediately after K-uno [regular] meetings, as this further enhances the mystery of this degree to non-members”<sup>612</sup> Imperial leaders understood this problem, and encouraged local groups to amplify the spectacular ceremony of these events—in order to let Klansmen see the dramatic relationship between ideology and action that these ceremonies dramatized—but in reality, as in other fraternal orders, the work of producing ceremony was a large part of members’ experiences. The key was for leaders to demonstrate how the bureaucratic procedures supported the reasons that motivated members of a particular local Klavern to join the group—whether it was fellowship, or the promise of participating in the euphemistic “rough stuff” for which the Klan was best known. Robes made these connections clear—between the labor of procurement, the performance of public and private ritual, and violent actions—even if Klansmen were not actually wearing robes while participating in these activities, or able to participate in some of these activities at all.

It’s also likely that the challenges that Butte’s Klansmen experienced in adhering strictly to imperial procedure actually strengthened members’ commitment to the

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<sup>612</sup> Grady, Henry A. “Bulletin for EC’s of NC Klans Re : K-Duo,” April 6, 1925. William Carlyle Hatcher Collection Folder 1.a. East Carolina University, Joyner Library.

organization—just as a sense of persecution may have contributed to their sense of its ideological importance. The structure of communication by correspondence, and the contingencies introduced by human error, much less the U.S. Postal service and American Railway Express, meant that systemic breakdowns only produced *more* communication.

In these cases, ritualized communication stood in for the robes in staging a sense of community between distant citizens of the empire. This was certainly the case in Butte, but true in other realms as well. In Carlock, Illinois Kilgrapp L.V. Kinzinger sent repeated calls to the Grand Dragon of Illinois, entreating him to please send more order blanks and minute paper, as the Klavern could not function properly without the prescribed supplies.<sup>613</sup> In Mecosta, Michigan, Klavern leaders engaged in multi-part correspondence with regional leaders about the proper use of robes in the meeting setting. Their attention to detail is as impressive as the time that Michigan Grand Dragon spent laying out the details in his initial and subsequent responses.<sup>614</sup> These communications, sometimes about other communications, likely helped local Klans, who sometimes expressed a sense of neglect, to feel part of the broader national action.<sup>615</sup>

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<sup>613</sup> Charles G. Palmer. Dec. 18, 1924. Ku Klux Klan Carlock Unit No. 71 records Box 1 Folder 1. Emory. Palmer, Charles G. "Supplies Sent to Carlock," February 10, 1925. Ku Klux Klan Carlock Unit No. 71 records Box 1 Folder 1. Emory University Manuscript and Rare Book Library. In Butte, James Bray complained that he had submitted a robe order, but could not submit payment because he did not have the proper forms. James A. Bray, "Supply Order." Business Letter, March 3, 1925. MS 131 Box 1 Folder 8. EWSHS. For supply order problems of Athens, GA Klan, see: Nathan Bedford Forrest, letter to R. L. Bramblett. "Supply Order," May 22, 1925. Ku Klux Klan Athens Chapter No. 5 Papers Box 1 Folder 5. Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia.

<sup>614</sup> M.A. Rathborn, and M. E. Cota. Letter to Mecosta Co. Klan. "Update to Members on Business of Mecosta Co. Klan-Incl. Robe Use Clarification," April 1925. Ku Klux Klan (Mecosta County, MI) Collection Box 1 Folder 10. Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University.

<sup>615</sup> Fred Arnold, Letter to Clyde Akers. "On Bayfield Supply Order + Seals," March 30, 1926. Bayfield, CO Ku Klux Klan Records Box 2 Folder 5. John F. Reed Library, Fort Lewis College. Letter to N. N. Furney, "Supply Request from CO GD to ATL HQ," March 30, 1926. Bayfield, CO Ku Klux Klan Records Box 2 Folder 5. John F. Reed Library, Fort Lewis College.

When procedures failed, as they did with a missing order of robes in Bayfield, Colorado, the pile of correspondence could extend beyond the issue at hand, as local Klavern officials folded in their concerns about internal corruption, and challenges faced by the Klavern.<sup>616</sup> For the Bayfield Klan, the problem was actually a Grand Dragon who had been siphoning money off the top of robe orders. When the Bayfield Klan did not get their supplies, Imperial officials apologized for the Klan being “handicapped,” without proper ritual supplies. “This is to advise you that we are forwarding a complete set of Altar and secretarial supplies. . . gratis as the National Organization supplies one set of these to each Organization.” Despite this nicety, the Klan was immediately supposed to write back with the status of their charter before the gift could be confirmed, and on and on.

The correspondence reached towards a sense of uniform coordination that could never be achieved, thanks to fallible and sometimes corrupt members, or challenging local conditions, or even just problems with the mail. Local Klan leaders understood the import of their work, and the degree to which such coordination mattered. As the Kleagle of

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<sup>616</sup> Bayfield Klan sent money order for supplies with post office money order addressed to Imperial Wizard, correcting this mistake "Kindly request to the Kilgrapp of this Klan to send all orders through your office." Make the check out to Dr. John Galen Locke (GD of Colorado), and he will send supply order to Atlanta." Dr. John Gale Locke, Letter to Clyde Akers. "Request for Bayfield Klan to Not Send Supply Orders Directly to ATL," May 22, 1925. Bayfield, CO Ku Klux Klan Records Box 2 Folder 5. John F. Reed Library, Fort Lewis College. "Esteemed Klansman, your order for robes have been in this office for some time, the reason being that the Grand Dragon has been involved in Court proceedings which may also include the Organization, therefore, no checks are being made out and we cannot forward the order. Just as soon as the matters can be adjusted your order will be mailed to Atlanta." Locke, Dr. John Galen. Letter to Clyde Akers. "Robe Orders Stuck in CO B/C GD Legal Trouble," June 11, 1925. Bayfield, CO Ku Klux Klan records. John F. Reed Library, Fort Lewis College; Letter from Imperial Rep of Colorado "Mr. Wright, of Grand Junction, and Natl. Lecturer Dr. Johnson advise that you have been handicapped in the work at Bayfield on account of your not having been supplied with Charter supplies. This is to advise you that we are forwarding a complete set of Altar and secretarial supplies via Am R.R. Express. These are sent to you gratis as the National Organization supplies one set of these to each Organization. We were under the impression that you were chartered, but according to Mr. Wright you never received your charter. Our records show that your number is 69. If you have never received your charter we will ask Atlanta to prepare a duplicate Charter and send you as the same was evidently issued." Hoffman, H.C. Letter to Clyde Akers. "Bayfield Klan Never Received Free Set of Charter Supplies from ATL, Correcting This," August 13, 1925. Bayfield, CO Ku Klux Klan Records Box 2 Folder 5. John F. Reed Library, Fort Lewis College.



McLean County Illinois wrote to all the Klaverns in his district: "I have dreamed of a perfect Saturday when all Kilgrapps will have their reports on time and myself being able to send in my report on time... it is by our numerical strength that we are able to put over big ideals for which we are working."<sup>617</sup> Butte's Klan went to great lengths to demonstrate their commitment to an organization they could never publicly acknowledge. Klan leaders sought to convert members through impressive displays and coordinated rituals, but Butte's Klan leaders saw firsthand that ritual was less of a mystical experience than a logistical headache. In so many ways, the performance of the bureaucracy necessary to conduct private ritual became a conduit for coordinating mass demonstrations and small gatherings alike, events that comprised the ideological center of the order. Bureaucracy was a kind of ritual in its own right. It was a structure that let Klan members could see and reproduce the power of the organization through their adherence to a set of replicable actions.

The ultimate achievement of connecting local activity with the national organization was that imperial officials could enlist Klansmen in the performance of the imperial agenda, as their robed bodies expressed not the localized concerns of any particular Klan, but instead stood for a broader message administrated through the mail from the Imperial Palace. The way that observers encountered this message—whether a mass of assembled Klansmen or a coordinated display of burning crosses—necessarily reflected their own set of experiences and biases that could make the message they received substantially different from the one that Klan leaders were trying to convey. Nonetheless, the uniformed bodies of Klansmen were a critical component of the project of delivering a message about the Klan, and its power, to the American public. The trick of

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<sup>617</sup> Hallett, Joseph R. "Outlining Structure of County Klan Subdivided into Units," Oct. 16, 1924. Ku Klux Klan Carlock Unit No. 71 records Box 1 Folder 1. Emory University Manuscript and Rare Book Library.

ritual—whether in the form of collective violence, ceremony, *or* bureaucracy—was that it made Klansmen understand themselves as active participants, rather than simple conduits of the Imperial agenda.

This was a scam, as Henry Fry charged, but for local officials it was a scam so wrapped up in the forms and tactics of everyday capitalism that their uncompensated labor could seem worth it. The ritualized performance, of both ceremony and ritual, created a sense of the Klan's power through the hierarchical chain of command that profited off of these local activities. Without the spectacular trappings of burning crosses or large scale parades, Butte's Klan underscored that the labor making the spectacles possible wasn't just logistics, it was another way of increasing members' commitment to the pyramid scheme.

## Chapter 6: Picturing a Visible Threat (Photo Essay)

“Terrorization, active or passive, of the colored people of American communities has been one of [the Klan’s] principle objects. It has been the result sometimes of public parades of Klansmen in their uniform, sometimes of posted or published warnings put out in the name of the Klan, sometimes merely of statements given to the press or spread by rumor that the K. K. K. was organizing or organized in a community.”

- U.S. Senator Leonidas C. Dyer, 1921

When Senator Dyer announced that he was worried about the Klan’s “active and premeditated use” of visual tactics to terrorize Black Americans, he did not yet know the scale that such demonstrations would reach. Dyer’s remark opened the Congressional investigation of the Klan in 1921, and shaped his approach to questioning the assembled imperial leaders. Four years before the Klan’s membership reached its greatest heights, its largest public demonstrations did not match the overwhelming size that made later Klan displays so effective. Yet Dyer understood that visual displays could terrorize viewers. Thanks to mass cultural media, the Klan’s trademark rallies could reach larger audiences than ever before.

Many of us are surprised to learn that there are no known images of robed Klansmen committing physical assaults in the early twentieth century. This is not to say that Klansmen were not part of violent mobs, but they either did not wear their regalia or

were not photographed in the act.<sup>618</sup> Photographs of violent mobs and public executions taken in this period demonstrated popular endorsement of white supremacy and the willingness to engage in extra-legal methods to enforce it.<sup>619</sup> These images advertised the fundamental principles at the heart of the Klan, they showed a phenomenon distinct from the organization. Some lynching photographs may have included the organization's members amidst the crowd, but these photographs did not picture *The Klan*.<sup>620</sup> The Klan's absence from this archive raises questions about how Klan leaders signaled the violence at the heart of their organization's project, without picturing it outright.

Lynching photographs were macabre documents of communities engaged in collective brutality, but violence also lurked at the margins of far more banal images of this period. Scenes of domesticity also showed imperial and racial domination, while the documentation of corporate spaces documented the rationalization of labor at work.<sup>621</sup>

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<sup>618</sup> Some scholars have argued that the scant evidence of Klan violence in the organization's records has led to a troubling assessment of the early twentieth century Klan as ineffectual. Nancy MacLean goes so far as to characterize the latter approach as methodologically "naïve," as it reflected scholars use of organizational records that did not include evidence of violent attacks. I take MacLean's point, but also push this discussion towards the ways that the Klan used the bodies of robed Klansmen to enact representational forms of violence, alongside more familiar physical threats. Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry*, 166.

<sup>619</sup> Literary scholar Jacqueline Goldsby has argued that lynching was at once "shocking and ordinary, unexpected and predictable, fantastic and normal, horrifying and banal" (27) for early twentieth-century Americans. Though spectacle lynching comprised a small percentage of mob violence in this period, the spectacle event took on outsized meaning, because it was construed from the start as a shared public experience. Jacqueline Denise Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). For the largest known catalog of lynching photographs, see Allen, James. *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America*. (Twin Palms, 2000).

<sup>620</sup> The closest thing to a Klan robe in any known lynching image is the white garment, reportedly Klan regalia, tied around the otherwise nude body of Abram Smith as he hangs from a tree in Lawrence Beitler's infamous photo of Abram Shipp and Thomas Smith, who were murdered by a mob in Marion, Indiana on August 7, 1930. Dora Apel and Shawn Michelle Smith. *Lynching Photographs*. University of California Press, 2007): 13.

<sup>621</sup> Elspeth H. Brown, *The Corporate Eye: Photography and the Rationalization of American Commercial Culture, 1884-1929*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); Laura Wexler. *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999); Christopher Pinney, ed. *Photography's Other Histories*. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003).

These images not only indexed violent actions, they actively contributed to the reproduction of these ideological projects. The visual rhetoric, what Laura Wexler has called the “grammar” of photographs reveals repeated visual tropes and techniques that signal the operations of power happening just underneath the surface.<sup>622</sup> Jacqueline Goldsby borrows Wexler’s language to think through the visual tropes of lynching photography, in which violence and brutality is never hidden. Images of Klan rallies operate in a strange space between the explicit violence of a lynching and the implicit threat that facilitated the kind of “tender” violence” that Wexler examines. The lack of visual documentation of explicit Klan violence in this period calls for a more careful analysis of the ways in which photographers pictured the Klan, and the way that Klan members and leaders used these images to understand the organization in which they participated.

The familiar photographs of masked Klansmen thus beg a very specific set of questions. What did it mean to picture the Klan in the early twentieth century? How did the practice of representing orderly, uniformed bodies also “actively terrorize” the communities devalued by the Klan’s political project? How, in short, could a peaceful demonstration also convey a threat through a visual register?

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<sup>622</sup> Wexler’s use of photographic “grammar” borrows from Susan Sontag. Wexler, *Tender Violence*, 50. See also Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret*, 219-221 for the application of this term to lynching photography.



Fig: 6.1: “None But Americans May Pass” Atlanta, GA. (ca. 1920-21). J. A. Murdoch, Photographer. Simmons Photo Album. Alabama Department of Archives and History.



Fig 6.2: “The Imperial Wizard Kneeling and Kissing the Flag” Atlanta, GA. (ca. 1920-21). J. A. Murdoch, Photographer. Simmons Photo Album. Alabama Department of Archives and History.

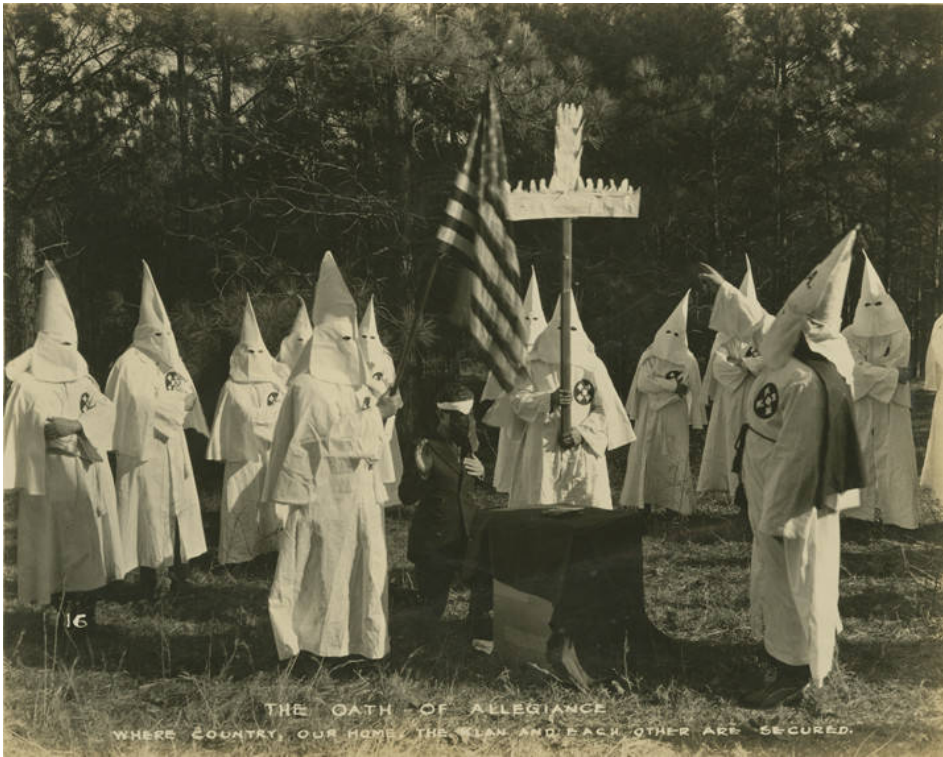


Fig 6.3: “The Oath of Allegiance.” Atlanta, GA. (ca. 1920-21). J. A. Murdoch, Photographer. Simmons Photo Album. Alabama Department of Archives and History.

The earliest images of Klan gatherings were taken by Atlanta photographer J.A. Murdoch, between 1920 and 1921, and later assembled in Simmons’ own photograph album. Murdoch’s photos depicted two different sides of the Klan: a relatively mundane fraternal order, and a secret society performing costumed rituals in wooded locations. The first group of images included photos of Klan officials in everyday dress, images of properties owned by the organization, a business office in downtown Atlanta, and an image of workers producing uniform robes in an Atlanta garment factory. The second group was more dramatic, with images of robed Klansmen performing theatrical rituals, helpfully captioned with text dodged into the surface of the photographic print. Murdoch’s images tell us little about how Klansmen behaved, but they do offer useful insight into



Simmons' vision of Klan as a mixture of modern business practices and anti-modern romantic traditions.



Fig 6.4: William J. Simmons in his office. Atlanta, GA. (ca. 1920-21). J. A. Murdoch, Photographer. Simmons Photo Album. Alabama Department of Archives and History.

Even in pictures of Simmons at his work, representations of the Klan as a powerful threat are interspersed with everyday business accouterments. One of the other Murdoch images is visible on the cover of the *New York Herald* just over Simmons's left shoulder. This photograph mirrors the drawing hanging just above it, though it is barely visible amidst the piles of papers, sentimental drawings, and waving flag that surround the desk.

This tension is visible in these and subsequent photographs of assembled Klans, including officially sanctioned images like those Murdoch produced, photographs taken by photojournalists, and more casual snapshots taken by witnesses of mass



demonstrations. After assembling an archive of photographs showing groups of Klansmen assembled between 1920 and 1929, an overwhelming sense of formal repetition emerges. Representing the Klan in the early 1920's meant trying to measure the organization's scale, a quality that Klan leaders played up with mass demonstrations of robed Klansmen. Uniform robes performed the crucial fiction of national coordination between Klans with different local agendas; as Klansmen in California and Mississippi appeared in public, their individual concerns were subsumed into a broader collective project of "Klan Building."

Klan leaders, and by extension, the photographers who captured their images, portrayed a ritualistic organization whose members performed coordinated actions in a disciplined way. There are few un-staged photographs of Klansmen during this period, a fact that reflects Klan leaders' careful management of its own image through the regulation of members' use of robes.

Robes were used for public events or ceremonies within the Klavern that included initiates preparing for "naturalization" into the Invisible Empire. Reserved for public spectacle, a robed Klansman's body was always on display. Even images whose framing captured some element of chance should still be read as staged images because of the way that uniformed Klansmen presented their robed bodies for public consumption.

Images of robed Klansmen generally took two forms two forms: images of paraded captured from enough distance to show a line of marching figures in formation and photos of mass rituals, often taken at night. Both groups of images feel remarkably static. This is unsurprising in the case of ritual images, given the flashbulb technology necessary for

photographing crowds in the dark, but slightly stranger in images of parades that show groups of Klan in motion.



Fig 6. 5: Klan march in Madison, WI. (Dec 5, 1924). Arthur M. Vinje, Photographer. Arthur M. Vinje Photographs and Negatives Collection, Wisconsin Historical Society.

The photographers of these images chose to position long lines of Klansmen diagonally across the frame of their photographs. The Klansmen march in peaceful formation, but the construction of the image highlights their ominous presence. The lines, comprised of individuals, start to blur into a single white figure towards the rear of the frame. The power of *The Klan*, as an abstract notion, was bound up with the abstracted bodies of anonymous robed figures. These robed bodies hinted at a capacity for violence without making the explicit connection.

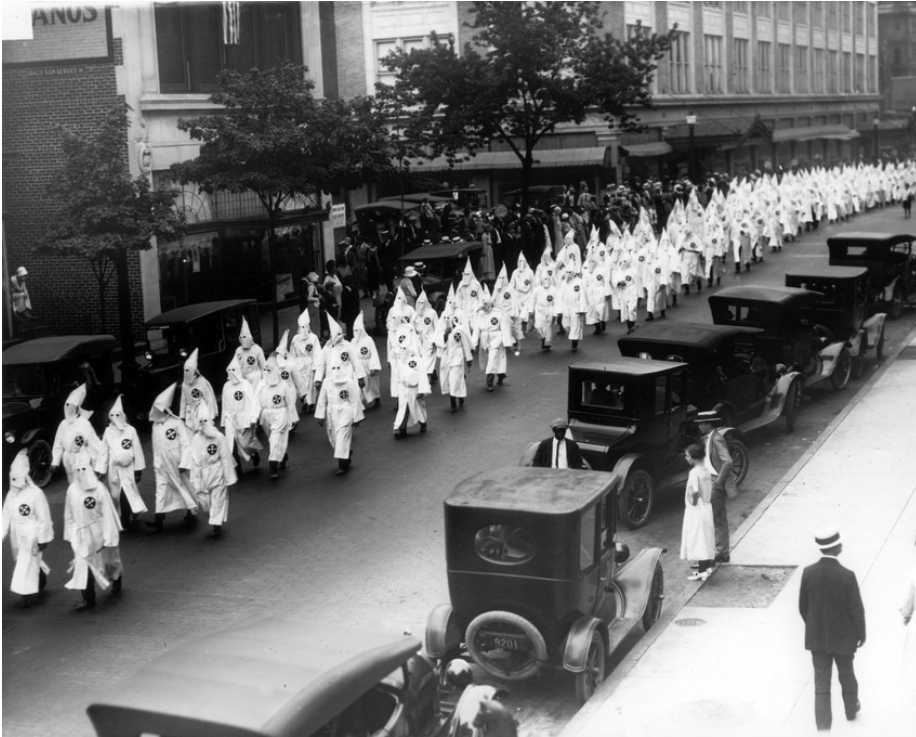


Fig 6.6: Klan March in Richmond, VA. (ca. 1925). Image courtesy of The Valentine, Virginia Commonwealth University  
[https://news.vcu.edu/article/Digital\\_map\\_shows\\_spread\\_of\\_KKK\\_across\\_Unit](https://news.vcu.edu/article/Digital_map_shows_spread_of_KKK_across_Unit)



Fig 6.7: Klan March in Milo, ME. (1923). Photographic Postcard, Island Falls Historical Society.



Fig 6.8: Klan march in East Liverpool, OH. (1925). Salem (OH) Historical Society.

At times the lines of Klansmen collided with other symbolic linear forms in the image. In the photo of Klansmen marching in East Liverpool, Ohio (above) Klansmen form a sign of the cross, again using linearity to underscore the Protestantism at the heart of their project. In others, as in the photo of Klansmen marching in Portland, Maine, the Klansmen align with the row of telephone poles fixed alongside the road. These poles symbolized modernity, as the wires that ran between them represented new modes of communication changing the way that Americans engaged with one another. And yet the telephone pole was also a technology of violence, providing the infrastructure for numerous lynchings across the South during this same period. These lines of promise and threat traveled along the same routes as the marching Klansmen.



Fig 6.9: Klan march in Portland, Maine, 1923. Maine Memory Network, Maine Historical Society.

Photos of Klansmen, and sometimes women, marching in uniformed formation give an overall impression of the organization as a coherent mass, suggesting continuity between Beaumont, Tennessee (1922); Milo, Maine (1923); Springfield, Ohio (1923); Portland, Maine (1923); Lincoln, Maine (1924); Madison, Wisconsin (1924) Lincoln, Nebraska (1924); East Liverpool, Ohio (1925); Grand Rapids, Michigan (1925); Richmond, Virginia (1925); Ashland, Oregon (nd); and the largest Klan rallies in Washington D.C., (1925 and 1926).





Fig 6.10: Klan march in Ashland, Oregon. (nd). Oregon State Historical Society.

The majority of these photos are composed to show the Klan from some distance. This was a formal decision that effectively documented the size of Klan demonstrations, but it also reinforced the way that Klan leaders wanted their organization to be seen, a partner to the Simmons office photograph. Images of Klans marching in formation make it hard to miss a sense of uniformity, discipline, and its separation from the everyday life of the town. The documentation of these qualities was not the same as the photographer's endorsement of the Klan's ideology, but images such as this, in which the linear formation is comprised as a series of flanks extending again diagonally across the frame, did not challenge the Klan's self-presentation.



Fig 6.11: Klan funeral procession in an unknown location. (1923). Prints and Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress.

Photos of larger groups of Klansmen also suggested a compositional strategy for picturing smaller demonstration, like the Klan funeral pictured above. While this assembled group lacks the numbers visible in other images of Klan in formation, the framing is similar. Again, the Klan is offered at a slight distance—not so far as to make the garments unintelligible, but far enough so that the white robes and hoods transform their wearers into symbolic forms.

A closer view of any given image of a Klan parade shows us all the places where the organization fell apart on an individual level. Many Klansmen marched out of step while wearing ill-fitting robes with unclipped seams and backwards buttons, as in the funeral march above. All of this was erased through distance and crowd, so that the

specific comportment of any particular Klansman mattered far less than his relation to others in his near proximity



Fig 6.12: Klan rally in Lake Zurich IL. (1921) *The Chicago Tribune*.

A final category of images shows assembled Klansmen for mass public rituals, most frequently for public initiation ceremonies. In these images, Klansmen gather in formation, often around crosses with real or simulated fire, and replicate the shape of crosses with their robed bodies. In this particular image shown above, the uniform shape is manipulated by the wearer's body to replicate the cross form in the horizon of the image, ad infinitum. Layering the Klan's two most threatening symbols—uniform regalia and fiery cross—linked the symbolic image with the notion that the organization venerated in these ceremonies was to be feared and obeyed.



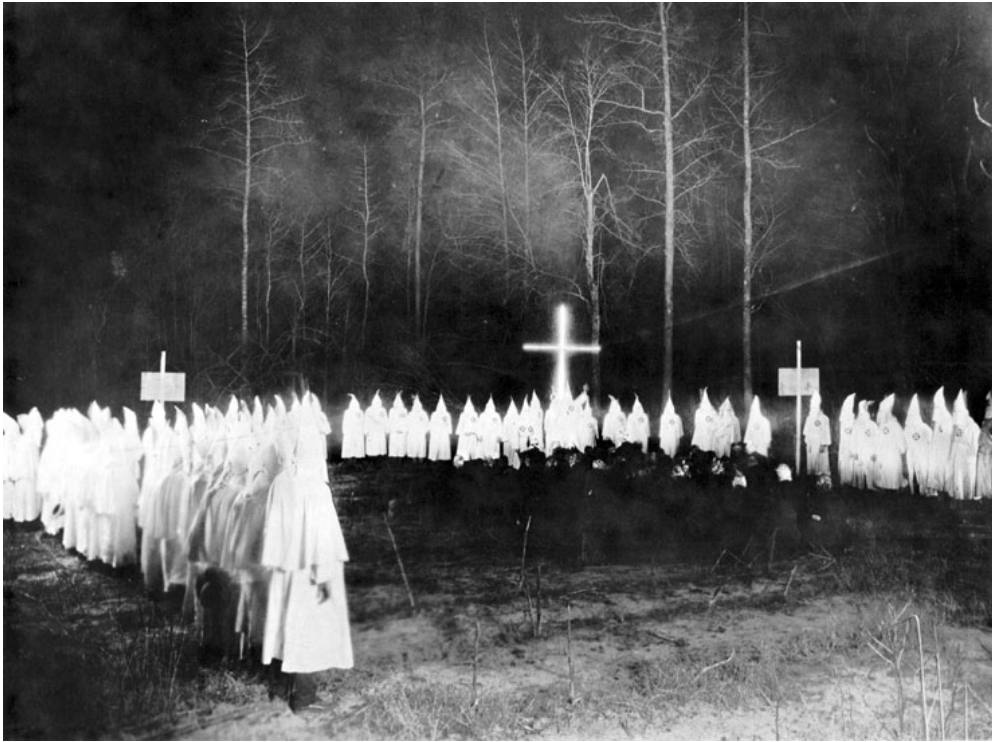


Fig 6.13: Klan rally in El Dorado (Union County), AR. (ca. 1920's). Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Arkansas Library.

None of this was coincidence, as Klan regalia scripted the photographer's representation of robed Klansmen. This perspective makes focusing on any individual challenging because the contrast between the white robes and everything around them is so stark that the exposure is overblown and hard to see. The glaring whiteness of robes, the uniformity of groups of robed Klansmen, and the strange shape of these garments, which visually distinguished members from non-members, all contributed to the perception of a uniform Klan. Photographing large groups of Klan members made this kind of relationship particularly easy to grasp, as the particularities of one masked figure can easily start to blend into the next. In these initiation photos, the kneeling oath takers, with their backs to camera, also bleed into each other and become anonymous. The first

step to become part of *The Klan* instead of individual men was to join one of these gatherings.

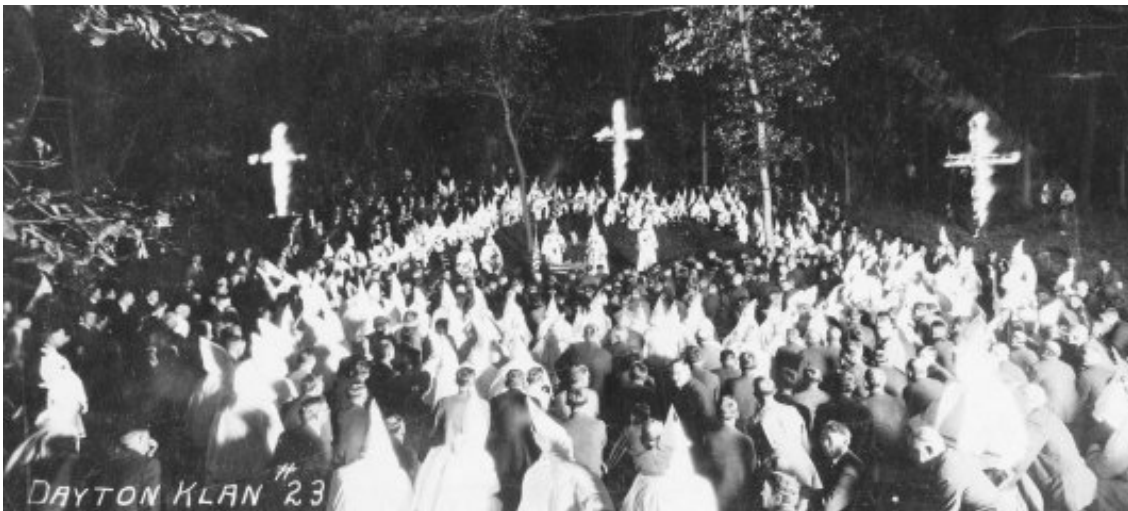


Fig 6.14: Klan rally in Dayton, OH. (September 27, 1924). *Dayton Daily News*.



Fig 6.15: Klan ceremony in Valdosta, GA. (October 10, 1922).  
Vanishing Georgia, Georgia Archives, University System of Georgia.



Fig 6.16: Klan ceremony, Unknown Location, June 28, 1922. National Photo Company, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.



Fig 6.17: Klan Ceremony in Denver, CO. (1925). Western History and Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library.



Fig 6.18: Klan initiation near Richmond, TX. (September 4, 1922) Fort Bend Museum.

Photos of public demonstrations played a critical role in the invention of the Klan as a national organization amidst a period of exponential growth. Masks and uniform garments made assembled gatherings of Klansmen into representations of the masses that Klan leaders hoped to assemble. In attempting to render the overwhelming scale of the organization, photographers often reproduced the leaders' characterization of citizenship in the Invisible Empire as a voluntary submission to anonymity, in service to a greater whole. This anonymity made it possible for photographs of any given Klan gathering to appear representative of the organization as a large, standing in for the abstracted idea of *the Klan* as much as they offered evidence of Klan operations in a particular location.

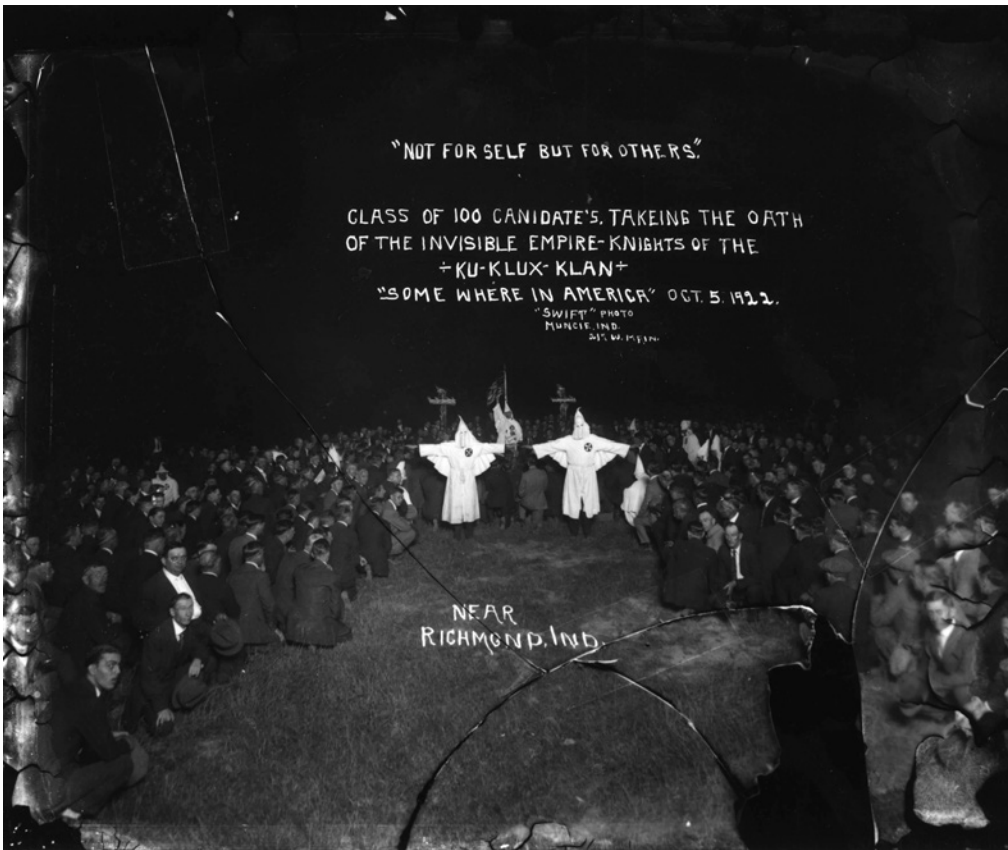


Fig 6.19: Klan initiation ceremony near Richmond, IN. (Oct 5, 1922) W. A. Swift, Photographer. W. A. Swift Collection , Ball State University Library

The repetition between images taken thousands of miles apart suggests that the circulation of representations of the Klan shaped the way that photographers chose to frame assembled groups of Klansmen, as they increasingly relied on familiar compositional techniques legible to a broader American public. There is no evidence that these parameters were outlined by Klan leaders, though Klansmen undoubtedly played a role in coordinating early images—like those taken by Murdoch—that helped photographers to see the spectacular potential of the Klan. Leaders likely shaped compositions in more oblique ways by calling massive rituals that demanded certain formal techniques—the panorama, the overhead shot, the distant view—to be legible to

viewers not present. The Klan's ability to disseminate this sight, through an ever-proliferating archive of parades, images, and events, facilitated a uniform vision of *the Klan* that could encourage its further replication.



Fig 6.20: Ku Klux Klan Rally Day Poster, nd. Alabama Textual Materials Collection, Alabama Department of Archives and History

Photographic representations may have also shaped how the Klan portrayed itself, as this pair of posters suggest. The first invited robed Klansmen to join thousands of others a “Klan Day Rally” at the Opelika District Fair, in East Alabama, while the second announced that Fifty Thousand Klansmen would gather for an initiation ceremony in Washington State. In the first image, members are repeatedly reminded the importance of bringing their robes—as the poster claims, members who bring robes will even get in free.

If the event and subsequent images of spectacle lynchings and other forms of mob violence “normalize[d] and [made] socially acceptable” a grotesque act, without taking away any of the violent threat depicted, then perhaps these photos of the Klan performed similar work.<sup>623</sup> These images could at once normalize the Klan, by creating familiar visual patterns and scenes, and at the same time circulate images of figures wearing uniform garments designed to evoke a still real historical threat. *The Klan* was something invented through performance and image, a fact that did not make masked and robed Klansmen (or unmasked and unrobed Klansmen, for that matter) any less real. Mass performances offered the public a way to see the Klan, but through their participation in these events and the circulation of representations after the fact, Klansmen also learned how to see themselves not only as a *uniformed* body, but as a *uniform* body.

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<sup>623</sup> Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 75.

## Chapter 7: Tearing off the Mask

The Klan marched into Lorena, Texas against the direct orders of the town's sheriff in October of 1921.<sup>624</sup> (*Fig 7.1*) Despite the potential for conflict, three thousand spectators traveled from neighboring towns to see the parade, and what followed was less of a patriotic demonstration than it was a melee. The crowd of marchers and spectators started to riot after Sheriff Bob Buchanan and two deputies tried to halt the line of Klansmen as they reached an intersection near the central business district. Two hours earlier, Buchanan met with two leaders of the group and demanded that the marchers reveal their identities in order for the parade to occur as planned. Like the other marchers, the group's leaders were dressed in full, regulation Klan regalia, with white masks that covered their faces. Not only did the leaders refuse to reveal the identities of their colleagues, they remained masked for the entire meeting with the sheriff. The meeting was an utter failure.

Buchanan's hard stance against the masked Klansmen was a decision about his own jurisdiction, but it was also part of an argument that was larger than the events in Lorena. Three months earlier, Texas Governor Pat Neff introduced legislation that would

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<sup>624</sup> "Blame Sherriff for Clash: Delegation of Lorena Citizens Exonerates Ku Klux Klan in Battle With Posse." *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 3, 1921; "Grand Jury to Act on Klan Clash." *New York Times*. Oct. 3, 1921; "Grand Jury to Probe Ku Klux Klan Clash with Texas Sheriff: Lorena Citizens Blame Sheriff for Interfering with Parade of Clansmen and Wounding of Ten Men During Street Fight." *Arizona Republican*, Oct. 3, 1921; "Klansmen and Sherriff Clash with Refusal to Unmask in Lorena TX." *The American Hebrew & Jewish Messenger*, Oct. 14, 1921.



“bar members of any secret organization, masked or unmasked, who attempted arbitrarily to enforce the laws of the State, from holding office.”<sup>625</sup> Neff’s proposal occurred after forty-nine members of the state house lobbied him to include anti-Klan legislation on the agenda for the upcoming special session, but the Southern Democrat’s motivations were by no means rooted in anti-racist or progressive politics. Along with the pointedly anti-Klan legislation, Neff requested laws that would make interracial cohabitation and a man’s desertion of his family subject to felony charges.<sup>626</sup> He argued that these new laws would reduce the necessity for extralegal moral policing in the state, and thus diminished the degree to which citizens would feel the need to intimidate their neighbors into following unspoken moral codes. The problem of the Klan, Neff argued, was not in the underlying moral structure of the organization, but instead in its secrecy and refusal to operate within the bounds of the law. Governor Neff’s legislation wasn’t about unmasking the Klan; he was more interested in making Klansmen see that the government was already doing their work for them, within existing legal channels.<sup>627</sup>

The conflict in Lorena stemmed from a similar concern. Sheriff Buchanan’s insistence that Klansmen reveal their identities in order to parade was not a repudiation of the Klan’s ideological goals. Rather it was a way of protecting law enforcement agents, and the community they served, from overzealous Klansmen taking the law into their own hands. The crowd of thousands easily overwhelmed the tiny town of less than 500 residents, located just outside of Waco, and it’s no surprise that a crowd of fifty masked

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<sup>625</sup> “Texas Bill Hits at Secret Societies: Klan Is Made Vehicle for Driving Home Arguments for Law Enforcement.” *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 3, 1921.

<sup>626</sup> Neff was referring explicitly to Black-white cohabitation. “Grand Jury to Act on Ku Klux Clash,” *New York Times*. Oct. 3, 1921.

<sup>627</sup> “Texas Bill Hits at Secret Societies.” *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 3, 1921.

men—even self-described patriots—put the sheriff on edge.<sup>628</sup> The demand for the Klansmen to unmask was in some ways a performative request. It's unclear whether the Klansmen marching in Lorena were from the town itself, or if the small-town sheriff and members of the crowd would have recognized their identities if they were to reveal their faces. The call to unmask had a rhetorical-ethical motivation: revealing the Klansmen's faces would force them to take legal responsibility for their actions. What came next resulted directly from a kind of unmasking that was more material and immediate.

When Buchanan and his deputies stopped the marching Klansmen, a crowd of spectators tried to remove the mask of a Klansman marching with an American flag, and all hell broke loose. As Klansmen rushed to rescue their colleague and protect his identity, more spectators entered the fray. The event came to a dramatic conclusion when Sheriff Buchanan was knocked to the ground by a pole carrying the Klan's standard: a modern "fiery cross" complete with two rows of electric light bulbs. The bullets that shot through Buchanan's lung and lodged in his knee were less symbolic, though far more dangerous. In addition to the sheriff, one of the spectators was seriously wounded with, as one newspaper put it, his "liver virtually cut in two."<sup>629</sup> Eight other men received knife and bullet wounds of varying severity, though none of them were reported to be members of the Klan. After the fight, Buchanan and his deputies were left with their wounds, but no suspects in custody. While law enforcement agents roiled at the obvious disrespect for legal authority, a group of Lorena residents responded with a public repudiation of the sheriff for inciting the riot. Their seven-part statement received national syndication, as

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<sup>628</sup> *Handbook of Texas Online*, Vivian Elizabeth Smyrl, "Lorena, TX," accessed May 15, 2017, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hll61>.

<sup>629</sup> "Grand Jury to Probe Ku Klux Klan Clash with Texas Sheriff." *Arizona Republican*. Oct. 3, 1921.

they held the sheriff accountable for “the shedding of blood” in their town.<sup>630</sup> The brawl in Lorena stemmed directly from the Klan’s refusal to unmask for what was to be a peaceful parade. However, the subsequent investigation into the misconduct of the sheriff, and lack of perpetrators to hold accountable, only reinforced Texas Governor Neff’s arguments for why the Klan’s masks were dangerous in the first place. The clash in Lorena underscored the need for regulations that would require Klansmen to reveal their faces. The masked Klan was a threat to legitimate legal authority, and no amount of peaceful marching would convince him otherwise.

In this, as in many other cases during this period, critics argued that masks provided visual evidence of the Klan’s disregard for legal authority. Klan leaders, in turn, defended the group’s use of masks in ideological terms, as these tools transformed groups of individuals into a coordinated “mass.”<sup>631</sup> The distinctive shape and ideological significance of Klan dress made each member a representation of the group’s politics, and, ideally, the mask’s anonymizing function served to further disconnect individuals from their own agendas in service of a larger collective project. This sense of submission to a larger cause was the basis of the Klan’s claim to support patriotic nationalism. The legal battle over Klansmen’s rights to assemble while wearing regalia took place on federal, state, and local levels over the next seven years.<sup>632</sup> During this period, anti-Klan

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<sup>630</sup> “Blame Sheriff for Clash” *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 3, 1921.

<sup>631</sup> Hiram Evans, “The Klan of Yesterday and Today,” (1924) 12. KKK Collection, AHC.

<sup>632</sup> Prior scholarship on unmasking has focused on the contemporary use of early twentieth century anti-masking laws as precedent for legal challenges to masking practices for Klansmen, anarchists, and women who veil their faces for religious reasons. Lone Riisgaard, and Bjørn Thomassen. “Powers of the Mask: Political Subjectivation and Rites of Participation in Local-Global Protest.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 33, no. 6 (November 1, 2016): 75–98; Evan Darwin Winet. “Face-Veil Bans and Anti-Mask Laws: State Interests and the Right to Cover the Face Note.” *Hastings International and Comparative Law Review* 35 (2012): 217–52. “Constitutional Law - Free Speech - Second Circuit Upholds New York’s Anti-Mask Statute against Challenge by Klan-Related Group - Church of the American Knights of the Ku Klux Klan v.

organizers of many political leanings pursued both local and national efforts to get the Klan to unmask.<sup>633</sup> The strategies led to an uneasy convergence of groups invested in a more progressive, and even radical vision of an anti-racist society, and law-and-order politicians for whom the masked Klan stood in the way of the law. The ways that Klan leaders and members responded to these legal attacks precipitated the Klan's decline in the late 1920s, and shaped the organization's legacy into the present.

### **Legally Unmasking the Klan**

#### **(Fig 7.2)**

“Unmask” was a capacious term that did a lot of work for anti-Klan activists. Since the Klan was obsessed with secrecy, code words, and any bit of subterfuge that would obscure the operation of its massive bureaucratic machinery, to “unmask” the Klan would be to make these workings visible. As demonstrated in Lorena, the strategy of unmasking was more than a metaphor; it was a material practice that shaped the legal strategy used to fight the Klan. During Reconstruction, victims of Klan violence testifying before the Joint Select Committee in 1870 routinely detailed encounters with costumed Klansmen in which they recognized their attackers. The practice of upending the Klan's claim to secrecy was in these cases a physical practice—peering around, behind, and through strange masks in order to commit the identity of a Klansman to memory. Testimony by

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Kerik Recent Cases.” *Harvard Law Review* 117 (2004 2003): 2777–84; Stephen J. Simoni, “Who Goes There--Proposing A Model Anti-Mask Act Note.” *Fordham Law Review* 61 (1993 1992): 241–74; Wayne R. Allen. “Klan, Cloth and Constitution: Anti-Mask Laws and the First Amendment Notes.” *Georgia Law Review* 25 (1991 1990): 819–60; Jack Swertfeger Jr. “Anti-Mask and Anti-Klan Laws Comment.” *Journal of Public Law* 1 (1952): 182–92.

<sup>633</sup> See, 187 Wis. 448; 204 N.W. 486; *Shields v. State*; Supreme Court of Wisconsin (June 22, 1925). George Shields was convicted of “assault with intent to do bodily harm” by the Circuit Court of Grant County WI, and the ruling was upheld by the WI Supreme Court. Shields’ case was remarkably similar to the brawl in Lorena: he attempted to unmask a Klansman during a march in Boscobel, WI where Shields was a night watchman. Another marching Klansman punched Shields, and he responded by firing his gun at the man who punched him. Though Shields’ gun did not discharge, the Klansman was nonetheless charged with assault.

victims during the early twentieth century was no different: convictions of Klansmen still required identification of the attacker.

Disguising perpetrators was a useful function of these masks, but they served a purpose larger than the scale of any particular attack. In the early twentieth century, uniform Klan regalia anonymized members, transforming individuals into representatives of a mass social movement. This function was similar to the role that strange costume played for members of the nineteenth-century Klan, but differences in the political strategies between Klans in these two periods show how masking functioned in a different way. In both cases, the sight of Klan regalia was to suggest the threat of danger to those who opposed the Klan's political project. But while the threat the Reconstruction Klan posed was immediate and acute, the early twentieth century Klan more often used regalia obliquely. Regalia signaled threat to potential victims, however, a half-century of lynching violence handily demonstrated that masks were not a necessary component of vigilante action.

In fact, the uniformity of Klan regalia performed a complicated double-speak. The anonymizing function of these garments, the clear hierarchy demonstrated in their decorative elements, and the extensive internal regulations governing their use, could also be used as examples of the order's disciplined morality, as Klan leaders frequently argued. Depending on the identity of any given viewer, the visibility of mass gatherings of Klansmen could be read as a deterrent to the disruption of order, as leaders argued, or a physical threat of violence to anyone whose lived existence disrupted the order that the Klan was trying to impose. In reality, these viewpoints were two sides of the same coin—on one hand the threat of violence made society safer, on the other, it clearly did not.

If “unmasking” was a term freighted with rhetorical significance, it also had material weight as a strategy for challenging the Klan’s legitimacy. The most powerful legal attacks on the Klan in the 1920s were in fact sartorial challenges, a tactic that confirmed the representational power of uniform Klan regalia, even as it attempted to dismantle the organization these garments represented. The Texas Anti-Klan Law of August 1921 was the first legislative action directed at the organization since Reconstruction. Over the next four years, the organization would face legal challenges in at least fourteen other states. In 1922, state legislatures in Oregon and Georgia passed anti-Klan measures. By the end of 1923, legislatures had similar regulations on the books in New Mexico, North Dakota, Minnesota, Washington State, Arizona, Michigan, New York, and Illinois. The following year, Iowa, Louisiana, Utah, and parts of Indiana grappled with anti-mask bills. The terms of these legal restrictions varied, but all placed the Klan’s practice of masking at the center of their challenge to the organization’s legitimacy.

Regulating the use of clothing in order to control Klan activity was a familiar strategy for lawmakers by the early 1920s, though the tactic actually predated the organization of the Klan. In 1845, New York lawmakers passed a law intended to curb a revolt of tenant farmers, who dressed themselves as self-styled “Indians” to protest their treatment by landowners.<sup>634</sup> The “act to prevent persons appearing disguised and armed” imposed penalties for appearing in outdoor, public spaces with “his face painted, discolored, covered or concealed, or being otherwise disguised, in a manner calculated to

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<sup>634</sup> Ruthann Robson, *Dressing Constitutionally*, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013) 125-126; Reeve Huston. *Land and Freedom: Rural Society, Popular Protest, and Party Politics in Antebellum New York*. (Oxford, UK ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

prevent him from being identified.”<sup>635</sup> Individuals arrested in such a condition faced a charge of “vagrancy” if unable to account convincingly for their disguised state. More serious, however, was the combination of costume and weapons, which carried the punishment of a significant fine, a prison sentence, or both. As legal scholar Ruthann Robson points out, this law was likely based on the 1723 Waltham Black Act, designed to limit the actions of British poachers who blackened their faces to take game from the property of landed gentry.<sup>636</sup> Like the New York law, the Waltham Black Act criminalized the use of disguise while armed. Both statutes tried to distinguish criminal disguise from costume used for pleasure and entertainment, but the New York law recognized that costumed figures could still have criminal intent, even without a weapon. Criminalizing costume in New York made sense in part because of early nineteenth century attempts to label popular masquerades and masked balls as “nuisances,” in the terms of the Pennsylvania penal code of 1808.<sup>637</sup> New York’s subsequent “Act for the Prevention of Masquerades” became law in 1829, though attempts to make the use of masks a criminal behavior were never successful, beyond the 1845 challenge to the anti-rent strikers.<sup>638</sup>

These regulations set the groundwork for using disguise to identify and challenge the validity of the Ku Klux Klan after its formation in 1866. An imperative for Kluxers to “unmask” was at the center of the first major piece of anti-Klan legislation, the Force Act of 1870 (later called the First Enforcement Act). Passed by the U.S. Congress in May of

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<sup>635</sup> “An Act to prevent persons appearing disguised and armed. Passed Jan 28, 1845.” *Laws of the State of New York, Passed by 68th session of Legislature*, Albany NY, 1845. (5-7).

<sup>636</sup> Ruthann Robson, *Dressing Constitutionally*, 125.

<sup>637</sup> “Penalty on Masquerades” Act of Feb 15, 1808. *A Digest of the Laws of Pennsylvania from the Year 1700 to the 16. Day of June 1836*. 5th ed. Philadelphia, PA: M’Carty & Davis, 1837.

<sup>638</sup> Robson, *Dressing Constitutionally*, 126.

1870, the overarching purpose of this act was to enact and protect the voting rights laid out in the Fifteenth Amendment, since “Race, color, or previous condition of servitude [were] not to affect the right to vote at any elections.”<sup>639</sup> Over the next seven pages, the act spelled out penalties for individuals and government officials who obstructed voters, tried to control the outcome of a particular vote, or voted unlawfully. The bill also authorized the president’s use of federal troops to “enforce” these provisions. Though not explicitly directed at former Confederate states, there was no question as to which Americans the legislation targeted. The act’s sixth article focused even more narrowly on the costumed Ku Klux who violently opposed the voting rights of Black men and Republicans across the South. Felony charges would result when “two or more persons shall band or conspire together, or go in disguise upon the public highway, or upon the premises of another, with intent to violate any provision of this act, or to injure, oppress, threaten, or intimidate any citizen with intent to prevent or hinder his free exercise and enjoyment of any right or privileges granted or secured to him by the Constitution or laws of the United States” Conviction, under these conditions, hinged on a question of the attacker’s intent.<sup>640</sup>

One year later, Congress approved two amendments to the initial Force Act. The first passed at the end of February in 1871. It gave the federal government more power over local election procedures by clarifying the process of voter registration and detailing the relationship between election supervisors and U.S. Marshalls, and expanded judicial oversight over the process. Congress approved a second amendment to the Force Act two months after that, stating that attempts to deny US citizens equal protection under the law

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<sup>639</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> enforcement act, Section 6.

<sup>640</sup> Ibid; Foner, *Reconstruction*, 444-459.



were a form of rebellion against the national government, and could thus be quelled by federal troops if necessary. In doing so, Congress gave President Grant the right to suspend the writ of habeas corpus, effectively overriding due process guaranteed by the Constitution. The Ku Klux Klan was never mentioned by name in these bills, but there was no doubt for lawmakers and members of the Southern public that Kluxers were the strangely-costumed specters that these laws were designed to suppress. Newspapers even started referring to the Force Acts as “The Ku Klux Laws” or “Ku Klux Acts” as early as January of 1871.<sup>641</sup>

Attempts to curb the use of disguise factored into only the first Force Act, and even there these garments were restricted based on the wearer’s intent. Outlawing the use of disguise for these purposes was thus important, but for a Congress enacting radical civil rights reform, costumes were an epiphenomenal sign of larger problems: secession, voter suppression, and violence against Black Southerners. Klan victims confirmed this perspective, and their testimony before courts and the Joint Select Committee investigating the Klan in 1870 generally focused on the effects of Klan attacks, rather than the methods Kluxers used. The degree to which costume could be responsible for Klan violence was a site for debate during this period, but the inclusion of dress in the first Force Act confirmed that costume was at the very least a tool whose use must be restricted. Still, the restriction of costume was mentioned only in the first of the five enforcement acts that Congress passed between 1870 and 1872. While these laws contained powerful legal language, white Southerners remained resistant to what they viewed as federal, and thus Republican, overreach, much less the new racial and social order that this early civil rights legislation was to protect. Moreover, Republican

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<sup>641</sup> *Nashville Union and American* (TN), Jan. 28, 1871; *Daily Phoenix* (Columbia, SC) Feb. 23, 1871.

legislators sent mixed messages about their commitments to the project, never approving the funding necessary to implement these measures. Southern Democrats played up these dynamics during 1874 congressional races, and with the re-enshrinement of the Democratic Party across the South, Northern lawmakers largely turned towards the process of political reunification, at the expense of civil rights gains for Black Americans.

### **Lobbying for Civil Rights**

The critical mass of anti-Klan legislation in 1923 was no accident, nor was it a spontaneous response to the Klan's own expansion program. In October of 1923, a new group called the National Vigilance Association (NVA) announced its formation by sending query letters to men "prominent in the educational and professional life of the nation." James Weldon Johnson received one such letter, which announced his appointment to the National Committee of the organization before asking his permission.<sup>642</sup> As an important national figure, the writer and secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) was a natural fit, along with the senators, judges, university presidents, and union leaders listed on the association's letterhead. The express purpose of the NVA was to "disintegrate" the Klan, as one reporter put it, and many of the men that the NVA queried were willing to support the organization's efforts—even if the details of who was behind the organization, and how it was funded, were not clear.<sup>643</sup>

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<sup>642</sup> Edmond F. Corcoran, Letter to James Weldon Johnson. "Query Letter from NVA, Requesting Membership on Natl. Board." Letter, October 25, 1923. NAACP Papers, Part 11 Series B Roll 5. LOC; Johnson to Corcoran, "Weldon Johnson Reminding Natl. Vigilance Assn That NAACP Has Been Fighting Klan since 1919." Letter, November 8, 1923. NAACP Papers, Part 11 Series B Roll 5. LOC.

<sup>643</sup> "Association Is Formed to Disintegrate Klan." *American Israelite* (Cincinnati, OH). Nov. 15, 1923.

Compared to the NAACP, which had been waging a battle against lynching violence for over two decades, the NVA was a small lobbying operation. Its strategy borrowed tactics from the NAACP's public appeal campaigns: members of the association were to provide their names to the cause, while the group's few staffers badgered politicians to propose and support anti-Klan legislation at the state level.<sup>644</sup> The organization's founders (a mix of journalists, publicists, and veterans of community campaigns for organizations such as the Red Cross) left no records of the organization's formation, or what their plans were for the group beyond their support for anti-Klan legislation. Likewise, reports of the organization died out relatively quickly, lasting no more than a year from November 1923. But the effects of lobbying by the NVA, and its longer-lasting model, the NAACP, lasted well beyond 1924, and shaped the way that both Black and white Americans saw the Ku Klux Klan.

The NAACP's strategy for challenging the Klan emerged from its existing fight against lynching violence, which was at the fore of civil rights activism in the period following Reconstruction.<sup>645</sup> From its founding in 1909, the NAACP kept detailed

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<sup>644</sup> "Denies He Belongs to Anti-Klan Body" *New York Times*. Nov. 13, 1923; "Fighting for Tolerance." *New York Times*. Nov. 13, 1923; J. A. Gregg Letter to James Weldon Johnson. "Gregg Asking If Natl. Vigilance Assn Is Real." Letter, Dec. 10, 1923. NAACP Papers, Part 11 Series B Roll 5. Library of Congress; Gregg, Telegram to Johnson, Dec. 2, 1923. NAACP Papers, Part 11 Series B Roll 5. Library of Congress; Johnson, James Weldon. Letter to Wilson Lovett. "Weldon Johnson Confirming Support of NVA to Black Banker from KY." Letter, Dec. 31, 1923. NAACP Papers, Part 11 Series B Roll 5. Library of Congress; Johnson. Telegram to Gregg. "Weldon Johnson on Board of Directors of National Vigilance Association." Telegram, Dec. 7, 1923. NAACP Papers, Part 11 Series B Roll 5. Library of Congress; Johnson, James Weldon, and James A. Walker. Letter. "NAACP Asking for Several Copies of Walker Anti-Klan Bill." Letter, Jan. 12, 1924. NAACP Papers, Part 11 Series B Roll 5. Library of Congress; "Vigilance Society Begins its fight against Ku Klux Klan." *Washington Post*; Nov. 12, 1923, sec. General; "War on Klan in All States In Now Begun by a New Group: National Vigilance Association Formed in Washington in the Fight." *Muncie Post-Democrat*. Nov. 23, 1923.

<sup>645</sup> The following section draws on several subject files of collected correspondence regarding anti-lynching legislation in the NAACP files, and Megan Ming Francis' excellent political history of the NAACP. *Civil Rights and the Making of the Modern American State*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). See Papers of the NAACP, Subject Files "Curtis Resolution calling for congressional investigation of lynching, mob violence, and race riots," Part 07: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955, Series B: Anti-Lynching

records on lynchings and mob killings, and conducted investigations into violent attacks against Black Americans.<sup>646</sup> The NAACP used multiple tactics as it undertook this work. First, NAACP officials collected both quantitative and qualitative data on lynching violence in order to better diagnose this epidemic and portray it to a wider public. Its influential report, “Thirty Years of Lynching in the United States, 1889-1919,” became a touchstone of anti-lynching organizing in subsequent decades. Second, NAACP leaders used their platform to recruit new members and position their organization as a site for building solidarity and conducting political education among members across the nation. Third, leaders encouraged members to participate in public campaigns that put pressure on civic leaders and businesses to further the goals of the organization. One early NAACP project was galvanizing popular challenges to screenings of *The Birth of a Nation*.<sup>647</sup> Under the helm of W. E. B. Du Bois, the NAACP’s magazine, *The Crisis*, became a clearinghouse for recording and disseminating information about anti-Black violence. Du Bois’s writings on the experience of Black life in America and Europe likely shaped his approach to reporting on both material and representational forms of violence in the pages of *The Crisis*.<sup>648</sup> Along with producing their own publication, NAACP officials engaged in a vigorous media campaign with the hope of shaping the agenda of other publications as

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Legislative and Publicity Files, 1916-1955; “Anti-Lynching Campaign Correspondence” in Papers of the NAACP, Part 07: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955, Series A: Anti-Lynching Investigative Files, 1912-1953; “Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill” Papers of the NAACP, Part 07: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912-1955, Series B: Anti-Lynching Legislative and Publicity Files, 1916-1955, LOC.

<sup>646</sup> Jonathan Markovitz. *Legacies of Lynching: Racial Violence and Memory*. (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2004) 4-6.

<sup>647</sup> “NAACP Protesting The Birth of A Nation,” *The Crisis*, July 1915. Another Fight Over Photo-Play: Founded on Tom Dixon’s Infamous Book ‘The Clansman.’” *Cleveland Gazette*. April 10, 1915. See “NAACP Campaign Against the Birth of a Nation,” Group 1, Series C, Administrative Files, Subject Files, 1912-1939 Series A, LOC.

<sup>648</sup> Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*, 179-221.

well. NAACP Secretary John Shillady and Secretary Assistant Walter White wrote thousands of letters encouraging, cajoling, correcting, and threatening public shame upon newspapers and magazines for the way they wrote about violence against Black Americans. Some of these letters went to local chamber of commerce associations, from Detroit to Greensboro, NC; business associations, like the National Shoe Wholesalers' Association; and private businesses, in each case seeking public support and assistance lobbying politicians.<sup>649</sup> These epistolary campaigns offered a way for the NAACP to affect a broad swath of Americans who would never come to a chapter meeting or subscribe to a magazine committed to civil rights. Building on Ida B. Wells Barnett's anti-lynching campaigns of the 1890s, the organization demonstrated that continued attacks on Black bodies threatened the cultural, political, and economic advancements of Black Americans. From this vantage point, the organization sought to show Americans that lynching violence, and indeed any racially motivated violence against Black Americans, was a moral problem that threatened American society as a whole. Each of these three strategies became central to the NAACP's ultimate project: lobbying elected officials to support anti-lynching legislation at local and national levels. Emerging from the popular interest media campaign, the NAACP's involvement in legislative action expanded as leaders of the organization worked with legislators to develop legal strategies that transformed their anti-racist mission into public policy.

These tactics resulted in varying levels of success. One ongoing frustration was the NAACP's inability to get a major anti-lynching bill through both houses of the U.S. Congress, despite the organization's well-developed lobbying apparatus. The NAACP supported no less than three major initiatives, including the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill,

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<sup>649</sup> Various correspondence NAACP Papers, Part 7, Series A, Folder 001527-002-0179.

introduced to the US House of Representatives in 1918, the Curtis Resolution (US Senate, September 1919), and, following the failure of these proposals to pass both houses of Congress, the Costigan-Wagner Anti-Lynching Bill of 1934.

Leonidas Dyer, a Republican congressman from Missouri, introduced his eponymous bill to the Introduced to the US house in 1918. The Dyer Bill made murders committed by a mob (three persons or more) a national crime, or as W. E. B. Du Bois put it in 1920, “an offense against the United States.”<sup>650</sup> This was one of several pieces of mob-control legislation under consideration by Congress in the early summer of 1918. Congressmen from Indiana and Illinois both introduced resolutions to the House, alongside the Dyer Bill. At the same time, the Intelligence Bureau of the War Department proposed anti-lynching measures drafted by members of the Military Intelligence Bureau.<sup>651</sup> Though NAACP staff was hard at work supporting, and in some cases, authoring these measures, there were political reasons to keep the organization’s advocacy a secret. As NAACP secretary John Shillady explained to economist Emily Balch, the Military Intelligence Committee’s proposed bill to protect citizens against lynching was drafted in consultation with the NAACP, but “because of Southern prejudice,” its lead architect would “not disclose his connection with this Association.”<sup>652</sup> The NAACP’s pursuit of multiple legislative efforts to curb lynching made a lot of sense; the organization often engaged in a strategy of redundancy, pursuing as many avenues to effect change as

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<sup>650</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “The Dyer Bill” *The Crisis*, Vol 22, No. 5 (Sept 1921) 212.

<sup>651</sup> US Congress, House, Committee on the Judiciary, *Military Intelligence Bureau; Proposed Bill to Protect Citizens Against Lynching: Brief of Capt. George S. Hornblower* 65th Cong, Second Session on HR 21179 (Jul 12, 1918) Serial 66- Part 2, 14-27. NAACP Papers, Part 7, Series A, Folder 001527-002-0179.

<sup>652</sup> John Shillady to Emily Balch, Personal Letter (June 18, 1918) NAACP Papers, Part 7, Series A, Folder 001527-002-0179.

possible. Still, the organization's support for the Dyer Bill was not a foregone conclusion, in part because NAACP leaders worried that the bill was unconstitutional.

Once the NAACP leadership decided to support the Dyer bill, the organization deployed a formidable public-facing apparatus to encourage public support for these bills. Through articles in *The Crisis*, a series of pieces placed in national newspapers, and a targeted correspondence campaign to civic, religious, and business leaders, the NAACP encouraged every American citizen to telegraph Washington—both as individuals, and through the collective power of fraternities, social clubs, and unions—in order to pressure representatives to pass the bill.<sup>653</sup> These requests often included copies of “Thirty Years of Lynching...” and references to the coordinated campaign that the group was mounting. Thanks to this advocacy, the House passed the Dyer Bill on January 26, 1922. But the victory was short-lived. Southern Democrats filibustered it in the Senate.<sup>654</sup>

Following the failure of the Dyer Bill, no more anti-lynching legislation emerged at the federal level until the Costigan-Wagner Federal Anti-Lynching Bill in 1934. The decade that passed between the Dyer and Costigan-Wagner Bills was not enough to change the attitude of Southern Democrats towards anti-lynching legislation. The same bloc defeated this second anti-lynching effort only a year after its introduction.

These bills had an enormous amount at stake for the ethnic and racial minorities most affected by lynching violence—particularly Black men—and thus their failure was another way of devaluing Black life in the early twentieth century. Historian Megan Ming Francis argues that focusing on the apparent failure of these bills underestimates their

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<sup>653</sup> The Dyer Bill was part of a slate of anti-lynching regulations under consideration by Congress that year.

<sup>654</sup> Various correspondence, NAACP Papers, Part 7, Series A, Folder 001527-002-0179

importance to subsequent Civil Rights leaders, for these legislative attempts set important precedents for what kind of legal battles would be possible.<sup>655</sup> Groups like the Anti-Lynching Crusaders, a committee of women affiliated with the NAACP organized amidst these struggles, played important roles in raising both public awareness and financial support for the ongoing struggle against lynching violence. The path towards civil rights legislation was uneven, and in the case of the anti-lynching legislation, a dead end. Sandwiched in between the two herculean efforts of the Dyer and Costigan-Wagner Bills to outlaw lynching violence in the U.S., the success of anti-mask legislation at the state level provides a notable exception from the trend of defeated Civil Rights laws during this period.

### **The Problem with the Mask**

Both the NVA and the NAACP lobbied hard for anti-masking legislation. The success of the latter in the wake of the repeated failure of anti-lynching regulations bears consideration. Anti-masking laws succeeded at a state level, including in states run by Southern Democrats who otherwise supported organized white supremacy. For some Klan members, anti-masking legislation was an attack on an organization that they supported—whether explicitly or implicitly—others saw the Klan as a useful foil that made less spectacular forms of racial prejudice more appealing.

Anti-masking legislation allowed lawmakers to shift the focus of their critiques from the potential social ills of white supremacist ideologies, and offer an alternate interpretation of why the Klan was dangerous: Under anti-masking laws or their close cousins, anti-Klan laws that focused on the disclosure of membership lists, the problem was the Klan's secrecy and its extralegal operation. By targeting the Klan's methods, these

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<sup>655</sup> Francis, *Civil Rights*, 10-11.



laws did not directly challenge the Klan's threat of violence against the bodies of those marked as racially or religiously "other." Instead, the key concern was the Klan's orientation against the government, which affected white, Protestant Americans just as it did the culturally marginalized people Klan members attacked. The problem was not necessarily the group's regalia, which stood for the group's ideological principles—chiefly white supremacy—but with the mask, which made the group something outside of the civilized polity of the nation. The problem, in short, wasn't the message. It was the methods that Klans used to articulate that message.

While Klan leaders strategically deployed regalia to try to manipulate public perception of the organization, Klan leaders used internal regulations to try to challenge what they described as the "misuse" of robes, or the use of Klan regalia in unauthorized circumstances. The Klan's constitution cited strict conditions for the use of regalia, including the rule that "Robes and helmets must not be permitted to be retained by Klansmen personally."<sup>656</sup> The robes were instead to be under the charge of a Klavern-level official named the "Kladd" who stored the garments, protected them from discovery by non-members and misuse by members, and maintained their "sanitary condition." Klavern officials needed permission from the Grand Dragon, a state level official, to sanction the use of regalia outside normal meeting times.<sup>657</sup> This message was a constant refrain during the mid-1920's when the Klan reached its highest membership numbers. Imperial

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<sup>656</sup> Department of Realms, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Pamphlet. "Klan Building: An Outline of Proven Klan Methods for Successfully Applying the Art of Klankraft in Building and Operating Local Klans." Pamphlet, August 28, 1923. Labadie Collection, University of Michigan.

<sup>657</sup> A Klan or member of this Order shall not use the official costume or any part of same on any occasion outside the Klavern, without permission of the Grand Dragon in organized realms or the imperial wizard in unorganized states" KKK Constitution. Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. *Constitution and Laws of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Incorporated*. (Atlanta, GA, 1921): Article XVIII, Ku Klux Klan Items 1920-1950, Box 1 Folder 2, Keenan Research Center, AHC.

Representatives sent official edicts to Klaverns nationwide in 1924, 1925 and 1927, reminding Klansmen that robes were the intellectual and material property of the organization at large.<sup>658</sup> “In the future permission for the use of robes outside the Klavern must be obtained and provided for. This law was enacted to protect the Klan and Klansmen from the odium resulting from the acts of irresponsibles (sic) and through its disregard has caused the natl. organization considerable embarrassment.”<sup>659</sup> The representative went on to remind local officers that Klansmen who left the organization were required to turn in any Klan property, including their robes.

Despite these supposedly strict regulations, Klaverns also set up procedures in which robes could be removed from communal property for “minor reasons,” such as funerals or laundry. Klansmen in Bayfield, Colorado, were to turn in their cards to their Klavern secretary when they took their robes home overnight, perhaps with the use of a specially made “robe bags” designed for transporting their regalia.<sup>660</sup> While long on bureaucratic detail, the Klan’s procedures for internally managing the use of regalia made plenty of room for their use in last-minute “matters of interest” as one Illinois Klansman coyly wrote.<sup>661</sup> Through these regulations, Klansmen sent mixed messages about the meaning and use of regalia.<sup>662</sup>

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<sup>658</sup> Nathan Bedford Forrest. “Realm of GA Bulletin No. 5,” December 1, 1923. Ku Klux Klan Athens Chapter No. 5 Papers Box 2 Folder 3. Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia.

<sup>659</sup> M. S. Belser, “Imperial Bulletin for NC Klan,” Nov. 5, 1927. William Carlyle Hatcher Collection Folder 1.b. Joyner Library, East Carolina University.

<sup>660</sup> Fred Arnold. July 22, 1927. Bayfield, CO Ku Klux Klan Records Box 2 Folder 4. John F. Reed Library, Fort Lewis College.

<sup>661</sup> H. Greene letter to Seward Bristow. “Inviting Carlock Klan to Regional Meeting,” June 2, 1924. Ku Klux Klan Carlock Unit No. 71 records Box 1 Folder 1. Manuscript and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

<sup>662</sup> C. C. McIlwain and NC Klans. “Bulletin about State Klan Celebration in NC,” April 6, 1925. William Carlyle Hatcher Collection Folder 1.A. East Carolina University, Joyner Library.

When Klan leaders chided members for using robes for the illegal and violent purposes expressly forbidden by the organization's constitution, they reinforced an enduring distinction between "good" Klan members, who followed the organization's rules and principles, and "bad" Klansmen, who used the organization for their own gain. Never mind that Klan leaders were themselves notorious for falling short on the latter side of this equation, even as they wrote the rules. Though references to violence were generally left out of organizational documents like Klavern meeting minutes and correspondence, coded requests for muscle and physical threat can be found in even the blindest collections of Klan organizational records. One request to a Bayfield, Colorado, Exalted Cyclops asked for the "husky Kluckers who do your private fighting" to act as bodyguards for Evans on a trip to nearby Pueblo.<sup>663</sup> Why the Imperial Wizard would need men who were "entirely fearless," as the Grand Dragon's deputy requested, was clearly not a question that the letter writer expected. The next communication included not only an itinerary for the trip, but a packet of anti-Catholic propaganda in anticipation of the challenges the Klansmen could face in Pueblo. The appropriate use of regalia did not discipline members, as leaders argued it could.

Neither did these garments represent some sort of transparent patriotism as Klan leaders claimed. The Klan's regalia still contained visible traces of the organization's birth as an anti-government terrorist group, since the distinctive form of the mask and pointed hood was still linked to Reconstruction-era violence through its representation in popular entertainment. This association highlighted a disconnect between the way that Klan

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<sup>663</sup> A. G. Davis, Jr. "Request for Bayfield Klan to Supply Bodyguards for Imperial Wizard," Aug. 18, 1927; Fred Arnold, "Itinerary for Imperial Wizard's Visit to Colorado + Anti-Catholic Information," Aug. 19, 1927. Bayfield, CO Ku Klux Klan Records Box 2 Folder 4. John F. Reed Library, Fort Lewis College.

leaders wanted Americans to understand the use of robes—as garments that demonstrated members’ submission to a larger, patriotic agenda—and the more commonplace understanding of masks as tools for criminals. Whether or not masks actually concealed members’ identities during any given attack or not was actually beyond the point. Concealing one’s face and features was another kind of representational act, not just a recollection of historical violence, but a very contemporary rejection of the principles of civil society. Even as Klan leaders rendered these garments in terms of political legitimacy, their formal properties resisted this characterization. The uniformity of these garments was too successful, in that it turned Klansmen into faceless militants, not ready citizens. This bid at patriotism through uniformity instead suggested the potential for a violent power grab.

State lawmakers, looking warily at the threat that Klans posed to the operation of civil democracy, viewed the group’s use of masking as a possible site for intervention. This explains why no lawmakers pursued a ban on the Klan’s specific regalia, but instead challenged the more generic practice of masking, attempting to regulate the organization through its *use* of regalia. Challenging Klan regalia as a whole would be challenging because of the organization’s ties to the Protestant Church, and the aesthetic proximity of the Klan’s ceremonial regalia to religious and fraternal attire. Though the group’s distinctive, pointed helmet could have been singled out as a target of legal control, anti-Klan activists chose to go after the item of clothing that was both symbolic *and* utilitarian: the mask. The Klan’s masks were a representational pivot point between the nineteenth-century anti-government violence of Ku Kluxers and broader platform of racial/religious/political prejudice that the twentieth-century Klan espoused. As a result,

pursuing mask bans, rather than other strategies for limiting the actions of Klansmen, was a practical decision that offered a higher potential to yield successful Civil Rights legislation. But with this pragmatic tactic, some of the moral power of banning the Klan was ceded. Maybe if challenging prejudice didn't work, as failed attempts to pass anti-lynching legislation suggested, challenging the use of seditious garments could gain broader public support.

How lawmakers defined the terms of anti-masking revealed dramatic political differences guiding these regulations. By 1921, when state legislatures started to pursue legal challenges to the Klan through masking, there was already some precedent of state-level regulations controlling the use of masks. Six states—TN (1869), CA (1873), NY (1881), OH (1886), WA (1909), and AR (1909)—had existing laws challenging the public use of disguise.<sup>664</sup> Several of these states limited the use of disguise outright, with exceptions for “peaceful assemblage for a masquerade or fancy dress ball” in New York (1881) and Washington State (1909). Other states created stronger penalties for other misdemeanor and felony charges if perpetrators were masked. These existing laws became models for other state-level efforts to challenge the Klan through a regulation of masking practices.

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<sup>664</sup> Prior to 1923, seven states already had laws that in some way restricted the use of masks to disguise the appearance. Tennessee (1869-70) stipulated a “penalty for going out masked or disguised,” California (1873) stipulated a misdemeanor charge for “wearing mask or disguise for unlawful purposes,” New York (1881) outlawed “an assemblage in public houses or other places of three or more persons disguised by having their faces painted, discolored, colored, or concealed,” Ohio (1886) charged riotous conspiracy when three or more persons committed a misdemeanor “while wearing white caps, masks, or other disguises,” Arkansas (1909) created a penalty against night riders and included the use of disguise at any time for unlawful purposes, and Washington State (1909) used a slightly truncated version of the Ohio statute. Civil Rights activist Pauli Murray’s compiled volume *States’ Laws on Race and Color* (1950) was invaluable to the process of locating these state laws.

The legislators who argued that the Klan's use of masks was anti-democratic did not do so along expected party or regional divisions. In Arizona, conservative Democrat Lewis W. Douglas proposed an anti-mask bill that combined prohibitions against conspiracy and the use of masks for disguise.<sup>665</sup> Arizona's 1923 law did not ban the use of disguise outright, but evidence of disguise impacted sentencing guidelines, transforming a misdemeanor committed by a masked assailant into a felony charge.<sup>666</sup>

Charles B. Griffith, the attorney general of Kansas, laid out his argument for barring masked public parades of Klansmen through the logic that these gatherings were a "disturbance of the peace and a common nuisance."<sup>667</sup> This classification, he argued, made Klan parades subject to restriction by legal authorities. The suit that led to Griffith's pronouncement was an injunction used to stop a parade of masked Klansmen that was to take place in Fort Scott, Kansas, on the evening of October 6, 1923. The night before the event was to take place, the state filed a case in the Bourbon County District Court to stop the planned march. The case was targeted against a shadowy opponent, since only one of the named defendants, Thomas Daly, was a confirmed member of the Fort Scott Klan. The subsequent brief, produced by Griffith and his deputy, Donald Stewart, helpfully worked through the complicated precedents supporting the state's case. The core of this argument was the characterization of public gatherings of Klansmen as a "nuisance," based on the group's historical association with the Reconstruction-era Klan. While recognizing a

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<sup>665</sup> "Arizona Bill Hits Ku Klux: Wearing of Masks Is Made Misdemeanor." *Los Angeles Times*. Jan. 25, 1923.

<sup>666</sup> Arizona Laws Ch. 78 § 43-3701 "Wearing a Mask in intimidating or evading arrest" and 43-3702 "Felony to commit misdemeanor while wearing mask," (1932).

<sup>667</sup> Chas B. Griffith and Donald W. Stewart. "Has a Court of Equity Power to Enjoin Parading by the Ku Klux Klan in Mask?" *The Central Law Journal*, Vol 69, No. 22 (Nov. 20, 1923), 384-92.

distinction between the two organizations, the attorneys general underscored the Klan's mobilization of a dangerous reputation in part through the deployment of "awe inspiring ritual and dress."<sup>668</sup>

In the final section of the brief, the attorneys tackled a complicated question: "what bearing, has any, on the defendant's motive in parading in mask?" While not explicitly stated, this question grappled with the Klan's own justification for using masks in public, which was generally less a demand for free expression, and more of an attempt to paint the Klan as a respectable organization. This claim was impossible to prove, Griffith and Stewart argued, in part because of the properties of the mask itself. Putting the mask at the center of the frame was tricky, since Griffith and Stewart first challenged the transformative properties of regalia, stating "an organization acquires strength not through the clothing of its members, but through their character." And yet, masks emerged again as a particularly violent category of dress. "The mask is not needed for advocacy of good principles. The logical effect and purpose of the mask is to frighten and intimidate. It has always been the mark of the marauder and has never been used to cover honest men on an honest purpose." By this formula, masks were bad objects, not capable of performing violence on their own accord, but nonetheless a useful tool for individuals with immoral intent.

In targeting the practice of masking, critics of the organization hoped to highlight the secretive, extralegal aspects of the Klan. This was possible because anti-masking legislation framed the Klan's threat in more universal terms. Focusing on the secrecy of the second Klan underscored the first Klan's genesis in political sedition, as nineteenth-

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<sup>668</sup> Ibid, 385.

century Kluxers conducted attacks on Reconstruction government officials and freedmen and women asserting federally bestowed rights. Though the second Klan was administrated through a modern, bureaucratic apparatus, and swore members' fealty to the national legal apparatus, the choice to continue wearing masks provided an unmistakable link between the secret violence of the old order, and the actions of the new, even if the stated motive behind the new Klan's actions diverged from that of the first. This connection allowed NAACP secretary James Weldon Johnson to identify an "anarchic" impulse in Klan practice that directed the group's violence against the state itself.<sup>669</sup> In short, these legislative proposals argued that the organization's targets extended beyond marginalized ethnic, racial, and religious groups. As a threat to legal order, they argued, the Klan was dangerous to all Americans - even its own members.

The anti-mask legislation worked because the politics underlying the organization's power grab were, for some, less objectionable than its methods. This offered a site for coalitional anti-Klan organizing—across racial divisions, but not necessarily a repudiation of the kind of politics that the Klan represented, instead merely its visible manifestation. The sartorial strategy was effective because the mask was at once a metaphor and a tool, and the slippery gap between these functions made it a powerful site for debate over the meaning of the organization and its members' actions. Debates over masking were also interventions into the Klan's use of representation and visual symbols. For some critics, anti-masking legislation was a way to materially curb the power of a violent, racist ideology, while for others, the Klan's masks represented the organization's threat to the US government and general social order. This distinction is critical for understanding both the success of anti-Klan organizing in this period and its

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<sup>669</sup> NAACP Press Bureau, Press Release, November 27, 1920. NAACP Papers, Part 11, Series B, Roll 4.



eventual consequences. Focusing on the threat of the Klan's practices as a secret organization would not achieve the goal that underlaid the civil rights legislation that the NAACP continued to pursue. The fear of the Klan was characterized as the fear of masking, of hidden violence, when some of the real danger was the kind of racialized legislation taking place in the very same legislatures that were proposing anti-Klan bills.

Though the Reconstruction Klan emerged as a form of anti-government protest, the Klan of the early twentieth century maintained a far more complicated relationship with the law. In many cases Klan leaders tried to prove that the organization worked alongside law enforcement, going so far as to suggest that the number of lynchings nationally dropped precipitously in the 1920s due to the growth of the Klan. As a result, the perception of the Klan as an anti-government group started to pose a challenge for Klan leaders who increasingly attempted to position the Klan as an organization that supported social and political order. The group's commitment to the use of regalia that visually connected the night-riding attacks of the first Klan with the actions of the second posed increasingly greater challenges to leaders. As the 1920s unfolded, Klan leaders sought to address legal and popular challenges to the Klan's use of masks on their own terms. More complicatedly, anti-mask legislation made it possible for Klan leaders to reassess the role that masking played for the organization, and to appropriate this strategy for their own uses.

**“Mister, you ain't the only Ku Kluxer in Mer Rouge who is nervous”**

One particularly grisly case gripped U.S. newspapers in the last months of 1922, just as Simmons was making final edits on his book. Late in August of that year, five men were kidnapped by a group of masked assailants in Mer Rouge, Louisiana, a small town in

Morehouse Parish. While three of the men made it home to their families, two were missing until November when their bodies were found floating in Lake Lafourche, displaced by a “mysterious” dynamite charge to the lake there. Unlike many other Klan crimes, this case had national interest, likely due in part to the identities of the victims—white men, one a WWI veteran, another the father of two young children. The missing men, and eventually the gruesome condition of their bodies, made headlines nationwide for good reason. The federal dragnet investigating the murders in Mer Rouge included undercover officers and yielded a titillating mix of murder, small town corruption, and a secret society that was catnip to national newspapers reporting on the murders. Residents of St. Louis, New York, and Los Angeles could read lengthy articles on the investigation, often including grainy photos of victims, suspects, and otherwise placid shots of a swampy bayou lake.<sup>670</sup>

Though Louisiana’s Klan immediately disavowed knowledge of the whole affair, there was no question that the Ku Klux Klan was behind the kidnapping. Many witnesses reported that the men were taken on their way home from a barbecue and political meeting in nearby Bastrop. Families in returning to Mer Rouge were stopped by a makeshift blockade, staffed by rifle-bearing Klansmen in full regalia, and the five men were pulled from their cars in full view of the onlookers. As the local Klavern leader later remarked, it was notable that this crime was conducted by only five of some six hundred Klansmen registered in the area, a fact that suggested the crime was conducted by a few rogue Klansmen. Still, as critics argued, the organization’s commitment to secrecy and its

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<sup>670</sup> “First Photos of Victims of Klan Murders in Louisiana, Scene of the Crime, and State Officials Investigating.” *Chicago Tribune*. Dec. 26, 1922; “New Photos of Mer Rouge and Principals in Klan Murders.” *Chicago Tribune*. Dec. 29, 1922.

material culture, particularly the use of uniforms that concealed the attackers faces, made this crime possible.

During the early stages of the investigation, Louisiana Governor John M. Parker returned from a meeting with President Warren G. Harding in Washington D.C. and announced he would “unmask the Klan in this state as an organization inimical to law and order.”<sup>671</sup> Again, Parker’s repudiation of the Klan was less a challenge to their belief system than it was a concern about the threat they posed to law and order. By Parker’s own account, the main reason for his visit to the capital was not to discuss the Klan, but to “protest against the appointment of a negro as Comptroller of Customs.”<sup>672</sup> Prejudice wasn’t the problem, but extralegal violence most certainly was. In Mer Rouge, the division between legal and extralegal violence was more slippery than Parker and his colleagues would have liked. The first arrest in the case was a sheriff’s deputy, and once the bodies were uncovered, local Klan leaders rushed to collaborate with law enforcement to show that their hands were clean. Still, Klan leaders in Bastrop Parish were nervous, as a young girl announced to a reporter for the *New York Times*.<sup>673</sup> The murders, whether sanctioned or concealed by local Klan leaders or not, irrevocably connected the white uniform robes that Klansmen wore with contemporary violence.

This stain on the national image of Klan robes was just one of many, though the Mer Rouge crimes were particularly well reported. The NAACP files and American newspapers were full of attacks by Klansmen, robed and unrobed, so many that the

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<sup>671</sup> “Louisiana Chief Executive to Open War on KKK,” *St. Louis Post – Dispatch*, Nov. 26, 1922; “Hooded Band Tortured Pair: Bones Were Crushed on Rock, Say Doctors Gov Parker Determined to Unmask Klan, He Says Morehouse Parish Cyclops Denies Charges.” *Boston Daily Globe*, Jan. 7, 1923.

<sup>672</sup> “Louisiana Chief Executive to Open War on KKK,” *St. Louis Post – Dispatch*, Nov. 26, 1922.

<sup>673</sup> “First Arrest Made in Supposed Klan Mer Rouge Murders.” *New York Times*. Dec. 24, 1922.

connection between the masked order and violence against a broad selection of Americans could not be ignored. At a conference of governors in December of 1922, Oregon's Governor Ben Olcott called the organization "The Nation's Greatest Menace," because of the threat they posed to law enforcement.<sup>674</sup> Many local Klans engaged in charm offensives to counter this bad press: staging parades, carnivals, and conspicuous displays of robed Klansmen doing public good. Between 1922 and 1926, Klans rebuilt churches, as when a tornado hit Lawrenceville, Georgia; they set up funds after disasters, as when North Carolina Klans banded together to support families of seventy men killed in a mine collapse; they delivered donations during services, as Klansmen did in Colfax, Washington; and they funded destitute families, as evidenced by the thank you notes sent to Klaverns nationwide.<sup>675</sup> By the release of Simmons's book in 1923, the attempt to make the Klan into a legitimate fraternal order that had put its corruption scandals and violent internal conflicts behind it was in full effect.

**(Fig 7.3)**

But try as they might, no amount of peaceful public demonstrations or charitable photo opportunities could wipe away the association of the white robe and pointed hood

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<sup>674</sup> "For War Upon Klan" *Washington Post*, Dec. 15, 1922.

<sup>675</sup> There is significant evidence of discussion of Klan charity during Klavern correspondence and meeting minutes, including the following: Mrs. W. J. Benthall Letter to E. D. Cleaton. "Thank You Note for Klan's Charity," Dec. 2, 1925. William Carlyle Hatcher Collection Folder 1.a. ECU; Butte Relief Committee. "Report on the Relief of Needy Members," Feb. 24, 1924. Kontinental Klan Records, Butte 1916, 1921-31 Box 2 Folder 92. EWSHS; Nathan Bedford Forrest, Letter to J. P. McCall. "Granting Athens Klan Permission to Wear Robes for Charity Donation," Apr. 19, 1926. Ku Klux Klan Athens Chapter No. 5 Papers Box 1 Folder 11. UGA; Henry A. Grady, Letter to NC Klans. "Request for Donations for Victims of Mine Disaster in NC," June 4, 1925. William Carlyle Hatcher Collection Folder 1.a. ECU; "Klansmen Visit Christian Church." *Colfax Gazette*. Nov. 24, 1922. HBCLS; Maurer, Mrs. Earl. "Thank You Note for Flowers to Sick Woman," Feb. 23, 1925. Ku Klux Klan Carlock Unit No. 71 records Box 1 Folder 1. MARBL; A. R. Meeks and R.J. Duckett. "Appeal for Donations to Rebuild a Church after Tornado," June 19, 1924. Ku Klux Klan Athens Chapter No. 5 Papers Box 1 Folder 3. UGA; Walden, Leo. "2nd Thank You Note for Charity to Walden Family," Jan. 24, 1926. William Carlyle Hatcher Collection Folder 1.a. ECU.

with a violent threat to those opposed to the organization. Reports of Klan violence divided communities from Inglewood, California, to Putnam County, Florida,<sup>676</sup> forcing Klan leaders to double down on the strategy of separating their righteous organization from violent bad actors that appropriated or used the organization for their own means. “A good motto, but why the disguise?” Uncle Sam asked a masked Klansman in an editorial cartoon published in the midst of the Mer Rouge investigation.<sup>677</sup> The Klan’s vision of protectionist Americanism was increasingly being embraced by politicians who were on the cusp of producing strict immigration controls with national quotas, and maintained the importance of Jim Crow rule across the South. And the Klan’s national leaders were trying to distance themselves from crimes like the murders in Mer Rouge, in favor of presenting the organization as an organization that promoted law and order. Klan members were running for office, and in 1924, the organization’s Speakers Bureau announced that its lecturers would no longer be banned from speaking about politics. Klansmen were fighting to “Keep Government Clean” and “Keep the State Separated from Church.”<sup>678</sup> It was increasingly clear to the order’s leaders that the principles that the organization’s uniform symbolized may be at odds with their political aspirations. So really, why the disguise?

### **Unmasking in Georgia: “No Room for Invisible Government in this State”**

Legal and popular challenges to masking made Klan leaders address this very question throughout the 1920s, but the question became increasingly frequent as the

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<sup>676</sup> Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 119-125, 228.

<sup>677</sup> Jay N. Darling, Darling. *A Good Motto but Why the Disguise?* Editorial Cartoon, December 29, 1922. Jay N. Darling papers. University of Iowa. Libraries. Special Collections Dept. J.N. “Ding” Darling Foundation.

<sup>678</sup> “Ban on Politics Is Lifted From Klan’s Lecturers: Speakers Now Admit Order Fights to ‘Keep Government Clean’ and ‘State Separated From Church.’ Hope Time to Unmask Will Come.” *Washington Post*, Aug. 21, 1924.

century wore on. Throughout much of the Klan's lifespan, the organization's leaders were defensive over the group's use of masking. The most popular strategy used to defend the Reconstruction Klan (that criminals were appropriating Klan costume for criminal purposes) no longer worked because Klan leaders had control of the regalia supply chain. If some Klansmen went rogue, leaders argued, it wasn't their fault. But Klan leaders also wanted to impress upon the public of the group's uniform cohesion and disciplined adherence to the cause. Arguing that robes were potential vehicles of criminal behavior would only strengthen arguments against the Klan.

**(Fig: 7.4)**

Instead, Klan leaders pursued a defense of the Klan's principles through the mask, arguing that the group's anonymity supported the kind of social order they were pursuing. This strategy is visible in a cartoon from the *Fiery Cross*, an Indiana newspaper dedicated to the Klan. In that image, a single masked Klansman holds a burning cross to ward off a group of black-hooded figures as they approach a single Black man kneeling in prayer. "Stop!!!!" the caption reads "This man will get a just trial as such men will get but a sentence passed, and a penalty paid according to law." Here the Klansman stands in opposition to other lawless organizations that may try to borrow the organization's methods for ignoble ends. The Klansman is not defending the prisoner, but instead is defending the idea of law, and the prisoner's right of due process, though the subtext of this caption is that the prisoner will undoubtedly be punished for his crimes. Notably, the Klansman defends the law while masked. The mask presents the Klansman as a representation of the organization as a whole, an identity that may offer him a kind of strength that exceeds the discrepancy in numbers between this lone Klansman and the

crowd he faces. This and other images tried to impress upon Klansmen and outside observers that the organization's sartorial practices could not only support legal transparency, but also made this possible.

Whether or not Klansmen believed this argument was another matter altogether. While men, and eventually women, joined the Klan for many reasons beyond a desire to commit violent attacks, the distinctive shape of Klan regalia clearly linked the organization with the incredibly violent Reconstruction Klan. Seeing the Klan as anything but an organization whose members dressed as representations of a violent threat was, at best, willfully naïve. In theory, each Klansmen swore to “stand up, and stand out, and stand on to the last breath of his life to the enforcement of every constitutional law in the United States of America,” as part of his initiation ceremony. In actuality, however, the NAACP case files, which compiled acts of violence committed by Klansmen, continued to grow and high profile attacks by masked men continued to make the news.

In addition to willful ignorance, at best, or, more likely explicit deception, Klan leaders started to test a new strategy. During the first several years of the decade, Klan leaders fought calls for the organization to unmask, with one notable exception. Amidst the internal power struggle that would divest Simmons of his position, Imperial Wizard Pro Tempore Edgar Young Clarke ordered Klansmen to remove their masks in public in 1922. In July of that year, Georgia Governor Thomas Hardwick gave a speech before the state's League for Law Enforcement, in which he called for a law banning the use of “masks” in public. Like so many other anti-mask advocates, Hardwick praised the “honest, law abiding members” who made up the majority of the Klan.<sup>679</sup> So many “went

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<sup>679</sup> “Governor Urges Klan to Unmask.” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 11, 1922.

into it with the highest and most patriotic motives for its creed and principles are patriotic and unassailable” he announced, while also admitting that “outrages by mobs of masked men are growing in this state however, and these performances must be checked.”<sup>680</sup>

Hardwick categorized his law as an assault on “mob rule,” not the Klan as an institution.

In fact, Hardwick was invited to join the organization, and “had read its rituals and printed principles, but had declined to join because of its regalia.”<sup>681</sup> That regalia, he argued, featuring the distinctive facemask was too easy to appropriate for ill intent. “Gov. Hardwick said that high officials of the Klan in whom he had confidence had told him that mob outrages which had been placed at the door of the Klan had not been perpetrated by the order. “It is unfortunate, however, that groups of men participating in such affairs have used the same regalia as the Klan,” he told a reporter. Hardwick’s proposed regulation had teeth, including the threat of martial law if Klans refused to comply with the order, and yet the underlying motives of this law reveal the true stakes of his intervention. The Governor’s rousing cry that the Klan must be unmasked because there was “no room for invisible government in this state,” sounded like a repudiation of the order to some, but others saw that his call to unmask enabled a distinction between the Klan and its material practices. When a group of Evangelical ministers in Atlanta voted to endorse Hardwick’s statements, a subset dissented, arguing that his position against masking sounded too much like an endorsement of the Klan itself.<sup>682</sup>

Just two weeks later, Imperial Wizard Pro Tempore, and Propagation department chairman Edgar Young Clarke issued an executive order “stopping for the time being all

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<sup>680</sup> “Governor Makes Attack on Mob Law in Georgia,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 1, 1922.

<sup>681</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>682</sup> “Governor Urges Klan to Unmask.” *The Atlanta Constitution*, July 11, 1922.



parades and the use of the mask and costume for any purpose in Georgia by the Klansmen except in the Klavern or lodge room of the Klan.”<sup>683</sup> When it was widely reported that the Klan was “unmasking,” Clarke fired back that this was only a temporary order that affected Georgia Klans only. He was working with the governor to attempt to curb “acts of lawlessness” for which the Klan was “directly or indirectly responsible.”<sup>684</sup> But Klansmen didn’t take to the order. In part this was because it represented a significant departure from the organization’s principles of uniformity and anonymity, both of which were enhanced by masks that reduced the individuality of any single Klansman in favor of a coherent representation of the “uniformed Klansman” as an important symbol of the order. Members and leaders argued as much in spirited testimony before the Georgia State House, which voted down Governor Hardwick’s proposed law in early August.<sup>685</sup> Notably, one major proponent of maintaining the organization’s regalia, mask and all, was Hiram W. Evans, the national secretary who would assume the position of Imperial Wizard just a few months later. Upon assuming his new role, Evans announced that the Klan’s mask would “never be taken off” because it was part of the spiritual regalia of the organization. Instead, Evans argued, “the spirit of Klan-Kraft has enwrapped the United States in a mantle of love for country which designing and ambitious politicians cannot break.”<sup>686</sup> Since Evans was the Klan’s highest official, his position won out, and Georgia Klansmen began to use masks in public again soon after the dispute.

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<sup>683</sup> “Ku Klux Klan Not Unmasked By Order, Wizard Pro-Tem Says,” *Nashville Tennessean*. July 25, 1922.

<sup>684</sup> “Ku Klux Unmasking Denied,” *New York Times*, Jul. 25, 1922.

<sup>685</sup> “Committee votes against measure unmasking Klan” *Atlanta Constitution*, Aug. 5, 1922.

<sup>686</sup> “Wizard Says Ku Klux Will Never Unmask” *New York Times*. Dec. 20, 1922.

This event reveals the Klan's commitment to masking, even after a legal challenge, but also highlights the degree to which Klan leaders recognized that the opposition to their project may have been organized around the Klan's methods, rather than the ideological stance that these methods were to protect. Clarke's flexible approach to the Klan's complex regulations posed a threat to the national uniformity of the organization, since much of the power of the Klan was in the group's appearance of unity across regional difference. And yet, as Clarke argued, while central to the Klan's project, regalia could be temporarily discarded if it was necessary to protect the greater cause of the organization. The Klan's commitment to uniformity called for men to subsume their individual identities to the cause, but Clarke's action argued that the group was not cowering in the shadows.

### **Marching Without Masks**

The litany of new legislative attempts to limit Klan activity through control of their regalia only intensified between 1923 and 1925, as the lobbying campaigns of the NVA and NAACP intensified. NAACP secretary James Weldon Johnson sent letters threatening public shame to Northern businesses and churches that allowed Klan sympathizers to operate in their midst.<sup>687</sup> Members of the NVA held meetings with lawmakers and private citizens in order to encourage support for anti-mask laws. Klans responded in ways that reflected their status within the communities in which they operated. The temporary order to unmask the Georgia Klan made it clear that - at times - Klans would have to acquiesce to local and state lawmakers on this matter.

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<sup>687</sup> Johnson, James Weldon. Telegram to Dr. Joseph D. Snyder. "Cordial Threat to Expose the Prsebytery of Brooklyn Nassau for Having a Minister Who Supports Klan." Telegram, ct 1923. NAACP Papers, Part 11 Series B Roll 5; NAACP Press Service. Press Release. "Underwood Typewriter Company Does Not Approve K.K.K." Press Release, February 1, 1923. NAACP Papers, Part 11 Series B Roll 5. LOC.

Navigating regalia legislation thus became a part of business as usual for Klans in states where regalia regulations went into effect, as when the Michigan legislature passed the “Burns Anti-Mask Law” (Michigan Act 276) on August 29, 1923. Targeted narrowly at the Klan’s use of masks in Michigan, the law made considerable exceptions for other uses of masks for public performances, masquerade, or other forms of play. The new law didn’t stop the use of masks in public, but it did mean that local Klan leaders had to strategize about their public use of masks on a case-by-case basis. For funerals and other solemn gatherings, Michigan Klans largely acquiesced to the regulations, choosing to appear in full regalia, sans masks.<sup>688</sup> Occasionally, for parades, local leaders tried to find creative ways around the law. Each time a Michigan Klan prepared for a public parade, they weighed the degree to which local law enforcement would take a generous view of the organization, and the degree to which they could pitch their parade or rally in such a way that it would fit within the bounds of the law. As Michigan’s Grand Dragon, George Carr, wrote to Lewis Capen, the Exalted Cyclops of a Klan in Millbrook, MI, in May of 1927, “when you obtain a permit to parade, get it reading permit to hold a historical pageant, with Visors Down. Then get someone to paint a banner reading ‘In Memory of the Old Ku Klux Klan.’ This will bring us within the limits of the law entirely.”<sup>689</sup> This wasn’t the first time Capen recommended this strategy to Klaverns in his state. Michigan Klans marched with “Visors Down” the previous September, in order to celebrate Imperial

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<sup>688</sup> George E. Carr. “Michigan Realm Bulletin #98,” August 25, 1926. Ku Klux Klan (Mecosta County, MI) Collection Box 1 Folder 10. Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University.

<sup>689</sup> George E. Carr, Letter to Lewis D. Capen. “On Getting Permit to Parade with Visors down,” May 9, 1927. Ku Klux Klan (Mecosta County, MI) Collection Box 2 Folder 1. Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University.

Wizard Evans' visit to the state.<sup>690</sup> Nor was this the first time that Klan members defended their use of uniforms as “historical tributes”—despite the organization’s attempts to recognize the significant distinctions between the sectional, anti-government orientation of the nineteenth-century Klan, and the patriotism of their current law-abiding organization.

On the surface, Klan leaders’ acquiescence to this increasingly restricted climate seemed like a straightforward desire to avoid legal conflicts, but the change of heart represents a more complicated strategic decision. In public forums, Klan leaders sparred with the organization’s critics over the meaning of the group’s regalia, and over the mask, in particular. Strategic unmaskings, such as a 1923 speech by a Great Titan in a New Jersey Methodist Church, billed as “the first time” an unmasked Klansman spoke publicly “in the history of the Klan in this state,” presented public relations opportunities for Klan regalia to be viewed in a new light.<sup>691</sup> Similarly, Klan publications reported mass gatherings, like a group of 1,500 invited guests who gathered in Decatur, GA to see a presentation by the Klan. While “hooded men guarded the doors,” a group of Klansmen in full regalia “unmask[ed] themselves before the audience, in a dramatic spectacle, with an electric-fired cross as ‘property.’<sup>692</sup>” But internally, the function of masks and regalia became a similarly contested terrain, particularly as the decade wore on.

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<sup>690</sup> George E. Carr, “Realm of MI Bulletin #100,” September 2, 1926; “MI Realm Bulletin 103,” September 13, 1926; “MI Realm Bulletin 104,” September 23, 1926; M. E. Parrish Letter to Michigan Klan; Ku Klux Klan (Mecosta County, MI) Collection Box 1 Folder 10. Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University.

<sup>691</sup> This strategy was a familiar one, as unmasked, but otherwise fully dressed Klansmen often used church appearances to stress the respectability of their cause. “Klansmen unmask to speak in church” *New York Times*. June 4, 1923; “Ku Klux Demonstration at Church,” *Fiery Cross* (Indianapolis, IN), Jan 5, 1923.

<sup>692</sup> “1500 Klan’s Guests in Meeting in HS,” *Fiery Cross*, (Indianapolis, IN), Jan 19, 1923.

Correspondence between Klans during this period reveals the degree to which masking was up for debate.<sup>693</sup> Internal memos sent from the imperial palace in Atlanta to local Klan leaders called for Klavern officials to assert greater vigilance over members' use of regalia. Imperial Wizard Evans began a publicity campaign denouncing the use of Klan regalia beyond appearances prescribed by the organization's leaders. The Klan's key tool was "moral suasion," not violent attack, he argued, and regalia was a tool that helped members better realize the principles at the center of the Klan's moral universe.<sup>694</sup> But after so many public scandals, it was becoming increasingly hard for leaders to justify the Klan's use of intentionally subversive regalia. By 1925, the choice to train an anti-Klan strategy on masking legislation offered Klan leaders a provocative choice. What would an unmasked Klan mean for the group's central political and social aims?

**(Fig 7.5-7.6)**

This was a question that Klan leaders discussed as the organization prepared for its largest public demonstrations ever: two major marches through Washington D.C., in the summers of 1925 and 1926. On each occasion, tens of thousands of Klansmen gathered from around the country to march together, with their "visors up." Klansmen marched

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<sup>693</sup> Johnson, Floyd F. Business Letter. "Certifying That Official Circular Read at Local Meetings." Business Letter, July 17, 1924. MS 131 Box 1 Folder 7. EWSHS; Grady, Henry A. Official Bulletin. "Notice to Be Read at Regular NC Klan Meeting." Official Bulletin, Jan. 27, 1925. William Carlyle Hatcher Collection Folder 1.a. East Carolina University, Joyner Library. Rathborn, M.A., and M. E. Cota. Letter to Mecosta Co. Klan. "Update to Members on Business of Mecosta Co. Klan-Incl. Robe Use Clarification," April 1925 Ku Klux Klan (Mecosta County, MI) Collection Box 1 Folder 10. Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University; Grady, Henry A. "Bulletin for EC's of NC Klans Re : K-Duo," April 6, 1925, William Carlyle Hatcher Collection Folder 1.a. East Carolina University, Joyner Library; Nathan Bedford Forrest, Letter to J. P. McCall. "Can't Grant Permission for Robes in Public and Recommending Reinstatement of Dr. Miller," November 30, 1925, Ku Klux Klan Athens Chapter No. 5 Papers Box 1 Folder 8. Hargrett Rare Books and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia. Grand Dragon of Alabama. "'Official Document' from the Grand Dragon of the Ku Klux Klan in Alabama," June 1926. Alabama Textual Materials Collection. Alabama Department of Archives and History; George E. Carr, "Realm of MI Bulletin #100," September 2, 1926. Ku Klux Klan (Mecosta County, MI) Collection Box 1 Folder 10. Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University.

<sup>694</sup> "Regalia only for Parade" *Washington Post*. Dec. 26, 1922.

down Pennsylvania Avenue in full regalia—sans masks. Stitched firmly into their pointed white helmets, it's unlikely that any Klansmen permanently removed the flap of fabric that usually covered their faces. Instead, they stuffed masks into the crown of their hoods, forming an ad-hoc sweatband to catch the briny moisture that gathered on the foreheads of marchers. These masks would be removed from hiding places following the 1925 march, in order to be used again for local rituals. Up to 40,000 Klansmen, by some reports, gathered in Washington D.C. and marched down Pennsylvania Avenue to publicize the size and strength of the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>695</sup> This march was a direct response to the Klan's critics, who argued that the rapid growth of the order that captivated the nation between 1920 and 1924 had already slowed following internal scandals and popular exposés of corruption by organization leaders. The 1925 march, and a similar gathering the following year, was intended to put these concerns to rest through the performance of the kind of visual spectacle that made the Klan famous.<sup>696</sup> Aerial photographs of the march showed neat rows of men marching in formation, creating the letter "K" with their bodies as they marched away from the U.S. Capitol Building following the customary route of the presidential inauguration parade.<sup>697</sup>

This experiment in unmasking was the result of the group's internal conflicts, as newspapers reported in the summer of 1925. "Conservative members who have worked actively for the order have done so with the hope that this feature of the regalia would

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<sup>695</sup> "See Klan Parade," *Atlanta Constitution*, Aug. 8, 1925 "Sidelights on Klan Parade;" *Washington Post*, Aug. 9, 1925; Stokes, Thomas L.; "Sight Astonishes Capitol." *New York Times*. Aug. 9, 1925; "White-Robed Klan Cheered on March in Nation's Capital." *Washington Post*. Aug. 9, 1925.

<sup>696</sup> "Klan Announces Plans To Parade In U. S. Capital." *Atlanta Constitution*, August 22, 1926; "Klan Again on Penn Avenue." *Variety*, Aug. 25, 1926.

<sup>697</sup> "Klan Announces Plans To Parade In U. S. Capital." *Atlanta Constitution* Aug. 22, 1926.

ultimately be dropped.”<sup>698</sup> The article’s anonymous source provided no hard evidence to newspaper readers that such a movement was really afoot, and in fact, the remainder of the article gave little other clues that the Klan’s masks were actually under discussion within the Klan. But arguments for doing away with the mask were a point on which the Klan’s most vocal critics, and the Klan’s own conservative faction, found an uneasy coalition. Klan critics maintained that members would be unwilling to participate in the organization if their membership was made public through requirements like the disclosure of membership rolls, and through the more intimate disclosure of faces, as laws in many states forced Klansmen to remove their masks. Meanwhile, the organization’s staunchest defenders argued that the majority of Klansmen were in the organization for noble reasons, and that violent acts were the provenance of a fringe minority of the group. If Klan critics and supporters agreed on the method—unmasking—the goals of these oppositional groups diverged dramatically after that point. For these advocates, unmasking the Klan could actually save the order by bringing members into the open, while critics argued that revealing Klansmen’s faces could be the secret to destroying the Klan once and for all.

### **Collapse**

The mass unmasking in Washington D.C. didn’t kill the Klan, but the organization’s new visibility didn’t save it either. When the Klan marched in 1926, again without masks, the organization’s numbers were already starting to drop from an all time high in mid-1925. High-profile crimes continued to call public attention to the hypocrisies of Klan leaders claiming moral superiority. One particularly egregious case was that of Indiana Grand Dragon D. C. Stephenson, whose abduction and rape of a white

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<sup>698</sup> “Klan Discussing Abandoning Mask.” *Washington Post*, Aug. 7, 1925.

Indianapolis schoolteacher lead the young woman to poison herself. Despite Stephenson's marginal status in the Klan—he had already been ousted from the group for trying to form a splinter faction—the visibility of his crime paid a toll on the credibility of the organization in that state.<sup>699</sup> In other locations, rounds of financial scandals (such as corruption charges against Pittsburgh Grand Dragon, Samuel D. Rich, a former Kleagle charged in 1926 with embezzling five million dollars from the order) only confirmed the portrait of a predatory organization intent on making money for the benefit of a few corrupt officials.<sup>700</sup> Both views of the Klan were utterly correct. The Klan was corrupt, and in many cases predatory, and members of the order frequently went against the group's stated principles of peaceful support for the state.<sup>701</sup> As the Stephenson trial pointed out, Klan leaders were not set apart from the violent actions they ostensibly preached against.

The organization also faced attrition for more mundane reasons: the organization's bureaucratic structure required constant maintenance, the political and social influence that members were promised seemed unattainable in many locations, and above, all the constant need to recruit new members required a ready and willing organizing apparatus that was, in many places, starting to lose steam.

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<sup>699</sup> Leonard Joseph Moore. *Citizen Klansmen the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1921-1928* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

<sup>700</sup> Rich's records are housed in the Pennsylvania State Archives, and his robe order data comprises part of the archive of chapter four of this dissertation. See also John Craig, *The Ku Klux Klan in Western Pennsylvania*. (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2015).

<sup>701</sup> Ralph B. Bradford, Letter to Mureld L. Lain. "Resignation Letter from Klan due to Corruption of Organization," June 6, 1926. Ku Klux Klan Crown Point, Indiana (Lake County) Records, 1913 – 1932 Box 1 Folder 2. William Henry Smith Memorial Library, IHS.



If membership numbers suffered during the late 1920s, the Klan's decline was not as immediate as any one of these factors may suggest. While the numbers of newly organized Klaverns declined dramatically from 1925 to 1926, clusters of new Klaverns continued to pop up across the Eastern Seaboard, the Midwest, and the Great Plains.<sup>702</sup> In 1927, successful Klan recruiters organized thirty-seven Klaverns in Colorado alone, as well as nineteen in Pennsylvania, three in New Hampshire, and several dozen others across the country. In 1928, new Klaverns were primarily clustered in the Northeast, though several formed in the Dakotas, Michigan, Minnesota, and even California. The story that these changing maps tell is slightly different from a narrative of the Klan's rapid decline in the late 1920s, though the Klan would never again have as impressive of a public face as it did in those years. The geographic distribution of the organization continued to shift over the next decade, until it reached a virtual standstill in 1936, thanks in no small measure to the national economic crisis of the Great Depression. The Klan of the 1930s was estimated to have only 100,000 members at its peak—a mere fraction of the three to five million at its height a decade earlier.<sup>703</sup> These newly formed Klaverns were often small and rarely boasted members with the kind of organizational commitment that the maintenance of a healthy Klavern required. Some these “new” Klaverns were in fact

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<sup>702</sup> Virginia Commonwealth University, “Mapping the Second Ku Klux Klan, 1915-1940” <https://labs.library.vcu.edu/klan/>

<sup>703</sup> Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 305. Regrowth of Klan in Indiana due to efforts of James Colescott, Stephenson's former Deputy, who took over the organization in 1939. James A. Colescott, “Bulletin on Indiana Klan's Activities and ‘New Life.’” Aug. 10, 1929. Ku Klux Klan Crown Point, Indiana (Lake County) Records, 1913–1932 Box 1 Folder 4. William Henry Smith Memorial Library, IHS. James A. Colescott, Bulletin. “Bulletin on Mass Appeal of the Klan.” Bulletin, Aug. 10, 1929. Ku Klux Klan Crown Point, Indiana (Lake County) Records, 1913–1932 Box 1 Folder 4. William Henry Smith Memorial Library, IHS. James A. Colescott, Bulletin. “Bulletin on Philosophy of Klan Revitalization.” Bulletin, Sept. 10, 1929. Ku Klux Klan Crown Point, Indiana (Lake County) Records, 1913 – 1932 Box 1 Folder 4. William Henry Smith Memorial Library, IHS. Colescott's positions were increasingly radical—calling for repeal of 15th Amendment, Colescott, James A. Bulletin. “Bulletin on Klan Position on White Supremacy.” Bulletin, Aug. 27, 1929. Ku Klux Klan Crown Point, Indiana (Lake County) Records, 1913 – 1932 Box 1 Folder 4. William Henry Smith Memorial Library, IHS.

reconfigured organizations built from the wreckage of Klaverns that closed due to neglect or scandal. Others were entirely new efforts whose members were enticed using the same local organizing strategies that brought the organization into the public eye a decade earlier.

Changes to the Klan's demographics required leaders to adopt new strategies to enlist potential members to the cause and keep current members engaged. While the Klans' secretive, extralegal reputation was appealing to some, public grappling over the use of masks brought a central conundrum to light. Klan violence was always a furtive affair, and regulating the use of masks would not keep Klansmen from using their regalia in "unsanctioned" ways. Meanwhile, the mainstream adoption of many of the Klan's central projects—restrictive immigration legislation, the maintenance of Jim Crow laws across the South, and, until 1933, the existence of Prohibition—made the Klan's role as an organization outside of the national polity into more of a liability for the group's leaders than an asset. Under these conditions, "looking like the Klan" could help the Klan continue to distinguish itself, but it also marked members of the organization with regalia that was hard to separate from the order's violent past. Klan leaders struggled with how to deal with this conundrum, as they sought to celebrate the Klan as an exceptional organization, but also worked to challenge notions that the organization operated outside the law.

Rapidly changing sartorial regulations reflected the changing financial circumstances of an organization whose numbers of new members were diminishing. Rather than viewing Klan regalia as an important money-making venture, as the organization once had, Klan leaders started presenting members with simpler fee structures, as in May 1927, when robe fees were folded into a single initiation fee for the

organization. Under this model, members initiated into the Klan's new "K-Trio" degree received a new robe and helmet to rent as long as he was in good standing.<sup>704</sup> Over the next year, Imperial leaders encouraged local Klansmen to commit to the organization's regalia, but the key rationale—the anonymizing function—was lost. Hiram Evans discontinued the use of Klan masks after 1928, with the introduction of a new degree for members of the fraternity. Once Klans received the rituals that comprised K-Trio, or Knights of the Great Forest, Evans announced, "No mask or visor shall be on the helmet of the regalia of any Klansman."<sup>705</sup> The process of dissemination was simple; Evans produced an official edict, which was subsequently read at Klonklaves, state or regional gatherings of Klansmen, across the country in January of 1928. Klans then had a month to put the dictate into effect.

**(Fig. 7.7-7.8)**

For some Klans this likely meant doing what many groups had for the last couple of years: simply folding the flap of fabric that covered the face and stuffing it under the pointed crown of the helmet each time they wore it. Others fixed their folded helmet in place with straight pins, or neatly cut and stitched the remainder of the mask into the top of the helmet. Others simply cut the masks off, not worrying about the jagged edges left behind. Despite the ceremonial significance that Klan leaders ascribed to these objects, there was little discussion of what members were to do with the scraps left behind. When a group of Klansmen did this in Western Washington, a local berry farmer's wife collected

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<sup>704</sup> Lewis D. Capen, "Inviting Klansmen to Participate in K-Trio Ceremony," Jan. 22, 1927. Ku Klux Klan (Mecosta County, MI) Collection Box 2, Folder 1. Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University; .Carr, G.E. "New Robe Fee Included in Initiation Fee," May 30, 1927. Ku Klux Klan (Mecosta County, MI) Collection Box 2, Folder 1. Clarke Historical Library, Central Michigan University.

<sup>705</sup> Hiram W. Evans, "Unmasking Announcement." Jan. 18, 1928. Kontinental Klan Records, Butte 1916, 1921-31, Box 1 Folder 11. EWSHS.

some of the masks and reportedly made a quilt from the white fabric. Unlike other Klan quilts made during this period, this particular object had no identifying marks indicating that the white patches in the *Drunkard's Path* design were in fact pieces of Klan regalia. They were simply hidden in plain sight.<sup>706</sup> The Klan was changing to meet the times, and the careful regulations designed to keep members looking uniform were becoming less and less important.

With this turn away from masks, and eventually uniform regalia as a whole, the Klan's central directive became murkier. Regalia that referenced nineteenth-century Klans allowed the organization to operate in an ambivalent relationship to violence. Masks in particular made tangible the relationship between nineteenth- and twentieth-century Klans, offering a visible threat that early twentieth-century Klan leaders tried to capitalize upon, while also trying to explain away. Giving up the mask was a concession to the organization's critics, who argued that it symbolized a violent, anti-government position. In doing so, Evans and his fellow leaders weakened the organization's claim to a moral high-ground—even if, for many critics, the idea of a “moral Klan” always required some rhetorical gymnastics.

Viewed from a broader vantage, the battle over masking practices shaped the way that Americans understood racial violence. When the Klan unmasked in 1928, its leaders understood that the practice would not end extralegal attacks by members of the

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<sup>706</sup> For longer analysis of this object, see: Katherine Lennard. “Running Stitch,” *The Journal of American Studies* Special Issue: Inhabiting Cultures, forthcoming, 2018. Accession File, Catherine Parmeter Quilt, Yakima Valley Museum. Other Klan quilts are housed at the Michigan State Museum and the DeSoto (KS) Museum. These two objects vary significantly from the Yakima quilt in that they were both made as part of fundraising raffles for their local Klan chapters. These quilts include the embroidered signatures of raffle participants, as well as text and symbolic images that specifically relate these objects to the Klan. ‘DeSoto Klan Quilt Helps Museum Educate’, *DeSoto (KS) Explorer*, July 13, 2000; Marsha MacDowell, and Mary Worrall, Charlotte Quinney, Joanna E. Evans, 2006. “The K.K.K. Fundraising Quilt of Chicora, Michigan, *Uncoverings 2006: Research Papers of the American Quilt Study Group*, 27, 91-122.

organization, or even the use of masks in “unsanctioned” situations. The Klan’s masks continued to be symbols used in popular culture to identify “Klansmen” or subversive vigilantes more broadly, a fact that cemented the legacy of the Klan, even as it helped to deconstruct the organization it was memorializing. The iconic form of the masked Klansman even more plainly stood for the pursuit of racial divisions, a fact that the Klan of the 1930s started to embrace anew as an incumbent Imperial Wizard, James Colescott, rose to power. Getting rid of masks challenged the viability of the Klan as an organization and as a business, but the Klan’s social vision, now embedded in the structures of twentieth century American life, remained.

## Conclusion: Thread by Thread

“Faced by the fact of the Ku Klux Klan, the United States has tried to get rid of it by laughing it off. We have talked of masquerading ‘in sheets and pillow cases’; we have caricatured the klan upon the stage; we have exposed its silly methods, the dishonesty of some of its leaders, and the like. But we have not succeeded in scaring it away by ridicule. It is there...”

-W. E. B. Du Bois (1926)

“It’s not an easy task. This is the thing. It’s not an easy thing to undo... Thread by thread. It’s a little frustrating.”

– Sonya Clark (2015)

In 2015, amidst rapidly mounting public outcry against murders of young Black men by U.S. police, Sonya Clark started to dismantle a piece of fabric.<sup>707</sup> (**Fig 8.1**) “Unraveling and Unravelled,” staged a performance of undoing, resulting in an artwork that offered a provocative way of addressing an enduring symbol of racial division. On the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Civil War, Clark began to take separate a commercially made Confederate flag into its component parts. Working over a period of several weeks, Clark stood in a New York gallery and actively dismantled an icon, in her words, “thread by thread.”

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<sup>707</sup> “Unraveling, Unraveled” was first exhibited at Mixed Greens (New York, NY) as part of a group show called “Old Dominion,” featuring the work of several Richmond artists. Priscilla Frank, “Artist Asks How Far We’ve Really Progressed In The 150 Years Since The Civil War.” *Huffington Post* Accessed August 20, 2016. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/02/sonya-clark-confederate-flag\\_n\\_7488316.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/02/sonya-clark-confederate-flag_n_7488316.html); Sonya Clark, Personal Website, <http://sonyaclark.com/>; Jessica Lynne, Jessica. “From Climate Change to Race Relations, Artists Respond to Richmond, Virginia.” *Hyperallergic*, July 13, 2015. <http://hyperallergic.com/221436/from-climate-change-to-race-relations-artists-respond-to-richmond-virginia/>

Physically undoing the Confederate legacy is Clark's part of a mounting challenge posed by politicians, artists, scholars, public humanists, and citizens from all parts of the country, all of whom are working to dismantle this symbolically charged form.<sup>708</sup> Publicity for these challenges has amplified over the past several years thanks to an increasingly coordinated campaign by activists, particularly those stemming from the #blacklivesmatter movement.<sup>709</sup> The vigor of these efforts is necessitated by the ubiquity of this image. The Confederate flag is a slippery signifier, thanks to an early twentieth century historiography that characterized the Civil War as a battle for "state's rights."<sup>710</sup> Five different states still use flags that carry some visual connection to Confederate standards—from Georgia's "Stars and Bars," the first flag of the Confederacy, adopted by Georgia voters in only 2003, to the flag of Alabama, which features a red cross of St. Andrew on a field of white. South Carolina's flag does not just incorporate elements of the Confederate flag, that state adopted the Confederate battle flag wholesale in 1948. But the flag's twentieth century re-appropriation for political means is not its only manifestation in contemporary American culture. The cultural adoption as a kitschy symbol of class divisions and "outlaw" politics of all kinds has prolonged the life of the confederate flag in new media. Emblazoned on watches, mugs, chairs, hats, belt buckles, pins, and bikini bottoms (just to name a few), the

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<sup>708</sup> Historians and legal scholars have sought to ground activists' discussions about the removal of flags and other controversial imagery with historical context. A plenary session at the 2016 American Historical Association was committed to this effort. See also: James Foreman Jr. "Driving Dixie Down: Removing the Confederate Flag from Southern State Capitols" *the Yale Law Journal* Vol 101 (1991) 505-526; K. Michael Prince, *Rally 'Round the Flag, Boys: South Carolina and the Confederate Flag* (2004).

<sup>709</sup> Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta. *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016).

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Confederate flag is now used to signal both ironic kitsch and Southern autonomy, thanks to its long career as a powerful historical symbol.<sup>711</sup>

Clark's work argues that simply removing violent symbols from view cannot help us better understand their invention, evolution, and why they continue to work.<sup>712</sup> To this end, the most arresting part of her installation is a small shelf featuring three piles of cotton thread separated by color: red, white, and blue. Each pile is innocuous on its own, and yet when woven together and stitched in place, these threads hold tremendous symbolic import. Seeing the material construction of the symbol is important, but so too is the effect of Clark's work of unraveling on the object itself. While these parts could conceivably be rewoven into cloth that could be stitched to form the original image, the process of unraveling likely damaged the threads themselves. Attempting to put these fibers back together would not yield a textile as strong as it was before, even if we wished to do such a thing. The question of how staging such processes of removal will shape popular discourse about these objects remains to be seen, but the fact remains that Americans are openly discussing, debating, and questioning the persistence of iconic symbols of historical violence in contemporary American culture.

Though this dissertation started five years before Clark began her project of unraveling, I understand this impulse. The spectacular white form of Klan regalia conceals

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<sup>711</sup> The popularization of confederate kitch was encouraged in no small part to the progenitors of "outlaw country" music in the 1970's, including, most famously, Lynyrd Skynyrd. The Southern band flew confederate flags behind their stage at the behest of their Brooklyn-based manager. See Charles Hughes, *Country Soul* (2015); Mark Kemp, *Dixie Lullaby* (2006).

<sup>712</sup> While removing symbols from view does not illuminate how they work, the process of removal is nonetheless a powerful statement, and can be important for communities who must face public reminders of violent histories incorporated into civic life. When Bree Newsome climbed the flagpole of Charleston, SC capitol building, her act was a gesture of rage and respect directed towards the seven men and women murdered in an AME Church in Charleston, SC on June 19, 2015. At the time of that mass shooting, Clark's unraveling and unraveled flag was already on display. These strategies are not mutually exclusive, but may work best in tandem.



the complicated mess of history and contradictions beneath the garment's surface—but that metaphor isn't exactly right because the surface is the contradiction. Clark's work suggests a new approach to studying such an over-determined icon, one whose reproduction also reproduces a set of ideas that Klan members and apologists designed. Attempts to display the robe must not simply use this object as evidence of racial violence in the past, we must find ways to actively dismantle the apparent coherence of the Klan's self-representation.

This is not easy to do. The Klan's capacity for regeneration is astounding, and over the duration of this project, the Klan has again entered the mainstream of American political life in a new way. Self-described racists have used symbols of the Klan to again signal their relationship to a longer historical agenda of organized white supremacy, while critics of white supremacy similarly continue to use Klan regalia as shorthand for this ideological system. In September of 2016, residents of Portland woke up to a graffitied portrait of Maine governor Paul LePage dressed in a uniform Klan robe. The connection between LePage's anti-immigration stance, which some have argued borders on nativism, and the white robe and hood was obvious to Portland's residents, who praised the mural painted on a space designated for street art.<sup>713</sup> Artists critiquing racial dynamics in the U.S. have turned to representations of Klan regalia to signal their participation in this conversation, but in many cases, these works have been ill-received, as Americans have

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<sup>713</sup> "Portland Won't Remove Graffiti of LePage in Ku Klux Klan Robe." *The Portland Press Herald / Maine Sunday Telegram*, September 6, 2016. <http://www.pressherald.com/2016/09/06/city-wont-remove-graffiti-depicting-lepage-in-ku-klux-klan-robe/>.

grappled with the problem of encountering artworks that critique the organization by reproducing its most powerful image.<sup>714</sup>

As shorthand for a particular brand of the political fringe, the continued revival of the Klan's image provided a productive symbol for groups wishing to identify their actions and feelings in dramatic historical terms. Following the Klan's turn away from masking in 1928, Klan members did not necessarily stop using robes altogether, but the apparatus of production, distribution, and use became so attenuated that these symbols no longer represented an organization at the center of American culture. Instead, when Klans abandoned masking, they let the masked Klan robe endure outside of time, as a symbol of violent social disruption. This was a way of acknowledging that the Klan's social project had largely folded into a mainstream political vision. Many of the politicians supporting anti-masking laws in the 1920's did so, not based on a sense of moral outrage about the

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<sup>714</sup> The most powerful outcry against a work incorporating Klan imagery was the response of Iowa City residents to Turkish sculptor Serhat Tanyolocar's life-sized paper-mache sculpture of a robed Klansman in 2014.

<sup>714</sup> "Controversial Statue Removed from University of Iowa Campus Hours after Placement." *WQAD.com*, Dec. 7, 2014. <http://wqad.com/2014/12/06/controversial-statue-removed-from-university-of-iowa-campus-hours-after-placement/>; "KKK Sculpture Ignites Tensions at a University." *Artnet News*, Dec. 9, 2014. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/kkk-sculpture-ignites-racial-tensions-on-university-campus-192331>; Kristen McConnaughey. "Art on Univ. of Iowa Campus Displaying Reminders To Racism Removed By Police." *Siouxland Matters*, Dec. 6, 2014. <http://www.siouxlandmatters.com/news/local-news/art-on-univ-of-iowa-campus-displaying-reminders-t-> Press, By Associated. "University Removes Art Display Depicting KKK Robe." *Mail Online*, December 5, 2014. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-2862936/University-removes-art-display-depicting-KKK-robe.html>; Staff, Daily Iowan. "UI Issues Statement on Taking down Art Display." *Daily Iowan Live - Latest News*, December 5, 2014. <http://www.dailyiowanmedia.com/live/2014/12/05/ui-issues-statement-on-taking-down-art-display>; Vanessa Miller *The Gazette* More stories from. "University of Iowa Artist behind KKK Statue Discusses 'Fear of Art.'" *The Gazette*. Accessed May 5, 2016. <http://www.thegazette.com/subject/news/university-of-iowa-artist-behind-kkk-statue-discusses-fear-of-art-20150224>; Political cartoonists have long used images of the organization to critique its mission and methods, and artists like Phillip Guston and Andreas Serano produced work in the wake of Klan revivals in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Recently, Paul Rucker, and Ignacio Gonzales-Lang have produced installations featuring Klan homemade Klan regalia. Rucker's work took the form of a durational performance in which he stitched a Klan robes and hoods from an unexpected fabric almost every day for a year. Gonzales-Lang has purchased regalia made for contemporary Klansmen and reshaped the form of those garments with the help of tailors living in various immigrant communities within his hometown of New York City.

Klan's exclusionary social agenda, but instead because of the way that masking suggested an anti-government agenda and an anarchic celebration of disorder.

For most Americans, letting the Klan—and its white robes and masks—continue to symbolize violent racism provided a useful foil for more mundane, but no less insidious practices of racial division. Jim Crow laws, school segregation, and redlining all flourished during subsequent decades, while immigration policies set during the Klan's revival in the 1920's remained law. Though some Klan revivals occurred in subsequent decades, the Klan's next big moment was, unsurprisingly, in the 1960's, amidst efforts to dismantle the social and political structures made possible by the ideologies that enabled the Klan's growth earlier in the century.

When Klans started to gain widespread public attention in the 1960's, after forming in towns across the rural South. Some members may have worn antique robes borrowed from their fathers and grandfathers, several garments in museum collections suggest patterns of re-use that gesture in that direction. Others wore garments stitched by loved ones, and still others dressed in robes that they ordered by mail from Klan newspapers, using an order form copied directly from the one used in the 1920's. But these robes by mail were not being sent from an Atlanta garment factory making ceremonial garments for the city's elite, the Klan of the 1960's was again more marginal, more fragmentary, and more self-conscious in its disruption of social order than its predecessor.

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If Klan robes are tricky historical subjects, they continue to pose problems as historical artifacts that endure into the present. Klan robes from the early twentieth-

century are now housed in museums, archives, and private collections across the country. The relatively small number of extant garments—several hundred remain of the hundreds of thousands produced in this period—reflects a widespread discomfort with the Ku Klux Klan over the past century, even as these objects and the organization they represent continue to hold an outsized place in American popular culture.

These garments present a difficult conundrum. What do we do with these discarded pieces of the Ku Klux Klan? While some museum curators privately say that they will never show Klan regalia—either because of patrons tolerance for unsightly bits of their local history, or because they don't wish to court controversy—museums display regalia in a variety of ways. The majority of institutions make clear that their display does not comprise an endorsement of the Klan, though some particularly sensational displays suggest that certain institutions are catering to macabre prurience over historical insight. Despite clear disavowals, the formal characteristics that make Klan robes such icons can also easily undercut these disavowals. White robes can be read from a distance in a way that discursive labels do not. Often, while on research trips to examine robes on display I saw visitors notice a robe and look away quickly, not needing to read the text to know what it was that they were viewing. After a century of circulating in a range of media, Klan robes are self-apparent, and for that reason, they continue to be dangerous cultural symbols that reproduce the violent threat to viewers that their creators intended.

Clarke's method, unraveling the threads of the flag, is not practical for museum objects, or even particularly productive beyond the catharsis of destroying such a seemingly indestructible form. Still, the principles underlying Clarke's work, the goal of understanding how the various components of the robe came together to form an object

capable of so much, provides a useful object lesson for thinking about what to do with such an undeniably bad *thing*. According to theorist Bill Brown, the difference between objects and things is that things script human behaviors, and suggest certain ways of engaging with the world through the use of that object.<sup>715</sup> These scripts are not inherent to the various material properties of an object, whiteness, lightness, opacity, but emerge through historical processes of meaning making as historical actors respond to those characteristics in the context of their own time and place.

Perhaps the goal is not to actually take regalia apart, but to consider whether thinking about the robe's component parts can help us find a strategy for making this symbol less evocative of a singular ideological project. Instead, maybe these garments can be viewed as sites of contradiction, challenges, and negotiations over meaning. The Klan robe's meaning is not apparent, it is a historical construct, and thus reflects contingencies and allowances produced as it has moved through time and space in various forms. Attending to the material construction of this idealized image helps us to better understand how, through its circulation in multiple forms, became central to the American racial imaginary.

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<sup>715</sup> Brown, Bill. "Objects, Others, and Us (The Refabrication of Things)." *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 2 (2010): 183–217; Brown, Bill. "Reification, Reanimation, and the American Uncanny." *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 2 (January 1, 2006): 175–207.

## Appendix A



Fig 0.0: Robe Manufactured by Gate City Manufacturing Company. (ca. 1920).  
Western History Collection, Denver Public Library.



Fig 0.1: Klan mask detail.  
New York Historical Society, Albany NY.





Fig 0.2: Klan Meeting Announcement, Dixie Sign Co. Athens, GA. (ca. 1920's).  
Ku Klux Klan Athens Chapter No. 5 Papers, Box 5.  
Hargrett Special Collections Library, University of Georgia.





Fig 0.3: Rear view of Klan Badge on robe.  
New York State Museum.

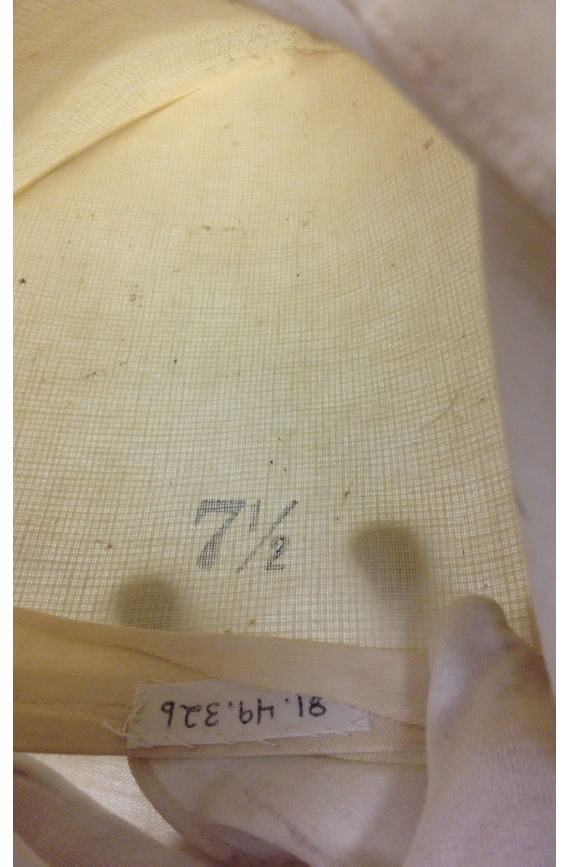


Fig 0.4: Klan Helmet Manufacturer's  
Stamp. Mississippi Department of  
Archives and History, Jackson,  
Mississippi.



Fig 0.6: Klansman's Robe on Display at the Henry Ford Museum. (1921). Dearborn, Michigan.



Fig 0.7: Author examining Klan regalia, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, Mississippi



Fig 1.1: Exalted Cyclops (local Klan president) robe and hood, New York State Museum, Albany, New York.



Fig 1.2: Mask Worn by John Campbell Van Hook Jr. in Roxboro, NC. (ca. 1870). North Carolina Museum of History.





Fig 1.3 “Plan of the Contemplated Murder of John Campbell” (1871), Nelson Atkins Museum Albumen Print



Fig: 1.3 Detail



NORTH CAROLINA.—"THE KU-KLUX KLAN"—PLAN OF THE CONTEMPLATED MURDER OF JOHN CAMPBELL, ON AUGUST 10TH, 1871, IN MOORE COUNTY.

Fig 1.4: North Carolina Ku Klux Klan. "Plan of the Contemplated Murder of John Campbell" on August 10, 1871, in Moore County" *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (October 7, 1871).





THE KU-KLUX-KLAN AGAIN.—PLANNING THE CONTEMPLATED MURDER OF JOHN CAMPBELL IN NORTH CAROLINA.

Fig 1.5: “Ku Klux Again” Planning the Contemplated Murder of John Campbell in North Carolina” *The Day’s Doings*, (Oct 28, 1871).



Fig 1.6: Ku Klux Captured in Mississippi (1871) Museum of Law Enforcement, Carte de Visite.



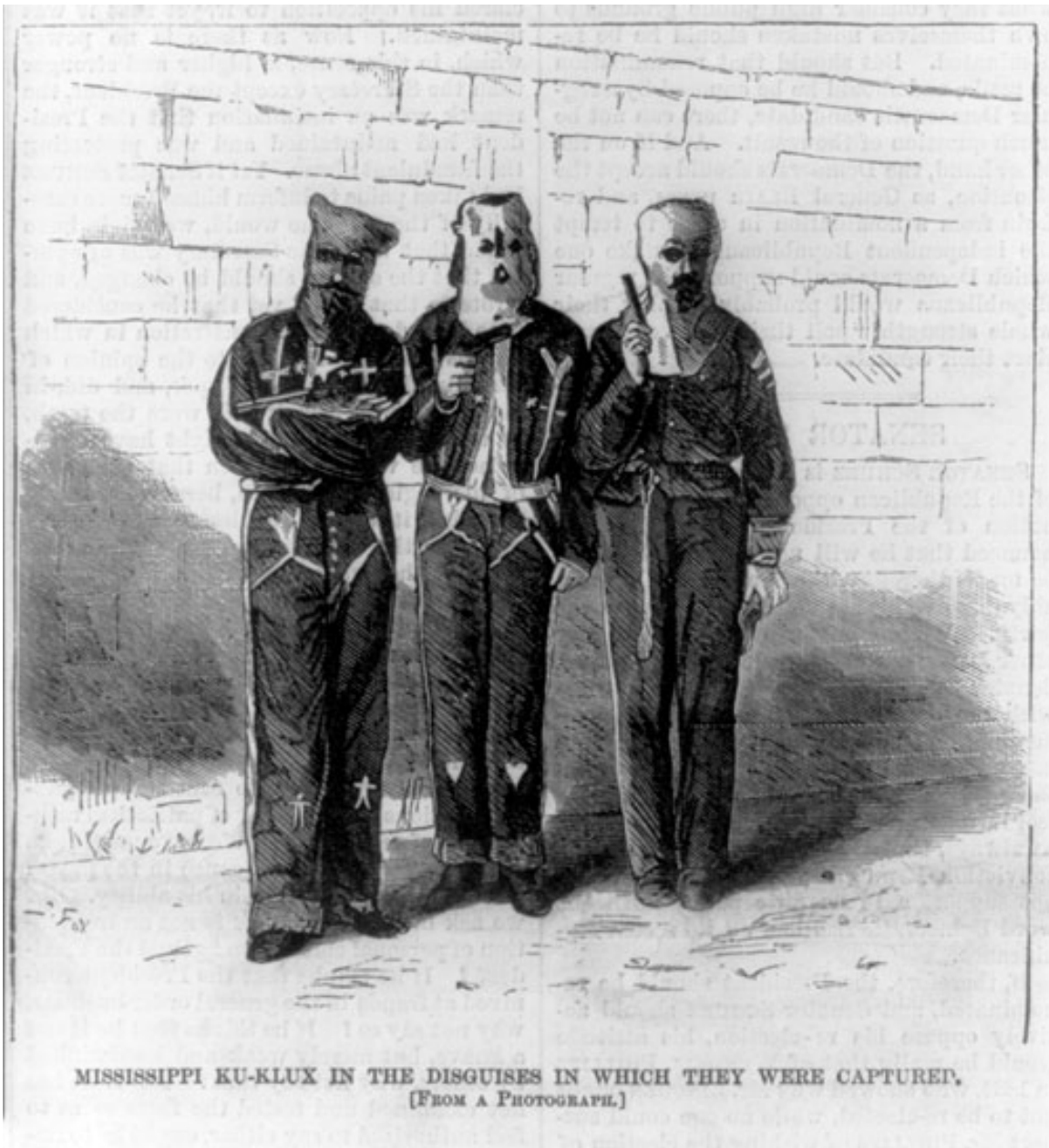


Fig 1.7: "Mississippi Ku Klux in the Disguises in which they were captured." *Harpers Magazine* (1872).



Fig 1.8: Cherokee "Booger" Dance Mask, North Carolina (ca. 1910).  
National Museum of Native American History, Smithsonian Institution.



Fig 1.9 Francisco Goya y Lucientes (Spanish, 1746-1828), Plate 23 from 'Los Caprichos' Etching, aquatint, drypoint and burin, (1799) Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Fig 1.10: "Regalia of the Grand Cyclops of the KKK," Postcard, United Daughters of the Confederacy. (ca. 1907) Walter L. Fleming papers, 1685-1932, bulk (ca. 1845-1932), Photographs, New York Public Library. Copy of the postcard also at the Alabama Department of Archives and History.





Fig 1.11: Man Wearing Ku Klux Klan Robe and Hood. Tintype (ca. 1870). From the Collections of the Henry Ford.

GEO. E. BENZ & CO., ST. LOUIS. 9

### Jacket or Blouse

No. 112a. Blouse, made of Dark Brown or any other color of cloth, trimmed with half-inch silver lace, cloth letters W. O. W. on shield. Price each .....\$1.50

No. 112b. Blouse, made of Dark Brown wool cloth, trimmed with half-inch silver lace, cloth letters W. O. W. on shield. Price each ..... 2.50

No. 114a. Blouse, made of Dark Brown silk finished Velvet, lined and inter-lined, trimmed with fine silver lace; the shield is made of fine satin, with fine silver letters on shield. Price each 5.00

When ordering give size of collar worn, size around girth and breast and length of sleeves, length from collar to top of pants.



### Coats

No. 115a. Made of Heavy White Duck, double breasted, with brass removable buttons, so they can be washed. This Coat is well made, with No. 119a Cap makes a fine appearance in parades. Price per dozen Coats .....\$18.00



### Masks

No. 12a. Fressed cloth, made to fit the face; price per doz.....\$3.40

No. 12b. Half wire, made to fit the face desirable for hot weather; per doz..... 2.50

No. 12c. Full wire desirable for hot weather; per doz..... 3.00



### Uniform Caps



Cap No. 119a. Made of Heavy White, Brown or Black Duck, navy style, stiff visor, with W. O. W. printed on band; per doz.....\$ 6.00

Cap No. 120a. Made of Dark Blue Cloth, trimmed with silver lace, navy style, stiff visor; per doz..... 10.50

No. 121a. Made of Blue Cloth, trimmed with fine black silk band, with gold cord, good stiff leather visor; the emblems (axe, beetle and wedge) silver plated; per doz..... 18.00

Cap No. 122a. Made of fine Blue Cloth with gilt lace band, gilt cord, good stiff visor, gilt ornament, per doz..... 21.00

Fig 1.12: Hoodwink. George A. Benz Company Catalog, St. Louis, MO. Regalia Catalog (1868) Scottish Rite Museum, Lexington, MA.

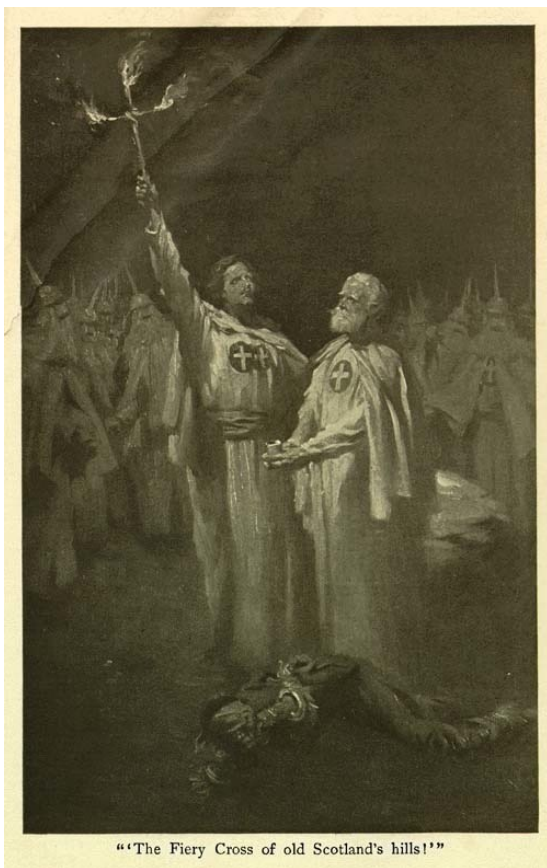


Fig 1.13: Arthur I. Keller Illustrations from *The Clansman* (1905)

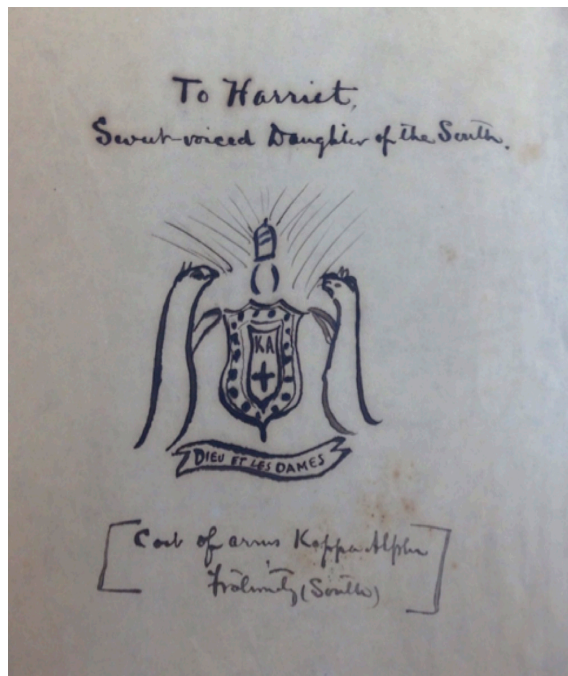


Fig 1.15: Sketch of Kappa Alpha Crest for *The Leopard's Spots*. Thomas Dixon Jr., to Henry Cathcart. "Original Sketch of Title Page, Dedication, and Kappa Alpha Crest for Leopard's Spots," October 29, 1901. Thomas Dixon Papers Box 1 Folder 1. Emory University Manuscript and Rare Book Library.

Fig 1.14: Kappa Alpha Badge Advertisement. *The Kappa Alpha Journal*, Vol 2 no 2 (1885), 61.

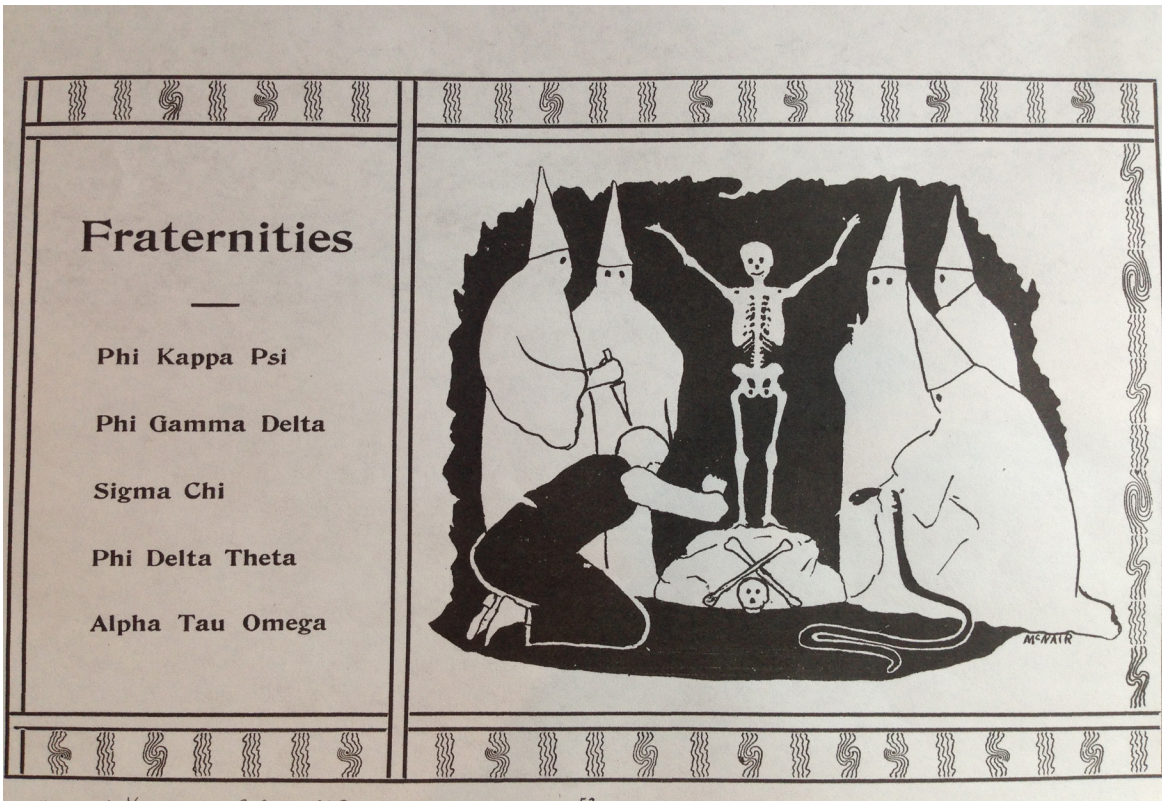


Fig 1.16: Pennsylvania College, *Yearbook 1900*. Gettysburg College Library Special Collections and Courtesy of Mike Raymond.





Figure 1.17: University of Maine, *Prism* Yearbook. 1898 (53), University of Maine Special Collections Library





Figure 1.18: “The Blainiac White-Caps.” *Puck*, Dec. 19, 1888. African American Images, St. Louis Mercantile Library Special Collections, Courtesy of University of Missouri-St Louis Digital Library.





Fig 2.1 : C. D. Williams, illustration for *The Leopard's Spots*. *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden—1865- 1900*, by Thomas Dixon, Jr. (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1902). Clifton Waller Barrett Collection, University of Virginia.

Fig 2.2 (below): Photo-plates from *The Leopard's Spots*. (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1902). Clifton Waller Barrett Collection, University of Virginia.

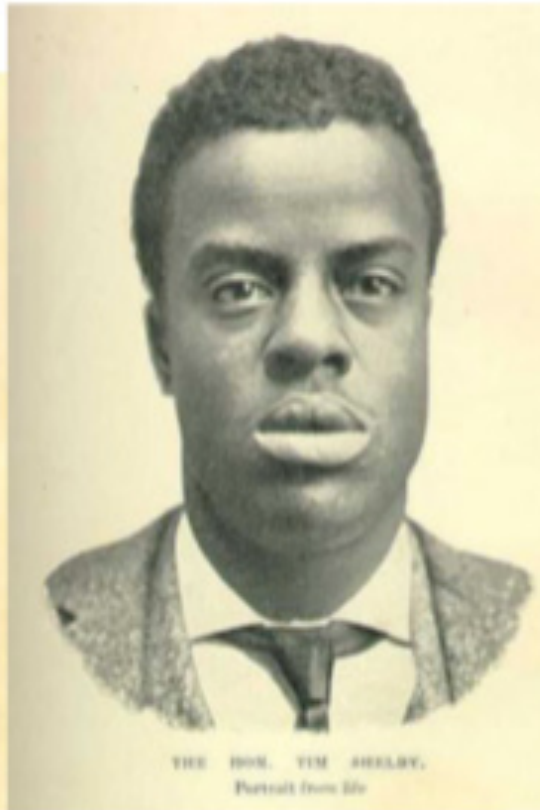




Fig 2.3: C. D. Williams, illustration for *The Traitor*. (1907).

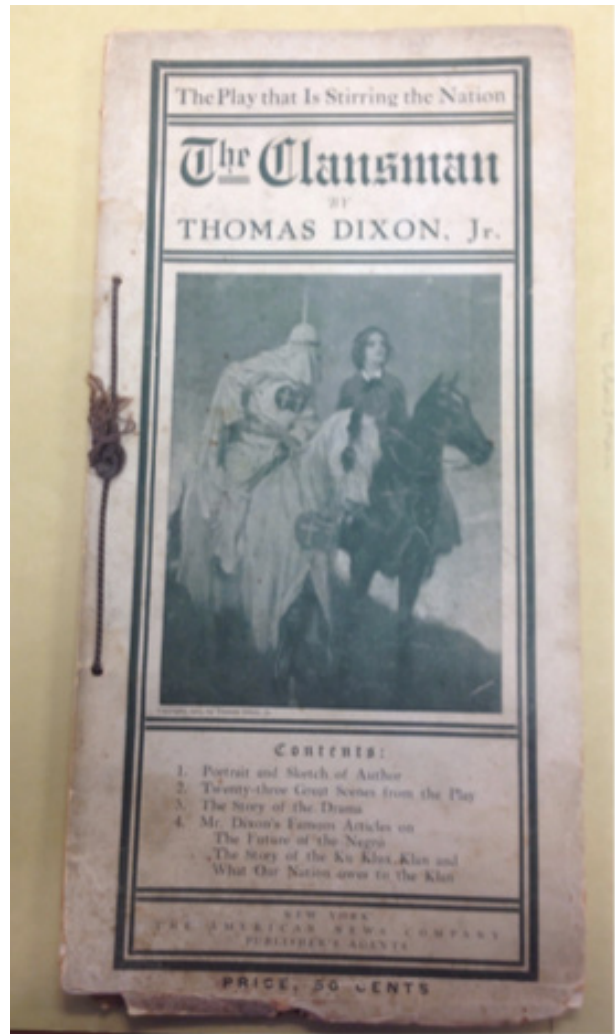


Fig 2.4: Play Souvenir, *The Clansman*. (Southern Amusement Company, New York, New York, n.d.), Ku Klux Klan Collection, folder 30, box 1, Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Emory University



Fig. 2.5: Play Souvenir, *The Clansman*. (Southern Amusement Company, New York, New York, n.d.), Ku Klux Klan Collection, folder 30, box 1, Manuscript, Archives and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

MASON OPERA HOUSE  
 H. C. WYATT,  
 Lessee and Manager.  
 ENTIRE WEEK, Commencing Monday, November 30.  
 Matinee Saturday.

FIRST TIME IN LOS ANGELES

Of the play that has enthused more than 4,000,000 American theater-goers.



Thomas Dixon Jr.'s Wonderful Drama of the KU KLUX KLAN and the Reconstructed South.

Fourth Record-Breaking Season.

**The Show**

You Have Been Eagerly Awaiting.

**The CLANSMAN**

From his two famous novels, "The Leopard's Spots" and "The Clansman." Direction of George H. Brennan.

Company of 75 People—A Troop of Cavalry Horses, Magnificent Scenic and Electrical Effects.

Prices—50c, 75c, \$1.00, \$1.50. SEATS NOW SELLING

Next attraction—ROSE STAHL in "THE CHORUS LINE."

Fig 2.6: Advertisement for *The Clansman*. *Los Angeles Daily Mirror* (Nov, 27, 1908).



Fig 2.7: Arthur I. Keller Illustration in *Metropolitan Magazine*. From *The Clansman*. (1905), reprinted in Dixon Jr., Thomas. "The Story of the Ku Klux Klan: Some of Its Leaders, Living and Dead." *Metropolitan Magazine*, 1905.



The young man avoided the issue and took his old commander for a ride. Forrest persisted in his questions about the Klan, and the youth kept smiling and changing the subject. On reaching a dense woods in a secluded valley outside the city, Morton suddenly turned on his former leader, and said:

"General, hold up your right hand!"

Forrest did as he was ordered, and the youth, trembling with excitement and his eyes misty with tears, solemnly administered the preliminary oath of the order.

That night the general was made a full fledged clansman and was soon elected Grand Wizard of the Empire.

Forrest was so elated over the success of his mission, he remained over a day to help young Morton with his girl who was hesitating over the eventful issue of life. She fairly worshipped the daring General and when he declared

streets of Nashville. The Capitol was still in charge of 3,000 Reconstruction Militia and 200 metropolitan police who had sworn to take every Ku Klux Klansman dead or alive who dared to show himself abroad.

On the night appointed, the squadron of thirty-five white and scarlet horsemen moved out of the woods and bore down upon

the city. The streets were soon crowded with people watching the strange procession of ghost-like figures. On the principal streets the police blew their whistles and darted here and there in great excitement, but made no move to stop the dare-devil paraders. On they rode up the hill and passed the Capitol building, round which the camp-fires of a thousand soldiers burned brightly, and not a hand was lifted against them.

They turned south into High Street and ladies began to wave their handkerchiefs



"THE LOWEST TYPE OF NEGRO, MADDERNED BY THEIR WILD INSTINCTS, BEGAN TO GRIP THE THROAT OF THE WHITE GIRL WITH HIS BLACK CLAWS."

Fig 2.8: C.D. Williams Illustration for *The Leopard's Spot*. (1902) reprinted in Thomas Dixon Jr., "The Story of the Ku Klux Klan: Some of Its Leaders, Living and Dead." *Metropolitan Magazine* (1905) 668.



Fig 2.9: Film Still from *The Birth of a Nation*, 1915. D.W. Griffith, Dir.



Fig 2.10: Film Still from *The Birth of a Nation*. (1915). D.W. Griffith, Dir.



Fig 2.11: Poster for *The Birth of A Nation*. (nd).



Fig 2.13: Advertisement from the *Butte (Montana) Miner*. (July 6, 1921). Image courtesy of the Butte Silver Bow Public Archives.



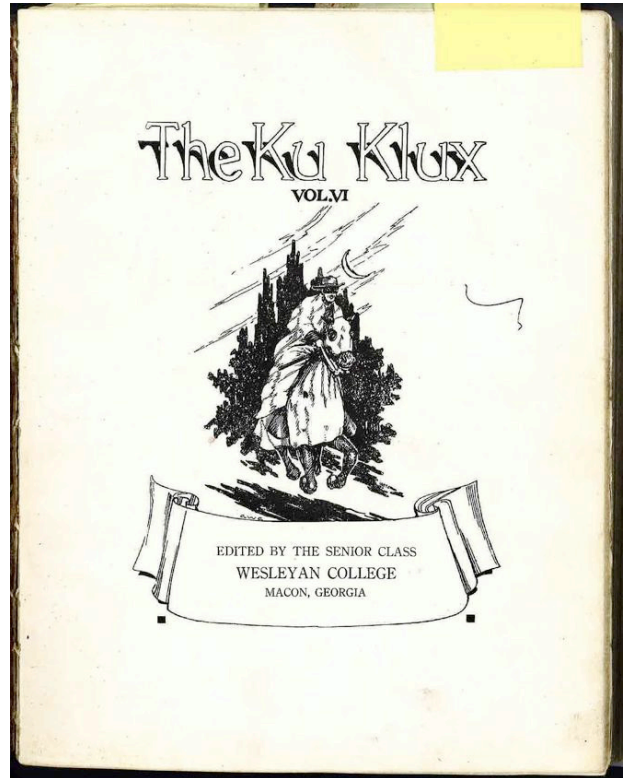


Fig 2.12: Wesleyan College (Macon, GA) Yearbooks. (1910, 1913) Wesleyan College Archives.



Fig 2.14: “Catalog of Official Robes and Banners.” Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Inc. (1925) David M. Rubenstein Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Duke University.


W. E. FLODING

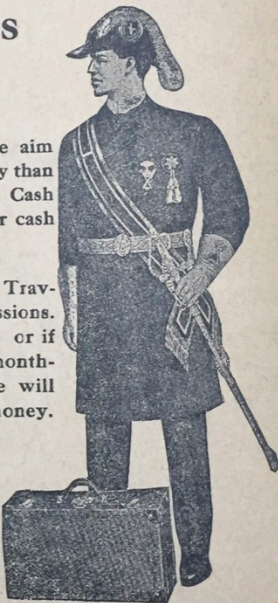
Successor to GEORGE A. FLODING

MANUFACTURER OF

Lodge Paraphernalia

For All Societies





WE sell direct from Catalog and we aim to sell better goods for less money than any other house soliciting your trade. Cash or installment plan. Liberal discount for cash with order.

BUY direct from us and save Agents' Traveling expenses and Agents Commissions. Liberal Discounts for cash with order, or if desired, supplies will be sold on easy monthly payments. Give us a trial and we will prove to you that we can save you money.

THE CREDIT OF ANY  
G. U. O. OF O. F. LODGE  
IS GOOD WITH US

**Largest Regalia House in the South**

ESTABLISHED 1875

*The Old Reliable Regalia House*

**ATLANTA**      **W. E. FLODING**      **GEORGIA**

Fig 3.1: W. E. Floding Company Catalog, (1915). W. E. Floding Co. Papers, Southern Tailors Flag and Banner Company, Atlanta, GA. Courtesy of Neal Zucker.





Fig 3.2: Photo of assembled Klan members and leaders (W. E. Floding, back row, 5<sup>th</sup> from right). (ca. 1919). J.A. Murdoch, Photographer. William J. Simmons Photograph Album, Alabama Department of Archives and History.

W. E. FLODING, MANUFACTURER, ATLANTA, GA.

ALTARS

A Lodge is similar to a Bank. If you do not put anything in it you cannot expect to draw anything out. How is your Lodge fixed for furniture and initiation Emblems? All regulated Lodges and Households should have both, because they increase attendance, and impress the members, and very materially affect newly instituted members.

No. 200—Holy Altar made according to General Law, 36 inches high, 18 inches square, finished in white and gold, and with proper emblems ..... \$32.50

FOR N. G., N. F., and V. G.

No. 201—Altars of Love, Friendship and Truth, each in proper colors, and with proper emblems, strictly regulation, first class material and workmanship. Each ..... \$24.00



Nos. 208 to 210

ION DESK

**MONEY RAISING BUTTONS**

Buttons with appropriate lettering and emblems for stimulating payments for lodge or church work. Suggestions: "I Have Paid My Dollar"; "For Our Lodge Regalia"; "Money Talks Loyalty." Buttons 1 inch in diameter.

No.	Buttons	Price
75	100 Buttons	\$ 5.50
25	250 Buttons	9.75
50	500 Buttons	13.50
50	1000 Buttons	20.00

Fig 3.3: W. E. Floding Company Catalog (1917) W. E. Floding Papers, Southern Tailors Flag and Banner Company, Atlanta, GA. Courtesy of Neal Zucker.



Fig 4.1: Gate City Manufacturing Company Photograph (ca. 1921) William J. Simmons Photograph Album, Alabama Department of Archives and History.



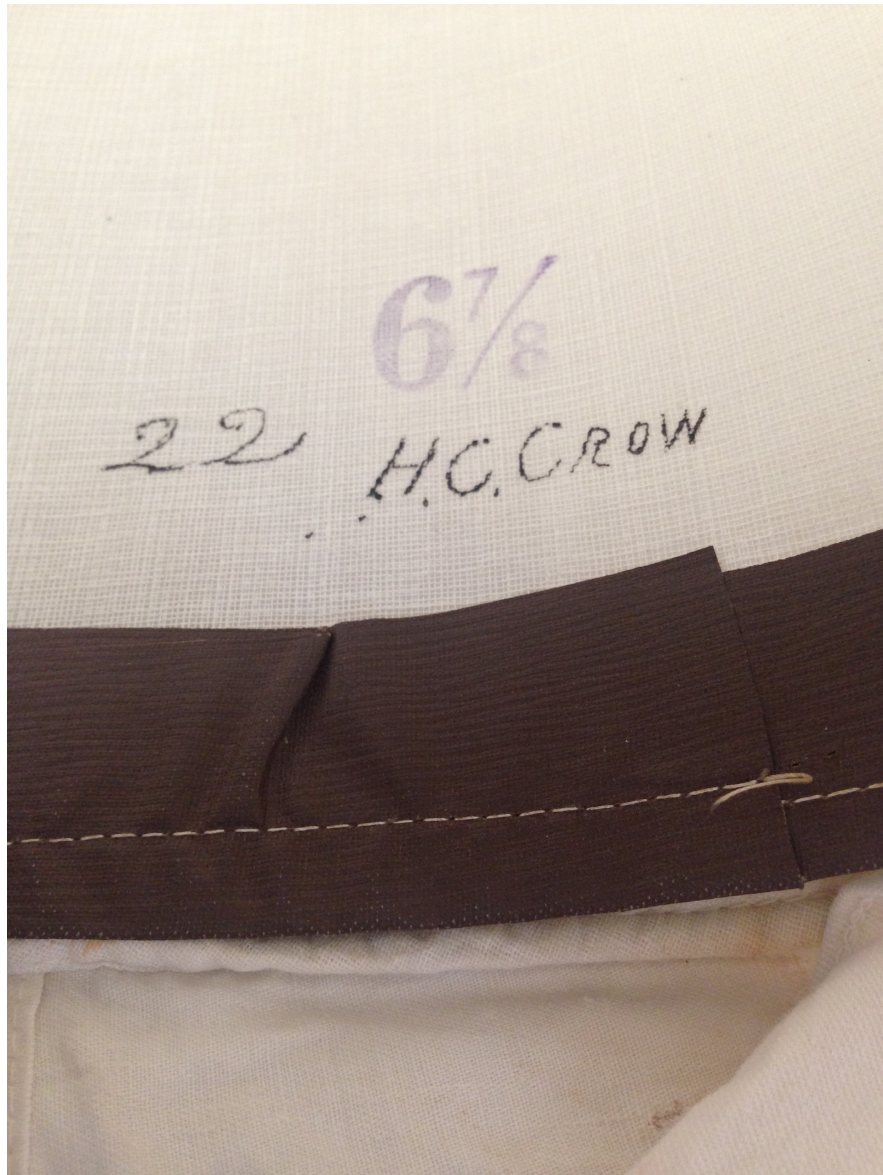


Fig 4.2: Klan Helmet Manufacturer's Mark. (ca. 1920's)  
Clatsop County Historical Society, Astoria, OR.



Fig 4.3: Detail, Photograph of Gate City Manufacturing Company. (ca. 1921). William J. Simmons Photograph Album, Alabama Department of Archives and History.



# American Printing and Manufacturing Co.

P. O. BOX 1204



ATLANTA, GA.



*We Manufacture*

LODGE REGALIA, HOSPITAL SUPPLIES  
WHITE GARMENTS OF ALL KINDS  
CONVICT CLOTHING OUR SPECIALTY

---

## *High Grade Printing*

---

NO JOB TOO LARGE--NONE TOO SMALL

*Write Us Your Requirements and Get Our Prices*

P. O. BOX 1204

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

Fig 4.4: Advertisement, American Printing and Manufacturing Co. *The Fiery Cross*, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

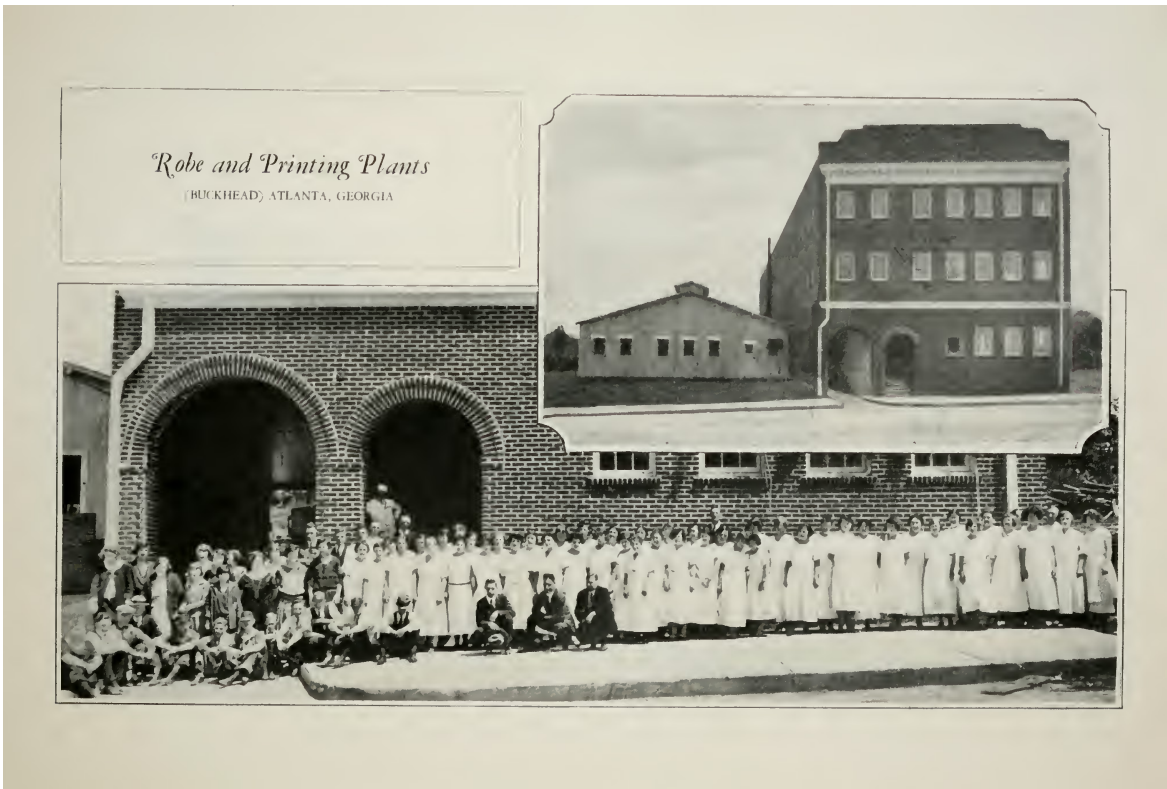


Fig 4.5: Employee Portrait, "Catalog of Official Robes and Banners." Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Inc. (1925) David M. Rubenstein Library, Duke University.



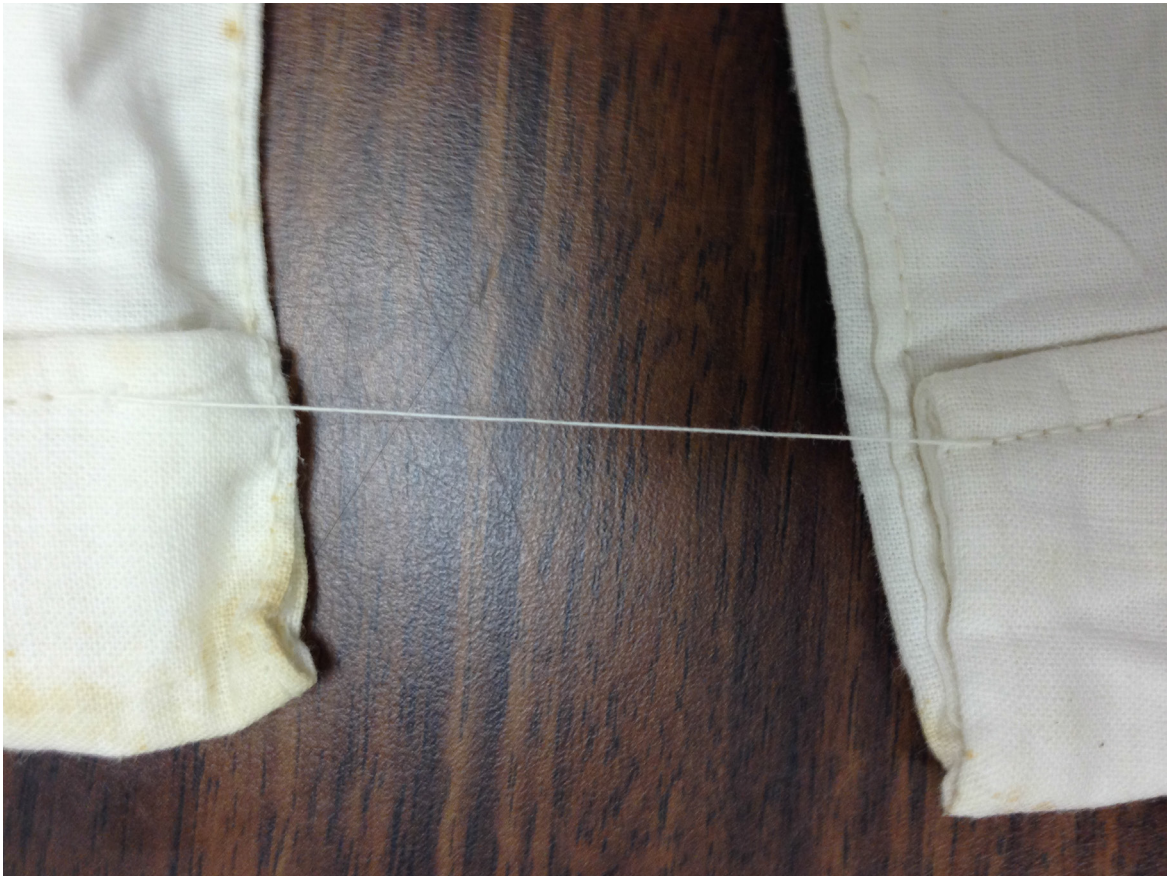


Fig 4.6: Unclipped Threads, Ku Klux Klan Robe. (ca. 1920's)  
New York State Museum, Albany, NY.

Form K-101

NAME .....  
 ADDRESS .....  
 ARTICLE .....

(Tear off at this perforation)

NAME .....  
 ADDRESS .....  
 SHIP TO .....  
 ARTICLE .....

ROBE MEASURE	
1 to 2	
3 to 4	
3 to 5	
3 to 6	
Chest 7	
Size Collar Worn	
Size Hat Worn	

To the Imperial Wizard, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Atlanta, Ga.  
 I hereby make requisition for .....

which I affirm same to be of my own use as a member of the Order. If ever my connection with the Order is for any cause severed, I will deliver above named article to Exalted Cyclops of my Klan without delay. I agree that the above article shall ever be the property of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, (Inc.)  
 Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Member.

Date ....., 19.....

I hereby certify that the person signed above is a member in good standing of Klan No. ...., Realm of ....., Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.  
 Signed, \_\_\_\_\_  
 Kligrapp of Klan No. ...., Realm of ....., Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.  
 Date ....., 19.....

MEMBERSHIP AND DUES RECORD [Form K-102]

Name GROSS MORTON  
 Res. Address Strawberry Plains  
 Bus. Address Holston Quarry Co  
 Occupation Ass't Book-keeper  
 Mail to 198 Address, Phone .....

Klan No.	State	Transferred from		1st Qr.
		19 <u>26</u>	19 <u>27</u>	
		January	January	
		February	February	
		March	March	
		April	April	
		May	May	
		June	June	
		July	July	
		August	August	
		September	September	
		October	October	
		November	November	
		December	December	

Age 24 Yrs. \$  2nd Qr.  
 Color Hair July \$   
 Eyes August \$  3rd Qr.  
 Height 5 ft. 11 in. \$   
 Weight 142 lbs. \$  4th Qr.  
 Single  Married  Widower

Suspended	Exiled	Banished	Transferred	Died
19____	19____	19____	19____	19____

NOTE: WRITE ALL REMARKS ON OTHER SIDE

Fig 5.1: Robe Order Form. (ca. 1920's)  
 Keenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center

Membership and Dues Record, Carlock Klan, ca. 1925 Emory University Manuscript and Rare Book Library





Fig 5.2: Baldrics.  
“Catalog of Official Robes and Banners,”  
Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Inc. (1925)  
David M. Rubenstein Library, Duke University.

Baldric, Michigan State Museum, ca. 1924

19213

# K. K. K. PARADE

Texas  
N.J.

Editor, Moody Courier, Moody, Texas.  
Dear Sir:--Enclosed please find \$2.00 in  
cash for which print and distribute the  
following notice on dodgers in your  
town:

## THE KU KLUX KLAN

Will parade the streets of Lorena,  
Texas, tonight, Saturday, October  
1st. The public is invited to wit-  
ness the exhibition.

Please distribute these circulars after  
4 o'clock Saturday afternoon.

COMMITTEE.

Fig 7.1: Poster for "Ku Klux Klan Parade, Lorena Texas" (October 1, 1921)" Broadsides and Ephemera Collection, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University Libraries.





Fig 7.2: Industrially Produced Klan Helmets

- Underground Railroad Freedom Center
- University of Georgia, Ku Klux Klan #5 Papers, Box 5
- Emory University Library, Ku Klux Klan Collection, Box 3
- Michigan State University, Ku Klux Klan Collection
- Clatsop County Historical Society
- New York State Museum
- Schomberg Library
- Museum of the Albermale



Fig 7.3: “*Good Motto but Why the Disguise?*” Editorial Cartoon, December 29, 1922. Jay N. Darling papers. University of Iowa. Libraries. Special Collections Dept. J.N. “Ding” Darling Foundation.

Fig 7.4 (below): Cartoon from *The Fiery Cross* (Indiana Klan newspaper) Feb 2, 1923 Indiana University Library

A GOOD MOTTO WHY THE DISGUISE.







Fig 7.5: Ku Klux Klan Marching in Washington D.C. (August 1926). Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.



Fig 7.6: Ku Klux Klan Marching in Washington D.C. (August 1926) Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress.



Fig 7.8: Pinned Mask. Senter Collection, Western History and Genealogy Collection, Denver Public Library.



Fig 7.9: Torn Mask. National Museum of American History, The Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.

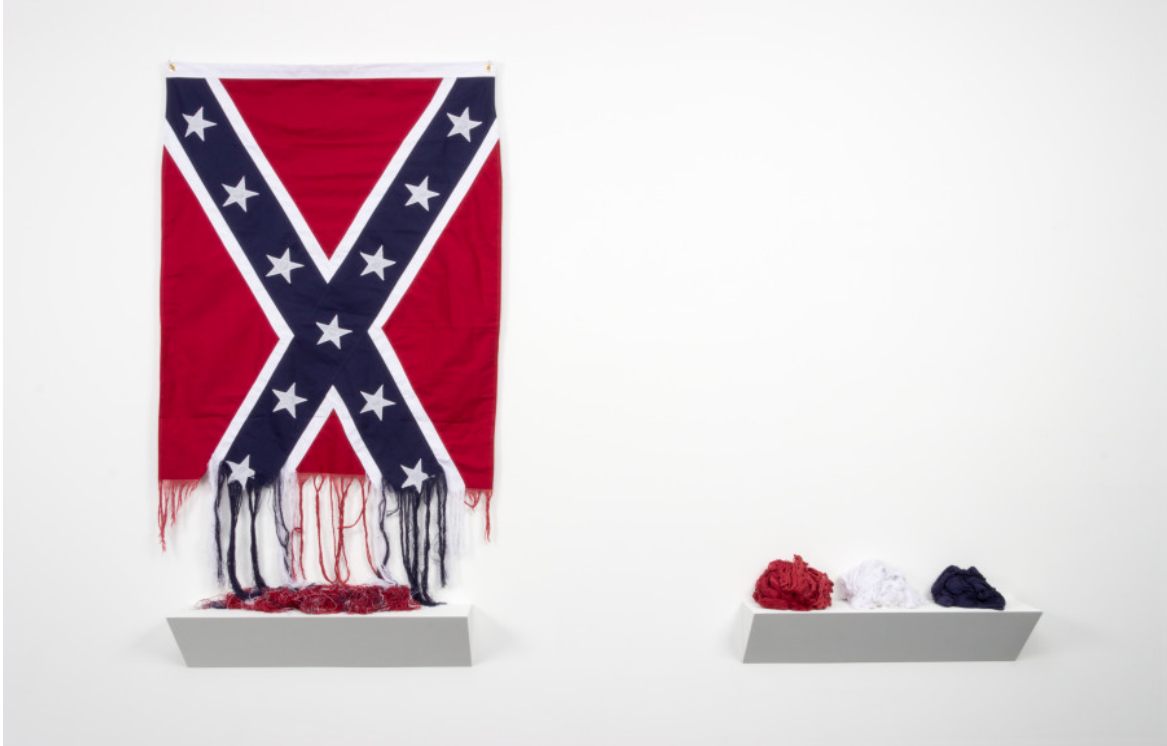


Fig 8.1: Sonya Clark, “Unraveling and Unraveled” (2015)

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Bayfield, CO Ku Klux Klan Records, 1921-1992, M075 John F. Reed Library, Fort Lewis College, Durango, CO.

Ku Klux Klan (Colorado) Collection, 1913-1992 History Colorado, Stephen H. Hart Library and Research Center, Denver, CO

Ku Klux Klan Items, MSS 644, Atlanta History Center, Keenan Research Center, Atlanta, GA

Ku Klux Klan Carlock Unit No. 71 records MS 903, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Atlanta, GA

Ku Klux Klan Collection MS 885 Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Atlanta, GA

Ku Klux Klan Knox County MS 147 Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Atlanta, GA

Thomas Dixon Papers MS 23 Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Atlanta, GA

W. E. Floding Company Records, Southern Tailor Flag and Banner Company, Atlanta, GA

Ku Klux Klan Athens Chapter No. 5 Papers, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia, UGA

Ku Klux Klan Crown Point, Indiana (Lake County) Records, 1913 – 1932 M409 William Henry Smith Memorial Library, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, IN

United Klans of America Collection 047, Louisiana State University, Shreveport, LA

Fraternal Regalia Catalogs, FR 002, Scottish Rite Masonic Museum and Library, Lexington, MA

Masonic Regalia Catalogs, MM 001, Scottish Rite Masonic Museum and Library, Lexington MA

Labadie Collection, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI

Ku Klux Klan (Mecosta Co. MI), Clark Historical Library, Central Michigan University,  
Mount Pleasant, MI

Ku Klux Klan Miscellaneous Collection, Clark Historical Library, Central Michigan University,  
Mount Pleasant, MI

Clarence Beardslee Family Papers, Clark Historical Library, Central Michigan University, Mount  
Pleasant, MI

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Montgomery, AL

Oral History Collection, Montana Historical Society, Helena, MT

Miscellaneous Local History Papers, Butte Silver Bow Historical Society, Butte, MT

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Durham, NC.

Ku Klux Klan Collection 425.1, East Carolina University Joyner Library, Greenville, NC

William Carlyle Hatcher Collection 79.1, East Carolina University Joyner Library

Ku Klux Klan Kleagle Robe Reports, 1924-1925, RG 30-19, Pennsylvania State Archive,  
Harrisburg, PA

Howard Harrick Scrapbook, Harry S. Ransom Center, University of Texas, Austin

Kontinental Klan, Butte 1916, 1921-31 MS 131, Eastern Washington State Historical Society,  
Spokane, WA

Ku Klux Klan Collection, Whitman College, Walla Walla, WA

NAACP Papers. Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

**Museums and Archival Collections—Artifacts and Visual Sources**

The Avery Research Center, University of Charleston, Charleston, SC

National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.

Clatsop County Historical Society

Underground Railroad Museum, Cincinnati, OH

North Carolina History Museum Raleigh, NC

Museum of the Albemarle, Elizabeth City, NC

Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, MI

Harry S. Truman Museum

Missouri State Museum Library and Research Center. Ku Klux Klan Collection 3A.3.5

Schomberg Library, New York Public Library

New York State Museum, Albany, NY

Mississippi Dept of Archives and History, Jackson, MS

Michigan State University Museum, Lansing, MI

Keenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center



Joyner Library, East Carolina University, Greenville, NC  
 Alabama Department of Archives and History,  
 Jim Crow Museum  
 Maine Historical Society, Portland, ME  
 Senter Collection at Denver Public Library's Western History and Genealogy Department.  
 Bremen Jewish Museum, Atlanta GA  
 Indiana State Museum, Indianapolis, IN  
 Vanishing Georgia, Georgia Archives, University System of Georgia  
 University of North Texas Library Archives  
 Fort Bend Museum;  
 Washington Historical Society  
 Alabama Department of Archives and History  
 Yakima Valley Museum  
 Western History and Genealogy Department, Denver Public Library, Denver CO  
 Library of Congress  
 California Historical Society Collection at the University of Southern California  
 Alabama Dept Archives and History  
 Spindletop-Gladys City Boomtown Museum, Beaumont  
 Island Falls Historical Society  
 Maine Historical Society  
 Nebraska State Historical Society  
 Salem Historical Society  
 Oregon State Historical Society  
 Mississippi Department of Archives and History, Jackson, MS  
 Clatsop County Historical Society, Astoria, OR  
 New York State Museum, Albany, NY  
 Michigan State Museum, East Lansing, MI  
 Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY  
 Museum of Law Enforcement, Washington D.C  
 National Museum of the American Indian  
 Scottish Rite Masonic Museum and Library, Lexington, MA  
 Tulane University, Special Collections Library, New Orleans, LA  
 Yakima Valley Museum, Yakima, WA

### **Digital Humanities Projects**

“Mapping the Second Ku Klux Klan, 1915-1940” Virginia Commonwealth University,  
<https://labs.library.vcu.edu/klan/>

### **42<sup>nd</sup> congress, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, House Report 22: Testimony Taken by the Joint Committee to Enquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States (Ku Klux Hearings)**

Testimony of Daniel Coleman, *KKK HEARINGS*, vol 9, Alabama  
 Testimony of James Gaffney, *KKK HEARINGS*, vol 2 South Carolina, (1872)  
 Testimony of Samuel J. Gholson, Vol 12, Mississippi  
 Testimony of Woodson H. Kennon Jr., *KKK HEARINGS*, vol 12, Mississippi  
 Testimony of James M. Justice, North Carolina  
 Testimony of Lucy McMillan, *KKK HEARINGS*, vol 3, South Carolina (1870-71)  
 Testimony of Jacob Montgomery, *KKK HEARINGS*, vol 3, South Carolina  
 Testimony of Mary Ann Norvill, North Carolina  
 Testimony of Christina Page, Vol 4. South Carolina  
 Testimony of John W. Tomlinson, vol. 4, South Carolina  
 Testimony of G. Wiley Wells, *KKK HEARINGS*, vol 12, Mississippi, (Feb. 10, 1872)

**Newspapers:**

This dissertation made use of several databases of digitized newspapers, including Chronicling America, Library of Congress; American Historic Newspapers, Proquest; Readex, Historical Newspapers, in addition to archival copies for publications not available digitally.

While the search function of these tools is far from perfect, digitization was ideal for tracking the movement of the images, objects, and people that comprise the subjects of this dissertation. These tools are well suited to cultural histories that focus on circulation, as they can reveal the appearance of subjects in unexpected settings. The following list of newspapers thus comprises publications consulted, not a thorough examination of any single publication.

Abilene (Kansas) Weekly Reflector  
The Advocate (Topeka, KS)  
Afro-American (Baltimore MD)  
The American Israelite (Cincinnati, OH)  
Anderson Intelligencer (SC)  
Arizona Republican  
Artnet News  
Atlanta Constitution  
Atlanta Daily World  
Atlanta Georgian  
Atlanta Journal  
Augusta (Georgia) Chronicle  
Bee (Earlington, KY)  
Billboard  
Bismark (ND) Daily Tribune  
Boston Daily Globe  
Broad Ax  
Brownsville (TX) Daily Herald  
Butte Miner  
Cairo (IL) Bulletin  
Charlotte (North Carolina) Observer  
Chicago Defender  
Chicago Tribune  
Clarksburg Telegram (WV)  
Collier's Weekly  
Colfax Gazette  
The Crisis  
The Biloxi Daily Herald  
Daily Iowan Live  
Daily Phoenix (Columbia, SC)  
Daily Public Ledger (Maysville, KY)  
Detroit Free Press  
The Dial  
East Oregonian (Pendleton)  
Emporia (Kansas) Gazette  
Evening Bulletin (Maysville KY)  
Evening Star (Washington DC)



Fiery Cross, (Indianapolis, IN)  
Fort Worth Star-Telegram  
Frankfurt (Kentucky) Roundabout  
The Freeman (Indianapolis)  
The Gazette  
Gold Leaf Volume  
The Greenville Times  
Guthrie (Oklahoma) Leader  
Harper's Weekly  
Herald and News  
Hickman Courier  
Hopkinsville Kentuckian  
Huffington Post  
Hyperallergic  
Imperial Night-Hawk  
Independent (New York)  
Kansas City (MO) Star  
Kourier Magazine  
The Lafayette Advertiser (Lafayette LA)  
Laurens Advertiser  
Los Angeles Herald  
Los Angeles Times  
Macon (Georgia) Telegraph  
Daily Mail Online (London)  
Marble Hill Press, Marble Hill, MO  
Meridional (Abbeville LA)  
Motography  
The Moving Picture World  
Mower County Transcript (Lansing, MN)  
Nashville Tennessean (1920-1922)  
Nashville Union and American (TN)  
The National Era  
New York American  
New York Clipper  
New York Evening Journal  
New York Times  
New York World  
News and Herald, Winsboro SC  
Ocala Banner  
Omaha Daily Bee  
Peninsula Enterprise (Accomac, VA)  
Pensacola (FL) Journa  
Pittsburgh Dispatch (PA)  
The Portland Press Herald  
Process  
Pulaski Citizen  
The Rich Hill Tribune (Rich Hill, MO)  
Richmond Climax (Richmond VA)  
Richmond Dispatch  
Roanoke (Virginia) Times  
Rock Island (IL) Argus

The Saint Paul Globe  
Salt Lake Herald  
Salt Lake Tribune  
Salt Tribune  
San Antonio Light (TX)  
San Francisco Call  
San Francisco Sunday Call  
San Jose (CA) Evening News  
Scranton (Pennsylvania) Tribune  
Spokane Chronicle  
St Landry Clarion  
St. Louis Post – Dispatch  
The St Louis Republic  
Star (Reynoldsville PA)  
Stark County Democrat  
State Chronicle Volume  
The Sun  
Sun (New York)  
The Times (Washington DC)  
Times Dispatch  
Topeka State Journal  
Virginian-Pilot  
The Washington Post  
Watauga Democrat (Boone, NC)  
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*Ladies' Garment Worker*  
*Kourier Magazine*  
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