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Reexamining the Oregon Klan in the Age of Trump: True Believers and Fellow Travelers

By Lawrence M. Lipin
Pacific University

In the 1920s a social movement on the right, grounded in white supremacy, anti-elitism, and what many of its adherents considered true Americanism, spread across the landscape, and in places like Oregon garnered enough public support to influence and momentarily control politics. The second Ku Klux Klan, as Linda Gordon has recently portrayed it, was hardly a bunch of rural and uneducated people from cultural backwaters. She presents a vision of the Klan that was well within the mainstream, embracing modern advertising and entertainment technologies. Much scholarship, done mostly about two decades ago, recognized the Klan’s modernity, noting that it was, especially in the west, more urban than rural. And such scholarship also noted that while the Klan could talk a good populist game, it rarely challenged the sources of capitalist accumulation and power. But the Klan also captured the attention and support of some influential people who would not be expected to support its right-wing agenda of the Klan, and certainly not its commitment to racism. This paper explores figures who are normally associated with the political left and who made some key interventions supporting the influence of this so-called “Invisible Empire.” Examination of these individuals in Oregon puts faces to the broad statements about the modernity and broad appeal that historians have heretofore declared was central to an understanding of this movement.

To explore these themes in the wake of the presidential campaign of 2016 and the Trump administration that has resulted is to remind ourselves how the present establishes the questions that we ask of the past. President Donald J. Trump has brought right-wing fringe groups, now rebranded as the “Alt-Right,” into the centers of public power and influence. The Trump campaign had made little effort to avoid using the imagery associated with white nationalist groups, a tendency recognized by both political parties; during the campaign, conservative Speaker of the House, Paul Ryan, responded to one of the candidate’s statements by denouncing it as a “textbook definition of a racist comment.” Once elected, President Trump would reaffirm his loyalty to his “Alt-Right” supporters by selecting former Breitbart editor Steve Bannon as Chief Strategist for the incoming administration. Soon afterward, the nomination of Senator Jeff Sessions to head the justice department seemed to have been meant to stop in its tracks a bipartisan effort to decrease incarceration rates, chiefly of African American men. Any doubt about a shift in discourse brought by the new administration was removed later that summer when President Trump articulated a moral equivalence between Nazis and their opponents that reaffirmed his sympathies with the aims of the “Alt-Right.” As it turns out, the election of 2016 brought forth a complicated blend of white nationalism, working-class frustration, and the willingness of the Republican Party leadership to work with President Trump despite his racist,

The rise of Trumpism and its open encouragement to racial antagonism on the right provides a good reason to reexamine the Oregon Klan of the 1920s. That Klan had many contradictions, not the least of which was the support for the organization by those who had little association with racism. Historians have recognized that it was anti-Catholicism that characterized the rise of the Klan in Oregon. This essay aims to suggest some of the ways in which the Oregon Klan embrace of anti-Catholicism lured many who were troubled by the influence of the Catholic hierarchy to work with an organization whose public language was avowedly largely racist. It compares a leading Klan lecturer in Oregon, the Reverend Reuben Sawyer, who gave lectures to crowded auditoriums across the state, with the aspirations of those whose politics were one way or another anti-capitalist.

The Trump ascension is further relevant to such an exploration because so many observers have commented on the way in which Trump’s campaign, if not his presidency, articulated the themes of right-wing populism that have echoed on the fringes of the Republican Party since the days of George Wallace and Patrick Buchanan. Journalist John B. Judis has focused on the long-term decline of manufacturing and the more recent impact of the Great Recession of 2008 on the white working class to propose that Trump represents a variant of right-wing populism, dedicated to exploding the certainties of fin-de-siècle globalism supported by neoliberal politicians of both political parties. E. J. Dionne suggests that Trump’s ability to dominate the Republican nomination process was rooted in the inability of the party to truly deliver on the kind of anti-elite sentiment conservatives have so often articulated without delivering the economic goods for its working-class constituencies; for Dionne, the racism and economic populism associated with the Trump candidacy was something the party rhetorically had fostered. With Trump in the White House, the interesting matter will be the continued willingness of Republican politicians and constituencies to embrace positions and language associated with what has long been seen as the fringe-right.

But it also provides an opportunity for historians to seek previous circumstances in which such a concatenation of social and political forces roiled our politics and to examine just how permeable our politics can be to radical insurgencies on the right. Reckoning with the meaning of this rise of right-wing populism and white nationalism is especially necessary for those baby boomers who came of age in the postwar era, which opened with the production of widely-read historical works on American exceptionalism and the strength of the liberal tradition that:

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celebrated the United States’ ability to navigate through the storms unleashed by totalitarianisms of the right and the left that had blown through many parts of the globe. Trump’s election signals the need to reorient our historical perspective toward earlier moments in which non-liberal forces threatened to overtake the body politic.

As a national institution, the second Ku Klux Klan was the product of the Progressive Era and World War I. It arose out of numerous sources, including the 1915 opening of D. W. Griffith’s technically innovative but politically provocative feature film, “The Birth of a Nation,” which portrayed the Reconstruction-era Klan as heroically redeeming the South from Northern corruption and black licentiousness. Another source of momentum leading to the rise of the Klan was the lynching of the Jewish factory superintendent Leo Frank in the same year in Georgia. Both these developments suggested that taking back their country from nonwhites and immigrants was a means by which white and often poor manhood could reassert its dignity; in the Frank case, the accused murderer had been given clemency by the Governor at the request of business progressives in Atlanta before the lynch mob wrested him from the jail and lynched him. The Klan, while not constructing such sentiments, built its discursive strategies around them. In the 1920s, amidst the dislocations and abrupt changes brought forth by the end of the war, the Klan would spread and became the basis for a mass movement in places like Oregon.

The broad influence of the second Ku-Klux Klan in Oregon and its anti-Catholicism was revealed most clearly in its role in electing the Democrat Walter Pierce to the governorship in 1922, and the simultaneous support that it gave to the measure to force all students into the public schools, an attack on the Catholic system of parochial religious education, which passed into law but was voided by the US Supreme Court two years later. Eckard Toy, the most thorough historian of the Oregon Klan, attributes those developments to a number of causes including postwar economic dislocations that affected adversely those engaged in shipbuilding, logging and agriculture. While he notes that racism, particularly directed towards the Japanese,

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7 Elaine Parsons has recently written that this earlier Klan, while clearly a racist and reactionary attempt to deprive recently freed men and women of their rights in the aftermath of the Civil War, modeled a form of fraternal manhood that was easily incorporated into northern and national popular culture. For such reasons, Griffith’s film might be seen as less exceptional and innovative than it appeared. *Ku-Klux: The Birth of the Klan during Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

was an important factor in its rise, he points out that the Klan was not uniquely racist, and he smartly quotes journalist Waldo Roberts, who had reported that it was “not the bad people of the State, but the good people—the very good people [who were] largely responsible for the transformation of the Oregon commonwealth into an invisible empire.” Such “good people” helped to “normalize” the Klan in Oregon, making it appear to be the champion of more progressive or “populist” causes.

Others have placed the Oregon Klan more clearly within the context of industrialization, emphasizing class politics. David Horowitz reveals that the La Grande Klavern (as lodges were known) provided its middle class and much of its railroad labor force membership the means by which they hoped “to restore the integration and cohesion threatened by modern life and diversity,” responding to “threatening change in a spirit of ethnic and social solidarity.” In his treatment of middle-class politics in Progressive Era Portland, Robert Johnston discusses the Klan in the context of developing conflicts over schools, but points out that the clearly anti-Catholic measure that aimed to force all children into the public ones had class overtones to it and was ultimately supported most strongly by skilled workers and the lower middle class. These studies of the Oregon Ku Klux Klan follow the historiography on the Klan nationwide, which portrays it as something more than the embodiment of violent and racist politics with which it is often popularly remembered; the Klan in Oregon, like its national affiliates, was well within the mainstream of Oregon political culture, for better or worse.

Katherine Blee has deployed the sources of oral history to uncover the breadth of the Klan coalition, revealing that the aging women whom she interviewed expressed little regret for their youthful participation with the Klan. Blee reconstructs individual lives though oral history, finding that some of her subjects went on to support social security or to promote equal pay for men and women. Despite their lack of repentance, Blee found that “many were sympathetic persons” who demonstrated “a facile ability to fold bitter racial and religious bigotry into progressive politics.” As Nancy MacLean, who stressed the proto-fascist nature of the Klan, asserts, the Klan appeal was “rooted deep within American society and culture: in the legions of middle-class white men who felt trapped between capital and labor.” Or more simply, as Blee

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puts it, the Klan’s impact may have been “devastating precisely because it was so integrated into
the normal everyday life of white Protestants.”

It is this ability of the Oregon Klan to gain the support of those who might otherwise be
associated with the formation of a modern liberalism that is the focus of this essay. The Oregon
Klan interests us not because of its extremism—there are better examples, like the one that
MacLean has explored in Georgia—but because of its capacity to tap into some important
progressive currents that in effect normalized it. This essay returns to the Oregon Klan by
examining two individuals who cooperated with it in the 1920s and in so doing provided some
progressive cover for the organization, helping to transform the image of the organization into a
democratic defender of American liberties and governance. Rather than define the Klan as a
“populist movement” as much of the historiography has done—though these figures would
certainly suggest such a thing—the intention here is to distinguish between the core of the Klan’s
appeal, which it will define as nativist and racist, from the broader coalition that it momentarily
attracted, a coalition that included socialists and civil libertarians. After defining the central
themes of the Klan as pronounced by leading spokesperson Reuben H. Sawyer, who lectured
across the state spreading the Klan gospel, this essay turns to William S. U’Ren, who is well-
known for having led the movement to establish direct democracy in the state and to pass into
law a measure that would have socialized land values, and it concludes with a discussion of the
less-known Eleanor Baldwin, a radical female journalist who continued to embrace her family’s
abolitionist tradition into the early twentieth century. U’Ren and Baldwin help us think in more
complicated ways about the nature of right-wing populist coalitions and their ability to attract
others interested in fostering change.

Folks like these who cooperated with the Klan helped to normalize it, but we do not
know exactly how any of the historical actors under discussion here viewed the Klan in
retrospect. Were they like the otherwise progressive women whom Katharine Blee had
interviewed who seemingly had no regrets? Or did they become troubled by Klan excess: the
prevalent violent language and the occasional physical violence? Would they be capable of
regretting their cooperation, coming to perceive, as Nancy MacLean has portrayed it, the Klan as
a quasi-fascist organization capable of doing terrible violence, once they had seen fascist groups
take control of the state apparatus in Europe? The historical precedent of the Klan demonstrates
that many different kinds of people participate in the complicated events that can bring a
populist, white nationalist group into power. The diverse group of radical progressives who
supported the Klan in the early 1920s suggests that events and social blocs are not always easy to
categorize. The present, if not the past, remains open-ended.

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It is instructive to begin with Sawyer, who is widely recognized as an important lecturer
and spokesperson for the Oregon Klan. Sawyer came to Portland when the pastorship of the
recently reorganized Eastside Christian Church was offered to him in 1916. In the years
following, Sawyer and his wife often graced the pages of the leading newspaper in the state, the
Portland Oregonian, and the coverage was broad, ranging from weddings or social events of the
Women’s Research Study Group, to which Mrs. Sawyer was an important contributor, to
condensed versions of Reverend Sawyer’s sermons. Eventually Sawyer would give up the

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12 Katherine M. Blee, Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s (Berkeley:
University of California Press, 1991), 3, 6; and MacLean, Behind the Mask of Chivalry, xiii.
pulpit, first to become an organizer of the Anglo-Israel society in Portland and subsequently to become a full-time Klan organizer. Sawyer would be relieved of that position during a shake-up in leadership in 1924, after organizing a chapter of the Ladies of the Invisible Empire. Sawyer’s visibility during the height of Klan influence provides us with an opportunity to explore the nature of the Klan message in Oregon.

He is best remembered for delivering a speech in Portland—one that he would give in other places including Eugene and Pendleton—before a crowd of 6,000, which included Portland Mayor, George L. Baker, in December 1921. Sawyer took on what some might today call “fake news,” denouncing the “ugly charges and yet more ugly rumors” about the Klan as a “nation wide slander” perpetrated by “a prejudiced press… controlled by the enemies of America.” Sawyer depicted a Klan dedicated to strengthening American institutions, one that supported the building of public libraries so long as “Bibles … always be kept on reading tables, and the American flag only shall be displayed over and within the building.” He also mentioned the substantial monetary support of the Chicago Klan for the University of America, situated in Atlanta and conceived by Klan founder William Simmons, “where every student is required to take a course in the Bible, and acquire a knowledge of the American Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.” In the face of hostility from a “prejudiced press,” Sawyer sought to set the record straight and pose the Klan as the bearers of American civilization.

That civilization required protection from a diverse set of threats, one of which eugenicist Lothrop Stoddard had recently termed, “The Rising Tide of Color.” But Sawyer claimed that the Klan was not anti-black, that it was a normal organization; he denied that “law-abiding negroes” had any reason to fear the Klan, noting that many had long “lived in the homes of prominent Klansmen for years.” Though he allowed that black people, like “other colored races,” had unspecified rights as citizens that “the white race—the ruling race” was bound to respect, their existence in America was not a right, but rather a “courtesy” of the white race. Black people’s rights were to be respected so long as they did not act on them; efforts by African Americans through organizations like the recently formed NAACP to “enforce an equality of races” was, the ex-minister asserted, “contrary to divine purpose.” Sawyer raised the stakes by asserting the defense often made for lynching: “The negro in whose blood flows the mad desire for race amalgamation is more dangerous than a maddened wild beast and he must and will be controlled.” Despite his assertions to the contrary, Sawyer’s speech established the racist credentials of the KKK.

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13 On Sawyer’s taking the pulpit at Eastside Christian Church, see Oregonian, October 27 and 29, 1916; for just a few of many examples of Mrs. Sawyer’s participation in local organizations, see Oregonian, November 20, 1919, December 21, 1919, January 12, 1920, and November 6, 1921; on his departure from the pulpit, see Oregonian, January 4, 1921; and on his work with the Ladies of the Invisible Empire, see Oregonian, July 9, 1922 and November 19, 1922. Linda Gordon provides a brief discussion of the LOTIEs in The Second Coming of the KKK, 157-161.
14 Geo. L. Baker to R. H. Sawyer, December 21, 1921, Box 1, Folder 2, Reuben H. Sawyer Papers, collection 488, Oregon Historical Society.
15 R. H. Sawyer, “The Truth about the Invisible Empire of the Ku Klux Klan, A lecture delivered at the Municipal Auditorium in Portland, Oregon, on December twenty-second, Nineteen Twenty-One to six thousand people,” 1-4, Folder 2, Box 1, Reuben H. Sawyer Papers, Collection 488, Oregon Historical Society.
We should note it was delivered in a climate that was increasingly receptive to such ideas. Portland newspapers over the years had welcomed the showing of D. W. Griffith’s “Birth of a Nation,” based on Thomas Dixon’s novel, *The Clansman*. The movie celebrated the Klan as the spontaneous uprising of white manhood necessitated by the licentious assertiveness of a black man towards a white woman, a charge that often had been used to justify the lynching of black men since the end of Reconstruction. Dixon had written to the New York *Globe and Commercial Advertiser* to deny that he and Griffith had produced a racist work, pointing out that they had paid “particular attention to those faithful Negroes who stayed with their former masters and were ready to give up their lives to protect their white friends.” The showing of the film in Portland drew protests from the unconvinced African American newspaper editor Beatrice Morrow Cannady and the local NAACP. When Sawyer spoke of his support for “law-abiding negroes” but warned against any assertiveness, he walked a well-trod path cleared by white supremacists of the era.

When Sawyer claimed that the United States was threatened by religious minorities, he addressed fears that were more central to the Klan’s success. One of those threats came from Jews, whom he charged “maintain a ‘government within our government’ and attempt to dictate to the American people concerning their customs, usages and laws which do not meet their approval.” Sawyer warned, “Our nation will tolerate the threat of no minority which challenges the supremacy of law, or endangers our common welfare.” Sawyer also focused on the Catholic Church, since so much local Klan political activity was oriented against it, particularly the measure designed to close all church-run schools. Fifty years earlier, he reminded his audience, this same class of “hyphenated Americans” engaged a bitter campaign against “another true blue American organization, the present great Masonic fraternity.” This was not “ancient history,” he warned, for he pointed out that the Church itself had pronounced that “Rome never changes,” and he warned the audience that the Archbishop John Joseph Kain of St. Louis had recently written that the Masons are “vicious criminals” and were the “enemies of ‘the school, the Church and the State.’” The mention of the Masons was significant because the initiative to close down the private schools was associated in the public mind with the Scottish Rite Masons as much it was the Klan. Sawyer claimed the objectives of the Masons were “inseparably associated with the development of American ideals and institutions.” Sawyer concluded, “If such absurd and wickedly false charges have been made, and are yet being made against 3,000,000 of America’s best citizens may it not be possible that the charges made by the same class against the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan are equally false and absurd?”

Though we may read Sawyer’s late 1921 defense of the Klan as the words of an extremist, they were meant to make the Klan seem less threatening and more within the cultural

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18 Kimberley Mangun, “‘As Citizens of Portland We Must Protest’: Beatrice Morrow Cannady and the African American Response to D. W. Griffith’s ‘Masterpiece,’” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 107 (Fall 2006): 382-409, Dixon quotation on 385.

mainstream of postwar America. To see them that way is to see them not only as they saw themselves, but to see them in their cultural context. In an era in which Jim Crow and the expanding use of lynching to control African Americans was culturally reaffirmed as northern and southern audiences thrilled to Griffith’s movie, Sawyer and the Klan added little that was new to American racism. Similarly, Sawyer’s diatribe against the Catholic Church built on generations of Protestant anti-Catholicism, some of which would be evident among those who might otherwise decry the racist dogma of this and other speeches that he gave across the state. Sawyer denied that he engaged in hatemongering in ways that seem to the modern eye—and, alas, to many people in his own day—contradictory and disingenuous. In a letter to the Oregonian, Sawyer asserted:

I am not a Catholic hater, a Jew hater, or the enemy of any individual, however much his views may differ from mine. I have lived in Portland for a number of years and as a result of endeavoring to give every man a square deal have made many friends and a few enemies. I am rather proud of both achievements. I do, however, covet the confidence of the newspapers and all fair-minded persons and believe that I will have much confidence when my work is known.  

Nonetheless, many Oregonians understood the threat implicit in Klan discourse, and resistance mounted in 1922 as Sawyer traveled the state spreading the Klan gospel. When he delivered a second speech to a mass audience in Portland, a meeting replete with film images celebrating the Klan, nearly two thousand people crowded into the streets outside Municipal Auditorium. The Oregonian reported that “a heavy cordon” of Portland police assembled outside to keep the protesting masses in order, “speedily” putting an end to the “sporadic attempts at speech-making by certain members of the crowd.” In other places around the state, smaller protests characterized similar Klan gatherings throughout 1922. In January, the Portland newspaper reported that a group of Klan opponents in Eugene had responded to Sawyer’s announcement that the Klan would be organizing there by “[taking steps] to remove the large white cross bearing the letters ‘K. K. K.’ erected on Skinner’s butte, overlooking the city.” A couple of months later, at a Klan meeting in Bend, Father Luke Sheehan of the St. Francis Catholic Church stepped up to the platform to respond to Sawyer, only to be confronted by a police officer and “masked men [who] started to seize him.” While the newspaper reported that “no violence was offered Father Sheehan,” he was forced to leave the building. In May, Father P. J. O’Rourke, and Knights of Columbus leader, H. C. Hurley, arose at a similar meeting held at The Dalles to defend the Catholic Church, only to be shouted down “by a storm of protest” and physically forced to take their seats.  

As the critical fall election of 1922 approached, a forcible attack on Sawyer’s character appeared in the Salem Capital Journal that charged pecuniary self-interest was at the bottom of

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20 Oregonian, November 27, 1922.  
21 Kimberley Mangun discusses Beatrice Cannady’s protests against cultural and political forms of white supremacy in “As Citizens of Portland we must Protest,” especially 393-94.  
22 Oregonian, May 11, 1922.  
23 Oregonian, January 14, 1922.  
24 Oregonian, March 17, 1922.  
the way that he spoke about Jews. The writer, Harry N. Crain, a persistent opponent of the Klan who had written a series exposing the extremism of the organization, noted that Sawyer, who was now in the habit of denouncing Jews, had in April 1921, prior to his affiliation with the Klan, written a letter to the Portland B’nai B’rith lodge that stated that he “had a message of great importance” for the Jewish community, and that he had signed his letter, “Yours in the Hope of Israel.” Crain noted that Sawyer had spoken to the Jewish organization soon after “he had made arrangements to represent the Anglo-Israel bureau” in the Pacific Northwest. Crain accused Sawyer of pecuniary motives, challenging anyone to explain “his desertion of the Jewish cause and his alliance with the enemies of Israel, the knights of the nightshirt.” In lieu of such explanation, Crain offered that he had been told, “This guy Sawyer gets $10,000 a year for leading the lambs to the kleagles for fleecing.”

In this, Crain aligned himself with a tradition of seeing the Klan as a mercenary effort to secure substantial incomes from naïve members, a tradition based on the self-interested behaviors of many of its leaders.

Crain’s denunciation of Sawyer’s apparent about-face identifies some important questions for understanding the relationship between the Klan and the broader racial climate of the era, as well as aspects of the “Alt-right” of our time. It was Sawyer’s involvement with Anglo-Israelism, established prior to his involvement with the Klan and maintained afterwards, that would arguably become his most important legacy. A largely forgotten form of biblical exegesis, Anglo-Israelism supported a sense of American mission in the world and would ultimately become one of the most important foundational sources of the racist Christian Identity religion. Its tenets merged imperialism, racism, and biblical revisionism, asserting that the real descendants of the ancient Israelites, God’s “chosen people,” were the Anglo-Saxons, both in England and in the United States. This was no traditional reading of the New Testament that spoke of new covenants, as it had been for John Winthrop and his Puritan followers in the seventeenth century who had sought to create a divine commonwealth in New England. In the context of growing scientific exploration and categorization of race in the late nineteenth century, British-Israelism established new meaning that dispensed with metaphor of any kind. British-Israel chosen-ness was meant scientifically and it was ancient: Anglo-Saxons were the true Hebrews of the Abrahamic covenant, genetically pure descendants of the ten lost tribes of the northern biblical kingdom, those chosen to bring divine enlightenment and improvement to the world. This conceit required the presence of apparent Jews be explained, especially the Eastern European Ashkenazi who made up the great bulk of Jewish immigrants to the United States. It was crucial to the British-Israel formulation to stress that such Jews were genetically inferior. Some Anglo-Israelists borrowed from progressive era race theoreticians like the New England Brahmin Lothrop Stoddard, who suggested that the Ashkenazi were largely Asiatic Khazars, with origins in the Caucasus region of central Asia. Many others, however, stressed intermarriage of the population of the surviving southern Biblical kingdom of Judah with Canaanites and other Middle Eastern peoples, in defiance of divine intention. The point was that Jews were neither the biblically chosen people, nor were they European.

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26 Capital Journal, September 7, 1922.

The leading historian of the movement, Michael Barkun, points out that Sawyer played an important role in the development of the Anglo-Israel idea in the United States. In 1920, Sawyer was instrumental in the founding the British-Israel World Federation in London, and he was the first to lead both that movement and a right wing political organization. Barkun notes, as Crain had appreciated, that Sawyer had previously written in ways that seemed hardly hostile to Jews. In April 1919, Sawyer had written of “the great Jewish people [and] their brethren Israel.” After speaking to the B’nai B’rith, the group’s president had thanked Sawyer for his word, assuring him that “your reception and the enthusiastic greeting which the members accorded you upon your completion of your address was a physical evidence of how much your auditors enjoyed your remarks.” Barkun argues that Klan speeches led Sawyer to leave “his philo-Semitic views behind.”

Certainly Sawyer’s involvement with the Klan created tensions with A. A. Beauchamp, the Boston-based editor of the Watchman of Israel, a monthly periodical devoted to British-Israelism. The Portland Klan lecturer claimed to see no contradiction between the two movements. As he was preparing to deliver his December 1921 lecture in Portland, Sawyer wrote Beauchamp that his position as a Klan lecturer would “enable me to do more for Anglo-Israel than ever before.” A few weeks later, Sawyer maintained that the Klan had provided him a platform from which he could convince “more good men and women that we are Israel than at any time in all my ministry.” Beauchamp was unconvinced, and he responded that “an organization that needs a mask and uses the lash and pot of tar certainly cannot represent American ideals.” Sawyer took Beauchamp to task for his dismissal of the Klan as un-American. “You are condemning an institution of which you confess you know nothing,” Sawyer warned. “This institution is being antagonized by the worst and most dangerous elements of American society. The Roman Catholics, Jews, Negroes and Japs are especially active in the warfare made against it.” Indeed, Sawyer’s language referring to Jews became more hostile as he worked with the Klan. In 1922, Sawyer asserted:

Jews are either bolshevists, undermining our government, or are shylocks in finance or commerce who gain control and command of Christians as borrowers or employers. It is repugnant to a true American to be bossed by a sheenie. And in some parts of America the kikes are so thick that a white man can hardly find room to walk on the sidewalk. And where they are so thick, it is bolshevism that they are talking, bolshevism and revolution.

The apparent change in language obscures continuities in Sawyer’s Anglo-Israelism, largely in his emphasis on Jewish race rather than religion, continuities that were publicly visible in issues of the Oregonian, which opened up its pages to his ideas. In early 1917, Sawyer

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29 R. H. Sawyer to A. A. Beauchamp, December 19, 1921; R. H. Sawyer to A. A. Beauchamp, February 2, 1922; A. A. Beauchamp to Rev. R. H. Sawyer, January 30, 1922; R. H. Sawyer to A. A. Beauchamp, February 8, 1922, letter fragment, Folder 2, Box 1, Sawyer Papers, OHS. Italics are mine.
30 Barkun, Religion and the Racist Right, 25.
announced, “we, the Anglo-Saxons of today are descendants of the Israelites of old.” He instructed his congregation that though “religious teachers insist that we are Gentiles, … God’s word makes it plain that we are Israelites.” When he departed for London to attend the first Anglo-Israel World Congress, the Oregonian noted that he had “made a concentrated study of prophecy and the Anglo-Israel question.” It also announced his series of ten Sunday sermons that purported to “review the 4,000 years of Anglo-American history as detailed in the continued story of the Bible,” which the newspaper associated with “the great Anglo-Israel movement … which is now attracting world-wide attention.” The newspaper also printed a letter from Sawyer and his congregation to the Prince of Wales, which declared “the great empire which you so worthily represent is that ‘company of nations’ described in the sacred Scriptures as the homeland of the unbroken Davidic line of kings through whom Jehovah would benefit and bless the world.” In that letter, Sawyer declared that the United States was “inseparably connected with ‘the company of nations’ and that an essential part of the revealed plan of ages is a friendship, love and working alliance between the people of ‘our race’ which will prove the instrument by which Jehovah will bless all the families of this earth.” He signed the letter, as he had his letter to the B’nai B’rith, “Yours in the hope of Israel.”

As the Klan presence grew more evident in Oregon, Sawyer’s work with the Anglo-Israel organization began to anticipate some of the themes that he would address as Klan spokesperson. At the banquet of the Anglo-Israel Research Society, held at the Benson Hotel in October 1921, Sawyer reiterated his belief that the American government was “the divine instrument of Christ,” but he also warned the gathered membership that immigrants to the United States comprised “foul streams of humanity flowing to our shores, the riffraff of all nations overflowing our business, social and educational institutions.” Yet, this perspective preceded the rise of the Klan, for a couple of years earlier pastor Sawyer had attributed radicalism in the United States to “the scum rising to the surface of the boiling cauldron—a part of the process by which the impurities of society are being eliminated.”

Even before assuming public leadership in the Klan, Sawyer’s equation of national and imperial greatness, racial solidarity, and hostility to non-Anglos was becoming evident to readers of the Oregonian. When he would subsequently describe his work with the Klan as a means of spreading the Anglo-Israel gospel, he suggested that there was more continuity in his work than otherwise might be suggested. Regardless of how much money Sawyer was being paid by the Klan, we need not reduce his racist discourse to pecuniary opportunity as Crain had charged. We should take it at face value; Sawyer was a true believer.

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Yet the Klan was more than its inner leadership and official spokespersons. Examining others who worked with the Klan help us address the question of how it was enabled or “normalized” by those Waldo Roberts had called “the very good people of the state.” The Klan’s rise to influence in Oregon was accompanied by the support of individuals who did not indulge in racial rhetoric, but who were attracted to the anti-hierarchical implications of the Klan’s assault on Catholic institutions. This essay examines two of them, and while there is no evidence that either of them entered the leadership of the Invisible Empire, and it is unclear how

31 Oregonian, May 30, 1920, September 5, 1920, October 17, 1920, January 4, 1921, and October 18, 1921.
32 Oregonian, October 18, 1921, and November 17, 1919.
long their support lasted, they help us understand the forces that attracted those whom we might call “fellow travelers” to engage in spreading a positive assessment of the Klan.

William U’Ren’s brief engagement with the Klan has mostly escaped historical attention. U’Ren is remembered for his work to establish direct democracy—the system of initiative, referendum, and recall—in Oregon. A product of an artisanal home in the Midwest, U’Ren discovered the writings of Henry George while traveling in the West, and became a confirmed supporter of the single tax. When he located to Clackamas County, just south of Portland, he fell in with a group of Populists who shared his interest in both George and spiritualism and who would help elect him to the legislature. In the legislature, U’Ren adopted a do-anything strategy to get measures passed that paved the way for direct democracy, and it was these efforts in particular that earned him national fame and the moniker, Oregon’s “lawgiver.” These structural changes were merely the means to achieve a particular reformist end; once the initiative had been established into electoral law, U’Ren led a number of campaigns for the implementation of Henry George’s single tax through the initiative process, which aimed to tax land values, put resources into production, and, thereby, to end poverty. But he was active in other ways that furthered his credentials as a progressive radical. As a lawyer, he served as a counsel for unions, and during the First World War he worked with the nascent American Civil Liberties Union defending communists from governmental prosecution. Amidst the postwar Red Scare, U’Ren appears to have been the embodiment of tolerance.33

However, in 1922, U’Ren became party to a Klan-supported challenge to the outcome of a Republican primary election that centered on the role of the Catholic hierarchy in politics. It was charged that numerous Catholic Democrats had changed their party affiliations at the direction of their priests so that they could vote in the primary for Republican Governor Ben Olcott, an avowed opponent of the Klan. The implication was that such voters did not display proper citizenship, voting their own understanding and conscience, but rather were dictated to by their priests. As attorney for the defeated Klan-backed candidate, state senator Charles Hall, U’Ren explained the basis of the challenge: “We have the names of a very large number of Catholic democrats who entered the polls and changed their party registrations who we believe would tell that story if we had the right to question them along that line.” When the court rejected his plea to interrogate Catholic voters regarding priestly influence, U’Ren said he would go to the legislature to seek amendments to the primary law that would prevent such “exercise of influence on the voters by the church or other organizations.” The battle lines of the case were further exposed when Olcott attorney, Jay Bowerman, offered “to announce my readiness to join with Mr. U’Ren in his determination to strengthen the primary law…providing he will agree to include also a provision which will prevent kleagles, wizards, and goblins from coming into a community and attempting to dictate to the electors.”34 By 1922, the father of Oregon’s direct

34 The candidate, Charles Hall, is said to have “alleged that voters in Marion County, particularly, were guilty of illegal voting.” Lawrence Saalfeld, Forces of Prejudice in Oregon, 1920-1925 (Portland: Archdiocesan Historical Commission, 1984), 31-34, quotation on 33.
democracy had become embroiled in a controversy as to what constituted a threat to local democracy. At least temporarily, U’Ren sided with the Klan.

But it was not the only time. As a member of the national committee of the ACLU, he argued that the organization should not challenge the Klan-supported Oregon Compulsory Public School bill in court. While that measure aimed to force all children into the public schools and to destroy the Catholic system of parochial education, it was also a threat to private schools that catered to the children of the wealthy. He told the rest of the board that Governor Walter Pierce was a “liberal” who only supported the Klan for political reasons, and therefore was not a threat to civil liberties, and that the measure would serve to remove class distinctions in education. He argued, “If every normal child must go to the district public school through the first eight grades, then every parent, whether rich or poor, Jew or Gentile, Catholic or Protestant, saint or sinner, will have the highest possible selfish parental interest in making the best possible school.”

Both instances, taken together, suggest that if there is little evidence that U’Ren embraced Klan-style intolerance, he was not deeply troubled by the rise of the Klan. He could work with it to attain populist ends.

In these ways U’Ren colluded with the forces of the Klan; we might surmise that it was due to a belief that the Catholic hierarchy wielded too much power and that this power could be deployed for reactionary purposes to thwart the democratic will of the majority. Over the years, U’Ren had allied himself with certain objectives of the Protestant reform community, including women’s rights and temperance. While running as a candidate for governor of Oregon, he came out strongly in favor of both women’s rights and prohibition, and it would be Democratic gubernatorial candidate Walter Pierce’s support for temperance that led the Republican U’Ren to endorse the Democrat for governor in 1918 over the incumbent Republican James Withycombe. Earlier, U’Ren had advocated a minimum wage so that young women would not be forced into prostitution, declaring in a 1912 article in the California Outlook, “Our mothers and wives and the mothers that are to be are rebelling against growing girls for the white slave traffic and for mistresses for men whose wages do not permit them to marry a wife and raise a family of good children and decent citizens.”

Though he did not identify himself with anti-Catholic politics in the prewar era, he had provided support for reforms that grew out of a Protestant sense of social morality. But that does not necessarily explain his sudden burst of anti-Catholic activity.

The motivations that led Eleanor Baldwin, a mostly forgotten Progressive Era journalist, in the same direction at the same time are equally hard to nail down. Baldwin simultaneously supported the Klan and the Bolsheviks in the postwar era, a juxtaposition of political positions that suggests that our own categories of left and right may be in certain ways inadequate for understanding the rise of the Klan in Oregon. Baldwin’s writings, which are plentiful and available for fifteen years prior to the rise of the Klan, provide further insight into the unexpected ways that the Klan could draw support from progressives.

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Capital Journal (Salem), August 15, 1922. Also, see Oregonian, August 15, 1922; and Capital Journal, August 16, 1922.


Baldwin came to the Rose City early in the twentieth century around the time of the Lewis and Clark Exposition in 1905. Soon thereafter she was hired by the Portland Evening Telegram to write a daily woman’s column, which she proceeded to do for nearly three years. In that column, Baldwin articulated a vision of progress that entailed full equality for women, emphasized the experience of women in careers heretofore dominated by men, and denounced suffrage opponents. Baldwin focused largely on the inequities of capitalist society, putting most of her energy into critiques of bankers and the monetary system. A product of Gilded Age greenback-laborism, Baldwin’s anti-capitalism flourished on the editorial pages of the Telegram, and after she departed from its employ, she became a frequent contributor to the Portland-based Labor Press, the organ of the Portland Central Labor Council.

While Baldwin could demonstrate a moralistic streak, evident in her ardent support for the efforts of the Travelers’ Aid Society to protect young women drawn to Portland by the Lewis and Clark Exposition from predatory men, she was more concerned by the immorality of capitalism than that which was associated with the saloon. Though she was employed by a daily Republican newspaper that sought to lure more female readers to its advertisement-laden pages, Baldwin was often critical of the ethos of mass consumerism: she condemned bargain hunting, which she associated with low wages paid to textile workers; department store owners for treating their female employees poorly; the fashion industry for imposing unhealthy dress on women and for killing birds to adorn their hats; or materialism in general for vulgarizing Christmas, arguing that Christians would be better served by developing concern for slum dwellers.\(^{38}\) Whether she discussed child labor or industrial accidents, Baldwin stressed the failure of the wealthy to demonstrate moral leadership. In response to the Monongah mine explosion of 1907 in which 362 coal miners were killed by explosions in West Virginia, she blamed what she called “the inhuman greed of the mine owners.” Baldwin used the disaster to imagine what a female-dominated government would tell the director of mining corporations:

\begin{quote}
Gentlemen, you have enormously enriched yourselves at the expense of the whole people; you have starved and murdered your employees [sic]; you have charged the people, who have permitted you to work these mines for your own profit, extortionate rates; in every way you have proved yourself grossly incompetent to administer so great and so vital a public trust, and the people now take over these properties and give you the privilege, if you desire, of earning for the first time in your lives a manly, honest livelihood by working in these mines under safe and sanitary conditions as will at once be instituted.\(^{39}\)
\end{quote}

Baldwin encouraged women to study political economy, both because social improvement depended on the education of female minds, but also because she believed that women could not afford to be ignorant of the forces of economic life. She pointed out that the working woman who saved “by self-denial and hard work” needed to have confidence that her

\(^{38}\) Baldwin’s sentiments on these matters paralleled those of the women like Florence Kelley who established the National Consumers’ League at the end of the nineteenth century. See Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Florence Kelley and the Nation’s Work: The Rise of Women’s Political Culture, 1830-1900* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1995). *Telegram*, July 20, 1907, November 2, 1907, February 6, 1908, March 26, 1909, and April 16, 1909.

\(^{39}\) *Telegram*, January 4, 1908.
deposited saving would not be “squandered on some scarlet woman by an irrepressible bank president or cashier”; instead, she urged that women recognize the potential benefit of governmentally-run banking institutions. She urged women to question how “a nation can be truthfully called prosperous” when part of the nation is “greedy and idle” while the rest “go half starved and do all the work.”

Her moral condemnation of capitalism was structured by her adherence to the New Thought spiritual tradition, which reconfigured the divine into a universal mind that upon becoming strong enough by a critical mass of believers would overcome material obstacles to equality and individual fulfillment. New Thought grew out of the same Protestant religious communities that had embraced spiritualism and mind-cure physiology, and Portland had a relatively thriving community of practitioners, particularly among women. Probably most indicative of New Thought’s relationship to spiritualism and its connections to Gilded Age populism was Lucy Rose Mallory’s World Advance-Thought, which was published in Portland for over three decades. A small but active religious community that had largely escaped attention from historians sustained and nourished Baldwin’s radicalism.

Baldwin’s radicalism was infused with her belief that the individual must be free to embrace progress and free thought. Like many within the Portland labor movement, particularly those in the metal trades, she viewed the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia optimistically, believing it was an important sign of progress amidst the tragedy and destruction of the war. In a letter to the Oregon Labor Press, she compared the persecution of “Bolshevists” by the US Justice Department to that of early Christians, reminding her readers that St. Paul had been denounced by Tertullus as a “mover of sedition among the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.” Her point was that “in those stirring times, to be recognized as a ‘Nazarene,’ was every bit as scandalous as to be called a ‘Bolshevist’ today.”

In her defense of the Bolsheviks, she entered troubled waters. She urged the editor (and the readers) of the Labor Press to “wake up to the difference between prelatism, priestism, clericism—in short—ecclesiasticism and religion.” She could not imagine the Bolsheviks, whom she perceived as promoters of progress, as hostile to religion, which was “a divine thing as native to the soul as love, truth, aspiration.” She explained what the Bolsheviks must have meant: “For any set of men to be authorized and paid by the state to decide what ‘religion’ is and then be empowered to exact material pay for their alleged spiritual product from all the rest of the world, is the opium of the people as in very truth it is.” In Baldwin’s hands, the Bolsheviks were transformed into latter-day Jeffersonians: their hostility to “religion” was in reality a declaration of the separation of church and state. In this way, Baldwin perceived a future that might overcome capitalism through both spiritual and material struggle.

Unlike many west coast progressives, Baldwin did not indulge in racist invective. Her columns had celebrated her family’s earlier abolitionist posture, and she affirmed it when she praised the existence of integrated theaters during a performance of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” when

40 *Telegram*, September 15, 1906.
42 *Oregon Labor Press*, June 10, 1921.
43 *Oregon Labor Press*, February 25, 1921 and April 22, 1921.
she criticized the police for the harassment of African Americans, and when she suggested that her readers ponder the “tragedy of being born black in a country of white domination.”

Similarly, she rejected antisemitism, expressing respect for those Portland immigrants who had fled pogroms in Eastern Europe. Perhaps most revealing was her consistent defense of Asian immigrants, whom she suggested were potential model citizens for their craftsmanship and their polite comportment in public settings. In fact, she may have lost her column when she condemned in strong terms the mobs and officials in California and Oregon who prevented a white woman from marrying a Japanese man. In both her unabated economic radicalism and in her denunciation of racism, Baldwin looks like poor Klan material.

Yet she too would work with the Klan in the early 1920s. While she did not perceive the Bolsheviks to be a threat to religious freedom, she could not help but conceive of the Catholic church as a reactionary hierarchical force that threatened human liberation. A year before she made her distinction between “religion” and “ecclesiasticism” in her effort to portray the Bolsheviks as tolerant, Baldwin entered the religious fray during the Portland school board election in June 1920. She urged the readers of the Labor Press to oppose a Catholic candidate who had condemned her opponents for “injecting religion” into the schools. Baldwin rejected the notion that Protestants had done any such thing, and in doing so began to articulate what she meant by “religion.” She pointed out that in New England in an earlier era, “the Bible was the one non-sectarian book of conduct and morals,” read daily by teachers and students. However, she mourned the fact that the “Bible has vanished from our public schools, spirited away by the same sinister clerical hand which still burns Bibles wherever it can be done safely.” This removal of the King James Bible from the classroom, a demand of growing Catholic communities in the nineteenth century, was the moment when Baldwin insisted the “religious question’ was ‘injected’ for the first time into the school problem.”

Baldwin then proceeded to articulate long-held Protestant grievances against the Papacy. She asked her readers, “What sect is it that hates the Bible? What sect burned at the stake men who translated it into the tongues of the multitude for the multitude to read? What sect is it which burned Bibles in free America; which still destroys them in Ireland; and since the Spanish War has fed them to the flames by the hundred in the Philippines?” Then she condemned the

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44 *Telegram*, February 5, 1907 and March 5, 1908.
45 *Telegram*, October 15, 1906.
48 Baldwin objected to the assertion of Mrs. D. A. Norton, who wrote in the *Daily Journal* that the candidate to whom Baldwin objected promised “teachers and contractors will stand or fall on their merit alone, and not because of their private religious beliefs.” See *Journal*, June 14, 1920. *Oregon Labor Press*, June 19, 1920.
Catholic Church for establishing schools “to fit sectarian-trained teachers for our non-sectarian public schools.” She censured school directors for hiring nuns to teach in the public schools of Marion and Washington counties, “forcing parents of other faiths to endure the humiliation and the danger of seeing their children papal-trained.” She attempted to demonstrate that the Catholic Church had historically sought control over education, resulting in the ignorance of the people in Catholic lands. The imperative surrounding the school board election, as far as Baldwin was concerned, was keeping Catholic influence out of the schools and protecting free thought. She concluded by stating, “No American boy or girl is fitted for citizenship unless fortified with an intelligent knowledge of the past and present activities of the Roman hierarchy, the controlling power in the Catholic Church—and trained to cope with the trickery and fraud constantly practiced by its right hand—the Jesuit order, in its effort to gain power and money.” As many during the immediate postwar years had done with the Bolsheviks, Baldwin did with the Church, identifying it as a grave threat to the American republic.

The concerns expressed by Baldwin were a bellwether of what was to come. The next year would see twice as many voters participate in the school board election, when an anti-Catholic slate defeated candidates endorsed by the three major newspapers in the city by a two-to-one margin. The sentiments unleashed in this election serve as a prologue to the more serious breach occasioned by the appearance of the Ku Klux Klan shortly thereafter. And Baldwin would intensify her assaults on the Catholic Church, writing an article for the Klan’s Western American that blamed the Vatican for the “Corfu Incident,” a murder of diplomats that was being used by Benito Mussolini to encroach on Greek territory. Declaring that the “Scarlet Woman on the Seven Hills” feeds on a “blood diet,” Baldwin called on the Masons and “other anti-clericals … [to] do the world a good turn” and support the Klan’s campaign to limit the influence of the Catholic Church. If the source of U’Ren’s capacity to work with the Klan is somewhat obscure, there is no such ambiguity with regard to Baldwin. Radical Protestantism had been evident in her family’s abolitionism, and it remained evident in her vision of a world without poverty. That it led her toward the Klan suggests how radical progressives helped “normalize” the Klan, and they reveal just how complex white nationalist insurgencies can be.

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When journalist Stewart Holbrook visited the watch shop of long-time socialist agitator Tom Burns, he was surprised to find a couple of prominent Klansmen engaged in conversation around a table in the cellar. Respond to Holbrook’s queries, Burns told the journalist, “the Oregon Klan is a very liberal Klan.” Reminiscing many years later, Holbrook claimed “I still don’t know what Tom meant.” In that response we can find clues to the contradictions embedded in the larger community that came together in one way or another through the Ku Klux Klan in Oregon. Klansmen used verbal threats and occasional violence towards nonwhites, and they flourished in an era and place that was avowedly racial in its consciousness. The Klan’s racist language, as expressed by Sawyer and others, did not prevent the expression of concern by

50 Johnston, The Radical Middle Class, 223.
51 Western American, September 7, 1923.
52 Peter Sleeth, “‘Read you Mutt’: The Life and Times of Tom Burns, the Most Arrested Man in Portland,” Oregon Historical Quarterly 112 (Spring 2011): 58-81, quotation on p. 73.
many Protestants, even some radical ones, who held regarding the power of the Catholic Church to subvert democratic and progressive processes, and it was the Catholic Church that was at the center of the Klan’s political efforts in the state. For Eleanor Baldwin, who imagined that collective thought had more than instructive value, that it could in fact move mountains, the postwar moment seemed particularly relevant. She imagined that the forces of human progress and liberation would be accelerated by the Bolsheviks, while she perceived the Vatican and the entire Catholic hierarchy as a threat to that very progress. And that made her discern danger in Catholic influence in the public schools. She was not alone in that kind of calculation, for William U’Ren, who had famously defended communists during the postwar Red Scare, perceived in the Church a threat to the democratic improvements that he and his supporters had made to Oregon politics. For U’Ren, the school bill was not rendered evil because it was supported by the Klan; instead he defended the bill within the halls of the national ACLU as a matter that would strengthen the forces of equality and meaningful citizenship. There is little evidence that either of these two radicals would have welcomed the white supremacist discourse of the Reverend Sawyer, yet it did not stop them from working with the Klan.

In a similar vein, many current day Republicans work with Trump not because they support the expressions of white nationalism with which his candidacy and presidency has been associated, but rather because his presidency offers other policy opportunities. Such cooperation should not be seen as confirmation that the party leadership necessarily supports racism, even if movement conservatism has drawn for decades heavily on concerns about civil rights. We would do better to recognize that white nationalism exposes some of the tensions and contradictions within the Republican Party.

Historical examples like these can be misleading if they lead us to imagine that history simply repeats itself, and that if we observe the patterns we are better prepared for the future. Instead history should impress upon us that technological, economic and cultural transformation constantly changes the stage on which individuals act. History should teach us humility and irony, reminding us that we human beings are imperfect calculators of reality and of even our own self interests. It is difficult to perceive the forces of change and continuity when immersed in the complicated political culture of our own day, especially since the meaning of historical precedents may actually disclose more difference than similarity. What history does is afford us the distance to assess the meaning and efficacy of human action in particular contexts.

Understanding the context in which the Oregon Klan arose provides some useful lessons. Though the Klan focused its political efforts on the Catholic Church, the culture that it sought to build through Reuben Sawyer’s speaking tour was profoundly racist. And this was something that grew out of Sawyer’s prior efforts to transform Anglo-Saxons into the genetic ancestors of ancient Israel, which required the transformation of Jews, particularly European Jews or the Ashkenazim, into either intermarrying “Edomites” of the Middle East or “Asiatics” from the Caucasus who had at most marginal racial connection to the God of the Old Testament. Sawyer imagined black folk who defended their white masters, instead of their own rights, as a racial ideal. To miss the racial component of the Klan and its leading publicist is to miss some of its most compelling force.
But that puts it squarely within the racial dynamics of the era, not antagonistic to it. During the Gilded Age, the chief source of immigration had changed from northwest Europe to Eastern and Southern Europe, and American cities were in the process of being transformed by the large number of immigrants who would establish communities there. While Oregon remained relatively untouched by this movement of Russians, Poles, Croats, Italians and Jews, much of the country was affected. The responses were often hostile. Madison Grant, the president of the New York Zoological Society, a conservationist and friend of Theodore Roosevelt, was moved to write *The Passing of the Great Race*, a fearful examination of the consequences of immigration and inter-marriage. Like Sawyer, Madison understood these migrants racially, and he divided the Europeans into three main races into a hierarchy, with “Nordics” at the top, beneath which were “Alpines,” followed by “Mediterraneans,” with Jews below all of these. Utilizing a form of Mendelian logic, he argued that the most advanced races were also the most unstable and that the child of a mixed union would be the same as the lower, more primitive, more stable race. The purity of the dominant race needed to be protected from the weakening and destabilizing effects of hybridization. This influential book was first published in 1916 and it was reprinted six times between then and 1922.53

By that time, Congress had begun the process of closing down immigration, building a legal and metaphorical wall against immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe and from Asia. Certainly, Grant influenced some of the Congressmen who voted to keep the possibility of migration from Germany and the United Kingdom open while otherwise closing it down. After the National Origins Act of 1924, the flow of immigration from lands with less than desirable racial stock would be reduced to a trickle until a new set of Congressional laws that abandoned the national origins formula in the 1960s.54 The Klan arose at a moment in which an “Invisible Empire” was not required to put American governance on an increasingly racial basis. Such policies were very visible. And by that time Jim Crow had been imposed in state after state to better control African Americans.

If the historical example of the Klan is to be useful, it is because it helps us understand how different the historical context and our circumstances are from those who either joined the Klan or fought against it in the 1920s. The examples provided here suggest that such coalitions bring together what seem like incongruent forces. While the contemporary right wing fights a battle to reverse the trajectory of recent history, which has been expressed in the growing influence of nonwhites abroad and domestically, it is unclear what the long-term relationship will be between the Alt-Right and the rest of the Republican party. Concerns that the Trump administration is proto-fascist stem from personality traits exhibited on the campaign trail and in office by President Trump, but also from his call for statist assertions of power hardly calculated to leave communities alone to determine their own futures. It remains to be seen just how much use of the state the Trump administration will make and how much his Tea Party, evangelical, and white nationalist coalition will support such assertions. The broad assumptions about white and American dominance cannot be assumed in the twenty-first century as it had been in the 1920s. They will be fought out in a very different context.

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