"History Written with Lightning": Religion, White Supremacy, and the Rise and Fall of Thomas Dixon, Jr

David Michael Kidd

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"History Written With Lightning": Religion, White Supremacy, and the Rise and Fall of Thomas Dixon, Jr.

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American Studies

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ABSTRACT

Baptist minister and author of novels, plays, sermons, and essays, Thomas Dixon, Jr. today remains most known as the storyteller behind the 1915 D. W. Griffith Film *The Birth of a Nation*. I argue that Thomas Dixon crafted a white supremacist rhetoric and narrative of modern whiteness indebted to the structures of Fundamentalist Christianity. With varying degrees of success, later writers struggled with the legacy the Dixonian cultural narrative bequeathed them.

Fundamentalist theology offered a whole host of tropes, metaphors, and arguments to its users. In short, Fundamentalism presented a rhetorical stance that was, in the hands of an ambitious and designing opportunist like Dixon, capable of being adapted for other purposes. Dixon structured his narrative of whiteness like a religion and drew the blueprints for that architecture from the Fundamentalist theology that he and his brother A. C. Dixon promulgated. That Fundamentalist mindset included consequential interpretations of the apocalypse that divided theological positions between premillennial and postmillennial points of view. Drawing on rhetorical analysis from Kenneth Burke, I analyze the ways Thomas Dixon crafted a blueprint for a revived Klan trained for constant surveillance of eschatological signs as a way to intervene and avoid the racial apocalypse he prophesied. Fundamentalist rhetoric and imagery provided Dixon tropes, arguments, and stirring icons that he could assimilate and incorporate into his vision of whiteness. This morality play for Dixon had some form of a threatening black man who menaced a pure white woman and called forth a white paladin of vengeance to be her savior. This savior then grouped all the men in the community in a white supremacist cult that would forestall the racial apocalypse Dixon worried would arrive. This study traces Dixon’s creations, strategies, and eventual failure at dressing his white supremacy in religious robes.

Far more than being a study of one author, this project ranges beyond Dixon himself to his impact on a surprisingly wide range of twentieth-century cultural texts and artifacts, including film. From the immediate response from writers like Charles Chesnutt, Kelly Miller, Sutton Griggs, and W. E. B. Du Bois to the epic engagements of William Faulkner and Margaret Mitchell, Dixon’s legacy has involved several writers in its wake. Ultimately the rise and fall of Thomas Dixon’s version of white supremacy offers a view of America’s racial and sexual obsessions and the rhetoric bestowed by white Protestantism through which to articulate and structure those obsessions into narratives and social formations designed to consolidate and preserve whiteness. Any view of the Dixonian narrative that treats it as a freakish aberration ignores the centrality and popularity that it enjoyed at its height, and such a view would risk misunderstanding the forces that shaped such a damaging vision, one that inspired the second Ku Klux Klan and codified the symbol of the burning cross.
Religion and racism run throughout the cultural and literary history of the United States, but they were never so infamously mingled and menacingly deployed than in the writings of Thomas Dixon.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The church of my Alabama youth, the Homewood Church of Christ, occasionally had “hymn-singing” services. One such Sunday evening in the early 1980s, our church invited the black song leader from the all-black, downtown Birmingham Church of Christ, a man who bore the emblematic name Calvin, mostly called Brother Calvin. Wayne Kilpatrick, the church’s head minister at the time, introduced Brother Calvin as the one who was doing “such good work at the downtown church,” and the man who would lead us in song. Kilpatrick requested that Calvin sing not in the way that we normally sang, but to sing in the way that “y’all sing at your church.” Calvin enacted Kilpatrick’s request with his first hymn, “There’s Not a Friend Like the Lowly Jesus,” by adding flourishes of intonation and rhythm as well as “hallelujahs” and phrases like “singin’ it!” To the delight of the all-white congregation, Brother Calvin moved away from the podium, swayed to the music, and brought ecstatic performances to his song-leading.

That night at the Homewood Church of Christ the congregation witnessed an invocation and control of black spirituality. This dissertation claims that summoning and mastering a performance of blackness was a central feature of most versions of post-Civil War southern white protestant Christianity, and that these variables were also the most essential components of the second Ku Klux Klan Thomas Dixon inspired with his writings. The conflation of religion, white supremacy, and violence appeared ominously in the burning cross, a symbol Dixon helped establish in his 1903 novel The Leopard’s Spots. I know that my fascination with the religion and the violent white supremacy at the heart of Dixon’s infamous narratives is a direct result of my being a child of the intensely religious city “Bombingham.”

All my life I have tried to understand how such an ostensibly religious community as Birmingham could produce people who would bomb a church and kill children. Those of us in the white-flight suburbs south of town were not often taught about it in school, but we all knew from whispers on porches at night and playgrounds in the day that in 1963 on Sunday, September fifteenth at 10:22 a.m., a bomb exploded under the steps of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church, killing four girls and injuring twenty-three congregants. Four Klansmen had planted the bomb: Robert Chambliss, Herman Cash, Thomas Blanton, and Bobby Cherry. Thomas Dixon was only one southern writer who fomented the virulent ideas and images that urged his audience to racially-motivated violence. While no one can logically blame Dixon’s writing for the Birmingham church bombing, his narratives do provide horribly clear examples of the tragic ways that white Protestantism framed and abetted the racial violence some southerners believed necessary. This study attempts to shed some light on the toxic ways that religion, race, and violence have combined in the south in the hopes that we may all understand the forces that caused these four girls — Denise McNair, Addie Mae Collins, Carole Robertson, and Cynthia Wesley — to become martyrs.
While the popular image of a writer is someone alone punching at a keyboard, I am mindful of an entire community of people who have helped me.

First and foremost, I want to thank my wife Lisa and my daughter Sophie for their love, encouragement, and patience. You two are my light and my hope.

Helpful research advice came from Jack Mayfield in Oxford, Mississippi, the wonderful librarians at Duke University's special collections, and the staff at Nashville's Southern Baptist Historical Library and Archive.

The College of William and Mary offered me the wonderful companionship and support of many kind and brilliant people. I count myself lucky to have studied and worked with Ella Diaz, Jackson Sasser, John Miller, Frank Cha, Edward Pompeian, and Laura Masur. In addition to the insightful guidance from committee members Scott Nelson and Grey Gundaker, I have learned a tremendous amount from Richard Lowry, David Aday, Melvin Ely, Maureen Fitzgerald, Cortney Cain, and Sharon Zuber. Getting to study American culture and literature with these people has been fulfilling and stimulating in every way imaginable.

I have also been blessed to be a teacher at Norfolk Academy during my work on this project. I want to thank John Tucker for launching me into study at William and Mary and Dennis Manning for continuing that support and encouragement. Norfolk Academy has always provided a community of scholarly colleagues, and I am especially indebted to Linda Gorsline, Jay Rainey, David Rezelman, Warren Warsaw, Eric Wilson, Natasha Naujoks, Pat Hume, Lesley Hennessey, and Trent Blythe for great conversation, excellent questions, and timely advice. I would also like to thank all of my students during the years I have worked on this project for their inspiration and boundless energy. Their fresh optimism continually kept me young enough in my mind to continue working full time while studying and writing.

I want to acknowledge my tremendous debt to Noel Polk, a mentor who taught me everything essential about being a southerner: how to read Faulkner, drink moonshine, eat catfish cooked in a bag, and use Lacan to understand church hymns. Noel made everyone he knew a more mindful and more joyously engaged person. I am certain that talking with Noel about this dissertation would have been one of the favorite conversations of my life, and it is a bitter loss not to be able to do that. I take comfort in the excellent scholarship and advice that Scott Romine has provided in Noel's stead, and I know that Noel's spirit lives in everyone who knew him. Not one word of this project could ever have been possible without the sustained vision, faith, and work of my director, Susan Donaldson, a teacher and scholar who has had the fortitude and patience to
nurture and challenge me in amazing ways. Susan is the best teacher of what Eudora Welty called “the habit of love.” In looking at research, thought, and writing, Susan always helped me find this “worn path” of love that Welty describes: “The habit of love cuts through confusion and stumbles or contrives its way out of difficulty, it remembers the way even when it forgets, for a dumbfounded moment, its reason for being. The path is the thing that matters.” Thank you, Susan, for being such a brilliant guide.

I would also like to thank Thomas Dixon, Jr. for being one of the worst southerners of all time. By being the louse and demagogue that he was, he showed us all what the south can still one day overcome.
For my wife Lisa and my daughter Sophie, my light and my hope
“HISTORY WRITTEN WITH LIGHTNING”

Religion, White Supremacy, and the Rise and Fall of Thomas Dixon, Jr.
INTRODUCTION

Two Roaring Crowds: the Dixon Mob from Jim Crow to the Dixiecrats

I. Thomas Dixon, Jr.¹ and His Cultural Narrative of Religious White Supremacy

Of all the possibilities for a study of southern literature, why would anyone choose Thomas Dixon? Matthew Arnold famously argued that an education should provide exposure to "the best which has been thought and said," but Dixon offers his readers only some of the worst. The author of the twentieth century's most melodramatic white-supremacist prose, Thomas Dixon does not give his readers much literary art or uplifting content.

To most students of American culture today, Dixon remains infamous as the storyteller behind the 1915 D.W. Griffith film The Birth of a Nation. Griffith's film perhaps inspired Woodrow Wilson's often quoted but unverified response: "It is like writing history with lightning."² Thorstein Veblen offered a pithy rebuttal to The Birth of a Nation: "Never before have I seen such concise misinformation."³ While Wilson's alleged comment highlights the epic and dramatic qualities that Dixon and Griffith hoped the film would bring audiences, Veblen's comment recognizes the dual status of the film's narratives: they were horrible efforts at misinformation about race and nationality, but they had the craft and economy of

¹ In all other references, I will refer to Thomas Dixon, Jr., simply as "Thomas Dixon," unless there is a need to distinguish him from his father, Thomas Dixon, Sr. In addition, I will simply use "Dixon" to refer to Thomas Dixon (when the context is clear), but I will use full names for other members of the Dixon family.
propaganda. Thomas Dixon, Jr.'s white supremacist narratives stretched across eighteen novels, twelve plays, many sermons, several non-fiction books, and countless essays. Dixon provided an enormous amount of concise misinformation, and most people would like to dismiss him without any further attention or examination.

Thomas Dixon's career may have started by drawing from Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and its many successful play adaptations. Dixon's narratives reverse the content of Stowe's, but emulate her focus on religion, race, and mass culture marketing, insidiously appropriating Stowe's sentimentalism. Dixon himself claimed his first novel was a heated response to an Uncle Tom play. Abolitionist writing like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* drew on a tradition of prophetic voices, embodied by writers like William Lloyd Garrison and apocalyptic revolutionaries like John Brown. Stowe likewise wove such abolitionist religious rhetoric in her novel. In her effort to reread the sentimental fiction of the nineteenth century and rescue it from the ways critics had ignored those writings, Jane Tompkins offers this synopsis: "*Uncle Tom's Cabin* retells the culture's central religious myth—the story of the crucifixion in terms of the nation's greatest political conflict slavery—and of its most cherished social beliefs the sanctity of motherhood and the family." In Stowe's novel, Uncle Tom's death elevates him to a savior who could redeem the nation from its sins of slavery. Dixon's retelling merely altered Stowe's variables so that the crucifixion was the

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justified lynching that followed from the rape of a white woman.

Thomas Dixon had a consistent vision of this narrative he reproduced in several different texts and over five decades, from the 1890s to the 1930s. W. E. B. Du Bois summarized this Dixonian narrative succinctly: “There’s a black man who thinks himself a man and is a man; kill him before he marries your daughter!”\(^6\) Dixon’s repetitive narrative line in his fictions follows this pattern: a white-controlled society becomes threatened by black rule, which leads to the threat of a black male attempting to (or actually accomplishing) the rape of a white woman. This crime causes white men to rally, first as a disorganized mob, but then as an audience led by a charismatic speaker who organizes them into a retributive group galvanized with the paramilitary gestures and religious symbols of the Ku Klux Klan. These white males enact some version of justice on the black rapist and then reassert white masculine rule. Thomas Dixon repeated this pattern from his sermons in the 1890s through his final novel, *The Flaming Sword* of 1939, essentially five decades of concise misinformation.

After rising to national prominence as a speaker and writer, Dixon became an embarrassment even to the most conservative and unreconstructed of his defenders. By the 1920s, Dixon’s popularity had all but evaporated (as had his wealth due to a number of financial reversals). Signs of Dixon’s decline began even before the resurgence of attention and success he achieved with his work on *The Birth of a Nation*. In 1907, a review of Dixon’s third novel in his Reconstruction Trilogy (after *The Leopard’s Spots* and *The Clansman*) *The

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Traitor received this panning: “We have failed to discover any favorable reviews of this novel. It is branded unspeakable.” By 1920, Thomas Dixon, Jr., had trouble getting his work into print. Even one of Dixon’s most ardent admirers, his biographer Raymond Cook, abstains from his usually effusive praise to demur, “the novelist was now producing outdated works in the afterglow of his fame”; Cook also admits that “the school of southern chivalry and romance to which Dixon had belonged no longer attracted so many readers as in the past.” Dixon tried to work with movies, real estate, and politics, but he turned again to writing even though he was largely ignored or treated as an embarrassment.

While a large part of Dixon’s misinformation performed its version of racial prejudice, an equally large component was devoted to advancing spurious interpretations of history, especially the Reconstruction. William Archibald Dunning, a history professor at Columbia during the years that Thomas Dixon lived in New York, published a variety of essays and studies at the height of Thomas Dixon’s heyday. Dunning’s books argued that Reconstruction, as an attempt to give southern blacks political power, had been a failure and that this botched endeavor had been orchestrated by vindictive Northerners (carpetbaggers) and the southerners who supported their efforts (scalawags). Opposed by the interpretations of scholars like W. E. B. Du Bois and John Hope

Franklin, and later the "revisionist" efforts of Kenneth Stampp and Eric Foner, the Dunning school still persists in publications by Neo-Confederates and other "Un-Reconstructed" writers.\(^{10}\) Despite the efforts of scholars like Stampp and Foner, the Dunning thesis may yet be the interpretation of southern history many Americans know. Although Thomas Dixon's historical veracity hardly needs more debunking, the manner by which he attempts to revise history and promote his racist vision does deserve much more scrutiny. Dixon's narratives reveal some important formulations in the southern conservative tradition, a tradition that more liberally inclined scholars ignore at their peril. Dixon's bombastic narratives certainty pushed later writers (most notably Margaret Mitchell) to more nuanced and disguised narratives of white supremacy. While Dixon's own narratives may not need to be proven false again, the need instead is to figure out why they held such an appeal and what legacy they may have provided.

His legacy comes mostly from the fame and popularity Dixon enjoyed earlier in his career. Dixon's first novel, *The Leopard's Spots* (1903), sold well enough so that "The sales [of *The Leopard's Spots*], which eventually passed the million mark, helped to establish Doubleday, Page & Company as a major publisher and made Dixon several hundred thousand dollars in royalties."\(^{11}\) A review by Earl Gregg Swem of *The Leopard's Spots* in as prestigious an

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\(^{11}\) Cook, *Fire from the Flint*, 112.
academic publication as *The William and Mary Quarterly* summarized its opinion by calling the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, “the inevitable manifestation of the conscious superiority of the white race” and by declaring that “Mr. Dixon tells the story of the white man’s burden and tells it well.”\(^{12}\) At the height of his popularity, Dixon could boast success with a major New York City publishing house as well as a favorable review by no less august an academic institution than America’s second oldest college.

Dixon also had popular tours with several plays, many lecture circuit engagements, and countless sermons and newspaper editorials, all testifying to Dixon’s authoritative and respected position with American audiences. These facts about Dixon’s influence led Joel Williamson to declare, “Dixon probably did more to shape the lives of modern Americans than have some Presidents.”\(^{13}\) Thomas Dixon’s rise and fall tells us much about how religion, race, and violence combined to create a new version of whiteness. At the turn of the twentieth century, Dixon’s writing drew upon many culturally stabilizing factors, especially those already in place in white southern Protestantism. Thomas Dixon was a shrewd combiner of these cultural forces. His popularity came in large part from his shrewd manipulation of his white audience’s racial anxieties.

Although writers like Joel Williamson have effectively explained and analyzed Dixon’s writing, this study examines the way Dixon used religion as a structuring principle in his rhetoric and symbolism, an unexplored aspect of the

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Dixonian cultural narrative. Neither has Dixon's literary influence been fully measured and understood. The dialogue that W. E. B. Du Bois, Margaret Mitchell, and William Faulkner had with Dixon's fiction is an important strain in the debates about the South, its history, and its literature. Moreover, the resurgence of interest in Dixon's work documented by a group like the Southern Poverty Law Center testifies to a recurrence of some strains of Dixon's white supremacy.  

Two problems emerge from focusing a study on a writer like Thomas Dixon: what influence such a writer had on subsequent writers and whether or not scholarly attention elevates, redeems, or replicates politically damaging ideas. The latter problem is easily dispatched by comparing a study such as this one to the work done by an epidemiologist studying the etiology of a disease, or the work of a historian examining the origins of National Socialism in Germany in the 1920s, or the many studies examining lynching in the American south. Scholars have a moral imperative to examine Dixon's career and legacy because any understanding of evil ideology can result in decreasing human suffering.

Thomas Dixon's influence on southern writers offers a more vexed set of problems. To say, for example, that William Faulkner was influenced by Dixon quickly invites a comparison to a statement frequently invoked in older literary studies, such as “John Milton influenced Percy Shelley.” Solving the problem of

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14 The Southern Poverty Law Center reports how the Pioneer fund has a history of supporting the publication of extremist writing, including a republication of Thomas Dixon's autobiography. http://www.splcenter.org/intel/intelreport/article.jsp?sid=370 (Accessed on Feb. 9, 2013)
influence will require some subtleties of cultural criticism, for Dixon’s influence did not usually work in the way someone like Harold Bloom, for example, would define strong precursors in his neo-Freudian paradigm. One noteworthy exception to this paradigm for Dixon, as I will argue in chapter four, is Margaret Mitchell, Dixon’s clearest literary daughter, and she does have some anxieties of influence from Dixon. Neither Dixon’s ideas nor his prose marks him as a “strong poet,” to use Bloom’s terms. W. E. B. Du Bois, William Faulkner, and other opponents did not need to struggle with Dixon in any Bloomian way, but they did struggle with the white supremacist culture that Dixon helped create. Dixon’s influence worked like a contagion, an infection to be overcome, particularly because Dixon coalesced and articulated myths already part of the fabric of white southern identity. In some cases, Dixon’s influence worked as a focal point for rhetorical attack. Black writers like Charles Chesnutt, Kelly Miller, Sutton Griggs, and W. E. B. Du Bois revealed Dixon’s influence on their work by directly taking on Dixon’s ideas and attempting to refute them.

This study takes its cues for framing Dixon from such works as C. Vann Woodward’s *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel*, Fredric Jameson’s *Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist*, Jane Tompkins’s *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*, and Stephen Kantrowitz’s *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy*.16

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Woodward explains his intentions at the outset of his study of an infamous southern demagogue: "I hold no brief for [southern demagogues], nor for Tom Watson in so far as he was representative of them. I do insist on understanding them clearly." In his efforts to understand the political unconscious involved in the conservative and protofascist narratives of Wyndham Lewis, Fredric Jameson observes that such a study may indeed prove valuable in exposing Lewis' hidden designs:

However embarrassing the content of [Wyndham Lewis'] novels may be for liberal or modernist establishment thought, it cannot but be even more painful for protofascism itself, which must thereby contemplate its own unlovely image and hear blurted out in public speech what even in private was never meant to be more than tacitly understood.

Applying ideas like Jameson’s, this study attempts to delineate the ways Dixon’s rhetoric and imagery structured attitudes about race and identity in the first half of the twentieth century and beyond.

Following the way Jameson understands how a “political unconscious” could be “blurted out in public speech,” this study asserts that Thomas Dixon blurted out an entire genealogy of how the ideology of white supremacy worked according to religious principles and symbols. That genealogy reveals the artificial and crafted way that Dixon fashioned his idealized Klan. Any historical account that considers Dixon’s Ku Klux Klan the inevitable choice for how the Ku

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18 Jameson, Fables of Aggression: Wyndham Lewis, the Modernist as Fascist, 23.
Klux Klan looked and worked ignores the possibility that several other groups—the Red Shirts, the Knights of the White Camellia, the White League, and others—could have instead taken the stage as the archetype of white supremacy's violent defenders. The Ku Klux Klan that the twentieth century came to recognize is Dixon's Klan, draped in apocalyptic Christian imagery. In order to see the design in Dixon's Klan, one would have to survey the symbolism and organization that he inherited. The differences lay bare the intentional structuring to the symbolism that he crafted.

The Ku Klux Klan has always been a deliberately imagined group, a social construct that had different designs in different eras. Even though his has been enduringly stamped in the public's mind, Dixon's version of the Ku Klux Klan first took its place alongside the others. In *A Fool's Errand*, Albion Tourgée characterized the first Klan, the original source Dixon would rework for his mythmaking, as designed primarily as "a ghostly police to play upon the superstitious fears of the colored people," and that the Ku Klux Klan was attired "in quaint and horrible guise." In Tourgée's book about the Ku Klux Klan, *The Invisible Empire*, he further characterizes the Ku Klux Klan as a group of poorly organized folk vigilantes who would have little in common with the tightly controlled imagery of the apocalyptic cult Dixon envisioned. Tourgée quotes one victim of Klan violence who describes their organization and symbolism:

> They had on gowns just like your overcoat, that came down to the toes; and some would be red and some black, like a lady's dress, only open before. The hats were made of paper and about eighteen inches long, and

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at the top about as thick as your ankle, and down around the eyes it was bound like horse-covers, and on the mouth there was hair of some description, I don't know what. It looked like a mustache, coming down to the breast, and you couldn't see none of the face, nor nothing. You couldn't see a thing of them. Some had horns about as long as my finger, and made black. They said they came from hell; that they died at Shiloh fight and Bull Run.  

Tourgée's representation of the Ku Klux Klan is not Dixon's, and this very fact highlights the deliberate symbolic crafting involved in Dixon's revised version of the Ku Klux Klan. The religious imagery that Dixon highlighted in his representations of the Ku Klux Klan gave his narratives an especially poignant resonance. Protestant readers could hardly have read scenes (or seen them on the stage and screen) of galloping white horsemen without having a frisson of terrifying recognition from the religious iconography and symbolism they had grown up hearing in hellfire sermons and stirring tent meeting revivals. Though this invisible empire may have eventually seemed inevitable in the mind of Thomas Dixon, it simply could not have taken this particular shape without the structuring his imagination gave it and the propaganda push offered by Thomas Dixon's novels and play (along with Griffith's film *The Birth of a Nation*) before a national audience. It was Thomas Dixon's imagination that crafted and codified the Ku Klux Klan's religious imagery. The black beast, the pure maiden, the burning cross, the white hood, and the lynching all come together in the Dixonian

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cultural narrative for a passion play that he hoped would unify and galvanize his white nation.

Although many have identified the basic narrative elements in Dixon’s thought, no one has yet given the religious elements of Dixon’s white supremacy the full attention they deserve. Identifying the “Klan’s religious orientation reflected [in] the mystical Celtic roots of the early Scotch, Irish and Scotch-Irish southern settlers,” Charles Reagan Wilson describes the overarching structure to Klan design: “More important than direct ministerial responsibility for Klan activities was the mystical religious tone to the Ku Klux Klan. Its members cultivated a mysterious appearance, dressing like medieval penitents in robes, usually ghostly white or demonic black.” Wilson’s suggestive comments do not fully account for or explore the possible ways that Christian imagery informed white supremacy. His comparison is more about how intensely held these ideas were and how their zeal resembled a religion. While Charles Reagan Wilson’s analysis is powerful in its possibilities, it is an incomplete foray into an archetypal school of cultural studies. More solidly historically grounded is Nancy MacLean, who concedes that the Ku Klux Klan saw itself having some of the same goals as Fundamentalism: “The Klan overlapped with, and helped feed the larger upsurge of Fundamentalism in the twenties.” MacLean claims the Ku Klux Klan contributed to militant Protestantism’s arguments and explanations, but she does

not explain how religious symbolism and discourse affected the very formation of and structure of the Ku Klux Klan.

Building on the arguments of Wilson and MacLean, Laura Veltman carefully draws her argument just short of considering the Ku Klux Klan a religion: "It is admittedly a stretch to consider the Ku Klux Klan as a church, though Dixon nonetheless suggests that their roles are analogous: in both the church and the Ku Klux Klan, the chosen must save the world from the forces threatening it." While Veltman's perceptive analysis suggests much about the possibilities of investigating Dixon's white supremacist religion, she overstates the possibilities for the relationship that Dixon's Klan has with religion. The Ku Klux Klan was not a church, and the church was not an outlet for the Ku Klux Klan (not even Thomas Dixon's), but the relationship between the two is subtler and more interactive, dynamic, and complex than any easy identification would reveal. Dixon did not want his Klan to be a church, nor was he using religion just as a way to express the intensity of his convictions. Instead, he wanted the ritual, the symbolism, and the rhetoric Protestant Christianity could provide. The white robe and burning cross were steeped in religious symbolism and typology in ways that the Confederate uniform, the carnival mask, and the executioner's hood never could be. Thomas Dixon was one of the main architects of modern white supremacy in the United States, a version especially invested in the symbolism of the Ku Klux Klan and in the crafting of the Ku Klux Klan's lore,

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propaganda, and ritual. Dixon crafted condensed symbolic images to strike immediate visual fear, work as propaganda, and benefit from the aura of religious iconography.  

Religious Fundamentalism offered Dixon a rhetoric of images already loaded with the sacred and the violent; Dixon added to that what W. J. Cash called the "rape complex" as well as adding the Dunning thesis. Dixon's mythical argument draws on the imagery of black beasts and pale riders from the book of Revelation but also from the rhetorical impulses of an end of times – a framework that structured his narrative of white supremacy like an eschatological cult. Lillian Smith, in Killers of the Dream, wondered, "How can one idea like segregation become so hypnotic a thing that it binds a whole people together ... making them one as only a common worship or a deeply shared fear can do?" The Dixonian cultural narrative had the organizational power that Smith lamented; she herself was trying to dismantle the "rites of segregation" perpetrated by Thomas Dixon. The designs involved in Dixon's "concise

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25 For his explanation of "rape complex," see W. J. Cash, The Mind of the South (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1941), 116-20. Incidentally, both graduates of Wake Forest University, W. J. Cash and Thomas Dixon are buried near each other in Sunset Cemetery, Shelby, North Carolina.


27 Ibid., 122.
misinformation” in turn unfortunately offered later generations models to design new rhetorics of white supremacy, new narratives, images, and vocabularies that reframed white supremacy in increasingly nuanced ways.

Though Dixon’s writing eventually disappeared from bestseller lists, his ideas had considerable effect on the generation of young writers who grew up in his literary shadow. Dixon’s influence on Margaret Mitchell alone underscores his impact on a writer who created one of the South’s most persistent mythic versions of itself. Thomas Dixon also had a great deal of influence on his nephew, Frank M. Dixon, who lived with his uncle in Gloucester, Virginia while he wrote *The Leopard’s Spots* and *The Clansman*. Frank M. Dixon became governor of Alabama from 1939-1943 and keynote speaker at the 1948 Dixiecrat convention. Frank M. Dixon echoed his uncle and thereby conveyed the Dixonian cultural narrative into the southern conservative response to the Civil Rights Movement.

Since Frank M. Dixon’s rantings at the Dixiecrat Convention, the legacy of the Dixonian cultural narrative has continued. At the time of this writing, the approaching 2015 sesquicentennial of the conclusion of the Civil War, the centennial of *The Birth of a Nation*, and numerous southern identity movements all sharpen a need to examine racist ideologies. Reissues of Dixon’s books also testify to the ways that certain groups have resurrected Dixon’s ideas and turned their messages to new causes. A 2003 academic conference devoted solely to Thomas Dixon and his cultural moment, two book-length studies, and a number
of articles have recently analyzed Dixon’s work and influence in some depth. This attention to Dixon shows no sign of decreasing. Anthony Slide, in his 2004 book *American Racist*, asserts, “A populist author, [Dixon] provided Americans with as much satisfying reading matter as John Grisham does a century later.” Popular and hated, famous and infamous, forgotten yet consistently invoked, Dixon’s writing appears again and again like the ghostly and apocalyptic Ku Klux Klan he created.

II. Chapter Summaries:


This first chapter examines how Fundamentalist ways of thinking and speaking eventually came to structure the white supremacist ideology Thomas Dixon promoted in his narratives. The relationship between Christian Fundamentalism and modernism in the early twentieth century fueled new debates in science, Biblical interpretation, and social class. In order to create his own version of white supremacy, Thomas Dixon plundered the vocabulary of Southern Baptist Christianity, itself already burdened with a history engaged with theologically inflected theories about slavery, emancipation, and Reconstruction.


29 Slide, 7.
Responding to a need to justify traditional Protestant orthodoxy while also satisfying upwardly mobile class aspirations of an increasingly professional Baptist ministry, Fundamentalist Christians forged a protean theological rhetoric that turned out to be adaptable to other purposes. Thomas Dixon's brother A. C. Dixon was the architect of a Fundamentalist Christian ideology equipped to do battle with perceived threats involved in modernity. Thomas Dixon mastered all of the ideas and strategies his brother helped create but also mobilized and repositioned those techniques in the service of a hysterical vision of white supremacy that updated the Lost Cause for a modern America predicated upon segregation and white rule. Differing in their approach to premillennial and postmillennial interpretations of the apocalypse, the Dixon brothers had vastly different strategies for thinking about how human agency was involved in maintaining white Protestant culture.

II. Thomas Dixon, Jr.'s Morality Play of White Supremacy

On Friday, September 23, 1905, the play version of Dixon's "The Clansman" premiered at the Academy of Music in Norfolk, Virginia. As the intermediate phase between fiction and the infamous 1915 D. W. Griffith film version "The Birth of a Nation," Dixon's play tries to define modern society according to the visual logic of white supremacy and religion. Dixon's play anticipated the way modern propaganda would use spectacle and image, especially through film. Drawing on visual culture studies and rhetorical theory about staging hate speech, this chapter examines Dixon's play as an attempt to make white supremacy sacred.
Dixon's orchestrated his dramatic spectacle to be the passion play companion to
the minstrel show, and his play's program displayed a variety of propagandistic
photographs designed to support his version of white supremacy and instruct his
audience about Klan history. Dixon's play worked to train the white eye to see the
world in the way that his myth would structure it.

"Whiteness," at this cultural moment, was an idea that southern conservatives
like Dixon considered to be endangered by a variety of forces; his play enacts a
performance of the whiteness he wanted to defend, but his play also reveals the
instability that this formation of whiteness betrayed. Whiteness, for Dixon, also
depended upon invoking a threatening black beast that would eventually be
controlled. The 1905 Norfolk, Virginia, crowd (including the Virginia and North
Carolina governors), which rose in a standing ovation for Dixon's premiere of The
Clansman, resonates a half century later when crowds jeered the first black
students integrating southern schools: both have something to do with the viral
strain of religious white supremacy in Dixon's myth, both were stages where
whites felt called to demonstrate a highly visual public defense of what they saw
as their way of life. In this light, Dixon's play version of The Clansman dramatized
the foundational myths of twentieth-century whiteness.

III. Prophecy, Apocalypse, and the Black Response to Thomas Dixon, Jr.:
Charles Chesnutt, Kelly Miller, Sutton Griggs, and W. E. B. Du Bois

Operating in a culture where the "problem of the color line" would come to
define so much of twentieth century thought, Charles Chesnutt, Kelly Miller,
Sutton Griggs, and W. E. B. Du Bois sought to refute Dixon’s rhetoric. In publications ranging from Kelly Miller’s pamphlets, Sutton Griggs’s novels and essays, and Du Bois’s pageants to short fiction and speeches, these four writers were vigorous rhetorical opponents and debunkers of the Dixonian cultural narrative. The politics and the methods through which these writers sought to create new vocabularies and narratives sometimes unwittingly redrew the color lines so essential to Dixon’s version of white supremacy; at other times their writing effectively dismantled Dixon’s work by effectively laying bare its inherent contradictions and by using scholarship from science and history to contradict his claims.

All four of these writers—Du Bois the most effectively and with the longest lasting influence—engaged in writing against Dixon by writing in the prophetic mode. Although visions of an apocalypse for these black writers often formed in more secular terms, they nonetheless engaged the postmillennialist ideas inherent in Dixon’s worldview. Kelly Miller employed a version of Christian thought heavily involved with common-sense democratic theory and legal arguments for civil rights. The engagement between Miller and Dixon involved the logic of the Protestant word, spoken and written; control of the word was central both to Dixon’s version of white supremacy and Chesnutt’s undermining of it. The religious and apocalyptic rhetoric in Griggs’s response in _The Hindered Hand_ met Dixon’s ideology of white supremacy on religious grounds and attempted to reverse it.

The rhetorical attacks from Chesnutt, Miller, and Griggs opposed Dixon in
secular, logical, academic, and legal ways. Du Bois broadened his understanding and attack to include prophetic modes of writing. While Miller and Griggs limited their attacks to the legal and the secular, Du Bois had a mind and pen vigorous enough to engage Dixon on his own prophetic terms. Ironically and fittingly, the prophetic voice was at the heart of the Dixonian cultural narrative, and Du Bois’ use of the prophetic mode was his most damaging attack.

IV. Rebirthing Thomas Dixon: William Faulkner and Margaret Mitchell

William Faulkner kept well into his adulthood the copy of Thomas Dixon’s novel *The Clansman* given him by his first-grade teacher, Annie Chandler. Margaret Mitchell staged her own neighborhood productions of Dixon’s novel *The Traitor* and of the film *The Birth of a Nation*. More than curious footnotes to two significantly southern literary biographies, these anecdotes about engagements with Thomas Dixon’s racial melodramas continued to have resonance for the adult careers of both Faulkner and Mitchell.

Margaret Mitchell, in response to a gushing fan letter from Thomas Dixon, praised him and confessed she had read him throughout her childhood. Dixon’s fictions informed Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* in a variety of ways, but she worked to disguise that influence. Her heroine Scarlett O’Hara also worked with disguise, as she had to work duplicitously to survive the ravages of the Civil War. Reconstruction Atlanta, in Mitchell’s portrayal, had already witnessed the racial apocalypse Dixon warned would come. In order to survive in this world, Scarlett
enacted a Machiavellian and masculine plan that allowed her even to restore her beloved Tara to something of its antebellum grandeur. Although occasionally posing as a victimized and passive white maiden, she acted the part of one of Dixon’s heroes. In essence, Scarlett was Dixon’s hero Ben Cameron in a hoop skirt, and she adapted the violent ideas of the Dixonian cultural narrative to the mannered and nuanced life of the new southern woman.

Rather than revising and fitting the Dixonian legacy for a new disguise as Mitchell does, William Faulkner shattered the variables of his precursor’s cultural narrative and created narratives that worked to disrupt the organizing principles of white supremacy. Faulkner’s lynching narratives took on in particular Dixon’s assumptions that defending white women from black beasts would consolidate southern society under white rule. Faulkner saw those forces as ultimately destructive for all those living in their presence, and he articulated a tragic vision of servitude, despair, and self-crucifixion. From the threats to white women and subsequent lynching in Sanctuary to the racist fury of Percy Grimm and Doc Hines in Light in August (as well as some deep reversals of the Dixonian narrative in short stories like “Dry September” and “Pantaloon in Black”), Faulkner attacked Dixon’s racial melodramas and historical fantasies and attempted to rewrite those narratives by directly confronting Dixon’s legacy of segregation, racial violence, and the toxic interaction of religion and racism. Faulkner asks his readers to follow the intricate webs of dialogue that form the narrative structure of his society. Full mastery of those webs (for readers and even for Faulkner himself) may lead not to liberation but to the revelation of those
webs as chains that forever join southerners to narratives of racial violence. Faulkner asks his audiences to follow, question, and reinterpret the foundational stories of the South, including the Dixonian cultural narrative.

Looking closely at Dixon’s legacy to Faulkner and to Mitchell and interrogating the ways they tried to rewrite that influence provides a compelling picture of how the South’s culture industry created and contested its own image. Both Mitchell and Faulkner began their imaginative careers in a region obsessed with Dixon’s narrative, and they spent considerable energy in their fiction examining it, Faulkner in an effort to banish it forever and Mitchell to update it for a new era.

V. Afterword: Dixiecrats, Neo-Confederates, and Hip Hop Artists Rediscover Dixon

The Dixonian cultural narrative’s legacy continued to plague the South well after Dixon’s death in 1946. Thomas Dixon’s nephew Governor Frank M. Dixon went on to become the keynote speaker in the Dixiecrat Convention of 1948. Dixon framed his anti-Civil Rights remarks directly in the religious and rhetorical mold his uncle Thomas Dixon had crafted and thus revealed the Dixonian cultural narrative’s entry into another generation’s debates. Thomas Dixon’s legacy continued to be invoked and contested in narratives such as William Bradford Huie’s 1967 novel *The Klansman* (along with Terence Young’s 1974 film of the same name). William Bradford Huie well understood the dangers of the Dixonian narrative continuing into the Civil Rights battles of the 1960s.
when he portrays the Ku Klux Klan in his 1967 novel *The Klansman* as posting passages from Dixon’s novel *The Clansman* on public bulletin boards as a way to underscore white supremacy’s resistance to and countering of Civil Rights activism. Dixon continues to prompt responses like D. J. Spooky’s (a.k.a. Paul Miller) remixing *Rebirth of a Nation*, a reinterpretation of *The Birth of a Nation* that frames the film in the emerging technologies, rhythms, and postmodern reappropriations of hip-hop culture and takes the seemingly endless battle with the virulent Dixonian narrative into a new era’s media and mindsets. Despite efforts like Huie’s and Paul Miller’s to revise and counter Thomas Dixon’s writings, writers in the loose grouping of Neo-Confederates (e.g., Michael Andrew Grissom, Sam Dickson, and various others who refer to *The Birth of a Nation*, for example) have kept Dixon’s infamous narratives alive into the twenty-first century.
CHAPTER ONE
THE FUNDAMENTALS OF THE DIXON CLAN: THE RELIGIOUS AND RACIAL TENSION THAT SPAWNED THE HIGH PRIEST OF AMERICAN WHITE SUPREMACY

I. Southern Christian Fundamentalism and Its Discontents

Thomas Dixon crafted a rhetoric of racism heavily indebted to the Fundamentalist Christianity that flourished at the start of the twentieth century. The relationship between Christian Fundamentalism and modernism fueled new debates about science, Biblical interpretation, and social class. In order to create his own version of white supremacy, Thomas Dixon plundered the vocabulary of Southern Baptist Christianity. His rhetoric drew heavily from Biblical idiom and reference, and his tone often used a prophetic mode. Paul Boyer explains that such a rhetorical stance promised its adherents a complete worldview: “Prophecy belief is a way of ordering experience. It gives a grand overarching shape to history, and thus ultimate meaning to the lives of individuals caught up in

30 Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby, in *The Fundamentalism Project*, explain the use of the term: “First, ‘fundamentalism’ is here to stay, since it serves to create a distinction between appropriate words such as ‘traditionalism,’ ‘conservatism,’ or ‘orthodoxy’ and ‘orthopraxis.’ If the term were to be rejected, the public would have to find some other word if it is to make sense of global phenomena which urgently bid to be understood” (Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby, *Fundamentalisms Observed. The Fundamentalism Project*, 1 [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991], viii).
history's stream." Thomas Dixon well understood how prophecy belief organized many chaotic elements of life, and he used that same strategy to provide a racial prophecy for early twentieth-century America.

The son of a Baptist minister and the brother of two Baptist ministers, Thomas Dixon grew up in the shadow of Amzi Clarence Dixon, his older brother. A. C. Dixon, one of the most renowned preachers of his day, edited and contributed to *The Fundamentals*, a multi-volume collection of ninety essays published from 1910 to 1915. This publication codified many of the Fundamentalist rhetorical stances and interpretive orthodoxies. Responding to a need to justify traditional Christian thought while also satisfying upwardly mobile class aspirations of an increasingly professional Baptist ministry, A. C. Dixon was the architect of a Fundamentalist Christian ideology that was equipped to do battle. He was himself the archetype of a Fundamentalist, especially of the early twentieth-century variety associated with conservative Protestants who opposed the teaching of evolution, warned against the dangers of alcohol, and argued for literal readings of the Bible. Thomas Dixon mastered all of the ideas and strategies his brother helped create, but Thomas Dixon also mobilized and reinterpreted all of Fundamentalism's techniques in the service of a hysterical vision of white supremacy. Furthermore, Thomas Dixon's understanding of postmillennialism, as opposed to the premillennialist orthodoxy of his Fundamentalist brother A. C., allowed him to use theology supposedly in the service of social change. Fundamentalists like A. C. Dixon ultimately rejected the

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Social Gospel but tacitly endorsed Social Darwinism. Enabled by a postmillennial stance, Thomas Dixon actually embraced both and fused them into a Gospel of Social Darwinism that he could graft onto his white supremacy. A. C. Dixon's Fundamentalist ideas and evangelical appeal all informed Thomas Dixon's religiously-inspired Ku Klux Klan, whose pale horses and pale riders burned crosses as a sign of their attempt to halt a racial apocalypse. In a study that attempts to examine the Ku Klux Klan as a Protestant movement, Kelly Baker has asserted, "The Klan hoped to unite Protestantism by moving past schisms within the faith and bringing Protestants together under one undivided banner." If one author was the muse for uniting Protestantism with the Ku Klux Klan, then that author was Thomas Dixon.

At the same time Christian Fundamentalists waged their campaign for personal piety, the South was undergoing a violent period of racial terror. In examining connections between religion and violence, Donald G. Matthews argues that "a white terror had ravaged the American South between 1865 and 1940," during which "Americans of African descent were raped, assaulted, tortured, and killed by the thousands." Matthews concludes, "Such was the flaw of a white evangelicalism that assumed absolutely no responsibility for the

33 Although Dixon's vision of The Ku Klux Klan was not limited to Protestants, his fiction seems to assume an almost exclusively Protestant membership.
violence inherent in its obsession with purity and danger."\textsuperscript{35} White southerners pursued segregation and lynching with religious zeal, but not just with emotional intensity. Segregation and lynching gave Fundamentalists another place to defend personal piety and purity, qualities they often saw as attributes of whiteness. Southern white culture was heavily indebted to a hermeneutics of Fundamentalism, an ideology equipped to define whiteness according to the logic of religious purity and eschatological prophecy. Southern white culture needed a vocabulary and a rhetoric to justify its social arrangements, and southern white Protestantism was eager to be socially relevant, so the two were a natural marriage.

Jackson Lears has argued that the Fundamentalism that animated American culture at the turn of the twentieth century was closely related to obsessions about manhood and sex. Lears understands the South's penchant for lynch mobs as a mix of those issues: "Imbibing the potent brew of race and sex, Southern white men merged manliness and whiteness, redefining manhood in racial rather than occupational terms. And whether work or sex created the conflict that led to the lynch mob, its main mission was the reassertion of white manhood."\textsuperscript{36} Scholars such as George Marsden, Ernest Sandeen, and Christine Leigh Heyrman have shown how Protestant versions of sex, selfhood, and sanctity have helped to justify social positions as far-ranging as prohibition, anti-Darwinist crusades, and anti-missionary work. They have not shown how these

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 183.
Protestant attitudes coincided with the rise of white supremacy that underwrote the Jim Crow era’s efforts to make modernity and its benefits for whites only.\(^{37}\)

The Dixon family provided the architects for Fundamentalism and the Ku Klux Klan.

A. C. Dixon was a minister first at the Mount Olive Baptist Church in Wayne County, North Carolina, but he went on to have ministries in such major metropolitan areas as New York, Boston, Chicago (in the pulpit D. L. Moody once held), Los Angeles, and London. In addition to these pulpits, A. C. Dixon preached in venues as far ranging as Norway and China. Although his roots remained strongly connected to rural North Carolina his entire life, he was a man who saw and spoke to the world.\(^{38}\) Editor of *The Fundamentals*, A. C. Dixon also wrote several essays in that series himself.\(^{39}\) *The Fundamentals* was the central

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\(^{39}\) George Marsden explains the immense reach of this publication: “*The Fundamentals* was conceived by a Southern California oil millionaire and edited by Bible teachers and evangelists. Published in twelve paperback volumes from 1910 to 1915, it was meant to be a great ‘Testimony to the Truth’ and even something of a scholarly *tour de force*. Lyman Stewart, the chief promoter and financial backer, described the prospective authors as ‘the best and most loyal Bible teachers in the world.’ He had a businessman’s confidence that the product would ‘doubtless be the masterpieces of the writers.’ Stewart hired as his first editor A. C. Dixon, a well-known evangelist and author, then pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago. He had greatly impressed Stewart with a sermon attacking ‘one of those infidel professors in Chicago.’ Dixon and two successors, Louis Meyer (a Jewish Christian evangelist) and Reuben Torrey, assembled a rather formidable array of conservative American and British scholars, as well as a
publication of early twentieth-century Christian Fundamentalism, appearing in
twelve volumes from 1910 to 1915. Given a certain predisposition to higher
academics and his own desire to rise socially, A. C. Dixon created a theology
that sought to reconcile Protestant theology with academic culture. Religious
historian Paul Harvey aptly summarizes that ambition:

> Denominational leaders, most often educated in the colleges and
> seminaries of the New South, brought the “task of scientific management”
> into their “church-craft.” They centralized denominational procedures, built
> educational institutions, introduced Victorian notions of public decorum to
> rural farmers and wage laborers, and taught their congregations about the
> virtues of sobriety and propriety.40

Nonetheless, these trappings of cultural uplift did not stop the practices of ring
shouts, foot washing, and some yearnings for other less middle-class folkways of
religious life for many adherents of Fundamentalism. Though often labeled anti-
intellectual, the Fundamentalists were talented writers of scriptural exegesis who
gave themselves a quixotic goal of synthesizing the essentially irreconcilable
forces of Fundamentalist Christianity and the modernistic forces of early

number of popular writers. Lyman Stewart, with the aid of his brother and partner
twentieth-century academics. A. C. Dixon's efforts to alter Fundamentalist Christianity demonstrated its plastic and adaptive nature, a fact that Thomas Dixon observed and later exploited. Fundamentalism arose as a response to boundaries being contested, boundaries of sex, selfhood, and sanctity. Only in a climate of contested interpretations would Bible colleges be founded and books like The Fundamentals be published. As such, A. C. Dixon attempted to redraw the outlines of intellectual history by making it more compatible for the Biblical literalism he and many other Fundamentalists saw as the essential guarantor of truth.

In addition to some writing and research about A. C. Dixon's Fundamentalism, many have understood how Thomas Dixon followed his elder brother's Fundamentalism for many years. Shelton Smith argues that in the early twentieth century Dixon was "a flaming apostle of Anglo-Saxonism." Declaring that "There was no collective Summa Theologica of either the Conservative or the Radical mentality," Joel Williamson described the role that Thomas Dixon's writing played: "It is probably significant that the one work nearest to a codification of the Radical dogma came not at all in a scholarly form, but in a

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41 To that end, Fundamentalists created a number of Bible colleges and minister-training schools, themselves evidence of contested boundaries for interpretation and for a need for the creation and dissemination of orthodox positions within Christian churches. See Joel Carpenter, "Fundamentalist Institutions and the Rise of Evangelical Protestantism, 1929-1942," Church History, 9:1 (March, 1980), 62-75.

novel. That book was *The Leopard’s Spots.* Williamson has identified a variety of terms with regard to the conservative tradition. Especially useful in his terminology is “Volksgeistian Conservatism,” which Dixon demonstrated along with being the “Radical Conservative” that Williamson calls him. Williamson suggested:

[Volksgeistian Conservatism] presumed that God had implanted in Southern white folk a unique and valuable spirit – that is, a ‘Volksgeist’; second, it was a rather direct translation of the Germanic, and particularly Hegelian, idealism into the Southern cultural and racial scene; and, third, it sprang from roots that were indeed squarely within the Southern Conservative tradition.\(^4\)

Thomas Dixon’s childhood Baptist household instructed him in the southern conservative tradition of the late nineteenth century. In addition, Dixon also mastered the terms of Germanic historical scholarship. Dixon studied history at Johns Hopkins (alongside his classmate Woodrow Wilson) under the German-trained professor Herbert Baxter Adams.\(^5\) The Dixon clan directed their rhetorical talents toward a conservative definition of all things southern, white, and Baptist, and the Dixons anticipated both the arguments of the Agrarians (especially in Thomas Dixon’s 1905 autobiography *The Life Worth Living*) and the Neo-Confederates. In their imagination, every white southern man had the right to be the Ben Cameron of his plantation mansion.


\(^5\) Ibid., 41.

Rather than seeing Fundamentalists as collaborators of an intellectually crafted paradigm, commentators from H. L. Mencken to even more recent scholars have parodied the Fundamentalists as Elmer Gantry style rubes who hypocritically marched through anti-intellectual and populist programs. In parodying what he saw as provincial Christian religion in his coverage of the Scopes trial, Mencken opined: “The cosmogony of Genesis is so simple that even a yokel can grasp it. It is set forth in a few phrases. It offers, to an ignorant man, the irresistible reasonableness of the nonsensical. So he accepts it with loud hosannas, and has one more excuse for hating his betters.”\(^4\)\(^6\) Entertaining as Mencken’s sarcasm may be, his wit gives us few clues about why Christian Fundamentalism has been so enduring and politically and socially consequential. Walter Lippmann delivered what he thought was a death sentence to the Fundamentalist movement in 1929 when he said: “The movement is recruited largely from the isolated, the inexperienced, and the uneducated.”\(^4\)\(^7\) Engaging too long in Lippmann’s and Mencken’s styles of rebuke and dismissal will reveal little more than clever name-calling and may obscure some important cultural information: how Christian Fundamentalism helped to shape its adherents and their decisions in a variety of consequential social spheres, especially politics and education.

Mindful that Baptists had come a long way from their historically humble and egalitarian origins and sensitive to critiques like those leveled by Menken,

\(^{47}\) Quoted in Marsden, 191.
many Fundamentalists were eager to prove themselves capable of engaging in scholarly debate, and they expected their ministers to participate in the university culture of research and theological exchange. A. C. Dixon’s vitriolic attacks on modernism\(^\text{48}\) often matched Mencken’s attacks on Fundamentalism, and A. C. Dixon worked hard to make his attacks as intellectual and educated as he could. In refuting the claims of modernism in H. C. Vedder’s 1922 book *The Fundamentals of Christianity* (a book A. C. Dixon disparagingly renamed “The Fundamentals of Modernism”), A. C. Dixon offered a lengthy rejoinder defending the intellectual credentials of leading Fundamentalists. He declared, “If [Vedder] had permitted the gray matter in his brain to work three minutes, unfettered by prejudice, he must have thought of Henry G. Weston, George C. Lorimer, A.J. Gordon ... hundreds of others, college men, university graduates, who believed in ‘the absolute inerrancy and infallibility of the Bible.’”\(^\text{49}\) A. C. Dixon stridently assured Fundamentalists they were indeed involved in an academic and professional religion.

\(^{48}\) Fundamentalism had a selective and paradoxical relationship with what it called “modernism.” “Modernism,” in this context does not refer to the literary endeavors of writers like T. S. Eliot and H.D., but it refers to a Fundamentalist’s version of modernity, especially in the ways that Fundamentalists saw early twentieth-century intellectual culture as capable of eroding traditional values that they felt important to their religion and way of life. Paradoxically, Fundamentalists were often eager to embrace the technological advances and trappings of modern life that helped them promulgate their ideas and further their upwardly-mobile class aspirations. For an extended discussion about Fundamentalism’s engagement with modern technology, see Tona J. Hangen’s *Redeeming the Dial: Radio, Religion and Popular Culture in America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

A. C. Dixon's Fundamentalism also paradoxically ensured its adherents they were engaging in modern scholarly endeavors while also defending their traditions. Fundamentalists like A. C. wanted to unite many different theological approaches into one powerful movement. By crafting interdenominational principles and setting aside differences (no small endeavor), Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, and many others could join together in a more politically consequential community. If Fundamentalism were to be an intellectual movement that unified several Christian denominations, then its defenders would need a flexible and erudite theology. Fundamentalism sought opportunities to get its message to the nation in a variety of modern media. Radio, motion pictures, and increasing urbanization in the early twentieth century exposed many southerners to national and international ideas and influences as well as increased opportunities for learning about Fundamentalism.\(^5\) A good number of Fundamentalists were in rural areas, but many were also in cities filled with citizens who had moved there from many other places. Social mobility and increased exposure to new ideas put many Christian Fundamentalists in a crisis that raised doubts about their faith and social status. Although one solution to this crisis was to retreat, another solution was to engage Fundamentalism with modernity.

In his *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, Richard Hofstadter, an unsparingly harsh critic of Fundamentalists, offered them a modicum of respect:

The minds of these men had been toughened by constant gnawing on Calvinist and neo-Calvinist theology and disciplined by the necessity of carving out their own theological fretwork." Fundamentalism was a concertedly "intellectual" endeavor, albeit one replete with flawed and tendentious logic. R. Lawrence Moore may be correct in his argument that religion should be viewed as "unstable and negotiable, a protean response to secularized modernity that propels people, in the absence of any code of meaning inherited from tradition, to produce the systems of meaning that they need." Moore's phrasing reveals that these Fundamentalist positions were social constructs, something that Thomas Dixon realized and exploited in his version of white supremacy. Americans in Fundamentalist churches did come to expect reassurances from their ministers that their religion was intellectually robust and its followers courageous enough to participate in national intellectual debates, especially debates they saw as threats to their hard-won identity as educated and upwardly-mobile. Sermons by A. C. and Thomas Dixon (as well as their colleagues in other churches) frequently engaged social and intellectual issues and combined editorial commentary on current events with complex scriptural exegesis. That fusion of cultural engagement with scriptural analysis created a way for Fundamentalist adherents to understand the world as subservient to the word. The Fundamentalist mindset faced an inherent contradiction: how could one point of view endorse literal

interpretation of ancient scripture while also engaging complex social issues of the day in respectably intellectual ways?

One response was to make tradition and Biblical literalism appear to be the product of modern scientific scholarship. A. C. Dixon focused on a word-centered spirituality for his version of Christian Fundamentalism. His reverence for the word itself fits into a larger Protestant trope and longstanding tradition of placing the text as the proper object of study and site of personal transformation for a Christian seeking a purer self. His reverence for the word was shaped by an almost fetishistic bibliocentrism. In a chapter from *The Fundamentals*, A. C. Dixon wrote, “With the kindly oriental climate and the care which the Jewish reverence for the book would naturally lead them to have, it is not at all improbable that the manuscript of Moses should have been preserved for more than a thousand years.” Such a passage illustrates his immense reverence for the literal word, but it also represents a hybridized speech, fusing the language of modern scholarship and modern science with the recognizably conservative Protestant declarations of textual power. Fundamentalists looked on their imagined opponents in modernity and their scholarship as a faddish upstart, chaotic foes to tame with their authority and traditionalism. Such a view would place Fundamentalists in the position of authority that Homi K. Bhabha called “the hybridity of colonial authority.” Fundamentalist speech in its doubleness parallels colonial authority: “authoritative to the extent to which it is structured around the ambivalence of splitting, denial, repetition—strategies of defense that

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54 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 165.
mobilize culture as an open-textured, warlike strategy whose aim is rather a continued agony."\textsuperscript{55}

To the extent that Bhabha's formulation can apply to other cultural fields, Fundamentalism revealed that it needed modernity and modernism, even in or especially in an agonized conflict, for the creation of its own boundaries. In Bhabha's terms, Fundamentalism sought to "colonize" modernity. The scars of that battle revealed themselves in Fundamentalism's hybrid speech, which allowed Fundamentalists to craft rhetoric that would register modern scholarship as well as religious orthodoxy. Fundamentalists sought to settle the perceived threats to their faith from academic findings – from the fossil record, evolutionary biology, and the higher criticism of the Bible. Using scientific language and proof was not then a contradiction for someone like A. C. Dixon. Instead it was a calculated effort to make Fundamentalist religious rhetoric superior to science. Such a rhetorical move, however, revealed exactly how protean and portable Fundamentalist rhetoric could be and how a writer like Thomas Dixon could use it for other purposes.

A. C. Dixon's Fundamentalist rhetoric was an attempt to subdue and control modernism's powerful and challenging tropes. Ernest Sandeen observes: "Throughout his ministerial career [A. C. Dixon] moved away from strict denominational allegiance and 'churchly' attitudes toward the type of tabernacle environment associated with many of the great evangelists of his day, especially

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 163.
A. T. Pierson and D. L. Moody. Far from being strictly doctrinaire in the face of changing times, A. C. Dixon wanted his Christianity engaged with modern thought. This disposition necessitated rhetorical doubleness that fused the secular with the religious or even allowed the religious to dominate the secular.

If Fundamentalism offered its adherents a rhetoric capable of adapting itself to new paradigms in science, then that rhetoric was also available to Thomas Dixon as a tool to structure his version of white supremacy. Highlighting Dixon’s role as the clerical organizer behind the Ku Klux Klan’s religious imagery, Edward J. Blum asserts: “During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, white pastor and novelist Thomas Dixon, probably did more than any other figure to dress racial superiority in spiritual clothes.” The clothing metaphor reveals how Dixon hoped to style his pose for the Ku Klux Klan in spiritual symbols, including their ghostly white robes.

In addition to the Ku Klux Klan clothing Dixon styled, he was quite aware of the matrix of symbols associated with the southern gentleman. If the Ku Klux Klan costume was for the night rider, then the day would require a southern gentleman’s garb in Dixon’s myth. A plantation owner in Gloucester, Virginia, Thomas Dixon wrote what he saw as a southern gentleman’s manifesto in his 1905 autobiography The Life Worth Living. Dixon saw this tradition as something that would need defending by violence and thus anticipated Tate’s theory of

56 Ernest Sandeen, 194.
tradition: "How may a Southerner take hold of his Tradition? The answer is, by violence. For this answer is inevitable. He cannot fall back upon his religion, simply because it was never articulated and organized for him." One might look through the lens of Tate's metaphor and see in Dixon's vision of the Ku Klux Klan a violent religion, one articulated to fit the specific idiom of southern racial violence. More to the point, Dixon suited his Klan with imagery already saturating Baptist theology, the imagery of the apocalypse.

II. Premillennialism vs. Postmillennialism

While the apocalypse may seem to be only about the end of times, it often figures as a narrative that comments on current times. Largely drawing on a set of quotations from the book of Revelation, apocalyptic theologies frame their ideas about the end of the world and an ultimate reckoning where good and evil would be parted. Such narratives often invoke current theories of what constitutes good and evil, and Fundamentalism was no different in structuring its apocalyptic narratives. In constructing his version of racial apocalypse, Thomas Dixon revised the apocalyptic tradition he inherited from the Southern Baptist perspective endorsed by ministers like his brother A. C. Dixon. Norman Cohn defines the chief narrative of the apocalyptic tradition, one applicable to Baptists in the Dixon family, accordingly:

There will shortly be a marvelous consummation, when good will finally be victorious over evil and forever reduce it to nullity; that the human agents of evil will be either physically annihilated or otherwise disposed of; that the elect will thereafter live as a collectivity, unanimous and without conflict, on a transformed and purified earth.⁵⁹

Apocalyptic stories have tremendous organizational power. As narratives about ultimate realities and purposes, they give direction and meaning for a variety of social groups and causes. The teleological and eschatological direction of apocalyptic narratives serves to simplify social chaos and otherwise conflicting or heterogeneous accounts of ultimate reality and settles debate once and for all in a march toward cataclysmic sets of events. In some modes, this cataclysm is avoidable, yet in others the cataclysm is capable of modification based on human will and intervention. Fundamentalist ministers frequently drew upon this set of images and rhetorical imperatives when offering a call at the end of the service for the unsaved or the sinners in need of reconciliation. Apocalyptic rhetoric also offered frames of interpretive reference for current events by positioning the apocalyptic speaker as a would-be prophet, and by using immediate details as the scriptural texts for typological interpretation. Such an interpretive strategy allowed apocalyptically-minded ministers to engage their hermeneutics of inerrancy with current events. In fact, the entire world and its events, in this point of view, could become a map of scriptural fulfillment to prophecy.

Two important orientations to apocalypse are premillennialism and postmillennialism. Premillennialism holds that the end of times will begin with the return of Jesus, who will then reign on the earth for a thousand years.

Postmillennialism holds that the end of times will come at the end of the thousand years of a gradual human perfection/complete conversion to a Christian utopia; Jesus, for postmillennialists, will conclude the millennium of human progress with his second coming to Earth. The two differing theories of eschatology essentially disagree over the question of human agency. In premillennialism, Jesus returns and he alone makes the utopia possible; in postmillennialism, human beings intervene in history (though guided by divine power) and bring about utopia, over which Jesus returns to preside.

Kenneth Burke’s terminology offers an even more precise understanding of these eschatological distinctions. Burke described rhetoric as strategies for organizing systems of meaning. Two of Burke’s systems of meaning have been taken from literature and apply to premillennialism and postmillennialism with special force: comic and tragic. Rather than the common meanings of “comic” and “tragic,” their literary meanings are more germane to Burke’s purposes. Burke defines tragedy with a deterministic frame, whereby believers see and understand events as moving toward an unavoidable conclusion, despite any human intervention. Most versions of Calvinism and predestination fit easily with a tragic frame of reference. “Comic,” in Burke’s use, is a frame of reference that stresses the power of human agency to affect outcomes. In the comic view, no conclusion is foregone, and there is usually time for intervention. Outcomes in

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the comic frame of reference have flexibility, and human choice and action becomes crucially important.

While A. C. Dixon, along with most Fundamentalists, endorsed a tragic premillennialism, Thomas Dixon revised his brother's theology by endorsing a comic postmillennialism. This difference may correspond to the differences between Fundamentalist and evangelical interpretations of scripture. A.C. Dixon may have had a tragic understanding of the apocalypse, one more involved with scriptural interpretation, whereas Thomas Dixon overthrew such a view in favor of fashioning his theology to fit the emerging ideology of white supremacy. In a framework that can help explain the Dixons' different approaches to eschatology, Stephen D. O'Leary offers his interpretation of apocalyptic theology:

Apocalyptic argument in the tragic frame grounds the authority of its pronouncements in the text of Scripture; that such argument locates the ultimate source of authority in the divinely inspired word, the meaning of which is fixed and determined by a single correct interpretation. Hence, the role of the interpreter in tragic apocalypticism is reduced to the breaking of the divine code. For argument in the comic frame, by contrast, authority is necessarily more mutable and can be refashioned to fit human needs, since the comic awareness of human fallibility requires the denial of all claims to absolute knowledge.61

Were A. C. Dixon working in an apocalyptic frame (to use Burke's and O'Leary's terms), he would be a tragic thinker. Thomas Dixon, in contrast, allied himself with the comic frame of apocalyptic thought by recommending action. "Comedy" and "tragedy" work here in their senses of emplotment. "Tragedy" reveals human limitations in an inevitable and destructive narrative, and "comedy" shows human limitations in a set of events open to any number of narratives and conclusions.

Whatever flaws a comic writer chooses to reveal will ultimately be correctable, and a resolution will involve lessons learned and a better society for those involved. Thomas Dixon grafted his myth onto this comic plot. In a Dixon novel, the Ku Klux Klan always arrives, as in the conclusion to *The Birth of a Nation*, to ensure a happy ending for the threatened whites. Thomas Dixon was to take the apocalyptic rhetoric he mastered while working as a minister and use it as the framing device for the Ku Klux Klan he would mythologize.

In his rhetorical study of the apocalypse, Stephen O’Leary analyzes the stances and arguments from ancient scriptures to the chiliastic imperatives behind Hal Lindsey’s influential 1970 book *The Late, Great Planet Earth*. O’Leary argues that the apocalypse represented a cataclysmic judgment that loomed perpetually on the horizon. The result of that constant judgmental menace for Fundamentalists was a rigorous dedication to spiritual vigilance and personal piety. Every moment and event could be defined in relation to the apocalypse. Every earthly event would merely be a precursor to the apocalypse, its meaning related only to its ability to predict the end. While millennial urgency was a way to scare Christians into piety, the apocalypse also presented a theory of how history worked, conferred meaning to daily life, and taught believers how to think about their role in human events. Some Fundamentalists approached the apocalypse passively or devoted themselves just to observing and interpreting its signs, but others would see themselves as active participants in the formation of the apocalypse and its many portents and signs.
Drawing on Kenneth Burke, O'Leary sees the apocalypse as offering vastly different philosophies with its comic and tragic frames of reference. O'Leary explains how he identified these two different ways of thinking about the end of times:

The differences between the tragic and comic frames of acceptance, as embodied in their characteristic dramatic constructions of time and evil, can be summarized as follows. The tragic plot conceives of evil in terms of sin or guilt; its mechanism of redemption is victimage, and its plot moves toward the isolation of the evildoer in the "cult of the kill." The comic plot conceives of evil in terms of error, misunderstanding, or ignorance; its mechanism of redemption is recognition, and its plot moves toward exposure of the evildoer's fallibility and his incorporation into society.62

While at first glance such a framework would not seem to suit anyone's understanding of Thomas Dixon or his theology, he nonetheless did operate with an apocalypse of his own, complete with a black beast – African Americans – as a sign of the end of times. Dixon argued for a comic understanding of how human beings could make the apocalypse avoidable and defeat the black beast. In both The Leopard's Spots and The Clansman, Dixon offered classically comic endings to his narratives: white women marry the appropriate white men after they defeat the black beasts.63 Dixon worked within the framework of apocalyptic threat, but, from his perspective, right-minded white people who read the symbols and prophecies in the right way would be able to intervene and change the course of events.

Apocalyptic frameworks focus attention on interpreting the present time as a way to understand the eventual end of times. In Susan Gillman's words, "Even

62 O'Leary, 200-1.
63 I use the term "classical" here to indicate the traditional literary meaning of that genre.
Dixon's threatening question, ‘Shall the future America be Anglo-Saxon or Mulatto?’ remains, as we have seen, conspicuously unanswered. It is a presentist call to arms rather than an apocalyptic vision of the future.⁶⁴ Dixon's Klan was thus a set of guardians dedicated to perpetual vigilance. O'Leary explains how he sees the comic frame as a spur to social action: “The fully comic interpretation of the Apocalypse, however, would not merely postpone the End. Rather, it would make the End contingent upon human choice, would assign to humanity the task of ushering in the millennium.”⁶⁵ Dixon’s narratives involved whites in a choice about whether or not to do battle with a black beast and forestall the apocalypse. Thomas Dixon wanted Fundamentalism to embrace the possibility of involving human beings in changing events and affecting (and perhaps even effecting as well) the apocalypse. It is altogether fitting for his symbolism that the human agents would don the costumes of the book of Revelation in order to act on these revelations and millennial imperatives. Seeing the Ku Klux Klan’s symbolism and rhetoric as coming from “the darkest corners of Christianity’s apocalyptic tradition,” W. Scott Poole argues that the Ku Klux Klan often had overt allusions to millennialist prophecies: “In both the symbolism [the Ku Klux Klan] chose and the terrorist tactics they practiced, the Klansmen gave evidence of the pervasiveness of apocalyptic themes in Southern society.”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ O'Leary, 84.
⁶⁶ Poole goes on to argue that the Klan became a kind of eschatological cult, one that attempted to forge the South into the Kingdom of God by violence and bloodshed” (W. Scott Poole, “Confederate Apocalypse: Theology and Violence in the Reconstruction South,” in Vale of Tears: New Essays on Religion and
Such trappings of symbols from the book of Revelation, complete with their apocalyptic resonance, must also have served to make the Ku Klux Klan all the more frightening to those who witnessed their night raids. As Poole’s comments suggest, Dixon’s Klan drew heavily from the imagery of Revelation, and, unlike the many other vigilante groups that could have become symbols of violent white supremacy, Dixon’s Klan has endured as a cultural icon. Dixon’s efforts to drape white supremacy in Christian symbols and rhetorics created a full mythology in order to make lynching a “sacred” act.

III. Thomas Dixon’s Gospel of Social Darwinism

A. C. Dixon ultimately endorsed premillennialism, and he concluded that a perfect God would create a perfect dispensational utopia after his return and that imperfect human beings would never be able to have a hand in such a utopia. Thomas Dixon had a far more difficult intellectual task ahead of him. He seemed to have adopted the Social Gospel (as evidenced by his 1896 treatise about social problems and religion *The Failure of Protestantism in New York City*), yet he also seemed devoted to Herbert Spencer’s Social Darwinism. The Ku Klux Klan Thomas Dixon created in his mythology could also be described as a violent Salvation Army that would spread the gospel of Social Darwinism. The Dixons cared a great deal for the scientific patina of both the Social Gospel and Social Reconstruction, ed. Edward J. Blum and W. Scott Poole [Macon: Mercer University Press, 2005], 47).
Darwinism. Both Dixons were scholars enough (albeit in tendentious and limited ways) to admit that science deserved a place in any social movement they would endorse, but the Dixons could not engage science without engaging race.

Arguing that the Bible actually predicted scientific explanations for events, A. C. Dixon presented his thesis: “The prophecies of the Bible establish beyond a doubt that the Bible is a revelation rather than an evolution. There could be no evolution giving future events.”

Fundamentalism’s engagement with science reached a climactic debate with the Scopes Trial of 1925. Often heralded as the end of Fundamentalism, the Scopes Trial revealed some very important truths about Fundamentalist racial anxieties.

Why was evolution such a charged issue for Christian Fundamentalists? Other scientific theories could have presented equal challenges for theology, especially observations from geologists about the earth’s age and from physicists about the beginnings and scope of the universe. The following illustration from Baptist minister and former engineer Clarence Larkin’s 1918 Fundamentalist text Dispensational Truth shows one way Fundamentalists attempted to engage in scholarship was to mimic the strategies of scientific discourse. In a direct response to the challenges they perceived coming from modernism and science,

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68 Later twentieth-century Fundamentalist writers would increasingly rely on using pseudo-science and current events as a way to justify a Fundamentalist outlook on political action. Popular eschatologies relied as much on “science” as they did on scripture. Hal Lindsey and Carole C. Carlson’s 1970 book The Late Great Planet Earth serves as a typical example. Both A. C. and Thomas Dixon anticipate those strategies.
Fundamentalists created their charts, too, almost as if in imitation of the charts they saw illustrating evolution.

"The Ages as Viewed From Different Standpoints" (Apocalyptic Dispensations Chart) Clarence Larkin, Dispensational Truth, Philadelphia, PA, Rev. Clarence Larkin Estate, 1918

Evolution had an especially threatening component because it argued against white Fundamentalism's essential ideas about race. A. C. Dixon wanted Darwin's body of work to speak to ways one race would lift another one up. The observation that A. C. Dixon would not tolerate (nor would Thomas Dixon) was that of a race lifting itself up, and that was what he believed was central to Darwin's theory of evolution.69 In essence, the theory of evolution from both

69 While Charles Darwin also expresses some racist claims that Dixon would have supported, Darwinian evolution did spark a variety of racial fears among Fundamentalists. For an extended discussion of these matters see Kidd, Colin.
Dixons' perspectives was a code for racial advancement and a blueprint for a new social order. An unreconstructed southerner, even one ostensibly more interested in Christianity than in social causes as, presumably, A. C. Dixon was, could not accept such a theory.

In rebutting the theories of Henry Drummond, a Scottish preacher who attempted to fuse Darwinian principles to Christian ones in his 1883 book *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*, A. C. Dixon revealed his own interpretations of Darwinism’s putative underpinnings: “[Drummond] ignores or denies the universal law that higher life always reaches down and lifts lower life into its realm, while it accepts and emphasizes the fallacy of the Greek philosophers, adopted by Darwin, that lower life rises into higher by inherent forces.”70 While A. C. Dixon could expand his notion of Fundamentalist Christianity to include some parts of scientific vocabulary, and while he could also work to make Fundamentalism compatible with the intellectual trappings of ambitious middle-class American life, he could not accept the challenge to “faith” he saw embodied in Darwinism.

White Fundamentalists who accepted certain strains of pseudo-science into their theological vocabularies then found themselves confronting the difficulty of accounting for the spiritual possibilities and influences for non-white peoples. How could blacks and Jews, for example, also inherit the spiritual gifts and

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destinies meant for true believers? If they were to be excluded, then what kind of Christian logic would underwrite such exclusion?

Fundamentalist Christianity revealed many of its contradictions and logical gaps when it dealt with race. In her biography of her husband, Helen Dixon related how A. C. felt about the black “Mammy” that raised the Dixon children: “She was black as to body, but white as an angel in soul. She taught us to pray and sing Gospel hymns. Our mother had such confidence in Aunt Barb’s piety that she gave us over largely to her teaching.”\(^7_1\) All of the Dixons must have learned their earliest lessons, Biblical and otherwise, from their “Aunt” Barb, and the fact that, at least for Thomas Dixon, race and religion combined in such complexly contradictory ways from their earliest days must remain one of the essential paradoxes of their childhood and education.\(^7_2\)

For Barb to have been able to raise the Dixon children, she must have mastered their lessons and been capable of exerting parental authority. Strangely enough, A. C. Dixon would describe his education from the blacks in his life: “I learned many a lesson of trust from the pious negroes as they lived and died in their simple, child-like faith.”\(^7_3\) How could a black woman like the Dixons’ Aunt Barb be at once parental and also capable of being “child-like”? If blacks

\(^7_1\) Helen Dixon, 19.

\(^7_2\) In *Killers of the Dream*, Lillian Smith calls the black nurse one of the “ghosts” that haunt the Southern psyche: “Sometimes he wants to stay in her lap forever; but he slips away shamefaced, remembering *this* mother is not ‘fitten,’ as she says herself, to sit in the living room and eat at the table with the rest of the family.” Smith also argues “This dual relationship which so many white Southerners have had with two mothers, one white and one colored ... makes the Oedipus complex seem by comparison almost a simple adjustment” (Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream*, [New York: W. W. Norton, 1994], 133, 131).

\(^7_3\) Helen Dixon, 19.
could be entrusted to help white children evolve into adults, then how could those blacks not be themselves capable of raising themselves to the level of their white employers? The Dixon clan clearly had involved and daily relationships with black people, so much so that members like “Aunt” Barb were counted as relatives. How could such a multiracial, Christian home generate the architect of the second Ku Klux Klan?

The racial anxieties Dixon’s version of white supremacy manifested about blacks were not so much about eradication as about subjugation. Controlling blacks was the goal of his idealized white supremacy, and control ironically depended upon their continued presence. A. C. Dixon’s understanding of blacks in southern life was one of a parent to a child, but, to carry this analogy further, this relationship would contain the possibility of the child growing up and becoming powerful. Later in his life, A. C. Dixon reflected that President Theodore Roosevelt’s invitation to Booker T. Washington to dine in the White House was an affront to the South. Many could look to Booker T. Washington’s invitation to the White House as a sign of blacks rising in the world. Such an “evolution” of blacks would be unthinkable for unreconstructed southerners. White Fundamentalists most feared racial equality from what they understood as the principles of Darwinian evolution. Historian Michael Linesch has argued, “Especially in the South, antievolutionists intimated that any acceptance of evolution would encourage racial equality and the eventual mixing of the races.”

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A. C. Dixon wanted racial relations to be a fixed entity, and he feared change in race relations as much as any feature of the modernist controversy.

Fundamentalists often reassured themselves about race relations by grounding their racial theories in Biblical ideas about a chosen race of people. Thomas Dixon held a book in his library that made the bizarre claim, based on Biblical quotations and argument, that the English were the next nation of Israel, followed by America as another. The book was Martin Lyman Streator’s 1900 volume *The Anglo-American Alliance in Prophecy*. Streator articulates the Biblical trope of a chosen people: “If then, Our Race be Israel, if we in America be a branch of Israel, the branch of God’s planting, the work of his hands that he may be glorified, then we are destined according to the good pleasure of the will of the Eternal and Almighty God, to spiritual and ethnical unity with the elect race of Israel wherever found.”75 A. C. Dixon used the Puritan trope of the nation of Israel as the chosen people of the Hebrew Bible, but he applied that trope to Fundamentalists. His efforts to structure this newly imagined community as one framed in the terms of other, earlier “chosen” people reveal the care and historical understanding that went into his social construct. The codes of national identity, a chosen people, and militant defense girded A. C. Dixon’s understanding of his Christian Fundamentalism, and all formed a lexicon of rhetorical tools – scriptural allusions, prophetic tone, apocalyptic imperatives, iconic symbols, etc. – that his brother would also incorporate with racism and apocalyptic rhetoric.

IV. How the Failure of Protestantism in New York City Would Lead to the Second Ku Klux Klan

“There is an hour for Christianity to wield the lash and use the knife. There is a time, in other words, for all things. There is a time for gentleness and tenderness and love. There is a time for wrath and indignation and for overturning. There is a time to laugh, there is a time to weep; there is a time to sing, a time to pray, a time to fight.”
– Thomas Dixon, Jr.

Thomas Dixon’s 1896 book *The Failure of Protestantism in New York City and Its Causes* articulated a vision of apocalyptic signs from the more racially diverse and urban America he saw developing in Manhattan. The book attempts to explain the social forces that led to the demise of Dixon’s ministry in New York City and his return to his plantation in Gloucester County, Virginia. Several decades before the Agrarians would make a parallel case in *I’ll Take My Stand*, Dixon had already anticipated those arguments. Dixon would also write his reconstruction trilogy (*The Leopard’s Spots*, *The Clansman*, and *The Traitor*) from a cabin on that land. Dixon’s texts reveal a movement from socially minded religious work in New York City-based religion to violent agrarian ideas at his plantation in Gloucester. If New York City could not be saved, Dixon reasoned he should retreat to the Southern plantation ideals he cherished. When Dixon talked about the religion he would like to see, the religion he believed could have saved New York City from its Babylon-like wickedness, he was essentially talking about the organization that would become the Ku Klux Klan in his later visions. White supremacy and white religion were one and the same for him, and he said as much when he revealingly declared, “The church of Christ is an invisible
Laura Veltman summarizes the troubling association between white supremacy and religion in Dixon’s oeuvre in no uncertain terms: “That Dixon so often supports [doctrines of white supremacy] by implicitly and explicitly grounding them in his understanding of Christian theology is troubling, but it stems from his great fear that the failure of Protestantism, he warns, is the failure of white supremacy.”77 If Veltman is right, then Dixon’s title might as well be “The Failure of White Supremacy in New York City.” Arguing that apocalyptic narratives often involve race as a major factor in dividing the wicked from the just, Thomas O. Beebee argues:

Racialized apocalypses depict three different kinds of possible worlds: In one, Tribulation is the beginning of openly racial warfare; in another, it is the end of race war, with the last race(s) becoming first; and the inhabitants of a third take an ecumenical approach, providing images of a rainbow coalition departing from Babylon and constructing the New Jerusalem.78

For Dixon, his new Jerusalem was his plantation, but he saw that haven in need of defense.

Seeing New York endangered, Dixon names it after a city important to several prophetic moments in the book of Revelation: “In the roar of this modern Babylon is religion increasing its hold on man? It is doubtful.”79 Dixon predicted the coming generation would not understand either their role as religious

76 Thomas Dixon, Jr., Dixon’s Sermons, Delivered in the Grand Opera House, New York, 1898-1899 (New York: FL Bussey, nd), 98.
77 Veltman, 254.
79 Thomas Dixon, The Failure of Protestantism in New York City and its Causes, 6-7.
adherents or as citizens in America; he imagines that their failure in those joint duties would culminate in an apocalyptic revolution:

I hear the coming tread of a generation of men who not only know not the name of Jesus Christ, but who do not even know the name of the government in which they were born; who do not know the flag under which they are supposed to march as citizens, who one day may stand before a staggering State and challenge it to make good its own life before the stern tribunal of the guillotine, the dagger, the torch and the dynamite bomb.\(^{80}\)

This passage describes the kind of social chaos Dixon saw coming and the violence needed to restrain it. Religion, for Dixon, was close to government in that both guaranteed meaning, defined purpose, and drew lines between and among people.

The end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century witnessed both Thomas Dixon’s height of popularity and the waves of immigrants that challenged definitions of whiteness. Early twentieth-century immigration placed new strains on stable notions nationality and whiteness, and an influx of European Catholics further undermined Protestantism’s claim to New York City and an exclusive nativist American identity. Dixon however openly admired Catholics and often wrote about what he perceived as their virtues. Though southern Protestants were mostly anti-Catholic, and the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s was virulently anti-Catholic, Dixon showed a curious predilection for admiring and even emulating certain parts of Catholicism. In his praise of the Catholic Church, Dixon discovered the blueprints for his Klan: “In the Roman Catholic Church there has been a degree of progress, a revolutionary change of

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\(^{80}\) Ibid., 25.
front, within the past few years, which has been nothing short of a miracle. We are profoundly interested in their affairs, Protestants though we are.\(^8^1\) He had similar feelings about the Salvation Army: "The voice of the Christian world, the voice of the independent thinking world today, is practically a unit as to the results of the work of this Army."\(^8^2\) Protestantism had failed in New York, according to Dixon's thinking, because other groups had surrounded Anglo-Saxon civilization, and the response required an organized, hierarchical army ready to enforce White Christianity. Dixon here shows an interest in getting his Christian soldiers in line and ready to march with crosses, and it would only be a matter of time before he would want those soldiers to wear frighteningly apocalyptic white robes and burn those crosses to signify their campaign of violence. For Dixon the answer to New York City’s problems lay in turning a chaotic mob into an organized white army.

In *The Failure of Protestantism in New York City and Its Causes*, Dixon characterized the crowd that threatened Anglo-Saxon Christianity, an apocalyptic crowd he saw as unable fully to participate in American culture and that would need violence to contain it:

> In your midst today, then, there is a population of 50,000, whose only restraint from torch and knife and bomb, is the fact that in your armories on your avenues, there stand black-wheeled guns that can be drawn into our streets and sweep them with grape and canister. The only power today that stands to guard your life, is that power which is itself the abrogation of civilization and the inauguration of the Reign of Terror and Death.\(^8^3\)

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\(^8^1\) Thomas Dixon, *The Failure of Protestantism in New York City and its Causes*, 101.

\(^8^2\) Ibid., 85.

\(^8^3\) Ibid., 26-27.
Dixon saw secret societies (or "cooperative societies," as he called them) as having the same kind of spiritual power that the church could have (and had unfortunately abdicated): "There are 'infidel' clubs in this very city that may go into the kingdom of heaven before some churches."\(^{84}\) The cooperative society he envisioned here had not yet donned robes and lit crosses on fire, but the variables were getting set. Their organization might take a Catholic form, imitating its hierarchy, ritual, and costume. A more precise way to put it would be that Dixon's Klan resembled the exotic fantasies an overheated Protestant mind would have of a militant and secret Jesuit assassination cabal. In *The Failure of Protestantism*, Dixon opined revealingly: "If Senator David B. Hill said, 'Give me the saloons, and you can have the churches,' he was talking about the Protestant churches, not the Catholic. Why? Because our Protestant churches are a disorganized mob."\(^{85}\) It is this Protestant "mob" that Dixon wanted to organize along the lines of a Catholic symbolism and hierarchy.

The next step in Dixon's logic would be for Protestant churches to organize (in a manner as the Catholics had) and cooperate to defend their culture.\(^{86}\) In the final formulation for his plans to rescue New York City’s

\(^{84}\) Ibid., 77.
\(^{85}\) Ibid., 105.
\(^{86}\) Dixon reinterpreted Protestant history to present it as being involved in organized violence: "Now I would not forget the infamies of Protestant history. There are some dark pages in our record. There were bloody persecutions in the Old World – even Martin Luther was not guiltless. John Calvin consented to the burning of Servetus. Our Puritan ancestors in New England fell first on their knees and then on the Aborigines, and afterwards made it warm for the 'witches.' Episcopalian whipped the Baptist, imprisoned and banished them in the early
Protestantism from obscurity, Dixon asserted that the church would have to organize and counter the problems he anticipated arriving with modernity: “The question now arises, what church will have the wisdom, the foresight, the love, to readjust itself in this twentieth century that is coming to the world needs of the people. The church that does will be the true church of Christ, and in His name will conquer.”87 Elsewhere, Dixon articulates the same religiously violent image: “So today the church of Christ in our centers of civic life is confronted with just such a crisis. The hour has come for righteous indignation. It is the hour for righteous wrath and for the action – yes, the violence of Christ under the influence of that wrath.”88 Dixon’s Klan would be much like a southern version of the Inquisition with his leadership of a counter-reconstruction. Dixon urged that this program of religious violence happen immediately in order to save society from the forces that threaten it: “In the life of society there are times when the community must rise in indignation and rid itself of pestilence.”89 Even Christian love, in Dixon’s hands, gets defined as a violent thing: “The love which filled the soul of Christ was a consuming fire, and before it evil must be burned up.”90 “Love” like this, for Dixon, would fuel the fires of lynchings.

While religion should be one of the forces that restrains the violence (like lynchings) that Dixon recommended, an anthropological view of religion would see its relationship with violence as being inextricably bound to a culture’s notion

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87 Ibid., 44.
88 Ibid., 131-32.
89 Ibid., 125.
90 Ibid., 128.
of the sacred. In an influential definition, Clifford Geertz looks at religion from the point of view of anthropology in his essay “Religion as a Cultural System”:

A religion is: (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.  

Geertz’s clothing metaphor is particularly apt for Dixon’s Klan. Even though both A. C. and Thomas Dixon often attempted to disguise their doctrines as timeless or only common sense, their theologies were shrewdly crafted social paradigms that involved a number of forces beyond the pale of what one would normally think religious: the business of mass marketing and ideology through propaganda, and, in Thomas Dixon’s case, through the promulgation of a white-robed army of apocalyptic “knights.” Dixon wrote novels about these knights of white supremacy, but he also put them in a play that toured the country, The Clansman, and that production became the way he most clearly articulated his vision for his white supremacist redemption of the entire nation.

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I, myself, being a deep south white, reared in a religious home and the Methodist church realize the deep ties of common songs, common prayer, common symbols that bind our two races together on a religio-mystical level, even as another brutally mystic idea, the concept of White Supremacy, tears our two people apart. – Lillian Smith in a letter to Martin Luther King, Jr.

In the letter to Martin Luther King, Jr. quoted above, Lillian Smith revealed her understanding of how the South was torn between the two forces of a binding and communal set of religious symbols, gestures, and speech while also being split by the pervasive forces of white supremacy. There would be no tension if Dixon could unite religion and white supremacy. Dixon’s narratives attempted to solve the tension those two forces brought to the South by crafting a religious version of white supremacy with his Klan. While Smith’s understanding of religion entails racial harmony (as does Martin Luther King, Jr.’s), Dixon’s religion would enact racial exclusion. In his two novels *The Leopard’s Spots* and *The Clansman* and the play called *The Clansman* (which drew from the two novels), Dixon created a liturgical and apocalyptic drama that portrayed wild black visions and voices ultimately being controlled by a Christian-inflected Ku Klux Klan.
Dixon's play *The Clansman*\textsuperscript{92} was a pageant of southern whiteness and conservative tradition, and it played an instrumental role in establishing the boundaries of early twentieth-century whiteness. This play looked back to a tradition of liturgical theater involving mystery and morality plays while it also looked forward to modern propagandistic films like Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (originally titled *The Clansman* and based largely on Dixon's play).\textsuperscript{93} As such, Dixon's play involved religious imagery as it draped its Klan with religious symbols and had them enact ritualistic gestures. In addition, this play anticipated and explored modern techniques of propaganda, particularly constructing a visual spectacle for its audience that taught them to use their collective gaze in the service of white supremacist surveillance and racial prohibition.

*The Clansman* offered audiences a white supremacist morality play that set loose a series of horrifying (to Dixon's white audience) black voices and images in order to show how the Ku Klux Klan could subdue them and ultimately protect white southern culture. Dixon drew from a whole matrix of religious symbols and narratives to invest this drama with the authority of ancient and Christian ritual. Although the play dramatized the most lurid negrophobic fears the white South had entertained, it also promised a heroic Klan that would intervene and halt the racial apocalypse Dixon feared. The play, and its

\textsuperscript{92} Thomas Dixon, *Birth of a Nation*, Manuscript, Duke University Special Collections. (Dixon renamed the play *The Clansman* after D. W. Griffith's film *The Birth of a Nation* was released.)

accompanying 86-page program, worked to make its audience into acolytes of Dixon's Klan.94

Ben Cameron, the play's main character, summarizes the drama and perhaps Dixon's work as a whole with the pithy and melodramatic line: "I hope to be worthy of your daughter, sir, but the God I worship never meant a Negro to rule a white man!"95 As Dixon's mouthpiece for religious white supremacy, Ben Cameron uses "God" and "worship" here to sanctify his ideas for racial hierarchy. Dixon's play capitalized on the shifting lines between theater and religion.96 It is little wonder that a minister and arch-racist would find ways to fuse the two endeavors. Clothed as it is in deeply religious symbols, Dixon's The Clansman toured the country like a Protestant revival, and this revival argued for a religious


95 Dixon, The Clansman (play), 18.

96 The revivalist evangelicalism of the nineteenth century had made the Protestant churches much more preacher-centered, aural experiences, and this trend was reflected in architecture and church construction. Jeanne Kilde argues that "for Finney and his associates, the missionary impulse justified a strong public presence for the church and justified, specifically, taking Christianity into the realm of the theatre. In short order, the spatial advantages of the theatre impressed Finney, the revival preacher. The stage accommodated preaching as no physically constricting elevated pulpit could, and the galleries and sloped floor not only helped rivet viewers' attention on the stage but also allowed the preacher to more easily see each listener" (Jean Halgren Kilde, When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005], 197).
conversion to white supremacy. As the Crucifixion is the main event in Christianity, so the lynching is the central narrative in Dixon's morality play.

Donald Matthews has argued that we should revise the opinion that lynching is the result of a frontier spirit of gladiatorial vengeance; instead, we should see it as a "blood sacrifice" draped in religious imagery, a description that could well apply to Dixon's play. Dixon's play fits the parameters of Matthews's argument simply because it attempts to sanctify racial violence by mythologizing the Ku Klux Klan and by making those white robes the raiment for a new order of murderous clergy.

Dixon's play version of The Clansman largely follows the novel and also follows the same melodramatic storyline of Dixon's first novel, The Leopard's Spots. After being arrested over not having paid exorbitant property taxes, Ben Cameron is released from prison and secretly acts as the head of the Ku Klux Klan, a post offered to him by Nathan Bedford Forrest. After Gus--Dixon's black beast rapist in this narrative--pursues Flora Cameron to her death, Ben organizes

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97 The Clansman further fits the strategies that Susan Gillman identifies in the early twentieth century: "All the pageantry, parades, and mass meetings, as well as the street theater and oratory, that one finds in the early decades of the twentieth century represent the historically specific use of spectacle to promote fraternal and race-based, national and internationalist, social and political movements" (Susan Gillman, Blood Talk: American Race Melodrama and the Culture of the Occult [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003], 27).


99 Though Nathan Bedford Forrest does not appear in the novel version of The Clansman, Dixon does add him to the play to fit with an overall strategy of teaching his audience the basics of what he saw as the Klan's history and key figures. For more information about Nathan Bedford Forrest's role in the early Klan and about the second Klan in general, see Nancy MacLean, Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 131.
the Ku Klux Klan to apprehend him. Using a secret cave for their Klavern, Klan members interrogate and execute Gus for the rape. For his Klan activities, the scheming mulatto Lieutenant Governor, Silas Lynch arrests Cameron and quickly schedules his execution. Even though Elsie Stoneman is Ben Cameron's intended, Lynch demands that she marry him and tells her that accepting his proposal will cause him to commute her fiancé's death sentence. Desperate to prevent the marriage, Elsie's father levels a revolver at the couple, prepared to shoot either his daughter or Silas Lynch or both of them. Lynch at gunpoint demands, “Will you kill your own child?” and Stoneman responds, “Sooner than see her in your arms.” At that precise moment, the Ku Klux Klan, led by Ben Cameron, arrives to depose Lynch and his black government. Elsie and Ben embrace, and a Klan parade ensues until the final curtain.

This play recounts an archetypal story that reveals white supremacy's underwriting of so many white psychological and social needs, tensions, and powers. On Friday, September 23, 1905, the dramatized version of The Clansman premiered at the Academy of Music in Norfolk, Virginia. The Clansman toured the nation for three years and drew a mixture of impassioned responses ranging from a standing ovation and the applause of governors to a riot and legal sanction. When the play opened in Charlotte, North Carolina, The Charlotte Daily Observer ran an advertisement saying that The Clansman (identifying it as a

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100 Dixon, The Clansman (play), 24.
“Romance of the South”) featured “fifty people” and “two carloads of scenery, accessories, and four horses.”\(^{101}\)

Dixon’s play left a wake of destruction and controversy. *The Virginian-Pilot* review, on September 23, 1905, cited a regional prejudice in Dixon’s favor:

“Further south, the southern sentiment is stronger. On a tour through the south ‘The Clansman’ will be like a runaway car loaded with dynamite.”\(^{102}\) Arguing that the racial hysteria promulgated by the play helped fuel the Atlanta riot of 1906, Mark Bauerlein gives an overview of the Atlanta audience’s response: “But the Atlanta audience cheered when Klansmen assembled before a blazing cross, and roared when sheeted white caps astride a half-dozen live steeds raced across the stage to save southern womanhood.”\(^{103}\) The play had its critics as well. John Mitchell, Jr., editor of the black newspaper *The Richmond Planet*, wrote: “Rev. Dixon is not only charged with making untrue statements but something worse. If the divine’s worst enemy could wish for him a worse journalistic thrashing than the one he is now receiving at the hands of his white critics, he is devoid of pity and a stranger to mercy. Farewell, Brother Dixon!”\(^{104}\) Mitchell also printed some unsparing comments from *The News-Leader* (Richmond), for instance: “If Mr. Dixon could arrange to have a man actually

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\(^{101}\) *Charlotte Daily Observer*, 14 Oct. 1905, 12.

\(^{102}\) *The Virginian-Pilot*. September 23, 1905.


\(^{104}\) *The Richmond Planet*, October 7, 1905, 4.
lynched on the roof of the capitol here, he would fill the square with people at two dollars a head.\textsuperscript{105}

*The Clansman* on the stage was a spectacle version of the Ku Klux Klan mythology Dixon had experimented with in his first two novels. From a script overseen by Thomas Dixon, D. W. Griffith captures that sense of spectacle with a quotation from Woodrow Wilson’s 1902 *A History of the American People* in the scene where the Ku Klux Klan first emerges. The quotation on screen reads, “The white men were roused by a mere instinct of self-preservation .... until at last there had sprung into existence a great Ku Klux Klan, a veritable empire of the south, to protect the southern country.”\textsuperscript{106}

Film still from *The Birth of a Nation*, David W. Griffith Corporation, 1915

Yet the quotation is a butchered sampling that distorts and ignores Wilson’s

\textsuperscript{105} Richmond Virginia News-Leader, Sept. 27, 1905.

\textsuperscript{106} In addition to Dixon’s novel and play being the basis for the plot of *The Birth of a Nation*, Dixon worked on the screenplay with Griffith.
vision of the Ku Klux Klan. The ellipsis brazenly omits over two pages of information from Wilson’s *A History of the American People*. This ellipsis signals a gap and a distortion in the narrative and the myth or the cultural narrative, and the intervening words were exactly the kind of arguments that the Dixonian cultural narrative wanted to silence in order to articulate a more ideologically “pure” version of white supremacy. The missing words demonstrate Wilson’s view that imprudent, passionate men of the South, mostly through secret societies and their amusement at first, eventually “took the law into their own hands” and created fear with “many an excited prank and mummery.”

Griffith’s film (the first film ever shown in the White House) alluded to the sitting President as a Klan supporter when a full rendition of his quotation would have revealed Wilson to be more critical. In his own history, Wilson provides an illustration of the Ku Klux Klan garb, conspicuously devoid of the religious imagery that Dixon added and thus reveals Dixon’s alteration of symbols and codes in his retelling of Reconstruction.

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In addition, Dixon adds a blood ritual, crosses (including a burning cross), and some Scottish folklore to the Ku Klux Klan's imagery. This Christian-inflected version of the Ku Klux Klan became codified in American culture, and Dixon coordinated its symbolism. The play version of *The Clansman* was the first step in that effort.

Dixon's play version of *The Clansman* declares itself in its program to be a sequel to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Before Dixon's writing, the Christian vision of race and slavery melodrama was certainly *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Dixon clearly saw *The Clansman* as a rebuttal to Harriet Beecher Stowe. (Indeed, *The Biloxi Daily Herald* labeled *The Clansman* the South's own *Uncle Tom's Cabin.*) For every person who had read Stowe's novel, fifty had seen the play version of *Uncle

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* Illustration of Klansmen in Woodrow Wilson's 1902 *A History of the American People* (left) contrasted with an image from Thomas Dixon's 1905 *The Clansman* (right)

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Tom’s Cabin, which attracted a new middle-class audience previously scornful of the theater. Given the pervasive influence of Stowe’s novel and its dramatized version, Dixon felt the need to position his play as a rebuttal.\textsuperscript{109} Matching Stowe, Dixon followed his novel with a play, hoping to counter Stowe’s influence. In his spoken address to the audience at The Clansman premiere in Norfolk, Virginia on September 22, 1905, as reported by The Virginian-Pilot, he said:

For fifty-two years, “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” has maligned the south and I can only hope that “The Clansman” may last that long and accomplish much for the other side of the great question. My object is to teach the north, the young north, what it has never known—the awful suffering of the white man during the dreadful reconstruction period. I believe that Almighty God anointed the white men of the south by their suffering.\textsuperscript{110}

As part of his “rebuttal,” Dixon replaces the suffering Christ-figure of Uncle Tom with a “justly-punished” black criminal. Dixon’s address also makes it clear to his audience that religious frameworks undergird his Klan. (“Almighty God anointed the white men of the south by their suffering.”) Dixon’s Klan was for him a sacred community, complete with priestly robes and “anointed” rituals all its own. In his

\textsuperscript{109} In his book about the cultural reception to Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin, David Reynolds recounts, “Stowe’s novel and its offshoots gave off unconventional, even revolutionary racial messages that seemed truly dangerous to white supremacists of the Jim Crow era, which lasted from the 1870s to the early 1960s. Most notably, the popular Southern author Thomas Dixon attended an Uncle Tom play in 1901 and was so infuriated by what he regarded as its endorsement of black power that he wrote bitterly of Stowe, ‘A little Yankee woman wrote a book. The single act of that woman’s will caused the war, killed a million men, desolated and ruined the South, and changed the history of the world.’ Dixon responded to Uncle Tom’s Cabin by penning virulently racist, anti-Stowe novels that became massive best sellers. One, The Clansman was the basis of D. W. Griffith’s adeptly made yet thematically abhorrent film The Birth of a Nation” (David Reynolds. Mightier Than the Sword: Uncle Tom’s Cabin and the Battle for America [New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2011], 9-10).

\textsuperscript{110} “The Clansman Scored a Sensational Success,” The Virginian-Pilot, 23 September 1905, 1.
own mind, and in the minds of a large part of his audience, Dixon had effectively moved the locus of sacred action from the cultural symbol and argument embodied by Uncle Tom to the Ku Klux Klan. His play offers a version of culture that attempted to replace Stowe’s story in a way that promoted citizenship in a new white supremacist nation. Whereas Stowe’s novel is a story of black suffering and white guilt, Dixon’s play tells a story of white suffering and black guilt. If Stowe saw Uncle Tom as a new Christ, a martyr whose sacrificial death could bring about a social transformation, Dixon saw Ben Cameron as an avenging Christ, an apostle of violence charged to keep his culture from apocalypse. The high priests of the nation’s white supremacy, Dixon’s Ku Klux Klan in this play, complete with ceremonial robes and a prayer to open their service, structure their propaganda along the lines of religious iconography.

One might think that if lynching were seen as a type of religious rite, the Christ figure would be the person who is lynched. Yet Dixon’s religious inclinations led him to transfer the quality of sacredness from the victim to the community exacting its presumed justice upon a scapegoat. Whereas Stowe’s religious inclinations led her to identify Uncle Tom with Jesus-the-son-of-God, who suffered to expiate humanity’s sins, Dixon’s Klansmen identify themselves with a thundering Jehovah, a God-the-father ready to crucify a demonic black “beast” for justice. Stowe elaborates her theological symbolism in her book’s sermon-like conclusion by comparing Uncle Tom’s death to Jesus’ crucifixion:

But, of old, there was One whose suffering changed an instrument of torture, degradation and shame, into a symbol of glory, honor, and immortal life; and, where His spirit is, neither degrading stripes, nor
blood, nor insults, can make the Christian’s last struggle less than
 glorious.\textsuperscript{111}

While Stowe wanted to reinvest the cross with an additional emblematic narrative
of slavery’s wrongs, and utilized Uncle Tom’s martyrdom to convert her readers
to an abolitionist crusade, Dixon appropriates the very same religious symbols
(cross, sacrifice, redemption) for the Ku Klux Klan. In the Grand Dragon’s
explanation of how news of Gus’s execution is spread, Dixon launches the
burning cross as one of the Ku Klux Klan’s most identifiable perversions of
Christian symbolism:

In olden times when the Chieftain of our people summoned the clan on
an errand of life and death, the Fiery Cross, extinguished in sacrificial
blood, was sent by swift courier from village to village. This call was
never made in vain, nor will it be tonight, in the new world. Here, on
this spot made holy ground by the blood of those we hold dearer than
life, I raise the ancient symbol of an unconquered race of men....\textsuperscript{112}

While Christian symbolism for Stowe worked to argue against slavery, Dixon put
the same set of Christian symbols to work in an argument for white revenge and
control. Dixon’s Klan is a society draped in symbols already resonant and
historically powerful in creating communities and pointing them toward violence
in a “sacred” cause.

Dixon’s religious symbolism has less to do with actual Christianity than
with creating a community through violent ritual. \textit{The Clansman}—both the play
and the novel—provides a model for communities preparing to commit vigilante
justice, complete with information about how to identify a scapegoat. Informed by

\textsuperscript{111} Harriet Beecher Stowe, \textit{Uncle Tom’s Cabin, or, Life among the Lowly} (New
York: Library of America, 1982), 480.
\textsuperscript{112} Thomas Dixon, \textit{The Clansman} (novel), 326.
anthropological analyses of the gospels and of ancient cultures, René Girard sees violent action as being instrumental to the formation not only of a religious group but also of a culture. Dixon’s play perfectly anticipates Girard’s theories. In his analysis, a scapegoat provides the necessary foundation for a group: “Whenever scapegoats truly function as scapegoats, they are seen as monsters of iniquity, whose expulsion is indispensable to the survival of the community.”

Dixon’s play was an effort in creating not just an entertained audience, but also a community, indeed a nation, of whiteness.

In the “religious” rituals in the Klavern scene, Dixon calls upon the collective imagination of those who see themselves as southerners; indeed, the segregated audience (with blacks relegated to a second-class status in the balcony at the Norfolk premiere) itself formed a mirror of the actions on the stage. Dixon’s rhetoric imagined a community where all gender, class, and religious differences mattered little when compared to the all-important whiteness that united them. The rites of white supremacy Dixon staged were efforts to train the gaze of his audience for collective and sustained scrutiny and defense of whiteness and purity.

II. “It’s Gus!”: The Klavern and the White Gaze

In a 1906 interview with Frank Morse of The Washington Times Magazine, Dixon asserted the primacy of the visual in his play The Clansman. When Morse

asked if Dixon preferred “the drama as a means of reaching the people,” Dixon replied that in play *The Clansman* “there are more than six hundred pictures presented to the audience in swift succession. It carries a realization that no book can give.”¹¹⁴ This understanding of his play reveals how Dixon’s strategies anticipated those methods that film could deliver. New technologies like film, advertising, and mass-distributed photograph-filled theater programs became avenues for exercising visual, rhetorical, and social power, and Dixon was masterful in exploiting them.¹¹⁵

Photograph of the Klavern scene from the play program for *The Clansman*. The caption reads “The Confession of Gus – Act III.”

¹¹⁵ Interpreting race as “the crucial means of ordering the newly enlarged meaning of America,” Grace Elizabeth Hale argues that mass racial meanings were made and marked at a time when technological change made the cheap production of visual imagery possible and the development of a mass market provided a financial incentive—selling through advertising—to circulate the imagery” (Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* [New York: Pantheon, 1998], 7).
One such picture from the program reveals the most important aspects of Dixon’s virulent strategy. In this staged photograph of this scene (also replicated in Griffith’s 1915 film *The Birth of a Nation*) Gus appears frightened in front of the Klansmen gathered in the Klavern cave as they investigate his guilt. His fear is on display and is at once further proof of his guilt and a visible demonstration of white power. The minstrel show had long used black fright for comic effect and for a similar demonstration of white superiority. If *The Clansman* owes something to the minstrel show, then it replicates what Eric Lott calls the “pale gaze”: “a ferocious investment in demystifying and domesticating black power in white fantasy by projecting vulgar black types as spectacular objects of white men’s looking.”\(^{116}\) This scene in the Klavern that puts Gus’s fright on display serves to demonstrate white power in precisely the same ways that Lott understands those threats to be deployed and contained in the minstrel show. The comic flourishes endemic to the “black fright” of minstrel shows essentially undermined black masculinity and aided the scapegoat portrait. Andrew Silver highlights the role that black fright played in minstrel shows: “Of course, black fright was one of the principal tropes of minstrelsy, and descriptions of such cowardice play an integral role in the comic reception of Klan activities in both northern and southern newspapers.”\(^{117}\) Dixon is not interested in writing a new minstrel show even though he draws from that tradition, and he wants Gus to be in an abject, and not humorous, position. Instead, he is interested in creating a white supremacist

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passion play/morality play complete with all of its allegorical meanings and religious iconography. Morality plays featured a main character challenged by various moral dilemmas, often an allegorical representation of some abstraction like "sloth" or "wrath." Further suggesting his play’s debt to traditions of liturgical drama, Dixon portrays characters as types or allegorical players like the morality play Everyman. Dixon uses names in the play like “the Carpetbagger” and “The Night Hawk.” Mystery and morality plays had a liturgical and ritual basis and argued for a vigorous defense of Christian values against a series of perceived threats. Dixon’s The Clansman also situated itself as a repository of moralistic advice and definition of community values; the minister/writer merely fuses religion with the Ku Klux Klan. Dixon arranges this moment on the stage to be a trial of one such perceived threat in his morality play that argues not for Christianity but for a white supremacy that had stolen the trappings of a Christian tribunal.

The scene in the Klavern where Gus is compelled to describe his crimes involves itself in a set of problematic prohibitions. Although he will not admit any wrongdoing, under the apparently irresistible mesmerism of Ben’s father Dr. Cameron, Gus eventually confesses that Flora ran from him, and that, in her shocked attempt to avoid one of his lunges, she jumped over a cliff to her death. After having been mesmerized by Dr. Cameron, Gus not only confesses to having pursued Flora with intent of rape, but he reenacts his actions before the Klansmen. The Klansmen groan as he shows them his crouching and menacing

118 Also a Klan title of rank
pursuit of Flora. This reenactment is ostensibly to prove Gus's guilt, but the Klansmen get Gus to present to them the very thing that they dread the most. While Dixon had thousands of ways to invent a guilty character, he revealingly chose to do it through confession and reenactment.

Dixon's presentation of his worst fears in the context of a play that sought to eliminate his worst fears involves his narrative in an important paradox. The linguistic (or dramatic) act of defining something as taboo involves a labeling or naming of that taboo. As Judith Butler has argued, "Language that is compelled to repeat what it seeks to constrain invariably reproduces and restages the very speech that it seeks to shut down."\footnote{119} Gus's confession is an engineered speech act that forces him to censor himself; the paradox is that the very same language that censors and limits his agency also, from the perspective of the white audience, displays his predatory sexuality.\footnote{120} As Gus describes his pursuit of Flora, the Klansmen groan: his recitation evokes a pornographic fear inherent in the Dixonian narrative of white women being pursued by black beasts. The passage definitely evokes black masculine power and threat while the passage also demonstrates its power to contain that very threat.

If the white pornographic imagination depended upon such a paradoxical deployment and \textit{jouissance} with taboo, then white supremacy for Dixon inextricably founds itself on interracial pornography. Dixon must have a rape

\footnote{119} Judith Butler, \textit{Excitable Speech} (New York: Routledge, 1997), 129.  
\footnote{120} Judith Butler identifies a linguistic paradox in the use of the term 'homosexual' in the former "don't-ask-don't-tell" policy of the United States Military: "The regulations propose the term as unspeakable within the context of self-definition, but they still can only do this by repeatedly proposing the term" (Butler, \textit{Excitable Speech}, 104).
threat in his play. Even though he had thousands of plot twists available to make Gus guilty, he chose rape. Dixon's pornographic propaganda was designed to excite sexual fears and move his white audience to murderous action. Drawing from the sources of religious iconography and pornography (unlikely as that pairing may appear to be), Dixon creates a pornographic propaganda of black threat and subsequent white control.

Even though interracial rape is a taboo subject, this sexual drama does seem to be replayed again and again, especially in southern texts. Clyde Taylor has pointed out that the attraction for white men in watching sex between a black man and a white woman is "negrophilia":

> The heart of negrophilia is bared in that curious erotic ritual in which a white male heightens sexual pleasure by witnessing his wife having intercourse with a black man—sometimes while he has sex with another partner. The white man's pleasure derives from identifying with the erotic experience and performance.121

The Klansmen's ambiguous groans as they hear Gus's tale in the Klavern could indicate their dismay and possibly their arousal at such a possibility. In their judgment of Gus, these Klansmen also potentially indulge (along with the audience) in negrophilia as they contemplate how Gus lusted for and pursued Flora. Gus's guilt seems to be established by his reenactment, but such a narrative device disguises Dixon's true purposes. Riché Richardson has argued that "formulations of black masculinity in the South as pathological—particularly those rooted in sexuality—have also been invoked, for instance, to veil the white

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masculine pornographic imagination in the South." Dixon's Klavern scene uses black sexual masculinity as the projection of the white masculine pornographic imagination. In a similar vein, Michel Foucault examines "the power that lets itself be invaded by the pleasure it is pursuing," a phrase that could describe Dixon's interracial rape melodrama. Dixon's narratives, oddly enough, anticipate the paradoxes of power and sexuality and the gaze that Foucault identifies. The groans of the Klansmen testify to an uncertainty about what that story means to them. Is it a repression or an expression of desire or both? What does the audience learn from viewing this spectacle?

Dixon's play attempts to train the white gaze to work in the service of policing black criminality, and the entire white community depends upon this surveillance of black criminality. Without that capacity for surveillance, whiteness, for Dixon, will be assaulted and eventually destroyed by racial mixing. Constant vigilance from Dixon's Klan would ensure control by identifying and labeling the black threat. René Girard highlights how rituals of control and exorcism can work on a linguistic level (as they do for Dixon). Renaming often accompanies the fantasies of control in such moments for Girard: "A disease with a name seems on the way to a cure, so uncontrollable phenomena are frequently renamed to create the impression of control. Such verbal exorcisms continue to appeal

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wherever science remains illusory or ineffective."\textsuperscript{124} If Dixon could reveal to his audience a mythology of how the black beast of the apocalypse (Gus) would destroy the pure white angel of culture (Flora), then he could argue that this apocalypse could be avenged this time and avoided in the future. In the logic of Dixon’s play, a constant surveillance of blacks would give whites some measure of control and some ability to read the signs of any threatening racial apocalypse.

While the play version of the Clansman used mesmerism to convey Gus’s guilt, the novel involved another method for visualizing the black beast rapist. The novel \textit{The Clansman} offers yet another way technologies of visibility and power worked in Dixon’s imagination as a way for whites to control the black masculine threat. In one of the more curious passages in all of Dixon’s fiction, Dr. Cameron in \textit{The Clansman} conducts an experiment on the eyes of a dead rape victim:\textsuperscript{125} “I believe that a microscope of sufficient power will reveal on the retina of these dead eyes the image of this devil as if etched there by fire…. Impressions remain in the brain like words written on paper in invisible ink.”\textsuperscript{126} As Dr. Cameron and his son Ben work, they come to find that the retina yields (albeit to the “trained” eye of the elder Dr. Cameron) an image central to Dixon’s vision of racial fear. The significance of the trained eye is that it would understand the spectacle of black criminality upon which Dixon bases his mythology of white supremacy. The passage where Dixon’s characters examine the victim’s eye

\textsuperscript{125} Her name is Marion Lenoir in the novel; Dixon makes Elsie Stoneman the second victim/threatened white woman in the play version of \textit{The Clansman}.
\textsuperscript{126} Dixon, \textit{The Clansman}, (novel) 312-3.
renders the act of seeing visible—it is as if Dixon wants his audience to see seeing. By doing so, the vision offered will render the most important of all visions in Dixon: the black male rapist/beast that would coerce white women to have mulatto children.

*Photograph from the play program for The Clansman*

The program structured its audience's point of view to work as a panoptic gaze of criminal detection linked directly to criminalizing black masculinity. The "training" that structured this way of seeing, this framing of reality depends of course on claims to scientific and irrefutable visual and empirical evidence. Dr. Cameron continues the examination: "What do you see?" asked the younger man, bending nervously. "The bestial figure of a negro—his huge black hand plainly defined—the upper part of the face is dim, as if obscured by a gray mist of dawn—but the massive jaws and lips are clear—merciful God!—yes!—it's
Gus!" The play program also includes a photograph of an unidentified black man (with a defiant expression on his face) looking directly at the camera. The caption under the photograph reads: “The lowest type of Negro, maddened by these wild doctrines, began to grip the throat of the white girl with his Black Claws." Perhaps the most damaging cultural statement of all, this photograph encourages audience members to apply the play’s codes of criminality to blacks they themselves could see. Paradoxically, the black beast Dixon created was the most important part of his white supremacy. Without that iconic threat, none of the rest of his cultural narrative of a threatened pure white heroine or a Christian-inflected Ku Klux Klan would be necessary.

In the play version of *The Clansman*, Dixon explores how a new visual economy based on white supremacist iconography could redefine the South. Bringing attention to that new visual economy, Jonathan L. Beller has argued, “As cinema mediates the apparent world, it also structures perception.” Dixon’s play (and accompanying program) worked to structure perception according to Dixon’s worldview and conception of white supremacy. The lurid melodrama on the stage worked like propaganda to move Dixon’s audience, but Dixon also manipulated what his audience had to imagine without actually seeing. Dixon hoped his audience would imagine the rape scene. He leaves the audience’s worst fears—those that were literally beyond what he could present on stage—to

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128 Dixon, Program for *The Clansman*.
their imagination. Dixon used the obscenity (literally meaning “off-stage”) of the scene where a black man rapes a white woman to get his audience to imagine the worst. It is as if this Baptist minister had transformed the typical images of hellfire and brimstone, imaginary images invoked countless times at the altar call at the close of a sermon, and instead invoked the scene of white women threatened by black men. The same narrative space that hellfire and beasts of the apocalypse once occupied in sermon became the narrative segment for Dixon’s drama where the black aggressor threatens southern white female purity. Dixon’s fear articulated itself as a racial apocalypse his myth argued would ensue if white culture did not assign a guard to defend it.

After Flora Cameron’s death and Gus’s lynching, the next threatened white female in the play is Elsie Stoneman. Worried about Ben’s furtive work with the Ku Klux Klan, Elsie goes to the Camerons’s servant Eve, who makes predictions and reads fortunes.
Photograph of Eve prophesying for Elsie Stoneman about the coming of a white rider to save her, from the play program for *The Clansman*. The caption reads "I see him comin' to you swif!' – Act III.

Eve asks Elsie to give her something with which to do her conjuring work.

Accepting a bill of money from Elsie, Eve [the stage directions read]:

puts the bill on her forehead and rocks back and forth, murmuring a voodoo song, and then she prophesies: "I sees him comin' to you swif'—wid a smile on his lips—de one you waits fur and dreams about. He's tellin' you what yer heart wants to hear—ye listen and a shadder fall between ye—what's dat a hand on yer throat about to strangle ye—dey er try an ter sabe ye an' dey can't —But Glory ter God he's a comin' agin—all in white, an' his eyes shine lak de stars an' his breaf's lak fire—"¹³⁰

This “conjuring”/clairvoyant prophecy is itself a preview of the restored white masculinity that Dixon hopes his play will accomplish, and the vision Dixon presents of masculinity is framed in apocalyptic terms. Dixon’s ultimate hope is that the white characters will be able to harness the power of the black voice. While Dixon imagines his black characters capable of being raping beasts, he also imagines them as being faithful servants and gifted with spiritual insight and prophetic voice.

III. Controlling the Prophetic Voice from the Pulpit to the Hiss

In addition to the spectacles of black guilt and white vengeance that Dixon wanted to portray in his novels and play, he also worked to display a mastery over the black voice. Black expressions, vocabularies, and gestures were, for Dixon, always understood as primitive and animalistic but were also more directly in contact with the spiritual voices and currents that ran through southern evangelical culture (both black and white). Hence, in the play version of The Clansman, Eve prophesied the coming of Ben Cameron as the play’s eponymous hero with a speech that was equal parts African American and allusion to the book of Revelation. While the play showed several black characters crossing linguistic boundaries and speaking in “uppity” ways that forebode white retaliation, the play also demonstrated a fascination with the black voice and an effort to understand and master its spiritual powers.

Mastering that black voice would be key to Dixon’s envisioning of white supremacy. In the Dixonian cultural narrative, the deprivation of speech is not the
mechanism through which power displays itself; power is displayed in the
invocation of black speech followed by a control of it. In *The Clansman*, white use
of the black voice and of black spiritual inflections (whether with Gus' confession
or Eve's prophecy) was Dixon's way of resolving the tensions that came from
having the significant spiritual presence of a black voice in the South and in his
life while also needing to subjugate that black voice as a condition of white
supremacy. The illusion of separateness of white and black depends largely on
finding ways to acknowledge the reality of black contributions to southern life
(and, in particular, southern religious life) while finding ways to control that
agency. George Marsden summarizes the weight of the influence that Methodists
and Baptists owed to millions of black converts: "Especially is this noticeable in
the South, where theology and religious philosophy are on this account a long
way behind the North, and where the religion of the poor whites is a plain copy of
Negro thought and methods."131 The very idea of black "influence" on white
southern religion suggests that their effect on it is something coming from the
outside in, and not, to borrow an eloquent phrasing from Mechal Sobel, "the
world they made together."132 Southern whites were often loath to admit the kind
of observation that Marsden casually asserts, that blacks played an integral part
in the ways all southern Protestants worshipped and behaved. Paul Harvey goes
even further in this analysis to suggest that "White and black southern religious

131 George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford
132 See Mechal Sobel, *The World They Made Together: Black and White
Relations in Eighteenth Century Virginia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press,
1989).
folk cultures drew from common evangelical beliefs and attitudes and swapped musical and oratorical styles and forms."\textsuperscript{133} That togetherness of black and white influences made some southerners uncomfortable even in religious settings, and Dixon's version of white supremacy goes to enormous lengths paradoxically both to acknowledge and disguise that influence.

In \textit{The Leopard's Spots}, Dixon describes a tent meeting at a black Baptist church: "This open place was covered with wheat straw to keep the mourners off the bare floor and afford some sort of comfort for those far advanced in mourning, who went into trances and sometimes lay motionless for hours on their backs or flat on their faces."\textsuperscript{134} This tent meeting involved a good deal of animal imagery, and the service resembled more a barn floor scene than a traditional worship area. Often, this animal imagery serves to make the point that blacks, for Dixon, were closer to nature. Though that trope worked mostly as debasement, it also serve to imagine blacks as being in a closer relationship to the spirit world. This connection with the spirit world enabled Dixon's blacks to have gifts of prophecy.

Dixon reserves the powerful rhetorical role for his white preachers, but their strength is, in part, generated from their ability to deploy and control the passionate blackness near the heart of southern spirituality. In \textit{The Leopard's Spots}, Reverend Durham has the ability to move crowds with his speaking, which


\textsuperscript{134} Dixon, \textit{The Leopard's Spots}, 180-81.
recalls the kinds of rhetorical forces Thomas Dixon hoped he wielded (and, by extension, the rhetorical powers he possessed as a novelist). Because of his volatile rhetoric and ability to move crowds, the black government in North Carolina banned him from public speaking and put him in jail. This instance in Dixon’s fiction revealed the exact opposite of what he hoped his narratives would accomplish. Dixon’s novels attempted to show white voices mastering black ones, not white ones being silenced. Yet this black suppression of the white voice moves the Reverend to defy orders and enact the forms and parodies of black speech that whites had long celebrated and jeered in the minstrel show.

The imprisoned Reverend Durham gathers “five of the best singers” from his church, and they sing (albeit as a parody) “a good old Yankee hymn,” “My Country ’tis of Thee.” Dixon describes their singing this way: “Heavens, how they sang it, while the Preacher lined it off, stood above them beating time, and led in a clear, mighty voice!” Another military order arrives immediately afterwards that forbids Reverend Durham “to sing or induce anybody to sing.” Upon hearing this second order, the crowd responds with derision: “When the soldier had disappeared, the Reverend John Durham ascended the platform, looked about him with a humorous twinkle in his eye, straightened himself to his full height, and crowed like a rooster! A cheer shook the building to its foundations.” The movement of Reverend Durham’s speech, from impassioned, argumentative rhetoric to music to animal noises, actually traces

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136 Ibid., 150.
137 Ibid., 159.
the route through which white southern religion saw itself drawing from black speech and spirituality. In this parody, Dixon reveals his belief that white speech could descend to all levels and master all forms of utterance.

Reverend Durham's performance leads ultimately to the speech that Charles Gaston will give when the Ku Klux Klan has overthrown the black government and white supremacy returns. Yet even that height of Anglo-American discourse in Dixon's imagination still bears the marks of influence from black speech and its spiritual inflections. Early in the novel, when the young Charles Gaston is despondent over his mother's continued illness, the faithful retainer Nelse finds him and attempts to comfort him:

"Now des lemme pick you er chune on dis banjer 'fo' I goes ter my wuk."

Of all the music he had ever heard, the boy thought Nelse's banjo was the sweetest. He accompanied the music in a deep bass voice which he had kept soft and soothing. The boy sat entranced. With wide-open eyes and half-parted lips he dreamed his mother was well, and that he had grown to be a man – a great man, rich and powerful. Now he was the Governor of the state, living in the Governor's palace, and his mother was presiding at a banquet in his honour.\textsuperscript{138}

Nelse's voice and instrument called the young Charles Gaston to imagine his mother restored to health, and that was what Nelse had hoped his song would do. The very fact that Nelse uses a banjo to create this tune perfectly illustrates the folk negritude that underwrote Dixon's white supremacy. It is almost as if Nelse shows Gaston the way to the Governor's Mansion while providing the musical accompaniment that could have come straight from a minstrel show. Gaston will eventually be the Governor that Nelse's song inspires him to imagine,

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 53.
and his rhetoric there will still be, as this dream was, in part predicated on the deployment and use of the black voice.

Once he becomes Governor, Charles Gaston gives a speech to his white constituents where he outlines his plan for a white supremacist government. The speech carries all of the Dixonian marks of a prophetic voice, one that intones the grand themes that Dixon himself imagined his sermons carried. Charles Gaston's rhetoric at the novel's close solidifies whiteness politically and personally for Dixon's hero, and, by extension, for Dixon's white readers. At the end of Gaston's speech, his future father-in-law concedes that he may marry his daughter. The vision of being Governor that Charles began while listening to the single voice of the faithful retainer Nelse at his banjo culminates in this passage where he hears a multitude of white voices, trembling with passion, fury, and support of his return of white supremacist rule. Dixon shows how his white supremacist mob has finally become organized and violent: "These patient, kindly people, slow to anger, now terrible in wrath, were trembling with the pent-up passion and fury of years. What power could resist their wrath!" Gaston achieves this dream by his mastery of the voice, demonstrated in the speech he gives to this multitude. Dixonian narratives usually conclude with a white male voice proclaiming the world safe again for their supremacy.

Yet many black voices rose to contest Dixon's. The Virginian-Pilot article about the opening of the play version of The Clansman noted that blacks in the balcony hissed during the performance – and curiously interprets the hissing

139 Ibid., 447
occurring at the end of the play: “And the hisses were the sincerest applause that could be given those actors who portrayed the villainous and unpopular characters.” Nonetheless, the newspaper article does concede that a good deal of hissing came from the gallery, where “hundreds of negro men and women were packed and jammed. Their hisses were just as cutting as those of the whites, but they were directed at the white characters.” The article, while registering the disapproving hisses, does not explain or interpret them further. Those hisses perhaps were the first—but certainly not the last—attempts to counter this play’s insidious messages and images. Eloquent black voices would rise to challenge Dixon’s conception of white supremacy. The next chapter in this study will articulate the first attacks on the Dixonian cultural narrative from four black writers: Charles Chesnutt, Kelly Miller, Sutton Griggs, and W. E. B. Du Bois. Of the three writers, Du Bois was the most adept and eloquent at beating Dixon literally at his own game of manipulating prophetic rhetorics and religious symbolism that could resolve questions of the color line in early twentieth-century America.
CHAPTER THREE

PROPHECY, APOCALYPSE, AND THE BLACK RESPONSE TO THOMAS DIXON: CHARLES CHESNUTT, KELLY MILLER, SUTTON GRIGGS, AND W. E. B. DU BOIS

I. Introduction: “a protest and a prophecy”

Charles Chesnutt, Kelly Miller, Sutton Griggs, and W. E. B. Du Bois all responded eloquently to Thomas Dixon, Jr.’s white supremacist narratives, but they did so in a way that revealed important distinctions in their own religion and rhetoric. Although he had created a narrative of white supremacy, and although his play *The Clansman* had toured the country, Thomas Dixon’s narrative of whiteness was radically unstable. Writers array in opposition to Dixon pounced on that instability and explored its consequences. In different ways, these writers’ rebuttals and counter-narratives revealed the fissures in Thomas Dixon’s rhetoric, and they also identified Dixon’s conflicted indebtedness to black voices and black religious discourse, an essential paradox of Dixon’s own peculiar version of twentieth-century white supremacy.

While many writers in the early twentieth century called Dixon an outrageous example (albeit popular) of white supremacist ideology, their efforts to counter his ideology took different and telling shapes. Chesnutt and Miller both situated their writings as legalistic and moralistic efforts to counter the Dixonian cultural narrative, but Sutton Griggs and W. E. B. Du Bois met Dixon on his own ground by structuring their writings through apocalypse and prophecy. While
Chesnutt and Miller certainly had both law and moral logic on their side, their arguments actually rehearsed the limited gains that accommodationist thinkers like Booker T. Washington had already promoted. Intuiting and exploiting the complex relationship that American racism had with white Protestantism, Griggs and Du Bois were able to attack Dixon's "Christian" underpinnings by directly attacking his appropriated religious symbols and rhetoric and to create an opening for black religion to conduct a socially-minded religious revival.

David Chappell goes so far as to assert that the Civil Rights Movement was itself a religious movement. Yet historians and cultural critics have not yet sufficiently examined the role that religion and religious rhetoric have played in the Jim Crow era and in the Civil Rights Movement. Declaring the willingness of some scholars to ignore religion's role "breathtakingly obtuse," David Chappell claims that one important aspect has not received enough attention: "Black southern activists received strength from old-time religion, and white supremacists failed, at the same moment, to muster the cultural strength that conservatives traditionally get from religion." The sources of the religious rhetoric that Chappell views as an important part of the Civil Rights Movement have a genealogy behind them, and this chapter explores how Chesnutt, Miller, Griggs, and Du Bois crafted increasingly religious rhetoric that engaged the prophetic and apocalyptic registers and vocabularies to attack the "Christian" core of the Dixonian cultural narrative.

Thomas Dixon provided an easy target for any black writer or activist in the early twentieth century, a target that even helped frame the terms of debates about white supremacy and spurred the creation of an organization like the NAACP. Melvyn Stokes points out that the fight against the 1915 Griffith film *The Birth of a Nation* strengthened the NAACP: “When the fight began, [the NAACP] was a small organization, not very well known and highly dependent on the initiative of its uneven network of local branches”; but after the protests against *The Birth of a Nation*, the NAACP’s membership doubled in size.¹⁴¹ These attacks helped make Dixon’s name the worst of all possible insults. In his 1924 essay “A Lunatic or a Traitor,” W. E. B. Du Bois blasted Marcus Garvey by asserting, “Not even Tom Dixon or Ben Tillman or the hatefulest enemies of the Negro have ever stooped to a more vicious campaign than Marcus Garvey.”¹⁴² Likewise, Dixon used Du Bois as an extreme example of his opposition. Dixon was still railing against his rhetorical enemies in his final novel *The Flaming Sword* (1939). This novel envisions the racial apocalypse and black takeover of the United States Dixon had warned about his entire career. One of the mouthpieces in *The Flaming Sword* spouts an editorial that could easily fit in Dixon’s earlier work:

> And now social equality with the great white race has become the passionate faith of ninety-nine out of every hundred educated Negroes in America. It is the soul of Du Bois’ teachings. Charles W. Chesnutt, your

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¹⁴² W. E. B. Du Bois, “A Lunatic or a Traitor.” *The Crisis*. May, 1924. This quotation also clearly shows that Dixon (along with his long time friend Ben Tillman) represented the rhetoric of the opposition for Du Bois.
Mulatto Cleveland novelist, believes it and proclaims it. Professor Kelly Miller, your distinguished Negro teacher in Washington believes it.\textsuperscript{143}

This passage frames Dixon’s understanding of the writers who most effectively argued against his white supremacist myths. For his part, Du Bois, the leading thinker and speaker for black America (especially after Booker T. Washington’s death in 1915), fired back at the Christian underpinnings of white supremacy. As head of the NAACP and editor of The Crisis, Du Bois had the task of commenting on current debates, including his charge that “A nation’s religion is its life, and as such white Christianity is a miserable failure.”\textsuperscript{144} In refuting Dixon, Chesnutt, Miller, Griggs and Du Bois made an early and enduring contribution to the religious narrative of the Civil Rights Movement. That contribution was a way of describing civil rights as a millennial religious movement. Griggs and Du Bois established a rhetoric for later writers like Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Toni Morrison.\textsuperscript{145}

Anticipating the vocabularies and debates of the Civil Rights Movement, both Dixon and Du Bois understood that the color line would entail a battle over which side was able to lay the most complete claim to the mantle of religious authority and prophetic utterance. Du Bois signals his intention to work in a

\textsuperscript{143} Thomas Dixon, \textit{The Flaming Sword} (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2005), 33.
\textsuperscript{145} Drawing from the arguments of George Shulman in \textit{American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture}, I agree that these writers (Richard Wright, James Baldwin, and Toni Morrison, for example) engage in an apocalyptic and prophetic rhetoric in the service of dismantling white supremacy and advancing civil rights. See George Shulman, \textit{American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
prophetic register when he frames the mission of Alexander Crummell in *The Souls of Black Folk*: “He saw, far, far away, the bronzed hosts of a nation calling, — calling faintly, calling loudly. He heard the hateful clank of their chains; he felt them cringe and grovel, and there rose within him a protest and a prophecy.” With diction like “vision,” “mystic,” and “wonderful,” Du Bois’s passage similarly labels itself as prophetic. Furthermore, Alexander Crummell, a minister and mentor to Du Bois, felt the call to spread a word of inspiration, but in this particular instance it is to redress a wrong (“the hateful clank of chains”) and to help his kindred (those who “cringe and grovel”). This prophetic discourse involves itself in the discourse of nationhood both for Du Bois and Dixon, for such language always had to do with the divine imperatives that grouped a people together and pointed them toward a purpose. Dixon and Du Bois inherited this fusion of prophetic and race discourse from the fiery rhetoric of writers like William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, and Sojourner Truth; the actions of revolutionaries like John Brown; and the narratives of novelists like Harriet Beecher Stowe. The immediate contest between Dixon and Du Bois would be which side of the color line would be able to lay the most complete claim to this prophetic tradition.

Prophecy deserves a definition and a description: Old Testament books like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel often involved themselves in bringing to light

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147 Alexander Crummel (1819-1898) was an important voice in the Abolitionist movement and in various other pan-African and Black Nationalist causes. Du Bois honors his influence on Du Bois in the eponymous essay in *The Souls of Black Folk*. 
divinely ordained insights that humankind seemed inclined to deny. In characterizing those who subscribe to apocalyptic theories and prophetic rhetoric, Paul Boyer declares, "Those who inhabit this world take seriously the Bible's apocalyptic sections and derive from them a detailed agenda of coming events"; and he adds, "Prophecy interpreters, like hobbyists assembling a picture puzzle or artisans crafting a mosaic, painstakingly build from hundreds of bible verses a picture of the final days of human history." Prophecy is a highly allusive rhetorical form that draws upon Biblical vocabulary and idiom in order to form critical predictions and dire warnings that look toward ancient rituals as much as to contemporary anxieties. In style, prophecy involves a shifting of the narrative level. This message, often delivered by a charismatic and inspired individual, is often a sudden, other-voiced intrusion of poetry into normal speech and is almost, but not quite, a kind of glossolalia or speaking in tongues. The flexibility of prophetic discourse is such that it will always already be relatable to current events and positioned to loan itself to contemporary political agendas. In fact, as James Darsey has argued, "The primitive source for much of the rhetoric of reform in America has been the prophetic books of the Old Testament," and both Dixon and Du Bois understood the role that prophecy had played in American rhetoric and deployed it to their ends. Yet far from just being a rhetorical tool, the prophetic mode drew strength from the religious convictions of its adherents.

In Dixon’s *The Leopard’s Spots* (whose title is itself a quotation from the prophet Jeremiah) features Reverend Durham speaking charismatically, and Dixon notes the shift to the prophetic register by a change in Durham’s voice:150

The Preacher’s voice was now vibrating with deep feeling, and the deacon listened with breathless interest. “Believe me, deacon, the ark of the covenant of American ideals rests today on the Appalachian Mountain range of the south. When your metropolitan mobs shall knock at the doors of your life and demand the reason of your existence, from these poverty-stricken homes, with their old-fashioned, perhaps mediaeval ideas, will come forth the fierce athletic sons and sweet-voiced daughters in whom the nation will find a new birth!” The Preacher’s eyes had filled with tears and his voice dropped into a low dream-like prophecy.151

This passage exhibits several aspects of the prophetic: the intrusion of poetic devices (like metonymy, synecdoche, metaphor, and a variety of typological symbols) into everyday speech, a warning about a future cataclysm, and even an awareness of its own status as prophecy. Durham envisions a “new birth” for the white southerners who represent an “Ark of the Covenant” for “American ideals,” and thereby anticipates directly (with the phrasing “the nation will find a new

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150 Mladen Dolar speculates that the prophet’s voice, along with the deep sound of the shofar (a ram’s horn sounded in Jewish religious ceremonies), represents the law of the father: “So we have to recognize, in the sound of a shofar, the voice of the Father, the cry of the dying primal father of the primitive horde, the leftover which comes both to haunt and to seal the foundation of his law. By hearing this voice, the community of believers establishes its covenant, its alliance with God; they assert their submission and obedience to the law. The law itself, in its pure form, before commanding anything specific, is epitomized by the voice, the voice that commands total compliance, although it is senseless in itself” (Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* [Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2006], 53).

151 Dixon, *The Leopard’s Spots: A Romance of the White Man’s Burden—1865-1900* (New York: Doubleday, 1902), 335. The title *The Leopard’s Spots* comes from the prophetic book of Jeremiah: “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.” Jeremiah 13:23. Conventionally, readers take the verse to mean that it is as impossible to stop doing evil once accustomed to it as it is for a leopard to change its spots.
birth”) the title that Dixon would claim he gave to Griffith for the film *The Birth of a Nation*, one Dixon himself claimed came upon him in inspiration and he shouted to Griffith across a lobby after an initial screening.\(^{152}\)

If prophetic voice works in the writings of Dixon and Du Bois as a call to a nation-state, then the inspired words the prophet delivers act as interpellation. Deploying an understanding of Althusser’s concept of “ideological state apparatuses,”\(^{153}\) Mladen Dolar argues that the act of interpellating indeed involves religious inflections: “The voice is ultimately linked with the dimension of the sacred and ritual in intricately structured social situations where using the voice makes it possible to perform a certain act.”\(^{154}\) Dixon’s work with the play version of *The Clansman* symbolically staged the type of sacred ritual that was at the heart of his construction of religious white supremacy. W. E. B. Du Bois also used the prophetic voice in his staging of such events as “The Star of Ethiopia Pageant” (1913) and in such scripturally informed and prophetically inclined works as *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903). The prophetic voice that can bring forth the identity needed for nationhood is exactly the sort of ritual that Dolar imagines (after Althusser) as a voice that performs the interpellation and calls a social structure into being. The voice for the prophet acts as the religious parallel

\(^{152}\) For an account of Dixon’s shouted idea for the film’s title, see Raymond Allen Cook, *Fire From the Flint: The Amazing Careers of Thomas Dixon* (Charlotte: Heritage Printers, 1968), 168. The language also echoes Abraham Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address,” with its phrasing “a new birth of freedom.”


to the edict, the fiat, and the law – uttered language that identifies and codifies
the people and their boundaries. The prophet's voice follows a set of rules that
could be described as a rhetoric, complete with its own tropes and vocabulary.
One major subject in this prophetic rhetoric is the apocalypse.

The ways Chesnutt, Miller, Griggs, and Du Bois engaged the apocalyptic
resembled the terms through which A. C. and Thomas Dixon negotiated their
own rhetorical frames. These theological terms can be analyzed in terms of
literary genre categories and their differing modes of emplotment. The
following chart suggests how these four authors differed with respect to
premillennial/postmillennial and tragic/comic frames:

155 For an extended analysis of the way that “emplotment” works, see Kenneth
Burke, The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology (Berkeley: University of
California Press, 1961). See also Stephen D. O’Leary, Arguing the Apocalypse:
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<th>Premillennial</th>
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<td>Tragic</td>
<td>A. C. Dixon</td>
<td>Sutton Griggs</td>
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<td>Comic</td>
<td>Kelly Miller</td>
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Comic and tragic frames, according to the rhetorical strategies of Kenneth Burke, differ in that comic frames emphasize the possibilities of change, of human error being potentially corrected, and of a better world being possible; tragic frames imply a worldview that sees human error following the logic of inescapable flaws, and tragic narratives tend to reveal a fated or predetermined course, one in which a better world is not really possible.

Thomas Dixon and W. E. B. Du Bois obviously disagreed as much as any two thinkers could disagree, yet their rhetorical orientation suggests they drew from spiritual rhetoric in similar ways to manipulate narratives about the end of times. Paul Boyer argues that times of crisis tend to increase interests in apocalyptic theories and prophetic rhetoric, and that those inclined to believe that Biblically-inspired prophecy can frame world events “listen with more than passing attentiveness to those who offer the Bible as a guide to events, or be particularly receptive to ostensibly secular works that are nevertheless
apocalyptic in structure and rhetoric." Premillennialism, the darker of the two orientations, is an apocalyptic frame that claims the end of times will begin with a thousand-year reign of a returned Jesus, and it asserts that human beings have no hand in any utopia or heaven on earth that can follow. Postmillennialism is another apocalyptic frame that argues claims human agency dictates what will happen and when. A. C. Dixon's emplotment according to these frames would have him declare that there really is nothing human beings can do except focus on following the directions given to them from God in the scriptures, and that the only choice for human beings is whether they want to go to heaven or hell.

Sutton Griggs believed that human agency was important to God but that it would not be possible to avoid a tragic cataclysmic apocalyptic race war. Kelly Miller and Charles Chesnutt both argue (in a category that would also contain Booker T. Washington) that involving oneself in social action for the betterment of humanity was a good in itself but would not make much difference to the divinely ordained narratives already unfolding.

If apocalyptic language and millennial frameworks carried a style or mode with them, then that would have to be prophetic rhetoric. Whether it is Eve speaking in Dixon's play version of The Clansman, Griggs sermonizing in The Hindered Hand, or Du Bois speaking of the veil in The Souls of Black Folk, prophetic rhetoric involves apocalyptic and typological symbols, an elevated prose style with an ecstatic vocal delivery, along with a sense that current events work dramatically to reveal a larger and unfolding divine plan. If prophetic rhetoric

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156 Boyer, 3.
was in part defined by an ecstatically vocal performance, then that was, for a
writer like Dixon, dangerously closer to African American speech patterns than to
white ones. Dixon’s secret fear was that blacks had a primal access to spiritual
language and prophetic discourse, a voice that Dixon frequently explored in his
reading and deployed (though perhaps only to control) in his writing.

The deployment and control of that prophetic voice is at the heart of the
Dixonian cultural narrative, but prophetic voice in early twentieth century white
Protestantism functioned differently than it did in black Protestantism of the same
era. White Protestantism, especially as articulated by the Dixon brothers, invoked
the prophetic to defend white supremacy, and black Protestantism invoked the
prophetic voice to attack white supremacy as it was emerging in the early
twentieth century. Charles Reagan Wilson alludes to the deeply held southern
belief in a prophecy’s gifts when he argues that “southern white religious
traditions are not the same as those of blacks, but deep in evangelical
Protestantism is a profound biracial supernaturalism that welcomes the workings
of the spirit.”157 While Wilson correctly outlines the southern cultural fascination
with a variety of spirit and spiritual activities, George Shulman sees the prophetic
mode as being crucially involved in social action and capable of doing things for
civil rights that rational liberal policies could not:

But liberalism already has many defenders and elaborators, most of whom
(not all!) repeat what I find here: a sustained complicity with white
supremacy that cannot be overcome solely by liberalism’s methods –
rights claims, juridical redress, public policy, legislative politics. These
need to be animated – and also unsettled – by prophetic practices that

157 Charles Reagan Wilson, Flashes of a Southern Spirit: Meanings of the Spirit
unrelentingly expose the hierarchies held in place, not undone, by the liberal ordinary.\textsuperscript{158}

Shulman's understanding of the role that prophetic practices played in the Civil Rights Movement can be applied the practices of these writers, who anticipated the rhetoric of the movement a half century later.\textsuperscript{159} Chesnutt, Miller, Griggs, and Du Bois, in their work to undo Jim Crow, drew from and deployed religious rhetoric and spoke and wrote in prophetic modes. Sutton Griggs, a Baptist minister like Dixon, effectively positioned his writing to oppose Dixon's narrative by engaging the apocalypticism and spirituality of Dixon's version of white supremacy, but Griggs's tragic sense of separatism kept him from fully endorsing ways white supremacy could be overcome and inspired his focus instead on the ways that blacks could fashion a separate state in the American West.\textsuperscript{160} Only in the works of W. E. B. Du Bois did the full-scale dismantling of Dixon's white supremacy occur, for Du Bois formulated a prophetic and spiritual voice, drawn explicitly from the black religious tradition, that would contain the potential for destroying Dixon's brand of white supremacy. Charles Chesnutt and Kelly Miller attempted to counter Dixon on more secular and legal grounds and wrote with the hope that the system of liberal democracy would solve the problems of the color line in twentieth-century America.

\textsuperscript{158} George Shulman, \textit{American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota P, 2008), xv-vi.

\textsuperscript{159} Shulman analyzes Baldwin, King, and Morrison especially as beneficiaries of the prophetic legacies from writers like the ones I examine in this chapter.

\textsuperscript{160} Kenneth Burke understands “tragic” to mean a mode of emplotment that casts narrative in an inevitable and cataclysmic outcome. See Kenneth Burke, \textit{The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1961).
II. “Blessed are the Meek”: Charles Chesnutt and Kelly Miller

To one unfamiliar with southern life, it might have seemed impossible that these good Christian people, who thronged the churches on Sunday, and wept over the sufferings of the lowly Nazarene, and sent missionaries to the heathen, could be hungering and thirsting for the blood of their fellow men. – Charles Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition*

Confining themselves to a legalistic and academic attack on white supremacy, Charles Chesnutt and Kelly Miller drew their arguments from a faith placed in civil procedure and legal and racial uplift. Although such an approach had many merits, it failed to sever the relationship that Dixon’s version of white supremacy had forged with white Protestant Christianity. All of these strategies were consistent with the rhetorical position of comic premillennialism and its underlying assumption that the end of times could not be brought about by social change or human effort. Meekly and patiently waiting for divine intervention, Chesnutt and Miller adopted this framework. Both Chesnutt and Miller were invested in social change (the comic frame in Burke’s terms), but they were also committed to seeing the world as unfolding gradually according to the dictates of a divine plan (premillennial). Dixon referred to Chesnutt and Miller frequently and attacked them in his writing a great deal, in part, one suspects, because he felt he could more easily defeat Chesnutt’s and Miller’s secular and legalistic arguments than the more prophetically engaged writings of Sutton Griggs and W. E. B. Du Bois.
Chesnutt situated his fiction as a response to the racial climate that Dixon would foster and novelize.\textsuperscript{161} Chesnutt’s own battle with that climate and with Dixon required defining the battle lines in defining the continuation of the abolitionist legacy, the interpretation of Reconstruction, and the national response to lynching. Later in his career, Chesnutt summarized the period at the turn of the twentieth century and the battle of ideas he saw his fiction entering: “Thomas Dixon was writing the Negro down industriously and with marked popular success. Thomas Nelson Page was disguising the harshness of slavery under the mask of sentiment. The trend of public sentiment at the moment was distinctly away from the Negro.”\textsuperscript{162} Dixon himself was acutely aware of Chesnutt’s opposition: the minister/novelist owned a first edition of Chesnutt’s \textit{The Marrow of Tradition} he kept his whole life and that remained in his library after his death. His possession of this novel testified to the importance it must have had in his literary life. His reaction to Chesnutt’s writing would rival a very similar response to Stowe’s novel \textit{Uncle Tom’s Cabin}: Dixon saw the theories of the South, Reconstruction, and race promoted by writers like Stowe and

\textsuperscript{161} Scott Romine has worked to uncover the intertextual connections between Chesnutt’s \textit{The Marrow of Tradition} (1901) and Dixon’s \textit{The Leopard’s Spots} (1902). Romine explains that Dixon and Chesnutt should be read together, “For several reasons, Chesnutt is an interesting author to read alongside Dixon, among them Chesnutt’s use of the label ‘Future American’ to refer to a mixed-race or postracial American and the fact that both authors were edited by Walter Hines Page” (Scott Romine, “Dixon and the Literary Production of Whiteness,” Gillespie, M. and R. L. Hall, eds. \textit{Thomas Dixon Jr. and the Birth of Modern America}, ed. M. Gillespie and R. L. Hall [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006], 148-49).

\textsuperscript{162} Charles Chesnutt, \textit{Stories, Novels, and Essays} (New York: Library of America, 2002), 908.
Chesnutt as the seditious works of his enemies. He articulated a desire for his writings to set the record straight and tell what he saw as the “true” story of the South’s history.

The reading that Thomas Dixon must have given Chesnutt’s novel was certainly fraught with anxieties. Dixon directly addressed the Wilmington race riot—on which *The Marrow of Tradition* was based—in a sermon entitled “A Friendly Warning to the Negro.” Dixon used this sermon about the Wilmington riots to review larger issues about race in the South; he also provided what he saw as theories about and solutions to these issues. In the same sermon, Dixon articulated the paradoxical ways he felt close to black people:

The first face I ever looked on in this world was the face of an old Negro woman. My early playmate was a coal-black Negro of my own age. We grew up together. We played together, we worked together, we fought one another. We had common hopes, joys, burdens, and sorrows. I had ample opportunity to study his character. He had his peculiarities; he was the greatest liar I ever knew without any exception, and he would steal anything he could put his hands on. I have known him to steal a palm leaf fan in the middle of winter, with snow on the ground. And yet, with all his faults, I loved the boy. He ran away when I was fourteen years old and left me to do all the work. But if I knew where I could find him I would go a hundred miles out of my way to shake hands with him.

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163 David S. Reynolds relates that Dixon’s career was in part launched by a reaction to Stowe: “Thomas Dixon attended an Uncle Tom play in 1901 and was so infuriated by what he regarded as its endorsement of black power that he wrote bitterly of Stowe, ‘A little Yankee woman wrote a book. The single act of that woman’s will caused the war, killed a million men, desolated and ruined the South, and changed the history of the world.’ Dixon responded to Uncle Tom’s Cabin by penning virulently racist, anti-Stowe novels that became massive best-sellers” (David S. Reynolds, *Mightier Than the Sword: Uncle Tom’s Cabin and the Battle for America* [New York: W. W. Norton, 2012] Kindle edition).


165 Ibid., 113.
Dixon was absolutely fixated on blacks in his writing, but this autobiographical confession reveals Dixon's obsessions were perhaps rooted in deeply held emotional contact with blacks even in his early life. In his most strident modes of attacking "the negro problem," Dixon revealed his tremendous attachment and debt to black people. Later in the sermon, in addition to recommending various resettlement possibilities for blacks, Dixon declared: "The southern white man really sympathizes most deeply with him and his life. He is his best friend, and he must realize this fact if he would find the solution of his life."\textsuperscript{166} Dixon's mixture of sympathy and aggression reveals the complicated ways that the writer understood his relationship with blacks and their agency. This vexed response to some degree acknowledged the complexities that Chesnutt examines in \textit{The Marrow of Tradition}.

Chesnutt's novel \textit{The Marrow of Tradition} and Dixon's sermon about the Wilmington Riot both revealed that interpretations and perceptions of the Wilmington events were crucial to white supremacy's continued success or eventual demise. Chesnutt understood well how white supremacy depended upon the display of spectacle as a theater of ideology to instruct whites about their "endangered" status and to demonstrate to blacks their vulnerability. He was not indulging in hyperbole in the following passage about the theatrical nature of spectacle lynching: "Some enterprising individual had begun the erection of seats from which, for a pecuniary consideration, the spectacle might

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\textsuperscript{166} Ibid., 117.
\end{quote}
be the more easily and comfortably viewed."\textsuperscript{167} Chesnutt's sense of how the town prepares for the lynching resembles the way a town might get ready to host a large athletic event, with business-minded people figuring out calculating ways they can turn a profit. The spectacle of this lynching acts also as a ritual that binds the community together and asserts its dominance and, for Chesnutt, its barbaric, un-Christian cruelty.

Dixon's treatment of a similar scene underscores how a lynching could turn a town into a murderous carnival where rendered human beings were reduced to animals in a slaughterhouse. Dixon may well have read Chesnutt's novel as participating in a religious rhetoric he hoped to pursue in crafting his narrative of white supremacy triumphant. Dixon's interest was in creating apocalyptic dread, and Chesnutt's interest was apocalyptic dread as an artificially constructed spectacle. In \textit{The Leopard's Spots}, Ben Cameron attempts to stop the lynching of his friend Dick. Dick and Ben have been friends since boyhood, perhaps a parallel to Dixon's own childhood black friend. Dixon describes the scene as Ben watches helplessly: "Under the glare of the light and the tears the crowd seemed to melt into a great, crawling, swaying creature, half reptile, half beast, half dragon, half man, with a thousand legs, and a thousand eyes, and ten thousand gleaming teeth, and with no ear to hear and no heart to pity!"\textsuperscript{168} Even when he describes the most despicable aspects of a lynching, Dixon uses apocalyptic imagery to stress the religious component for him in these rituals, and he draws from the book of Revelation for its warehouse of tropes about

\textsuperscript{167} Chesnutt, \textit{The Marrow of Tradition}, 178.
\textsuperscript{168} Dixon, \textit{The Leopard's Spots}, 384.
eschatological monsters.\textsuperscript{169} Charles Chesnutt well understood the violent crowd energy that accompanied spectacle lynching, and he dramatized the tensions fueling such forces in his novels. For Chesnutt, law held answers rather than apocalypse or prophecy.

*The Marrow of Tradition* and *The Leopard's Spots* debate whether whites or blacks could hold the mantle of Biblical authority, but Chesnutt limits his side of the debate to a legalistic framework. Chesnutt also invests his narrative with a great deal of hope in the future for American blacks. To that end, Chesnutt's orientation may look somewhat like Dixon's to the extent that both harbored (albeit quite different) hopes for a better day for both races and were buoyed by a scriptural understanding of how those hopes might be realized. White supremacists like Dixon may well have found a thinker like Booker T. Washington more palatable than Chesnutt, Miller, Griggs, or Du Bois because Washington seemed to engage less frequently in direct critiques of powerful white institutions.\textsuperscript{170}

Contrasting Chesnutt's ideas about racial progress with those of

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\item[169] For example, see Revelations 13:2-4: “And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion: and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority. And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death; and his deadly wound was healed: and all the world wondered after the beast. And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?”
\item[170] Despite some praise of Booker T. Washington, Dixon had a very dim view of progress for blacks in America. John David Smith writes that “Dixon considered efforts to elevate the Negro even by conservative reformers like Booker T. Washington, problematical. According to Dixon, ‘no amount of education of any kind, industrial, classical, or religious, can make a Negro a white man or bridge the chasm of the centuries which separate him from the white man in the evolution of human civilization’” (John David Smith, “My Books Are Hard
Washington, Maxine Lavon Montgomery concludes, "Chesnut felt that Washington had rendered a disservice to the majority of African Americans" and that, unlike Washington, Chesnutt "did not hesitate to level criticism at a white southern power structure." Washington's views took a more gradual and passive approach to change – without a threat of an apocalypse accelerating the timeline of his theories. Instead, Washington argued for gradual progress that would be its own motivation and reward.

In *The Marrow of Tradition*, Chesnutt invokes millennial and apocalyptic rhetoric as a legalistic protest to white supremacy. Chesnutt envisions Major Carteret, the novel's most moderate white supremacist but also the chief promoter of its propaganda, setting himself to task of writing:

Taking for his theme the unfitness of the negro to participate in government, -- an unfitness due to his limited education, his lack of experience, his criminal tendencies, and more especially to his hopeless mental and physical inferiority to the white race, -- the Major had demonstrated, it seemed to him clearly enough, -- that the ballot in the hands of the negro was a menace to the commonwealth. He had argued, with entire conviction, that the white and black races could never attain social and political harmony by commingling their blood.

Such a description anticipates the thesis of Thomas Dixon's writing career, and demonstrates how fully Chesnutt understands the tenets and arguments of white supremacy.

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From the legal and racial theories that Major Carteret contemplates, Chesnutt quickly shifts to a religious discourse. Such a transition suggests that Chesnutt understood the alliance white supremacy had made with Protestant Christianity. Carteret's black servant Jerry worries about coming events with an apocalyptic imagination: "'Ef dere's gwine ter be anuder flood 'roun' here, I wants ter go in der ark wid de w'ite folks; -- I may haf ter be anudder Ham, an' sta't de cullud race all over ag'in.'" The view that Jerry expresses is a premillennial one: envisioning having to start again after a destruction; human work discounted and destroyed in the face of divine wrath; marginalization and exile for the people not among the chosen. The novel's protagonist Dr. Miller intones a premillennial vision for blacks: "'Blessed are the meek,' quoted Miller at the end of these consoling reflections, 'for they shall inherit the earth.' If this be true, the Negro may yet come into his estate, for meekness seems to be set apart as his portion." Chesnutt's articulation here of his premillennialist stance indicates that patience and faith will receive rewards after the apocalypse and second coming.

Throughout the novel, Chesnutt frames the characters' thoughts and experiences in a network of Biblical allusions. Most of those allusions collude with references to law and the expectations of a civil society. Thinking about her complex racial and family secrets, Mrs. Carteret contemplates how both the Bible and law inform the ways families organize and define themselves: "To herself, marriage was a serious thing, -- to a right-thinking woman the most serious
concern of life. A marriage certificate, rightfully procured, was scarcely less solemn, so far as it went, than the Bible itself.”

Olivia Carteret gives a religious cast as well to the way she hopes this melodrama would conclude when she prays that Dr. Miller might save her son by operating on him after the mayhem of the riots: “O God!’ she prayed, in tones which quivered with anguish, ‘pardon my husband’s sins, and my own, and move this man’s hard heart, by the blood of thy Son, who died to save us all.” By the terms of Olivia Carteret’s prayer, Christian ideals would then usher in a new era of racial cooperation, if Dr. Miller chooses to perform the operation at the novel’s close. Yet Chesnutt can only gesture toward that possibility happening one day. In his premillennial framework, Chesnutt can only imagine a better society in a perpetually deferred future.

Chesnutt’s legalistic visions of how to counter Dixon found another advocate in the very academic arguments of Kelly Miller. A Howard University professor who, like Dixon, had studied at Johns Hopkins, Kelly Miller offered trenchant critiques of the Dixonian cultural narrative and, not incidentally, foregrounded apocalyptic and prophetic rhetoric in his writing. “The Hebrew prophet’s utterances,” Miller claims in Out of the House of Bondage, “apply with all but absolute accuracy, even in detail and minutia, to the relative circumstances and situation of the white race and the negro of the American

\[175\] Ibid., 206.

\[176\] Ibid., 243. Dr. Miller is ironically Olivia Carteret’s brother-in-law, but her racism prevents her from doing anything with Miller socially until her son needs the emergency operation at the novel’s conclusion.
soil." While such a formulation would seem to fit the hermeneutic paradigm used by a Fundamentalist like A. C. Dixon, Miller sees his Hebrew prophets as reaching a different, more socially minded, egalitarian, and pedagogical conclusion. In the conclusion to *Out of the House of Bondage*, Miller, in a prophetic litany with verbal flourishes in the mode of Ezekiel or Daniel, imagines Lincoln's assassination: "I see the assassin striking down the great Emancipator; and the house of mirth is transformed into the Golgotha of the nation." A rubric of a spiritual and prophetic typology then serves to interpret all events in American history. Miller thus invests historical events with the symbolism of Biblical narrative and trope.

Thomas Dixon's performance of *The Clansman* was another version of "Golgotha" for Kelly Miller, but he was able to do something about this nightmarish performance. At the New York City performance of *The Clansman*, Miller had his pamphlet "An Open Letter to Thomas Dixon Jr." distributed to the audience entering the theater, at least until the theater owner summoned the police to discourage those distributing it. Drawing on the implicitly religious terminology that the Ku Klux Klan adapted, Miller called Dixon "the chief priest of those who worship at the shrine of race hatred and wrath." Grounding his argument in major thinkers like Aristotle, Newton, Jefferson, and Darwin and using all the trappings of classical rhetoric, Miller compares Dixon to Ben Tillman,

178 Ibid., 70.
James Kimble Vardaman, and Tom Watson. As a counter to Dixon’s theory of education, Miller states his case in classically logical form: “White man’s civilization is as much of a misnomer as the white man’s multiplication table.”

Civilization for Miller was not something exclusively for whites, unless the whites had simply denied the rights to access to that civilization. Rationality was the method for Miller to move forward.

Kelly Miller saw the best way to oppose someone like Thomas Dixon was through social uplift and education. A life-long proponent of black education, Miller saw progress occurring best through learning. Miller’s *Out of the House of Bondage* traces the progress that the author saw blacks acquiring. He credited slavery, evil though it was, for giving blacks “an acquaintance with the English language” (afterwards to lead to literacy) and Christianity. “The whole race,” Miller explained, “as if by magic, embraced this spiritual cult which appeals so powerfully to its own inner longings.”

Miller’s depiction of black spirituality as a “cult,” and its appeal as working “powerfully,” suggests that Miller saw the black church as somewhat irrational. If Miller engaged in a prophetic voice in his writing, he ultimately subordinated it to a legal argument that followed the logic of liberal democratic theory. The prophetic serves then merely as a surface ornamentation for Miller, something literary that added zest and urgency to argument.

Ultimately, Miller’s attack on Dixon did not fully engage religious modes and limited itself to academic logic. His use of religious and prophetic modes was

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180 Ibid., 12.
only ceremonial and legitimating. In a rhetorical flourish that also mocks the kind of prophetic utterance a Dixon character might deliver, Miller launches his final indictment in his rebuttal to Dixon:

You [Dixon] preside at every crossroad lynching of a helpless victim: wherever the midnight murderer rides with rope and torch, in quest of the blood of his black brother, you ride by his side; wherever the cries of the crucified victim go up to God in the cracking flame, behold you are there; when women and children, drunk with ghoulish glee, dance around the funeral pyre and mock the death groans of their fellow man and fight for ghastly souvenirs, you have your part in the inspiration of it all.182

Miller’s flourishes here hit all the prophetic gestures full force: anaphoric repetition, Biblical diction, foresight, invective, curses, etc. Miller highlights the apocalyptic nature of Dixon’s fundamentalism as he almost algebraically breaks down the variables in the Dixonian cultural narrative: “It is conceivable that you voluntarily unfrocked yourself as a priest of God, where your function was to save the individual soul from punishment in the next world, in order that you might the more effectively warn your race to flee from amalgamation, as from the wrath to come.”183 Miller asserts here that Dixon was warning his audiences about “amalgamation,” a warning based in part in the formulations of apocalyptic religion. Miller’s greatest understanding of Dixon’s oeuvre and method was to articulate and lay bare its religious and rhetorical structure. Building on Miller’s

182 Kelly Miller, As to the ‘Leopard’s Spots’: An Open Letter to Thomas Dixon Jr., 20.
183 Ibid., 20. By using the word “unfrocked,” Miller calls attention to both the fact that Dixon’s roles have been socially constructed even to the point of resembling garments that can be put on or removed in a ceremonial way as well as the literal pun about a minister’s robes perhaps being exchanged for a klansman’s robes. Miller’s rebuttal points out the religious dimensions of the frocking, the “frocks”/robes Dixon invests with religious symbolism, bestowed upon by Dixon, for the Klan’s fight for white supremacy. Dixon’s effort to unfrock himself sets up the possibility that he did so to refrock himself in the white raiment of the Klan.
ideas, Sutton Griggs and W. E. B. Du Bois positioned themselves to create even more effective opposition.

III. The Pen in the Hindered Hand: The Strange Career of Sutton Griggs and His Response to Thomas Dixon

If, when his services are in demand, the chiseler of the epitaph for Mr. Dixon’s tombstone desires to carve words that will be read with patience in the coming better days of the world, let him carve thus: “This misguided soul ignored all of the good in the aspiring Negro; made every vicious offshoot that he pictured typical of the entire race; presented all mistakes independent of their environments and provocations; ignored or minimized all the evil in the more vicious element of whites; said and did all things which he deemed necessary to leave behind him the greatest heritage of hatred the world has ever known. Humanity claims him not as one of her children.”


Perhaps the university lectern limited Miller’s ability to engage his writing in the prophetic mode, but the Baptist podium of Rev. Sutton Elbert Griggs held no such limitations. Sutton Griggs was the most prolific opponent of Thomas Dixon’s career. If he cast the black “hand” in the United States as being “hindered,” then he could also imagine a hand that would craft an epitaph for Dixon. Griggs saw his own hand working through essays and his fiction as an epitaph for the Dixonian narrative. A Baptist minister and a novelist, Griggs was especially well positioned to understand and to oppose Dixon’s religiously inspired version of white supremacy. His fellow black Baptist ministers elected Griggs to write the official response to Thomas Dixon.¹⁸⁴ Griggs included a

¹⁸⁴ Finnie D. Coleman points out that “At the 1903 meeting of the National Baptist Convention in St. Louis, Missouri, the delegates voted unanimously to
rebuttal to Dixon’s white supremacist fiction in an afterword to his novel *The Hindered Hand*, and his rhetoric soared and flourished, much like the prose of the man he attacked: “May this trumpet call to a greatness of soul in keeping with its greatness of power, supplant the voice of Dixon the hater, summoning men to grovellings in the valleys of a thousand years ago.” Differentiating Griggs from Chesnutt, Maxine Lavon Montgomery observes, “Unlike Griggs, Chesnutt hoped that his predominantly white reader-audience would respond more readily to the reasoned plea on the part of the black middle class for social acceptance and then work toward achieving racial harmony.” Griggs essentially parodied Thomas Dixon, perhaps Griggs’s greatest limitation, for the parodist often has a very literal engagement with his subject, depending upon the target of attack for its content and style. Griggs wrote like a black Dixon and envisioned a separate America for blacks as the only suitable future for racial compatibility.

Griggs’s most direct rebuttal of Thomas Dixon absolutely depended upon the Dixonian arguments it attacked for its very structure. True to his elected role as the man assigned officially to attack Dixon’s ideas, Sutton Griggs indicted Dixon’s version of white supremacy as being a response to an internal and spiritual presence of black culture and thought:

commission Sutton Griggs to publish a response to Thomas Dixon’s particularly vitriolic novel *The Leopard’s Spots: A Romance of the White Man’s Burden, 1860-1900*. The convention promised full financial backing from some 2.5 million members from more than 17,200 churches across the country” (Finnie D. Coleman, *Sutton E. Griggs and the Struggle Against White Supremacy* [Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2007], 22).


The unquestioning faith of the Negro in the Bible is largely responsible for the militant orthodoxy of the white Christian ministry of the south, which makes life miserable for any mind retaining and applying to religious matters the old Anglo-Saxon habit of investigating. 'The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world,' even if that hand is a black hand. It is the boast of the southern white preacher that he was nursed by a black mammy.187

Griggs understood how Thomas Dixon's fiction portrayed an exorcism that at once invoked, demonized, and controlled blackness.

Griggs's fiction also labors to counter Dixon's and, in so doing, follows a number of Dixon's fictional conventions. The fact that Griggs involves another novel, *Imperium in Imperio*, with lynching and a secret society (the society that Griggs has create the black nation, "the Imperio") is enough to argue that his fiction participates in the same variables and scenarios of Thomas Dixon's fiction. Several of Griggs's characters deliver "sermons" that resemble the speeches Dixon's characters deliver (and also the actual sermons that Dixon delivered from the pulpit). In a thirteen-page manifesto for equal rights frequently echoing Biblical language and imagery, Ensal Ellwood in *The Hindered Hand* urges:

Grant unto us equality of citizenship. Fix your standard for a man! If you choose, plant the foot of a ladder in a fiery test and engirdle each round with a forest of thorns. Do this and more, if your civilization and the highest needs of the unborn would require it. But when, through the fire and up the path of thorns, we climb where others climb, hurl us not back because of a color given us from above.188

Unlike Chesnutt and Miller, Griggs saw a chance to "climb," to make some social progress. Griggs was sure that a cataclysmic apocalypse was always on the horizon, but he was also sure that some kind of effort at creating utopia here

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188 Ibid., 159.
would be important. If just as an act of faith, making some effort at social change was a part of Griggs’s theological stance, a tragic postmillennialist framework.

Griggs, like Dixon, was a Baptist minister, and he based a good deal of his ideas on his theology. More than any other writer, Griggs was in a position to comment on the manner Dixon had used theology and race together in structuring his white supremacy. In a brilliant insight, Griggs saw how Dixon’s white supremacist myth was predicated upon interdependence with black religious practices. As such, Griggs focused on the ways Dixon characterized the very black spirituality he both feared and needed:

Mr. Dixon essays to portray Negro worship and makes of it a very grotesque affair. Over against Mr. Dixon’s representation of Negro worship as a heathenish affair, we place the old plantation melodies evolved in those and earlier days. Charged as these melodies are with true religious fervor, they stand as a bulwark against all who would assail these earlier groupings of the race after the unknown God.\(^{189}\)

Griggs well understands how Dixon’s narratives of white supremacy depended in large measure upon blackness. This dependence went well beyond a need for a series of black beast images to threaten white audiences. In his most explicit formulation of these ideas, Griggs traces Dixon’s real literary paternity to the blacks he demonized:

Mr. Dixon has not breathed the Negro air of emotionalism without being affected thereby. The Negro minister whom Mr. Dixon derides in his book is beyond all doubt Mr. Dixon’s spiritual parent as far as power is concerned. The fact that Mr. Dixon has chosen the discomfiture of the Negro race as the chief end of his existence is not inconsistent with the fact that the predominating element in his power is the gift of that race. It is perhaps this subconscious feeling on the part of Mr. Dixon that he is in the grasp of a power not Anglo-Saxon that causes him to rant and cry for a

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\(^{189}\) Ibid., 309-10.
freedom that his own southern brethren less affected do not understand.\textsuperscript{190}

Declaring that Dixon’s “spiritual parent” is black strikes at the very heart of the fear so often expressed in white supremacist discourse – that the mixing of races would result in a racial Armageddon. One could dismiss Griggs’s point as a sarcastic turning of the tables on Dixon, but the jab has a measure of truth to it that anticipates Ralph Ellison’s notion that blackness and whiteness have an interdependent relationship.\textsuperscript{191} For Griggs, Dixon’s voice was informed and even powered by black voices.

Black voices had a powerful and troubling influence on Dixon, but they did for Griggs as well. Black voice, for Griggs, was a prophetic gift but also a troubling sign of backwardness. “The Negro race,” Griggs asserts, “is said to be in its vocal period, the period of song and noise, whereas the white race is said to have advanced out of the vocal stage.”\textsuperscript{192} Far from despairing that this “noise” would result in an unproductive cacophony, Griggs wanted to see voice developed into voice as a written style: “By intelligently speaking to the white

\textsuperscript{190} Ibid., 330.
\textsuperscript{191} See, for example, Ralph Ellison’s “Haverford Statement” where he argues, “The American people are united in all their regional, class, and ethnic, and religious diversity by a bond of language. There are many idioms of that language, and it is partially the creation of a voice which found its origin in Africa. Indeed, the language began to be influenced by this voice long before the American nation was formed. In the beginning was the word, and our voice sounded in the language with which the word was spoken. The American language owes something of its directness, flexibility, music, imagery, mythology, and folklore to the Negro presence. It is not, therefore, a product of ‘white’ culture as against ‘black’ culture; rather it is the product of cultural integration” (Ralph Ellison, “Haverford Statement.” \textit{The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison} [New York: Modern Library, 1995], 461).
race through literature, and understandingly hearing from it through a like medium, the esteem in which the race is held will be materially advanced. Therefore let the entire race rally around the printed page." Griggs’s interest in black uplift included a deeper commitment to getting their ideas into print, and he saw a need to meet white supremacy’s texts directly with his own writing. Part of Griggs’s effort to do battle Dixon’s narratives was to parody them, but that parody necessitated some degree of replication.

Griggs’s writing enacted a kind of literary miscegenation by taking on Dixon’s white voice in parody. Mikhail Bakhtin asserts that parody is a mode of writing where two voices inhabit the same verbal space and have an oppositional relationship. Bakhtin explains the nature of this relationship:

The second voice, once having made its home in the other’s discourse, clashes hostiley with its primordial host and forces him to serve directly opposing aims. Discourse becomes an arena of battle between two voices. In parody, therefore, there cannot be that fusion of voices possible.

According to Bakhtin, the two voices joined in parody involve a doubling where the two voices intersect and one takes charge of the other. Griggs’s voice of protest took on Dixon’s voice as the target of its parody. Griggs also parodies (and, therefore copies to some degree) Dixon’s situations, plots, and theories. The great irony of this crossing of voices was that it certainly could go both ways, as Griggs had pointed out with Dixon’s inheritance from a black “spiritual parent.”

193 Ibid., 83.
If a black writer were able to take on a white voice, then the reverse was possibly true as well.

In part, Griggs's fiction operates on the principle that a black man could write like Thomas Dixon, or that Griggs was America's black Dixon. Finnie D. Coleman identifies one of the most important strategies in Griggs's fiction, that he was able to find one of Dixon's most essential paradoxes: "In a clever move, Griggs turns this argument around to suggest that Dixon's most important selling point (the ability to write emotionally) was something that he had gleaned from his intimate contact with Blacks." Dixon worried extensively, in passages in his sermons and his novels, about his own intense emotional connection with blacks, and Griggs exploits that seam of insecurity quite effectively. Yet more than just identifying a clever move against Dixon, Griggs's notion reveals a crucially important aspect to all of Dixon's work. Blacks were so essentially important to the Dixonian cultural narrative (and, by Dixon's own account, in his own life) that a fundamental paradox to the entire mythology was that it absolutely necessitated a constant and recurring black threat as its most important plot element.

Both fiction and flesh, it would seem, were capable of transformation and boundary crossing for Sutton Griggs. In addition to its recurring images of threatening black beasts, apocalyptic literature suggests the body's boundaries face greater risks, as if the end of times would require physical change or disruption. In apocalyptic settings, disease attacks bodies, threatening monsters

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195 Coleman, 117.
appear, and the flesh prepares itself for a rapturous ascent into a new heavenly body or a sulfurous descent into a pit of perpetually destroyed flesh. Griggs’s characters undergo similar transformations, and their bodies testify to the ways that flesh can be a harbinger of eternal truths. Echoing Isaiah 40:6 ("All flesh is grass"), prophets frequently emphasized that bodies matter little when compared to the soul and eternity. Such an attitude could underwrite various systems of social control for these transitory bodies, but it could also suggest that these bodies are capable of adapting to alternative appearances and performances.

In the novel *Imperium in Imperio*, Griggs demonstrates, in a wild sequence of events with his character Belton Piedmont, the fluidity of flesh and identity. Belton sets out on an errand to learn what white people think of blacks, and he adopts a disguise to carry out this mission:

He had this wig made especially to his order. He bought an outfit of well fitting dresses and other garments worn by women. He clad himself and reappeared in Richmond. His wife and most intimate friends failed to recognize him. He of course revealed his identity to his wife but to no one else. He now had the appearance of a healthy, handsome, robust colored girl, with features rather large for a woman but attractive just the same.  

Apparently able to pass as a woman, Belton reveals the radically unstable parameters of identity. Far from being a source of comedy, Griggs sees this instability a sign of how white male supremacy directs social performance. Belton’s status as “female” and as a servant gives him access to several secret conversations, and Belton takes advantage of these opportunities to survey white culture’s understanding of blacks:

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196 Sutton Griggs, *Imperium in Imperio*, 76.
In this guise Belton applied for a position as a nurse and was successful in securing a place in the family of a leading white man. He loitered near the family circle as much as he could. His ear was constantly at the keyholes, listening. Sometimes he would engage in conversation for the purpose of drawing them out on the question of the Negro. He found out that the white man was utterly ignorant of the nature of the Negro of today with whom he has to deal. And more than that, he was not bothering his brain thinking about the Negro. He felt that the Negro was easily ruled and was not an object for serious thought. The barbers, the nurses, cooks and washerwomen, the police column of the newspapers, comic stories and minstrels were the sources through which the white people gained their conception of the Negro. But the real controlling power of the race that was shaping its life and thought and preparing the race for action, was unnoticed and in fact unseen by them.197

Griggs's narrative tours Belton through social levels and thereby reveals white supremacy's fragile and tenuous social constructs. Belton's position, enabled by his disguise as a woman, allows him to occupy a place of power, one that will inform the actions of the black separatist government Griggs envisions.198

Belton's narratives of passing not only involved greater access to secrets but led him to confront the violence of lynching. In one of the most dramatic reversals to a lynching, Belton enacts Griggs's hope that blacks would rise in revolution against the lynching white supremacist culture around them. After passing as a woman, Belton also passes later in the novel for dead. Belton

197 Ibid., 76.
198 Belton discovers as well the way that black women are continually harassed in his culture: "Belton also stumbled upon another misconception, which caused him eventually to lose his job as a nurse. The young men in the families in which Belton worked seemed to have a poor opinion of the virtue of colored women. Time and again they tried to kiss Belton, and he would sometimes have to exert his full strength to keep them at a distance. He thought that while he was a nurse, he would do what he could to exalt the character of the colored women. So, at every chance he got, he talked to the men who approached him, of virtue and integrity. He soon got the name of being a 'virtuous prude' and the white men decided to corrupt him at all hazards" (Sutton Griggs, Imperium in Imperio, 77).
pretends to have died at the lynching and fools the mob. Before Belton is
"lynched" the attending physician, Dr. Zackland, offers whiskey as payment for
an intact black corpse upon which to conduct scientific experiments: “Just hang
him and fire one shot in the back of his head. I want him whole in the interest of
society. That whiskey will be the finest that you will ever have and I want a good
bargain for it.”199 Because of a series of accidents, the execution fails, but Belton
pretends to die in order to escape later. Belton waits patiently on the operating
table until the doctor is alone with him, and then he rises and kills the doctor with
his own surgical instruments. He escapes to further the aims of the Imperium
government in which he plays a central role. Having surveyed a white culture he
decides never will be able to accept blacks, Belton resolves to create a separate
nation for blacks.

Although Belton Piedmont’s revolution eventually gives way to a more
accommodationist conclusion, Griggs asserts the possibility in Imperium in
Imperio that a large portion of the white south (Texas and parts of Louisiana) are
potentially spaces that can be transformed into territory owned and governed by
blacks. Imperium in Imperio is a frustratingly difficult novel to follow.200 The
novel’s initial narrator, Beryl Trout, presents himself as someone who has

199 Ibid., 85.
200 Eric Curry suggests that Griggs’ Imperium in Imperio may be the result of an
effort to portray a debate among black intellectuals about the best path forward,
whether revolutionary or more gradual. Curry’s reading of Imperium in Imperio
sees also a kind of narrative loophole Griggs may be using as a way potentially
to disavow more frighteningly violent and revolutionary strategies for black
progress. See Eric Curry “‘The Power of Combinations’: Sutton Griggs’ Imperium
in Imperio and the Science of Effective Efficiency.” American Literary Realism
Vol. 43, No. 1 (Fall, 2010) 23-40.
uncovered documents about the stories and debates of Bernard Belgrave and Belton Piedmont. Belgrave represents the more accommodationist position as he argues for a future for black Americans who will work alongside whites (reminiscent of the ideas of Booker T. Washington), and Belton represents the more revolutionary and separatist energies of someone like Marcus Garvey, albeit one that prefers a kind of secession to expatriation to Africa.

In the final chapter of Imperium in Imperio, after Belton's demise, Bernard Belgrave muses about how blacks are prepared to visit apocalyptic violence on white America. Belgrave addresses his fury to the American flag: "Float on proud flag, while yet you may. Rejoice, oh! ye Anglo-Saxons, yet a little while," and then he promises, "You shall be richer food for the buzzards to whom I have solemnly vowed to give your flesh." From this violent rhetoric, Griggs provides a tempering voice as the novel's framing narrator, Beryl Trout, reacts: "I felt that beneath the South a mine had been dug and filled with dynamite, and that lighted fuses were lying around in careless profusion, where any irresponsible hand might reach them and ignite the dynamite." While Beryl Trout's terrors may mollify the violent rhetoric somewhat, clearly Griggs wished to give his readers a vision of the kind of racial apocalypse that could come from his separatist inclinations.

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201 When the novel's framing narrator Beryl Trout relates how Bernard Belgrave speaks at Belton Piedmont's burial, Imperium in Imperio seems similar in structure to the melodramas of the gothic novel and even (with the doppelganger character names) recalls the wordplay of Edgar Allen Poe. Such convolutions also further the novel's difficulties and serve to distance Griggs from any direct authorial statement.


203 Ibid.
In addition to echoing Dixon’s histrionic style, Griggs also accepted some ideas about separating blacks from whites. In *The Hindered Hand*, one of Griggs’s characters, Eunice “a mulatto,” offers a speech about her racial mixing that could very well, with a few changes, fit into a Dixon novel:

For argument’s sake, grant that I have some Negro blood in me. You already make a mistake in making a gift of your blood to the African. Remember what your blood has done. It hammered out on fields of blood the Magna Carta; it took the head of Charles I; it shattered the scepter of George III; it now circles the globe in an iron grasp. Think you not that this Anglo-Saxon blood loses its virility because of mixture with Negro blood. Ah! Remember Frederick Douglass, he who as much as any other mortal brought armies to your doors that sacked your home. I plead with you, even if you accept that girl’s malicious slanders as being true, not to send your blood back to join forces with the Negro blood.

For Griggs, “white blood” metonymically was able to achieve certain historical milestones, all of which argue for a narrative of ascending human freedom and achievement. Those achievements of freedom all involve a violent act: “hammered,” “took the head,” “shattered,” “sacked,” etc. Mixing of bloods troubles Griggs as well as Dixon – the result of white blood mixing with black blood has the capacity for Griggs to produce violent social change. These moments in Griggs’s fiction seem almost lifted from Dixon. For example, Viola, a character in *The Hindered Hand*, writes a suicide note decrying the mixing of races:

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204 Griggs most explicitly does this in his novel *Imperium in Imperio* where blacks turn Texas into their own nation. Finnie D. Coleman has argued that Griggs problematically endorsed some of Dixon’s racial essentialism: “In countering Dixon, Griggs seems to accept essentialist statements about Blacks that demonstrated an uncritical acceptance of negative racist assessments of Black people” (Coleman, 116).

The intermingling of races in sexual relationship was sapping the vitality of the Negro race and, in fact, was slowly but surely exterminating the race. It demonstrated that the fourth generation of the children born of intermarrying mulattoes were invariably sterile or woefully lacking in vital force. It asserted that only in the most rare instances were children born of this fourth generation and in no case did such children reach maturity.206

The variables might be reversed, but Griggs shared, in some parts of his fiction, the same sort of racial essentialism and fears that Dixon had about racial mixing.

A defeatist and thoroughgoing separatism informed Griggs’s ideas about black nationality and caused him to advocate for removal from the system rather than to try reform. One way to think of Imperium in Imperio is that it strove to be a “Birth of a Black Nation.” Like a Moses who brought tablets of inscribed print to lead his people to a new understanding of their obligations and mission, Griggs wanted to act as that prophet who could lead his people to a higher place. Griggs himself was unable to play that part, but someone else was.

IV. The Coming of W. E. B. Du Bois: the Prophetic Mode and the Black Secular Apocalypse

Crucified on the vast wheel of time, I flew round and round with the Zeitgeist, waving my pen and lifting faint voices to explain, expound and exhort; to see, foresee and prophesy, to the few who could or would listen. – W. E. B. Du Bois, Dusk of Dawn

Dixon may have constructed his literary persona in The Flaming Sword as the anti-Du Bois for good reason as the two men had deployed their ideas in similar cultural moments and places. Thomas Dixon and W. E. B. Du Bois have some interesting parallels in their careers: 1903 saw the publication of The Souls

206 Griggs, Imperium in Imperio, 95.
of Black Folk, the year after The Leopard’s Spots, while 1905 was the year of the Niagara Conference and The Clansman. When one considers the Star of Ethiopia pageant and the play version of The Clansman from 1906 onwards, then the clashing interests of the NAACP’s creation and the film The Birth of a Nation in 1915 seem yet another parallel culmination.

The two men, Dixon and Du Bois, shared more than a common battle – they both understood the important dimension that religious discourse played in the ideology and mythology of white supremacy and the role prophetic use of voice and religion could play in structuring any success that white supremacy might have. More than Chesnutt, Miller, or Griggs, Du Bois was able to craft his writing in the tone of that prophetic voice and thereby anticipate the ways writers like James Baldwin and others in the Civil Rights Movement would deploy religious and prophetic rhetoric.

To the extent that W. E. B. Du Bois was an American prophet, he engaged with presentist concerns and incited his readers to action. George Shulman has defined such a prophetic voice: “Prophecy in America is thus a biblical genre, a vernacular idiom, and a political language, gripping and yet capacious, available for opposing uses.” The political language that Shulman identifies with prophecy could turn either to Dixon’s uses or to those of W. E. B. Du Bois. Joel Williamson, fusing German philosophy with Biblical reference, claims that Du Bois may have seen himself as a secular savior: “It is possible, then, that by 1893 Du Bois saw himself potentially as one of Hegel’s world-historical-men, a

207 George Shulman, American Prophecy: Race and Redemption in American Political Culture, x.
dark Messiah to lead his people toward salvation.‘ Dixon might have had similar ideas for himself about his role for white supremacy.

Du Bois and Dixon both wrote a book about a nineteenth-century figure who also styled himself as a prophet. No historical figure representing slavery and prophecy loomed larger than John Brown, and both Du Bois and Dixon wrote about John Brown. According to Dixon’s lights, Brown represented the kind of militaristic and religious imperatives the minister/novelist celebrated but pointed in the wrong direction. Reverse the polarity in Brown’s ideas, and you have Thomas Dixon, a Klansman rather than an abolitionist. For Du Bois, Brown was a vexing and inspiring figure who forced the issue of slavery to a crisis. In his 1909 biography *John Brown*, Du Bois characterized Brown as a prophetic mystic whose “saturation in Hebrew prophecy ... sense of personal sin and shortcoming and the voices from nowhere, deepened, darkened and broadened his religious life.” Dixon characterized Brown’s gifts and problems in *The Man in Grey* (a novel about Robert E. Lee), which analyzed Brown’s powers as the result of his Puritan nature. The Puritans, for Dixon, were cold-hearted, mechanically-practical, witch-hunting, Indian-killing, religious warriors: “The secret of his power lay in a mystic appeal to the Puritan conscience. He had been from childhood afflicted with this conscience in its most malignant form.” Du Bois in turn found Brown to exhibit a deeply-held understanding of Hebrew prophecy, and such a

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view, according to Du Bois, would naturally lead to social action. Brown was
drawn to help others, Du Bois argued, and this sympathy was strengthened by a
saturation in Hebrew religion which stressed the personal responsibility of
every human soul to a just God. To this religion of equality and sympathy
with misfortune, was added the strong influence of the social doctrines of
the French Revolution with its emphasis on freedom and power in political

Du Bois also sees in Brown a bit of himself since he argues Brown was a proto-
Marxist interested in abolishing private property, starting his revolution by
abolishing the worst private property of all: slavery.

In contrast to Du Bois, Dixon saw a racial apocalypse begun by Brown
and Harriet Beecher Stowe. According to Dixon, "John Brown had realized his
vision of the Plains. He had raised a National Blood Feud. No hand could stay
the scourge. The Red Thought burst into a flame that swept north and south, as
a prairie fire sweeps the stubble of autumn. \textit{Uncle Tom's Cabin} had prepared the
stubble."\footnote{Thomas Dixon, \textit{The Man in Grey}, 311.} For Dixon, Brown was a figure who very nearly ushered in a racial
apocalypse, the racial apocalypse he saw writers like Du Bois attempting to
effect. If both Du Bois and Dixon agreed on Brown's prophetic importance, and, if
both Du Bois and Dixon saw some version of themselves, however distorted, in
Brown, then both writers saw their careers as secular prophets about race, but
differed about what directions those careers should take. Both Du Bois and Dixon
involved themselves in prophetic speech about race as much as Brown. If John
Brown for Dixon was an example of how a racial apocalypse could begin, then
Brown for Du Bois was an example of social action to redress the wrongs of slavery. Apocalyptic imagery and rhetoric would recur for Dixon and for Du Bois in a variety of different works.

One of W. E. B. Du Bois' most quoted and most broadly suggestive passages in *The Souls of Black Folk* involves an image important to apocalyptic religious imagery: the veil. Du Bois asserts that the Negro was "born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, -- a world which yields him not true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world." Apokalypsis and means a revelation, the final book of the Bible, Revelation, an uncovering, or (in some dictionaries) an unveiling. If the Negro, according to Du Bois's understanding, was gifted with a special ability to discern certain truths, then those gifts were perhaps akin to those religious visions granted to those who participated in a prophetic and apocalyptic discourse. A popular understanding of "apocalypse" may obscure the subtleties of Du Bois's usage. Far from being a fortuneteller's scary fantasy about the end of times, apocalyptic rhetoric participates in the prophecies, the Jeremiads, and the workings of the spirit that led to the gift of voices.

Limiting the apocalyptic canon to the book of Revelation would be far too narrow of a categorization. Instead, if the apocalyptic is about cataclysmic events foretold with warnings about the current state of society, then several Biblical stories and tropes emerge in this broader definition of the apocalyptic: Noah and

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the flood, the tower of Babel, Sodom and Gomorrah, Queen Jezebel, the entire ministry of Jesus, etc. The narratives contained in the apocalyptic tradition have strong elements of gothic horror to them. To turn a phrase important to James Baldwin (one of the most eloquent heirs to this apocalyptic tradition in black spiritual writing), the apocalyptic tradition is not as much interested in the promise of the rainbow as it is in "the fire next time." Du Bois was interested in using his prophetic insights to change this world and not the next. Jonathon Kahn argues that Du Bois "uses the language of religion not to reflect on God’s nature but to urge changes in this-worldly realities such as justice, mortality, love, guilt, and hope."²¹⁴ W. E. B. Du Bois understood that this language of religions underwrote Thomas Dixon’s mythology of white supremacy, and he understood how that mythology worked to suppress black agency.

In his autobiography Dusk of Dawn, W. E. B. Du Bois took the measure of the influence that Thomas Dixon and D. W. Griffith had had with their white supremacist narratives. Du Bois clearly worried about how to move the "unthinking masses" who could be affected by its powerful claims to historical and social truth. Such a problem further urged Du Bois to take on the role of a counter-prophet to Thomas Dixon. In countering Dixon and D. W. Griffith, Du Bois described The Birth of a Nation:

This would have been a great step in the development of a motion-picture art, if it had not happened that the director deliberately used as the vehicle of his picture one of the least defensible attacks upon the Negro race, made by Thomas Dixon in his books beginning with the “Leopard’s Spots,” and in his play “The Clansman.” There was fed to the youth of the nation

and to the unthinking masses as well as to the world a story which twisted
the emancipation and enfranchisement of the slave in a great effort toward
universal democracy, into an orgy of theft and degradation and wide rape
of white women.\textsuperscript{215}

Du Bois well understood the parameters of the Dixonian narrative, and Du Bois
was ultimately the man who could defeat Dixon's arguments on every level.

Dixon knew that Du Bois had defeated him, and \textit{The Flaming Sword} bears
the telling scars of that defeat. The novel's title dramatically reveals how Dixon
and Du Bois conducted their debate on the plane of Biblically inspired rhetoric in
a prophetic mode. Du Bois was the ultimate foil to Dixon's arguments, so much
so that Dixon's \textit{The Flaming Sword} railed against Du Bois in several passages
and took its very title from Du Bois's masterwork of Reconstruction
historiography, \textit{Black Reconstruction}, a book Dixon had branded "the Negro
Bible of Communism."\textsuperscript{216} In \textit{Black Reconstruction}, Du Bois had said, "A clear
vision of a world without inordinate individual wealth, of capital without profit and
of income based on work alone, is the path out, not only for America but for all

\textsuperscript{215} Ibid., 729-30. Du Bois argued that this narrative had real-world consequences:
"Without a doubt the increase of lynching in 1915 and later was directly
couraged by this film. We did what we could to stop its showing and thereby
probably succeeded in advertising it even beyond its admittedly notable merits.
The combined result of these various events caused a sudden increase of
lynching. The number of mob murders so increased that nearly one hundred
Negroes were lynched during 1915 and a score of whites, a larger number than
had occurred for more than a decade" (W. E. B. Du Bois, \textit{Dusk of Dawn}, 731).

\textsuperscript{216} Quoted in John David Smith's Introduction to \textit{The Flaming Sword}, from a
letter from Dixon to Cox. Thomas Dixon, \textit{The Flaming Sword} (Lexington:
University of Kentucky Press, 2005).
men. Across this path stands the south with flaming sword.” If any one man could be said to wield that flaming sword, then that man would be Thomas Dixon.

In a speech at the opening to the *The Flaming Sword* (so named as a response to Du Bois’s quotation from *Black Reconstruction*), the older white patriarch of the town, Captain Collier, delivers a defense of the racial theories of Booker T. Washington but then attacks the ideas of W. E. B. Du Bois: “Professor W. E. B. Du Bois was born in Massachusetts. His people never knew slavery, at first hand, or second hand. All he knows of the history of our states and our people he drew from the imagination of Abolition fanatics who caused the Civil War.” Dixon identifies his rhetorical enemies when Captain Collier talks with Rex Weldon, the mulatto head of Negro schools: “And now social equality with the great white race has become the passionate faith of ninety-nine out of every hundred educated Negroes in America. It is the soul of Du Bois’ teachings. Charles W. Chesnutt, your Mulatto Cleveland novelist, believes it and proclaims it. Professor Kelly Miller, your distinguished Negro teacher in Washington believes it.” In this passage, Dixon essentially gives a roll call to all of his major black opponents as he saw them, but he singles out Du Bois for the most treatment in the novel. In other attacks on the Du Bois oeuvre in *The Flaming Sword*, Dixon regarded *The Souls of Black Folk* as an example of seeing “the

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217 W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1935), 707. The phrase “flaming sword” most probably refers to the device God installs to guard the tree of life after the fall in Genesis 3:24: “So he drove out the man; and he place at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life.”
219 Ibid., 33.
naked soul of a negro beating itself to death against the bars in which Aryan society has caged him! No white man with a soul can read this book without a tear." The irony of Dixon’s attacks in part is that his very attention to *The Souls of Black Folk* a full thirty-six years after its publication does more to underscore than to undermine its importance.

Throughout *The Flaming Sword*, Dixon goes out of his way to take rhetorical shots at Du Bois and his work by making links between the “black beast” rapist of the novel and Du Bois’s ideas. The newly married Marie Cameron, daughter to Ben Cameron of *The Clansman*, is assaulted in her home in a scene that is Dixon’s most violent and graphic. The rapist claims that his inspiration for this violence is the James Weldon Johnson poem “The White Witch,” published in *The Crisis* (under Du Bois’s editorial leadership) in 1922, a poem he quotes as he rapes Marie. The vigilantes who gather a search party for him find a copy of the poem and read it, with outrage and horror, at the start of their chase. “‘That’s the sort of damned stuff given to Niggers to read,’” they declare, “‘there’s the match that fired the powder!’” Dixon likely read the lines

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221 Dixon here strangely seems attuned to the future parameters of the canon of African-American literature. One might well argue that white supremacy has an important force in canon formation, albeit in a negative sense: a Dixon attack signaled that the work was important. Elsewhere in *The Flaming Sword*, Dixon writes: “‘On the other hand, I have been stirred to deepest antagonism. I am interested in the attitude of your scholarly editor, Du Bois, the most powerful leader the Negro race has in America. He has not only destroyed the prestige of his old rival, he has a hundred followers to every one who give his rival lip service. Washington won white friends by the genius of his diplomacy. Du Bois has won the black race by his daring and dangerous doctrines. I’m meeting his influence at every turn in my study’” (Dixon, *The Flaming Sword*, 321-22).
222 Ibid., 142.
"And I have kissed her red, red lips / And cruel face so white and fair; / Around me she has twined her arms, / And bound me with her yellow hair" as examples of the kind of interracial eroticism that he explores in this scene.\textsuperscript{223}

The rape scene in \textit{The Flaming Sword} was a direct attack on W.E.B. Du Bois. The rape itself has as graphic a description as Dixon wrote, and it structures itself along the lines of a pornographic narrative:

He gripped her wrist and dragged her unresisting into the large bedroom, crushed his naked sweating body against hers, and pressed his bulging thick lips into her mouth until she gasped for breath. For half an hour he played with her as a cat a mouse, raped her with brutal violence and ordered her to get up, while he stretched his huge black body full length on the bed, his mud covered wool socks staining the white linen.\textsuperscript{224}

The intruder orders Marie to stand against the wall with her hands over her head so he can admire her body while he relaxes, but as Marie begins to slump, he whips her with "an ugly rawhide whip from the inside of his trousers" so badly that he draws blood.\textsuperscript{225} The intruder boasts, "Dey got mah brother, Sam Hose, down in Gawga. But he git what he wanted fust. I'se a gittin' what I come atter, too."\textsuperscript{226}

\textsuperscript{223} James Weldon Johnson, \textit{Fifty Years and Other Poems} (Boston: Cornhill, 1917), 17. Yet Dixon ignores or misinterprets the poem's message contained in the opening and closing stanzas (repeated): "O, brothers mine, take care! Take care! / The great white witch rides out to-night. / O, younger brothers mine, beware! Look not upon her beauty bright; / For in her glance there is a snare, / And in her smile there is a blight."

\textsuperscript{224} Dixon, \textit{The Flaming Sword}, 136. The gesture of putting his dirty feet on the white linen recalls the infamous scene in \textit{The Clansman} (and later in the Griffith film \textit{The Birth of a Nation}), of the character "Old Aleck" putting his unshod feet upon the desk in the legislature of the Reconstruction of South Carolina. See Thomas Dixon's \textit{The Clansman} in chapter eight - "The Riot in the Master's Hall" - for an extended use of foot imagery as Dixon's trope for what he claimed was uncivilized behavior of black reconstruction government.

\textsuperscript{225} Ibid., 136.

\textsuperscript{226} Ibid., 137.
Dixon's narrative has already taken shots at Du Bois, and the Sam Hose reference was another deliberate effort to hit Du Bois in a vulnerable place. Du Bois lived in Atlanta at the time of Sam Hose's 1899 torture and lynching by a crowd of over a thousand whites. By Du Bois's own confession, Sam Hose's lynching galvanized his efforts at social reform by prompting his move from theory to action. Dixon's black beast at the opening of *The Flaming Sword* was antagonistically named Dan Hose, certainly Dixon's most horrifying villain.

After her rape, Marie utters a jeremiad for white culture in America and sets up the fears and tensions for the rest of the novel, the only novel by Dixon that ever ended not with what he hoped for American culture but with what he feared could happen. Dixon fictionalizes Sam Hose's brother as the worst of his black beast rapists as a further counter to Du Bois. As the intruder relaxes

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227 Edwin Arnold explains that Du Bois had a particularly vivid recollection and call to arms when he witnessed the effects of Sam Hose's lynching: "W. E. B. Du Bois, for example, identified Sam Hose's torture-death as the event that, as Du Bois put it, 'pulled me off my feet,' and determined him to take on his lifelong fight against racial injustice" (Edwin T. Arnold, *What Virtue There is in Fire*: *Cultural Memory and the Lynching of Sam Hose* [Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009], 171).

228 Arnold explains: "The horror of Sam Hose's torture, burning, and dismemberment was already being transformed locally through a kind of grisly southern humor. Pig knuckles were commonly used to add taste to beans and soups. As one present-day correspondent familiar with the events of the Hose lynching has written, 'Du Bois apparently never understood the baseness of Southern humor toward blacks and the humor's insight into the fabric of white thinking toward the other race. Butcher shops all around Atlanta and Newnan displayed pig knuckles in their windows under a sign labeling them as the knuckles of Sam Hose. It was a joke and an advertising gimmick. The shop owner would laugh, patrons would laugh, and Papa would laugh at the dinner table when he told his wife and children that the beans were flavored with the knuckles of Sam Hose.'" (Edwin T. Arnold, *What Virtue There is in Fire*, 172). Arnold's book title, *What Virtue There is in Fire,* is a quotation from Thomas Dixon's novel *The Leopard's Spots.*
between beatings and rapes, Marie wonders: “Where were the officers of the law. Where were the soldiers and their guns? Where were the ministers of Jesus Christ who proclaimed the law? Civilization! There was no such thing. A world witnessing a thing like this was not civilized. And God didn’t live in it.”\(^{229}\) Marie’s lamentation has the hallmarks of the Dixonian cultural narrative’s call for order and religiously backed enforcement of her ruined purity as the only course for restoring civilization.

The lynch mob in *The Flaming Sword* reveals the kind of audience that Dixon really wanted for his fiction. The most prominent men of the region formed the mob and would not yield to the logical and civil appeals of Dixon’s attorney character Phil Stevens.\(^{230}\) He attempts to reason with the wild mob: “The crime committed was horrible beyond the power of words to describe it. What good will come of your trying to match it with another?’ ‘We’ll protect our homes, by God!’ came an answering shout.” Another in the crowd shouts, “To hell with lawyers!” and still another, “To hell with your civilization!”\(^{231}\) Dixon portrays the lynch mob as an approving town meeting committed to carrying out a brutal sentence: “While the two men held the writhing figure, the prisoner was emasculated, slowly, crudely, savagely. The first wild screams of pain came from his bulging

\(^{229}\) Dixon, *The Flaming Sword*, 137.

\(^{230}\) Though perhaps only a coincidence, this attorney character seems a possible allusion to Faulkner’s character Gavin Stevens who narrates the events of Joe Christmas’s lynching in *Light in August*. Many have speculated that Faulkner’s Gavin Stevens draws inspiration from Faulkner’s friend Phil Stone. Although there is no evidence that Thomas Dixon knew anything about William Faulkner’s life, the fact that he has a character named “Phil Stevens” who is also an attorney commenting on a lynching seems an encouragement to further research into Dixon’s potential readings of Faulkner’s life and work.

\(^{231}\) Thomas Dixon, *The Flaming Sword*, 146.
lips, his eyes fairly popping from his head. The crowd yelled approval." This lurid description of Dan Hose's lynching suggests that the fictional community has solved its problems and forestalled any racial apocalypse, but a larger problem loomed for Dixon's white characters in this novel.

*The Flaming Sword* concludes with the racial apocalypse that Dixon had feared his entire career. The novel's final apocalypse comes with a black Communist party takeover of the United States, with only the South showing any effective form of resistance: "In South Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama and Louisiana the NAT TURNER LEGION have begun a reign of terror—burning, murdering and raping. The Home Guard of the Patriot Union is everywhere engaging them in battle." The novel's final passage draws racial apocalypse, white heterosexual union, and scripture together, a fitting conclusion to Dixon's entire writing career:

"Communism is the collapse of the human mind under the pressure of modern life—a malignant, contagious, mental disease now sweeping the world as the Black Death swept Europe in the Middle Ages." Angela answered tenderly: "All right, Phil, we'll just play our parts. It's glorious to be alive and have the chance!" The two clasped hands in a warm pledge of faith, courage and love.

Angela sees the fight for civilization as a battle between the black communists and the white adherents of democracy. Rather than concluding his novel with a hopeless defeat, Dixon provided a challenge to his audience and a hope for their battle to defend white supremacy. The mastermind behind this revolution for Dixon was W. E. B. Du Bois, portrayed in the novel as an American version of

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232 Ibid., 148.
233 Ibid., 452.
234 Ibid., 453.
Vladimir Lenin, leading, in this instance, black America to an uprising. Rather than a racial apocalypse as premillennialist tragedy, Dixon situated his racial apocalypse at the conclusion of *The Flaming Sword* as a presentist call to arms to urge his audience to fight against a black uprising. Dixon's final words in the novel echo 1 Corinthians 13:13 ("And now abides faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.") but replaces "hope" with "courage." Even to his last words in his fictional career, Thomas Dixon was finding ways to argue for white supremacy by twisting the language of religion.

Du Bois recognized how the ideology of white supremacy had co-opted the language and the rhetorical strategies of Christian Fundamentalism, and he wanted to show in his writings the genealogy of how the two (religion and white supremacy) worked together. In addition to producing several short stories involving a black Jesus ("The Gospel According to Mary Brown" and "The Son of God," for example), Du Bois wrote several pieces that expressed his understanding of the troubling parts of southern religion. Du Bois saw the color line dividing the southern Protestant church, and dividing it from its religious purpose:

> There may be in the south a black man belonging to a white church today but if so, he must be very old and very feeble. This anomaly – this utter denial of the very first principles of the ethics of Jesus Christ – is today so deep seated and unquestionable a principle of southern Christianity that its essential heathenism is scarcely thought of, and every revival of

235 In "The Son of God," the crucifixion for the black Jesus shows Du Bois giving this lynching a clearly religious significance: "And so swiftly he was sentenced for treason and inciting murder and insurrection; quickly they hurried him to the jail-yard, where they stripped him, and spit upon him, and smote him on the head, and mocked, and lynched him. And sitting down, they watched him die" (W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Son of God," *Writings* [New York: Modern Library, 1996], 145).
religion in this section banks its spiritual riches solidly and unmovedly against the color line, without conscious question.236

Dixon responded in kind to quotations like these from Du Bois. He saw Christianity to be crucially located as a broker of what racial solutions were possible. Dixon wrote about the black Protestant church in *The Flaming Sword*: "If we should build up a population of 50,000,000 Negroes, all good Christians in the south, would the conflict of Color be solved? It would be immeasurably aggravated. The Church, of all our institutions, should support the Negro in his aspirations for separation and national freedom." Dixon feared any form of black agency, even in the one area he should have accepted: religion. The only role for black religion for Dixon was as an aid to separation. For Dixon, white religion's role, most especially white southern Protestantism, was to enforce the separation of whites and blacks.

Du Bois well understood that strategy in Dixon's thought and identified how religion worked as a broker for the ideology of white supremacy that often used Christianity to cloak its message. In describing how a white friend of his came to absorb and tacitly endorse systems of white supremacy, Du Bois wrote in *Dusk of Dawn*, "[White supremacy] was not stated as clearly as any of the other codes; it certainly did not echo in Sunday sermons, although he sometimes suspected it lurked there." The same man had fears about the precarious nature of white supremacy: "It would seem that colored folks were a threat to the

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world. They were going to overthrow white folk by sheer weight of numbers, destroy their homes and marry their daughters.\textsuperscript{239} If white supremacy lurked inside the Sunday sermons this man heard, then there must be some historical path it took to get there. That path had a great deal to do with the relationships between blacks and whites in the South and the way in which those relationships were also a part of the religious experiences blacks and whites had and shared.

Du Bois suggested, as does Sutton Griggs, that there was a deeply repressed interaction with black spirituality in American white Protestantism, that white Protestants frantically worried over how to represent and control its significant fraternity to and contact with black spirituality. Du Bois examined the history of this interaction in his essay “The Gift of the Spirit,” and concluded that the black church had made significant contributions to white Christianity:

"It will be seen that the development of the Negro church was not separate from the white. Black preachers led white congregations, white preachers addressed blacks. In many other ways Negroes influenced white religion continuously and tremendously. There was the ‘Shout,’ combining the trance and demoniac possession as old as the world, and revivified and made wide-spread by songs and religious dances absorbed much from the Negroes and whatever there is in American religion today of stirring and wild enthusiasm, of loud conversions and every day belief in an anthropomorphic God owes its origin in no small measure to the black man.\textsuperscript{240}

Like Griggs, Du Bois delineated how white Protestantism had absorbed some gestures and expressions of an energetic and emotional mode of worship from blacks. Du Bois draws attention to this inheritance and thereby challenges white Protestantism to acknowledge its deeply involved relationship with black

\textsuperscript{239} Ibid., 671.
Christians. For Du Bois, religion was yet one more way that blacks could argue for full membership in the nation, but for Dixon religion always helped him draw the line of segregation.

In *Darkwater*, Du Bois opens his “Credo,” with the statement “I believe in God, who made of one blood all nations that on earth do dwell.” This statement most probably draws from the language of Acts 17:26: “And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.” Both Dixon and Du Bois supported their causes with scripture, demonstrating the plasticity and versatility of Biblical reference to justify a variety of ideas about race. This particular Bible verse was an important one for Dixon as well, a verse that substantiated for him several racist claims. The flexibility of this verse to be interpreted as support for or against white supremacy indicates that it would depend on how writers wanted it to work.

In Dixon’s novel *The Clansman*, Austin Stoneman, the “Radical Leader of Congress” debates with President Lincoln the nature of this verse specifically. Stoneman, defending the mixing of races, asserts, that “God hath made of one

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242 Another Biblical allusion for these words could also be: Deuteronomy 32: 8: “When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel.”
243 Edward Blum describes the clash between Dixon and Du Bois over this scripture thusly: “Deploying the 'of one blood' rhetorical tradition, both Dixon and Du Bois engaged in a social and scriptural battle over the place of African Americans in the United States. For Du Bois, this biblical verse had powerful relevance because whites in the United States refused to honor its implicit suggestion of equality and universal kinship” (Edward J. Blum, *W. E. B. Du Bois, American Prophet* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007], 29).
blood all races,” and the response from Lincoln expressed Dixon’s attitude and interpretation of this particular scripture:

“Yes – but finish the sentence – ‘and fixed the bounds of their habitation.’ God never meant that the Negro should leave his habitat or the white man invade his home. Our violation of this law is written in two centuries of shame and blood. And the tragedy will not be closed until the black man is restored to his home.”

The use of the Bible to justify either slavery or abolitionism had a long rhetorical tradition, and Dixon and Du Bois both show some mastery in that genre’s rules and citations. Any effort to undermine white supremacy would have to have some strong understanding of how racists had used scripture to bolster its causes.

The racial rhetoric of Jim Crow America involved itself in a battle between those who would use religious language to defend white supremacy (with Thomas Dixon as their chief proponent) and those who would use religious language to attack it (with W. E. B. Du Bois as their most successful thinker and writer). This rhetorical contest was charged with the pressing voices of prophecy and the compelling threats of postmillennial and premillennial views of the apocalypse. All of these debates had a genealogy that one could trace to Abolitionist literature, including Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, as well as to the many defenses of slavery that flourished before the Civil War. Dixon could imagine only apocalypse would follow Du Bois’s success. While Thomas Dixon’s final novel *The Flaming Sword* and W. E. B. Du Bois’s history *Black Reconstruction* might have settled the questions over white supremacy’s future for some readers in the 1930’s, two of the most

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244 Dixon, *The Clansman*, 47. Dixon’s interpretation of Lincoln was that he saw slavery as a tragedy and that he wanted to send blacks back to Africa.
consequential writers about the American South took up the terms of the debate along the same lines as had Du Bois and Dixon: William Faulkner and Margaret Mitchell.
CHAPTER FOUR

REBIRTHING THOMAS DIXON, JR.: MARGARET MITCHELL AND WILLIAM FAULKNER

I. Margaret Mitchell and William Faulkner Revise the Dixonian Cultural Narrative

The forty-year span from 1890 to 1930 corresponds to the rise and fall of Thomas Dixon, Jr.’s career as the American hierophant and high priest of white supremacy, and it also overlaps with the formative years for William Faulkner and Margaret Mitchell. During these years the alliance between Christian Fundamentalism and white supremacy that Dixon so pervasively and, for his early audiences, persuasively portrayed created a monologic master narrative of white supremacy. William Faulkner and Margaret Mitchell had significant youthful readings of Dixon’s iconic white supremacist novels, and their adult fiction revealed efforts to move the white South’s cultural narrative beyond Dixon and the legacy of white supremacy he had bestowed to them both.

Mitchell and Faulkner interpreted that Dixonian legacy in vastly different ways. Mitchell’s Dixon is not Faulkner’s Dixon in the same way that Mitchell’s South is not Faulkner’s South. Mitchell and Faulkner debated that legacy provided as a part of their larger projects to define southern history and identity. Mitchell’s use of the Dixonian legacy was to reiterate his ideology of white
supremacy for the South’s “new woman.” In contrast to Mitchell, Faulkner wrote specifically to “keep the hoop skirts and the plug hats out,” as he said about his novel *Absalom, Absalom!* (published in 1936, the same year as Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind*).\(^{245}\) Thomas Dixon was the main writer who bequeathed them both a legacy, a legacy Mitchell worked to update and one Faulkner worked to defeat once and for all.

Thomas Dixon’s novels of white supremacy presented the recurring rescue of southern whiteness by a religious cult of Klansmen. Both Mitchell and Faulkner would present a post-Dixonian view of the South that saw the racial “apocalypse” as having already happened, and both Mitchell and Faulkner desacralized their revisions of white supremacy, looking instead to secular ways of understanding southern history and identities. Faulkner understood how Calvinistic energies informed white supremacy especially in *Light in August*, and he worked to separate those two cultural forces by exposing and interrogating that relationship. While Faulkner had a tragic understanding of southern lynching that led him to hope his audiences would learn to abandon the ways they “crucified themselves and one another” (to borrow a phrase from *Light in August*), Mitchell wanted to reiterate the Dixonian cultural narrative for the urbane southern manners of her generation. For Mitchell, Dixon’s vision of threatened white femininity, unreconstructed historical melodrama, and swooningly purple prose formed a narrative core for *Gone with the Wind*. If Dixon’s uniform for his Klan was the white hood and robe, then Mitchell’s white supremacy would find

\(^{245}\) Faulkner, *Letters*, 79.
how well it could fit the hoop skirt. The narrative triangle of Dixon, Faulkner, and Mitchell revealed how all three writers worked to define southern identities according to the roles assigned in lynching and lynch mobs.

Even before Faulkner and Mitchell crafted their historical narratives, many writers had launched new theories about the South and its past. By the 1920s and 1930s, historians and writers reconsidered the role that Reconstruction played in southern history. William Archibald Dunning’s ideas about Reconstruction found their counter in W. E. B. Du Bois’s watershed study *Black Reconstruction* (published in 1935, a year before Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* and William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*). Mitchell and Faulkner addressed this historiographical debate in their writings and with vastly different aims. Faulkner dismantled and interrogated many of the South’s myths and white supremacist assumptions and Mitchell offered a feminized reframing of the Civil War and Reconstruction heavily indebted to the legacy Thomas Dixon had bequeathed her.246

The Dixonian legacy was an especially clear and virulent form of the white supremacy socially constructed and reasserted in various forms in different decades. Dixon’s version of white supremacy itself was the result of a good deal

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246 In writing about Mitchell’s role in her era’s emerging debates about the Reconstruction, Darden Pyron, Mitchell’s main biographer, writes, “American historiography was on the brink of a monumental shift in its approach to Reconstruction, black history, slavery, and the South just as *Gone With the Wind* was going to press. Circumstances caught Mitchell’s novel in a historiographical vise. The radical revision of scholarship in the forties, fifties, and much more afterward, made Mitchell’s work appear especially reactionary” (Darden Pyron, *Southern Daughter: The Life of Margaret Mitchell* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991], 311).
of craft and design, the culmination to Dixon's own version of historiography.

White supremacy was a radically unstable cultural narrative that needed constant updating and reassertion from its adherents. In 1955, C. Vann Woodward pointed out in *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* that the Jim Crow South was actually the result of many imposed social constructions rather than being the natural state of things that white supremacists like Thomas Dixon had claimed.247 Faulkner and Mitchell both well understood that white privileges were socially constructed.248 Just as Dixon's narratives had all but faded from the public mind, Mitchell's novel *Gone with the Wind* updated and feminized the Dixonian cultural narrative and rewrote its white supremacist ideology for the New South woman.249 Faulkner's narratives directly countered the Dixonian cultural narrative, but Mitchell offered

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248 Writers like Grace Elizabeth Hale and Riché Richardson have examined the ways in which whiteness required different narratives to attend its various incarnations. See Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Pantheon, 1998). See also Riché Richardson, *Black Masculinity and the U. S. South: From Uncle Tom to Gangsta* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007). Drawing from works like Hale's and Richardson's, Peter Schmidt asserts: "White supremacy wielded tremendous cultural authority, true, but it also proved to be immensely insecure, in need of constant reiteration and reformation and boundary drawing, not to mention violent purgation and reaffirmations of its own virtuousness. It thereby revealed itself not to be a given, but to be something that had to be learned and reinforced" [Peter Schmidt, *Sitting in Darkness: New South Fiction, Education, and the Rise of Jim Crow Colonialism, 1865-1920* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2011), 152].

an updated reiteration of Dixon's work that had insidious mass appeal and great success in what Michael Kreyling dubs "the southern memory market."\textsuperscript{250}

While the historical vision of the South that Du Bois offered in his 1935 \textit{Black Reconstruction} and the literary version of the South that William Faulkner presented in his 1936 \textit{Absalom, Absalom!} were both aesthetically superior to and make a better historical case than \textit{Gone with the Wind}, many readers voted for Mitchell's version with their book purchases.\textsuperscript{251} These three books took the measure of the debate over southern history that opened in the 1930s. The decades of what scholars would call the Southern Renaissance witnessed a variety of voices that engaged in vigorous historical scholarship and debate. Any account of the voices of the South would have to take into account the way that those voices engaged the past and theories of the past.

Richard Gray describes the voices in southern literature as being involved in a web of "surrounding and indwelling voices" whose intertextual relationships are "not a matter of simple influence or allusion, rejection of past texts, or reverential imitation of them; it is not even a matter of conscious or deliberate referencing."\textsuperscript{252} Using the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, Gray argues that any text is in dialogue with other texts, a conversation that involves extension, revision,

\textsuperscript{250} See Michael Kreyling, \textit{The South That Wasn't There: Post-southern Memory and History} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010).
\textsuperscript{251} As to the popularity of Mitchell's fiction about the Civil War and Reconstruction, Drew Gilpin Faust relates that "Since its publication in 1936, \textit{Gone With the Wind} has sold an average of 500,000 copies each year. More Americans learn about the Civil War from Margaret Mitchell than from any other single author" (Drew Gilpin Faust, "Clutching the Chains That Bind: Margaret Mitchell and \textit{Gone With the Wind}," \textit{Southern Cultures} 5:1 [1999]: 6).
\textsuperscript{252} Richard Gray, \textit{A Web of Words: The Great Dialogue of Southern Literature} (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), x.
parody, and rebuttal. Both Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind*, and William Faulkner’s lynching narratives (“Dry September,” *Sanctuary, Light in August*, and “Pantaloon in Black”) engage in revising the Dixonian cultural narrative, but in vastly different and revealing ways.

Faulkner registered the polyphonic nature of the South’s discourse, but, in a postmodern turn, refuses to give prominence to any single voice of mastery, even the one he as author could claim. Mitchell, in contrast, also recognized a polyphonic South, but she displayed the urgent need for a master voice to emerge and establish a hierarchy. Mitchell cast her heroine Scarlett in the plot of a survival-horror narrative in an Atlanta that has witnessed the worst fears of the Dixonian cultural narrative: a racial apocalypse with mobs of freed blacks and an economic upheaval that leveled the hierarchies of the Old South. In the post-apocalyptic terrain of Reconstruction Atlanta, Scarlett is both heroine and victim, a dual status that betrays a tremendous number of anxieties about identities within class, gender, and race. Faulkner did not share Mitchell’s desire for monologic control. Rather than offering a master narrative to control all of these southern voices, Faulkner sets them in dialogue with each other and with his readers.

Dixon isolated whiteness as the defining characteristic of southern identity (blacks, in Dixon, are always ultimately African), and he predicated much of that racial narrative on the white female victim of black male attacks. Mitchell retains Dixon’s notions of female purity and centrality in her vision of southern culture, but she gives Scarlett a fiery Machiavellian spirit and preternatural social
awareness that outdoes any of Dixon’s Klan heroes. Distrustful of patriarchy’s continued ability to provide leadership and mastery over white women and over blacks, Scarlett essentially mimics the male master narrative in order to re-establish the Old South’s culture in the New South’s economy. Dixon’s passive white heroines offer a screen and disguise for Scarlett O’Hara in her performance of an essentially male savior (like Dixon’s Ben Cameron) who will re-establish old southern racial and economic hierarchies. Scarlett’s ability to cross gender boundaries in her performances also unwittingly reveals the fluidity of other categories of self. Scarlett’s boundary crossing reveals just how permeable those lines and walls surrounding selfhood have become after the Civil War. In her feminized revision of the Dixonian narrative, Mitchell creates a Scarlett who is at once victim and heroine. Dixon’s heroines were always the beautiful and charming lily-white victims of the black brutes, and Dixon’s men were her defenders. Mitchell’s Scarlett inherits the beauty and charms of Dixon’s heroines, but Scarlett also inherits the heroic assertiveness of Dixon’s male heroes. In this way, Mitchell updates Dixon and reiterates his protagonists in her lead female character.

In contrast, Faulkner’s lynching narratives collectively open up the Dixonian cultural narrative to a barrage of techniques of disruption, reversal, and interrogation. As such Faulkner’s strategies anticipate the destabilizing narrative experiments of postmodernism. While it would be easy to suggest Faulkner’s

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253 I use this term in the sense that Homi K. Bhabha uses the term “mimicry” to denote a strategy for understanding colonial anxieties and responses. See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 121-31.
tremendous intellect and artistic/narrative prowess were forces that put him well outside the tremendous undertow of white supremacy in his Mississippi, his public statements may have revealed some moments of succumbing to that very cultural undertow. Faulkner’s 1931 letter about lynching to The Memphis Commercial Appeal (published a month after the publication of “Dry September”) revealed a view difficult to reconcile with the messages in Faulkner’s fiction. In this letter, Faulkner writes, “Some will die rich, and some will die on cross-ties soaked with gasoline, to make a holiday. But there is one curious thing about mobs. Like our juries, they have a way of being right.”254 Faulkner here seems to echo Dixon’s sentiments. Yet this statement is difficult to reconcile with the messages and arguments in Faulkner’s fiction that deal directly with lynching.255 Nonetheless, his 1931 story “Dry September” lays bare the machinery of the lynching narrative; Sanctuary and Light in August display the dramatic consequences of defining selfhood according to the lynching narrative; and “Pantaloon in Black” maps the polyphonic web of voices in Yoknapatawpha that not only fail to represent Rider’s story accurately but also work to misunderstand and misrepresent him.

In these lynching narratives, mobs of angry whites form at barbershops, outside of burning houses, and in clandestine whispered conversations among women. Through its own ideological state apparatuses, southern culture, to use


255 Faulkner’s fiction that deals most explicitly with lynching starts with his short story “Dry September” (1931), continues through his novels Sanctuary (1931) and Light in August (1932), and culminates in “Pantaloon in Black” from Go Down, Moses (1942).
Louis Althusser’s terms, interpellates citizens as lynch mobs. Faulkner explored the narrative energies that create and compel those mobs to the racial violence Dixon urged. The narrative arc from the nadir of Dixonism in Faulkner’s letter to The Memphis Commercial Appeal through the lynching narratives of “Dry September,” Sanctuary, Light in August, and “Pantaloon in Black” reveals an increasingly self-conscious dismantling of white supremacist narratives. The resulting effect of such narratives would be to engage his readers, indeed even to interpellate them, as historians deeply involved in their own debates about the historiography of his own characters. Faulkner constructs his audience and even demands that his audience become historians of a sort who would weigh evidence, reconsider theories, revise assumptions, and offer competing interpretations. Faulkner requires such intellectual and historical work for readers even to decipher his narratives. Such complexity was the very opposite of the tyrannical simplicity of white supremacy that Dixon offered in his iconic novels.

Faulkner’s most ambitiously intellectual characters, the ones who tried to make modernist/grand narrative sense of it all (Quentin Compson, Horace Benbow, Gail Hightower), all admit some measure of a tragic defeat and find their own voices imprisoned by the mob of southern voices. These mobs form, on one level, as a way of policing which members of their community belong and which ones do not. Even white bystanders who refuse to join in the violence (Hawkshaw in “Dry September,” Horace Benbow in Sanctuary, both threatened by violent mobs) risk their status inside the community.
Advertisement in The Oxford Eagle (October 22, 1908) for The Clansman at the Opera House in Oxford, Mississippi

Although a theater audience is hardly the same as a lynching mob, if the play being watched is Dixon’s *The Clansman*, then the difference between lynching mob and audience is diminished. The Dixonian cultural narrative dominated the “southern memory market” of William Faulkner’s childhood. William Faulkner’s first-grade teacher, Annie Chandler, helped shape her pupil’s first reading habits. Joseph Blotner reports that Chandler gave Faulkner a copy of Thomas Dixon, Jr.’s *The Clansman*, a book that Faulkner kept his entire life. If we believe that Faulkner read this book, then we have to assume that some of his first

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256 Joseph Blotner writes “Billy Faulkner was precocious in drawing and painting as well as in reading, and he put his talent to use for Miss Chandler, presenting her with a watercolor comprising not one but three separate scenes. A book still in the artist’s library half a century later may indicate Annie Chandler’s reciprocal feeling for her pupil. It was a melodramatic story of Reconstruction days entitled *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*, by Thomas Dixon Jr., and it bore the inscription ‘Annie J. Chandler 1905” (Joseph Blotner, *Faulkner: A Biography* [Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005], 94).
encounters with narratives that attempted to explain the Reconstruction, slavery, and history were with Thomas Dixon, Jr. In 1908, the touring version of the play The Clansman, arrived in Oxford, Mississippi. In The Oxford Eagle on October 22, 1908, the article "Ku Klux Klan Drama in Sight" points out that The Clansman was "especially notable for its vivid picture of the Ku Klux Klan, an organization of southerners that restored white supremacy to the South after the Civil War."\(^{257}\) According to Jack Mayfield, the historian for The Oxford Eagle, Col. Faulkner and his law partner Lee Russell, who was later governor of Mississippi, ran the Oxford Opera House, where Thomas Dixon’s The Clansman was shown.\(^{258}\) Although no confirmation of Faulkner’s attendance at this play exists, a presentation of this magnitude in his grandfather’s Opera House would have been almost impossible for Faulkner to ignore.\(^{259}\) Both Faulkner’s grandfather and his beloved teacher seemed eager to present The Clansman to wider audiences. Given the prevalence and billing given to Dixon’s works in Oxford at this time, many would find it difficult to imagine that this community was nurturing the future author of Sanctuary and Light in August.

In addition to theatrical spectacles about lynching, Faulkner certainly knew at least one real lynching. The Nelse Patton lynching of 1908 also happened near the Faulkner home and seized the attention of the entire region. Nelse Patton was a black man and alleged bootlegger accused of the murder of a white

\(^{257}\) The Oxford Eagle, October 8, 1908.
\(^{258}\) Jack Mayfield, e-mail message to author, May 2, 2012.
woman. The lynching occurred a mere two blocks from Faulkner's home, and the mutilated corpse itself hung in the courthouse square. Seven weeks after Patton's lynching, Dixon's dramatization of *The Clansman* appeared on stage in Oxford. How would these horrifying events, framed by the recurring presence of Thomas Dixon's racist visions, affect the young Faulkner years later? Margaret Mitchell also had a childhood framed by significant interactions with lynchings, the Ku Klux Klan, and Thomas Dixon's fiction. Mitchell's correspondence with Thomas Dixon demonstrated her complex inheritance from his ideas. Mitchell's vision was for a new social order for the South, anchored in the power of white women and the subservience of blacks. While Dixon's novels featured passive white heroines in need of rescue, Mitchell's novel gave its readers an active white female protagonist. Dixon's reading of Mitchell in part confirms this view. After reading *Gone with the Wind*, Thomas Dixon wrote in a letter dated August 5th 1936, to Margaret Mitchell,

> I have just finished your glorious epic of the South. I throw my hat in the air as a southern author! You have not only written the greatest story of the south ever put down on paper, you have given the world THE GREAT AMERICAN NOVEL. I wish to write a study of your book for a magazine. Please send me your photo and a few things about your life. Do let me know when you get to New York. I wish to pay my respects!

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260 For a fuller account of these events, see Joseph Blotner, *William Faulkner: A Biography* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2005), 32. Joel Williamson relates dramatically that "William Faulkner was almost eleven on the night of the [Nelse Patton] lynching, and his bed was not more than a thousand yards from both the jail and the square. Knowing William Faulkner as man and boy as we now do, it is impossible to imagine that he failed to record and retain every detail of the drama that came to his senses" (Joel Williamson, *William Faulkner and Southern History* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1995], 55-60).

In a letter on August 15, 1936, Mitchell replied, explicitly acknowledging her debt to Dixon,

I was practically raised on your books, and love them very much. For many years I had you on my conscience, and I suppose I might as well confess it now. When I was eleven years old I decided that I would dramatize your book "The Traitor" — and dramatize it I did in six acts. I played the part of Steve because none of the little boys in the neighborhood would lower themselves to play a part where they had to "kiss any little ol' girl." The clansmen were recruited from the small fry of the neighborhood, their ages ranging from five to eight. They were dressed in shirts of their fathers, with the shirttails bobbed off. I had trouble with the clansmen as, after Act 2, they went on strike, demanding a ten-cent wage instead of a five cent one. Then, too, just as I was about to be hanged, two of the clansmen had to go to the bathroom, necessitating a dreadful stage wait which made the audience scream with delight, but which mortified me intensely. My mother was out of town at the time. On her return, she and my father, a lawyer, gave me a long lecture on the infringement of copyrights. They gave me such a lecture that for years afterward I expected Mr. Thomas Dixon to sue me for a million dollars, and I have a great respect for copyrights ever since then. Thank you again for your praise. Coming from a Southerner, and a Southerner of your literary reputation, it made me very happy.262

At this point in his career, Thomas Dixon had seen his reputation evaporate, and he was eager to get back into belles letters in any way he could, and he certainly saw Mitchell's vision of the South as growing from his own, as he mentions in his gushing letter to Mitchell.263 Her anecdote about copyright infringement perhaps

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262 Mitchell, letter to Dixon, August 15, 1936, Hargrett Library, University of Georgia. Also, their correspondence continued, and Dixon signed the next letter of continued effusive praise, "With my love and boundless admiration," a gesture that may have prompted the increasingly wary Mitchell to sign as "Mrs. John R. Marsh" in her next letter.

263 In terms of how Mitchell understood and liked Griffith's Film The Birth of a Nation, Helen Taylor asserts: "Like thousands of her contemporaries, Margaret Mitchell was a great fan of this film. A report published in 1933 argued that it had had a major influence on children; it had been screened repeatedly across the country to enthusiastic audiences. With its vast epic and heroic scale, it almost certainly inspired Mitchell to write her own version of the War and its effects on Southern women in an epic and romantic-historical mode. And the line which
signals that she herself understood how Dixon’s influence over her bordered on the inappropriate or plagiaristic.\textsuperscript{264} That may be the most damaging aspect of her work, that she was able to update versions of Dixon’s narratives that were more socially acceptable – as if she were writing the script of how to pursue the aims of the Ku Klux Klan according to the bylaws of the Atlanta Junior League.

\textit{GWTW} takes on the Klan is remarkably similar to that in \textit{The Birth of the Nation} (Helen Taylor, \textit{Scarlett’s Women: “Gone With the Wind” and Its Female Fans} [New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press], 59-60).

\textsuperscript{264} For an extended discussion about Margaret Mitchell’s and her estate’s struggles with charges of plagiarism and copyright, see Michael Kreyling’s \textit{The South That Wasn’t There: Postsouthern Memory and History} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 149-75.
II. The Location of Southern Culture: Scarlett O’Hara

Margaret Mitchell in 1916, pointing a sword at the camera and playing the part of Steve in her dramatic staging of Thomas Dixon’s novel The Traitor (Athens: University of Georgia Archives)

Mitchell’s staging of Dixon’s novel The Traitor reveals the inheritance and tensions of her Dixonian apprenticeship; specifically, she was at great pains to disguise how her work constituted a cross dressing that made Dixon acceptable to the New Women of the South. Mitchell’s notions of gender revealed an understanding that a certain amount of fluidity and manipulation was possible. Rather than seeing female identity as being a limitation on her character Scarlett, Mitchell presented Scarlett with the opportunity to fashion for herself the role that would do her the most strategic good, no matter how masculine. The photograph above is of Mitchell playing a male part in a play of Dixon’s The Traitor, and it reveals starkly just how Mitchell could easily envision a female being able to go into a kind of “drag” as a way to accomplish heroic deeds. Mitchell’s role in this Dixon play anticipates the way that she would allow Scarlett O’Hara the chance to imitate the aggression and manipulation she saw in Rhett Butler. Dixon’s novel
The Traitor (the culminating installment in the Reconstruction trilogy that began with *The Leopard's Spots* and *The Clansman*) tells another melodramatic story of the Ku Klux Klan – an ancestral mansion's restoration to its true owner, the murder of a Judge whose last name is Butler, and the conniving revenge of his beautiful daughter whose arching eyebrows speak to a powerful heroine's schemes. These parallels between *The Traitor* and *Gone with the Wind* suggest a direct set of borrowings from Dixon. Asserting that “Mitchell does not so much retell the same old story as simply lift it, unchanged, from the pages of Thomas Dixon and Claude Bowers and insert it into her novel,” Ben Railton has also asserted that “Page, Dixon, Griffith, and Bowers may have reached a number of Americans with their version of the Reconstruction myth, but Mitchell reached more than all four of them combined.”265 Mitchell may have reached more readers than her literary mentors did, but perhaps another way of framing their collective influence is to see them all involved in a deliberate effort to provide a narrative of triumphant white supremacy to justify the social and legal mores of the Jim Crow south. Margaret Mitchell simply stood on the shoulders of several white supremacist giants.

Mitchell even eventually came to see her own writing persona as a ravaged white female, a Flora Cameron or Temple Drake of the literary world. Mitchell cast herself as both a victim and her own heroine, and she had Scarlett enact that same drama. In a letter to Stark Young in which she discusses the

difficulties of being a writer, Mitchell talks about how the review of *Gone with the Wind* by Malcolm Cowley in the *New Republic* was a criticism that couldn’t upset her (though Pyron asserts that the review devastated her):

> I’d have to do so much explaining to family and friends if the aesthetes and radicals of literature like it. Why should they like it or like the type of mind behind the writing of it. Everything about the book and the mind are abhorrent to all they believe in. One and all they have savaged me and given me great pleasure.266

Mitchell’s intriguing language here asserts that she saw her own persona as a writer as having been “savaged,” and that that had given her a kind of approval and “pleasure.” The same woman who wrote the scene in which Rhett carries Scarlett up the stairs to bed (with a suggested spousal rape) possibly understood her role as an artist as one involving a muse (or critic) who was a male aggressor. Such narrative plot lines are also dangerously close to suggesting the rape threat so prevalent in Thomas Dixon’s novels.

In chapter forty-two of *Gone with the Wind*, Mitchell reveals how thoroughly she drew from Thomas Dixon’s novels and views of the South. She relates a narrative that could come straight from a Dixon novel:

> A negro who had boasted of rape had actually been arrested, but before he could be brought to trial the jail had been raided by the Ku Klux Klan and he had been quietly hanged. The Klan had acted to save the as yet unnamed victim from having to testify in open court. Rather than have her appear and advertise her shame, her father and brother would have shot her, so lynching the negro seemed a sensible solution to the townspeople, in fact, the only decent solution possible. But the military authorities were in a fury. They saw no reason why the girl should mind testifying publicly.267

267 Mitchell, *Gone With the Wind*, 695.
Mitchell’s language, however, is slightly distanced from the heated rhetoric of a Dixon novel; she puts this information in the third person and is careful not to offer either sanction or approval. As such, the passage reveals how Mitchell often uses the Dixonian cultural narrative in her novel: she hides her own version of white supremacy behind the codes of female propriety. Not only is Gone with the Wind one of the most consequential novels in changing how many readers understand the South and its history, but it also is a study in how the Dixonian cultural narrative could be rendered conventional, genteel, and feminine.

Religion, while so prevalently a part of Dixon’s narratives of white supremacy, is conspicuously absent in Mitchell’s vision. Indeed, Mitchell desacralizes Dixon’s white supremacy and opens it up to a much subtler and more pervasively invisible presence than the pale riders emblazoned with religious symbols could ever achieve. Mitchell’s re-costuming of white supremacy was to find ways for the new white supremacists to wear not the white robes but the hoop skirts and plug hats that Faulkner fought to exclude from his novels. In addition, the Dixon-Mitchell line of influence also extended to mass culture through the film versions of these twin towers of white supremacist visions. Just as Dixon’s fictions were turned into the 1915 Griffith blockbuster The Birth of a Nation, Mitchell’s fiction became the 1939 blockbuster Selznick film Gone with the Wind (winning at that point a record ten academy awards), still one of the most successful motion pictures of all time. Anyone who dismisses Dixon and Mitchell would do well to remember how pervasively influential their narratives became.
Mitchell's use of certain details from Dixon's fiction revealed the nature of her indebtedness to his vision. In Thomas Dixon's novel *The Leopard's Spots*, the faithful retainer Nelse accepts a sword from Mrs. Gaston to guard the family when the too-young Charlie Gaston is unable to defend them from marauding bands of blacks attacking white families. Dixon writes, "She took the sword from its place and handed it to Nelse. Was there just a shade of doubt in her heart as she saw his black hand close over its hilt as he drew it from the scabbard and felt its edge? If so she gave no sign." The sword here, standing as a symbol for authority and phallic power, also carries with it a sense of sacred relics. In addition to that symbolism, a certain measure of sexual tension arises when Mrs. Gaston hands the sword to Nelse. The doubt that she may have registered as she handed the sword to Nelse serves to remind readers of the potential for this black male to become a sexual threat to the white woman who has just armed him. Her handing over the sword invests Nelse with the role of defending the family against attack, a role that the young Charlie Gaston is not yet able to assume. The very fact that Mrs. Gaston has had to resort to giving arms to a black man for her defense, according to the logic of Dixon's narratives, seems engineered to provoke the reader to envision an immediate need for a Klan to step in to defend the Gaston house. One can only imagine the way such a passage with its racially coded version of violence, honor, investment of phallic authority, and sexual suspicion worked on the mind of a younger Margaret Mitchell reading her literary mentor Thomas Dixon.

Margaret Mitchell deploys similar moments of melodrama, combining the historical with the erotic, especially when Rhett arms Scarlett as he leaves her to join the Confederacy. After fleeing a burning Atlanta, Rhett gives Scarlett not a sword but a gun. Rhett concedes his devotion to "lost causes" as he belatedly joins the Confederacy and kisses Scarlett goodbye. She protests his departure by arguing that he is leaving her and the pregnant Melanie Wilkes "helpless." Rhett's rebuttal is prophetic for Scarlett: "God help the Yankees if they should get you." Indeed, Scarlett will eventually kill a scavenging Union soldier with that pistol while Melanie Wilkes stands helpless with a sword in her hand. Mitchell's updating involves giving a more active role to the female protagonist. Mitchell's Scarlett self-consciously performs her gestures, intonations, inflections, and feints; she has learned them by careful study; she adds to that repertoire all of the Machiavellian manliness of Rhett Butler.

Women's use of weapons in Gone with the Wind is one way that Mitchell destabilizes the gender roles inherited from white supremacy. The sword was seemingly a ubiquitous symbol of southern honor and tradition, one prevalent in the Mitchell family. The young Margaret Mitchell recalls the Atlanta race riots of 1906, riots that Walter White, in part, blamed on the performance of the play version of Thomas Dixon's The Clansman. Did Mitchell attend this play? Was she already familiar with the novels The Leopard's Spots and The Clansman, both in print at this point? (She does claim in her first letter to Dixon that she was "raised on [his] books.") In his book Negrophobia: A Race Riot in Atlanta, 1906,

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269 Mitchell, Gone With the Wind, 355.
Mark Bauerlein writes about how Margaret Mitchell, in response to the tumult of the riot, handed a sword to her father to defend their house:

> Twilight falls and her father anticipates an all-night vigil, while Margaret [Mitchell] retires to her bedroom upstairs. Everything is quiet outside, but she can’t sleep. Eugene hears a footstep and turns to find Margaret holding a large sword kept in the house, offering it as another weapon of defense. He grasps it with care as she scampers back to her room, slipping underneath her bed and remaining awake the entire night, listening for sounds of an approaching invasion.

Mitchell’s fiction, however affected by the memory of this scene in her early life, cast the domestic sphere as a place threatened by racial chaos and to be defended, preferably by a patriarch. Instead, two women do the violent work in *Gone with the Wind*.

If Melanie represents the Old South (embodied by her sword and her indomitable ladylike grace throughout the novel) then Scarlett would be the New South with the pistol (and sharpened by a pragmatic, mercenary outlook on survival and success). Yet the two women work must together to move the body and deceive the others who have heard the gunfire. While Melanie praises Scarlett for her bold action, Scarlett begrudgingly admits a respect for Melanie’s quick explanation and cover-up (as well as her suggestion to search the dead soldier’s pockets). Melanie’s duplicity after the murder suggests yet another fascinating performance in Mitchell’s novel. The crisis of the war calls all social

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270 Joel Williamson quotes Eugene Mitchell (Margaret’s father) about this event: “I had no gun and could only get the axe and waterkey [a T-shaped metal tool made to control the house’s water supply, but that might be used as a weapon like a hatchet or pickaxe] when Margaret suggested that Mr. Daley’s sword would be a good thing. I adopted the suggestion” (quoted in Williamson, *The Crucible of Race*, 92).

symbols and behaviors into reconsideration and renegotiation. The women use a shimmy\textsuperscript{272} to clean up the blood, recalling the same kind of shimmy Scarlett imagines Rhett seeing her without. A bloody shimmy would also disguise their murderous deed as a feminine problem, or perhaps as being related to Melanie's troubled childbirth. So the murder of this Union soldier becomes hidden behind a very feminine screen, just as Scarlett's phallus/pistol was hidden behind her dress as the Union soldier advances toward her on the staircase. Scarlett and Mitchell both again cast themselves as victim and heroine, ever doubtful of a male rescuer.

Melanie's ability to help Scarlett cover up the murder suggests that the New South would need the duplicity of the Old South in order to move forward. Amanda Adams argues that Mitchell's Old South patriarchs, the ineffectual and then demented Gerald O'Hara and the plantation Prufrock Ashley Wilkes, clearly have little to offer the South struggling through the convulsive changes in Reconstruction.\textsuperscript{273} Melanie at first seems an easy embodiment of the threatened white female in the Dixonian narrative: she's pure, angelic, and almost asexual. Yet, like Ashley, she's also clumsily out of place in the new world order of the postbellum South. If Melanie functions as a younger, childish version of Mitchell, then she is also an older, more Dixonian South that allows Scarlett and Mitchell to arise as the new defenders of white southern femininity.

\textsuperscript{272} Mitchell uses “shimmy,” an archaic corruption of “chemise,” or a woman's shift or slip.

\textsuperscript{273} For an extended treatment of the intersections of gender and history in Gone With the Wind, see Amanda Adams, “‘Painfully Southern’: Gone With the Wind, the Agrarians, and the Battle for the New South,” The Southern Literary Journal 40, no. 1 (2007): 58-75.
The rules of feminine identity for Mitchell’s Scarlett may come from Dixon’s rules for racial identity. Indeed, Mitchell’s reading of Dixon may have helped her create a Scarlett O’Hara that has more in common with Ben than Elsie Cameron of The Clansman. As such, Scarlett is not so much “the belle gone bad” as she is “the belle gone Ben Cameron.”

Mitchell’s adolescent aping of Dixon’s dramas included a turn on the stage cross-dressing as a Dixonian male hero (see photo above), and this performance served as a rehearsal for the manipulation of identities that Mitchell explored in Gone with the Wind. Mitchell’s novel dramatizes how identity is formed and the ways a traumatic cultural upheaval can redefine the landscape of identity. Scarlett gets a chance to fashion herself according to new sets of rules, but whatever New Woman feminism we may attribute to her self-fashioning narrative may merely mask how white supremacy and the Dixonian narrative get refined and ushered into a new era. Complete with a pistol and a shimmy for the blood, the new Dixon woman in Mitchell’s narratives is ready to defend tradition with violence.

Mitchell asserts that the New South (Mitchell) would defend the Old South (Dixon) with fakery and duplicity. The same narrative logic that led the young Mitchell to fashion the Ku Klux Klan outfits out of her father’s old shirts for her production of Dixon’s The Traitor could inform how Scarlett uses drapery to

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274 Betina Entzminger declares, “Like antebellum bad belles, Scarlett is also dark-visaged. Perhaps Scarlett’s bad qualities are so titillating and dangerous because through them she steps over the boundaries of race and class. Though she plays her role as belle to perfection, the role is based on deceit. Underneath, Scarlett is fiery, dark, and sexualized, the traits reserved by her culture for slave women or white trash, such as Emma Slattery” (Betina Entzminger, The Belle Gone Bad: White Southern Women Writers and the Dark Seductress [Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2002], 108).
fashion herself a lady. Arguably, that very logic of versatility informs how dress for Mitchell was always a way to change social roles. Her literary youth was an effort to try on Dixon’s Klan robes, but her literary adulthood was an effort to have the same racist ambitions fit the dress of a southern lady. Aware of the self-fashioning at work in Gone with the Wind, Scott Romine argues that Mitchell’s novel is “… the South’s most famous narrative fake.”

Romine identifies the larger narrative implied by Mitchell’s Gone with the Wind that fictional narratives can compete to rival even those produced by professional historians. Further than that, Romine sees how Mitchell’s fake version of the South became for many readers a more realistic depiction of the South’s past, even to the point of creating a self-fashioned “southernness.” This cultural artifice, for Romine, is “sustained as a virtual, commodified, built, themed, invented, or otherwise artificial territoriality.” Such a description also can accommodate the phenomenon of the fake becoming real according to the logic of Baudrillard’s simulacrum. Scarlett herself is a master of fakery, a performance that only another master of deception can identify.

Seemingly only Rhett Butler is able to see through Scarlett at the Twelve Oaks barbecue where she makes a dramatic bid for Ashley Wilkes’s affections.

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276 Romine, 9.
277 This phenomenon certainly applies to Scarlett’s efforts to create and recreate herself as well. For another examination of Margaret Mitchell and narrative invention, see Michael Kreyling’s The South That Wasn’t There: Postsouthern Memory and History (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010, pp. 1-17). For an explanation of Baudrillard’s concept of simulacrum, see Jean Baudrillard’s Simulacra and Simulation, trans. Sheila Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994, pp. 2-15).
Mitchell reveals that “Scarlett had an uneasy feeling that this man who was not received was the only one present who knew what lay behind her wild gaiety and that it was affording him sardonic amusement.” Both Rhett and Scarlett inhabit positions of outsiders in this culture, and their status enables them both a certain measure of an ability to see social roles as constructs. This insight also provides both Scarlett and Rhett the ironic detachment helpful in refashioning themselves in ways that can suit their designs in any given situation.

Mitchell invites a variety of anthropological perspectives with custom and dress in chapter nine, the chapter in which Rhett scandalously dances with the recently widowed Scarlett. Bristling in her black outfit of mourning, Scarlett yearns to dance as she envies the beautiful clothing other young women wear to the dance (incidentally, a fundraiser for the Confederacy). Rhett has the social and cultural perspicacity to compare Scarlett’s mourning dress to a distant culture’s practices: “I have always thought ... that the system of mourning, of immuring women in crêpe for the rest of their lives and forbidding them normal enjoyment is just as barbarous as the Hindu suttee.” In Rhett’s “sly civility” he is pointing out that Scarlett’s status as a widow hardly qualifies (since Rhett knows Scarlett did not really love her late husband) as someone who would immolate herself in widowhood. Rhett exclaims a moment later, “How closely women clutch the very chains that bind them!” This is a statement that subversively links female social status to a version of slavery that has elicited cooperation from the women enslaved.

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278 Mitchell, Gone With the Wind, 116.
279 Ibid., 187.
This witty flirtation also sets the stage for the dance that Rhett gets from Scarlett by purchasing it in an auction. As the dance begins, Scarlett declares that she does not care that she is dancing with the rakish Rhett Butler, and that she “didn’t care if he were Abe Lincoln himself!” This dance parodies the legal emancipation that Lincoln enacted in 1863 for American slaves and reveals Mitchell’s larger strategy of manipulating cultural symbols (costume, allusion, gesture) to replace emancipation for blacks with emancipation for white women. Yet Rhett ultimately offers to “free” Scarlett from her costume of bogus grief, soon after giving her a fetching green bonnet on the condition of her not festooning it with the customary widow’s crêpe. With Rhett’s help, Scarlett recognizes social roles and their accompanying costumes, gestures, scripts, and affectations open to strategic alteration and manipulation.

Scarlett’s use of disguise is subversive, empowering, and even more deceptive than it first appears. Mitchell would have her readers believe that the real issue of power in the Reconstruction South is about gender, and she uses that gender battle to disguise the ways that the white South still depended upon subordination of blacks. While the gender roles for whites in the South may have seemed like the foundation for the social order, especially the notion that white femininity needed defending, those very gender roles in Gone with the Wind come under constant scrutiny, interrogation, revision, and even reversal.

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280 Ibid., 195.
281 The usually reserved and uncritical Melanie even whispers to Scarlett that the dance is “a little like a slave auction” (Mitchell, Gone With the Wind, 193).
Scarlett’s various disguises and attempts at performing (and at times even achieving) certain social roles operates according to the logic of mimicry as Homi K. Bhabha understands it in colonial discourse. For Bhabha, a colonial power would need to have intermediaries between the dominant colonial powers and those colonized. The intermediaries would be drawn from the colonized, but they would come to imitate those from the other country that had come to dominate them. This group of intermediaries would imitate the manners and the social gestures of the colonizers, and, in so doing, perform a double action: their ability to resemble the colonizing masters would at once confirm the authority of their masters, but also threaten the boundaries upon which any dominance or hierarchy would depend. Scarlett sees herself as a slave to men throughout the novel and the men themselves as her colonizers. Rather than simply submitting to these masters, Scarlett mimics them. Her mimicry is “at once resemblance and menace,” and also threatens to show how other categories of identity important to the social order (especially race and class) have similar vulnerabilities and instabilities.282

Scarlett’s various disguises not only suggest the instability and plasticity of identity but also the availability of such strategies to a writer. The challenges to identity that Dixon witnessed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had not melted away by the time Mitchell was writing Gone with the Wind, and she, like her relentlessly inventive heroine, found new ways to define femininity, whiteness, and class. Molly Haskell points to Mitchell’s reinscribed social codes

282 Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture, 122.
in her book *Frankly, My Dear: Gone with the Wind Revisited*: “If D. W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* was, in part, a recruitment film for the Ku Klux Klan, whose reemergence it inspired, *Gone with the Wind* was a training manual for budding belles, a lesson in the laws of sexual manipulation and flirtation directed toward marriage.” Haskell’s comparison suggests that these belles were also absorbing the rules of white supremacy and their roles as icons of virtue to be defended with vigilance and violence. Like Dixon’s, Mitchell’s version of white supremacy was radically unstable and constantly under threat of being exposed as the disguise and social construct that it was.

These narrative tensions come to a climax in chapter thirty-five of *Gone with the Wind*, perhaps the novel’s most Dixonian chapter. Chapter thirty-five details what Scarlett does after Rhett Butler, while a prisoner of the Union Army occupying Atlanta, fails to help her with Reconstruction taxes on Tara. Scarlett has come to Atlanta with a dress she fashions from window curtains in Tara, and she hopes that this dress will help her wheedle money from Rhett. Much to Scarlett’s chagrin, Rhett sees through her disguise and notices her hands roughened by farming. This failure at disguise prompts Scarlett to create even more effective disguises as she continues to try to find economic security.

While Scarlett may be suffering from economic woes and from the sting of Rhett’s refusal of aid, she notices that some residents of Atlanta seem to be enjoying new-found freedoms. Right after Rhett refuses her a loan, Scarlett walks through a rainy Atlanta and encounters several free blacks:

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*Molly Haskell,* *Frankly My Dear: Gone With the Wind Revisited* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 21-22.
Thank God, [Rhett] couldn't see her now, with her clothes soaking wet and her hair straggling and her teeth chattering. How hideous she must look and how he would laugh! The negroes she passed turned insolent grins at her and laughed among themselves as she hurried by, slipping and sliding in the mud, stopping, panting to replace her slippers. How dared they laugh, the black apes! How dared they grin at her, Scarlett O'Hara of Tara! She'd like to have them all whipped until the blood ran down their backs. What devils the Yankees were to set them free, free to jeer at white people!284

In a Dixon novel, Scarlett would have been pursued by the “negroes” she encountered in the street, a confrontation leading to a rape (or rape threat) and lynching, and a resurgent white supremacist government. Yet Scarlett does not do anything overt about the actions of these freed blacks; instead she reverts to covert scheming for a way to restore her Georgia to the social hierarchy that existed before the war. Scarlett’s internal narrative voice essentially extols the precepts of white supremacy inherent in Dixon’s novels. Instead of writing the Dixon cultural narrative, though, Mitchell transforms that story to be one of unspoken, internalized racism whereby Scarlett can think of them (but not call them) as “black apes” and fantasize about the violence she would like to see them undergo for their perceived insolence. Even though Rhett, according to Scarlett, would be allowed to laugh at her plight, the laughter of freed blacks turns Scarlett to thoughts of rage and whipping. The Dixonian cultural narrative was an instance of trying to contain the white panic about the racial apocalypse it always worried would come to be. The scene here is quite Dixonian in its portrayal of Reconstruction Atlanta and the social “chaos” occasioned by freed blacks, but it is remarkably muted (and not acted on externally) in Mitchell’s

284 Mitchell, 551-2.
revisioning. Scarlett's white panic leads her to find some other way to reassert the economic and social power she sees herself as having lost (both to Yankees, to blacks, and to men), and it continues the Dunning and Dixonian project of casting the Reconstruction as something awful inflicted upon white people. To reassert her power, Scarlett will need a new disguise and a new man or a new identity.

Also in chapter thirty-five, Scarlett spots a wagon passing her with her sister Suellen's fiancé Frank Kennedy driving it, and she immediately starts to work on taking advantage of him. Having failed to secure Rhett's financial backing, Scarlett pounces on the next available financier-as-husband. As the two ride in Kennedy's carriage, Scarlett learns about his general store and the lumber business he has just acquired, both economically essential, as Scarlett muses to herself, to the needs Atlanta would have in the Reconstruction era. Thinking that Suellen would marry Kennedy and leave the rest of the family to fend for themselves at Tara, Scarlett concocts a plan to lie and say that Suellen has thrown Kennedy over for another man. The dim-witted Kennedy does not sense Scarlett's strategy even when she follows the shocking news about Suellen immediately with news about a party that evening to which she hopes Kennedy will escort her. At the end of the carriage ride, Scarlett, sensing her advantage and moving in like Sherman himself taking Atlanta, "squeezed his hand in parting and turned the full battery of her eyes upon him."²⁸⁵

Describing her eyes as a "full battery" makes Scarlett's feminine wiles

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 561.
seem like the tools of war, things reserved in Gone with the Wind for men. This phrasing also serves to remind readers how Scarlett is no stranger to a pistol. Mitchell further suggests that the real war for women might not be about being conquered by Yankees, but about conquering men. Yet Scarlett’s aggression bumps her into some limits, and she realizes the need for disguise. At the party while flirting with Kennedy and trying to seal the deal for the general store and the lumber business, Scarlett recalls some advice from Rhett about her eyes and seeming too aggressive: “She looked at Frank so steadily, her eyes narrowing, that he became somewhat alarmed and she dropped her gaze swiftly, remembering Rhett’s words: ‘I’ve seen eyes like yours above a dueling pistol. . . . They evoke no ardor in the male breast.’” Scarlett’s disguise involves a tricky balance of assuming certain aspects of aggressiveness usually reserved for men and of hiding that very masculine aggression behind feminine wiles. In Bhabha’s concept of mimicry, such a performance would at once assert the power of masculine behavior and its employment as a strategy for women. Such a paradox reveals the instability of those categories of identity. In order to portray gender roles and performances as fluid and open to calculated alteration, Mitchell has Scarlett describe Kennedy in overtly feminine terms as she reasons through her strategy: “Moreover, [Kennedy]’s nervous and timid and well meaning, and I don’t know of any more damning qualities a man can have. But at least, he’s a gentleman and I believe I could stand living with him better than with

286 Ibid., 557.
Rhett. Certainly I could manage him easier."\textsuperscript{287} Later, Scarlett calls him "that old maid in pants, Frank Kennedy."\textsuperscript{288} If Frank Kennedy can be an "old maid in pants," then Scarlett could be emboldened to act like a man, despite her improvised dress.

The gender performance that Scarlett enacts in chapter thirty-five reveals Mitchell’s complex attitudes about the nature of race and gender in \textit{Gone with the Wind}. Drew Gilpin Faust goes so far as to argue that "Scarlett barters her own womanhood like the body of a slave."\textsuperscript{289} Faust asserts that \textit{Gone with the Wind} consistently flirts with presenting female servitude as another form of slavery, but she does not fully account for the way Scarlett’s performance of masculinity presents her also as a master of Kennedy.\textsuperscript{290} Although Scarlett may be using her body, she does so to become the master of Frank Kennedy by taking over his businesses and ruthlessly expanding them into massively profitable enterprises. She even employs former convicts at drastically low wages, a fact that worries Ashley Wilkes, whom she also employs as a manager. Given these facts, Scarlett’s transactions hardly seem servile. While often gently castigating patriarchy for its failures, Mitchell does see gender and race as both defined by

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{287} Ibid., 577.
  \item \textsuperscript{288} Ibid., 552.
  \item \textsuperscript{289} Drew Gilpin Faust, 14.
  \item \textsuperscript{290} Faust concludes her argument powerfully, arguing that Scarlett’s empowerment is hollow in \textit{Gone With the Wind}: “Yet Mitchell was unable to come to terms fully with the meaning of freedom and slavery in the Civil War experience or with the issues of race that transcended that era to plague her own time. Ultimately, she was ensnared by her inability to confront or to deny the foundations and power of race in American life. And it was this inability to deal with the meaning of emancipation for African Americans that rendered her unable to imagine a genuine female freedom as well” (Drew Gilpin Faust, 18-19).
\end{itemize}
masters and slaves.

The party offers Scarlett a number of opportunities to question the social order that is emerging in the South, her place in it, and possible ways the social order would work in general. Scarlett looks at the former aristocrats making do with a less lavish party and laughing about their decline in wealth and status, and she is secretly disgusted by their lack of capital. Scarlett wonders what, if not money, could constitute ladyhood: “Even though they’re poor, they still feel like ladies and I don’t. The silly fools don’t seem to realize that you can’t be a lady without money!” Later in the party, Scarlett, waiting in an alcove for Kennedy to bring her a drink, muses about what she needs for herself and for Tara. Scarlett questions her own identity and performance as a lady:

But she could not feel herself a lady, for all her velvet dress and scented hair, for all the pride of birth that stood behind her and the pride of wealth that had once been hers. Harsh contact with the red earth of Tara had stripped gentility from her and she knew she would never feel like a lady again until her table was weighted with silver and crystal and smoking with rich food, until her own horses and carriages stood in her stables, until black hands and not white took the cotton from Tara.

However much Scarlett may identify herself as a master or a mistress in this scene, she also imagines her economic and social prowess being predicated upon the use of “black hands.” In short, the black hand that dangerously held the sword that Mrs. Gaston in Dixon’s novel The Leopard’s Spots would for Mitchell in Gone with the Wind need to be transformed into the black hand that could once again subserviently pick the cotton on Tara’s plantation.

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291 Mitchell, 570.
292 Ibid.
Mitchell takes *Gone with the Wind* directly into Dixon's narrative territory when Scarlett makes a perilous journey (on behalf of her lumber business) through the mixed-race Shantytown outside of Atlanta. Despite warnings to avoid traveling alone, Scarlett drives her horse and buggy through Shantytown, a community purportedly devoted to whiskey-making and other activities the wealthy whites in the Kennedy, Butler, and Wilkes set find threatening. Two men, one black and one white, hear Scarlett's buggy approaching, and they attempt to rob her, and both the novel and the film make it clear that their attack has overtones of rape as they rip her shirt and she faints in their dark hands.\(^{293}\)

Mitchell makes her Dixonian inheritance clear when she describes the way that the black man attempts to rob Scarlett and clearly reveals the subtext of sexual threat:

> The negro was beside her, so close that she could smell the rank odor of him as he tried to drag her over the buggy side. With her one free hand she fought madly, clawing at his face, and then she felt his big hand at her throat and, with a ripping noise, her basque was torn open from neck to waist. Then the black hand fumbled between her breasts, and terror and revulsion such as she had never known came over her and she screamed like an insane woman.\(^{294}\)

Later, Scarlett is scolded by the women in her immediate circle for having forced the men, by her reckless independence, to don their Ku Klux Klan robes and

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\(^{293}\) Scarlett's perilous journey recalls the journey made by Faulkner's Temple Drake in *Sanctuary*, another novel with a well-to-do white heroine attacked when she careens out of control into a den of whiskey-making outlaws. Mitchell seems to have had a fascination with Faulkner's *Sanctuary* and its film version *The Story of Temple Drake* (1933).

\(^{294}\) Mitchell, 733.
lynch her attackers. When they tell her that the men have all gone out on a Klan raid of Shantytown, she protests innocence and says that she can't believe that the men are in the Ku Klux Klan, to which India Wilkes retorts: "'Of course, Mr. Kennedy is in the Ku Klux Klan and Ashley, too, and all the men we know,' cried India. 'They are men, aren't they? And white men and southerners. You should have been proud of him instead of making him sneak out as though it were something shameful.'" However progressive and empowered Scarlett may be as a candidate for the New Woman, her status as a lady still rests upon the Dixonian cultural narrative of men who will don Klan robes and lynch to defend her honor.

Mitchell's novel relies on the same variables involved in Dixon's fiction. Mitchell's Dixonian view of southern history and culture enjoyed (and continues to enjoy) a broad readership. The 1930s witnessed a true dialectical battle for the dominant narratives of the South, but Gone with the Wind became one of the most important versions of southern identity and history for many American readers. Ultimately, Mitchell succumbs to the Dixonian cultural narrative and retells Dixon's stories in subtle ways. Even after having destabilized the social roles available to Scarlett and Rhett, Mitchell reiterates the white supremacist principles upon which Dixon based his iconic novels. These efforts to update white supremacy's ideas for a new generation happened alongside early twentieth-century historiography. William Archibald Dunning's books and

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295 Scarlett is rescued by Big Sam, an event unlikely to occur in a Dixon novel. Nonetheless, Dixon and Mitchell both enjoyed the typology of the faithful retainer in their novels.
296 Ibid., 742.
teachings (upon whom Mitchell based much of her novel's history) and E. Merton Coulter's books, especially his 1933 *Georgia: A Short History*, were actively perpetuating myths about the Reconstruction that fit easily with Thomas Dixon's white supremacist history. These historians met their most immediate opposition in W. E. B. Du Bois' *Black Reconstruction* as well as from later writers like C. Vann Woodward, Kenneth Stampp, and Eric Foner. Yet if a contemporary novelist of Mitchell's could be said to offer a counter-narrative to *Gone with the Wind*, then that writer is surely William Faulkner.

III. Interpellated by the Lynch Mob: Faulkner's "Dry September" and *Sanctuary*

"Shoot, men! My God, shoot! There are things worse than death!"
– Thomas Dixon, Jr., *The Leopard's Spots*

"Better for her if she were dead tonight, Horace thought."
– William Faulkner, *Sanctuary*

In "Dry September" and *Sanctuary*, Faulkner examines the many ways lynch mobs interpellate all of the members of a southern community. Louis Althusser asserted that ideologies work to define individuals and their socially constructed roles according to the logic of “hailing.” Althusser explains,

Ideology “acts” or “functions” in such a way that it “recruits” subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or “transforms” the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the

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lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: “Hey, you there!”

In the two epigraphs above, lynching interpellation factors as a major ideological force. Southern communities in Thomas Dixon’s fiction, and, for that matter, in Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha frequently called its members to participate in lynching as a sign of whether or not they belonged in that community. White men especially in Faulkner’s fiction egged each other on and pressured each other to have the “right” attitudes about lynching and to participate in lynching.

In the Dixon novel *The Leopard’s Spots*, Tom Camp sees his daughter being taken away by a band of black troops from the Reconstruction government, and he urges the quickly-formed posse to shoot at them no matter whether they hit his daughter Annie or not. The members of the posse respond by firing at the black troops, killing several of them, scattering the rest, and also killing Tom’s daughter Annie. The moment of interpellation enacted by Tom Camp’s orders and the men’s response to shooting, according to the logic Althusser uses, "recruits" these men and defines them in a specific place in the social order. Tom Camp’s charge to these men and their following his orders are a microscopic

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298 Louis Althusser “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses.” *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. David J. Romagnolo, trans. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 163. In addition, Judith Butler, in declaring that all human speech acts are to some degree “excitable” and therefore beyond control, asserts that “The interpellative name may arrive without a speaker – on beaureaucratic forms, the census, adoption papers, employment applications. Who utters such words? The bureaucratic and disciplinary diffusion of sovereign power produces a terrain of discursive power that operates without a subject, but that constitutes the subject in the course of its operation. This does not mean that there are no individuals who write and distribute the forms. It means only that they are not the originators of the discourse they convey and that their intentions, however strong, are not finally what control the meaning of that discourse” (Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 34).
version of the Dixonian cultural narrative, an ideology that situated white women as needing white men to defend them from black “beasts.” In *Sanctuary*, William Faulkner examines the same variables at work when Horace contemplates Temple Drake’s fate at the hands of Popeye. Faulkner there explores how seemingly almost all of Yoknapatawpha is interpellated by the central cultural events of Temple’s rape and Lee Goodwin’s trial and lynching. Horace Benbow registers the pull of the cultural apparatus of lynch mob mentality and its associations with Dixon’s legacy when he imagines that Temple, like Annie Camp, is about to confront something worse than death.

Interpellation into lynch mobs also happens in Faulkner’s 1931 short story “Dry September.” The barbershop in “Dry September” serves as the location where men gossip and plan for action to defend Miss Minnie Cooper’s honor, but their narratives and their assumptions have many contradictions and uncertainties. Although the “evidence” presented at the barbershop does not warrant any certain conclusion, the men push each other and interpellate each other into a lynch mob. In relating how these men work each other up despite any facts, Faulkner interrogates the yearning this community has to enact a lynching. The narrative blank spots in “Dry September” (what actually happened to Miss Minnie, whether or not Will Mayes threatened her, what actually happened when the men took Mayes for a ride) are completely based on rumor and are precisely the spots where Thomas Dixon’s purple prose would fill out the story in lurid detail.
"Dry September" narrates everything about a lynching except for the actual lynching itself and the sexual violence rumored to have inspired it. In response to the lack of detail about the rape, Miss Minnie Cooper's friends in "Dry September" take an extraordinary interest in the particulars of Minnie's alleged rape, their eyes bright with "dark glitter": "When you have had time to get over the shock, you must tell us what happened," they tell her. "What he said and did; everything." Miss Minnie Cooper's friends display the reactions and energies upon which Dixon's audience depended, the very narrative details Faulkner invokes a hunger for and then denies. They want to hear the Dixonian tropes of a black hand on a white throat, innocence defiled by an African beast, and Klan riders coming to the rescue of imperiled white culture. The Dixonian cultural narrative was one version of that lynching narrative, and Faulkner's short story "Dry September" posits a series of lawyerly questions to its readers about how such narratives arise, gain strength, and destroy (like the image of the fire moving quickly through the dry landscape at the story's beginning). Was there a rape, or did Miss Minnie accuse Will Mayes for some other reason? How can readers be certain that the black man apprehended was indeed Will Mayes?

Ultimately "Dry September" suggests the continuing presence of the Dixonian narrative in the South and its dependence on that narrative as a way to organize the structure of Jim Crow segregation of gender and race. "Dry

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299 Faulkner, "Dry September," 80.
September" questions that inherited narrative and lays bare the many inconsistencies and gaps and incorrect assumptions upon which that narrative rests. "Dry September" offers a logic for interrogating lynchings in general and gives its readers the role of weighing and interpreting evidence. Faulkner also displays in this story how the mobs form and act upon assumptions. These assumptions are already written cultural scripts that have the roles of assaulted white woman, black beast, and avenging white man already prepared. The story's very form engineers a different role for the mob than it does for the audience. The role that Faulkner creates for his audience of this story is somewhat like that of a jury having to consider the evidence (or lack of evidence) for a rape and a lynching.

Specific revisions in the story may have furthered Faulkner's aims in stripping "Dry September" of all of the Dixonian tropes and scripts of black beasts raping and getting lynched. Finding artistry in Faulkner's changes to "Dry September," James Ferguson argues that this story underwent a revision that made the prose more and more carefully drawn and spare: "In the final paragraph of the fourth section of the manuscript [of "Dry September"], when Minnie's friends are ministering to her after the disastrous trip to the movie, they refer to 'The black brute' (7; WFM 9 271) – an unnecessarily explicit allusion that Faulkner wisely cut out of the printed story."301 Faulkner literally cuts "the black brute" from his story, but he leaves the insinuation that the story of what actually happened is an open question. Readers then must imagine what has happened,

301 James Ferguson, Faulkner's Short Fiction (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 137.
and the reader's very imagination, fueled by the Dixonian narrative or not, implicates the reader in the story's patterns of judgment and participation in the "lynching." The only thing of which readers can be certain in "Dry September" is the southern community's lingering hunger for the Dixonian narrative of the black "beast" rapist, the assaulted white woman, and the vigilante response.

Like "Dry September," Faulkner's *Sanctuary* also involves itself in narratives about lynching. While no black "beast" from a Dixon novel haunts its pages (although readers frequently assume erroneously that Popeye is black), *Sanctuary* nonetheless invokes the Dixonian narrative and disrupts it. Faulkner notoriously described *Sanctuary* as the result of having "speculated what a person in Mississippi would believe to be current trends, chose what I thought was the right answer and invented the most horrific tale I could imagine." Faulkner's understanding of what a person in Mississippi would want to read seems to have involved narratives about sexual threats to a young white woman. Among the many troubling aspects of *Sanctuary* the novel certainly shares with Dixon is an obsession about the threats to the white female body. Like a Dixon narrative, *Sanctuary* also involves a lynching. While Dixon structured his narratives so that the black "beast" would pursue and rape a young white woman, Faulkner replaces that villain with a white bootlegger.

The absence of a black "beast" rapist in *Sanctuary* may be its most important revision to the Dixonian cultural narrative. That absence asserts that the black "beast" is not the problem. Faulkner's reveals the clumsy machinery

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behind the Dixonian narrative attempt to define and construct social relationships. In an analysis of *Sanctuary*, Elizabeth Binggelli notes, “While Popeye is not a black man, in *Sanctuary* he occupies the familiar narrative position of the black male defiler of the white female.”303 The “dark, brownish paint” that stains the corncob Popeye used at once suggests the literal sign of Temple Drake’s violated virginity as well as the black male phallus so threateningly central to the Dixonian narrative. In this disrupted version of the Dixonian cultural narrative, Temple is still socially defined by her violation and Horace by his inability to defend her.

Like “Dry September,” *Sanctuary* offers multiple audience responses and multiple scripts. *Sanctuary* renders both Horace and Temple unmoored from their social roles in the ideological order. Horace struggles to find an identity in Yoknapatapha that is not in some way defined by Temple’s rape or Lee Goodwyn’s lynching. Worrying about Horace’s leaving his wife and daughter to get involved in Temple Drake’s story, his sister Narcissa Sartoris attempts to code in racial terms: “‘But to walk out just like a nigger,’ Narcissa said. ‘And to mix yourself up with moonshiners and street-walkers.’”304 The opposite visual counterpoint to Narcissa’s worries is the ease with which Temple imagines her father enjoying his leisure: “[Temple] thought of her father sitting on the veranda, in a linen suit, a palm leaf fan in his hand, watching the negro mow the lawn.”305 Rather than this tranquil scene of white, suburban leisure, *Sanctuary* assaults its

303 Elizabeth Binggelli, “Worse than Bad: Sanctuary, the Hays Office and the Genre of Abjection” *Arizona Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (Autumn 2009): 105.
305 Ibid., 54.
readers with a southern version of the gangster narrative. The two narrative poles of *Sanctuary* (Narcissa’s ghetto-gangster nightmare and Temple’s vision of her father supervising a black man mowing his lawn) both involve a whole world view predicated upon either the murderous freedom of blacks or the working subservience of blacks. Any violation of this social order would threaten the very personhood and cultural citizenship of everyone involved. *Sanctuary* posits a world in which the only way for anyone to achieve selfhood would be to participate in lynching.

Horace’s vision of Temple’s defilement becomes a crucial component of his own conception of selfhood, for himself and for others. In a moment of catharsis envisioning what happens to Temple in the barn, however, Horace experiences not so much an identity formation as a blurring of identity:

> Then he knew what the sensation in his stomach meant. He put the photograph down hurriedly and went to the bathroom. He opened the door running and fumbled at the light. But he had not time to find it and he gave over and plunged forward and struck the lavatory and leaned upon his braced arms while the shuck set up a terrific uproar beneath her thighs. Lying with her head lifted slightly, her chin depressed like a figure lifted down from a crucifix, she watched something black and furious go roaring out of her pale body. She was bound naked on her back on a flat car moving at speed through a black tunnel, the blackness streaming in rigid threads overhead, a roar of iron wheels in her ears. The car shot bodily from the tunnel in a long upward slant, the darkness overhead now shredded with parallel attenuations of living fire, toward a crescendo like a held breath, an interval in which she would swing faintly and lazily in nothingness filled with pale, myriad points of light. Far beneath her she could hear the faint, furious uproar of the shucks.306

In a Dixon novel, this scene would be a lurid, titillating tableau. Faulkner reverses that expectation to create a scene of revulsion and nausea. In doing so, Faulkner

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306 Ibid., 223.
reinterprets this Dixonian scene. Faulkner attempts to use Horace in the service of re-interpellating his audience, to call them to a different response from the ones that Dixon tried to arrange for his audience. Horace’s reaction to this scene is, in a way, the responses audiences should long have had to Dixon’s rape scenes – physical revulsion and illness. Such a treatment serves to strip away any eroticism from the event. The rushing “blackness” in this passage both anticipates the “rushing blackness” at Joe Christmas’ demise in addition to the possibility that something threatening about blackness recurs at the heart of this novel. The blackness may suggest racial coding, but there still is no Dixonian black “beast.” Diane Roberts argues:

Sanctuary captures the lynch-mob culture that tried to control deviations from the symbolic order. That the novel does not overtly engage the race question does not make it less grounded in the southern context. The otherness of sexuality is present in the otherness of blacks and women themselves. All are potential threats to the careful, always-precarious decorum of the New South. The violence on which class and gender roles are built in the south is exhibited by what happens to Temple Drake, the fallen icon.307

A far greater threat to the social order, Popeye has escaped detection for so long because Faulkner’s South had spent all of its energies searching for black “beasts” instead of other threats.

The novel’s only beast, Popeye does suggest himself as a placeholder for the black “beast,” but Faulkner further disrupts the Dixonian cultural narrative by identifying the bootlegger as a greater threat than the black “beast.” Diane Roberts simply asserts, “Perhaps the strangest thing about Temple’s strange...”

rape and Lee Goodwyn’s lynching is that nowhere in this world where women’s bodies are under threat does a black man appear in his usual role as rapist.308  
The absence of the “black beast rapist,” so rampant in Dixon’s narratives and in the visual argument put forward by The Birth of a Nation, testifies to Faulkner’s efforts to remove that element of contagion in the virulently white supremacist primal scene of southern identity. Faulkner’s revisionist impulses in Sanctuary suggest that bootleg whiskey and the psychopathic redneck gangster Popeye are a much greater social problem than any Dixonian black “beast” could ever be.

IV. Slaves to a Narrative: Light in August and “Pantaloon in Black”

In his attempts to articulate and understand the narrative forces that defined southern culture according to the rules of the lynch mob, Faulkner offered both Light in August and “Pantaloon in Black” as tragedies where characters were unable to escape the cultural narratives that defined and enslaved them. Characters in Light in August frequently read, whether it is Joe Christmas with his detective magazines, Doc Hines with his Bible, or Hightower with his Tennyson and Henry IV. Oral narratives also draw the characters in Light in August, ranging from Lena Grove’s oft-quoted promises from Lucas Burch, to Hightower’s Civil War stories heard from an ex-slave. These moments of reading and listening reveal the characters in Light in August as being directed and even circumscribed by the narratives they study. Characters in Light in August almost

308 Ibid., 139.
all seem to be led by some inherited cultural narrative that impels them toward a fatalistic confrontation with the forces of white supremacy, violence, and apocalyptic religion. Southern strains of Evangelical and Fundamentalist Christianity all stressed Bible-centered theologies that offered rigorously literal close reading of scripture as a means to salvation. Joe Christmas, himself described frequently as bearing flesh that is “parchmentcolored,” seems to exist as a living text, as if his very skin were the kind of vellum upon which words will appear.309 The curiosity about what happened and the narrative compulsions felt by Miss Minnie Cooper’s friends in “Dry September” (“When you have had time to get over the shock, you must tell us what happened”) seems answered in full by a novel like *Light in August*, a narrative that traces the tragic events with the detail and scope of a Sophoclean trilogy.

In *Light in August* Faulkner alluded directly to a famous moment in *The Leopard’s Spots* to illustrate a link between Joe Christmas and the character Gus, who will be lynched by Ben Cameron’s Ku Klux Klan in Dixon’s novel. In Thomas Dixon’s novel *The Clansman*, Dr. Richard Cameron (Ben’s father) conducts an experiment in which he uses a powerful microscope to examine the eye of the corpse of Flora Cameron, who committed suicide after her rape. Dr. Cameron explains to Ben, “I believe that a microscope of sufficient power will reveal on the retina of these dead eyes the image of this devil as if etched there

309 The idea of Joe Christmas, often understood as a kind of transmogrified Christ figure, as a kind of parchment may also reveal Faulkner’s suggestion of John 1:14: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.”
by fire."\textsuperscript{310} In a similar moment to the ocular examination Dixon proposes, the dietician in the orphanage housing Joe Christmas, worries about what tales the "spying" Joe Christmas will tell about her. In detailing the manner that Joe's image haunts the dietician, Faulkner writes: "upon her retinas was that still, grave, inescapable, parchment-colored face watching."\textsuperscript{311} Both moments involve an image, but the image really stands for the larger narrative of identification of a black "beast," the central character in instigating the lynching narrative sequence. The dietician plays an essential role in \textit{Light in August}, setting Joe Christmas on his fated journey that will end with his death in Jefferson at the hands of Percy Grimm. To the extent that the dietician herself is caught in a culturally scripted role of seeing blackness as evil, she is playing the part assigned to her in the seemingly predestined passion play that Joe Christmas cannot escape.

Calvinist theology acts as an ur-narrative for all of the other narrative compulsions in \textit{Light in August}. By that logic, the religion in Yoknapatawpha will always lead to crucifixions, but they go by the name of lynching. In \textit{Light in August}, the defrocked minister Gail Hightower muses presciently "... And so why should not their religion drive them to crucifixion of themselves and one another? ..."\textsuperscript{312} Almost like the Furies of a white supremacist \textit{Oresteia}, the trinity of characters in \textit{Light in August} who do the most to ensure Joe Christmas' "crucifixion" (Doc Hines, Simon McEachern, and Percy Grimm) find their opposites in a trinity of "crucified" characters: Joanna Burden, Gail Hightower,  

\textsuperscript{310} Dixon, \textit{The Clansman}, 312-13.  
\textsuperscript{311} Faulkner, \textit{Light in August}, 123.  
\textsuperscript{312} Ibid., 368.
and, of course, Joe Christmas himself. Doc Hines and Simon McEachern both bring a Fundamentalist approach to their understanding of the life they hope to inscribe on Joe Christmas. Doc Hines frequently watches Joe Christmas at the orphanage, always prepared to intervene should Christmas deviate from the narrative Hines wants him to follow. McEachern, a prophet-like figure for whom “bigotry and clairvoyance were practically one,” insists that Joe memorize his catechism. McEachern thrashes Joe for putting the text on the stable floor: “You would believe that a stable floor, the stamping place of beasts, is the proper place for the word of God. But I’ll learn you that, too.” The irony in McEachern’s rebuke is that, in Christian imagery, the manger of the Christ’s nativity was the proper place to receive “the word made flesh.” McEachern’s slavishly literal approach to scripture reveals how his version of religion locks him into a certain way of understanding the world and the people in it. Without McEachern’s Fundamentalist mindset, Joe Christmas might have found a different path for his life. It is significant that McEachern’s approach to scripture also abets the fated nature of the narrative Joe Christmas follows. The Bible that Doc Hines constantly reads at the orphanage and the catechism that McEachern uses both play their part in directing Joe Christmas to this drama’s culturally-scripted climax with Percy Grimm. With his deliberate exposure of the alliance

313 Virginia H. Hlavsa argues that “For Faulkner, the modernist, neither the Christian nor the primitive world was less powerful when the family ties between them were revealed” (Virginia H. Hlavsa. “Crucifixion in Light in August.” in Faulkner and Religion: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1989) ed. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie [Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1991], 138).
315 Ibid., 149.
between racism and fundamentalist Christianity (so fully exploited by Dixon in his career), Faulkner disrupts one of white supremacy's greatest cultural alliances.

In addition to religion, lynching offers itself as a ritual for bringing the white community together to enact its dominance. *Light in August* is a novel framed and defined by lynching. As such, it is a novel that explores this community's efforts to define its members according to the roles they play in that lynching plot. Faulkner closes chapter one with the ominous and portentous image of the column of smoke rising from Joanna Burden's burning house.\(^{316}\) The pregnant Lena Grove, riding on a wagon, witnesses this column of smoke without the understanding she will have of its import in a few days of the narrative's time. Faulkner marks Jefferson as visually defined by the violent sequence of events that will culminate in Joe Christmas' lynching. Similarly, at the novel's close, Lena Grove is again riding (this time she has progressed to a truck) and says her baby was "born three weeks ago, down at Jefferson"; Lena's driver replies "Oh. Where they lynched that nigger."\(^{317}\) Almost a parody of community phrases of boosterism and chamber of commerce rhetoric, this driver's seemingly casual remark operates as a metonymy for Jefferson, renaming it as a lynching location. The terms for the town of Jefferson that bracket this novel have the effect of treating lynching as something that can be in apposition to the town, something

\(^{316}\) "Following his pointing whip, she sees two columns of smoke: the one the heavy density of burning coal above a tall stack, the other a tall yellow column standing apparently from among a clump of trees some distance beyond the town" (Faulkner, *Light in August*, 29-30).

\(^{317}\) Ibid., 496-97.
that renames it. In *Light in August*, "Jefferson" essentially becomes, "Jefferson, where they lynched that nigger."

If Faulkner shows on a larger level that Jefferson can become known as a lynching town, he also shows on a smaller level how the community assembles itself as a community prepared to enact the lynching drama. The crowd that forms (reminiscent of the mob formation in the barbershop in "Dry September") outside of Joanna Burden’s burning house shares nothing in common save curiosity and a common sense of how to interpret the symbols and clues involved in this event. Faulkner describes the crowd:

> Among them the casual Yankees and the poor whites and even the southerners who had lived for a while in the north, who believed aloud that it was an anonymous negro crime committed not by a negro but by a Negro and who knew, believed, and hoped that she had been ravished too: at least once before her throat was cut and at least once afterward.318

This part of the crowd automatically fills in the blanks in the narrative with the kinds of lurid details that would come from an iconic novel of white supremacy like Thomas Dixon’s.

The entire community seems drawn to this event, shares a collective interpretation of its events, and is ready to act upon those conclusions. Ready to start a manhunt, "some of them with pistols already in their pockets began to canvass about for someone to crucify."319 Women, also, attend this event and abet the circulating gossip that serves to form and direct the lynch mob:

> And the women came too, the idle ones in bright and sometimes hurried garments, with secret and passionate and glittering looks and with secret frustrated breasts (who have ever loved death better than peace) to print

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318 Ibid., 288.
319 Ibid., 289.
with a myriad small hard heels to the constant murmur. *Who did it? Who did it?* Periods such as perhaps *Is he still free? Ah. Is he? Is he?* These ladies have “glittering looks” (also Faulkner’s language, “glittering,” to describe Miss Minnie’s friends in “Dry September”) and an urgent need to know whether or not the murderer is still at large, registering an ambiguous “ah,” either of delight, fear, or both. For Jefferson’s residents that afternoon, this event becomes “… an emotional barbecue, a Roman holiday almost …” Faulkner’s critique of this mob in *Light in August* represents an important step in his portrayal of white supremacy, violence, and the union of those forces to unite southern communities in dangerous ways.

While Faulkner’s description of these mob formations seems to carry with it an ominous quality and a critique of the horrible energies such mobs can unleash, Thomas Dixon celebrates the power of such mobs. The conclusion to the Griffith film *The Birth of a Nation* showed audiences a crowd cheering the violent Klansmen riding in triumph. In that way, *The Birth of a Nation* summoned its audience to its feet, for all intents and purposes interpellating the audience as a lynch mob as well. One chapter in *The Leopard’s Spots* entitled “A Thousand-Legged Beast” presents a lynch mob as a frighteningly violent and unified entity: “Under the glare of the light and the tears the crowd seemed to melt into a great, crawling, swaying creature, half reptile, half beast, half dragon, half man, with a thousand legs, and a thousand eyes, and ten thousand gleaming teeth, and with

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320 Ibid., 290.
321 Ibid., 289. This language also echoes Faulkner’s own concluding line in the letter about lynching to *The Memphis Commercial Appeal* (quoted earlier in this chapter): “some will die on cross-ties soaked with gasoline, to make a holiday.”
no ear to hear and no heart to pity!”

In contrast to Dixon’s mob descriptions, Faulkner, in this scene before Joanna Burden’s burning house in *Light in August* writes, “It was as if all their individual five senses had become one organ of looking, like an apotheosis, the words that flew among them wind- or airengendered *Is that him? Is that the one that did it? Sheriff’s got him. Sheriff has already caught him.* The sheriff looked at them. ‘Go away,’ he said.”

Faulkner registers the mob’s insistent need to find a scapegoat and punish him immediately and thereby implies that their judgment is hasty and barbaric. If they were to kill the man that the sheriff was questioning at that moment, then they would have certainly killed an innocent man. Faulkner’s sheriff has the sense to dismiss the mob’s irrational fury. Although Faulkner may have claimed in his letter to *The Memphis Commercial Appeal* that “There is one curious thing about mobs. Like our juries, they have a way of being right,” this mob in *Light in August* is clearly wrong. In this respect, *Light in August* suggests something of Faulkner’s evolution to a much more critical view of lynching. In a Dixon novel, a character in the sheriff’s position would have likely given a speech about white supremacy that then led to the crowd’s proceeding with the lynching. While the sheriff is able to disperse this mob, he is not able to contain Jefferson’s most Dixonian character, Percy Grimm.

Percy Grimm plays his role in *Light in August* exactly according the logic of the Dixonian cultural narrative in such a way that Grimm indeed may be a parody of Dixon himself or of Dixon’s avenging angel of white supremacy, Ben

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323 Faulkner, 291.
Cameron. Percy Grimm suggests himself as the most Dixonian of characters with his interest in rallying the community in pursuit of Joe Christmas even before the prisoner escapes police custody. As the town leaves the evening picture show, the inhabitants of Jefferson retire to an evening of relaxing while Grimm arms himself (against the Sheriff’s orders) and gets his “platoon” to wear uniforms that recall Dixon’s Klans. An avenging “angel” of white supremacy, Percy Grimm instigates the violence that follows.

Gail Hightower alone may suggest some strategies for resisting interpellation by the lynch mob. *Light in August* has its trinity of crucifiers in Doc Hines, Simon McEachern, and Percy Grimm, but it also has its crucified characters in Joanna Burden, Joe Christmas, and Gail Hightower. Often dismissed because of his immobilizing obsession with the past, Hightower is nonetheless granted the novel’s most wide-ranging vision of his culture and its tensions. Hightower, like Quentin Compson, understands a more complete picture of the South’s ills and discovers that such pictures carry with them an unbearable burden. The full matrix of Hightower’s obsessions includes his haunted relationship with his grandfather’s Confederate past as well as the solitude provided by the theological contemplation offered in the seminary. Hightower’s description of how the South’s religious culture drives them to “crucifixion of themselves and of one another” lays bare the novel’s most thesis-like moment: southern white Christianity violently reverses the commandment “to
love one another” and instead is driven to rituals of crucifixion and lynching.\textsuperscript{324}

Hightower wonders succinctly in what could be a parodic evocation of the melodramatic purple prose of Dixon’s novels: “‘Lynch him?’ Hightower says. ‘Lynch his own grandson?’” These words could recall the outrageousness of the moment in Dixon’s \textit{The Leopard’s Spots} where a father urges pursuing Klansmen to shoot his own daughter caught in the grip of a black “beast”: “‘Shoot, men! My God, shoot! There are things worse than death!’”\textsuperscript{325}

Hightower is granted the novel’s most complete understanding of all the cultural narratives constantly enslaving the members of his community, including the narratives that have enslaved him. Faulkner grants Hightower an understanding of the novel’s multiple levels of narration. Musing on the nature of southern culture and the ways religion serves to advance some of its more cataclysmic and more healing aspects, Hightower makes a distinction between the spiritual energies of Sunday morning and Sunday evening services:

\begin{quote}
Sunday evening prayer meeting. It has seemed to him always that at that hour man approaches nearest of all to God, nearer than any other hour of all the seven days. Then alone, of all church gatherings, is there something of that peace which is the promise and the end of the Church. The mind and the heart purged then, if it is ever to be; the week and its whatever disasters finished and summed and expiated by the stern and formal fury of the morning service; the next week and its whatever disasters not yet born, the heart quiet now for a little while beneath the cool soft blowing of faith and hope.
\end{quote}

If Percy Grimm’s energies (and, by extension, Thomas Dixon’s) resemble more the “stern and formal fury of the morning service,” then Hightower’s hopes lean

\textsuperscript{324} Hightower’s line may bear a verbal echo to John 13:34: “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another.”
\textsuperscript{325} Thomas Dixon, \textit{The Leopard’s Spots}, 126.
toward the “faith and hope” embodied by the bumbling romance of Byron Bunch and Lena Grove. Having achieved a vision of the novel’s whole scope of events, Hightower is in a position to understand all of the forces and events that have driven the characters to this tragic situation. As the only character in the novel to have such a point of view, Hightower stands in the closest position to the reader who has also presumably followed all of the characters’ stories and motivations. This understanding enables Hightower to think about narrative in the absence of any governing script; he is free to open his understanding to include multiple scripts and to doubt the conclusions that Doc Hines, Percy Grimm, and even Gavin Stevens may offer. Hightower does not feel compelled to follow the Calvinistic ur-narrative that drives so many in *Light in August*, nor does Hightower succumb to something like the Dixonian cultural narrative either.

As he muses about Sunday morning and evening services, Hightower recognizes that this community will enact a crucifixion. He hears this message encoded in the church music: “It seems to him that he can hear within the music the declaration and dedication of that which they know that on the morrow they will have to do.”326 These acts will lead this southern community to lynch Joe Christmas “in whose crucifixion they too will raise a cross.”327

Faulkner’s *Light in August* shows his understanding of the cultural scripts compelling the Percy Grimms and Thomas Dixons of the world to enact their violent spectacles and their myths of white supremacy, but he also seems to understand that another strain in the southern spirit, one of reconciliation and

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327 Ibid.
healing could one day take hold. Any version of healing or reconciliation would have to start with a recognition of the many complex stories and lives that intersect in this community. Efforts to simplify or to force these narratives into the narrow categories of Calvinistic determinism or of the Dixonian cultural narrative would only do violence to their subjects. Clues for unraveling Faulkner’s complex vision can come from thinking about Hightower’s role as a kind of Faulkner critic or a historiographer who must register the full web of Yoknapatawpha’s narrative complexity.

After situating enlightenment in his character Hightower in *Light in August*, Faulkner moved his enlightenment to his audience. In “Pantaloon in Black,” Faulkner manipulates his reader’s response as a way to offer his most complete narrative defeat of the Dixonian cultural narrative. “The grieving protagonist Rider (so nicknamed for his sexual abilities) seems the very type of black “beast” that Dixon would deploy in his fiction, but Faulkner does all he can to show Rider’s deep grief at his wife’s death and the clumsy inability of the white characters to fathom his rage and sadness.” At the same time that “Pantaloon in Black” involves a moving story about loss, it also attempts to explain criminal behavior. While Dixon would have given his readers just the criminal behavior and linked that to racial threats, Faulkner complicates such a simple conclusion.

328 The recurring black “beast” character is best exemplified by Gus in *The Leopard’s Spots*, a character type who recurs in Dixon’s fiction. For an extended examination of this character type in Southern literature and beyond see Andrew Leiter, *In the Shadow of the Black Beast: African American Masculinity in the Harlem and Southern Renaissances* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 2010.
Nonetheless, several characters in “Pantaloon” sound as though they have fully absorbed the Dixonian rhetoric. The deputy talking to his wife complains:

“Them damn niggers,” he said. “I swear to godfrey, it’s a wonder we have as little trouble with them as we do. Because why. Because they ain’t human. They look like a man and they walk on their hind legs like a man, and they can talk and you can understand them and you think they are understanding you, at least now and then. But when it comes to the normal human feelings and sentiments of human beings, they might just as well be a damn herd of wild buffaloes.”

As the deputy recounts Rider’s demise, his wife cuts his story off, and “Pantaloon in Black” ends abruptly: “I think if you eat any supper in this house you’ll do it in the next five minutes,’ his wife said from the dining room. ‘I’m going to clear this table then and I’m going to the picture show.’

If the deputy and his wife work as a Greek chorus that comments on the action that has come before, then they offer an outrageously insufficient interpretation. Faulkner actually situates his readers in a position to take issue with and debate the community’s understanding of events. Faulkner casts his readers as historiographers of these events already engaged in debating the conclusions that the deputy and his wife draw. The reader at that point in the story is absolutely unable to accept the deputy’s account or interpretation of events – no reading of the story would be so callously dismissive of Rider’s grief. Faulkner invites his readers to take on the role of historian and judge of the discussion that the deputy has with his wife, and, in a larger frame, as a critic of a culture that could use lynching narratives and white supremacy as its organizing principles. Faulkner’s “Pantaloon in Black” (like “Dry September” before it)

330 Ibid., 120.
concludes with people going to the movies. The deputy's wife gives no evidence of having heard his story about Rider, nor does she comment on it. The jarring juxtaposition of the deputy's wife's blunt statement of needing to clear the table and planning to go to the picture show suggests that she was ready for another type of narrative, one easier for her to interpret. The deputy also does not demonstrate any ability to comment on Rider's tragic end other than astonishment and racist clichés. Faulkner's positioning of the reader as outside this discussion resembles the response elicited at the conclusion of *Light in August*, whereby the furniture salesman labels Jefferson as the town "where they lynched that nigger." The response that Faulkner engineers to such a concluding commentary is to alienate his reader from the world of violence, vindication, white supremacy, and lynching with its smug, monologic conclusions parallel to the Dixonian cultural narrative.

V. Conclusion: An Old Diary, A Homemade Spaceship, and Rhett Butler's "Leopard's Spots"

William Faulkner's fiction, in sharp contrast to Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* and the Dixonian cultural narrative from which it drew, worked to expose and undermine the seemingly coherent view of history and narrative that white supremacy needed. Priscilla Wald's strategies for understanding narrative correspond to Faulkner's larger project in his writings: "My readings attend to

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33 She has been upset by a recounting of the scores at her afternoon Rook game that took the first place prize from her. The card game may itself be a parody of the gambling that Rider has used as a way to get in his final fights.
disruptions in literary narratives caused by unexpected words, awkward grammatical constructions, rhetorical or thematic dissonances that mark the pressure of untold stories."\textsuperscript{332} Faulkner’s writing places a great deal of work in the very act of reading it; readers must loop through his texts, by reconsidering details, accounting for sudden shifts in time frame, moving from one level of consciousness to another in a single characters’ narrative, noticing glaring omissions of crucial information, and negotiating the biases of several narrators, to name but just a few of the literary challenges attending any reading of Faulkner’s work.

Drew Gilpin Faust finds this Faulknerian complexity enough of a warrant to call his fiction more moral than Mitchell’s: “But Mitchell lacks the critical vision of the South that gives Faulkner’s novel its moral and literary power.”\textsuperscript{333} Mitchell’s one novel hardly qualifies as a counter to Faulkner’s career, but the influence that her novel has enjoyed places it squarely in front of anyone attempting to understand how white southerners have represented and misrepresented their history and themselves. Faulkner, unlike Mitchell, did evolve in his understanding of representing the South and its painful tragedies of lynching. If “Pantaloon in Black” (published in 1940) represents an evolution from Faulkner’s 1931 letter about lynching, then the narrative arc of Faulkner’s thinking about lynching moves from certainty to skepticism. No single authoritative voice of mastery exists, so readers and scholars must consider and reconsider what the denizens

\textsuperscript{333} Faust, 13.
of Yoknapatawpha thought and did about the tragic and violent and racist history they inherited. Whatever his personal limitations and whatever conservative southern mores might have informed his public statements, Faulkner asked his audience to immerse themselves in the full complexity of the region and not in the escapist white supremacist fantasies of writers like Margaret Mitchell and Thomas Dixon. Faulkner’s narrative strategy may seem to be deeply irrational, distrustful of progressive summaries and ideals, and even despairing that the South’s tragic history would forever enslave it to the horrible task of “crucifying themselves and one another,” but his narrative strategy did attempt to educate his readers to become proficient in the historiography of the South, to engage in a debate over history, violence, gender, and race.

Hayden White has argued that “In order to qualify as historical, an event must be susceptible to at least two narrations of its occurrence.” By this logic, then at least two versions must be possible for a historian to have any work to do, and that work would be to judge between (at least) two events. Of course, two would be the minimum number of narrations, but there could be several others. Faulkner was mindful of such narrative and historical complexity when he had Temple Drake Stevens retell in Requiem for a Nun Rider’s story from “Pantaloons in Black.” Temple explains Rider’s story by relating her understanding of his grief, “At first he tried just walking the country roads at night for exhaustion and sleep, only that failed and then he tried getting drunk so he could sleep, and that failed, and then he tried fighting and then he cut a white man’s throat with a

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334 Hayden White, The Content of the Form (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), x.
razor in a dice game and so at last he could sleep for a little while.” Temple’s re-narration opens yet again how this narrative can be examined and interpreted beyond the casual white supremacist assumptions of the deputy and his wife at the close of “Pantaloon in Black.” To paraphrase Quentin Compson, maybe nothing is ever narrated just once and is done. Narratives seemingly possess a coherence that raw history rarely provides, but Faulkner’s narratives deliberately reopen and problematize accepted narrative expectations, especially in how they ask readers to reconsider the master narrative of white supremacy.

Faulkner literally undertook this debate himself with the text of southern history. Sally Wolff has uncovered the fascinating relationship that Faulkner had with the diary of Francis Terry Leak, a wealthy plantation owner who kept a diary from 1839 to 1862. According to Edgar Francisco, Jr. (who as a child witnessed Faulkner reading the diary in the McCarroll/Francisco home in Holly Springs), Faulkner frequently visited the family and asked them to retell stories from the diary and explore them in conversation. Wolff relates, “Francisco witnessed Faulkner reading and rereading the Leak Diary, taking notes from it, and even angrily addressing the diarist.” It is that very act of “angrily addressing the diarist” that testifies to the debate with which Faulkner wanted to engage his region – and his readers. Philip Weinstein finds Faulkner’s struggles with region and race to be a losing cause and to betray that “Faulkner harbors inside himself

335 Faulkner, Requiem for a Nun, 198-99.
the unaltered convictions of his dead fellow white Southerners of 1865." In remarking on Faulkner's 1956 New York interview with Russell Howe, Weinstein concludes that "Remnants of antebellum identity remain embedded, shard-like, in this anguished Southerner caught up in mid-1950's racial turmoil. In crucial moments, such as this unrehearsed New York interview, these remnants rise troublingly to the surface." Whether or not Faulkner was able to remove the shards of racism Weinstein finds so evident in those infamous public remarks, Faulkner certainly attempted to do so by engaging the past with a kind of literary archaeology and excavating his region's complex past.

In a similar vein, Faulkner spoke in 1959 about an apocalyptic scenario as the final moments of human beings on the earth: "The last sound on the worthless earth will be two human beings trying to launch a homemade spaceship and already quarrelling about where they are going next." Faulkner does not tell us the race, the gender, the age, or the class of the two people. A skeptic might claim that Faulkner, with a Mark Twain flourish, is using comedy and the bustling space program as a way to distract his audience from the intensifying Civil Rights movement and the recalcitrance of massive resistance. A response to that skeptic might point out that at least Faulkner imagines dialogue and hope even in the distant apocalyptic future. A skeptic might reply that more

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338 Ibid.
Americans can quote Gone with the Wind than can quote Absalom, Absalom! or Light in August.

In the closing chapter to Gone with the Wind, Rhett says goodbye to Scarlett as he leaves her for his estranged relatives in South Carolina. Explaining his attitude toward all he had done in his life, Rhett assures Scarlett, "'I've had a hell of a good time – such a hell of a good time that it's begun to pall and now I want something different. No, I never intend to change more than my spots.'"340 The reference to his spots alludes directly to Thomas Dixon's novel The Leopard's Spots. In that novel, the Rev. John Durham charges, "Even you are still labouring under the delusions of 'Reconstruction.' The Ethiopian cannot change his skin, or the leopard his spots."341 At the end of her narrative, Mitchell still signaled her preference for the monologic cultural narrative that Thomas Dixon had bequeathed her.

In contrast, Faulkner's web of debating, polyphonic voices opened a discourse about the South that would eventually also find voice in the writings of C. Vann Woodward, Richard Wright, Lillian Smith, James Baldwin, and Toni Morrison. Yet even those writers would have to contend with the Neo-Confederate energies of thinkers and politicians like Frank M. Dixon, Alabama governor and Thomas Dixon's nephew, for whom Margaret Mitchell portrayed a Dixonian South that they would try to create yet again. Other writers as late as 1967 still engaged the Dixonian cultural narrative, especially William Bradford

340 Mitchell, Gone With the Wind, 956.
341 Dixon, The Leopard's Spots, x. Dixon drew the title of this novel from Jeremiah 13:23: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil."
Huie whose novel *The Klansman* of that year contained a barbershop reminiscent of the one Faulkner describes in “Dry September” where characters read and posted passages from Thomas Dixon’s fiction. Even though the Dixonian narrative was delegitimized and driven into secrecy by a culture embarrassed by Dixon’s histrionic and barbarically overt racism, the South continued to struggle with and debate the legacy that Dixon’s narratives bestowed.
The Dixonian cultural narrative continued in a variety of forms and disguises well after Thomas Dixon's death in 1946. Even the present day has witnessed some recurrences of the kinds of religious white supremacy that Dixon helped make such a prominent part of the southern conservative tradition. While this
dissertation has considered the rise and fall of Dixon’s white supremacy, others need to examine the ways that his virulent ideas have evolved to become a part of the debates in the Civil Rights Movement as well as with contemporary debates where religion, race, and violence combine in toxic ways.

Two such examples need special attention: the Dixiecrat convention and Neo-Confederate publications. Thomas Dixon ended his first novel *The Leopard’s Spots* with Charles Gaston’s rising to the position of the Governor of South Carolina and ensuring the stability of white rule. While Dixon was writing *The Leopard’s Spots* in Gloucester, Virginia, his nephew Frank M. Dixon lived with him. Thirty-six years after the publication of *The Leopard’s Spots*, Thomas Dixon was working with his publisher on *The Flaming Sword*, his final novel. Arranging a time for a meeting with his publisher in Atlanta to discuss *The Flaming Sword*, Dixon mentions in this letter, “I am planning to get down to Atlanta but not before the inauguration of my nephew, Frank Dixon, as Governor of Alabama.” The fact that Frank M. Dixon had spent his formative adolescent years with his uncle during the writing of *The Leopard’s Spots* and *The Clansman* certainly informed the trajectory and character of his political career. Frank’s Uncle Tom was really more of a father to him. To Thomas Dixon, his nephew must have seemed the embodiment of Charles Gaston and Ben Cameron: at last a true Clansman became a Governor.

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342 Frank M. Dixon’s father, also named Frank, was a Baptist minister like his two brothers A. C. and Thomas, Jr. At Frank, Sr.’s death in 1901, his son Frank M. Dixon went to Gloucester, Virginia to be raised by his uncle, Thomas Dixon, Jr. 343 Duke University Special Collections, Dixon Archive.
Even the most cursory glance through Frank M. Dixon's writings as Alabama Governor (1939-1943) reveals a good deal of influence by his uncle's thought and rhetoric. After serving as Governor of Alabama, Frank M. Dixon went on to be a key thinker in southern politics, taking the Dixon family's rhetoric to a new era. Diane McWhorter characterized Frank M. Dixon as "The south's most rococo spokesman for white supremacy," and as someone who would be "following in the steps of his uncle Thomas Dixon." As the keynote speaker to the States' Rights Party Convention of 1948 and the chairman of the conference (who rapped the gavel to start its proceedings), Frank M. Dixon played a central role in crafting the rhetoric and political stance of a generation of white southern politicians who would oppose civil rights. Declaring that he "set the tone" for the convention, Kari E. Frederickson summarizes Frank M. Dixon's speech at the 1948 Dixiecrat convention in Birmingham, Alabama: "Dixon warned that Truman meant to eliminate segregation in the public and private schools 'from grade schools through colleges.' Black schoolteachers would soon have charge over their white children which would inevitably lead to an increase 'in immorality, in vice, [and] in crime.'" One might say that only a Dixon could give a speech like that, but, by that point, the white South had many who had absorbed the racist

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rhetoric that the Dixon family had helped codify. In that speech Frank M. Dixon declared, "The States' Rights movement would prevent the establishment of a 'federal Gestapo' and would serve as a defense 'against those who would destroy our civilization and mongrelize our people.' If Thomas Dixon, Jr., used his understanding of Fundamentalist and evangelical southern Christianity to structure his white supremacy, then his nephew helped use white supremacy to structure a political party that people would rally around with religious intensity.

If Frank M. Dixon's rhetoric also reveals how some whites saw their way of life threatened by the Civil Rights Movement, then a good deal of the conservative tradition and the Neo-Confederate causes can be said to echo Frank M. Dixon's rhetoric in their style and theme. When co-founder of The National Review Frank Meyer called Brown v. Board of Education a "rape of the Constitution," he used the same sort of rape complex obsession that fueled Dixon's narratives. Was Meyer merely being incendiary with his remarks, or was he, to borrow an idea from Fredric Jameson, blurring out in public speech the conservative tradition's political unconsciousness, its Dixonian id?

347 Strom Thurmond and Fielding Wright were the eventual Presidential and Vice Presidential nominees for the "States' Rights Democratic Party"/Dixiecrats who would carry four Southern states (Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, South Carolina, and one faithless elector from Tennessee) and 29 electoral votes in the Presidential election of 1948.
348 Barnard, 115.
Reconsiderations of the Civil War, Reconstruction, and southern historical identity in general has in recent years fueled new versions of white supremacy has drawn again at the source of Dixon’s visions. Kevin Hicks has argued in “Literature and Neo-Confederacy” that “As recently as 1993, Sam Dickson, a leader of the racist and neo-Confederate Council of Conservative Citizens, argued in the introduction to a reprint of the trilogy that ‘Dixon’s novels are as timely as ever’ as they call into question efforts by liberals ‘to integrate the races already within the country.’” To claim that Dixon’s insights are as “timely as ever” would immediately horrify many readers, but such a claim could also simply demonstrate the lines of the genealogy that bind modern conservatism to the Dixonian cultural narrative.

Writers outside of the conservative tradition and Neo-Confederacy have also found a need to engage the Dixonian cultural narrative, but in the form of creating rebuttals and counter narratives. William Bradford Huie’s 1967 novel The Klansman returns to the type of engagement with the Dixonian narrative that Kelly Miller and Sutton Griggs had. Throughout Huie’s novel, several allusions to Dixon and to the Griffith film The Birth of a Nation occur. The sheriff’s deputy, Butt Cut Cates, takes his favorite passages from Thomas Dixon’s The Clansman and puts them on community bulletin boards. One of Huie’s characters in the

352 Perhaps Huie’s novel’s title, with its “K,” suggests a more direct affinity with the Ku Klux, and Dixon’s novel title suggests the possibility of Scottish tradition with its “C.” In another change of one letter, the setting for The Klansman is “Ellington” with a possible nod to Dixon’s plantation home of “Elmington” where he lived when he wrote The Clansman.
novel describes the political climate in the South as, "a hundred years of lying and Kluxing and slobberin' over films like Gone with the Wind and Birth of a Nation."\textsuperscript{353} Riché Richardson has labeled Huie's The Klansman one of the "boldest critiques and revisions" of The Clansman and The Birth of a Nation, in no small part because the "reactionary racial and sexual ideological heritage in the Reconstruction-era South ... was still evident in the Civil Rights era."\textsuperscript{354}

Huie's understanding of the Dixonian cultural narrative's legacy led him to examine the ways that white supremacists in the 1960s used shocking images of black sexuality to stir their constituents to action. Presenting two sheriffs pictures from a Civil Rights demonstration, the fictional Alabama governor in Huie's The Klansman (a caricature of George Wallace) shows how white supremacists framed the photographs of Civil Rights demonstrators according to the same logic wielded by Dixon in his spectacles but also extended Dixon's fears to interracial homosexuality:

Big Track and Allen were shown enlarged photographs of some of the beatniks in the Selma March: the arms of white females around the necks of Negro males; the hands of Negro males on the rumps and breasts of white females; a Negro male and a white female kissing and 'sucking each other's tongues'; a Negro male and a white male kissing; and a Negro male and a white male lying under a tree each with a hand in the other's crotch.\textsuperscript{355}

Riché Richardson comments on Huie's use of these photographs, and she finds the novel's interest in displaying those photographs as an animating force in the white male pornographic imagination: "In the novel, it is also important to

\textsuperscript{353} Huie, 55.
\textsuperscript{354} Riché Richardson, Black Masculinity and the U. S. South: From Uncle Tom to Gangsta (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 37.
\textsuperscript{355} Huie, The Klansman, 9.
recognize that this perverse and fetishized photographic record threatens to displace and substitute for the kinds of video documentaries that were so effective in giving national exposure to the abuse and violence that black civil rights demonstrators encountered."\textsuperscript{356} The newspaper images of Emmett Till's corpse or of fire hoses used on demonstrators and bystanders in Birmingham served to further the aims of the Civil Rights Movement, but Huie presented another motivation for photography in this era. Huie wanted these fictional photographs of sexually unrestrained demonstrators to represent an effort at rebuttal to the photojournalism that furthered the aims of the Civil Rights Movement. Dixonian characters like Huie's racist governor in \textit{The Clansman} would attempt to undermine the photojournalism of the Civil Rights Movement by offering their own visual counter arguments. Dixon himself would have certainly understood the insidious psychology behind defending a racist social order by stoking an audience's fears about sex.

As William Bradford Huie attempted to counter the seemingly chronic interest in Dixon's narratives with his novel \textit{The Klansman}, so too does Paul Miller, also known as "DJ Spooky, that Subliminal Kid," attempt to attack this matrix of narratives with his performances and 2008 video \textit{Rebirth of a Nation}.\textsuperscript{357} Drawing his music (Original score by Paul D. Miller, performed by Kronos Quartet) from motifs by Howlin' Wolf and Robert Johnson, Paul Miller, as he explains in a variety of ways in the DVD audio commentary, undoes \textit{The Birth of

\textsuperscript{356} Richardson, From Uncle Tom to Gangsta, 43.
\textsuperscript{357} Rebirth of a Nation, DVD, directed by Paul Miller/DJ Spooky That Subliminal Kid. New York: Anchor Bay, 2008.
a Nation through a hip-hop informed deconstruction. He claims to apply DJ technique (sampling image as well as sound) to remix the film and asserts to his audience, "I hope you walk away from this remix and think that another world is possible." Miller also uses computer graphics and film techniques available to computer culture in the twenty-first century to refocus the viewer’s experience; he adds circles and lines, redirecting the viewers’ attention to different parts of the scene, changing the line of view and arguing for new ways to see things. Moreover, he zooms, changes focus, and shifts the center of the scene in a variety of ways throughout the film as well as blurring certain parts of the screen to shift the focus. Miller argues that Griffith has done these kinds of shifts in his (and by extension Dixon) narrative re-construction of events in history. To underscore this point, Miller sets a frame the entire time to remind the viewers he has reframed every shot in the film; he also redoes the silent screen cards with a font in imitation of Griffith to show the mobility of those infamous images now redone with new possibilities and new significances.

In a National Public Radio interview with Liane Hansen, Paul Miller asserts that Rebirth of a Nation is “a digital exorcism.” Paul Miller’s Rebirth of a Nation is an attempt at exorcising the Griffith film and its Dixonian cultural narrative by taking The Birth of a Nation through an artistic deconstruction, but his video still

358 Ibid.
359 Paul Miller’s promotional materials for Rebirth of a Nation are available at his website: http://www.djspooky.com/art/rebirth.php (accessed on Feb. 9, 2013)
retains the entire film in its efforts. Perhaps a more complete exorcism comes not with replication but with replacement.

On Thursday, November 7, 2013, President Barack Obama screened the Steven Spielberg film *Lincoln* in the White House.\(^{361}\) So many things about this event would have horrified Thomas Dixon. Less than a century after Dixon and Griffith had persuaded Woodrow Wilson to screen *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915, the first film ever shown in the White House, a re-elected black president would screen a vastly different motion picture. While *Lincoln* is not a strictly accurate film historically, Spielberg's film does reference and revise *The Birth of a Nation* in sustained and substantive ways.\(^{362}\)

While Thomas Dixon may have ended his life pleased with the vision of his nephew as Governor of Alabama, he could not have envisioned his nightmare of President Barack Obama in the White House. These words from President Obama’s second inaugural address of January 21, 2013 serve well as the final words to this study:


We the people declare today that the most evident of truth that all of us are created equal -- is the star that guides us still; just as it guided our forebears through Seneca Falls and Selma and Stonewall; just as it guided all those men and women, sung and unsung, who left footprints along this great mall, to hear a preacher say that we cannot walk alone; to hear a King proclaim that our individual freedom is inextricably bound to the freedom of every soul on Earth.\textsuperscript{363}

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\textsuperscript{363} President Barack Obama, “Second Inaugural Address.”
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