

DEFENDING THE SACRED HEARTH:
RELIGION, POLITICS, AND RACIAL VIOLENCE IN GEORGIA, 1904-1906

by

Eric Tabor Millin

(Under the direction of James C. Cobb)

ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that the religious rhetoric of white Georgians created an environment in which violence against African Americans was not just an option, but a sacred duty. In 1904, a mob in Statesboro, Georgia lynched two black men who had been repeatedly described as "black devils" and "demons." A year later, Thomas Dixon accompanied his play "The Clansman" to Atlanta. His stage production and his best selling novels celebrated racial violence as a component of progressive religion. Meanwhile, soon-to-be-elected Hoke Smith ran a religiously-charged gubernatorial campaign that included black disenfranchisement among his central objectives. "Holy Hoke," as some called him, promised to secure white supremacy with violence, if need be. In the months preceding the 1906 Atlanta riot, Atlanta's newspapers drew on religious language familiar to all of these events, particularly that violence was justified in defense of sacred white "womanhood" and the sanctity of the white home.

INDEX WORDS: Georgia, Thomas Dixon, Statesboro, Lynching, Violence, Atlanta, Riot, Hoke Smith, Politics, Race, Religion, Southern evangelicalism, Christianity, Populism, Progressivism, Disenfranchisement

DEFENDING THE SACRED HEARTH:
RELIGION, POLITICS, AND RACIAL VIOLENCE IN GEORGIA, 1904-1906

by

ERIC TABOR MILLIN

B.A., The University of North Carolina at Asheville, 1999

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2002

© 2002
Eric Tabor Millin
All Rights Reserved

DEFENDING THE SACRED HEARTH:
RELIGION, POLITICS, AND RACIAL VIOLENCE IN GEORGIA, 1904-1906

by

ERIC TABOR MILLIN

Major Professor: James C. Cobb

Committee: Kathleen Clark
E. M. Beck

Electronic Version Approved:

Gordhan L. Patel
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
August 2002

DEDICATION

For Christina

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

So many people have contributed to the production of this thesis. My major professor James Cobb has provided many helpful comments and much needed editing. He has also shown remarkable patience, a wonderful gift in itself. Frank Forts and Justin Nystrom, along with other classmates and faculty members at the University of Georgia, have encouraged my intellectual growth in our many conversations. John “Truth Drifter” Hayes has been a very good friend over the last two years. His willingness to read my papers, to talk theology, and to drive two hours in search of the perfect ’que has enriched my thinking as well as providing many good times. If any man deserves a covenant woman, it is he. My longtime friends Jeremy Phillips and Jim Kirk, though many miles away, have always been a sure source of encouragement and insight. I would also like to thank my parents, Lou and Peggy Millin, my brother Grant, and my sister Karen. They have always encouraged me to take risks and pursue my dreams. Most of all, I would like to thank my wife Christina. In addition to encouraging me through periods of extreme frustration and self-doubt, she has patiently helped me throughout my graduate school experience. Her computer savvy, editing abilities, and sharp intellect shape every page of my work—not unlike how she has touched the rest of my life.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|------|
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..... | v |
| INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| CHAPTER | |
| 1 “GLORY TO GOD! THE KLAN!”: THOMAS DIXON IN ATLANTA, 1905..... | 14 |
| 2 A "CARNIVAL OF HELL": STATESBORO'S CATO-REED LYNCHING, 1904..... | 38 |
| 3 VOX POPULI VOX DEI: GEORGIA'S DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY, 1905- 1906..... | 65 |
| CONCLUSION..... | 90 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY..... | 103 |

INTRODUCTION

Earnest Cox prayed for his sister daily. He asked that she and her husband might find a church that preached the full Gospel. During his seminary studies, he often wrote to her, pressing the importance of a life sanctified and perfected through Jesus Christ. He had counseled her in the matters of the spirit, but had never dwelt upon her physical well-being. What had she to fear in her suburban Atlanta home? September 22nd, 1906 changed all that. Special editions of the nation's newspapers screamed of race riot, detailing how Atlanta's whites, hearing sensational—and ultimately false—reports of black men assaulting white women, had taken to the streets. Ten thousand whites raged through the city, indiscriminately beating and killing the city's blacks. Yet it was not the white mobs Cox feared. He wrote that "no warfare ever waged was more righteous than the defense of house, family, and posterity." No, it was the Negro—the "black fiend"—that was the menace. Their death "was the result of an effort to protect those whom God has ordained that we must protect, an effort that cannot be legally justified but has its grounds and justification in a law that is higher than laws made by men." The "God of Purity," for whom Cox labored, demanded that the white man defend unflinchingly the "purity of his home."¹

Were Cox's reflections on the Atlanta Riot of 1906 an isolated example of theologically articulate racism, we might easily disregard them. Sadly, Cox was not alone. Many white Americans saw the riot as a God-ordained defense of home and family. It was not, however, only in retrospect that Christianity was used as a lens for understanding racial violence. In a widely published letter addressed to "the White People of Georgia," William H. Fleming angrily denounced the catalytic role of religious rhetoric in the weeks before the riot. How could the riot have surprised anyone, he asked, when news papers published Cox-like tirades "that summoned

¹ Ernest Cox to Emma and Edward Pines, Sept. 29, 1906, Ernest Sevier Cox Papers, Duke University.

the permission, if not the command of God" to murder "a few of those classed with hogs," that is, African Americans. Fleming seems to have regarded these religious vituperations as anomalous, but this rhetoric was not new, nor did it disappear after the riot had ended.²

In 1904, a mob in Statesboro, Georgia had lynched two black men accused of killing local farmer Henry Hodges along with his wife and three children. The crowd had burned the men alive and then turned their rage on members of Statesboro's black community. As in the weeks preceding the Atlanta riot, newspapers framed events in religious terms, demanding a response to the threat from "black devils" and "demons." In fact, firsthand lynching accounts frequently record appeals to divine justice, mention clergy in the mob, and reassure readers that victims were allowed to pray before being put to death. A little over a year later, Thomas Dixon accompanied his play "The Clansman" to Atlanta. His stage production and his best selling novels celebrated racial violence as a component of progressive religion. Meanwhile, Hoke Smith ran a religiously-charged gubernatorial campaign that included black disenfranchisement among his central objectives. "Holy Hoke," as some derisively called him, promised to secure white supremacy with violence, if need be. He went on to win the 1906 white Democratic primary in a landslide. The comments of Earnest Cox were thus more than a troubling interpretation of a horrible event. They represented widely held beliefs that justified racial violence in religious terms.

These religious arguments were not the only contributing factors to the Atlanta riot, nor were they to any other instance of racial violence. Turn of the century Atlanta experienced rapid growth that exceeded the city's infrastructure and taxed already meager city services. The new suburbs lacked sufficient police protection and the city struggled to enforce laws within its own bounds. Problems that often accompany urbanization—prostitution, poverty, crime—particularly affected African Americans, who were then blamed for many of the booming city's problems.

² *Macon Telegraph* 12 October, 1906.

Black laborers also presented competition to white workers, creating further opportunity for conflict. While every one of these factors encouraged racial violence, the religious arguments went beyond other contributing elements. In certain circumstances, killing a black person was not simply an option, it was a sacred duty.³

The origins of this rhetoric lay in Biblical defense of slavery, which assumed white supremacy was divinely ordained. These Biblical arguments were never simply post hoc rationalizations of race slavery. As Winthrop Jordan has shown, religion shaped European and Euro-American ideas about race and race relations from the first sustained encounters with Africa. Most Europeans viewed the world through their Christian traditions, all of which stressed God as creator and sustainer of the universe; there was perhaps no other way for them to think about race but within a divinely-ordered cosmos. Some Europeans believed they shared the same origins as Africans and explained black pigmentation as the result of a hot climate. The more enduring interpretation, however, was “blackness could scarcely be anything but a curse.” The curse was normally traced to Ham. The rise of this theory preceded the widespread practice of slavery, so it cannot be dismissed as a convenient explanation for the exploitation of African labor.⁴ The cursed and heathen black was juxtaposed to the blessed and Christian white.

As important and as numerous as the Biblical justifications of slavery were, the South was less thoroughly Christianized in the antebellum period than it was following the Civil War. The frontier character of much of the South had inhibited church growth. After the war, Reconstruction involved rebuilding ecclesiastical institutions as much as civil and economic institutions. Southern denominations rapidly expanded their membership, with Methodists and Baptists capturing nearly all the growth. Almost all of these churches were “evangelical”: that is, they emphasized an inner conversion experience that signified personal reconciliation with God.

³ Gregory Mixon, “The Atlanta Riot of 1906,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Cincinnati, 1989); Charles Crowe, “Racial Massacre in Atlanta, September 22, 1906,” *Journal of Negro History* 54 (1969):150-73, Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

These evangelicals also tended to be theological conservatives who insisted on the full historical accuracy of the Bible and took traditional beliefs like Hell as literal descriptions of reality. By the turn of the century, conservative evangelical Protestantism dominated the South and its cultures.⁵

Although the evangelical explosion coincided with the development of “Jim Crow” segregation, few historians have examined the role religion played in shaping white racial attitudes. This is readily evident in the historiography of southern violence, despite the vast literature on lynching and racial conflict. Early efforts to explain lynching, like those of sociologist Arthur Raper (1933) and NAACP activist Walter White (1929), did pay attention to the role of religion. Raper found that ministers from the “First” churches of the cities and town were more likely to oppose extralegal violence than were smaller, rural congregations. Among the weaknesses of the latter was their emphasis on religious individualism, which fostered indifference to social problems. He also argued advocates of lynching assumed “it is a plan of God that the Negro and his children shall forever be ‘hewers of wood and drawers of water.’” Walter White blamed the emotional excesses of southern revivalism as a contributing factor. Regardless of the role they believed religion played in racial violence, Raper and White joined others in asserting that the South’s agrarian economy and underdeveloped institutions were the root causes. Once the South was “modernized,” lynchings would stop.⁶

As lynchings decreased in the second quarter of the twentieth century and with the end of massive resistance to desegregation, both scholars and the public shifted their attention away from southern violence. This changed after the turmoil of the late sixties and early seventies. Witnesses to the continuing power of popular unrest, historians reawakened their interest in southern violence. Jacquelyn Hall's *Revolt Against Chivalry* (1979) was the first major example of this change. Hall argued that lynchings dramatized southern hierarchies, demonstrating the

⁴ Winthrop Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), 18-19.

⁵ Donald Mathews, “‘Christianizing the South’—Sketching a Synthesis,” in *New Directions in American Religious History*, eds. Harry Stout and D. G. Hart (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997): 84-115.

place of men and women, black and white, in the social order. At the same time, lynchings served as a means of building white solidarity in the face of an alleged black threat. Hall acknowledges the role of evangelicalism in motivating racial reconciliation and opposition to lynching, but her religious analysis stops there.⁷

Following the publication of *Revolt Against Chivalry*, scholars have dramatically expanded our understanding of southern racial violence. Historians and sociologists have correlated lynchings with economic fluctuation and competition. Expanding one of Hall's central themes, several historians have connected the subjugation of women with the use of violence to protect white economic control. They argue that lynching, and the rumors of rape that often accompanied it, served the dual purpose of protecting white supremacy and patriarchal control. Historians like Edward Ayers and Bertram Wyatt-Brown also cite the southern dedication to honor—the idea that one's personal worth is derived from the perception of others—as a culturally contributing factor. Many scholars argue southern white men regularly resorted to violence as proof that they would risk bodily harm, if not death, to defend their honor. This willingness to meet insult with force also had special resonance within the South's race relations. Nothing was more dishonorable than to be insulted or challenged by an African American. Southern racial violence thus found its primary cultural legitimation in the principles of honor.⁸

This would not last forever. By the end of the nineteenth century, industrialization and migration disrupted the southern culture of honor; no longer bound to the land or to stable communities, southern white men became less concerned about how others perceived them. White southerners also became more sensitive to the interests of northern capital. Mob violence now threatened the livelihood of the burgeoning southern middleclass. Together with business

⁶ Arthur Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1933), 19, 21-23, Walter Francis White, *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch* (New York: Knopf, 1929).

⁷Jacquelyn Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).

⁸ Edward Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

elites, middleclass southerners successfully pressured state and local governments to end extralegal violence.

Perhaps no scholar has produced a more nuanced and comprehensive treatment of southern racial violence than Fitzhugh Brundage. In *Lynching in the New South*, Brundage argues that most historians have stressed lynching as an expression of core southern values. The search to identify these values leads to an overemphasis on lynching as an unchanging phenomenon. Most lynchings reinforced white supremacy, but as he argues, white supremacy was not a single ideology, but a group of interrelated and sometimes contradictory ideas. Racial violence varied over time and geography, in part because the violence was connected with regional labor practices. In areas like coastal Georgia, lynching was relatively rare because white paternalism and black assertiveness created space for mutual accommodation. In southern Georgia rapid growth meant white and blacks competed for land and employment. With no established sense of “place,” members of both races were likely to resort to violence to settle conflicts. Other factors also contributed to variations in southern racial violence. Rather than a manifestation of amorphous racial or economic anxieties, lynchings occurred in response to specific events. The type of lynching varied according to the alleged crime of the offender. A black man accused of insulting a white employer might be whipped or even hanged by a small group of men. A black man accused of rape or murder—or, as in one of the cases I study, accused of both—might be mutilated and burned in a highly ritualized manner before a crowd numbering in the thousands. Lynchings of the latter type constituted but a small fraction of southern lynchings, though their savagery and publicity made them seem all the more prominent. Because of their scale, these large lynchings did give voice to communal values, though Brundage believes it was the visible presence of the mob, not the private sentiments of its constituents, that testified to lynching’s moral legitimacy.⁹

⁹ W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

Brundage pays little attention to religious justifications of lynching. Like other historians, he emphasizes the importance of religion in mobilizing anti-lynching opposition. Some scholars, like Ayers, see evangelicalism as inimical to the culture of honor. At least indirectly, they see the rapid growth of southern Protestant denominations at the close of the nineteenth century as a harbinger of lynching's decline. The historiographical mainstream's understanding of southern religion and violence ends much where it began: like Hall, most historians have portrayed southern evangelicalism in opposition—if not as simply irrelevant—to the southern culture of violence.

A handful of recent publications, however, challenge this oppositional view. The spread of the "scapegoat thesis" reveals that some scholars are beginning to see southern religion and violence as complimentary. Several writers—Lillian Smith, Trudier Harris, and Joel Williamson, for example—discussed lynching in terms of scapegoating long before it became associated with southern religion. Orlando Patterson, Donald Mathews, and Theophus H. Smith, however, move beyond these earlier observations to draw direct links between lynching as scapegoating and southern evangelicalism. All three scholars begin with the work of literary-critic-turned-anthropologist Rene Girard. Girard contends that competition between individuals is the primeval human state. This individual competition breeds disorder. To overcome this anarchic state, the creation of human society required the establishment of an outside "rival." This outsider is expelled or killed by the community in an act that requires social unity. The resulting cohesion from this act of "generative violence" leads the community to mistakenly believe that they have removed the source of social disorder from their midst. Because a cohesive society requires this violence, it must be repeated. Typically, this process is ritualized, so that the enemy is construed spiritually (e.g. sin) and the scapegoating is achieved through ritual gesture like

communion or the substitution of an animal sacrifice. Girard believes the criminal serves a similar role in the modern state.¹⁰

Combining Girard's thesis with the conclusion that lynching created white solidarity, scholars like Patterson and Mathews argue that lynching African Americans was religiously motivated generative violence. Instead of referring back to Girard's belief in an act of original violence, they argue that southerners drew their sacrificial rite from evangelical Christianity. Donald Mathews has articulated the most sophisticated of the scapegoat theories. He argues that there is a parallel between lynching and the death of Christ on the Cross, a story with which southerners were well acquainted. Underlying the white southern understanding of Christ's death was a theology of punishment in which death is the only appropriate punishment for sin. For the Christian, God's wrath had been poured out on Christ, fully satisfying the demand for justice. In a culture where violence was understood as a means of righting the cosmic order, a black man who violated racial norms became the sacrificial scapegoat—a necessary victim of God's just vengeance. Paralleling Girard, the author believes whites lynched (i.e. sacrificed) black men to right wrongs in the "divine" order of segregation and white supremacy. Thus every sacrifice "saved" southern society.¹¹

By highlighting the connection between religious conceptions of justice and racial violence, advocates of the scapegoating thesis have raised important issues. There is also a limited amount of evidence that seems to corroborate their claims about lynching's sacrificial qualities—in his letter to his sister, for example, Earnest Cox crossed out the word "killed" in reference to murdered blacks and wrote in the word "sacrificed," an act that implies careful syntactical reflection. Evidence like this is undoubtedly provocative. When closely examined,

¹⁰ René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), Trudier Harris, *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1984), Orlando Patterson, *Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries* (Washington, D.C.: Civitas/CounterPoint, 1998), Lillian Eugenia Smith, *Killers of the Dream* (New York: Norton, 1961), Theophus Harold Smith, *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), Williamson, *Crucible*.

however, provocative does not always translate into convincing. Not one of these scholars substantiates his claim with extensive evidence. (The Cox quotation was found during my research. There is nothing in the works under discussion that approaches this level of explicitness.) Patterson, Mathews, and Smith compensate for this paucity of evidence by basing their arguments largely on theoretic deduction. This deductive approach leads to questionable conclusions. In fact, both the secular and the religious formulations of the scapegoating thesis are largely based on the fallacious use of analogy: because southern ritual killings resemble other manifestations of ritual killing in *some* respects, it does not follow that southern ritual killings resemble other ritual killings in *all* respects.

Scapegoating also does not account for variety among the ritualized lynchings in the American South. Nor does it provide any means for distinguishing between sacrificial and non-sacrificial lynchings. As Brundage has pointed out, any metatheory of southern racial violence is bound to fail when confronted with the regional and historical variability of southern racial conflict. Only by looking at local events as occurrences within particular contexts can southern racial violence be understood. This is not to say that we cannot draw connections between particular instances of violence within the South, or that we must categorically reject cross-cultural analogies between southern lynchings and other manifestations of violence. After all, it may be that lynching was an act of ritual sacrifice. But we must first understand the historical relationship between southern evangelicalism and specific instances of postbellum racial violence.

The following pages represent the results of two such studies in which I inquire how southern racial violence looks different when we take religious language seriously. For example, does our understanding change if we interpret white claims to God-ordained superiority not only as expressions of economic and political interest, but also as theological assertions? I argue that

¹¹ Donald Mathews, "The Southern Rite of Human Sacrifice," *Journal of Southern Religion*; available from <http://jsr.as.wvu.edu/mathews.htm>; Internet, accessed 23 July, 2001. See also Mathews, "'Christianizing the South.'"

taking religion seriously does change our understanding of race relations in the South. When we explore the significance of religious language, we see that the boundaries we often draw between categories like politics and religion, the sacred and the secular, are not distinctions that historical actors often make.

My approach to religion is atypical in that it does not rely on sermons and denominational documents. The work of church officials and the declarations of religious bodies are important parts of the past, but it is easy to exaggerate the influence of the clergy since most religion, so to speak, happens on the ground. White southerners did take ministers seriously, but they did not always agree with them. In a Protestant culture that stressed the individual's relationship with God and the accessibility of God's truth to all believers, personal interpretations had a primacy over the doctrines of others. Because of this, I emphasize the religious rhetoric of lay people rather than ministers. In doing so, I try to capture a cultural mood that made violence acceptable. At the same time, I acknowledge that no "mood" is all pervasive. Religious defenses of violence often highlighted divisions even as they attempted to demonstrate solidarity.

I am also more concerned with public rhetoric than with private sentiment. Most of my sources are printed materials that were widely available at the time of publication. In particular, newspapers provide the most ready access to the rhetoric of racial violence. Their use does not come without shortcomings, however. Their main weakness is that they tell us only the views of their writers and editors. In some instances, as in newspapers that covered turn of the century Georgia, they also printed letters to the editor. Yet, editors surely refused to print letters that did not serve their own ends. Furthermore, newspapers had a limited readership, a fact that needs special attention when dealing with the semiliterate South of the turn of the century.

The limitations of newspapers notwithstanding, they are still very important sources. In smaller towns where editors had long lasting and deep ties to their community, newspapers that hoped to remain in business had to reflect the cultural values of their readership. Papers in larger towns similarly had to find a core audience to stay in business. The print media, despite its

limited readership, had a profound influence on public opinion. As one disapproving reader of the *Atlanta Journal* noted, “many people . . . agree that the sensational publications [sic] of the crimes, and the display headlines used in detailing the acts of mob rule, have the possible effect of increasing these crimes by inflaming the public mind.”¹² Historians like Grace Hale have taken a less equivocal stance, asserting that newspapers were integral to the phenomenon of modern lynching.¹³ The newspapers cannot, of course, tell us why each man participated in an act of racial violence, nor can they give voice to many of its advocates and opponents. The analysis of language in these sources does, however, reveal common cultural threads that bound together members of the mob.

Though this is a story primarily about Georgia, I begin in New York where Thomas Dixon ended his ministerial career. Dixon possessed a remarkably broad conception of “ministry” that grew out of his advocacy of the Social Gospel. I argue this extended to his literary career, which he viewed as a new medium for his liberal theology. Dixon was thus neither a Georgian nor a representative of southern religion. However, Dixon’s sermons, and later his novels and plays, articulated a religious defense of racial violence that reflected the sentiments of many southerners. In particular, Dixon believed black political equality posed a direct threat to the Anglo-Saxon home. True manhood could not abide this threat because the home was a sacred space. Dixon hoped his play “The Clansman,” which came to Atlanta in October, 1905, would reveal to others the dangers of black equality. While Dixon’s production met vocal opposition, many white Atlantans attested to the play’s basic truthfulness.

I further explore the relationship between racial violence and the God-ordained defense of the home in Chapter Two. In 1904, the home of Bulloch County farmer Henry Hodge was burned to the ground. The remains of Hodge, his wife, and their three children were all found in ashes. Two local African Americans, Paul Reed and William Cato were arrested as the most

¹² *Atlanta Journal* 24 August, 1904.

likely perpetrators. Local law enforcement protected Cato and Reed until their trial, but a mob broke into the courtroom just after they had been sentenced to hang. The two men were taken outside of town and burned alive. White gangs then raged through Statesboro attacking African Americans.

Weeks before they had even been tried, newspapers described Cato and Reed in demonological terms. By calling the alleged perpetrators "demons" and "devils," white Georgians put the Hodges' murder within a larger cultural framework, a framework that was, at least in part, defined by the language of evangelical Protestantism. The murders were conceived as part of a spiritual struggle against the powers of "darkness." Much as Cox understood the events in Atlanta, many regional whites saw these powers aligned against their divinely ordained status as white landowners and patriarchs. Violent action was a logical conclusion based on this perspective.

Chapter Three analyzes the Democratic gubernatorial primary of 1905-1906. The ultimate winner, Hoke Smith, represented the reform wing of the Democratic party. Smith portrayed himself as a deeply religious man and described his candidacy as divinely consecrated service on behalf of the white people of Georgia. His campaign united religiously oriented Georgians sympathetic with reform. Smith's platform included the disenfranchisement of African Americans as prerequisite for progress and prosperity. Many of Smith's religiously-minded followers justified their support for suffrage restrictions in religious terms, emphasizing the association between black Georgians and sin. Smith advocated the use of force on several occasions, reinforcing religious justifications for racial violence.

The conclusion examines the conjunction between the language of religion, white supremacy, and masculinity and how these factors contributed to the 1906 Atlanta Riot. I argue that racial violence in turn of the century Georgia was often justified as a manly duty to protect

¹³ Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 206.

the sanctity of women and the home. While a variety of factors contributed to the riot, religion provides the lens through which many Georgians interpreted race relations. Understanding these religious interpretations cannot tell us definitively why whites did or did not participate in racial violence, but this understanding does tell us something important about how white Georgians explained their actions and how they looked at the world. To begin our consideration of southern religion and racial violence, we turn now to the writings of Thomas Dixon.

CHAPTER 1

“GLORY TO GOD! THE KLAN!”: THOMAS DIXON IN ATLANTA, 1905

When Thomas Dixon arrived in Atlanta in late October of 1905, he came as much as an evangelist as a playwright and director. He was touring with his controversial play “The Clansman” to spread his racial theology throughout the nation. In Georgia, Dixon found an audience particularly sensitive to his religious ideas. Though Dixon was far more theologically liberal than most white southerners, his play highlighted familiar religious themes, not the least of which was his portrayal of violence as a sacred duty. The use of force ensured the security of the home, the progress of civilization, and the coming Kingdom of God. He did not shy away from this aspect of his literary work. In fact, he openly claimed a moral purpose for his theatrical endeavor. During its single Atlanta run, “The Clansman” evoked a variety of reactions and was not soon forgotten.

In mid-October 1906, former state representative William H. Fleming published an open letter "to the white people of Georgia." The Atlanta race riot had raged through the city's streets just three weeks before. Fleming offered a diagnosis of the riot's origins in hopes of guaranteeing more peaceful race relations in the future. He laid blame on three prominent Georgians, all of whom play an important part in our story: John Temple Graves, Hoke Smith, and Thomas Hardwick. They had taken part in the recently concluded Democratic primary and were all guilty of promulgating racist rhetoric. But Fleming named as "chief among offenders" a North Carolinian who then resided in New York. The accused was none other than the famed novelist and playwright, Rev. Thomas Dixon. “The Clansman” had made its single Atlanta run nearly a year before the riot. It had been scheduled to return in late September, 1906. However, the

Atlanta riot made its return undesirable; the city barred it for fear it might reignite the still smoldering racial tensions. Despite the seriousness of Fleming's accusation, he did little to elaborate on Dixon's culpability beyond indicting him as the preeminent "mob inspirer."¹

Given the time between the play and the riot, Dixon's responsibility is questionable. But Fleming's indictment was not completely unreasonable. During its run, "The Clansman"—as Fleming's comments attest—obviously struck a chord with the local audience. At the height of his popularity—and he was hugely popular—the novelist inspired extreme reactions of reverence and revulsion. Both responses manifested themselves in violence on more than one occasion. Such was almost to be expected. Not only did his novels depict some of the most controversial subjects of the turn of the century, but the stories *were* violent. In fact, they celebrated violence.

Dixon remains a notorious figure. He is most famous for his novel *The Clansman*, which served as the basis for both the play of the same name and D. W. Griffith's epic film *Birth of a Nation*. *The Clansman* was the second installment of Dixon's wildly popular Reconstruction trilogy. All three novels told the story of the Ku Klux Klan and its role in ending the horror of Federal occupation and Republican—i.e. "negro"—rule. Dixon portrayed the rise of the Klan as the last means of self-defense for an outraged citizenry. Many critics see his stories as reactionary, though a few recent studies emphasize the progressive elements of his thought. Whether they present him as a reactionary or a progressive, scholars have failed to put Dixon's racial thought within a larger context beyond his Social Darwinism—unless, as Joel Williamson and Glenda Gilmore have done, they are explicating the psychological contours of Dixon's seemingly pathological hatred of African Americans.

Of course, Dixon was obsessed with questions of race, and he may have suffered some psychological abnormalities. However, because scholars have ignored the religious components of his thought in the early stages of his literary career, they have not only missed important

¹ *Macon Telegraph* 12 October, 1906.

themes in his work, they have missed its controlling purpose: Dixon was as much, if not more, of a theologian than a scientific racist. Moreover, without an understanding of Dixon's theology, scholars have ignored his relation to ideologies that enjoyed considerable influence in the South, if not the entire nation. As we will see in subsequent chapters, Dixon's racialized theology was but an extreme example of religious thought that played an important role in lynching and other forms of racial violence.

The son of a North Carolina Baptist minister, Dixon began his religious education early. He attended college at Wake Forest and then went to John Hopkins. By the time Dixon reached Baltimore, he was a committed religious skeptic. During his time there, he studied with Herbert Baxter Adams, whose Teutonic germ theory impressed the young man. Adams "combined the latest in evolutionary science with Victorian romanticism," claiming "democracy sprang from the intellectual equivalent of a gene that made its way from German forests to Britain and then to colonial America. Moving only through pure bloodlines, it predisposed some men for self-government."² Dixon seems to have clung to many of these ideas for the rest of his life. They would not, however, remain unaltered.

After completing his studies, Dixon worked as a lawyer and served as a North Carolina state representative. The intricacies of law did not hold him for long. Following a profound conversion experience, he entered the Baptist ministry in 1886. The young clergyman's eloquence and fiery personality quickly earned him many admirers. A year after his ordination, a congregation in Boston lured him away from North Carolina. In 1888, he accepted a call to a church in Manhattan. Now in the nation's largest city, his renown as a minister only increased, with the likes of John D. Rockefeller among his admirers.

Part of Dixon's reputation was based on the substance of his sermons. Dixon rejected conservative theology entirely. His nondenominational "People's Church," which he founded in

²Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 67-68.

1895, was a self-titled "liberal" congregation. In addition to its liberal theology, the church and its minister were avid advocates of the Social Gospel.³ Their guiding principles included

Jesus Christ incarnated in sacrificial and redemptive love, is the only essential principle of salvation for man, nation and society.

The Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man, the Unity of Nature.

All forms and ceremonies belong to the childhood of religion. Religion has to do with this world and not the next. . . .

There is no secular world. The sphere of religion is the sphere of conscience.

The Church is not an end, but a means to an end, namely, the establishment on this earth of the Kingdom of God, a divinely just social order.

The State is the organ through which the whole people search for righteousness.

Politics is religion in action.⁴

Dixon's sermons reflected these commitments. Dixon once asked, "The state, is it sacred or secular?" He replied that "all law is divine law. Law that is not divine law is not law. The state is the supreme embodiment of law. It should be as holy as the altar of the church itself." God was an immanent presence at work in the world. Politics was the vehicle to serve God, the means to establish the "divinely just social order" in *this* life, not the next. In short, he said, "politics should be sacred."⁵ His sermons did not always dwell on abstractions like the law. In a manner described as "abrupt, militant, and uncompromising," he regularly condemned political corruption, advocated the cause of the laborer, and excoriated numerous other social ills of the day.⁶

Like other exhorters of the Social Gospel, Dixon believed religion could solve the pressing problems accompanying urbanization and immigration. Ministers in the North—and in the South, as we will see—believed the forces of modernization threatened the ideal family home. Soaring rates of alcohol abuse, exploitation of child and female labor, and a host of other factors endangered the ideal Victorian family. Dixon believed the home was tremendously important; "it is holy ground. It is a little kingdom of God in itself, where man learns the first lesson of sacrifice and love and obedience." Indeed "the home is the secret altar from which God speaks to

³ Raymond Allen Cook, *Fire from the Flint; the Amazing Careers of Thomas Dixon* (Winston-Salem, NC: J. F. Blair, 1968), 50-93.

⁴ These principles were printed in the *Free Lance*, a serialized reprint of Dixon's People's Church sermons.

man in his divinest message." ⁷ For Dixon, the home had more than a religious character, it was a religious institution.

At the center of the home stood the husband and wife, whose union constituted the basis of "progressive civilization."⁸ One of the important functions of marriage was reproducing and preserving "the race." To ensure this end, Dixon believed that marital union harmonized "elemental" world-historical forces through the unique abilities of each sex. As the primary caretaker of children, nature had left women as "the conservator of the past attainments of the race." Women had an inherently loving and patient character that allowed them to nurture a child over its lengthy maturation. This role as child bearer, child raiser, and—perhaps more importantly—as teacher of the past, required that they be inherently conservative. Not only were women conservative by nature, "femininity is a synonym for conservatism. All conservation is essentially feminine," Dixon insisted. If women represented the conservative force in society, "Man is the radical factor of society. Progress is his work." While the woman worked at conservation, the man pushed forward into new arenas by using his mental and physical force. "The power of judgment and intellectualization" characterized his mind. His "highest nature" found "its expressions in justice and the wider social relations." Through mental acuity and physical strength, men pursued this justice, moving their nation towards its "world destiny." Exalting man as the Divine instrument for progress, Dixon proclaimed masculinity "the synonym for radicalism. All radicalism is essentially masculine."⁹

Without the harmonization of these forces in stable marriages, no society could fully develop. Because of its foundational status, the minister claimed marriage "is more sacred than the church. It is more authoritative than the state. Its celebration is a social rather than an individual function, and its records are the most important human documents filed in our

⁵ *Free Lance*, November 1898, 103.

⁶ Cook, *Fire*, 81.

⁷ *Free Lance*, 103.

⁸ *Ibid.*, January 1899, 129.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 130.

archives."¹⁰ As important as it was, marriage did not supercede religion. Rather, it was foundational to religion. As marriage united "elemental" forces, the fusion of masculinity and femininity concomitantly revealed the character of God: as it was written, "God created man in his own image, male and female." A harmonious marriage thus quite literally disclosed Divine reality.

While Dixon rejected creedalism and embraced universalism, like other turn of the century liberals he believed some religious expression was superior to others. The fact that not all cultures practiced monogamous marriage thus reflected on their stage of spiritual development. If monogamous marriage provided insight into the character of God, then those cultures practicing monogamy had a deeper religious understanding than did polygamous societies. Monogamy was then a primary indicator of religiosocial progress: "Monogamic marriage is a divine gospel unfolding through the ages calling man onward and upward."¹¹ The ideal had not yet been attained, "but it is the good toward which man is struggling."¹²

As someone who did not distinguish between cultural and racial phenomena, Dixon believed monogamous marriage implied racial superiority as well as religious superiority. As he explained in a sermon on marriage, "the highest expression of racial power is found among those people whose family life has attained its noblest expression. . . . Here we reach the climax of the process of natural selection in the evolution of racial vitality. . . . It is here we touch one of the vital secrets of Anglo-Saxon world dominance. Here they possess a source of life and love that mark them as an elect people." Dixon detailed how monogamic marriage safeguarded "law and order" by offering statistics of lower rates of criminality and insanity among the married. "It is not too much to say," he added importantly, "that the ideal family is the unit of the coming Kingdom of God."¹³ The progress of civilization, the coming of the Kingdom of God, the

¹⁰ Ibid., 131.

¹¹ Ibid., 132.

¹² Ibid., 133.

¹³ Ibid.

advancement of the Social Gospel, Anglo-Saxon dominance—all this rested on the survival of the home.

Despite his concerns about pressures on the home, Dixon shared the optimism felt by most turn of the century Christians. There was broad consensus that God was using the United States as a means of uplifting the rest of the world. In Dixon's interpretation, the nation was moving "forward . . . to a new world-destiny with resistless power." Gender played an important role in Dixon's vision of progress. Male radicalism made men the primary agents of world's improvement. Though Dixon believed that a world without war lay in the not so distant future, in cases like the American Revolution, he believed progress sometimes necessitated violence. In 1898, Dixon urged his congregation to cast their gubernatorial vote for Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, hero of the Spanish-American War. Roosevelt represented the ideal candidate because among other things, "he showed himself a heroic soldier in war. . . . He declared with pride that he had done all in his power to bring about that war for liberty and humanity. And when the bugle rang its clarion blast he was found in the front ranks." Men like Roosevelt worked for struggle—even war—and overcame it, ensuring world progress. Their endangerment of themselves on behalf of others embodied sacrificial and redemptive love. In this way, violence helped usher in the Kingdom of God.¹⁴

Dixon's view of race prevented him from defining progress solely in terms of gender. He also construed the Republic's "world-destiny" in decidedly racial terms. He saw in the twentieth century "a mighty Republic of three hundred millions of people—Anglo-Saxon people with Anglo-Saxon government and Anglo-Saxon rulers."¹⁵ One of the great challenges to the Anglo-Saxon destiny was the enfranchisement of so many unqualified voters. In fact, he saw this as a major failing of American polity. The nation's "future progress depends not upon the expansion

¹⁴ Ibid., November, 1898, 89.

¹⁵ Ibid., December, 1898, 114.

of the suffrage, but upon its intelligent restriction."¹⁶ The North Carolinian could find no better example of this than the nation's dealings with African Americans. As America marched towards its destiny as an Anglo-Saxon power, Dixon believed, African Americans became irrelevant factors in American life. The coming of the Kingdom of God in the United States faced more pressing problems than rectifying imagined wrongs done to the nation's black residents. For example, how could one complain about the conditions of the "prosperous negroes of the South" when "the workingman of the North faced his own problems, deeper, more serious and far-reaching than any question of the skin or of racial origin?"¹⁷ Corporate greed, the exploitation of child labor, corrupt government—problems like these demanded attention. Managing race relations served only as a frustrating distraction.

In a sermon entitled "A Friendly Warning to the Negro," Dixon detailed how the Anglo-Saxon—specifically the southern Anglo-Saxon—had been sidetracked by the problem of race relations. His account already reflected the themes that defined his later literary and cinematic endeavors. As we will see, his argument also reflected rhetorical themes prominent in southern states like Georgia. The instigator of the South's racial problems was radical Republican Charles Sumner, whom Dixon charged with enfranchising black southerners as an act of personal vengeance against the South. This "crime of colossal proportions" had terrific results, the greatest of which was "a threat to the progress of the Republic." Their security now threatened by ignorant black politicians and illiterate black voters, southern whites were forced to ignore the pressing problems of the day to protect themselves. "The Southern people do not vote on anything except the question of the preservation of their race and civilization." Furthermore, the legality of black suffrage meant that white Southerners had to resort to political corruption to keep the African Americans out of office. They committed vote fraud, intimidated voters, and used their positions to enrich themselves because a more democratic process would have given

¹⁶ Ibid., 119.

¹⁷ Ibid., 115.

blacks political power. The only means of real salvation remained unattainable. Establishing a divinely just social order that protected the laborer, provided for the sick, educated the children, and did everything else in its power to promote the brotherhood of man was an impossibility while corrupt southern governments labored to maintain white supremacy. Black suffrage had thus paralyzed and polluted the quite literally sacred sphere of Southern politics. Until they were disenfranchised, southern African Americans threatened America's divinely ordained Anglo-Saxon destiny. Suffrage restriction represented not only a political necessity, but a sacred duty to further the Social Gospel and the Kingdom of God.¹⁸

Dixon's contributions to the coming Kingdom took a dramatic shift in February, 1899. The failure of numerous urban churches had convinced Dixon that "this disintegration of organic church life in our civic centers is merely part of a larger divine plan." God had other things in mind, for the church as a public organization "is but one of the ways through which the Kingdom of God, a divinely just social order is coming in this world." Dixon resigned his charge and embarked on a new stage of his career.¹⁹

Dixon left the pulpit to travel the Chautauqua circuit for several years, his theatrical style and smoothly-spoken discourses attracting large audiences. Despite his success, he did not gain a true sense of purpose until seeing a production of "Uncle Tom's Cabin." Enraged over the play's depiction of his home region, Dixon resolved to undo Stowe's South. In six weeks he produced *The Leopard's Spots*, the first book in a trilogy detailing the trials and travails of southern whites during Reconstruction. The novel's publication in 1903, met with startling success. Besides selling hundreds of thousands of copies in both the North and South, Dixon's novels were serialized in major dailies. In Georgia, newspapers like the *Atlanta Journal* and the *Savannah Press* made his work available to anyone who could afford a newspaper. Even young children avidly digested Dixon's writings; Margaret Mitchell once wrote Dixon of how as a child she had

¹⁸ Ibid., 118, 119.

¹⁹ Ibid., February, 1899, 154.

dramatized one of his novels, her friends donning their father's shirts to serve as Klan costumes.²⁰ Despite the author's use of a new medium, the content was hardly an aberration from his previous work. The novels this vast audience consumed represented an extension of Dixon's labor in the pulpit. The Social Gospel prophet preached on.

The Leopard's Spots follows the stories of Reverend John Durham and Charlie Gaston, residents of a small North Carolina town. The first two-thirds of the novel focus on Durham, a "dogmatic" Baptist minister who never preaches on political topics.²¹ The death of Lincoln inaugurates the rule of corrupt carpetbaggers and beastly African Americans, exacerbating the plight of a white populace already suffering from the war. The new government disenfranchises southern whites and grants suffrage to the newly freed slaves. The inversion of voting rights instigates an inversion of race relations as a whole, as African Americans translate political equality into the dissolution of all racial barriers. The freed people, whom Dixon repeatedly describes with animalistic language, now seek only to assert "negro power" over their former masters. Their use of this power has a variety of detrimental effects, including insolence, laziness, and general disorder. Of all the results of the new suffrage rights, uninhibited black lust is the most nefarious. To make this point, Dixon uses one his favorite devices: the sly, plotting "mulatto," who once educated by a northern philanthropist harbors secret desires for his benefactor's daughter. Come to aid in Reconstruction, this character now endeavors to shape the law to legitimate his romantic longings. In this case, Tim Shelby tells a black assembly that southern whites can "feel the coming power of the Negro. They fear their Desdemonas may be fascinated again by an Othello! Well, Othello's day has come at last." Attainment of the franchise has liberated his deepest desires: "if he has dreamed dreams in the past, his tongue dared not speak; the day is fast coming when he will put these dreams into deeds, not words."²²

²⁰ Margaret Mitchell Marsh to Thomas Dixon, August 15, 1936, Margaret Mitchell Marsh Papers, Hargrett Library, University of Georgia.

²¹ Thomas Dixon, *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden, 1865-1900* (New York: Doubleday Page, 1903), 39-40.

²² *Ibid.*, 90.

Now that men like Shelby have ascended to office, "government threatened to become organized crime instead of the organized virtue of the community." The whites suffer under this regime, but they do so peacefully—that is, until white women are threatened. Black troopers barge into a wedding over which Durham is presiding and kidnap the bride. The white men fire at the fleeing kidnappers, killing several of them. When they inspect the bodies, they find the young woman with one of their bullets in her throat. The girl's father, one of Durham's most pious parishioners, tells the shooters, "You've saved my little gal. I want to shake hands with you and thank you. . . . Now it's all right. She's safe in God's hands."²³ Durham reassures the man that his daughter has not died in vain; "a few things like this will be the trumpet of the God of our fathers that will call the sleeping manhood of the Anglo-Saxon race to life again."²⁴ Though Durham has endeavored to separate his duty as a minister from his duty as a citizen, ultimately he cannot. Durham soon helps organize a local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan, and takes his place among its leadership. Through selective lynching and whipping, the fighting parson and his followers reassert their power over their former slaves, though they still do not possess political power.

In *The Leopard's Spots*, the Klan has a limited effectiveness. It represents the "old way" led by a dogmatic Baptist who long struggles to connect his faith and his politics. Though it enables whites to protect their homes, when the Klan falls into the hands of unruly whites, it becomes uncontrollable and dangerous. In addition, the Klan's extralegality excludes it from legitimately controlling the government, which has dire consequences. As Durham declares repeatedly, two hostile races simply cannot share governmental power. Echoing Dixon's sermon, black political participation has caused the South to "lag behind the age," a "conspiracy against human progress." Black political power thus cuts to the heart of Dixon's progressive theology—black suffrage endangers the white home, the foundation of civilization. As Tim Shelby tells his

²³ Ibid., 127.

²⁴ Ibid., 128.

white benefactor, "politics is but a manifestation of society. Society rests on the family. The family is the unit of civilization. The right to love and wed where one loves is the badge of fellowship in the order of humanity. The man who is denied this right in any society is not a member of it."²⁵ An interracial Democracy means interracial marriage: "you cannot seek the Negro vote without asking him to your home . . . if you ask him to your house, he will break bread with you at last. And if you seat him at your table, he has the right to ask your daughter's hand in marriage."²⁶ Faced with this kind of systemic corruption, Klan vigilantism does not present a sufficient solution. The South needs a leader of a new mold, and that man is Charlie Gaston.

Gaston's sense of responsibility for his fellow southerners develops in religious terms. Unlike Durham, who clings to formal religion and takes his faith from the Bible, Gaston develops his religious sensibilities through his interaction with others, especially in his interaction with women. As in his sermons, Dixon's novel grants romance a revelatory, if not divine, power. "Every woman," he says, "is something divine to me. I think of God as a woman, not a man—a great loving Mother of all Life. If I ever saw the face of God it was in mother's face."²⁷ Charlie sees the divine face again in his lover Sallie. Though Charlie became a religious skeptic in college, his love for Sallie brings the insight that "God is love." He then prays for the first time since childhood. Charlie's love for God and his love for Sallie are indistinguishable, the beginning of the sacred harmonization that finds fruition in the home.²⁸

Even as Gaston is finding religion through romance, he is also finding it through exercising his manhood. Durham tells Charlie that God is testing him, to see what he is made of. Charlie must be a man, which means doing what a man is meant to do. Durham states: "the center of gravity of a strong man's life as a whole is . . . in justice and intellect and their

²⁵ Ibid., 396

²⁶ Ibid., 244.

²⁷ Ibid., 247.

²⁸ Ibid., 257.

expression in the wider social relations.”²⁹ Durham’s words are a reiteration of one of Dixon’s homilies on manhood. Having discovered God through his love for Sallie, Charlie now knows his responsibility as a man. He must enter politics to seek justice in the wider social sphere. He must protect the sacred space of the white home. To do so, he must end black suffrage. In the process, he becomes a holy crusader.

As he labors for black disenfranchisement, he becomes an agent of change, an agent of divinely guided progress—he embodies, in other words, masculine radicalism. This is nowhere more evident than in Gaston’s discussion with General Worth, his future father-in-law. The General guides Gaston through a tour of his modern cotton mills, all the while praising industry and the promise it presents the South. With such tremendous opportunities available, the General wonders why Gaston chooses to sully himself in politics. The young politician explains the choice for politics over business was forced by black suffrage. Before the South can prosper, it must again be under the control of whites. He believes it is comparable to the General’s practice of hiring only white laborers in his mills: “You have prospered because you have got rid of the negro.” Gaston and his allies want to achieve the same end politically: progress through disenfranchisement. This was a sacred enterprise. “To me,” Gaston proclaimed, “politics is a religion. . . . I believe the Government is the organized virtue of the community, and that politics is religion in action. . . . I believe that the State is the now the only organ through which the whole people can search for righteousness, and that the progress of the world depends more than ever on its integrity and purity.”³⁰ This almost verbatim recapitulation of the principle of the People’s Church was hardly accidental. Anglo-Saxon progress toward its divinely guided destiny and the coming Kingdom of God required racial and political purity. Gaston is thus a fictional exemplar of Dixon’s Social Gospel.

²⁹ Ibid., 308.

³⁰ Ibid., 284. Emphasis added.

Charlie gains control of North Carolina's state Democratic Party and leads them in their campaign for white supremacy. When Gaston outlines the goal of white supremacy in a dramatic speech, he declares that "we believe that God has raised up our race as he ordained Israel of old in this world-crisis to establish and maintain for weaker races, as a trust civilization, the principles of civil and religious liberty."³¹ Guaranteeing this sacred trust might continue to result in violence, but Gaston insisted whites were not at fault. Gaston explains that "so long as the Negro is a factor in our political life will violence and corruption stain our history. We cannot afford longer to play with violence. We must remove the cause."³² As in Dixon's homiletic "warning to the Negro," southern whites are simply reacting to the black threat to their divine mission. Albeit in hopes of securing long-term peace, defending this divine mission justifies both physical violence like lynching as well as political violence like disenfranchisement. After Gaston succeeds in his disenfranchisement efforts, the manly crusader is nominated as governor. In an odd parallel with the nomination of Hoke Smith to be discussed in Chapter Three, the men at the convention cry out to Gaston: "And now . . . our eyes have seen the glory of the Lord, as we heard His messenger anointed to lead His people."³³ *The Leopard's Spots* thus points the way to redemption through a complex interplay of masculinity, violence, religion, and race, each inextricably linked to the other.

The Clansman was Dixon's second installment in the Reconstruction trilogy. The novel reworks the first two-thirds of the *The Leopard's Spots*, with a few significant changes. Dixon replaces North Carolinian Charlie Gaston with South Carolinian Ben Cameron, who finds his destiny in the Klan, rather than in politics. These changes notwithstanding, *The Clansman* explores many of the same themes as does the first novel. Dixon continues to dwell on black iniquity and the challenge it presents to progress. Illiterate black voters are easily bribed with liquor, debasing the political system. The educated "mulatto" who helps run the Reconstruction

³¹ Ibid., 439.

³² Ibid., 442.

regime—in this case a man curiously named Lynch—exhorts the black mob to take the white man’s daughter if they wish.³⁴ Rape follows as a natural consequence of political equality.

The Scots-Irish citizens in Ben Cameron’s community array themselves against Lynch and his allies. Cameron and his white neighbors are described as “God-fearing” people bent on self-preservation.³⁵ Beautiful young white women embody “God’s message . . . to the world.”³⁶ Though long suffering, white men cannot abide the threat men like Lynch pose to sacred white womanhood. This threat is as indistinguishable from the issue of white supremacy as it is from the issue of progress. As one character states, “our future depends on the purity of the racial stock. The grant of the ballot to this millions of semi-savages and the riot debauchery which has followed are crimes against human progress.”³⁷ Unable to endure the multitude of outrages to southern civilization being perpetrated by the Reconstruction government, Ben organizes the Klan, their chaplain opening meetings with prayers to the “Lord of our Fathers.”³⁸ As Ben leads his crusade against the Black Death that threatens southern progress, he realizes his own manhood: “I am a revolutionist,” he declares at one point.³⁹ By emphasizing Ben’s, and thus the Klan’s, embodiment of revolutionary change, Dixon loses the sense of qualified endorsement that characterized *The Leopard’s Spots*. *The Traitor*, the trilogy’s third installment published in 1907, again emphasized the limits of the Klan. *The Clansman*, however, reads like a whole-hearted celebration of extralegal racial violence.

The play that arrived in Atlanta in late October, 1905, was an adaptation of the novel, featuring the same characters and plot. As a play, “The Clansman” added visual elements absent from the novel. The production included many spectacles unique for the time. Not only was there an elaborate stage setting, but audiences were awed by a pyrotechnic display and a scene

³³ Ibid., 448.

³⁴ Thomas Dixon, *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1905), 275.

³⁵ Ibid., 188.

³⁶ Ibid., 190.

³⁷ Ibid., 291.

³⁸ Ibid., 319.



BEN. "I RAISE THE SYMBOL OF AN UNCONQUERED RACE OF MEN!" ACT III

Ben Cameron lifts the burning cross in the Klan's hideout. Notice the live horses. *Image courtesy of Hargrett Library, University of Georgia*

that featured live horses galloping across the stage. Dixon also used visual elements to magnify the horrors of Reconstruction. The play opens with African Americans passing flasks and walking with ballots in their hands. A black preacher explains that “de Lawd call de cullud men ter come up on high.”⁴⁰ Dixon repeats similar lines throughout the play, using ironic juxtapositions of black immorality and their constant invocation of religious language.

Black immorality is contrasted by the righteousness of southern whites. Their greatest treasure is their women, who are still portrayed as possessing divine qualities. Ben hopes Elsie (“Sallie” in the novel), who appears to him like an angel, will guide him “into the ways of peace and life.”⁴¹ These women are under continuous threat. Ben’s adolescent sister Flora, receives unsolicited gifts from a lustful black man named Gus. Ben says to his father, “The Negroes are growing bolder and more insolent every hour—unless we strike, where will it end?”⁴² His question is soon answered. Gus assaults Flora, who manages to throw herself over a cliff before

³⁹ Ibid., 339.

⁴⁰ Thomas Dixon, “The Clansman,” Act 1, 1. Copies of the play are very difficult to find and may account for why few, if any, historians have analyzed the play. The Library of Congress, the Harvard Theatre Collection, and the D. W. Griffith collection at Museum of Modern Art all possess copies of the play

⁴¹ Ibid., Act 1, 20, 21.

⁴² Ibid., Act 3, 9.

he can consummate his deed. The white men can stand by no longer; Ben mobilizes the Klan of which he is Grand Dragon. They capture and try Gus. Ben orders his men to “execute this beast.” Their deed is as much a spiritual act as it is anything else. As he sends them away to hang Gus, Ben tells them “It shall be a deed of the soul, not of the flesh, an act of open revolution.”⁴³ Here again is Dixon’s spiritualized, masculine radicalism. Through long struggles, the Klan eventually reestablishes white supremacy and rescues Elsie from the clutches of Lynch.

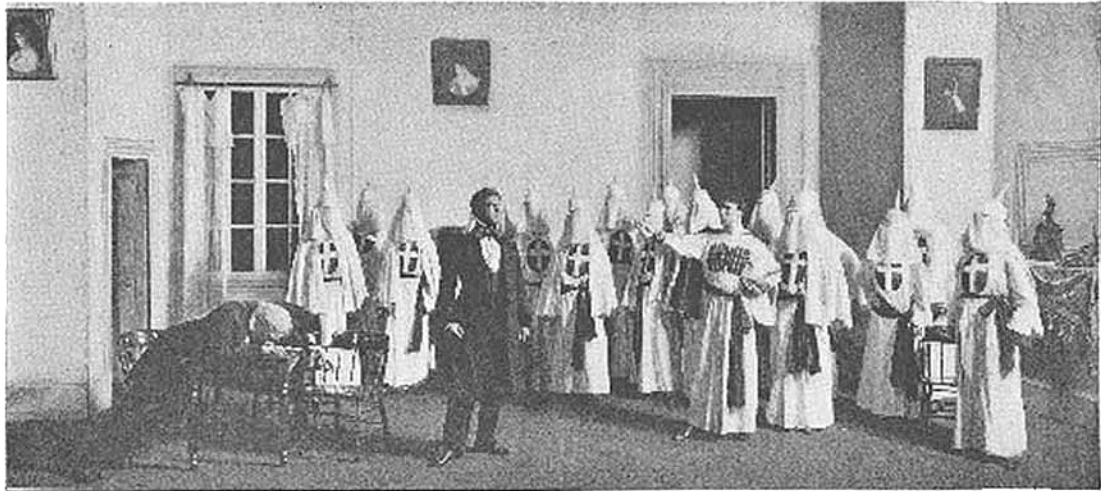
The play’s visual elements also emphasized the religious content. Following the death of Flora, the Klan appears on stage for the first time. Meeting in their subterranean hideout, they wear white costumes emblazoned with large crosses. Their meeting is opened with prayer, intoning “God of our fathers, have mercy on the innocent, the weak and the defenseless. The terror of night deepens with the darkness and the stoutest heart grows sick with fear for the red message the morning bringeth! Forgive us our sins for they are many but hide not thy face from us, oh God! Thou art our refuge.”⁴⁴ If their prayer and costumes did not speak loudly enough, they are contrasted with Gus who is brought in to reveal “the color of his soul.”⁴⁵ Under the power of hypnosis, the weak-minded Gus details the thoughts that went through his head as he planned his assault on Flora. Not only does he repeat his thoughts but he mimics his actions. He had managed to find her alone in the woods. He made a bird whistle, luring her closer to his hiding place. The stage directions describe him with “eyes gleaming, lips agape, fingers closed, body trembling, for the spring”: “She—she comin’—now—now I git her.” By this point he is overcome by bestial desire. Dixon had the actor “crawling, cat-like, suddenly springs, clawing, griping [sic], breathlessly.”⁴⁶ His animal ferocity in pursuit of his prey reinforces the godliness of the cross-wearing men surrounding him. After Ben sends him to his death, the Grand Dragon takes up a burning cross. He cries “In olden times, the Fiery Cross, extinguished in sacrificial

⁴³ Ibid., Act 3, 30.

⁴⁴ Ibid., Act 3, 27.

⁴⁵ Ibid., Act 3, 28.

⁴⁶ Ibid., Act 3, 29.



STONEMAN: ' THE KLAN ! GLORY TO GOD ! THE KLAN ! ' --ACT IV

Ben and the Klan confront Lynch. A relieved man praises God for the Klan's arrival, an exclamation reinforced by the cross-embazoned costumes. *Image courtesy of Hargrett Library, University of Georgia*

blood, called every clansman from the hills. And so to-night; here on this spot made holy ground by the sacrifice of a daughter of the South, I raise the symbol of an unconquered race of men."⁴⁷ The Klan now will brook no threat to sacred womanhood. When the cross-wearing Klan arrives to rescue a white woman from the clutches of the evil "mulatto" Lynch, the woman's father exclaims "Glory to God! The Klan!"⁴⁸ Considering the overtness of the play's religious symbolism and its performance for audiences that were sensitive to religious language, it is not difficult to take quite literally the man's thankfulness for the arrival of the God-invoking Klansmen.

When Dixon's play arrived in Atlanta in October 30, 1905, it was greeted by an expectant city. Opening day attracted "three of the largest and most representative audiences that ever attended a theatrical performance at Atlanta's Grand Theater." Many of these audiences were so large that people had to stand in order to watch the performance. According to one witness "the enthusiasm of the audience was in keeping with its size and the bursts of applause were frequent

⁴⁷ Ibid., Act 3, 30.

and deafening." They met the climax of each scene with "tense excitement," rewarding the resolution with "tremendous applause." Leading citizens like Governor Terrell rose to give the play an ovation that went on for several minutes. As the *Atlanta Journal* reported, "Mr. Dixon's performance has created interest bordering on the sensational and is being more widely discussed than any play that has been presented in the South in a long time."⁴⁹

"The Clansman" played to racial tensions already well known in Atlanta. Georgia had been the site of horrific lynchings like that in Statesboro a year before. In addition, the Democratic primary was in full swing. One of the campaign's most contested subjects was black disenfranchisement. These factors only heightened responses to Dixon's stage production. White audience members were particularly disturbed by one scene in which a black character, sitting in a white man's parlor, "dramatically exclaimed that Negro rule meant the extermination of the Aryan race and the perpetration of the nameless crime upon the wives and daughters of white men."⁵⁰ John Temple Graves—the editor of the *Atlanta News* and a nationally famous orator—observed "the white element applauds wildly every allusion to white supremacy: and up to the last gallery a fierce roar of defiant approval greets every dangerous allusion to social and political equality and to the intermarriage of the races."⁵¹ But it was not only whites who reacted strongly to the play. If the offended participants looked into the galleries above them they saw a gallery packed with black ticket holders. "As the play progressed, the white audience applauded the white heroes and hissed the villains. The black audience applauded the black characters as heroes and hissed the whites as villains."⁵² The political implications of the cries were obvious: "every suggestion of equality is met with howls of approval from the third gallery and storms of hisses from every other section of the house."⁵³

⁴⁸ Thomas Dixon, *The Clansman: An American Drama from His Two Famous Novels the Leopard's Spots and the Clansman, Presented by the Southern Amusement Co.* (New York: American News Co., 1905).

⁴⁹ *Atlanta Journal* 1 November, 1905.

⁵⁰ *Atlanta Independent* 11 November, 1905.

⁵¹ *Atlanta News* 31 October, 1905.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

As events in Atlanta demonstrated, Dixon's play was as much a religious production as it was political. "Everything that would show the superiority of the white man, spiritually, intellectually and morally was the climax of every act," a reviewer wrote in the *Independent*, Atlanta's African American newspaper.⁵⁴ In at least one performance, Dixon personally explained to the audience that his stage production presented "a picture of the darkest hour ever sent by a great God upon a great race."⁵⁵ The playbill read that though Dixon had left the ministry, his faith remained as strong today as it had ever been.⁵⁶

Anyone who missed "The Clansman's" religious purpose needed only to follow the controversy between Dixon and Len Broughton, an extremely influential minister. Broughton, now pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church, knew Dixon well. They grew up in the same North Carolina town and had been classmates at Wake Forest. Like Dixon, Broughton was committed to the social implications of Christianity. But while Dixon was renowned for his theological liberalism, Broughton was helping to impart fundamentalism to the South. Broughton had strong connections with Alexander Torrey and A.C. Dixon—both of whom edited *The Fundamentals*, the book series from which fundamentalism took its name. The latter, incidentally, was Thomas Dixon's elder brother and an internationally famous minister. Broughton had long been a critic of the theater, and thus had two reasons to rail against Dixon. And rail he did. In a weekday sermon, Broughton revealed his fundamentalist leanings when he exhorted his congregation that "the time is now on when there has got to be a separation between the church and the world—the two cannot run hand in hand." Broughton's underlying pessimism and his radical bifurcation of the church and "the world" was a significant departure from most of his contemporaries. But he felt he had good reason to be alarmed. He remarked with horror that on his way to that evening's service, he had witnessed "the great mass of people, many of them church members, who were making for the Grand Opera house." They were going to see "The Clansman," which Broughton

⁵⁴ *Atlanta Independent* 11 November, 1905.

⁵⁵ Quoted in *Atlanta News* 31 October, 1905.

believed "was born in hell and operated by the devil. It makes no difference who may be in charge of its affairs, the devil is all through that thing from top to bottom, as he is in the theatre business today."⁵⁷

After being informed of Broughton's remarks, Dixon could only reply that Broughton's views were "sheer inanity." Demonstrating a strong sense of mission, Dixon insisted that "the drama has come to be the most powerful form of artistic expression, and the theatre is coming more and more to the moral uplift of the world." Broughton's views were the result of ignorance: "he is two hundred years behind the age in which we live and don't know it." Dixon had transcended the archaic moralism of ministers like Broughton. In fact, Dixon believed that his present endeavor was far more important and significant than his work from the pulpit. "My play 'The Clansman' is the most important moral deed of my life," he told the Atlanta Journal. "Before the throne of the Eternal God, I will stand beside Dr. Broughton, or any other Baptist preacher, with that manuscript in my hand, and say to the Judge of the Earth, with reverence, with joy and pride, 'This is my work, I did it.'" He could only regard the Atlanta minister's views as "a stumbling block in the way of intelligent religion" and could only encourage his "friend" to "respect and fall in line with the progress of religion and culture."⁵⁸

Broughton was not prepared to relent. Instead, he challenged Dixon to a public debate over the morality of the theater. , Awaiting Dixon's response, Broughton extended his attack on the playwright in a November 6th sermon delivered to over 4,000 people. "The Clansman's" immorality went beyond its being a play, the minister believed. Broughton had long been an advocate of white paternalism, and he was horrified by Dixon's portrayal of southern race relations. He was also disgusted by Dixon's claims to a moral mission. The reverend denied the South needed "moral uplift;" white Southerners already knew how "to keep our men chivalrous,

⁵⁶ Dixon, *The Clansman, An American Drama*.

⁵⁷ *Atlanta Journal* 1 November, 1905.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

our women pure, and our children free from the blood of blacks." In emphasizing the Klan's fear of miscegenation, Dixon had also misrepresented history. The play threatened both African Americans and whites with harm. He begged "for a halt in all this wild talk about the negro. Let the white man go on and rule this country as he is doing it now, but for God's sake, the negro's sake, and our sake, give the negro a rest from abuse and incendiarism! Here are office seeking politicians, theatre pyrotechnics, newspapers and some preachers, all yelling and yelping, 'Nigger! Nigger! like a hound dog on the track of a rabbit. Is there any Christianity in our statesmanship? It is un-American, it is unchristian, it is unsound, and it is unsafe." Broughton's diatribe revealed the ambivalence of so many conservative white Christians. On the one hand they demanded a measure of dignified conduct to African Americans as the ideal; on the other hand they advocated a racist system that subverted the dignity they demanded.

Dixon, now in New York, had absolutely no interest in a debate. He did take time, however, to have fun at Broughton's expense. His disparagement flowed readily from his belief in a masculine, progressive religion. Atlanta did not need a debate, Dixon wrote the *Atlanta Journal*, it needed special public classes for "Broughton's kind." Stronger public education would allow the South to "outgrow the kind of religion which is but a single degree removed from negro voodism." Dixon teased that Broughton's anachronism was only a secondary reason for refusing the debate. The playwright's "real" objection was that he played "only the legitimate drama—never vaudeville or burlesque." Broughton was famous for his long, curly blonde hair, which Dixon characterized as "waving tresses a foot long." Broughton's hair presented a perfect target for Dixon's wit and sense of masculinity. "Think of a joint performance with such a reverend in the irreverent atmosphere of a theatre! If sinners should mistake him for a fairy masquerading in pantaloons the police would have to pull the whole show." Dixon's gender-bending jibes were for more than just humorous effect. Like in his earlier sermons, Dixon was connecting Broughton's conservative religion with an image of femininity. "May it not be," he asked rhetorically, "that the effeminate vanity which he [Broughton] displays in that hair is the real stumbling block in the

way of the religion of Georgia." Were Broughton ever convicted of the sinfulness of his hair, Dixon joked he would pay the bill to have it sheared—after all, his actors were in need of a dozen minstrel wigs.⁵⁹

If Dixon had his critics, he had his supporters as well. John Temple Graves, a nationally-known advocate of black colonization, admitted that “there were moments in that play . . . when, with the race question so sharply and fiercely drawn, a single hot word spoken” could have sparked a “monstrous tragedy.” After all, Dixon’s stage production contained dangerous things. It was conceivable that four hundred African American men “went home with their black bosoms throbbing the echo of every speech on the stage that pulsed the idea of social and mental equality. And out of the four hundred it is fearfully safe to say that there were more than one whose black hands in blacker dreams clutched . . . at the white bosom of Elsie.” Despite its excesses, Graves celebrated the main thrust of the play. The Klan “comes like a burst of sunshine through the midnight gloom, with its every sin forgiven in its mission and its every crime forgotten in its results.” If Dixon exaggerated the events of Reconstruction, which Graves doubted he had, so be it; it was a proper antidote to works like “Uncle Tom’s Cabin.” Even critics more ambivalent than Graves celebrated “The Clansman’s” basic truthfulness. Ernest Dallis, reviewing for the *Atlanta News*, wrote that though the play left a bad taste in his mouth, “every line rings true up to the heights. . . . ‘The Clansman’ brings home, clear and undeniably, the Negro problem in a manner which cannot be disputed.” Another reviewer for the *News* worried about the play’s impact on its black audience, fearing it would make “the mean Negro . . . more insolent.” At the same time, he recounted the play’s ability to recall to him all the emotions he had experienced during Reconstruction.⁶⁰

Thus despite the extremities of Dixon’s portrayal, many whites found that his work struck at fundamental truths about southern race relations. While numerous factors contributed to this

⁵⁹ *Atlanta Journal* 6 November, 1905.

⁶⁰ *Atlanta News* 31 October, 1905.

acceptance, one important element was Dixon's use of religious rhetoric to frame and seemingly to justify racial violence. White Georgians had a long tradition of justifying lynching as a sacred duty. To understand this rhetoric, we now turn to events in Statesboro.

CHAPTER 2

A "CARNIVAL OF HELL": STATESBORO'S CATO-REED LYNCHING, 1904

There was little doubt that Will Cato and Paul Reed would die that day, though no one who crowded around the courthouse knew how gruesome that death would be. It was August 16th, 1904, the day of Reed's trial.¹ Based on Cato's trial, which took only one day, Reed's conviction could be expected quickly. The men in the crowd had known that it would be hot, but that did not stop them from showing up. Some said there were 1,500 people in the crowd, others reported 5,000; it was difficult to tell the exact number, but it was obvious that the folks swelling Statesboro's population of 2,500 came from miles around.² Despite the varying backgrounds and ages of those who gathered that day, there was widespread agreement that "in the criminal annals of the state, nothing has exceeded in barbarity the awful crime" for which Cato and Reed were charged.³ Murder was not unknown in Bulloch County, but never in recent memory had an entire household been slaughtered as had occurred on Thursday, July 28th. Henry and Claudia Hodges, along with their three small children had been murdered and their home set aflame. There were also claims that Claudia and her daughter Kittie had been victims of another crime. As they waited for the trial to end, the crowd of predominantly white men talked, some perhaps discussing the upcoming cotton harvest or swapping jokes with the state militia who had been called in to prevent a lynching; but some were almost certainly talking about what they were going to do that afternoon and why it had to be done—they were charged, it must have seemed, with a sacred purpose.

¹ The best general treatments of the Statesboro lynching are Charlton Moseley and Frederick Brogdon, "A Lynching At Statesboro: The Story of Paul Reed and Will Cato," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, LXV (Summer 1981): 104-118, and John Douglas Smith, *Statesboro Blues* (M.A. thesis, University of Virginia, 1987).

² *Savannah Morning News* 16 August, 1904.

The alleged criminals had been quickly identified. On August 2, 1904, the *Statesboro News* declared that "the web that fixes the guilt of the fiends who committed the awful crime at the [sic] home of Mr. Henry Hodges . . . is fast weaving itself around the heads of the two Negroes, Paul Reed and Will Catoe [sic]."⁴ Simply identifying the murderers did not, however, reveal the meaning of the Hodges murders. The web of guilt was connected to another web of the *News*' own making. But this web was an interpretive one through which the Hodges murders could be understood. The *Statesboro News*, together with newspapers throughout the region, endeavored to create a coherent, causal sequence of events. In doing so they gave meaning to the Hodges' deaths.

Although not all of the interpretations agreed, they did demonstrate common understandings of the murders. One of the most common descriptions of the murders utilized demonic language, calling Cato and Reed "demons" and "devils." In doing so, white Georgians put the events within a religious worldview. Not unlike Thomas Dixon, they arrayed these black demonic forces against the sanctity of the white home. Southern men believed it was their responsibility to protect their households. The future of the community could not be secured unless the black threat was violently repressed. In another parallel to Dixon and a foreshadowing of the Atlanta Riot, interpreters of the murders in Statesboro also saw broad political implications in the attack. Politics, masculinity, race, and religion thus all conjoined at the lynching of Cato and Reed.

On July 28th, 1904, neighbors awoke to see smoke pouring from the direction of Henry Hodges' farm. When they approached to investigate, they discovered the family house had been burned to the ground. A reporter who arrived at the scene as the ruins still smoldered stated that while "the whole family had been wiped out of existence, not one left to tell the tale, none were

³ *Statesboro News* 2 August, 1904.

⁴ *Ibid.*

needed. The awful scene told its own tale."⁵ It had all started on a Thursday night on Henry Hodges' family farm. Piecing together a variety of physical evidence, the reporter wrote that Hodges had been attacked in the lane heading to his house. He had somehow managed to escape his attackers' first assault, breaking toward his house. But his attackers would not be shaken; they "pursued" him and caught him near his front gate. The ferocity of the attack was still evident as locals flocked to the remains of his house: pools of blood clotted in soil still saturated from the storm that had come through the previous night; a rail fence had been broken; footprints ran helter-skelter through the yard. Thirty yards from his front door Hodges made his last stand, his skull finally shattered by an axe blow.⁶

Within a few days of the murder, it was widely believed that the assailants had hoped to rob the Hodges of several hundred dollars they thought hidden on the property. When investigators discovered six dollars in Hodges' wallet, some whites began to fear that larceny had not been the only crime committed in the attack. Here the crime story was narrated by a lamp "still sitting on the front gate post . . . left there to tell its fair share of the tale."⁷ That tale was of the most "unholy" sort. Claudia Hodges, responding to the sounds of her struggling husband, was said to have brought the lamp out to see what the matter was. Perhaps witnessing the "fiends" crush the skull of her husband, she left the lamp and fled. While the two murderers (at this point the story only mentions two sets of footprints) had merely "pursued" Mr. Hodges, "signs of two bloody hands" near the front gate led investigators to the conclusion that the murderers "*leaped* over the fence after Mrs. Hodges"—an indication, perhaps, that the murderers had been overcome by lust, leaping with wicked desire after the defenseless Mrs. Hodges.⁸ Despite the fact that the family's bodies

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid. Italics added. The *Savannah Press* 31 July, 1904, initially reported that the bloody handprints testified only to the struggle that had taken place between Hodges and his assailants. The *Swainsboro Forest-Blade* 4, August 1904 maintained that after Henry Hodges was killed, Kittie had been assaulted first, then her mother.



Little Kittie Hodges, who offered Cato and Reed five cents, all she had, for her life and was refused.
Copyright © 1944 by T. M. Bennett

A postcard bearing a photograph of Kittie Hodges. *Image courtesy of James Allen*

had been burned almost beyond recognition, many believed the six dollars and bloody prints spoke loudly enough; Mrs. Hodges, if not also her daughter Kittie, had been the victim of that unspeakable crime.⁹

After having his (their?) way, the murderer(s) dispatched the wife. Based on clumps of hair found stuck to the bottom of a discarded and bloodied shoe near the Hodges' home, "it would seem that the fiend had stamped out her brains with the heel of his shoe."¹⁰ How this happened while she was sitting up—the position in which the *News* guessed her death had come—the paper did not say. Nor did it explain how they were certain of Mrs. Hodges' death position when her body had been moved inside, placed with the bodies of her husband and their three children. The murderous "devils" had then set the house ablaze in hope that the bodies would be consumed and

⁹ The *Savannah Press* was one of the only papers to maintain that there was no sign of assault on the women. See 1 August, 1904.

¹⁰ *Statesboro News* 2 August, 1904.

all evidence of their wickedness obliterated.¹¹ The two youngest children, Harmon, age two, and six-month old Talmadge, "were burned beyond recognition, only small lumps of burning flesh marked their remains."¹² The flames had so consumed their bodies that the whole family was buried in one coffin.

For readers, the charred bodies must have loudly testified to the diabolical nature of the crime, even if the account in the *News* left many details unexplained. Yet the story of the crime continued to take shape—the scene had only "told" so much. Investigators searched the home of Paul Reed, an African American employee of a local turpentine camp and alleged owner of the bloodied shoe. There they discovered more damning evidence: bloodstained pants. The bloodied trousers still did not necessarily connect Reed to the crime. Instead, it was Reed's wife's testimony that helped shape the "demonic" character of the story behind the Hodge's murder. Immediately after discovering the pants on Saturday, July 30th, investigators arrested seventeen-year-old Harriet Reed. She told investigators that her husband and Will Cato had hoped to kill Hodges and then steal \$300 they believed hidden near his house.¹³ On Thursday the 28th, they went to kill him (with perhaps two or three others, she thought). They returned in about one and a half hours to the Reed home where Reed admitted having committed a terrible crime. But their horrific deed was not yet complete: they "remembered that the little girl had escaped and would tell who they were. They returned to the house and found her hid behind a trunk." The woman told investigators that the men dragged the girl out, killed her, and then fired the house.¹⁴ Harriet Reed's account of nine-year-old Kittie Hodges' murder became the most notorious anecdote from the crime story. Upon discovery, Kittie reportedly offered a nickel in exchange for her life. Unmoved, the "devils" had smashed-in her skull.¹⁵ The utter cruelty and total pointlessness of the deed was emphasized by the failure of the men to find any money in the house. The murder

¹¹ The August 5 edition of the *Statesboro News* reported that Mrs. Hodges died in the house.

¹² *Statesboro News* 2 August, 1904.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.* The story later changed: the young girl was reported to have been killed in their first trip. *Statesboro News* 5 August, 1904.

stories seemed to say that the perpetrators had only the wickedness of their acts, their bloodguilt, to take away with them.

The race of the two men only compounded the horror of the crimes. When the *Statesboro News* described the act as “the blackest deed that ever blackened the fair name of our county,” more than a few readers must have seen the double meaning.¹⁶ White Georgians took it as common knowledge that Negroes had a baser nature than the white man. By the late nineteenth century, most southern whites were convinced that African Americans, now denied the “civilizing” influences of slavery, were retrogressing into savagery. As we saw in Dixon’s work, black criminals, particularly black rapists, were the source of growing fears.¹⁷ Ray Stannard Baker, a northern journalist who wrote of the Statesboro lynching, echoed this assessment when he asserted that “nearly all of the crimes committed by negroes are marked with an almost animal-like ferocity. . . . For the moment, under stress of passion, he [the Negro] seems to revert wholly to savagery.”¹⁸

Near the end of the nineteenth century, religious explanations of racial difference had gained an appeal that had been largely lost after the Civil War. While most southerners maintained the traditional understanding that Africans were the descendents of Ham, more radical interpreters revived the pre-Adamite argument, claiming that God had created Africans with the animals.¹⁹ In a small section entitled “Random Thoughts,” *Atlanta News* editor John Temple Graves, for example, asked “If Cain’s wife, whom he found in the land of Nod, was not a Negro of prehistoric creation, to what race did she belong?” The Biblical record simply could not account anything other than pre-Adamite creation. “The claim of the negro that he descended from Ham,” and thus the correlative claim of being created in the image of God, “is too silly for

¹⁵ *Savannah Press* 1 August, 1904.

¹⁶ *Statesboro News* 2 August, 1904.

¹⁷ Brundage, *Lynching in the New South*, 53.

¹⁸ Ray Stannard Baker, “What Is a Lynching? A study of Mob Justice, South and North,” *McClure’s Magazine*, 307.

¹⁹ George M. Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 276-277.

intelligent people to waste time investigating.”²⁰ Even if most southerners accepted the Hamitic origins of Africans, many believed that God had set the Anglo-Saxon over the nonwhite races for a reason. As previously explored, Thomas Dixon had a meticulously developed theology connecting ideas of white racial superiority with the mark of God’s favor. While few Georgians would have agreed with all the details of his theology of race, many would have concurred with its general point. A man identified as “one of the first men professionally and socially in Georgia” drew on biblical language as he wrote, “‘*As for me and my house*’ we shall stand for the white man as the ruler of the white man’s country.” He signed his letter to the editor simply as “Aryan.”²¹ Whether intentionally or not, the author conflated religious devotion with white supremacy. While a few readers probably balked at what seemed an idolatrous equation of religion and race, they likely quarreled with the extremity of his argument rather than with its general spirit. To many white Georgians it seemed clear that blacks represented a menace to Christian civilization.

That menace had taken a particularly disturbing form on that stormy July night. The killing of a well-known white landowner would have been enough to arouse the wrath of whites. Henry Hodges was a well respected member of the community. He was also a prosperous farmer who owned his land outright. In this respect he was what many South Georgians aspired to become. Like much of South Georgia, Bulloch County had been sparsely populated into the late nineteenth century. Rising populations and economic hardship had led many upcountry Georgians to the southern end of their state, where there was abundant land available for cultivation. In 1880, Bulloch County had approximately 8,000 residents; by 1900, Bulloch’s inhabitants numbered over 21,000, a twenty year growth rate of 160 percent. Statesboro, the county seat, doubled in size between 1900 and 1910. Most immigrants, however, were taking

²⁰ *Atlanta News* 29 August, 1904. Graves was a Presbyterian elder who a year earlier had delivered a controversial convocation speech at the University of Chicago on the need for racial separation. There he had boldly detailed the divine origins of race prejudice, which he considered “a pointing of Providence.” *Atlanta Journal* 3 September, 1903.

²¹ *Atlanta News* 17 August, 1904. Italics added.

residence on farms: the number of farms grew from 2,229 to 3,621 in the first decade of the twentieth century. Hodges' success must have represented the very end for which so many Bulloch County men labored. The attack on the Hodges home was thus an attack on the embodiment of the yeoman ideal that was so central to southern agrarianism.²²

The normal social strain accompanying such rapid growth was surely exacerbated by racism, as whites had to compete against African Americans who came to the region for the same reasons. The African American population was 9,000 in 1900, nearly four times the 2,256 recorded in 1880. Many of them came as agricultural laborers, though others were involved in the turpentine industry which exploited the rich pine forests in southern Georgia. Turpentine workers tended especially to be a rough lot: they were typically single young men of little means and education who were given to heavy drinking and carousing. Few southern whites, however, distinguished the workers' difficult situation from their race. John Temple Graves voiced the general conviction that "It is true that the negroes in the turpentine camps of south Georgia are in the main a lot of irresponsibly and half-savage vagabonds, apparently hopeless to the redeeming efforts of civilization and their presence makes a continual menace and threat."²³

As Fitzhugh Brundage points out, racial violence occurred most often in those Georgia counties experiencing the most rapid growth. Not only were black and white men competing for resources, but the "place" of both were thrown into question.²⁴ African Americans who were well-known within a community were far less likely to be attacked than those with few local connections. Some of this was simply fear of the unknown: the *Statesboro News* lamented the rapid influx of black immigrants, which meant "now the most brutal Negro murderer from a distant state can settle in a community, and dip turpentine or work on a farm, and no question asked."²⁵ As recent immigrants who had come to work in the turpentine camps, Cato and Reed

²² "Historical, Demographic, Economic, and Social Data: The United States, 1790-1970." Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, 1977.

²³ *Atlanta News* quoted in the *Statesboro News* 5 August, 1904.

²⁴ Brundage, 118.

²⁵ *Statesboro News* 2 August, 1904.

were outsiders who had no reputation or benefactors to help them if they were in fact innocent. Cato and Reed and the crime of which they were accused thus represented an assault on the way of life and future aspirations of an unsettled white population.

The attack was all the more significant because it had centered on the home and it allegedly involved the "unspeakable crime." The death of Claudia Hodges and the three children struck at the core of white southern values. This was in no small part because many Georgians shared Dixon's belief in the sacred character of the home. This was the culmination of an age of sentimentality and romanticism; marriage, child-rearing, and family life were widely understood as not simply divinely ordained, but as religious institutions. According to Ted Ownby, many late nineteenth and early twentieth century evangelicals believed that "religion and affectionate relations between spouses and between parents and children went hand in hand, and the home, as much as the church, became the house of God."²⁶ Ministers and evangelists commonly communicated the Gospel in terms of family metaphors. Heaven, for example, was often described as a place that looked astonishingly similar to an ideal middle-class home.²⁷ A writer for the *Christian Index*, the publication of Georgia's Baptist Association, approved the assertion that "a well regulated home . . . is a millennium on a small scale."²⁸ In addition, children were the subjects of special sentimentality, a fact that suggests the repugnance with which the murder of the Hodges children must have been greeted.²⁹

Much as Dixon did in his sermons and novels, Georgians often described the southern home as the basic social unit. According to the *Sparta Ishmaelite*, the family "is at the foundation of all our civil polity, and the family is at the base of the town, as the town is at the base of the State." The article added importantly that "so long as the family relation is kept pure and

²⁶ Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 4.

²⁷ Paul Harvey, *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities Among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 152; Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 7-10.

²⁸ *Christian Index* 16 March, 1905.

²⁹ Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 185.

undefiled among any people, . . . so long will that people possess shields and [sic] safeguards against enemies in having homes and altar fires worth fighting for.”³⁰ A man's ability to protect and care for his family thus had a sacred character that was taken quite seriously. The attack on the Hodges's home was, then, an assault on the religious and civil foundations of southern society. Violence in defense of the home was a duty to civilization and a duty to God.

According to the most prominent murder narratives, the criminals in this case had not only violently penetrated the sanctity of the home, they had also violated the purity of its female inhabitants. The accusation of rape was apparently based solely on the belief that black men, filled with wicked passion and demonic rage, could do nothing other than assault a white woman and her daughters. These stories confirmed anxieties long present in the southeastern county of Bulloch. “You don't know and you can't know,” a Georgian said not long after the summer's events, “what it means down here to live in constant fear lest your wife or daughter be attacked on the road, or even in her home. Many women in the city of Statesboro dare not go into their back yards after dark. Every white planter knows that there is always danger for his daughters to visit even the nearest neighbor, or for his wife to go to church without a man to protect her.”³¹ More than a few local whites probably echoed this assessment.

The fear of sexual assault by black men on white women was particularly troubling to southern men because sexual relations between black men and white women, consensual or not, implied a racial equality that threatened white status in the South. As Jacquelyn Hall has pointed out, “a black man did not literally have to attempt sexual assault for whites to perceive some transgression of caste mores as a sexual threat. White women were the forbidden fruit, the untouchable property, the ultimate symbol of white male power. To break the racial rules was to conjure up an image of black over white, of a world turned upside down.”³² The alleged rape

³⁰ *Sparta Ishmaelite* 29 July, 1904; also *Ibid.* 14 August, 1904.

³¹ Quoted in Baker, “What Is a Lynching?,” 302-303.

³² Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, “The Mind that Burns in Each Body,” *Southern Exposure*, Nov./Dec. 1984, 64. See also Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), especially 130-157.

reinforced the perception that Cato and Reed and attacked the yeoman ideal that Hodges represented. Southern Christianity composed an important element in this belief. Women were thought to possess a more religious nature than men, an association that did much to sacralize their characterization as virtuous and pure.³³ As religious beliefs shaped notions of gender, the exaltation of “pure” and pious white womanhood reinforced the racial inferiority of African Americans and endowed the specter of black on white rape with a distinctly sacrilegious character. The murder of the Hodges family was thus more than an assault on race or class status. Many understood, even if only tacitly, the murders as a horror of cosmic significance.

The murder and lynching accounts often spelled out this significance. The Hodges murders revealed that "human demons are abroad in the land who value not the lives of people when it is necessary for the commission of rape or robbery."³⁴ By employing creatures bent on rape and robbery as wage laborers and tenant farmers, good Christian men like Hodges (who had been clerk at Friendship Baptist Church), were nursing "human vampires" and "demons for the destruction of precious lives and happy homes."³⁵ Only the presence of such creatures could explain what had happened to the Hodges. The *Atlanta Journal* averred that “human beings with immortal souls, possessed of ordinary sanity, are not equal to it. It requires the lowest order of brute; the devilish ingenuity of a fiend, to concoct and commit such a crime.”³⁶ Neither the schoolhouse nor the church, nor any form of “moral suasion” could reach the Catos and the Reeds. Only fear, the editor of the *Macon Telegraph* asserted, could appeal to them.³⁷

It would be a mistake to follow traditional historiography and assume that religious language—if not religion itself—is mere window dressing for the "real" motives of historical agents. By calling Cato and Reed "demons" and "devils," white Georgians like the writer for the

³³ Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 11-12; Gail Bederman, "'The Women Have Had Charge of the Church Work Long Enough': The Men and Religion Forward Movement of 1911-1912 and the Masculinization of Middle-Class Protestantism," *American Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (Sept. 1989): 435-440.

³⁴ *Statesboro News* 2 August, 1904.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Atlanta Journal* 17 August, 1904.

³⁷ *Macon Telegraph* 19 August, 1904.

Statesboro News put the Hodges' murder within a larger cultural framework, a framework that was, at least in part, defined by the language of evangelical Protestantism. By labeling the murderers "demons," writers gave meaning and significance to the Hodges' deaths. The perpetrators were not simply cruel, but unhuman, transfigured into "evil incarnate."³⁸ The race of the accused was no doubt critical to the invocation of demonic imagery, but the use of religious rhetoric meant that the struggle was not simply racial.³⁹ Instead, the murders were conceived as part of a spiritual struggle against the powers of "darkness."

The scope of this struggle was not immediately apparent. One of the major obstacles investigators faced was simply figuring out who had been involved in the murders. Despite confidence in the story "told" by the murder scene, the cast of characters was in constant flux. Thirteen African American Bulloch county residents were taken into custody within days of the murders.⁴⁰ Only two of them, Will Cato and Paul Reed, could be tied even circumstantially to the crime. All of the available evidence, it seemed, pointed to them.

Paul Reed's comments shortly after his arrest, however, added a new dimension to the case. Making what were the first of many counter accusations, he accused Handy Bell of carrying out the murders and claimed to have served merely as a lookout. Many whites believed his implication of Bell, though there was no evidence with which to indict him. Aside from lingering suspicions about Bell, it was generally believed that Cato and Reed were solely responsible for the murders.⁴¹ However, Bulloch County Sheriff J. Z. Kendricks, a long time friend of Henry Hodges, maintained that while Cato and Reed had probably been the ones who carried out the "fiendish" deeds, their actions had been part of a plot laid by "a number of negroes."⁴²

³⁸ *Statesboro News* 19 August, 1904.

³⁹ See Winthrop D. Jordan, *The White Man's Burden: Historical Origins of Racism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 7-13.

⁴⁰ *Savannah Press* 30 July, 1904.

⁴¹ *Statesboro News* 5 August, 1904.

⁴² *Savannah Morning News* 1 August, 1904.

Few guessed the complex twist this plot would take. Reed's frequently implicated others, and the investigators' readiness to believe him (despite an early caveat that his finger pointing might be a ruse to shift blame), ultimately magnified the significance of the murders. On July 31st, Reed and Cato had to be transferred to Savannah because officials feared a lynching. Then on Tuesday, August 9th, three Bulloch County men went to Savannah, where they believed Reed was prepared to confess. However, when the investigators arrived and began to question Reed, he was not immediately forthcoming.⁴³ Slowly he began to tell them a story of a well-organized conspiracy. Reed explained that the robbery had been hatched in an Odd Fellow lodge, a popular African-American fraternal organization. The conspirators called themselves the "before day club" and were led by two ministers, Tolbert and Gaines.⁴⁴ The precise nature of this conspiracy was not immediately disclosed; as Reed was describing how he and Cato had carried out their work at the Hodges' home, John E. Myrick, then Reed's counsel, interrupted the interview.⁴⁵ The interview ended, but talk of "Before Day Clubs" had only begun.

It is not clear whether Reed came up with the story independently or if he simply hoped to escape incrimination for murder by capitalizing on Kendricks' insistence that there had been a larger plot. Regardless of its origins, by Monday, August 15th, the day of Cato's trial, the Before Day Club was a widely accepted element of the story. Rev. Gaines was believed to be the head of this society "which has for its object the avenging of real or imaginary wrongs at the hands of whites."⁴⁶ Members of the group reportedly named those who had wronged them; then each member placed his name in a hat. Anyone whose name was drawn had to kill his offender. The attack on the Hodges' home gave whites ample evidence to believe that this "avenging" went beyond simple murder to shocking brutality.

⁴³ *Statesboro News* 12 August, 1904.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* The Before Day Club was not capitalized in its first newspaper appearance.

⁴⁵ Myrick never appeared at the trial. Several papers reported that a group of men waiting at the Statesboro train station asked each departing passenger if he were John Myrick. While the papers claimed this was the action of a few, it was perhaps enough to intimidate the lawyer sufficiently that if he made the trip, he decided not to disembark.

⁴⁶ *Savannah Morning News* 15 August, 1904.

The first of the two trials began on August 15th. In a climate of growing fear, Judge Alexander F. Daley convened *Georgia v Will Cato*. Lynching had been a constant threat following the identification of two likely suspects. However, the press and regional elites had, at least publicly, encouraged adherence to the legal system. Rev. Harmon Hodges, Henry's brother who was a minister in Texas, opened the trial with a lengthy prayer. Observers, standing "in reverent attention," were obviously moved by the words of this man still wrestling with the death of his brother's family. In the presence of a crowd that filled the courthouse to overflowing, Hodges prayed earnestly to "the higher court" that "the spirit of sound-mindedness, and the true conception of unbiased judgment and that the sovereign law of the state might take due course in the affair that had torn the hearts of many." He asked that they not surrender to their grief and rage, but instead that the community might find God-given strength and courage. Hodges ended his prayer by pleading "that there might be no violence to the cause of righteousness." The minister then addressed the crowd directly, telling them that "we should uphold the majesty of the law and resort to no violence that will drag it to the level of crime." He asserted his "confidence in Bulloch's manhood," a phrase that affirmed their "cool judgment," "level-headedness," and self-restraint. "Thank God," he said, "there has been nothing of violence here."⁴⁷ Manhood had—for the moment—revealed itself as Christian self-control.⁴⁸

Despite the fact that the accused were being tried separately, most of the testimony in the Cato case was directed at Paul Reed. There was little that directly implicated Will Cato. Harriet Reed's testimony, as it had earlier, established the strongest link between Cato and her husband. Cato took the stand, though he was terribly distraught and at one point began crying.⁴⁹ He said that he had visited Paul Reed on the night of the murders. As they were parting company, three men approached and conversed quietly with Reed. The four men asked Cato to help rob the

⁴⁷ *Savannah Morning News* 16 August, 1904; quoted in *ibid*.

⁴⁸ For more on Christian conceptions of manhood, see Harvey, *Redeeming the South*, especially 164-166; and Bederman, "The Women Have Had Charge."

⁴⁹ *Savannah Morning News* 16 August, 1904.

Hodges' home, but he had refused and then headed home. He admitted he rejoined them later on, but maintained that he had no part in their crime. The jury, however, was not convinced. At 7:18 pm, after deliberating for only eight minutes, the jury returned a verdict of guilty. Judge Daley withheld sentence and ordered the court to reconvene for Reed's trial at 8:30 am the following day.⁵⁰

On Tuesday, August 16th, the state made its case against Paul Reed. The bloodied pants and shoes, as well as an assortment of other physical evidence were presented to the court. Cato appeared on the stand and repeated his testimony from the day before. Reed also testified, offering yet another version of his Before Day Club story. He claimed he had gone to a club meeting at the Outland Church several months before the Hodges robbery. The group intended to "make money for Preacher Gaines and Talbot [Tolbert?]."⁵¹ The *Savannah Morning News* reported that "a murmur of anger from the spectators greeted Reed's statement as to the complicity of the Negro preachers and their leadership in the 'Before Day Clubs.'"⁵² As he continued, he again implicated Handy Bell, Will Rainey, and Will Cato, as well as new accessories: "Big John" Haws and someone simply called "Kid."⁵³ He maintained that he had only served as a lookout, adding that when he heard Mrs. Hodges "squall" he ran home.⁵⁴ Reed failed to persuade the jury. Like Cato, he was convicted in short order. Will Cato and Paul Reed were each sentenced to "be hung by the neck until you are dead" on September 9th. Judge Daley also ordered that "this execution be held in private and be witnessed only by such relatives and friends of the defendant as he may desire to have present."⁵⁵

Judge Daley and Captain Robert M. Hitch, commander of a small state militia detachment called in to protect the trial, decided that Cato and Reed should be sent to Savannah to prevent the possibility of public unrest. Despite reports that the crowd planned to lynch the

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Quoted in *Savannah Morning News* 17 August, 1904.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid. *Atlanta News* 17 August, 1904.

⁵⁴ Quoted in *Savannah Morning News* 17 August, 1904.

men after the trial, Daley and Hitch believed that there was no longer need to worry about a lynching: in part, no doubt, because lynchings typically preceded trials and rarely followed them. It was also reassuring that the crowd was significantly smaller on Tuesday than it had been for Cato's trial and the morning had passed without incident.⁵⁶

According to the newspapers, what happened next caught everyone by surprise. After the conclusion of the trial the crowd did not diminish, many men remaining in the courthouse halls, others crowding the front and back entries. The news that the prisoners were to be moved had leaked and there was a loud demand for a public execution. The *Statesboro News* had loudly proclaimed on August 5, that the criminals should be executed publicly.

We hope that when the bloody *devils* who did the terrible crime on Mr. Henry R. Hodges and family are hung, as they must and shall be done, that Judge Daly [sic] will take into consideration the great enormity of this diabolical crime, the blackest that the civilized world has ever seen, that he will sentence them to be executed in public. . . . The people not only are anxious to know that these murderers are hanged high and hanged until they kick out their bloody and criminal existence between heaven and earth, but they want to see the thing done. While all this will not restore one of the unfortunate victims again, yet it will be at least of some satisfaction to an outraged people, to see the thing happen. Private hangings should be done away with, let the example be taught in the open air.⁵⁷

The editor was uncertain how the people could be able to control themselves after such horror, but the public execution of the "bloody devils" would go along way toward "appeasing and quieting" the people's wrath. The citizens of southeastern Georgia would not be denied "satisfaction."⁵⁸

If there remained any reluctance on the part of the crowd, they fully committed themselves to lynching after hearing Reed's description of the "colored mafia" (i.e. the Before Day Club).⁵⁹ Before the Civil War, their ancestors had perceived slave insurrection as a constant threat; afterward it was the specter of "Negro domination," race riots, and physical assault. In a letter to the *Atlanta News* published about a week after the lynching, Macon resident James

⁵⁵ *Georgia v Paul Reed, Georgia v Will Cato*, Minutes, Bulloch Superior Court, August Special Term, 1904.

⁵⁶ *Savannah Morning News* 16 August, 1904.

⁵⁷ *Statesboro News* 5 August, 1904. Italics added.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Savannah Morning News* 17 August, 1904.

Callaway wrote that the Before Day Clubs had formed for "massacre and rapine and robbery" in the exact "manner of the John Brown clubs of 1859 and 1860."⁶⁰ John Temple Graves so heartily agreed that he included a lengthy editorial affirming the contemporary existence of John Brown clubs. In further testimony to this analogy's seeming insight, he and Callaway agreed that "diabolical" African American newspapers from the North and elsewhere were encouraging their readers to "organize and answer in bloodshed every imaginary persecution which the southern people impose upon them as a race."⁶¹ Not surprisingly, the editor suggested a remedy that recalled his antebellum forbearers: "the papers which print appeals like these ought to be abolished by law or burned by an outraged citizenship."⁶² Though by October the papers had to admit that there were no Before Day Clubs, this admission would come too late to save Cato and Reed.⁶³

Excluded from the execution and fueled by fear of a black uprising, the men who surrounded the courthouse grew increasingly aggressive, at one point trying to use ladders to reach the courtroom. Judge Daley and Rev. Hodges both tried to calm the crowd. To the appeals of the latter, someone cried out, "We don't want religion, we want blood!"⁶⁴ Although many white Georgians did see lynching as a religious duty, the man's response shows that not everyone articulated racial violence in religious terms and that no single ideology motivated the lynch mob. However, in an evangelical culture like turn of the century Georgia, those who did not consider themselves "Christian" were intimately familiar with religious idioms, including those used to justify violence. William Faulkner's experience of southern Christianity was likely typical: "My life was passed, my childhood, in a very small Mississippi town and that was part of my background. I grew up with that. I assimilated that, took that in without even knowing. It's just there. It has nothing to do with how much of it I might believe or disbelieve—it's just there."

⁶⁰ *Atlanta News* 22 August, 1904.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Swainsboro Forest-Blade* 15, 22 September, 1904; *Statesboro News* 4 October, 1904. See also "The Before Day Bogie," *Voice of the Negro* 1, no. 11 (Nov. 1903): 563-564.

Even those who had little use for religion may have even “believed”—the demarcation of a Christian in the early twentieth century had more to do with personal behavior and lifestyle than with subscription to certain propositions about God. Evangelists like the nationally famous Georgian Sam Jones spent their time encouraging people to “quit your meanness” and “get right with God” rather than trying to overcome objections to the veracity of the scriptures or the possibility of miracles. A man who desired only “blood” thus still likely found some legitimation in calls for the destruction of devils whether he was interested in religion or not.⁶⁵

As men jeered, joked, and yelled at the militia, a crowd member wrested a gun from a young soldier. It was unloaded. Realizing that the guards (more than a few of whom saw familiar faces in the crowd) posed no real threat, mob members quickly overwhelmed the soldiers. According to Captain Hitch, he was “betrayed by the sheriff’s bailiff or deputy and seized and thrown down the stairs and out of the [courthouse] front door.”⁶⁶ There is no record as to the immediate fate of Hodges and Daley, though it is clear that they were unharmed. Several witnesses claimed Sheriff Kendricks personally led the mob to the prisoners’ room, unlocked the door, and pointed the two men out.⁶⁷

A group estimated at 500 to 1,500 men (though Hitch said there were as many as 2,500) marched Cato and Reed through the streets of Statesboro and out of town.⁶⁸ The leaders of the mob originally intended to execute the two men at the Hodges’ farm, but the oppressive August heat dissuaded them. They stopped two miles outside of town. Though several men suggested a hanging, a cry of “Burn them!” went up through the crowd. Some accounts averred that the decision was left to Ruthie Moore, Henry Hodges’ mother. Her short reply was “Burn them.”⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Quoted in Baker, “What Is a Lynching?,” 306.

⁶⁵ Quoted in *Atlanta News* 18 August, 1904; quoted in Susan Ketchin, *Christ-Haunted Landscape: Faith and Doubt in Southern Fiction* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), xiii. On Jones see Kathleen Minnix, *Laughter in the Amen Corner: The Life of Evangelist Sam Jones* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* 18 August, 1904. Kendricks denied collusion with the mob. See *Atlanta News* 19 August, 1904.

⁶⁸ *Atlanta News* 17 August, 1904; Hitch quoted in *Ibid.* 18 August, 1904; *Swainsboro Forest-Blade* 18 August, 1904.

⁶⁹ Brogdon and Moseley, “A Lynching At Statesboro,” 115.

In other reports, advocates of a hanging pressed their case for a more "humane" death, but Cato and Reed's fiery end was ensured when someone recounted the fate of Kittie Hodges.⁷⁰

While men went to get kerosene, the condemned were given the opportunity for prayer and confession. Some objected, "claiming that no opportunity had been given the members of the Hodges family for prayer."⁷¹ The matter was finally settled and W. B. Addison agreed to lead the assembly in prayer. The supplication was "to the effect that the negroes might find forgiveness for their awful crime."⁷² Addison was a member of the Statesboro Baptist church. He worked primarily as wagoner, though he performed other important duties. In addition, he was a lay preacher involved in planting a new Baptist church. His presence in the mob, and the subsequent absence of censure from his church or the Bulloch County Baptist Conference is telling.⁷³ There is no record that Addison made any attempt to chastise the mob. His willingness to participate so prominently suggests that he had little concern about his standing as a clergyman. Assuming he was sincere in his religious beliefs, he likely saw no contradiction between the lynching and his religious beliefs. In fact, that he lead the assembly in prayer suggests he saw his religious beliefs integral to the assembly. Similarly, the fact that mob members asked for prayer suggests that they saw no reason why their activities were inimical to local religious values. Indeed, rather than disregarding religious rites associated with capital punishments, they chose to practice them, suggesting that they saw their actions as compatible with legal executions. At the same time, they demonstrated that they saw their extralegal activity as compatible with Christianity.

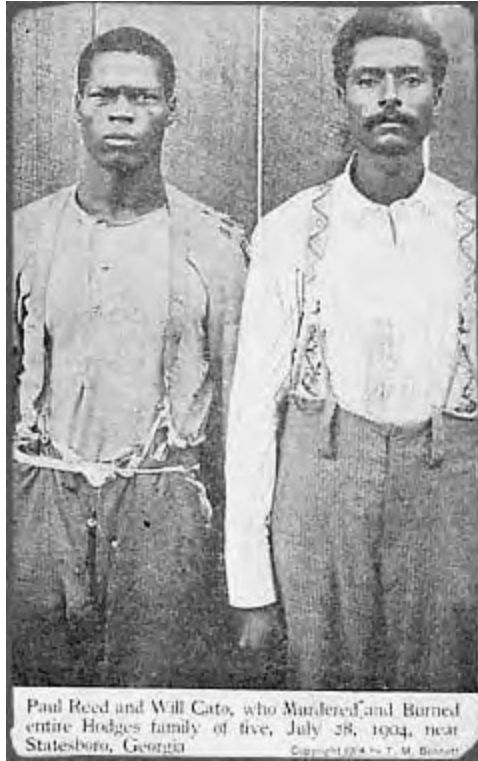
Reed reportedly confessed involvement in the murders. In one account he claimed Cato had served only as a lookout, while in another Reed named Cato as one of the murderers.⁷⁴ He also named men he had previously implicated as well as several new conspirators. Cato admitted involvement in the crime, but insisted he had killed no one.

⁷⁰ *Savannah Morning News* 17 August, 1904.

⁷¹ *Atlanta News* 17 August, 1904.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ United States Census Manuscript Schedule for Bulloch County; Statesboro First Baptist Church Record Book, Special Collections, Mercer University, 170-173; Bulloch County Baptist Association, *Minutes*, 1904, 1905.



Paul Reed and Will Cato, who Murdered and Burned entire Hodges family of five, July 28, 1904, near Statesboro, Georgia
Copyright 1914 by T. M. Bennett



Thirty minutes after Cato and Reed were burned, Aug. 10th, 1904

Pictured left: a postcard of Paul Reed (left) and Will Cato (right). Pictured right: the stump to which the two men were chained and burned. *Images courtesy of James Allen*

The ritual confession completed, Cato understood that his qualified admission had made no difference. He begged not to be burned, asking to be hanged or shot instead.⁷⁵ He received no mercy. Cato and Reed were chained to a large stump, surrounded by pine knots, then doused with kerosene. Someone applied the torch. One observer reported that "the scene which followed beggars description. Frenzied cheers rent the air as men, almost crazed with the hatred of the men being punished, saw the cruel flames drinking up the blood."⁷⁶ Cato died screaming. Reed's last words were "Lord have mercy!"⁷⁷

Though the "sacrifice," as one editor later termed it, was complete, the righteous anger of local whites had not yet run its course.⁷⁸ The night after the lynching and the following day,

⁷⁴ *Savannah Morning News* 17 August, 1904; *Atlanta News* 17 August, 1904.

⁷⁵ *Savannah Morning News* 17 August, 1904.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Sparta Ishmaelite* 23 September, 1904.

whites formed parties that went looking for more victims. Many papers reported that the men believed to have been accomplices to the crime were killed.⁷⁹ One man was found dead in a ditch, two bullets in his body. Handy Bell was reportedly "shot to pieces." Alfred Roberts, an elderly African American was shot and killed when he was mistaken for another man. Roberts' son Raymond was also killed. Over a week after the lynching, the *Statesboro News* reported that African Americans believed to be implicated in the crime were being flogged. These whippings were a "nightly occurrence, too frequent to excite more than passing notice." Some black residents were sleeping in the woods for their own protection, while others were boarding trains to leave.⁸⁰ The rioters obviously felt that the lynching had not sufficiently met their ends.

Though few publicly sympathized with the rioters, many justified the lynching with "eye for an eye" logic—a common strategy among lynching advocates. Lynchings arose, as one supporter claimed, from the desire "to repay the hellish culprit in his own coin."⁸¹ Another similarly wrote, "hundreds of the best citizens of the county [Bulloch] said '*These demons shall reap what they have sown* . Let them die the death they gave to poor Mr. and Mrs. Hodges and their three precious little darlings.'"⁸² The members of the mob, a minister wrote, "had been transformed from peaceful farmers to avengers of blood, . . . men who would willingly risk their lives to see that the murderers did not escape they punishment they had brought on themselves."⁸³ This was the punitive logic among the lynching apologists. The burning of the men had been the only appropriate response because "nothing short of burning could have avenged the crime."⁸⁴

Furthermore, many believed that the extralegal burning had been justified because the law was not capable of meting out the appropriate punishment. Echoing Jesus' condemnation of religious legalism, "the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath," one man asserted that "people are not made for the law. The law is made for people." When the law's dispensation

⁷⁹ *Savannah Press* 17 August, 1904.

⁸⁰ *Statesboro News* 26 August, 1904.

⁸¹ *Atlanta News* 25 August, 1904. See also *Statesboro News* 19 August, 1904.

⁸² *Statesboro News* 19 August, 1904. Italics added.

⁸³ *Ibid.* 23 August, 1904.

of justice failed to protect the people, they were charged with taking it into their own hands.⁸⁵

This insistence that community members participate in the execution is what made the pro-lynching rhetoric distinct from those who opposed it. As one Georgian noted, “it is perfectly natural that when the very foundations of our manhood are shaken by the act of nameless *deviltry* on the chaste womanhood of the south [sic], we take a cruel, savage vengeance.”⁸⁶ In the swirl of print media that surrounded Cato and Reed’s death, lynching was defended not as a ritual sacrifice, but as the divinely mandated right to defend the sanctity of the home from a demonic black menace.⁸⁷

The demand for a public death served two purposes. First, it answered the problem presented by the demonic perpetrators; an execution in itself was insufficient to sway other demonic creatures, lacking all moral sense, from striking again. Only the fear produced by a public execution could prevent such crimes from recurring. As many historians have noted, lynching was intended to terrorize African Americans psychologically. Second, it allowed the men to participate in the defense of their homes and social status. As the *Conyers Banner* put it, “we are going to protect our wives and daughters from the *devilish* brutes.”⁸⁸ Their divinely ordered world had been violated and lynching allowed them to reassert control.

This insistence on justice intertwined the sacred with southern masculinity and racism. Long known for its rugged and violent pastimes, southern male culture had adopted a combativeness rooted in the frontier, slavery and the continued presence of African Americans. The fear of slave violence, resistance from freedmen, and the perceived threat from “Before Day” bogies, left whites “with a need to prove their fighting abilities both to themselves and to their

⁸⁴ *Swainsboro Forest-Blade* 18 August, 1904.

⁸⁵ *Atlanta News* 24 August, 1904; *Atlanta Journal* 17 August, 1904; *Sparta Ishmaelite* 19 August, 1904. See also Ralph E. Luker, *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform 1885-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 89. Mark 2:27.

⁸⁶ *Atlanta News* 25 August, 1904. Italics added.

⁸⁷ See also *Sparta Ishmaelite* 5 August, 30 September, 1904.

⁸⁸ Quoted in *Sparta Ishmaelite* 23 September, 1904. Italics added.

fellow whites."⁸⁹ At the same time, southern men were extremely patriarchal. They were obsessed with the preservation of female "purity," a sentiment the expression of which almost always included religious imagery. The meeting of religion, race, and masculinity produced an explosive admixture in which "white men felt they had a moral obligation to be vigilant in their oppression of blacks in order to protect their women's virtue."⁹⁰ They may not have been "revolutionary" in Dixon's sense, but they shared with the author the belief that protecting the sacred foundations of civilization—namely women and the home—required the use of violence.

More than a few comments on the events in Statesboro reflected these sentiments. Edward Hill observed that lynchings were widely supported "when it comes to dealing out summary justice to the human-shaped fiend who so ruthlessly *desecrates the temple* of chaste womanhood."⁹¹ More provocatively, the *Statesboro News* reprinted an editorial from the *Sparta Ishmaelite* that insisted the mob "is composed of husbands and fathers who feel in their hearts that they are simply standing for the sanctity of their homes and the safety of the wives and children." Like all reprints that reflected the paper's opinion, the column was included without comment or qualification.⁹²

Lynching was thus the cultural nexus where evangelical morality, and its emphasis on protecting the family and home, intersected with southern masculinity and white supremacy. The *Ishmaelite* had stated this opinion more forcefully in 1901. The editor defended a lynching in Indiana by claiming the mob

did *God* worshipful service. That is justice in its last analysis. It is the unwritten law of the glorious South, and in spite of cravens and Pharisees it will continue to be unrepealed and irrepeable[sic] while the manhood and the civilization of the South endure. The spirit which underlies and upholds lynch law as the only proper answer to the infamous outrage on female inviolability is the principle virtue which differentiates the civilization of the South from that of the North and West. It is a part of the *religion* of our people. It is the main safeguard of our social institutions and it will be perpetuated in spite of the threats of unprincipled power, or the cowardly pleadings of degenerates in our midst.⁹³

⁸⁹ Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 16.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 17.

⁹¹ *Atlanta News* 25 August, 1904. Italics added.

⁹² *Statesboro News* 23 August, 1904

⁹³ *Sparta Ishmaelite* 22 November, 1901. Italics added.

But if lynching was considered by some to be the main safeguard of Southern families, it was hardly considered the only safeguard. This was because lynching was a horrific manifestation of a more generalized attempt to protect "white homes." In Statesboro, lynching had not restored order to the community. The subsequent small scale riot proved this. Demonic forces were still abroad and they had to be exorcised.

Anyone who expected the lynching to produce total white solidarity was bitterly disappointed. Several editors and politicians roundly condemned the violence, citing the riot as proof of the threat lynching posed to law and order. These condemnations ranged from subdued criticism to strong indictments. None, however, publicly objected to Cato and Reed's death. Not all Georgians were content with just criticism. Whitely Langston, minister of the Statesboro Methodist Church, was the only witness to name members of the mob in the investigation that followed the lynching. He surely knew this was a dangerous move, though he may have been comforted by the Methodist practice of regularly moving ministers from church to church. Langston could at least take comfort that he would soon be transferred. His parishioners, however, took a far greater risk. The congregation issued an official protest against the lynching. Like others, their main complaint centered on contempt for law and order. Yet, this was more than a trite appeal for Georgians to obey the law. They declared their opposition to mob violence in any form. While they condemned all members of the mob, they singled out members of their church. They declared that any member who participated in the mob "be hereby apprised of the displeasure of the church and be requested to withdraw without delay from our communion and membership, unless a public confession of wrong be made with expression penitence and contrition." Participation in the mob was thus not mere lawlessness, it was sin. Hinting at a

vision of masculinity similar to that of Harmon Hodges, they commended the "manly attitude and the Christian conduct" of Langston and other outspoken members of the church.⁹⁴

The protest was a notable move. Unlike Langston, the congregants were not protected by an upcoming transfer. Knowing that many of their friends and neighbors either tacitly or actively supported the lynching, their protests involved real personal risk. The presence of this risk meant that the lynching highlighted divisions within the community as much as it had implied white solidarity. The reality of this division manifested shortly after the protest was made public. When two members of the congregation were excommunicated for participation in the mob, twenty-five members of the church left with them.⁹⁵

Save for the Statesboro Methodist Church, relatively few white Georgians ever condemned the lynchings outright. Most southern critics refused to place all the responsibility on the members of the mob, and almost all refused to see it as an indictment of all southern whites. One southern apologist wrote "the unctuous Pharisees of the north, who are lifting holy hands in horror against the lawless and lamentable and yet almost natural vengeance of the Statesboro [sic], should turn for a while their paragraphs and their oratorical stilettos against the bosom of their own civilization, and wash their own lawless and blood-stained linen before they devote any more time to the purification of ours."⁹⁶ Many placed responsibility in the hands of northern politicians. Southerners were particularly defensive because they feared Theodore Roosevelt planned to use the "Statesboro Horror" to his advantage by connecting it with the Democratic Party, which could claim most of the South's white population among its members.⁹⁷ Like the writer for the *Waynesboro True-Citizen*, numerous editors insisted that the blame for southern lynchings "belongs to those who had control of the government after the South was overthrown and her wise laws and great traditions crushed: to those who set the Negro up in all his ignorance

⁹⁴ *Statesboro News* 2, 6 September, 1904.

⁹⁵ *Statesboro News* 6 September, 1904, Baker, "What is a Lynching?," 308. The exodus supports the conclusion that many churchgoers saw no contradiction between their religious faith and the practice of lynching.

⁹⁶ *Atlanta News* republished in *Statesboro News* 23 August, 1904.

⁹⁷ See *Savannah Press* 25 and 26 August, 1904.

and incapacity to be the equal of educated white." The principle of political equality "has opened a Pandora's box of evils the effect of which God only knows when the end will be reached or what the end will be."⁹⁸ Another writer opined that he who taught the African American equality "is the negro's worst enemy, for surely as the dews fall and the sun shines, he is starting a carnival of crime."⁹⁹

Many white Georgians actually blamed the events in Statesboro on President Roosevelt—who not coincidentally was running for reelection in that year's election. Like other reflections on the crime, these accusations often made use of religious language. The editor of the *Savannah Press* expressed his hearty agreement with the *New Orleans States* indictment of the President. In the course of the campaign, Roosevelt's appeals to the black vote "has done more to incite in the South *the hellish* deeds of such negroes as Cato and Reed than any man who has ever live in America." There could be little doubt, the editor continued, that Roosevelt was responsible for Statesboro's "carnival of hell."¹⁰⁰

M. B. Wharton, an eminent clergyman in Atlanta, wanted Northerners to reflect on what had befallen the Hodges. He contrasted the Hodges, a "prominent, industrious, kind-hearted, religious people," with the "fiends incarnate" who had murdered them. While the Hodges "were enjoying . . . the blessings God had given them they were fallen upon and brutally butchered by negroes belonging to 'The Before Day Club.'" The Reverend boldly declared "had it not been for Roosevelt's coddling the Negro those devilish ideas would not have gotten into their heads in all probability."¹⁰¹ For Wharton and those who shared his views, neither the rope nor the faggot were sufficient to defeat Roosevelt and the demons like Cato and Reed who he inspired. Much as Gaston had discovered in *The Leopard's Spots*, physical violence was but a part of the divinely consecrated struggle to defend the white home. White Georgians thus carried their fight to very

⁹⁸ *Waynesboro True Citizen* September 10, 1904.

⁹⁹ *Atlanta Journal* quoted in *Savannah Press* 19 August, 1904.

¹⁰⁰ *Savannah Press* 26 August, 1904. Italics added.

¹⁰¹ *Atlanta Journal* 21 August, 1904.

center of Georgia's political apparatus, framing the 1905-1906 Democratic primary as a religious contest. They then took their cause to the streets of Atlanta.

CHAPTER 3

VOX POPULI VOX DEI: GEORGIA'S DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY, 1905-1906

Georgians became increasingly concerned about race relations in the years after the Statesboro tragedy. While racial tensions climaxed in the 1906 Atlanta riot, race, religion, and politics continued to demonstrate their sometimes violent interrelationship in the intervening time. Between 1905 and 1906, candidates for Georgia's governorship waged sensational campaigns, using race-baiting as one of their most common tactics, a method all the more significant because African American disenfranchisement was one of the central matters of debate. Three candidates—Clark Howell, editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, Richard B. Russell, former superior court judge, and James M. Smith, Oglethorpe County planter—opposed disenfranchisement because they believed current practices sufficiently limited black political power. Hoke Smith, who would win the election in a landslide, challenged them, arguing that white supremacy could be maintained only through legal proscriptions on black voting. He also demanded numerous other reforms, all of which aimed at purifying the political process by putting more power in the hands of the white citizenry.

While most historians have ignored the religious dimensions of this gubernatorial race, the campaign was replete with religious language. Like Dixon and the Statesboro commentators, many other whites used religion to understand their political environment. The Populists, a group of agrarian reformers, and the Progressivists, a loose collection of the urban middle class, often saw their efforts to redeem politics as the work of God. Both groups shared concerns about unregulated capitalism. They commonly expressed grave reservations about black political power, which had often been used by conservative Democrats to marginalize reform efforts.

Hoke Smith, a reform-wing Democrat, successfully united Georgia's reformers by appealing to the common interests of both Populists and Progressives and combining them with the power of the dominant political party.

Smith's appeal lay not only in the political component of his platform—corporate regulation and African American disenfranchisement—but also in his religious rhetoric. Smith portrayed himself as the leader of a Christian host set on purifying state government. In doing so, he often drew on militant, and even sometimes violent, language. His supporters may have stopped short of calling his political campaign “religion in action,” but many whites viewed the election as much as a religious event as it was a political event. The mixture of religiously sanctioned militancy and racialized politics resulted in a landslide victory for Hoke Smith. Most white Georgians transferred this religious mood to continued efforts at social and religious reform, not all of which was intended to harm blacks. Others, however, felt differently and took their convictions to the streets of Atlanta on September 22nd.

The Populists Smith had appealed to were mostly farmers who had fallen on hard times in the 1870s and continued to be hurt by economic volatility, falling crop prices, and rising transportation costs—factors that had all encouraged the previously noted immigration to Bulloch County. Populists bemoaned the changes wrought by industrialization and centralization. They also decried the economic stratification evidenced by the accumulation of wealth in the hands of a few. These forces threatened the agrarian ideal of the independent landowner that was so important to southern farmers. Ideally, a man controlled his own farm, and was able to provide for his family. The achievement of this ideal was becoming increasingly difficult.

Despite the challenges these changes presented, most Populists were not reactionaries. They believed that agricultural reform was part of the modernizing process and could be harnessed to protect their way of life.¹ Farmers organized self-help societies and cooperatives

¹ Julie Roy Jeffrey, “Women in the Southern Farmers Alliance: A Reconsideration of the Role and Status of Women in the Nineteenth-Century South,” *Feminist Studies* 3 (Fall 1975): 72-91.

through which they could buy and sell goods at better prices. These organizations also agitated for concrete political reforms like a graduated income tax, the monetization of silver, and government ownership of the railroads. They hoped these efforts would "bring the nation back to its roots of egalitarian principle and the harmony of all social classes."² The largest Populist organization was the Farmer's Alliance, which by 1889 claimed 662,000 members in the Southern states, 104,000 in Georgia alone. Total membership increased to over two million by the mid 1890s.³ In addition to its large agrarian membership, the Alliance successfully allied itself with other reformers like the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Knights of Labor. In the early 1890s, the Populist-run People's Party made a significant third-party challenge in many states, including William J. Northen's 1890 victory in the Georgian gubernatorial election.⁴ By the end of the decade, however, establishment forces defeated the Populists and their numbers began to decline.

From their inception, the Populists never distinguished between agrarian politics and religious activity. Throughout their political campaigns in the 1880s and 1890s, the agrarians articulated their indignation within the structures of a religious world. In many parts of the country, Populist political rallies borrowed components of evangelical revivals, using familiar religious idioms and rituals to shape their political agendas. In its first constitution the Farmer's Alliance admitted only one who believed in a supreme being and was "a farmer, farm laborer, a country school teacher, a country physician, or a minister of the gospel."⁵ The latter often provided crucial leadership in states like Alabama, where agrarian reform enjoyed enormous

² Michael Kazin, *Populist Persuasion: An American History* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 29.

³ Edward L. Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 220.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 274.

⁵ Quoted in *Ibid.*, 274. See also Richard C. Goode, "The Godly Insurrection in Limestone County: Social Gospel, Populism, and Southern Culture in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Religion and American Culture* 3, no. 2 (1993): 155-169, Randall J. Stephens, "The Convergence of Populism, Religion, and the Holiness-Pentecostal Movements: A review of the Historical Literature," *Fides et Historia*, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2000): 51-64.

support from the Baptist clergy.⁶ In Georgia, religion provided a powerful critique of economic exploitation. The state's *People's Party Paper* published a letter from "Free Homes," who combined his concern about providing a home with Christian egalitarianism. He made a series of arguments that "no one will be without a home or out of supplies," supplying a biblical proof text for each. Another man wrote that he who would follow God "here and yet assist the moneyed kings and monopolies of this land to press the heel of tyranny more firmly upon the necks of the poor but humble followers of his son will have their portion with the damned in the region of despair."⁷ Julia Walsh notes that shared events like church picnics allowed Augusta's Populists to emphasize their common values regardless of their status as urban or rural workers, large or small landholders.⁸ In some cases religion also provided white Populists with a critique of their own racism.

Even as Populist numbers dwindled, their reform sentiments continued to have wide appeal. Some Democrats, threatened by the Populist challenge, incorporated agrarian reforms into their platforms.⁹ Many southerners, however, had concerns different from those of the agrarians. In the South's growing cities and towns, middle class reformers worked to alleviate the problems associated with urbanization. Town and city "Progressives" rejected the radicalism sometimes associated with Populism, laboring instead to make existing structures more equitable and efficient. They demanded an end to the convict lease system, called for increased expenditures on the public schools, and asked the state to regulate industry. They also hoped to improve the safety of the home by addressing the poor sanitation that could introduce disease.¹⁰

⁶ J. Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998).

⁷ *People's Party Paper* 28 April, 1892, 27 March, 1892.

⁸ Julia Mary Walsh, "'Horny-Handed Sons of Toil': Workers, Politics, and Religion in Augusta, Georgia, 1880-1910" (Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1999).

⁹ Ayers, *Promise*, 285.

¹⁰ See Dewey W. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983), William A. Link, *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

Like agrarian reformers, urban Progressives often saw their reform efforts as part of a larger religious endeavor. Of Atlanta's four major papers, none more fully reflected the Christian reform movement than did the *Atlanta News* under the editorship of Charles Daniel. Daniel attacked the exorbitant fees charged by the southern railroads and called on the government to regulate rail transportation. He added this to a litany of reforms, including his condemnation of "bucket shops," his militant demand that labor unions be recognized, and his lengthy editorial campaign calling for legislation to protect Georgia's wild game birds.¹¹ Daniel's editorials frequently weighed-in on theological matters, and he brought the same piety to bear on matters of political and economic import. Asking what Christopher Columbus would think of current affairs, Daniel averred, "After digesting the protective tariff iniquities, reading of our Philippine imperialism, holding his nose over the Packingtown revelations . . . we can imagine him falling on his knees and begging the Good Lord to forgive him for ever discovering a land so riotous with anti-Christ [sic] and bloody with every brand of barbarism!"¹²

If Daniel understood the sins of the age as *sins* of the age, he also believed that Christian conviction demanded concrete action. Religion was not an arena sequestered from the rest of life. Daniel chastised those who thought of politics as a corrupt and despicable "trade." "Politics is not a trade," he insisted. "It is the science of government and government is an ordinance of God." It was certainly true that politics could be corrupt, "But Eden was not impenetrable to Satan, and politics isn't hog-proof against those who would degrade a noble science into a scramble for office and a scout for spoils."¹³ As a buttress against such corruption, Daniel proposed imitating a recent innovation in Memphis where a clergyman at each precinct booth opened election day with prayer. Voters who did not pray themselves would benefit by having "proper prayers made for them that will recall them at the polls to the civic duty of voting for those men and measures that

¹¹ Bucket shops were saloons that served alcohol from open barrels.

¹² *Atlanta News*, 10 July, 1906.

¹³ *Atlanta News* 14 July, 1906.

are clean and wholesome for a Christian civilization."¹⁴ Daniel had sympathizers like Martin V. Calvin, who maintained that "it is the religious duty of every qualified voter that he should vote."¹⁵

The exhortations of Daniel and Calvin may have been as much prescriptive as descriptive: surely not all voters connected religion and politics as intimately as did they. At least one Georgian complained that southern Christians were not doing enough to tackle the challenges facing the New South. "If the Christian men of Georgia voted in accordance with their professions there would not be a bar room in the state nor a bucket shop, nor child slavery, not a gambling hall, nor the usurer."¹⁶ Despite such lamentations, there was a pervasive religious mood that reached even the statehouse floor. Summing up an ultimately successful bid for an anti-bucket shop law, state legislator Seaborn Wright told the General Assembly, "God Almighty and the civilization of the age are behind this movement, and you can't stop it. The world is growing better every day and the dawn of a brighter era is at hand."¹⁷

The legislator's exclamation reveals the degree to which notions of civilization, Christianity, and progress were interwoven at the turn of the century. Frequent revivals throughout nineteenth century America had fostered the idea of a perpetual spiritual awakening that would Christianize the nation. Nineteenth century Protestants held a less stringent view of human sinfulness than had earlier American Protestants. This changing view of human depravity manifested in attitudes toward perfection. The Holiness movement, an offshoot of Methodism, came to Georgia in the 1870s and enjoyed both professional and working class adherents.¹⁸ Advocates claimed the Christian could be completely sanctified in an instantaneous and emotional experience separate from conversion. In this experience, the believer was cleansed of all inborn sin, now able to live a life free from deliberate disobedience of God's commandments.

¹⁴ *Atlanta News*, 29 July, 1906.

¹⁵ *Atlanta Georgian* 13 August, 1906.

¹⁶ *Atlanta News*, 31 July, 1905.

¹⁷ *Atlanta Constitution* 25 July, 1906.

The Keswick movement enjoyed an even larger following than did Holiness. The Keswicks promoted "practical holiness," the idea that a "higher life" awaited those who subjugated personal vice, but they eschewed the Holiness contention that the Christian life could be free of conscious sin. Prominent Keswicks had large Atlanta followings. Alexander Torrey held a month-long revival in Atlanta in March, 1906. The *Atlanta Journal* provided the revival with daily coverage, including editorial space for Torrey's famous hymn-writing partner, Charles Alexander. Torrey's friend Len Broughton, pastor of the influential Atlanta Tabernacle, made holiness a central theme at the Tabernacle's yearly conferences. The conference held simultaneously with Torrey's revival was so large that police were required to handle the crowd and two thousand people had to be turned away.¹⁹ These large audiences showed a strong interest in self-regulation and purity, not unlike the political goals of the Populists and Progressives.

The belief in the gradual Christianization of America combined with these more optimistic views of human nature to produce a pervasive optimism. Americans and Europeans alike spoke of the ascent of "Christian Civilization," a term that equated religious development with material and technological progress. American Protestants added their commitment to science and incorporated strains of evolutionary thought, though usually less overtly than did Thomas Dixon, whose progressive theology reflected these optimistic sentiments. By the turn of the century, many Georgians—be they rural agrarians or urban reformers—shared a millennial vision in which a triumphant Christian civilization would bring social, political, and spiritual enlightenment to a benighted world.²⁰ Thus a writer from the *Christian Index* wrote of "a near approaching age when America will be the arbiter of the world, and the direction which the

¹⁸ Briane K. Turley, *A Wheel within a Wheel: Southern Methodism and the Georgia Holiness Association* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1999), 192.

¹⁹ George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 96, *Atlanta Constitution* 9, 12 March, 1906, William R. Glass, "The Ministry of Leonard G. Broughton at Tabernacle Baptist Church, 1898-1912: A Source of Southern Fundamentalism," *American Baptist Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (March, 1985), 40.

²⁰ See *Christian Index* 16, 23 March, 1899.

development of humanity will then take will be determined by the ideals, commercial, social and religious that dominate America.”²¹

Based on this perspective, the church participated in the work of God by working in the world. For many southerners, religion was not then a component of progressive reform. Instead, it was reform that was a component of progressive religion. Their commitment to reform via political means did not mean that their efforts were any less religious or their faith in the supernatural at all diminished. As James Moorhead puts it, if advocates of this millennial vision “had one foot in the world of steamships and the telegraph, the other was still firmly planted in the cosmos of John's Revelation—a universe where angels poured out vials of wrath, the dead would rise again, and the wicked would be cast into a lake of fire burning forever.”²² The conservative religious ethos that so characterized the South was thus never inimical to "Progress" as southerners understood it. Indeed, one was predicated upon the other.

Progressive attitudes were often reinforced by an insistence on purity, a prominent demand in turn of the century America. This was the period when writers like Upton Sinclair disclosed the revolting lack of cleanliness in the meat packing industry. Alcohol distributors often diluted their products with water or harmful solutions. The late nineteenth century also witnessed particularly hard fought battles over currency, pitting advocates of the “pure” gold standard against those who advocated using a mixture of precious metals to increase the money supply. The most ambitious purity campaigns were carried out against alcohol and corrupt government.

American Protestants had organized mass temperance movements well before the Civil War. During most of the nineteenth century, temperance advocates had been true to their name, advocating moderate drinking of wine and beer and abstinence from distilled liquors. These activists were most concerned with the sin of drunkenness and its attendant evils. Some recalled

²¹ *Christian Index* 6 September, 1906.

that at one time it had been common to offer the minister a toddy when he came for a Sunday meal. At peace with the dram, the minister "rarely if every refused."²³ Towards the turn of the century, however, many Protestants began to argue that the evil fruits of drunkenness grew from evil inherent in liquor itself. Ministers and lay activists now entreated Christians never to imbibe, lest they give Satan a foothold in their lives and thus in their homes. They also exhorted their audiences to join the crusade against the saloon. A "Temperance Lesson" in the *Christian Index* asserted "the drunkard's feet search out the 'gates of hell' and the fruit of his lips drives decent people to flee from him. He is utterly bad, and he who calls a drunken man a 'good fellow' is a fool."²⁴

As Christians warred against liquor, many of them saw a need for more sweeping reforms. In an article entitled "Antiseptic Christians," Rev. D. W. Key wrote that "the Christian is in the world as a purifying agent. . . . The Christian is sent into the world to destroy the works of sin and inspire works of righteousness." Key expected this spirit to have a far reaching impact. He believed Christianity would "extend the lines of the kingdom of righteousness and peace of love and joy, and rub out the lines of separation between the classes, and bring in the nations of this world with all their glory and crown Jesus Lord of all." Before this could happen "there is need that laws regulating personal relation shall be brought under they dominion of the life that is greater than law, so that political and civic justice throughout the world shall harmonize with teachings of Jesus of Nazareth."²⁵ Thus ideas of religious purity often flowed into other areas of life, particularly politics and government. In a "Christian age," one essayist put it, "it is becoming more and more a duty which Providence has placed upon us to assume the reins of government, to enforce the organic and statute law that all the people may share in the wealth of the country which is being rapidly absorbed by unrighteous trusts and combines, to purify our commercial

²² James H. Moorhead, *World without End: Mainstream American Protestant Visions of the Last Things, 1880-1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 2.

²³ John Temple Graves, "Georgia Pioneers the Prohibition Crusade," *Cosmopolitan* 45 (June 1908), 87.

²⁴ *Christian Index* 15 March, 1906.

²⁵ "The Antiseptic Christian," *Christian Index*, 19 April, 1906.

system of the corruption which is contaminating the nation and to develop the untold resources which lie at our very doors."²⁶ The *Golden Age*, the voice of Atlanta's nascent fundamentalist community (Len Broughton was a regular contributor), based its motto on similar connections. Their banner read "Piety in the Home, Purity in the State, Power in the Life." The magazine regularly celebrated reform and carried numerous articles encouraging government to expand its responsibilities.²⁷

The talk about political purity required the assumption that the government was impure. Many believed Georgia was under the control of party bosses who took their orders from corporate interests. Critics called the political elite, all members of the Democratic party, the "Machine," and dubbed their backroom dealing and corporate ties "ring-rule." These epithets testified to the strength and organization with which the Democratic leadership manipulated the political process. Members of the Machine had shown repeatedly that they were not above bribery and fraud, and even occasional intimidation, to get the results they desired. After defeating the People's Party, the Populists' political organization, in the 1890s, the Machine effected a one-party system by disordering and marginalizing its opponents.

Mobilization, if often by corrupt means, of the black vote had been one of the most frequent tactics used by Machine Democrats. Georgia had a majority white population and, like the rest of the South, was strongly Democratic. The Democratic primary was the only election that really mattered. In 1900, Georgia Democrats had instituted a white-only primary, effectively disenfranchising most African Americans. Machine Democrats had opposed outright disenfranchisement because the white primary provided an effective weapon against any challenge to their power. Under a rule established in 1898, the primaries allowed the direct election of candidates. This meant that any political opposition would have difficulty convincing voters to join a third party by simply arguing corporations and party bosses controlled the

²⁶ *Atlanta Georgian* 17 August, 1906.

Democrats. The specter of "Negro Rule" also helped ensure participation in the white primary, further strengthening the position of the Machine.²⁸ Moreover, the Democratic primary operated according to rules established by the party, allowing them to alter voting stipulations when necessary. If the party needed to mobilize black votes, it could. If it needed to raise the specter of "Negro Domination," it could. Disenfranchisement thus posed a serious threat to "ring rule" and presented an advantage to political reformers. Reform leaders exploited the race issue less out of virulent racism than out of their desire to gain enough political power to achieve those reforms they considered most important. The race-baiting that characterized the election, and eventually fueled the riot, was ironically intended to end race-baiting once and for all.²⁹

The alcohol question was intimately related to the issue of political corruption. Southern politicians had a long tradition of using alcohol to bribe black voters. White Populists, who had openly appealed to African Americans for political support, believed that Democrats used this ploy to defeat them in the 1890s.³⁰ While the political aspects were bad, the alleged black betrayal was worsened by strong prohibitionist sentiments among many white Populists. For Populists who maintained that "Christianity and whiskey don't mix," African Americans who sold their votes for whiskey likely said as much about their religious character as their political reliability.³¹

By 1906, African American voters had also become notoriously associated with southern "wets." Many prohibitionists remembered the defeat of Atlanta's local prohibition option in 1887. African Americans who had voted in favor of the option voted against renewing it two years later. Their main complaints were that the law was only enforced on establishments that served African Americans and that prohibition had caused economic damage to black neighborhoods. If any

²⁷ See for example "The Anglo-Saxon Revolution," *Golden Age*, 29 March, 1906, and "Our American Magazines," *Ibid.*, 3 May, 1906.

²⁸ Russell Korobkin, "The Politics of Disenfranchisement," *Georgian Historical Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 40-41.

²⁹ See Watson's comments in *Atlanta Journal* 4 August, 1906.

³⁰ Walsh, "Horny-Handed," 317.

³¹ Quoted in *Ibid.*

whites remembered these facts, they never mentioned them. In the same essay in which he called the saloon the child of hell, J. C. Solomon insisted that white Americans "said by the freeman's ballot, I am in favor of the saloon."³² In March 1906, evangelist Sam Jones unflinchingly wrote that he was "straight out, through and through with Hoke Smith on the question of the disenfranchisement of the negro." With the "ignorant and vicious voter eliminated" not only could Georgia elect better officials, but "we will then put the saloon out of business in Georgia."³³

While Prohibitionists transformed drinking from a dangerous indulgence to a categorical evil, African Americans became notoriously associated with alcohol. In Atlanta, for example, the black district along Decatur Street was infamously associated with "dives" and salons. The clustering of bars in black neighborhoods encouraged white southerners to believe blacks were especially susceptible to the lure of drink. Prohibitionists stressed this connection by repeatedly associated blacks with sin: Christians did not drink, African Americans did. Certainly, this association was not always explicit, nor did it always imply virulent racism. Many black ministers were also concerned with intemperance, though they explained the problem in terms other than inherent racial disposition, arguing instead that the black drunkard was no worse than the white one.

Many white Georgians, however, felt they had more than sufficient reason to believe in the greater sinfulness of a drunken black man. In addition to the vote bribery issue, they were convinced that the overactive black libido could not account totally for the epidemic of rapes they believed beset the South. They alleged that black lust, already unpredictable, was intensified by liquor. In an article for *Cosmopolitan*, John Temple Graves wrote that the South had been under siege by lusty African Americans who threatened the security of white women. Living in this

³² "Solomon's Stirring Plea for Boys," *Golden Age*, 1 March, 1906, 4.

³³ *Atlanta Journal* 24 March, 1906.

environment, Southerners were convinced that "the brutal impulse behind these fiendish assaults" was fueled by liquor and drugs.³⁴

Because they saw African Americans as the common thread connecting political corruption, anti-prohibition forces, and sexual assault, many white reformers believed the removal of African Americans from political power represented the key step for future progress—a sentiment also expressed by Thomas Dixon. Reform required organization, however, and the Democratic machine still labored to keep reform interests marginalized. But in the first years of the new century, anti-machine forces had gained a powerful voice in the *Atlanta Journal*. The paper provided reform perspectives with an influential medium, while simultaneously serving the still more important role of giving their movement direction. As they now sought to move forward, they also gained a dedicated leader in Thomas Hardwick. As a state representative from 1898 to 1902 and then as a U.S. congressman beginning in 1903, Hardwick had worked assiduously to curb corruption in Georgia's Democratic party. In 1905, Democratic reformers saw an opportunity for substantial gains in the upcoming gubernatorial election and initially selected John Pope Brown, a member of the Georgia railroad commission, to lead their crusade. Reform strategists then hoped to enlist the support of populist leader Tom Watson, who promised to endorse any anti-Machine Democrat running for Georgia's governorship. The Populist movement's People's Party was significantly weaker than in its halcyon days of the 1880s, but it still commanded a large following. Watson's support would bring a significant white voting bloc back into the Democratic fold, greatly bolstering the power of the party's reform wing.

Hardwick orchestrated the proposed alliance with Watson. While not a Populist, Hardwick had been disgusted with the fraud used to defeat the Populists in the 1890s. He developed a friendship with Watson and had often inquired with Watson for political advice.

³⁴ Graves, "Georgia Pioneers," 87.

Populist support did not come without strings. Watson made it clear that his support was conditional: any candidate he supported must include African American disenfranchisement as an element of his platform.³⁵ By 1904 Watson had given up on interracial politics, now insisting that as long as black Georgians could vote, anti-reform Democrats would be able to use the specter of "Negro domination" to attack their opponents. Like most Democrats in the reform wing, Hardwick had come to the same conclusion years earlier and proposed Georgia's first disenfranchisement legislation in 1899.

After surveying the challenges they believed at hand, reformers must have felt confident with James Pope Brown's dual platform of corporate regulation and African American disenfranchisement. However, many felt far less comfortable with the candidate himself. The *Atlanta Journal* soon proffered Hoke Smith as the preferable candidate. Smith's only previous political experience was as Secretary of the Interior in the Cleveland administration, but he had long been active in state politics and had repeatedly demonstrated his commitment to Progressive reform. As a government official and prominent lawyer, Smith repeatedly attacked exorbitant railroad fees. Smith, who owned and edited the *Journal* from 1887 to 1900, had set the paper's tone on the railroad issue and later helped lead the regulatory efforts in 1904 and 1905. Smith had also fought for regulations on public utilities and had contributed much of his time and energy to the cause of public education.³⁶ By all accounts, Smith had not previously considered running, but he was willing to answer the call. Smith announced his candidacy on June 2, 1905 and Brown withdrew from the race. Proudly proclaiming his status as a reformer, Smith called all white Georgians to his banner.

On June 29, 1905, Hoke Smith delivered his first campaign speech. At the same time, he gave his campaign a distinctly religious tone. In the blistering Georgia heat, Smith stood atop a platform in the town of Madison, a banner reading "Justice and Civic Righteousness" draped

³⁵ Korobkin, "Politics," 47.

behind him. Smith told the large audience that he had previously not given thought to running for governor. Flooded by thousands of letters and entreated by numerous petitions, however, he had been compelled to take up the cause of "the people"—that is, the white people—of Georgia. Smith selected one letter to share with his audience, reading it as he looked out over the crowd. The author was state senator John H. McGehee, of Talbot county. McGehee expressed alarm at the growing power of "corporate and ring rule." Yet he saw deliverance in the calls of the people to Smith. The senator wrote that "If I fully believed that the voice of the people is the voice of God, I would say that the call to you to lead them is divine." Whether or not this was intended as a literal endorsement of the maxim "Vox Populi Vox Dei" is impossible to know—the phrase had long been a staple among Populists. As Smith commented on the letter, he stopped just short of explicitly claiming a divine call and described the letters and petitions as a direct summons from the people, without ever claiming a direct call from God. If the speaker initially left his "call" tenuously related to Divine Purpose, he soon gave the audience little doubt as to the character of his campaign: "No man ever accepted a call to the ministry with a more consecrated purpose to serve the Master than I accept your call with the purpose by God's help and direction to serve the people of our state."³⁷

Smith then proceeded to detail his platform, narrating a tale of corruption but promising redemption. History had forever presented a battle between "class rule" and "popular freedom." The founding fathers, particularly the great American statesman Thomas Jefferson, had bequeathed to the people the power to defeat class rule. Though they had vouchsafed truths with which to hold evil at bay, the people had been weak and had failed to exercise their power. This had allowed outsiders to usurp their place. Foreign companies, that allegedly owned the state's railroads, conspired to keep agricultural products from reaching the coast, where they could be

³⁶Dewey W. Grantham, *Hoke Smith and the Politics of the New South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958), 36-37, 118-26.

³⁷Hoke Smith, *Speech of Hoke Smith Delivered at Madison Georgia, June 29, 1905*. (Atlanta: Bennett Printing House, n.d.), 2.

shipped inexpensively.³⁸ Perhaps more frighteningly, the transportation companies, representing the greatest combined wealth in the nation, had descended on Washington, manipulating the political process to the extent that "it is almost impossible at Washington to pass legislation against their wishes."³⁹ In Georgia, the railroads had similarly come to dominate the Democratic party machinery. The situation was dire: the temple of democracy had been defiled. Yet all was not lost. "All over our country the fight is being waged for purity and popular rights."⁴⁰ To restrain the power of the railroads, Smith demanded a strengthened and directly elected railroad commission. He also demanded an antilobbying law to restrain corporate influence in the state government, as well as numerous other reforms.

Smith was convinced the people needed further safeguards against corporate machinations, and he warned his audience that African Americans also threatened the purity of the political process. If the whites were ever divided on an issue, might it not be possible for someone—or some entity—to exploit that division with black votes? Smith saw black disenfranchisement by constitutional amendment as the only solution. The candidate reminded his audience that it had "only been a few years since our Populist friends made a fight outside the white primary. What a blessing it would have been . . . had a constitutional amendment eliminated during that contest a large ignorant negro vote subject to commercial influences."⁴¹ In the coming months, Smith repeatedly referred to black votes as "purchasable"—a modifier that saddled African Americans with responsibility for the bribery and fraud politicians used to mobilize black voters. He thus connected the cause of white supremacy with that of corporate regulation. As Dixon had contended in his novels, Smith believed the coming of a just social order required the disenfranchisement of African Americans.

³⁸ Grantham, *Hoke Smith*, 131.

³⁹ Smith, *Speech*, 4.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

Also like Dixon, Smith put this struggle within a religious context. Smith adroitly ended his speech on the same tone with which he had begun. He emphasized that the fight ahead was not his, but belonged to all. He was a manifestation of their righteous indignation for "no one man is responsible for the popular uprising."⁴² Acting together, ever vigilant, Georgia's white population had little to fear. At the end of his address, Smith assured his audience that in the coming struggles, "We can ask the help of the Infinite." With that aid, "the people will re-capture Georgia."⁴³

Even as he endorsed violence, his campaign maintained the same religious character. Smith's endeavors at reform were likened to Jesus cleaning the temple. One poet extended this image to the movement Smith represented: "When Jesus found the temple/Polluted by bad men,/He did not build another,/but swept the temple clean./The temple we deem sacred/By many a dear bought tie/Contains some who disgrace it;/Let's whip them out or die."⁴⁴ Smith supporter J. E. Lovvorn told a group of other Smith supporters in Tallapoosa that he was determined that when, "by the guidance of Almighty God," white Georgians had the opportunity

to wrest our beloved state from the clutches of an insatiate corporate greed, and to preserve to posterity that Anglo-Saxon supremacy which God, in his infinite wisdom, has decreed by an immutable law, and which the race had deserved and won and proven by thousands of years of progress in His cause, . . . my children shall remember their father as having done what he could in consecrated service to that cause which has no peer among temporal things.⁴⁵

Lovvorn went on to describe the election, but instead of using political language, he used the language of revival.

In subsequent speeches, Smith was often introduced to his audiences as a "Christian gentleman" and many Georgians cited this as one of the reasons they supported him. Smith filled his speeches with comments like "If I am elected Governor, and I pray God that I might be." He

⁴² Ibid., 5.

⁴³ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁴ *Atlanta Journal* 20, May, 1906.

⁴⁵ *Atlanta Journal* 4 August, 1906.

also justified white supremacy and slavery by “divine right.”⁴⁶ While some called him a Christian gentlemen, others praised him for his “Christian manhood,” though they meant it differently than had Harmon Hodges in Statesboro. Smith was a very large man. White Georgians like *Atlanta News* editor Charles Daniel, who as we will see also glorified violence and Christian manhood, often celebrated Smith’s “physical and mental power” as among his leading qualifications for governor. While he did not do so in explicitly religious terms, divinely consecrated Smith often declared that Georgia’s whites would secure white supremacy by peace if they could, “but with guns if we must.” He even cited Thomas Dixon as an expert on race relations.⁴⁷

It is impossible to gauge the depth of Smith's religiosity. Indeed, he may have been cynically playing to the religious beliefs of the electorate. However, there is little evidence to suggest that Smith was anything other than sincere. In addition to his advocacy of church-related beneficence, Smith taught Sunday School at North Avenue Presbyterian Church, of which he was a founding member. He also served for a number of years as the church's Sunday School superintendent and in 1899 was elected president of the Triennial International Sunday School Convention.⁴⁸

Certainly, his church involvement did not disqualify him from crass manipulation. Yet, his personal religiosity is ultimately irrelevant. Regardless of his motivations, framing his campaign with religious language did more than just give his candidacy legitimacy. Like the demonological references in Statesboro, Smith's religious appeals placed Georgia's citizens in the midst of a struggle of cosmic significance. Not only was Smith's candidacy "consecrated" but so was the work carried on by Smith's supporters. At a time when reform efforts were already intimately connected with a progressive religious vision, the religious idiom that characterized

⁴⁶ *Atlanta Independent* 9 December, 1905.

⁴⁷ *Atlanta Journal* 9, 17 July, 1905, *Ibid.*, 15 August, 1906 Scrapbook vol. 22, p. 28, vol. 24, p. 16, Hoke Smith Papers, Richard B. Russell Library, University of Georgia, *Atlanta News* 23 August, 1906, 1 July, 1906.

⁴⁸ Grantham, *Hoke Smith*, 117.

Smith's campaign reflected and reinforced major cultural forces already at work in the South. Religion helped define the cycles of Southern life in forms like weekly church services, seasonal revivals, or hymn singing at a community gathering. Insofar as it reflected the daily life and beliefs of southern communities, Christianity was far from an otherworldly preoccupation. In fact, it was a decidedly thisworldly activity that gave temporal significance to all things considered important.

Politics was thus another aspect of a religious world. Southern politics and Southern religion could never be easily separated. As one Atlanta supporter wrote, "The people of Georgia, as well as throughout this country are being aroused as never before, and thank God, there is a wave of reform that is sweeping over this beloved land of ours that is as sure to prevail as God reigns in high." This "spirit of reform" manifested in "the hearts of the people, who are praying and trusting to the God above to contrive to raise up to us such leaders as . . . Mr. Bryan of Nebraska, and our own invincible Hoke Smith."⁴⁹ Smith was to be accepted not merely because he was called by God, but because God was using him to answer the prayers of the people. For the people, the consecration of Smith's campaign testified as much, if not more, to the righteousness of suffering white Georgians as to the legitimacy of Smith's candidacy.

If Smith was not alone in his religious appeals, neither was he simply speaking platitudes. The energy with which Smith's opponents attacked his Madison declarations reveals that the prominence of Christianity in his campaign was not simply part of an expected performance. "His holiness," as Smith was derisively called, was often caricatured frocked in monks robes and crowned by a tacked-on halo. Clark Howell's organ, the *Atlanta Constitution* most frequently lampooned Smith. Shortly before the election, the newspaper claimed that voters were deserting Smith in favor of Howell. A caption entitled "That Divine ('Come Back!') Call!" showed a haloed Smith beset by calls for him to rescue lost votes. A poem mockingly quoted his

⁴⁹ *Atlanta Journal* 4 August, 1906.



Caricatures of Hoke Smith. The halos are surrounded by dollar signs. The cartoon to the right plays Smith's religious rhetoric against white paternalism. The black child asks for help only to be told that Smith is "'called' elsewhere." *Atlanta Constitution* June 5 and 10, 1906.

supporters pleas that he "Come back, My Hoke, come back 'agin';/ the way they're leavin' us—oh, it's a sin."⁵⁰ The *Macon Telegraph* ran a similar but more humorous poem entitled "That Divine Call": "'Vox Populi vox dei,' it's been said. / At least the statement somewhere I have read: / They say they've heard from old 'vox populis' / the call divine: 'Come back, come back,' he cries. / Seems to me there ought to be an 'est' / Some where run in that sentence that the best / interpretation might not then be missed— / (Just run 'im in and say 'vox Populist' / You'd hit it right, the coalition true— / It's plain to every Democratic view.)."⁵¹

Atlanta's African American newspaper, *The Independent*, also regularly mocked Smith's religious claims. A scathingly ironic editorial reminded its readers that "Hon. Hokey is a prophet and was divinely called from heaven to deliver the democrats of Georgia from the body of death

⁵⁰ *Atlanta Constitution* 12 August, 1906.

⁵¹ *Macon Telegraph* 9 August, 1906.

to which they had been reduced" by previous leaders like Henry Grady.⁵² Six months later, the *Independent* asked if "holy Hokus," that "'divinely called 'Moses' [sent] to save the people from perdition," would be quiet long enough for the state legislature to get its work done.⁵³ The extraordinarily overt theological themes of Smith's campaign supplied his critics with ample ammunition.

Despite its pejorative character, this mockery simultaneously revealed that even his most bitter opponents took his claims seriously. The Saturday after Smith's Madison speech, Clark Howell ridiculed Smith in an extensive editorial, lambasting what he believed was Smith's claim to a divine call. However, it was not the claim that Providence intervened in politics that Howell thought objectionable. He insisted, "It is undoubtedly true that in real crises in the world's history, the Divine Power which directs that affairs of men has marked for leadership certain great men." Instead, Howell objected to Smith's claim that he in particular had been called by God, based on what Howell believed about his opponent's character. After all, history had never revealed "that a PHARISEE was ever given a Divine Call to lead the Christian hosts."

Howell listed numerous instances in which large corporations—most notably railroad companies—had paid Smith enormous fees to protect their interests. Perhaps somewhat disingenuously, Howell noted that ordinarily his paper might have ignored such charges, "but when in giving reason for his candidacy for office, he advances the bold, preposterous and almost sacrilegious declaration that he is a Divine Instrument, some analysis of his claim of being Providentially ordained is plainly called for." Howell concluded that it was an insult to the people of Georgia to assume they would believe that a man so corrupt could be believed to have a direct call from the divine. But it was Smith's alleged corruption that disqualified his claim, Howell was saying, not the impossibility of the claim itself.⁵⁴

⁵² *Atlanta Independent* 2 December, 1905.

⁵³ *Ibid.* 30 June, 1906.

⁵⁴ *Atlanta Constitution* 1 July, 1905.

Despite these criticisms, religion was clearly an important part of Smith's broad appeal. Evangelical Christianity provided common values around which Smith could rally reform minded Georgians, especially white urban middle-class reformers and rural Populists. But urban reformers and Populists certainly shared more than religious conviction. Hoke Smith's race-baiting—for which the campaign was to become most famous—also provided a useful means for uniting disparate elements of Georgia's electorate. As one supporter said, "Men may differ on a thousand issues, but one thing is certain, that the great rank and file of Georgians are determined that the Negro shall be eliminated from politics."⁵⁵

Disenfranchisement, as the foundational key to anti-Machine success, was always an important component of Smith's platform, though its prominence as a central issue changed dramatically. Initially, robbing African Americans of the franchise was an ancillary component of Smith's other objectives. He had devoted very little time to the issue in his Madison speech. It was Clark Howell, Machine candidate and editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, who pushed the issue to center of the campaign by repeatedly attacking Smith's proposal. Howell and his supporters maintained that the white primary sufficiently protected white supremacy. Howell's main objection was that the education and landownership restrictions needed to disenfranchise black voters (the Fifteenth Amendment prohibited voting restrictions based on race) would also disenfranchise thousands of uneducated and poor whites.

Smith's retorts escalated the debate. Howell, of course, responded and the cycle began to escalate: each candidate resorted to one-upmanship, repeatedly defending his proposals as the best protection of white supremacy while accusing the other of endangering white voters. Race-baiting, somewhat muted in the summer of 1905, would reach a fevered pitch by August of the following year. But while the tone and intensity surrounding his discussion of disenfranchisement changed, Smith's central argument did not. He contended that African

⁵⁵ *Atlanta Journal* 14 August, 1906.

Americans corrupted the political process. Their supposed intellectual and moral inferiority made them particularly vulnerable to manipulation, even when they were not advocating destructive policies of their own making.

Many disenfranchisement advocates similarly appealed to southern paternalism by claiming it was in the "best interest" of southern blacks. However, a sizeable group advocated a more radical position, echoing sentiments heard at Statesboro. J. Dan Woodall, secretary of the Populist state convention, believed morality alone disqualified black voters. Hoke Smith's proposal was the only appropriate option when one remembered "the imperious beauty, the immaculate virtue of Caucasian femininity, the un[im]peachable superiority of Caucasian manhood, the imperative necessity of Caucasian purity, and the supreme blessings of Caucasian dominion of everything that is incarnated on this beautiful beneficent God appointed planet." He cursed the doctrine of equality that "friends" in politics and religion had preached to African Americans, blaming this message for black on white rape. He hoped the Republicans would read Genesis 34 and 35, as well as the last three chapters of Judges "and see the most stupendous object lesson in all history, and how emphatically God stands for helpless womanhood, and take warning." He ripped the "*Constitution's* niggerfied defending attitude," citing its condemnation of the Statesboro lynching and its opposition to disenfranchisement. Opposition to disenfranchisement, Woodall charged, was tantamount to encouraging rape. Here again we see an equivalency rooted in a distinctly religious understanding of black immorality.⁵⁶

Religious reform and religious understandings of black immorality all combined under a "consecrated" campaign in which the religious and political were often indistinguishable. Col. John C. Reed, a prominent Atlanta citizen and a strong Smith's ally, made one of the most striking summations of this fact. Three days after Smith won the Democratic primary with 104,796 popular votes (his opponents received a combined vote of 70,477), Reed wrote that "some secret agency—I believe it was a divine call" had united the people of Georgia to call upon

Hoke Smith. That same agency had caused him to consent. Hoke "felt that the battle was the Lord's" and on behalf of the "robbed, oppressed and insulted people" had taken it up with the courage of David. Reed encouraged Georgians to "Read over the 17th and 18th chapters of Revelation. There you will find our corrupt railroad power in politics drawn to the life, and also its destruction vividly told." He likened the railroad interests to the harlot of Babylon. Prominent men, including some clergy, had defiled themselves with this prostitute. But justice had been done: "God hath remembered her iniquities" and Smith was the tool of His judgment.⁵⁷ Such was the character of Smith's victory.

On September 4th, when Democrats gathered in Macon to officially nominate Smith and set their party platform, their language eerily recalled Charlie Gaston's nomination in *The Leopard's Spots*. James Anderson took the floor to nominate Smith, insisting that while Smith had never claimed to be divinely called "the hand of Providence is in it. Is not that man 'divinely called' who is the efficient instrument to work the will of God?" Anderson was certain his children would look back and see "a nimbus" about Smith's head. "I do not hesitate to say that he has a divine mission—a mission which means . . . the salvation of the South." Among those things Smith would rescue them from was "the black and sickening cloud of Negro insolence" that threatened "our homes, our wives, and our daughters." Like those who had commented on Statesboro, Anderson connected black political equality with sexual assault. By enfranchising black voters and transforming the kindly "old-time negro" into a "demon," the North had blighted the South and "soiled southern womanhood." But Smith would redeem Georgia. He would save Georgia's women from these demons. He was "a man powerful of mind and body and absolutely sincere of purpose; a man who will win the fight." This was a "strong man whom God has sent us"—a man who would smash corporate rule and put the "Negro" back in his place.⁵⁸ Was Smith's role to be political or religious? The question's implicit bifurcation would have surely

⁵⁶ *Atlanta Journal* 4 August, 1906.

⁵⁷ *Atlanta Journal* 25 August, 1906.

seemed a fallacious one to many of Smith's supporters. Indeed, it would have also seemed strange to many of those who took to Atlanta's streets on September 22nd.

⁵⁸ *Atlanta Journal* 4 September, 1906.

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, in the years after Statesboro, events like the Democratic primary and the performance of "The Clansman" agitated already tense race relations. In early July of 1906, reports of prowling black men in Atlanta's suburbs began to excite the white population.¹ In late July, the first of several alleged black on white rapes exacerbated the already heightened tension. Annie Laurie Pool, a fifteen year old girl, was assaulted around 10:30am near her suburban home in Lakewood. Frank Carmichael, later identified as the assailant, fled into the woods but was captured that afternoon. Men dragged him before Pool, who identified him as the criminal. According to newspaper reports, Carmichael confessed to the crime. He was taken outside the house and riddled with bullets. His body was then taken to a black undertaker in Atlanta where it remained visible through the window. Over the next day and a half, hundreds of onlookers were reported to have viewed the corpse.

Charles Daniel, the pious progressive editor of the *Atlanta News*, lauded Carmichael's death just as he would celebrate and encourage all the violence in coming months. Daniel refused to call the lynchers a "mob," insisting that they represented "loyal, patriotic citizens." The fact that Carmichael's death had been achieved without a lengthy and humiliating trial, testified "to the eternal glory of his captives." "Would to heaven," he wrote, "that such men could always handle crimes and criminals of this sort." Daniel's piety and propensity for theological reflection suggests that his religious language was not accidental. For Daniel and for other Atlantans, the execution constituted a religious good, for which men could gain heavenly glory.²

On August 20th, the newspapers reported that a black man had brutally beaten Ethel Lawrence, age 30, and her niece Mabel Lawrence, age 14. As both women were taken for

¹ *Atlanta Journal* 8 July, 1906, *Atlanta Georgian* 12 July, 1906.

medical care, hundreds of heavily armed men began looking for the culprit. The *News* reported that it was "certain he would be lynched if identified." As proof of the paper's increasingly militant stance against sexual assault, Charles Daniel announced that the *News* would pay \$1,000 reward "for the capture and conviction of the criminals who commit this unmentionable crime." The *News* also announced its intention to supply Atlantans with six to ten quality bloodhounds. The dogs would be used to track down the "black devils" accused of rape. Daniel proudly noted that this was but part of a larger strategy: "before long this paper will undertake on its own account to run down and capture the perpetrators of these horrible deeds." Over the next few days, three men were arrested, but the women insisted that the assailant was not among them. The thousands of white men gathered for a lynching went unsatisfied. The searchers failed to find the perpetrator.³

Daniel was not the only outraged editor. The *Atlanta Journal*, which had previously been restrained in its descriptions of sexual assault, issued an editorial entitled "WE MUST PROTECT OUR WOMEN." Unlike the *News*, the *Journal* rejected the extralegal, instead calling on vagrant laws and increased police protection. In the *Atlanta Georgian*, John Temple Graves described the state of affairs in Atlanta as a "reign of terror" in which white women could not journey outside after dark. Graves lamented that "killing, shooting, burning" had ceased to frighten would be rapists. He suggested a new and mysterious punishment—"the passing over a slender bridge into a dark chamber wherein the utter darkness and in utter mystery the assailant of woman's virtue would meet a fate which his friends would never know and which he himself would never come back to make them understand." This new punishment so steeped in mystery would more powerfully deter the members "of this ignorant and superstitious race." Graves' main proposal, however, was that black teachers, editors, and preachers suspend their criticisms of lynch law and "get busy with the vigorous use of their lungs and their lead pencils against the crime, if not

² *Atlanta News* 31 July, 1906, 2 August, 1906.

³ *Atlanta News*, 21 August, 1906, 23 August, 1906.

suppressed, will ultimately destroy their race." This had to be done, for Georgia's white men would not "endure in this Southern country a siege in which our women are the prisoners and in which every Southerner is an anxious sentinel at the very shrine of his home."⁴

The newspapers issued this first great salvo of editorials only the day before the primary election—a fact that almost certainly helped Hoke Smith's performance at the polls. The politicians along with the *Constitution* remained silent on the assaults. At least one Georgian expressed frustration with this reticence. B. E. Watson asked if the "political fortunes" of the primary candidates were more important "than the safety of the most sacred objects of the homes of southern men—wife, mother, sister, daughter." How else could he explain the silence? Like many others, Watson also expressed that he had no patience for ministers who decried lynching in the name of "Christian civilization." How could any man sit by and watch southern womanhood be dragged through the courts? Lynching offered a means of defending the home without humiliating the victim.

While Watson tired of anti-lynchers' appeals to "Christian civilization," many Georgians believed it compatible with lynching. "Citizen" wrote the *Atlanta Georgian* that while he was a "church man" he "would not have an easier job than to raise 100,000 Baptists or Methodists any time our homes need protection."⁵ A.C. Ward, pastor of Temple Baptist church, thanked Charles Daniel for his recent editorials on "the unmentionable crime," calling them "along the right line."⁶ Another man wrote John Temple Graves in response to his editorial on the "Reign of Terror." He could "not refrain from thanking the good God for a man who has the ability and the courage to write such a plea." He assured Graves that "you are set aside with a divine gift, which you are consecrating to what will prove ere long the greatest question ever confronted the Caucasian

⁴ *Atlanta Georgian* 21 August, 1906

⁵ *Atlanta Georgian* 25 August, 1906.

⁶ *Atlanta News* 15 August, 1906.

race."⁷ Numerous Atlantans sounded a similar refrain, writing editors like Graves and Daniel that "they thanked God" for their editorials on the race issue and "prayed" for their success.

The clamor for the protection of the sacred home would continue until the riot. On August 26, the *News* announced the formation of the "Public Vigilance Committee"—which Daniel approvingly compared to the Ku Klux Klan. Like the Klan, membership and meeting were to be secret. The Committee proposed to protect the unpoliced suburban areas of Fulton County with policies that included severely "thrashing" African Americans found loitering after dark, unless they produced a certificate showing a local residence. Daniel had already begun circulating petitions, and in one night he had obtained signatures from "several hundred of the best and most substantial citizens of this section."

In the same edition, Daniel published an editorial entitled "Men of Georgia, Bestir Yourselves!" In what almost amounted to a series of aphorisms, Daniel called white men to arms. He described rape as "a violation of the sanctity of womanhood." Like Dixon and the advocates of the Cato-Reed lynching, Daniel claimed women were the basis of civilization. He also repeatedly imbued women with religious significance: women were "the bulwark of life and religion; they were "angels of the earth;" their religion made "life worth living." After the pious editor provided this striking spiritual description of southern femininity, he insisted that "to contemplate a brutal, black fiend and devil violating the sacred person of such a woman as we have described is almost beyond the mind. It does not seem possible that such a crime against nature and against noble womanhood could be tolerated by the power which rules mankind and all civilization." Divine justice was thus on the side of his righteous crusade against the "black devil." He could promise "great distinction and great public honor and glory" to those who guaranteed the death of the "imp from hell fire" who perpetrated unholy crimes against the God-given purity of the white woman.⁸

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ *Atlanta News* 26 August, 1906.

Perhaps from fear of giving voters reasons to choose Hoke Smith, the *Constitution* remained noticeably quiet on the race issue until the end of August, when the paper added its own voice to growing racist clamor. On August 31, an editorial demanded concerted efforts to close the saloons. The author acknowledged the “law and order element among the negroes,” but he believed they were not up to dealing the threat to the city. Neither the pulpit, the editors, nor any “moral influence” could reach the “negro outlaws and degenerates” who threatened Fulton County’s women. These black criminals would only respect “brute force.”⁹

The *Constitution* was not alone in looking for concrete means to protect white womanhood. Local ministers joined Daniel to pressure the Atlanta city council into suppressing the saloons believed to be the source of so much black crime.¹⁰ On September 8th, the city began a "crusade" against drinking establishments, focusing on the black-owned establishments along Decatur and Peachtree streets. One license inspector expected nearly all the "lunch houses" and dives—over two hundred establishments—along the two streets to be closed. If some whites feared the role of the saloons, others feared more organized conspiracies. In early September, J. G. Robinson, a minister in the African Methodist Episcopal church, had written the *Atlanta Journal* to deny reports in a local paper that black homes and churches in Decatur were supporting “Before Day clubs.”¹¹

As the crusade got underway, Rev. J. C. Solomon, superintendent of the Georgian Anti-Saloon League, prepared an essay that described why he and other Georgians favored closing Atlanta's saloons. In short, Solomon believed that "from the wedlock of the negro vagrant and the liquor den come the unspeakable crime." He noted the large number of black vagrants who congregated around Decatur street. This "trifling, lustful horde" could only make him shudder. "Continue to give the negro this defective sort of education; keep in his hands the right of franchise, the sacred ballot; keep open before him the lust-exciting, crime-producing saloon, and

⁹ *Atlanta Constitution* 31 August, 1906.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 1 September, 1906.

he is a horrible menace day and night. No home is safe with a brute like that slaking through the land." The threat to the home was readily deduced: "tank him up on booze and his bestial nature is aroused. Full of liquor, full of lust, and the black brute makes toward a white woman." For the white man to provide the black man with liquor fanned "the hellish lust of the negro" leaving the white home "the target of his devilry."¹²

Solomon's language testified to Atlanta's mounting racial tension. On September 10th, John E. White, pastor of the Second Baptist church, told an assembly of Baptist ministers that the growing racial hostility was putting Christianity on trial. Too many white Christians were giving themselves over to feelings of vengeance toward the black community. He was grieved "to find some ministers as bitter on this [race] question as the politicians would like them to be." He believed the recent campaign had aggravated racial animosity and that Smith's landslide victory proved "the wish of the people in the county to rid themselves of the negro." Though he did not mention the paper by name, White concluded his address by condemning what he believed was a reward offered for lynching by the *News*. He denounced this action as "abhorrent to Christian civilization."¹³

In an editorial on the following day, Charles Daniel responded to White, insisting that the \$1000 reward was only for the "capture and conviction" of rapists. His paper "would not think of or countenance the offering of a public reward for the lynching of any man, black or white." He made no mention, however, of his regular defense of extralegal violence.¹⁴ White answered the *News* that he had been mistaken regarding the reward's stipulations and admitted the money was not intended for lynchings. Yet he did not apologize. He countered that the paper offered another form of award for extralegal violence, "It offered praise. It offered applause. It offered support. It offered as far as its influence extended immunity." The minister then accused the *News* of

¹¹ *Atlanta Journal* 1 September, 1906.

¹² *Atlanta News* 8 September, 1906.

¹³ *Atlanta Journal* 10 September, 1906, *Atlanta News* 12 September, 1906.

¹⁴ *Atlanta News* 11 September, 1906.

using the reward as a ploy to distract critics from its praise for mob violence. The logic underlying Daniel's celebration of lynching suggested that it was preferable to "conviction." Moreover, White was well aware of the religious content of Daniel's editorials. He accused the paper of advocating lynching as "a noble and patriotic business . . . not at all abhorrent to Christian civilization." If such was their view, then why not be consistent and offer their reward for lynching as well as for conviction?¹⁵

Daniel let the matter drop. Others were not prepared to let the issue die. White's denunciations reminded J. S. Burns of reactions to the "Statesboro tragedy," specifically of those that had criticized the actions of the mob. These critics had been concerned about little other than winning the approval of "Mr. Roosevelt and the northern press." The fact of the matter was legal execution had not been equal to Cato and Reed's crime. The dignity of a hanging would never frighten these types of creatures. Neither they nor those like them had concern for death because their spiritual advisors, who Burns believed were behind many "before day"-like plots, convinced the Cato's and Reed's of the world that their gruesome deeds were "God's will." Black ministers also promised the criminal that should they be captured and executed, they were but "crucified and redeemed," while "their crucifiers will be eternally damned." Burns could only imagine that like the Statesboro critics, White had never worried about the threat these demons posed to his defenseless family. Thankfully, "God in his infinite goodness endowed some men with human hearts . . . capable of . . . sympathy for suffering humanity." These men could imagine the "hellish plot" hatched by those "arch-demons of hell." These men could "hear those little angel voices in the agony of death, while being brained with an ax like worthless dogs, pleading for mercy and calling pitifully for mama and papa whose mutilated forms lie cold in death below." He reminded White and other "pretenders to virtue and piety" that "the law of nature which is God's own law" had not been violated by "the noble men of Bulloch county." Lynching was no

¹⁵ Ibid. 12 September, 1906.

crime against Christian civilization, rape was. Until the statute law reflected divine law, the men of Georgia would repeat the events in Bulloch.¹⁶

Things were now coming to head. Several reports of “negro prowlers” circulated through Atlanta. On September 20th, recently deputized Charles Daniel helped catch “Troy,” a man accused of assaulting Dottie Kimball. Governor Terrell had summoned the state militia who, unlike in Statesboro, averted a lynching.¹⁷ On the same day as Kimball’s assault, Luther Frazier broke into the home of eighteen year old Orrie Bryan, after allegedly removing his “hat, shoes and trousers.” She had only been able to escape by locking herself in a closet. Her father, a Methodist minister, had been out on business at the YMCA.¹⁸ Frazier was tried the next day and Mr. Bryan had only just restrained himself from attacking Frazier in court. He wrote the *Atlanta Georgian*, “I notice some of the preachers writing on the philosophy of the mobs. Just wait till a half-naked Negro breaks your door open and grabs at the the throat of your wife or daughter and it’s ‘good-bye philosophy!’ There is not a preacher in Atlanta but would kill him if he could, on the spot. . . . [T]he Negroes have put us in bondage. Negroes are even keeping us away from the church of God—they make us stay and protect our homes. Southern men, when shall we be free?”¹⁹ But at least one man saw the hand of God working at the Bryan’s home. Robert Bryan Harrison wrote the *Constitution* that it had been “the divine spark or the Christ within” that prompted her into the closet, thus saving her from the “black devil.”²⁰

Few white Atlantans were convinced that trusting to the “Christ within” would save them from the black menace to sacred white womanhood. On Friday, September 21, Charles Daniel published an editorial entitled “It Is Time to Act, Men.” He asked the men of Fulton County if the “black devils” would be permitted to assault white women without retribution. He

¹⁶ *Atlanta News* 18 September, 1906.

¹⁷ *Atlanta Georgian* 21 September, 1906, *Atlanta News* 21 September, 1906, *Atlanta Constitution* 21 September, 1906.

¹⁸ *Atlanta Constitution* 21 September, 1906; *Atlanta Georgian* 21 September, 1906.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, quoted in Mark Bauerlein, *Negrophobia : A Race Riot in Atlanta, 1906* (San Francisco: Encounter Books, 2001), 127.

²⁰ *Atlanta Constitution* 22 September, 1906.

encouraged men to do their duty and join the *News*' Public Vigilance Committee or to offer their services to the authorities. It had come time for the men of Atlanta to act.²¹

Action soon came. On Saturday, the city began a series of raids on black saloons. In the process, they found lewd photographs of white women. Around 4pm newsboys began hawking extras that detailed a series of black assaults on white women and more appearances of black prowlers. White men began to gather on street corners to discuss the attacks. Around 8:30, stories of fights between blacks and whites were carried through the streets, and impromptu speeches called for an end to the black menace. With cries of "Nigger! Kill the black devil!" mobs attacked any black person they saw. Enraged whites overturned streetcars and looted black businesses.²² The attackers were not only working class men, many in the mob were very well dressed. By 10:00, nearly 10,000 whites rampaged through the streets. Bloodied corpses were piled around the Henry Grady monument, where souvenir seekers came to take body parts as tokens of victory. Though city and state officials had suppressed most major violence by early Sunday morning, sporadic clashes occurred over the next few days. With time, however, the violence passed. But in its passing, the riot left twenty-five black men dead, one hundred and fifty men and women seriously injured, and hundreds more with minor wounds. In addition, Charles Crowe estimates that over a thousand African Americans fled the city.²³

In the wake of the riot, clergymen called for a reassertion of Christian principles to rebuild interracial harmony. White paternalists like former governor Northen, a pious Baptist, labored to create space for interracial dialogue. While most of these attempts had little impact, they lay the foundation for later groups like the Council for Interracial Cooperation, which had strong church ties.²⁴ There were others, however, who saw no need to reassert Christian

²¹ *Atlanta News* 21 September, 1906.

²² Quoted in Crowe, "Racial Massacre," 159.

²³ Williamson, *Crucible*, 215-220, Bauerlein, *Negrophobia*, Minnox, "Atlanta Riot."

²⁴ Brundage, *Lynching*, 211-215.

principles in the wake of the riot. What had happened on the streets of Atlanta was but an outgrowth of the Christian duty to protect the home.

As we have seen, these sentiments were widespread. Thomas Dixon articulated a racialized, progressive theology that celebrated violence in manhood's defense of the Anglo-Saxon home, which the author considered the very basis of civilization. Defenders of the Statesboro lynching articulated the burnings in a way that echoed many of Dixon's sentiments. The white Democratic primary had given voice to many of these sentiments in a religiously-charged, political forum. While the conjunction of masculinity, race, religion, and politics was not the only contributing factor to the riot, it fostered an environment in which violence was not merely an option, but a sacred duty. Even if no one reflected on this duty as they joined the mob, this sense of duty encouraged the incendiary rhetoric that drove many whites into a rage.

Many scholars have argued that racial violence served as a form of scapegoating. Joel Williamson makes this assertion in connection with the Atlanta race riots. As the primary showed, Georgians were frustrated over the mounting problems of urbanization and industrialization. African Americans offered a convenient target for white frustrations. While Williamson does mention the role of churches in the forces preceding the riot, he is not as concerned with the role of religion in encouraging violence. Donald Mathews, however, has extended the scapegoating argument to explain the function of lynching in southern society. Mathews argues that many African Americans have noted parallels between lynching and the crucifixion, the "core of the Christian paradigm that was so essential a part of Southern culture."²⁵ Mathews himself lays the religious onus of lynching on atonement theology, specifically "satisfaction theology." In their articulation of satisfaction theology, white southerners maintained that the wages of sin was death, because they believed God demanded just compensation for sinful transgressions. In His mercy, God allowed expiation through substitutionary sacrifices. Christ had died on the Cross as the sacrificial lamb; in doing so he

satisfied God's demand for just punishment, thereby saving humanity from eternal damnation by shedding his blood for them.²⁶

This view of Christ's work had dire consequences. Mathews boldly claims that "the Christianity of the white South was a religion of sin, punishment, and sacrifice." More succinctly, he argues southern evangelicalism "was a religion of violence." In a culture where blood sacrifice was understood as a means of righting the cosmic order, a black man who violated racial norms became the sacrificial scapegoat. Whites thus lynched (i.e. sacrificed) black men to right wrongs in the "divine" order of segregation and white supremacy. This act of sacrifice "is the connection between the purpose of white supremacists, the purity signified in segregation, the magnificence of God's wrath, and the permission granted the culture through the wrath of 'justified' Christians to sacrifice black men on the cross of white solidarity."²⁷

Mathews' observation about justice is a good one. The clamor for the punishment of rapists and murderers was often articulated in theological terms. The contention that "the object of the law is to mete out justice to the culprits, inflicting upon the guilty ones the punishment they justly deserve" would have been widely accepted.²⁸ However, it was not just lynching apologists who argued this. Everyone, including lynching's vociferous African American critics, understood the death of the guilty parties as a metaphysical necessity.²⁹ Those who opposed extralegal violence did so because they maintained that legitimate punishment could only be carried out by the state. Many advocates of lynching also acknowledged a theology of punishment, but one where they saw themselves as the embodiment of law.

Whatever insights about justice Mathews had suggested, his theory falters in several places, not the least of which is the paucity of sacrificial references among apologists of racial

²⁵ For an example of this see W. E. B. Dubois, "Jesus Christ in Georgia," *Crisis*, vol. 2 (Dec. 1911): 70-74.

²⁶ Donald Mathews, "The Southern Rite of Human Sacrifice." See also Mathews, "'Christianizing the South.'"

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Atlanta News* 29 August, 1904.

violence. Whites more frequently attributed an almost demonic character to African Americans. One does not offer God a demon in repayment for sin. If anything, white racial violence more often resembled an exorcism than a sacrifice. And it was not just individuals who were possessed by these satanic minions—many southerners saw a systemic indwelling that threatened the “purity” of their cherished institutions, be they the government or the home. As in Statesboro and Atlanta, white outrage was thus not always satisfied with a single act of violence. The religious rhetoric of racial violence could then go beyond the rhetoric of justice to something more akin to war.

The prevalence of this demonology of race among so many men suggests that historians have overemphasized the feminization of Christianity, a process that is said to have occurred in the late nineteenth century. According to this argument women slowly took de facto control of denominational structures while men grew increasingly alienated from the church. Shamed by this fact, early twentieth century men tried to reassert control of the church through movements like Men and Religion Forward. Ted Ownby argues that the South reflected this general pattern, with a strong division between male culture and southern evangelicalism. Ownby believes that many southern men still found ways of expressing their Christian values outside of the church, though he sees these expressions primarily as accommodations to feminized values. While this may be partly true, events in the turn of the century Georgia suggest that the relationship between masculinity and religion was far more complicated. The frequent critiques of clerical anti-lynching pronouncements suggest that men did feel alienated from the church. These men did not, however, reject the church altogether nor did they simply accommodate feminized values as Ownby suggests. Rather, many men expressed a faith that was a complex fusion of masculine honor and Christianity that emphasized the sanctity of the home and man’s duty to protect it. It also appears that many southern white men had formulated this synthesis long before the

²⁹ For African American perspectives see “Oh Lord! How Long?,” *The Voice of the Negro*, (Sept. 1904): 411-413, *Atlanta Independent* 20 August, 1904.

feminization of the church was of significant concern. In 1875, a Maryland mob righteously declared that “before God we believe in the existence of a higher code than that which is dignified by the [law] . . . and that the high and holy time to exercise it is when the chastity of our women is tarnished by the foul breath of an imp from hell and the sanctity of our homes invaded by a demon.”³⁰

It is important to emphasize that religion was more than an epiphenomenal manifestation of “real” concerns like economic interests or political power. Because Christianity provided a powerful interpretive tool with which to bring coherence to the world, it helped determine the meaning of events for religiously oriented southerners. The belief in the foundational nature of the home meant that any perceived black threat to that home took on a more sinister character. Moreover, because many southerners saw the home as the foundation of the state, it also provided a means of connecting black sexual assault with white political power. The core of these ideas was well-established long before the radicalization of race relations in the 1890s and 1900s. Beliefs like temperance certainly gained new meaning when faced with inner-city saloons, but it was a mutual reinforcement, not simply a process of putting religion in the service of white supremacy. The flipside of this is that religion also helped determine attitudes that ultimately undermined white supremacy. The study of religious rhetoric in relation to racial violence thus reveals that lynchings often divided southern communities rather than uniting them.

If southern religion played the determining role that I believe it did, then historians need to be more attentive to ways in which religion can shape people’s lives and attitudes. The line between politics, religion, gender, and all the other categories we distinguish are often indistinguishable in minds of historical actors. Indeed, recent events have made this insight all the more important.

³⁰ Bederman, “The Women,” Ownby, *Subduing Satan*. Quoted in Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice*, 241.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

Periodicals

Atlanta Constitution
Atlanta Georgian
Atlanta Journal
Atlanta Independent
Atlanta News
Christian Index
Free Lance
Golden Age
Macon Telegraph
People's Party Paper
Savannah Morning News
Savannah Press
Sparta Ishmaelite
Statesboro News
Swainsboro Forest-Blade
Voice of the Negro
Waynesboro True Citizen

Government Documents and Manuscripts

Bulloch County Baptist Association. *Minutes*. 1904-1905.

Dixon, Thomas. "The Clansman." Rare Books and Manuscripts, Library of Congress.

Ernest Sevier Cox Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University.

Georgia v Paul Reed, Minutes, Bulloch Superior Court, August Special Term, 1904.

Georgia v Will Cato, Minutes, Bulloch Superior Court, August Special Term, 1904.

Margaret Mitchell Marsh Papers, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia.

Hoke Smith Papers, Richard B. Russell Library, University of Georgia.

Statesboro First Baptist Church Record Book, Special Collections, Mercer University.

United States. Manuscript Schedules for the 1900 Population for Bulloch County and Chatham County Georgia.

Articles and Books

Baker, Ray Stannard. "What Is a Lynching?: A Study of Mob Justice, South and North." *McClure's Magazine*, January 1905: 299-314.

Dixon, Thomas. *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden—1865-1900*. New York: Doubleday Page, 1903.

_____. *The Clansman: An American Drama: From His Two Famous Novels the Leopard's Spots and the Clansman: Presented by the Southern Amusement Co.* New York: American News Co., 1905.

_____. *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1905.

Dixon, Thomas and Karen Crowe. *Southern Horizons: The Autobiography of Thomas Dixon*. Alexandria, Va.: IWV Pub., 1984.

Graves, John Temple. "Georgia Pioneers the Prohibition Crusade." *Cosmopolitan* 45 (June 1908): 83-90.

Smith, Hoke. "Speech of Hoke Smith Delivered at Madison Georgia, June 29, 1905." Atlanta: Bennett Printing House, n.d..

SECONDARY SOURCES

Ayers, Edward L. *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.

_____. *The Promise of the New South : Life after Reconstruction*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Bauerlein, Mark. *Negrophobia: A Race Riot in Atlanta, 1906*. 1st ed. San Francisco, Calif.: Encounter Books, 2001.

Bederman, Gail. "'The Women Have Had Charge of the Church Work Long Enough': The Men and Religion Forward Movement of 1911-1912 and the Masculinization of Middle-Class Protestantism." *American Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (Sept. 1989): 432-465.

Brogdon, Frederick and Charlton Moseley. "A Lynching at Statesboro: The Story of Paul Reed and Will Cato." *Georgia Historical Quarterly* LXV (Summer 1987): 104-118.

Brundage, W. Fitzhugh. "Lynching in the New South : Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930." 1988.

Cook, Raymond Allen. *Fire from the Flint; The Amazing Careers of Thomas Dixon*. Winston-Salem, N.C.: J. F. Blair, 1968.

Crowe, Charles. "Racial Massacre in Atlanta, September 22, 1906." *Journal of Negro History* 54 (1968): 150-173.

Flynt, J. Wayne. *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998.

- Frederickson, George M. *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1987.
- Gilmore, Glenda Elizabeth. *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.
- Girard, René. *The Scapegoat*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.
- Glass, William R. "The Ministry of Leonard G. Broughton at Tabernacle Baptist Church, 1898-1912: A Source of Southern Fundamentalism." *American Baptist Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (March 1985): 35-60.
- Goode, Richard C. "The Godly Insurrection in Limestone County: Social Gospel, Populism, and Southern Culture in the Late Nineteenth Century," *Religion and American Culture* 3, no. 2 (1993): 155-169.
- Grantham, Dewey W. *Hoke Smith and the Politics of the New South*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958.
- _____. *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1983.
- Hale, Grace Elizabeth. *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*. New York: Vintage Books, 1998.
- Hall, Jacquelyn Dowd. *Revolt against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign against Lynching*. Rev. ed. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.
- Harris, Trudier. *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- Harvey, Paul. *Redeeming the South: Religious Cultures and Racial Identities among Southern Baptists, 1865-1925*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- "Historical, Demographic, Economic, and Social Data: The United States, 1790-1970." Ann Arbor, MI: Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research, 197?.
- Jeffrey, Julie Roy. "Women in the Southern Farmers Alliance: A Reconsideration of the Role and Status of Women in the Nineteenth-Century South." *Feminist Studies* 3 (Fall 1975): 72-91.
- Jordan, Winthrop D. *The White Man's Burden; Historical Origins of Racism in the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1974.
- Jordan, Winthrop D. *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro, 1550-1812*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968.
- Kazin, Michael. *Populist Persuasion: An American History*. New York: Harper Collins, 1995.

- Ketchin, Susan. *The Christ-Haunted Landscape: Faith and Doubt in Southern Fiction*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994.
- Korobkin, Russell. "The Politics of Disenfranchisement," *Georgian Historical Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 20-58.
- Link, William A. *The Paradox of Southern Progressivism, 1880-1930*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992.
- Luker, Ralph. *The Social Gospel in Black and White: American Racial Reform 185-1912*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991.
- Marsden, George M. *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.
- Mathews, Donald. "'Christianizing the South'—Sketching a Synthesis." In *New Directions in American Religious History*, ed. Harry Stout and D. G. Hart, 84-115. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- _____. "The Southern Rite of Human Sacrifice," *Journal of Southern Religion*; available from <http://jsr.as.wvu.edu/mathews.htm>; Internet, accessed 23 July, 2001.
- Minnix, Kathleen. *Laughter in the Amen Corner: The Life of Evangelist Sam Jones*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993.
- Mixon, Gregory Lamont. "The Atlanta Riot of 1906." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cincinnati, 1989.
- Moorhead, James H. *World without End: Mainstream American Protestant Visions of the Last Things, 1880-1925*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.
- Ownby, Ted. *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990.
- Patterson, Orlando. *Rituals of Blood: Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries*. Washington, D.C.: Civitas/CounterPoint, 1998.
- Raper, Arthur. *The Tragedy of Lynching*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1933.
- Smith, John Douglass. "Statesboro Blues." M.A. thesis, University of Virginia, 1987.
- Smith, Lillian Eugenia. *Killers of the Dream*. New York,: Norton, 1961.
- Smith, Theophus Harold. *Conjuring Culture: Biblical Formations of Black America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Stephens, Randall. "The Convergence of Populism, Religion, and the Holiness-Pentecostal Movements: A review of the Historical Literature," *Fides et Historia*, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2000): 51-64.

- Turley, Briane K. *A Wheel within a Wheel: Southern Methodism and the Georgia Holiness Association*. Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1999.
- Walsh, Julia Mary. "'Horny-Handed Sons of Toil': Workers, Politics, and Religion in Augusta, Georgia, 1880-1910." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign, 1999.
- White, Walter Francis. *Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch*. New York: Knopf, 1929.
- Williamson, Joel. *The Crucible of Race: Black/White Relations in the American South since Emancipation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1984.
- Wyatt-Brown, Bertram. *Honor and Violence in the Old South*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.