

Paper

From Stone Mountain to the Statehouse: The Second Klan's Rise in Georgia, 1915-1925

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On Thanksgiving night in 1915, Georgia played a central role in the Second Ku Klux Klan movement. That night, the Klan was reestablished and Georgia would continue to serve as the Klan's national headquarters, earning it the nickname of the "Invisible Empire State," coined by W.E.B. Du Bois to designate the state as the primary command center and birthplace of the movement at its source.¹ The founding ceremony in 1915 took place on Stone Mountain, a prominent granite outcrop just outside Atlanta, in a highly choreographed event involving fire, ritual oaths, and religious symbolism.² Atlanta then became home to the Klan's national office, known as the "Imperial Palace," and, at its height, the Atlanta chapter alone boasted over 15,000 members.³ By the mid-1920s, the Klan had established chapters throughout the state, from major cities to rural hamlets, working together to expand influence and coordinate membership drives.⁴ This article examines the social and religious factors that enabled the Second Ku Klux Klan to achieve mainstream acceptance in Georgia between 1915 and 1925. In particular, I argue that the Klan's mainstream success rested not only on racist ideology or intimidation, but on its calculated alignment with dominant religious values, moral reform agendas, and political structures. As I will trace below, Georgia's cultural and institutional landscape was particularly amenable to the Klan's presentation of itself as a defender of Protestant virtue, civic order, and American identity.

The period from 1915 to 1925 marks the organization's peak in Georgia, from its Stone Mountain revival to its political and cultural ascendancy across the country, before internal scandals and national backlash triggered a decline in the late 1920s and early 1930s.⁵ In order to track this rise, I draw on local newspapers, Klan publications, pamphlets, oral histories, and government documents to analyze the narrative strategies and institutional collaborations that underpinned the Klan's rise. The first section examines how post-Reconstruction resentment, Lost Cause mythology, and racism created a climate of white anxiety in Georgia. The second section explores the overlap between Klan ideology and Protestant moralism, particularly within Southern Baptist traditions, and how religious symbols, biblical references, and ministerial cooperation helped the Klan enter mainstream

Notes

¹ Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), introduction XIV.

² MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry*, 5.

³ MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry*, 9.

⁴ MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry*, 14.

⁵ Thomas R. Pegram, *One Hundred Percent American: The Rebirth and Decline of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2011), 183.

church life. The final section traces the Klan's shift from fringe movement to political influencer, focusing on the campaign of Clifford Walker for Governor and case studies, including the lynching of John Glover in 1922 and the subsequent testimony of Sheriff Jim Hicks on Klan influence in law enforcement. Together, these sections show how the Klan harnessed Georgia's religious and political institutions to gain cultural legitimacy and structural power. A central concept running through this article is what Thomas R. Pegram describes as "Protestant nationalism," a worldview that equated American identity with those who were native-born, white, and Protestant, casting Catholicism, Judaism, immigration, and pluralism as threats to the nation's moral order. This framework is used to underpin my argument about how the Klan embedded itself in Georgia's religious culture and justified its political ambitions through its supposed defense of "American values."⁶

Despite the abundance of scholarship on the Second Ku Klux Klan, Georgia's centrality to the movement has often been overshadowed by studies focusing on the Midwest or on national trends. Seminal works by Nancy MacLean, Thomas Pegram, and Kelly Baker explore the Klan's reach and religious framing, but few focus on Georgia as the ideological and administrative heart of the Second Klan.⁷ In this article I reposition Georgia as the ideological and administrative heart of the Second Klan, highlight the role of religious rhetoric and church structures in its appeal, and demonstrate how the Klan shaped local politics not only through violence but through legal, electoral, and legislative pathways that redefined citizenship and morality in public life.

Contemporary press coverage captured the mystique of the reemergence of the Klan. As reported in *The Americus Daily Times*:

A weird story has come to Atlanta from Stone Mountain about the revival of the mystic rites of the Ku Klux Klan. A night or two ago a mysterious yellow flame was seen to burn brightly on the top of Stone Mountain, and in the early dawn a number of mysterious figures were seen to come down the mountain side and disappear into the woods.⁸

This almost mythical portrayal of the Klan's reemergence was no coincidence; it was part of a deliberately orchestrated event rooted in deeper anxieties and aspirations within Georgia society. The flames on Stone Mountain did not ignite in a vacuum; they were the culmination of long-simmering tensions, cultural currents, and regional dynamics that shaped the state's identity in the early twentieth century.⁹ To understand why this moment occurred in Georgia

⁶ Pegram, *One Hundred Percent American*, 158.

⁷ MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry*; Pegram, *One Hundred Percent American*; Kelly J. Baker, *Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant America, 1915-1930* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011)

⁸ "Ku Klux Klan With Old Rites and the Weird Brought Out," *The Americus Daily Times-Recorder*, November 29, 1915."

⁹ MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry*, 3-5.

and why it resonated so strongly, it is necessary to examine the social, religious, and political environment of the time.

William J. Simmons, the Klan's founder and so-called Imperial Wizard, the title given to the organization's national leader, selected the symbolic setting of Stone Mountain as part of his shaping of the ideological character of the revived Klan. Simmons later declared, "It was MY creation, MY CHILD, if you please, MY first born."¹⁰ The choice of Stone Mountain tapped directly into Lost Cause mythology, recasting the Confederacy as a noble, divinely sanctioned struggle; the mountain had already served as a prominent site for Confederate reunions and memorial gatherings in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, giving Simmons a ready-made landscape of Southern memory on which to stage the Klan's rebirth. The ceremony's flaming crosses and ritual oaths infused the Klan's rebirth with Christian imagery, presenting it as a spiritual crusade to "restore" an imagined racial and religious order.¹¹ Georgia was not only the site of Stone Mountain, but also a hotbed of white anxieties surrounding race, immigration, and urbanization, issues upon which the Ku Klux Klan would build its ideological foundation. Leo Frank was lynched in Marietta after his death sentence for the murder of 13-year-old Mary Phagan was commuted. Georgia's governor, Nat E. Harris, condemned the killing as "the most atrocious lynching ever committed in any Southern State," underscoring the volatile climate into which Simmons launched his revived order.¹²

Nativist sentiment in Georgia during the 1910s and 1920s existed along a broad spectrum, and the Second Ku Klux Klan exploited this uneven landscape of anxieties. Anti-immigration attitudes were present, although generally less pronounced than the state's pervasive racial tensions, and nativism was not uniformly embraced across politics or the press.¹³ Even conservative newspapers such as *The Atlanta Georgian* occasionally adopted more moderate positions, criticizing restrictive immigration measures as "stupid laws to regulate immigration" and extending a conditional welcome to "healthy, intelligent, honest white immigrants of all kinds."¹⁴ Such views reflected a belief that certain white immigrants, primarily those from northern and western Europe, could still integrate into American society if deemed morally fit. By contrast, southern and eastern Europeans, especially Italians and Irish Catholics, were often viewed with suspicion and were not always considered fully "white" within the hierarchy of Anglo-Saxon Protestant identity.¹⁵ Other publications, however, advanced even more extreme positions. In 1916 Tom Watson's *The Jeffersonian* warned that immigrant communities formed "separate Kingdoms" loyal to a "foreign Potentate," echoing anti-Catholic fears central to Klan ideology.¹⁶ Simmons repeatedly framed immigrants, especially Catholics and Jews, as agents of moral and social decay. In one of his manifestos, he argued that the Klan stood against "alien doctrines" and those whose first

¹⁰ William J. Simmons, *America's Menace or The Enemy Within* (Atlanta, 1926), 66.

¹¹ Simmons, *America's Menace or The Enemy Within*, 233.

¹² MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry*, 12.; Georgia's Shame', *The Jeffersonian* (August 26 1915).

¹³ Baker, *Gospel According to the Klan*, 6.

¹⁴ 'Stupid Laws to Regulate Immigration', *Atlanta Georgian* (February 15 1914).

¹⁵ Pegram, *One Hundred Percent American*, 51.

¹⁶ 'Trying to establish a Political Despotism for Catholic Priests, Northern Corporation, Whiskey Interests and Rotten Politicians', *The Jeffersonian* (October 26, 1916).

allegiance was not to the United States but to foreign religious or political authorities.¹⁷ By positioning itself as the defender of white, Protestant Americanism, the Klan effectively harnessed both the moderate unease and the more radical nativist fears circulating within Georgia, transforming them into a powerful tool for recruitment and ideological consolidation.

This climate was further shaped by enduring post-Reconstruction resentment, the white Southern anger over federal intervention and the brief period of Black political participation after the Civil War. That resentment had, by the early twentieth century, solidified into a belief in white supremacy as both natural and desirable.¹⁸ The 1910s and 1920s marked a period when white supremacist thought was not only widespread but seemingly validated by contemporary science, social theory, and popular culture.¹⁹ The Second Klan's call for a "white, patriotic, and Protestant community" resonated deeply within this context. In Georgia, collective memory of Reconstruction and the consolidation of Jim Crow policies fueled fears of racial equality and loss of white control. Prominent white leaders who advocated even limited cooperation with Black communities, such as Governor Hugh Dorsey and members of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC), faced backlash, accused of betraying Southern racial solidarity.²⁰ The vehemence of this response showed that the Klan's ideology was not a radical aberration but an intensification of long-standing white anxieties embedded in Georgia's political and cultural life.

D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) played a pivotal role in reinvigorating the Ku Klux Klan, particularly in Georgia. The film was a major box office success, even before it hit Southern theatres, and was scheduled to premiere in Georgia theatres just before Thanksgiving.²¹ While the film was widely acclaimed at the time, it did face minimal opposition in Georgia's larger cities, such as Atlanta and Augusta. A small delegation of ministers, led by Presbyterian clergyman Dr. C.B. Wilmer, petitioned for the film to be banned, although their specific objections were not fully detailed in contemporary reports.²² Despite this resistance, the film proved immensely popular across the state. By romanticizing the Ku Klux Klan and portraying Klansmen as heroic defenders of the South against so-called "beastly Negroes," the film provided a powerful and deeply racist narrative that contributed significantly to the Klan's revival.²³ This volatile mix not only made the Klan's return possible, it prepared the ground for a movement that would cloak its racial and political agenda in the language of Protestant morality.

The revival of the Ku Klux Klan in Georgia in 1915 was not only racially and politically motivated; it was also steeped in religious symbolism and moral rhetoric. William J. Simmons' writings, including *America's Menace or the Enemy Within* (1923) and articles in

¹⁷ William J. Simmons, *The Klan Unmasked* (Atlanta, 1923), 50.

¹⁸ Illinois Legislative Investigating Commission, *Ku Klux Klan: A Report to the Illinois General Assembly*, Chicago, Illinois Legislative Investigating Commission, 1976, 2.

¹⁹ John M. Matthews, "Studies in Race Relations in Georgia, 1890-1930" (PhD diss., Duke University, 1970).

²⁰ MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry*, 130.

²¹ Pegram, *One Hundred Percent American*, 7-8.

²² 'Birth of a Nation', *The Americus Daily Times-Recorder* (October 10, 1915) .

²³ Maclean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry*, 13-14.

The Imperial Night-Hawk, consistently framed the Klan as a Protestant moral force.²⁴ The Klan did not merely present itself as the defender of white supremacy, it styled itself as a righteous force upholding Christian civilization by divine order.

One of the key reasons the Ku Klux Klan had a particularly strong resonance in Georgia was its deliberate alignment with Protestant moralism, a worldview rooted in Southern Baptist traditions that emphasized personal discipline, sexual purity, temperance, and the defense of “Christian civilization.”²⁵ William J. Simmons made this connection explicit during his testimony before the House Committee on Rules, where he described the Klan’s creed as “the highest form of Southern Protestantism.” By presenting the organization in these terms, Simmons positioned the Klan within a familiar moral framework that many white Protestants already embraced.²⁶ Klan literature and public speeches reinforced this link by invoking themes of moral decline and denouncing alcohol, gambling, sexual promiscuity, and perceived “urban corruption.” Drawing on this religious vocabulary, the Klan framed its political agenda as a moral crusade through concepts such as “law and order,” “purity,” and “Americanism,” each tying civic belonging to Protestant values and racial boundaries.²⁷ Supporters such as Alma B. White, the first female bishop in the United States and an outspoken advocate for the Klan, captured this sentiment, for example in her claim that “no person has any right to citizenship in the United States who cannot uphold the principles for which this great organization stands,” referring specifically to the Protestant ideals championed by the Atlanta chapter.²⁸ By embedding its nationalism and racism within the language of Protestant moral reform, the Klan was able to legitimize its cause as a religious duty, positioning itself as the defender of Christian civilization rather than a fringe extremist movement.²⁹ Religious symbolism was also central to the Ku Klux Klan’s identity during its 1915 revival in Georgia. Simmons introduced the burning cross, drawn from romanticized accounts of the first Klan and popularized by *The Birth of a Nation*, as a ritual emblem that blended Anglo-Saxon heritage with spiritual authority. In Klan literature and speeches, the fiery cross was described as representing “the light of Christ” and “the flaming sword of Protestantism,” reinforcing the organization’s claim to defend white Protestant civilization.³⁰

The Klan further strengthened this religious framing by structuring its ceremonies to mirror church hierarchies. During Konklaves, the Kludd, the Klan unit’s chaplain responsible for prayers and religious instruction, presided like a pastor, and Klansmen formed a square, standing three feet apart, around a central altar on which a Bible was placed and opened specifically to Romans chapter twelve.³¹ This passage was chosen because it emphasizes spiritual sacrifice, moral discipline, fraternal unity, and hierarchical obedience values the Klan

²⁴ Simmons, *America’s Menace or The Enemy Within*, 25. ; ‘Klansman, To Church!’, *The Imperial Knight-Hawk* (May 23, 1923).

²⁵ Pegram, *One Hundred Percent American*, 7.

²⁶ United States, The Ku-Klux Klan. Hearings before the Committee on Rules, House of Representative, Sixty-seventh Congress, First Session (Washington D.C., 1921), 127.

²⁷ Baker, *Gospel According to the Klan*, 9.

²⁸ A. B. White, *Klansmen: Guardians of Liberty* (New Jersey 1926) 123.

²⁹ Interview with Lawrence Brooks Hays by A. Ronald Tonks, May 1972, *Oral History Program*, Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention.

³⁰ Baker, *Gospel According to the Klan*, 74. ; Simmons, *America’s Menace or The Enemy Within*, 233.

³¹ William. J. Simmons, *Kloran: Knights of the Klu Klux Klan* (Atlanta 1916) 12-13.

selectively interpreted as divine sanction for its beliefs.³² By adopting church-like offices, altar-centered worship structures, and scriptural framing, the Klan positioned itself as a religious community in its own right, effectively co-opting Protestant forms to present its racial and political agenda as a sacred duty.³³ Following the placement of the Bible, the ceremony continued with the singing of a hymn and a prayer led by the Kludd. It opened with an appeal for God's guidance, asking that each Klansman be led by Christian virtues.³⁴ The prayer called for "clanish fidelity" and unity among members, describing loyalty to the Klan as a sacred duty. It emphasized that a Klansman's highest honor was to serve and preserve the mission of the Order. The prayer also invoked divine blessing for absent members, the nation, and the leadership of the Invisible Empire, including the Emperor, asking that they be granted wisdom and grace. It concluded with a collective vow to serve both God and the Klan, ending with the line: "For my country, the Klan, my fellow Klansmen and my home."³⁵ This prayer combined Christian language with white supremacist ideology and nationalist loyalty.

The Ku Klux Klan's influence in Georgia extended far beyond its secretive Konklaves and became deeply intertwined with Protestant (especially Southern Baptist) church life. The Klan actively used Protestantism and Southern Baptist values, such as temperance, sexual purity, strict Sabbath observance, and the policing of personal morality to promote its ideology to Georgia's white churchgoing population.³⁶ Klansmen organized religious revivals, and sympathetic ministers allowed members to attend services in full regalia. After joining the Klan, many members became deeply involved in congregational life, often joining churches and serving as deacons.³⁷ According to Lawrence B. Hays, a traveling lawyer active in Georgia's Southern Baptist community during the mid-1920s, this visible Klan presence deterred some people from attending services.³⁸ Yet, in many Methodist and Baptist churches, Klan influence became dominant and contributed to increased membership. Klan-dominated congregations across the state cooperated in pursuing shared goals, most notably gaining mainstream acceptance and boosting local chapter recruitment. This network of religious alliances helped make Georgia the second-highest Klan state in the South in terms of membership.³⁹ The Klan's reign in Georgia church life was not, however, entirely unopposed. Some churches demanded the expulsion of Klan-affiliated ministers. For example, Central Baptist Church only readmitted former Imperial Kludd Dr. C. Ridley after he claimed to have severed ties with the Atlanta Klan chapter, though several ministers continued to contest his return.⁴⁰ According to the Atlanta-based Committee on Interracial Cooperation (CIC), ministers who opposed the Klan's methods far outnumbered those who supported them, though direct confrontation remained rare.⁴¹

³² Baker, *Gospel According to the Klan*, 54-56.

³³ Baker, *Gospel According to the Klan*, 6 and 24.

³⁴ Simmons, *Kloran*, 6.

³⁵ Simmons, *Kloran*, 13-15.

³⁶ Simmons, *Kloran*, 36.

³⁷ Illinois Legislative Investigating Commission, *Ku Klux Klan*, 34.

³⁸ Interview Hays, May 1972.

³⁹ Maclean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry*, 15.

⁴⁰ 'Dr. Caleb Ridley Reinstated by Baptist Pastors', *Atlanta Tri-Weekly Journal* (January 29, 1924).

⁴¹ MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry*, 15.

Religion, particularly Southern Baptist values and broader Protestant moralism, therefore played a foundational role in shaping the message and appeal of the Ku Klux Klan in Georgia during its 1915 revival. The Klan skillfully cloaked its white supremacist and nativist ideology in the language of Christian morality, portraying itself as a divinely sanctioned guardian of American civilization.⁴² By aligning itself with traditional Protestant anxieties about urban vice, immigration, and moral decay, the Klan effectively embedded its message within the moral and cultural framework of Georgia's white protestant communities. This religious integration not only expanded the Klan's reach but also lent moral weight to its message, allowing the organization to present itself not merely as a political force but as a righteous instrument of divine and national renewal.⁴³

By the mid-1920s, the Second Ku Klux Klan had emerged from the shadows and begun asserting itself as a powerful force within Georgia's public institutions. Actively pursuing political influence, the Klan embedded itself in local government structures, law enforcement, and even parts of the judicial system. It endorsed political candidates, manipulated voter turnout through intimidation tactics, and framed its policy goals as moral imperatives grounded in Protestant nationalism. This form of American Protestantism linked civic legitimacy to white, native-born Protestant identity and cast pluralism and social change as threats to the nation's moral order. By aligning itself with this vision, the Klan was able to present its political agenda as the defense of "American values," granting it disproportionate sway over public life, particularly in a state already shaped by one-party dominance, disenfranchisement, and racially biased law enforcement.⁴⁴

According to Klan doctrine, democracy could only function if its participants were articulate, educated, and morally disciplined. William J. Simmons made this racialized logic explicit when he declared that "the African Negro cannot realize democracy today because he is psychically, and hence morally, unfitted for its responsibilities."⁴⁵ In the Klan's view, only white, native-born Protestant men of Anglo-Saxon descent were fit to exercise political agency, including the right to vote.⁴⁶ Although the organization initially claimed to have no political ambitions, its rhetoric and activities quickly revealed otherwise.⁴⁷ By the early 1920s, the Klan was not marginal to Georgia's political landscape but deeply embedded within it.⁴⁸ Contemporary observers noted that "no other state, however, presented a better study of intrenchment by the Klan into local politics than the State of Georgia," where the organization helped elect sympathetic officials, including Governor Clifford Walker, and cultivated allies in the judiciary, legislature, and even Congress.⁴⁹

⁴² United States, *The Ku-Klux Klan*, 127.

⁴³ Pegram, *One Hundred Percent American*, 14.

⁴⁴ Pegram, *One Hundred Percent American*, 188-190.

⁴⁵ Simmons, *The Klan Unmasked*, 141

⁴⁶ Simmons, *The Klan Unmasked*, 142-143.

⁴⁷ Simmons, *America's Menace or The Enemy Within*, 124.

⁴⁸ Clement C. Mosele, "The Political Influence of the Ku Klux Klan in Georgia, 1915-1925", *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 57:2 (1973) 235-255, 253.

⁴⁹ Mosele, "The Political Influence of the Ku Klux Klan in Georgia, 1915-1925," 236.

The exception was Columbus, a city marked by unusually fierce resistance from anti-Klan figures such as Julian Harris, editor of *The Columbus Enquirer-Sun*. There, a candidate for city commissioner was forced to relocate after being exposed as a Klansman and losing the election, illustrating the intensity of local opposition.⁵⁰ In such local contexts, running for office as a known Klansman could still carry significant personal and electoral risk, especially while state and federal authorities were making early, though largely ineffective, attempts to curtail the organization.⁵¹ But these isolated setbacks did not reflect the broader political landscape. Across most of Georgia, the Klan rapidly became an entrenched force, holding the balance of power in numerous communities, maintaining a paid lobbyist in Atlanta, and exerting considerable influence over public officials. The contrast between Columbus and the rest of the state underscores how exceptional local resistance was during a period when the Klan's political reach in Georgia was otherwise expanding dramatically.⁵²

The case of Governor Clifford M. Walker offers a telling example. He ran for Governor of Georgia in 1922–1923, less than a year after the city commissioner candidate in Columbus was forced to leave town following revelations of his Klan affiliation.⁵³ While Walker's personal membership in the Ku Klux Klan remained unconfirmed during the campaign, his bid for office was heavily, and visibly, influenced by the Klan's political machine.⁵⁴ He received a quiet endorsement and benefited from the organization's extensive network, which was supported by sympathetic Baptist and Methodist churches. His platform of moral reform and anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant rhetoric resonated with rural white Protestant voters.⁵⁵ This so-called "quiet" endorsement didn't go unnoticed when the *Atlanta Tri-Weekly Journal* interviewed Imperial Wizard Edward Y. Clarke. In this interview, the Imperial Wizard insisted the Klan was "distinctly a non-political organization," and claimed it had abandoned the violence of its Reconstruction-era predecessor.⁵⁶ Both claims proved false, as the Klan resorted to intimidation and coercion in support of Walker's election campaign.⁵⁷ The Klan deployed members to polling stations and neighborhoods to discourage Black voters, as well as Catholic and immigrant sympathizers, from casting their ballots, using threats, coercion, and outright acts of intimidation.⁵⁸ The *Atlanta Tri-Weekly Journal* condemned the organization as a "cheap political machine" that used character assassination, intimidation, and physical violence to deprive citizens of their rights.⁵⁹ Violence against Catholics, immigrants, and Black people often went underreported, and local authorities, many sympathetic or unwilling to intervene, failed to investigate or prosecute these abuses.⁶⁰

⁵⁰ 'Look out Politicians', *The Cordele dispatch and daily Sentinel* (December 12, 1922).

⁵¹ 'Government is able to erase Ku Klux Klan', *The Americus Times-Recorder* (September 30, 1921).

⁵² Mosele, "The Political Influence of the Ku Klux Klan in Georgia, 1915–1925," 235–236.

⁵³ 'Look out Politicians', *The Cordele dispatch and daily Sentinel* (December 12, 1922).

⁵⁴ Mosele, "The Political Influence of the Ku Klux Klan in Georgia, 1915–1925," 246.

⁵⁵ Mosele, "The Political Influence of the Ku Klux Klan in Georgia, 1915–1925," 237 ; MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry*, 9–10.

⁵⁶ Clarke Reveals Plan to Broaden Scope of Ku Klux', *Atlanta Tri-Weekly Journal* (December 30, 1922).

⁵⁷ MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry*, 17.

⁵⁸ MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry*, 163–164.

⁵⁹ 'Factions Ruining Klan, E.Y. Clarke Writes President', *Atlanta Tri-Weekly journal* (December 29, 1923).

⁶⁰ Matthews, *Studies in Race Relations in Georgia*, 164.

Mainstream Protestant newspapers often minimized or ignored acts of racial or religious violence altogether. It was instead Black press outlets and organizations such as The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People that documented these violations, painting a fuller picture of how the Klan's intimidation tactics undermined the democratic process during the 1922–1923 elections.⁶¹ This silence in official records allowed the Klan to continue operating with impunity, masking the scale and severity of its campaign of terror during one of Georgia's most politically volatile moments. Walker's Klan-endorsed campaign eventually led him to victory. By the time his Klan-affiliation became official, it was already largely accepted by many of the majority of Georgia's white population.⁶²

While the Ku Klux Klan publicly professed political neutrality, its founder, William J. Simmons, was explicit in asserting that law enforcement, and both civil and criminal justice, should serve as tools to uphold what he described as “white man's law.”⁶³ Simmons declared in a brochure that the Klan's objectives were:

To aid and assist in the execution of all constitutional laws, and to preserve the honor and dignity of the State by opposing tyranny, in any and every degree attempted from any and every source whatsoever, by a fearless and faithful administration of justice; to promptly and properly meet every behest of Duty without fear and without reproach.⁶⁴

This rhetoric granted Klansmen a self-styled mandate to enforce what Simmons called “white man's law” by any means deemed necessary.⁶⁵ In Georgia, this ideology translated into deliberate efforts to place Klan members within local law enforcement across towns with active chapters.⁶⁶

Once embedded, these officials frequently ignored Klan violence or directly participated in it. In some cases, this complicity extended to lynching. The 1922 killing of John Glover in Macon illustrates this dynamic: deputies stood by as a mob pursued, shot, and burned Glover after he allegedly killed a deputy sheriff.⁶⁷ A year later, Macon County sheriff Jim Hicks admitted that most local law enforcement officers were Klan members and actively obstructed him from enforcing the law, with several deputies and county commissioners openly acknowledging their affiliation.⁶⁸ These revelations underscore how the Klan's penetration of Georgia's law-enforcement structures allowed it to operate above the law, transforming public institutions into instruments of racial terror and political enforcement.

⁶¹ Matthews, *Studies in Race Relations in Georgia*, 135.

⁶² ‘Chief Executive Attended Meet of Hooded Order’, *The Americus Times-Recorder* (October 14, 1924).

⁶³ Simmons, *The Klan Unmasked*, 158

⁶⁴ William J. Simmons, *ABC of the Invisible Empire* (Atlanta, 1917).

⁶⁵ Simmons, *Kloran*, 13–15.

⁶⁶ United States, *The Ku-Klux Klan*, 75

⁶⁷ ‘Bibb County Authorities Take no Action Following Execution by Mob’, *The Cordele dispatch and daily Sentinel* (August 3, 1922).

⁶⁸ ‘Backing up Hicks’, *The Cordele dispatch and daily Sentinel* (October 4, 1923).

By 1925, the Second Ku Klux Klan had become a powerful presence in Georgia's religious, civic, and political life. The Klan did not gain influence simply through intimidation or racial violence; it succeeded because it embedded its message within the everyday moral language, institutional structures, and political expectations of white Protestant Georgia. The Klan's appeal rested on its ability to present white supremacy and nativism as expressions of Christian duty and civic responsibility. By adopting the rituals, rhetoric, and authority of Southern Protestantism, especially Southern Baptist moralism, the Klan framed its cause as a sacred defense of community and nation. This religious veneer allowed the organization to move beyond the margins and into the center of church life, where ministers, congregations, and lay leaders often provided tacit or explicit support. At the same time, the Klan capitalized on widespread social anxieties about racial change, immigration, and moral decline. It offered white Georgians a narrative of order and renewal at a moment when many feared the erosion of traditional hierarchies. Politically, the Klan leveraged these cultural currents to infiltrate law enforcement, influence elections, and shape legislation, blurring the boundaries between religious conviction, civic authority, and racial ideology. These factors reveal that the Klan's rise in Georgia was not an aberration imposed from outside, but a movement that grew from within the state's own institutions and belief systems. Its power lay in its ability to appear ordinary, rooted in familiar values, reinforced by trusted institutions, and justified through the language of faith and patriotism.

That seeming ordinariness, rather than its extremism, explains how the Klan became woven into the fabric of Georgia's public life during the 1915-1925 period. This research points towards a potentially generative path for future scholarly investigations, which should examine Georgia in a comparative way against the experience of other Southern states and trace the decline of Klan influence after the 1920s, building a more locally specific picture of the rise and fall of the Klan across the United States. Further attention might also be given to the role of women's auxiliaries, as well the responses of Black and immigrant communities at the grassroots level. What this study ultimately reveals is that the Klan's power in Georgia was not just in its robes or rhetoric, but in its ability to become ordinary, to speak the language of churches, courtrooms, and campaigns. That remains its most enduring and dangerous lesson for future movements based on racial and political extremism.