

ten deplores discourse as racist without explaining what is going on. For example, the author spends several paragraphs deploring the criticism of General Philip Sheridan in Louisiana in 1875, without making clear that the issue was his stationing of Union soldiers in the legislative chambers to deter a coup (pp. 201-204). The criticism was probably wrong and enabled by resurgent racism, but fears for civil liberties encouraged a frosty press response. The author's abstract

level of political analysis lends itself to ready moralizing.

That said, this is a reasonable, well-researched, and mostly persuasive look at an important topic. Emberton's broad characterizations seemed interpretively correct and original to this reviewer. All good books raise questions, and in this case they are fruitful ones.

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White Robes, Silver Screens: Movies and the Making of the Ku Klux Klan

By Tom Rice

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015. Pp. xx, 302. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Clothbound, \$80.00; paperbound, \$28.00.)

Tom Rice's book begins with a description of the 1915 opening of *The Birth of a Nation* in Atlanta. In celebration of the film, Klansmen marched down Peachtree Street and staged a rifle salute outside the theater. On the surface, the Klan's appearance before the film resembled the performance of hooded nightriders at the movie's Los Angeles premiere. But, as Rice explains, the Klansmen in Los Angeles were actors; in Atlanta, they were actual members of the newly formed white supremacist organization. Was this a case of art imitating life? Rice's study of the complex, mutual development of the modern Ku Klux Klan and the American film industry, visual culture, and politics is a benchmark

example of the contribution film studies can make to our understanding of American history.

Rice tracks this history from Thomas Dixon's play *The Clansman* (1905), which served as a basis for *Birth*, to the social problem films of the 1930s. Nearly four decades after federal policies drove the Reconstruction-era Ku Klux Klan underground, William Simmons formed a new iteration of the terrorist organization in 1915. The modern Klan exploited popular culture depictions of the organization in productions such as *Birth* to establish its legitimacy and bolster its membership. The modern Klan was not formally connected to the earlier version of the organiza-

tion, but *Birth* provided Simmons a widely recognizable set of visual symbols—especially costumes—that helped manufacture a sense of historical continuity.

While the role of *Birth* in Hollywood's genesis is well known, Rice's most fascinating revelations consider how local contexts for the film's showing interacted with broader national changes. The entwined development of the onscreen Klan and the real-life organization, Rice explains, was supported by the machinations of local film exhibitors and by city and state censorship practices. Rice cites several cases of theater managers who fueled racial tensions during their marketing campaigns for films such as *Birth*. Building on the work of Lee Grieveson, Rice exposes the role Progressive-era censorship played in eradicating meaningful indictments of the Klan by limiting all depictions of racial conflict.

Rice's work presents important questions about the role of publicity in an era of mass culture. The modern Klan was acutely aware of its public image. Besides maintaining a Propagation Department, the organization's "media empire" included local and nationally syndicated newspapers, film companies, printing presses, and radio stations. Klan members also operated motion picture theaters.

Readers of this publication will be especially interested in the book's numerous references to Indiana, where *Birth* was frequently integrated into the state's thriving Klan activity.

Despite the power that images of the Klan's robes and depictions of its mysterious rituals acquired, the images onscreen were slippery. Film exhibitors and distributors, as well as the Klan itself, assigned different meaning to these symbols depending on local markets or changing ideologies. In the 1920s, as the Klan became increasingly nativist, it mobilized its visual imagery to attack Jews, Catholics, and modern women. At the heart of the Klan's relationship with the cinema was the organization's desire to control its public representation.

White Robes, Silver Screens is an accessible read that should appeal to a broad range of scholars. It adds to the important work of Paul McEwan, Melvyn Stokes, and Janet Staiger, and contributes to our understanding of useful cinema, and of local and non-theatrical film exhibition, especially in rural contexts.

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