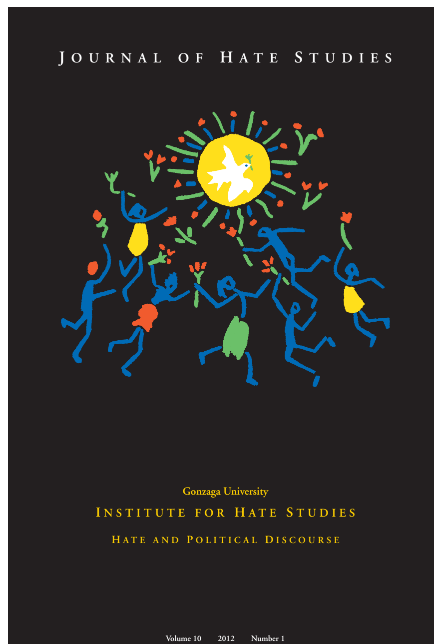

JOURNAL OF HATE STUDIES

Hate and Political Discourse
Volume 10 • 2012

Book Review: Arthur Goldwag's The New Hate: A History of Fear and Loathing on the Populist Right & Thomas R. Pegram's One Hundred Percent American: The Rebirth and Decline of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s

Rebecca Barrett-Fox

Suggested Citation:

APA: Barrett-Fox, R. (2012). Book Review. [Review of the books *The New Hate: A History of Fear and Loathing on the Populist Right*, by A. Goldwag and *One Hundred Percent American: The Rebirth and Decline of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s*, by T.R. Pegram] *Journal of Hate Studies, 10(1)*, 221-229. Retrieved from: http://journals.gonzaga.edu/index.php/johs/article/view/185.

Bluebook: Rebecca Barrett-Fox, *Book Review*, 10 J. HATE STUD. 221 (2012) (reviewing ARTHUR GOLDWAG, THE NEW HATE: A HISTORY OF FEAR AND LOATHING ON THE POPULIST RIGHT and THOMAS R. PEGRAM, ONE HUNDRED PERCENT AMERICAN: THE REBIRTH AND DECLINE OF THE KU KLUX KLAN IN THE 1920S), *available at* http://journals.gonzaga.edu/index.php/johs/article/view/185.

ALWD: Rebecca Barrett-Fox, *Book Review*, 10 J. Hate Stud. 221 (2012) (reviewing Arthur Goldwag, *The New Hate: A History of Fear and Loathing on the Populist Right* and Thomas R. Pegram, *One Hundred Percent American: The Rebirth and Decline of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s)*, *available at* http://journals.gonzaga.edu/index.php/johs/article/view/185.

BOOK REVIEWS

Arthur Goldwag's *The New Hate: A History of Fear and Loathing on the Populist Right*

[New York, NY: Pantheon, 2012. 368 pp. $27.95]

Thomas R. Pegram's *One Hundred Percent American: The Rebirth and Decline of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s*

[Lanham, MD: Ivan R. Dee, 2011. 281 pp. $27.95]

Rebecca Barrett-Fox
Hesston College
Bethel College

As reported by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), the number of hate groups in the United States has continually risen since 2000 in response to three factors: the election of the nation's first African American president, economic turmoil, and undocumented immigration (Potok, 2011). While these structural changes might feel painful for those native-born white Americans who view signs of increasing pluralism as worrisome and who believe that their economic losses are due to the gains of minority groups, they are not new challenges—nor are the hate-filled responses to them new. In both *One Hundred Percent American: The Rebirth and Decline of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s* by Thomas R. Pegram and *The New Hate: A History of Fear and Loathing on the Populist Right* by Arthur Goldwag, the authors make the point that hate groups and the conspiracy theories that circulate within them are deeply rooted in American culture and that, while they are, in the details, constructions of their own times, they are also responses to problems seen as long-standing threats to American security and prosperity, responses that are consistent across time. Indeed, writes Goldwag, "The New Hate is the same as the Old Hate—only now it's hiding in plain sight" in a way that is "beyond Orwellian" (pp. 26-27) as haters adopt the language of populism, espouse claims of discrimination, and depict themselves as victims in politics and political entertainment. While the work of Pegram, a professor of history at Loyola University Maryland, focuses narrowly on the 1920s Klan movement, his careful detailing illustrates a broader trend: that the methods used by hate groups are embedded in the culture of the moment. In contrast, Goldwag,

author of *Cults, Conspiracies, and Secret Societies* (2009) and *'Isms & 'Ologies* (2007), demonstrates, in his investigation of conspiracy theories, antisemitism, anti-Masonic activism, anti-Catholicism, and Islamaphobia, pseudo-conservativism, and white supremacy and black separatism, that the animating forces of hatred are similar across hate movements. Taken together, the two books—the first written by an academic, the second by a journalistic writer—provide a picture both broad and deep of how hate movements start, organize, and decline.

Much scholarly work on the Klan of the early 19th century has focused on local histories and subtopics, such as gender or religion, or taken a narrow methodological approach. (See, for example, Michael Newton, *The Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi: A History* or Mark Paul Richards, " 'This Is Not a Catholic Nation': The Ku Klux Klan Confronts Franco-Americans in Maine" in *The New England Quarterly* for examples of recent local histories; see also Kathleen Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* and Kelly J. Baker, *Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant America, 1915–1930* for examples of explorations of subtopics, or Rory McVeigh, *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-Wing Movements and National Politics*, for scholarship with a narrower methodological approach.) Pegram respectfully engages such scholarship, drawing from it, as well as from innumerable primary sources, including Klan publications and newspaper commentary, in his story of the Klan's meteoric rise and fast fall. In synthesizing information about individual klaverns and Klansmen, Pegram effectively shows the diversity across Klan experience and thinking—fragmentation that would contribute to the organization's downfall in a few years.

Pegram's depiction of the Klan of the 1920s intimates that the organization and the motivations of its members were more complex than history books suggest. While the "first rising" of the Klan, which occurred during the Reconstruction Era and was confined to the former Confederacy, was established as a terrorist organization to maintain the superiority of whites over formerly enslaved peoples, the 1920s Klan addressed a mishmash of goals, including the denigration of African Americans, Jews, and immigrants, in an effort to bolster the privilege of white native-born Protestants. It also saw itself as—and was seen in many communities as authentically participating in civic life as—a moral police force, promoting sobriety, marital fidelity, respectful intergenerational relationships, patriotism, and the Protestant work ethic. By promoting itself not primarily as a bigoted organization (though this theme certainly resounded in many Klan strongholds) but as a pro-American values organization, the Klan grew in its appeal, particularly in the Midwest and Northwest but also in Mid-Atlantic states,

where the violence that inflected Southern and Southwestern klaverns was less acceptable.

The 1920s Klan was successful because it tapped into the underlying sense of white Protestant privilege that many white Protestants shared, as well as into their fears about changing demographics due to large-scale immigration from Jews and Catholics. At the same time, it depicted itself as a fraternal organization, one that stressed brotherhood and unity—values shared by other fraternal organizations also popular at the time. (Indeed, many Klansmen were members of both their local KKK and the Masonic lodge or other fraternal group.) The Klan thus put into play fears about masculinity as well as whiteness, the same concerns that drove the development of the Boy Scouts and U.S. military and political incursions into Latin America and the Philippines. In this way, the 1920s Klan was very much a product of its time, "historically distinctive" from other manifestations of racist movements (p. 220).

The Klan was situated in the 1920s in other ways, too, though. When the 1920s Klan failed to emerge as a powerful organization as quickly as founder Hiram Evans desired, he hired a marketing duo—Elizabeth Tyler and Edward Young Clarke—to promote the organization, though the marketers were careful to downplay the role of Tyler because of her sex. Using marketing techniques that were increasingly common in the commercialized 1920s to sell all kinds of new products to overextended consumers, they continued to develop the intricate system of Klan culture—the secret handshakes and code words that Evans saw as central to developing "klannishness"—but expanded the appeal of the group by layering over the fraternal aspects further claims to patriotism, law and order, and family values. Perhaps as importantly, they created a pyramid-scheme-like system of recruitment, with professional "kleagles" serving as Klan salesmen. Each new recruit paid $10 to join, plus more for the necessary robes and associated fees. A cut went to the kleagle, and allotments went to the local chapter and national office. The Klan, then, was as much an ideological fraternal organization as a business, and it was, at first, highly successful, enforcing moral behavior through vigilante violence, organizing boycotts, supporting Klan-owned businesses, electing candidates at nearly all levels of government, infiltrating churches, funding local charities, and running charitable organizations such as orphanages.

The central paradox of the Klan, though, is that it failed, despite its appeal to nativist, antisemitic, racist whites who wielded so much power at the time. And here Pegram makes one of his most valuable contributions to scholarship on the Klan, by showing that the intensive efforts that the Klan made to appear mainstream in 1920s society were also evidence of the outsider status of the Klan. Internal factors contributing to its downfall include

the revelation of morally hypocritical behavior, including drinking and illicit affairs, among Klansmen and their leaders; differing ambitions among local and national leaders that caused tension as "the Klan organization pushed beyond the grassroots support that had made the Invisible Empire a social movement of national consequence" (p. 183); and the inability of leadership to control the violent behavior of members. Additionally, the Klan's appeal as a fraternal organization disappeared as internal tensions about leadership and organizational direction built; Klan members looking for fraternal community had other, better options—ones that did not subject them to potential anti-Klan backlash, including violence, or endanger them or their businesses. As Pegram notes,

> Although compelling and exciting for many native white Protestants, especially during the boom years of the early 1920s, neither the public nor the secret, insular manifestations of the Ku Klux Klan community won the permanent loyalty of the hooded multitudes it had attracted into its ranks. (pp. 44-45)

External factors contributed to the decline of the organization, too. The Klan avoided running a third party in politics, but it did have success in electing Klan members and those who supported the Klan's goals; however, in politics, the newly-elected Klansmen, while ambitious, were often inexperienced and incompetent in governing. For those politicians who were not Klansmen, Klan endorsement was often damaging, as the group was a "divisive and therefore unwelcome presence in national party politics" (p. 212). Backlash came not just from the increasing number of Jewish and Catholic Americans who were targeted by the "one hundred percent American" activism of the organization, but also from those who feared the consequences of the extra-legal operations that came to define the Klan during this era. As Pegram notes, Klan members were more likely to be victims of anti-Klan violence (though they sometimes provoked such violence and certainly celebrated it as evidence of the poor character of their attackers) than perpetrators, but the brutal and highly publicized instances of Klan violence, much of it directed at other white Protestant members of their own communities who were disciplined for their moral failings, guaranteed the Klan's association with violence—an association that the hoods, paramilitary drills, and other traditions reified. "By accepting the tainted currency of white vigilante violence and the mass support it attracted, the Klan thereby collaborated in the construction of its own violent image," Pegram notes (p. 159). This was especially likely in the South and Southwest, where violence and vigilantism were cultural forces in effect before the Klan arrived and where legal policing was weak. However, as the Klan tolerated and even romanced its violent elements, it soon found itself controlled, to

an extent, by them—or at least by the image of them. Consequently, "Many observers by this time understood violence to be an essential component of Klan strategy and behavior" (p. 178). The Klan, in other words, could not put the genie of violence back in its bottle. The consequences were damaging, not just for those members who wanted no part of violence, but also for the public image of the Klan. Such violence, whether committed by Klansmen or by anti-Klan activists against Klansmen, "severely tested the commitment of its own members and alienated the American mainstream in the postwar years" (p. 181). Membership dropped as public criticism mounted.

Pegram artfully blends stories from across the country to illustrate the multiple problems that beset the Klan by the mid-1920s, and the strength of his writing is in its attention to details that both make for compelling, interesting reading and forward his thesis. If his argument fails to make a provocative claim of its own, readers nonetheless owe him a debt of gratitude for his ability to synthesize the many narrower studies of the 1920s Klan into a general history that will interest scholars, activists, and general readers.

If Pegram's analysis of the Klan is firmly grounded in the 1920s, Arthur Goldwag's lively history of hate groups is all over the chronological map, though he brings every hate group and conspiracy theory into the current moment—especially as it relates to the emergence of Tea Party politics, what Amarnath Amarasingam (2011) has termed "Baracknaphobia," and the general climate of partisan politics that afflicts the U.S. today. Irreverent, witty, and at times nearly frenetic, Goldwag's analysis relies on scholarly secondary sources as much as the writer's own primary scholarship, which includes correspondence with his living research subjects: people who self-identify as Holocaust deniers, are members of paramilitary organizations, and organize their politics around hate. In this way, Goldwag's research is both more dangerous than Pegram's and more unstable—since, after all, insufficient time has passed to allow scholars to evaluate the conspiracy theory that Barack Obama is the anti-Christ or to reflect on the place of Islamaphobia in post-9/11 America.

At the same time, Goldwag's historical grounding of even these contemporary themes suggests that, despite differences in technology, hate is relatively consistent across time. The joke of *The New Hate* is how much new hate is like older forms of hate, and Goldwag is effective in connecting the past and present, often drawing from Enlightenment-era documents to illustrate how hateful ideas about, say, Jews or Masons or African Americans, came to circulate then and continue to circulate today—no small accomplishment given the wide range of Godlwag's subjects and his broad time frame. Goldwag's analysis repeatedly returns to hate groups'

responses to the election of Barack Obama, but the mistrust of the president is used as an illustration of how hatred finds its object more generally. Perhaps more importantly, Goldwag argues that this kind of thinking harms not just a political leader or party but also, more broadly, America; it damages the body politic, civil discourse, and democracy.

At times, Goldwag is insensitive with his language, invoking psychological analysis (the word "paranoid" is used frequently) without full consideration of its consequences and without an evidence base for assigning psychological disorder or at least disturbance to believers. (For a fine counterargument to the claim that right-wing religionists are mentally ill or unreasonable, see Clyde Wilcox, Ted Jelen, and Sharon Linzey, 1995.) Similarly, further sociological analysis of the pull toward hate groups would have provided a more humane and sensitive telling of the story—similar to the attitude adopted by Kathleen Blee (1993) in her research on contemporary Klan membership. Further consideration of the sociological rather than ideological factors that draw people to hate groups would have contributed to a deeper understanding of the sociology of hate. At times, Goldwag does adopt this perspective, suggesting for example, that in "times of great stress and transition," when people are "breathing an atmosphere . . . toxic with fear and anger and confusion," they seek "not just a comprehensible explanation for their very real problems but a scapegoat, a villain" (p. 23). Thus, hate is not simply an individual psychological response, but a collective, sociological phenomenon, one that is predictable.

The predictability of hate is a comfort for readers of both Pegram's and Goldwag's books. As reported in *The Atlantic* by Richard Florida (2011), hate follows a particular geography, and demographics such as educational level, income, occupation, regionalism, and religiosity are correlated with hateful beliefs and actions—which explains why Klan membership rose during a period of immigration, just as hate group membership swelled again in the early part of the 21st century, and why conservative Protestantism then and now corresponds with higher degrees of hate group affiliation. (As Goldwag notes, "For many religious Americans, 'evil' is not just an adjective but also a noun" (p. 81).) Taken together, *One Hundred Percent American* and *The New Hate* effectively illustrate that, as Goldwag observes,

> The most salient feature of . . . the New Hate is its sameness across time and space. The most depressing thing about the demagogues who tirelessly exploit it—in pamphlets and books and partisan newspapers two centuries ago, on Web sites, electronic social networks, and twenty-four-hour cable news today—is how much alike they all turn out to be. (p. 14)

However, for anti-hate activists, predictability is not so much depressing as

useful, for it provides a guide to the concerns of those who participate in hate groups, concerns that can then be defused via activism. One of these concerns is that

> there are those of us who are really "us" and those of us who are essentially "other"—aliens, interlopers, pretenders, and culture distorters, parasites and freeloaders, who bear the blame for the fact that being a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant American no longer suffices to make one the cynosure of the world,

as Goldwag describes how the objects of contemporary populist hatred are viewed (p. 310), but also how Pegram could have described Klan attitudes toward immigrants, Catholics, Jews, and moral reprobates of the early 20th century. That this fear of the other is deep-rooted and reappearing is discouraging, on one hand, but, on the other, it also means that hate studies scholars can predict when, where, and among whom spikes of hateful behavior are likely. Additionally, it provides a strategic focus for anti-hate activists, who can "normalize" despised populations in order to facilitate public acceptance of them (as many same-sex marriage advocates have effectively done, resulting in a significant shift in popular opinion about gay marriage over the previous 10 years).

For those who find themselves the objects of hatred, of course, knowing that they are part of the historically predictable trend of hate is little solace. Thankfully, despite the increase of hate groups in the U.S. since 2000, violent hate crimes as a category have actually not risen—though, again, this is no comfort to those who have been victimized. What has changed, though, is the tone of political discourse, which has been pushed rightward, adopting more violent rhetoric. This includes visual images of Tea Party activists brandishing handguns at rallies (Associated Press, 2011), the use of racial and sexual epithets against members of Congress who supported the president's health care reform bill (Douglas, 2010), and the threat by rock musician and right-winger Ted Nugent at a 2012 National Rifle Association meeting that "if Barack Obama becomes the president in November again, I will either be dead or in jail by this time next year. . . . We need to ride into that battlefield and chop their heads off in November" (Glor, 2012). The examples are innumerable, from statements made on the floor of statehouses (where Kansas state representative Virgil Peck suggested that undocumented immigrants be shot like "feral hogs" (Carpenter, 2011, para. 19)) to comments made in Congress (where, in 2009, South Carolina Republican Congressional Representative Joe Wilson interrupted President Obama's address to Congress when he called the president a liar—an act that earned him a rebuke from the House, but also earned him increased donations ("Rep. Wilson shouts, 'You lie' to Obama during

speech,", 2009)). The broad threat, then, of an increase in hate groups in both the early 20th and 21st centuries is the shift toward behaviors, from whippings to lynching, and rhetoric that undermine democratic participation and civil discourse.

References

Amarasingam, A. (2011). Baracknophobia and the paranoid style: Visions of Obama as the anti-Christ on the World Wide Web. In J. S. Exum, J. Økland, & S. D. Moore (Series Eds.) and R. G. Howard (Vol. Ed.), *Network apocalypse: Visions of the end in in an age of internet media* (pp. 96-123). Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press. Retrieved from http://www.academicroom.com/article/baracknophobia-and-paranoid-style-visions-obama-antichrist-world-wide-web

Associated Press. (2011, March 4). Tea party encourages guns at Capitol rally. *Helena Independent Record*. Retrieved from http://helenair.com/news/article_f01b1b8a-4676-11e0-bbad-001cc4c002e0.html

Baker, K. J. (2011). *Gospel according to the Klan: The KKK's appeal to Protestant America, 1915–1930*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press.

Blee, K. (1993). Evidence, empathy, and ethics: Lessons from oral histories of the Klan. *The Journal of American History, 80*, 596-606. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/

Blee, K. (1991). *Women of the Klan: Racism and gender in the 1920s*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Carpenter, T. (2011, March 18). Dems call on Peck to resign from House. *Topeka Capitol-Journal*. Retrieved from http://cjonline.com/legislature/2011-03-18/dems-call-peck-resign-house Rep. Wilson shouts, 'You lie' to Obama during speech. (2009, September 9). *CNN.com*. Retrieved from http://articles.cnn.com/2009-09-09/politics/joe.wilson_1_rep-wilson-illegal-immigrants-outburst?_s=PM:POLITICS

Douglas, W. (2010, March 20). Tea party protesters scream 'nigger' at black Congressman, *McClatchy Newspapers.* Retrieved from http://www.mcclatchydc.com/2010/03/20/90772/rep-john-lewis-charges-protesters.html#storylink=cpy

Florida, R. (2011, May 11). The geography of hate. *The Atlantic*. Retrieved from http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2011/05/the-geography-of-hate/238708/

Glor, J. (2012, May 4). Ted Nugent explodes at notion he's not a moderate. *CBS News*. Retrieved from http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-505263_162-57427792/ted-nugent-explodes-at-notion-hes-not-a-moderate/

Goldwag, A. (2012). *The new hate: A history of fear and loathing on the populist right*. New York, NY: Pantheon.

McVeigh, R. (2009). *The rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-wing movements and national politics.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Newton, M. (2010). *The Ku Klux Klan in Mississippi: A history*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Pegram, T. (2011). *One hundred percent American: The rebirth and decline of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s*. Lanham, MD: Ivan R. Dee.

Potok, M. (2011, Spring). The year in hate & extremism, 2010. *Intelligence Report,* 141. Retrieved from http://www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-report/browse-all-issues/2011/spring/the-year-in-hate-extremism-2010

Richard, M. P. (2009) "This is not a Catholic nation": The Ku Klux Klan confronts Franco-Americans in Maine. *The New England Quarterly, 82*(2), 285-303. doi:10.1162/tneq.2009. 82.2.285

Wilcox, C., Jelen, J., & Linzey, S. (1995). Rethinking the reasonableness of the religious right. *Review of Religious Research, 36*(3), 263-276. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/