

Research Interest Statement

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In *The Civil War as Theological Crisis*, historian Mark Noll argues that, after the Civil War, the Protestant theological consensus that had dominated U.S. culture since the Second Great Awakening was left in disarray from its inability to resolve the debate over slavery. At this key time of territorial expansion and immigration, Americans were left without a shared vocabulary and method of inquiry to discuss increasingly contested ideas about race and citizenship.

Drawing on ritual books, organizational records, newspaper accounts, and the data available from cemetery headstones and census records, my current research argues that adult fraternal organizations filled the vacuum left by the collapse of Protestant Common-Sense readings of scripture. These organizations, which included more than a quarter of the adult male population, became the new locus for creating civic self-understanding in the United States from the years following the Civil War to the Great Depression. In particular, I analyze the role of working-class white and African-American organizations in framing racial identity and answering the question, “Who is worthy of full civic participation?” I argue that, while white organizations gave up older, comprehensive ideas of citizenship for understandings of Americanism rooted in racism and nativism, now-forgotten African-American fraternal organizations were among the earliest advocates of Afrocentrism.

These organizations, formed a bridge of continuous intellectual and cultural development between the post-Civil War clashes of the first Ku Klux Klan and the African-American Union League and the post World War I emergence of the Second Klan and Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association. While white organizations clung to a cultural and political vision rooted in the traditional, patriarchal family, African-American organizations showed a breadth of responses to modernity, including creating organizations that breached the gendered public and domestic spheres and allowed women to exercise significant leadership in partnership with male co-fraternalists.

As someone who is first and foremost a cultural historian of ritual, I am completing an article from the chapter that forms the intellectual core of my dissertation, which I plan to submit to the *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*. Drawing on classical anthropological work on the liminal state, research by contemporary neuroscientists Ian Cross and Aniruddh Patel, and of Wellesley historian of hymnody Stephen Marini, I argue that, by their endless tinkering with their rituals, nineteenth-century fraternalistic created spaces where men and women were uniquely receptive to new ideas about citizenship and race, supplementing or entirely replacing

the weakened vocabulary of American Protestantism to create new consensuses about race and citizenship.

Over the last three years, with research incentive funding from the University of Arkansas College of Arts and Sciences, I have been able to employ two student research assistants and expand the dataset from my dissertation to include more than 1,200 black fraternalists in Arkansas between 1880 and 1930. Compiled from matching fraternal headstones with census data, I show that three black fraternal organizations (the International Order of Twelve, the Mosaic Templars, and the Supreme Royal Circle of Friends of the World) had distinct ritual and public outlooks that appealed to three very different class groups. Furthermore, rather than being politicized by outside groups like the Universal Negro Improvement Association, Black fraternalists in the rural South anticipated these group's rhetoric and created durable social networks that laid the groundwork for the long civil rights movement. The editor of the *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* has already expressed a strong interest in publishing my initial findings and I expect to submit an article by this summer. Eventually, I plan to make the dataset available on the Internet for other researchers as it comprises a unique resource for African-American history in Arkansas.

A second phase of this project will involve a similar round of data collection on working-class white fraternal groups. For these groups, I will look at how membership in groups including the Grange, the Knights of Labor, the International Order of Odd Fellows, and the Woodmen of the World shaped rural white self-understanding and politics leading up to and following the Union Labor and Populist Party's challenge to Arkansas's Democratic establishment in 1880 and 1890s. I have already completed significant gravestone data collection in the areas where the populist uprising was strongest and will be seeking support to complete this smaller data sample in the next 18 months.

Each of these three projects, rooted in chapters of my dissertation, will coalesce into an interdisciplinary book tentatively titled *Initiating Race and Citizenship: Fraternal Organizations, Racial Identity, and Public Discourse in American Culture, 1865-1930*. The volume will span the areas of Southern, fraternal, African-American, and religious history, which makes it a bit difficult to position for a specialized university press series, but I plan to complete and begin shopping a book proposal over the next year.

Sample conference presentations are available at jdtreat.com.