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Bloomington: Indiana University**

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Reviewed by John Lepley

History clashed with memory when *USA Today* interviewed Adam Driver about his role in the 2018 film *BlacKkKlansmen*. Raised in Mishawaka, Indiana, Driver recalled the Ku Klux Klan as a ubiquitous presence throughout his childhood. “If anything, I was more aware of it as a kid growing up in Indiana because they were always Klan rallies, like, every summer,” he shared. However, James H. Madison, a historian at Indiana University, threw cold water on this reminiscence. “Most of the memories of this sort tend to be grossly exaggerated, but at the same time, it’s quite possible that he [Driver], saw men and women in robes and sheets. It’s quite possible that he saw a burning cross. But not a lot of it,” Madison explained.¹⁵⁵ We ought to cut Driver some slack, though; his recollection exemplifies the history that Madison describes in *The Ku Klux Klan in the Heartland*.

In the early 1920s, the Indiana KKK boasted over 300,000 members, peaking in 1922–1923. Madison contends that too much attention has been focused on its elites, particularly Grand Dragon D. C. Stephenson. Instead, he tells us to look at the rank and file that organized “Klaverns” in every county in the state. “In the American heartland, the Klan found its best people,” Madison writes. (p. 2). Nativism, 100% patriotism, and militant Protestantism provided a milieu that African

¹⁵⁵ “*Star Wars* Actor Adam Driver Says He Had KKK Neighbors in Indiana,” 5Chicago, modified Aug. 21, 2018, <https://www.nbcchicago.com/news/local/star-wars-actor-adam-driver-says-he-had-kkk-neighbors-in-indiana/49645/>

Americans, Jews, and Catholics threatened to tear asunder. While the Klan reinforced de jure and de facto structures to marginalize African Americans, “they were never considered as dangerous as Catholics” (p. 95). The Klan is usually associated with virulent racism because of its origins in the aftermath of the Civil War and resurgence during the Civil Rights era in the 1950s and 1960s. However, the Great War intensified the suspicion with which white Protestants regarded the Eastern and Southern Europeans who immigrated to the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s. By the 1920s, these factors created a siege mentality upon which the Klan erected a formidable redoubt.

The Ku Klux Klan in the Heartland is outstanding regional history. The endnotes reveal deep archival research. One-third of the monograph is visual; two galleries feature photographs and images illustrating the Klan’s pursuits. A flyer for a Klan picnic in Vincennes advertised “One Whole Day of Diversified Delight and Amusement”; several photos bear the name of “W. A. Swift,” a Muncie photographer who covered Klan functions. Still, Madison’s focus on the local level unearths a deep vein of exclusion and division in the American past writ large. “Running through that history is racial, ethnic, and religious conflict and hatred,” he continues (p. 7). Hoosier Klan members were not illiterate backcountry rubes who eschewed civic and patriotic ideals. To the contrary, in their minds, they were its defenders and evangelists who used modern technologies to promulgate their creed, enforce moral standards, and regulate who belonged to the nation. Less than a decade after Woodrow Wilson screened *Birth of a Nation* at the White House, the Klan produced the films *The Toll of Justice* and *The Traitor Within* that “portrayed the Klan as a nonviolent moral reform organization” (p. 107).

Madison’s emphasis on the Klan’s cultural, political, and social aspects creates a rich history, but it lacks a political-economy perspective that would have enhanced his argument. For example, did the postwar glut in agricultural commodities influence Klan membership? The distinction that Madison makes between the Klan’s intimidation of African Americans and the violence the Klan actually perpetrated invites scrutiny as well. Even if there are no primary sources to support the claim

of “an intensely violent Indiana Klan,” (p. 110) mere threats are on the same spectrum as actual deeds. Chapters on the Klan’s critics and opponents, its political endeavors, the downfall of D. C. Stephenson, and brief revivals in the latter decades of the 20th century round out this excellent contribution to midwestern history.

Driver’s recollections of the Klan prompted others to speak up. Corey Havens, a reporter for the *South Bend Tribune*, documented several instances of Klan violence and hate group activities in Indiana in the 1990s and early 2000s. Travis Childs, an educator at South Bend’s History Museum, who had also cast doubt on Driver’s claims, owned up to his mistake. “I was shocked. I would never have guessed there were that many events. Shocked and saddened,” he admitted.¹⁵⁶ In an ironic way, this row anticipated Madison’s conclusions in *The Ku Klux Klan in the Heartland*. “The Klan story does not give comfort. It rests at the core of American history, not at the margins” (p. 198).

John Lepley is a labor educator in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and graduate of Indiana State University’s MA program in labor and reform movement history.

¹⁵⁶ Yes, There Were Plenty of KKK Rallies when Adam Driver Lived in St. Joseph County,” *South Bend (IN) Tribune*, Aug. 21, 2018, https://www.southbendtribune.com/news/local/yes-there-were-plenty-of-kkk-rallies-when-adam-driver/article_ddeafc15-d21f-5cce-beff-6e48f66a1e00.html.