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The Two Faces of Anti-Semitism: Reuben Sawyer the Klansman and Reuben Sawyer the British Israelite

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The Two Faces of Anti-Semitism: Reuben Sawyer the Klansman and Reuben Sawyer the British
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When discussing the relative relationships between faith traditions, it is generally understood that though Christianity is greatly influenced by the sacred texts and history of Judaism, there was extreme enmity between the two religions. The hatred of Jews by Christians has its origins at the death of Jesus, when some Christians blame the whole of Jewry for betraying their son of God. Another branch of discrimination against Jews, or anti-Semitism, has its roots in the Christian distrust of the secluded Jewish communities that were prevented from integrating at Christians' behest.¹ As the concept of nationalism reached its peak of popularity in the beginnings of the late modern era, the idea of nationhood became inextricably linked with religion. Many right-wing political movements saw the idea of a religiously homogeneous nation as a stronger basis for national identity, including an American group determined to create a white ethnostate based upon religious and racial intolerance: The Ku Klux Klan.

The white nationalist society known as the Ku Klux Klan had many ebbs and flows in its political and social power from its birth in the Reconstruction-era southern United States, when it

¹ Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and Its Relation to Modern Anti-Semitism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1943), 115.

tried to keep newly-free black tenant farmers from taking any political or social power, to the Klan's next peak a century later during the African-American Civil Rights movements of the 1960s. In between these two well-known iterations was a movement under the same banner that came to power in the early 1920s. This iteration of the Ku Klux Klan, the Klan of the 1920s (the so-called "Second Klan"), was a reactionary movement against many of the social changes in early twentieth century United States, from American entrance into World War I, the Progressive Era's failure to achieve its lofty goals of limiting corruption and economic inequality, and an explosion of immigration from new sources, namely southern Europe, eastern Europe, and eastern Asia. The burgeoning film industry was also crucial, producing propaganda such as D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* to lionize the Klansman as the last bastion of honor for America's whites.²

Unlike the rest of the Klan's history, the Second Klan was most powerful in the Midwest and West, with Indiana and Oregon being the most affected states, primarily due to their overwhelming whiteness. The Pacific Northwest was also especially damaged by economic woes after World War I; the lumber and agriculture industries so entrenched in the region experienced the Great Depression about a decade prior to the rest of the United States. Oregon's agricultural industry looked to counteract this economic downturn by bringing in new farmhands, mostly farmhands from Japan, ostensibly shrinking the market for unskilled white labor.³ The Second Klan, as it is sometimes known, was also distinct in its rhetoric; while its leaders and followers

² Shawn Lay, "Introduction: The Second Invisible Empire," in *The Invisible Empire in the West: Toward a New Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s*, ed. Shawn Lay (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 6.

³ Eckard Toy, "The Ku Klux Klan in Oregon," in *Experiences in a Promised Land: Essays in Pacific Northwest History*, ed. Thomas Edwards and Carlos Schwantes (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 270.

for the most part had anti-African sentiment, the primary groups looked down upon included Catholics, Jews, and Asian immigrants. Especially in Oregon, where Chinese labor had been instrumental in building the state's railroads and other infrastructure, anti-Asian views were quite common.

Oregon was also a prime candidate for Klan saturation because of its segregationist past; the state constitution had forbade African-Americans from living there, and the small pockets of blacks living in cities were heavily discriminated against and given little hope for upward mobility.⁴ Another bonus for the Oregon Klan was that the Protestants of Oregon had a significant fear of "alien influences, whether papal (Catholic) or Bolshevik (Communist)," so even those unaffiliated with the Klan were often sympathetic to the Klan's white supremacist aims.⁵ Among the most influential positions in the Klan was that of the Kleagle, whose main job was recruiting new members.⁶ The Imperial Kleagle, or the head of the recruitment department, of the Oregon Ku Klux Klan during the Klan's height of power in the state was a man named Reuben Sawyer, a Portland cleric affiliated with the British Israelite (or Anglo-Israelite) movement.

In response to the influx of southeastern Europeans, many American whites came to identify themselves by their Protestantism, and when the identities of Protestant and American combined, the end result was a movement called Americanism, focused on keeping the nation as

⁴ Eckard Toy, "Robe and Gown: The Ku Klux Klan in Eugene, Oregon," in *The Invisible Empire in the West: Toward a New Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s*, ed. Shawn Lay (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 153.

⁵ Toy, "Robe and Gown," 156.

⁶ Correspondence from Reuben Sawyer to the Ku Klux Klan Field Force Personnel, January 26, 1922, MS-488, Box 1, Folder 2, Reuben Sawyer Papers, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

close as possible to its imagined Anglo-Saxon roots.⁷ British Israelism was an evangelical Protestant fringe belief that sprouted from the most literal interpretations of the scripture of the Church of England in 1840, at which point it spread to the United States and the rest of Britain's former empire. Its founder, John Wilson, originally taught that all of northern Europe could claim lineage from the lost houses of Israel, but later amended his views in the 1870s that "England had moved up to a special and unique position, demonstrated not only by her extraordinary maritime skills, but also by the rise of America as her brother."⁸ The aforementioned maritime skills of the English are used as proof that the Israelites who were the strongest seafarers made the journey to Great Britain. British Israelites teach that the Anglo-Saxon bloodline is a direct genealogical line back to the lost tribes of Israel, and thus Adam and Eve, marking the British race as descended from God.⁹ There was even a pseudo-linguistic explanation given; British Israelites asserted that the word Britain, instead of coming from Celtic origin and the Roman province of Britannia, came from the Hebrew word "brit," meaning covenant.¹⁰ This paper hopes to demonstrate that while Sawyer spoke upon the talking points of both the Ku Klux Klan and the British Israelite movement, these doctrines are separate and incongruous, and his success as the Imperial Kleagle came from his ability to explain mainline Protestant viewpoints and how the Klan would benefit the average American.

⁷ David Horowitz, "The Ku Klux Klan in La Grande, Oregon," in *The Invisible Empire in the West: Toward a New Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s*, ed. Shawn Lay (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 187.

⁸ David Katz, "Israel in America: The Wanderings of the Lost Ten Tribes from Mikveigh Yisrael to Timothy McVeigh," in *The Jews and the Expansion of Europe to the West, 1450–1800*, ed. Paolo Bernardini (New York: Berghahn, 2001), 112.

⁹ Dennis Tourish and Tim Wohlforth, "Prophets of the Apocalypse: White Supremacy and the Theology of Christian Identity," *Cultic Studies Journal* 17, no. 1 (2000): 31.

¹⁰ Katz, "Israel in America," 112.

Reuben Sawyer

Reuben Sawyer (1866-1962) was born in Colorado, and first came to prominence as pastor at the East Side Christian Church in Portland, affiliated with the Southern Baptist tradition. He became an itinerant preacher across western North America after leaving the East Side Christian Church in 1916, achieving notoriety in Vancouver and Victoria for his conservative moral values, when such social movements as temperance were in vogue in the United States and Canada.¹¹ Sawyer was taken with the notion of Americanism, and saw race as a determining factor toward whether a person or group could be considered American, and he therefore was drawn to British Israelism. This belief was entrenched in popular social science movements of the time such as social Darwinism and phrenology, misusing the concept of “survival of the fittest” to claim Britons’ superiority, with the British Empire’s hegemony over the world as their only evidence.¹² The British-Israel World Federation (B-IWF), founded in 1920, was hugely important in gaining the movement political legitimacy as well as theological, thanks in large part to the efforts of one of its founders, Reuben Sawyer. Sawyer helped draft the constitution and lecture across Britain, as well as act as a host for British Israelite leaders coming to North America.¹³ While still a preacher, he founded a British Israelism research society to study whether the Anglo-Saxons did indeed have any link to the ten tribes of Israel, using the cutting-edge phrenological practice of measuring skull shapes.¹⁴

¹¹ Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 22.

¹² Lawrence Lipin, “Reexamining the Oregon Klan in the Age of Trump: True Believers and Fellow Travelers,” *Pacific University CommonKnowledge* (2018), 8.

¹³ Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 23.

¹⁴ Katz, “Israel in America,” 116.

Sawyer was swept up in the fervor of the Second Klan in Oregon, joining the organization around 1919. He was incredibly active in the Klan until 1924, at which point he stopped publishing on the Klan's behalf entirely. He seems to have been driven toward the Klan, like many white people in the Western United States, by their growing unease at the multicultural realities of contemporary America. Sawyer was not content to join the rank and file of the Klan, as his clerical training granted him excellent command of crowds. He became a Kleagle, or recruiter, and turned the goal of his lectures into explaining the Klan's aim for a wholly "Americanist" America.

Reuben Sawyer was deeply entrenched in two of the most powerful white supremacist organizations of the early twentieth century, and is useful as an insight into the similarities in doctrine the two share. Through each stage of his career, it is clear that Sawyer was not the standard-issue Klansman or British Israelite. His sermons, lectures, and correspondence with others in the Klan and B-IWF show disagreements with both sides. Additionally, in his role as Imperial Kleagle, Sawyer discovered that his greatest successes in recruiting were not using hatred of "the other," but rather appealing to beliefs the people of Oregon already held. When demagoguery was necessary, Sawyer used the almost entirely white population of Oregon's innate fear of an upending of the social order. This paper will serve to examine the biggest players in the Oregon Klan during the 1920s as well as other leaders of the British-Israel World Federation, to appraise whether Sawyer's views are unusual compared to his contemporaries. Additionally, Sawyer's extensive writings to his followers in both movements are the best source for determining how he speaks to each faction, and where there is overlap, what beliefs are shared.

In the Klan's national scene, Reuben Sawyer's most significant impact was the founding of The Ladies of the Invisible Empire (LOTIE), an all-woman auxiliary to the Ku Klux Klan designed to replicate the mystical features fraternal organizations supplied to men. In the words of religious historian Kelly Baker, women of the Klan had to be "virtuous white women in need of defense and protection," yet "echoing the concerns over the sanctity of the home."¹⁵ Despite the antiquated social structure that the Klan supported, female suffrage was largely supported, because most women supported Prohibition and were thought to be more politically conservative. Sawyer penned the Ladies of the Invisible Empire manifesto in 1922 outlining the characteristics of a "patriotic, Protestant woman."¹⁶ In the introduction, he lists thirteen "objects" that describe his vision for how LOTIE and Klansmen overall should conduct themselves, and while several are based upon Protestantism, none of them are tenets of British Israelism. Members of LOTIE are charged with "providing a common meeting ground for American Protestant women who are willing to cooperate in bringing about better conditions in the home, the church, and social circles."¹⁷ Similarly, Protestantism is used to define Sawyer's definition of who is American, when he calls women to "affirm our faith in the Bible of our Pilgrim fathers, of Washington, Lincoln, Garfield, and other greater Protestant leaders."¹⁸ Later "objects" refer to religion as the just basis for government and education, but not as reasoning for any designation of "chosen people" in the way British Israelism does. The Ladies of the Invisible Empire was

¹⁵ Kelly Baker, *Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant America, 1915–1930* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 126.

¹⁶ Reuben Sawyer, *The Ladies of the Invisible Empire* (Beattie & Hofmann: Portland, 1922), 4.

¹⁷ Sawyer, *The Ladies of the Invisible Empire*, 1.

¹⁸ Sawyer, *The Ladies of the Invisible Empire*, 4.

overwhelmingly successful; Sawyer was able to sign up over one thousand Portland women within the month of his pamphlet's publication.¹⁹

Historiography of Sawyer and the Oregon Klan

While it is generally accepted that there are connections between the beliefs of the Ku Klux Klan and British Israelism, opinion is divided on whether the movements worked together to grow their respective influence, and Reuben Sawyer's influence upon the Oregon Klan is used as an example by academics on either side of the debate. Sawyer's career arc as a preacher, then a British Israelite lecturer, then a recruitment officer, is used to point to the link.

Michael Barkun, a political scientist at Syracuse University, studies the relationship between religious extremism and political extremism, and studies Sawyer in *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement*. Barkun is writing to use Sawyer as an example of a British Israelite, through his writings to A.A. Beauchamp that will be examined later. Unlike anthropologists such as Dennis Tourish and Tim Wohlforth, who studied the British Israelites from the perspective of modern-day fundamentalist hate groups, Barkun does not characterize British Israelism and the Klan as similarly composed movements, calling them "very different organizations," and citing a fundamental difference in their beliefs regarding Zionism, which British Israelites supported and the Klan opposed, until Israel had the gall to request self-determination.²⁰ The connection he sees in order to explain Sawyer's affiliation to both groups is their need for charismatic lecturers. Barkun is fairly unique in that he analyzes British Israelite writings on a timeline, and sees early speeches that were much less anti-Semitic

¹⁹ Kathleen Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 63.

²⁰ Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 23.

than the ones of the mid-1920s. He even proposes the idea that Sawyer's anti-Semitism is completely in service of the organizations he helped to lead, and was not a belief he truly held, citing speeches of his in which he affirmed his devotion to the Jewish people.²¹

Linda Gordon, a historian from the state of Oregon, recognizes Reuben Sawyer as "one of the few Oregon Klansmen to prioritize anti-Semitism," and attributes this to his affiliation with British Israelism.²² Gordon does not go so far as to say that the beliefs are one and the same, just that the angry rhetoric of one group may lead people down the path of the other. Along with Sawyer's affiliation with LOTIE, Gordon argues that his greatest impact upon the Oregonian Klan came in his rabid support of the Oregon School Bill, and that he was on a personal crusade "to get the Bible back into the schools," a claim which implied the invalidity of Catholicism.²³ When Gordon discusses the Second Klan's history of anti-Semitism, she invariably cites reasons that align with supposed cultural disagreements between Protestantism and Judaism, such as a Jewish affinity for banking and Communism, although she never makes that distinction explicit in comparison to racialist bigotry.²⁴

Eckard Toy also focused much of his research on the Oregon Klan, and situated Reuben Sawyer as an exploiter, rather than the originator, of existing racism within Oregon's Protestant community. Interestingly, Toy lists several specific brands of bigotry in the state's early history, but anti-Semitism is not mentioned, until Klan rhetoric made its way into the state during the Russian Revolution, with the fear of Jewish "Bolshevism" beginning to affect the lives of the

²¹ Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 24.

²² Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition* (New York: Liveright, 2017), 144.

²³ Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK*, 152.

²⁴ Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK*, 203.

few thousand Oregon Jews.²⁵ Toy shares an anecdote in which Sawyer was prevented from giving a lecture in Eugene by protests, and was forced to give the speech to a substitute. The substitute, L.E. Berger, was much less charismatic, but still was able to gain support for the Klan, showing how the Klan's ideas were well-received, even when Sawyer's charismatic stage presence was not a draw. Toy is more conservative in his estimation of Sawyer's influence than writers such as Barkun and Gordon, but does argue well that Sawyer acted more as an echo chamber for Protestants' inherent views than an extremist who changed the narrative.

Ann Burlein is a historian of Christian extremism, including Christian Identity, a sect that views British Israelism as an ideological basis for their work. Burlein agrees with Barkun that British Israelism, while anti-Semitic, was not more outwardly so than any average white Protestant Americans. The Anti-Semitism, Burlein says, was "not the focus of [British Israelism's] public policies because there was simply no use hammering a point home that most people tended to agree with anyway. This complicates Sawyer's role in normalizing anti-Semitic behavior and doctrine in the United States and Canada.

David Katz, a history professor in Israel, studies Israel in the context of its pull on American politics, from early Zionism to the modern day. Katz uses Sawyer as a gateway into the mind of early American Zionists. He, like Barkun, notes the distinction between Sawyer's pre-1921 writings, calling them "philosemitic," and Sawyer's British Israelite writings from the Klan era.²⁶ Katz further aligns himself with Barkun, in that he claims the anti-Semitism of British Israelism is an "accident of history," and views the transition from British Israelism to Christian

²⁵ Toy, "Robe and Gown," 159.

²⁶ Katz, "Israel in America," 116.

Identity as lacking logic.²⁷ Barkun diverges from Katz and most British Israelite historians in that he identifies two separate strains of the belief, one that was necessarily anti-Semitic, and one that was fairly philo-Semitic, even Zionist.²⁸ Katz, instead, views the Zionist views of British Israelites as the predecessor of more rabid anti-Semitic beliefs post-1921, to create a chronological distinction rather than two separate paths.

Joshua Trachtenberg, a rabbi in the mid-twentieth century, wrote on the history of sociocultural anti-Semitism in *The Devil and the Jews*, and categorized the bigotry into three discrete categories: Jews as demons, as magicians, and as heretics.²⁹ Sociocultural anti-Semitism is the discrimination against Jews based upon the things the cultural group does. This definition seems to overlap greatly with the definition of race offered by racialist anti-Semites, except in one important way; both groups cite ethnicity, language, and religion as components of a race, but only racialist anti-Semites inexorably attribute these things to blood, that which cannot be altered by purer behavior.³⁰ Trachtenberg's agenda does not mention the Ku Klux Klan, but there are several tropes studied within his book that are echoed in Sawyer's Klan lectures and pamphlets.

The History of Sociocultural Anti-Semitism

The demonic depiction of Jews reached its peak as the holy wars of the Middle Ages began in earnest. The Jews became a convenient scapegoat for when crops failed, when military

²⁷ Katz, "Israel in America," 116.

²⁸ Ann Burlein, *Lift High the Cross: Where White Supremacy and the Christian Right Converge* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 55.

²⁹ Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 11.

³⁰ Robert Singerman, "The Jew as Racial Alien: The Genetic Component of American Anti-Semitism," in *Anti-Semitism in American History*, ed. David Gerber (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 104.

campaigns failed, or when royals died unexpectedly.³¹ As Catholic and Orthodox nations met with Islam in the Crusades, they rationalized that the Jewish minority within Europe must be responsible, as they did not offer troops to defend Jerusalem from the Ayyubid army.³² The connection between Jews and Satan itself was made, according to the Christians of the time, because of the legend of the Antichrist who would rise from Babylon, a land inhabited by Jews during the sixth century BCE. Thomas Aquinas and other medieval scholars claim to have triangulated the exact circumstances of the Antichrist's birth: a Jewish whore giving birth to the devil's child Babylon and raising it in Galilee.³³ This explanation, while influential in the massacres of medieval Jewry, was no longer in vogue by the time of the Klan.

The other two categories of anti-Semitism relate the traditions of Judaism to an incompatibility with European society, specifically a Christian one. Much of medieval anti-Semitism was based upon Jews' dealings with the hatred of Christians within their faith, even that common Jewish prayers involve the cursing of Jesus.³⁴ This prejudice was used to keep Jews from enjoying specific positions in society, which were then used to show their barbarism; when Christians believed that Jews needed unbaptized blood for their holy days, Jews were prevented from taking roles in education, thereby keeping them uneducated.³⁵ The phenomenon of ritual murders, too, was used to scapegoats any missing or accidentally killed Christians, and the racism against Jews meant barristers were unlikely to defend the Jews from the charges.³⁶ These misconceptions pervaded much of the Christian world into the twentieth century, even

³¹ Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 102.

³² Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 11.

³³ Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 35.

³⁴ Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 182.

³⁵ Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 115.

³⁶ Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, 121.

influencing anti-Semitic politics. The yellow Star of David denoting Jewish ethnicity in Nazi Germany was an allusion to a thirteenth-century papal decree forcing Jews to announce themselves with their dress.³⁷ These references strongly permeated the Christian way of thinking, and the foundations of the anti-Semitism found in the Ku Klux Klan are in these beliefs.

Ku Klux Klan and Sociocultural Anti-Semitism

Preserving their preferred Anglo-American social order was of the utmost importance to the leaders of the Second Klan, and their belief that Judaism's central tenets were antithetical to that order is what much of their anti-Semitism is based upon. Fraternal organizations were at their peak of importance and membership during the 1920s. Groups such as the Masons, the Knights of Pythias, and the Odd Fellows had over 10 million members during the decade, with many Klansmen belonging to one or several other orders.³⁸ Reuben Sawyer used the already-existent respect for these organizations to draw people in. In a lecture in Portland's Municipal Auditorium in 1921, while citing why Jews and Catholics were the enemies of America, Sawyer accuses both groups of "calling all Masons thieves and murderers," besmirching "the present great Masonic fraternity."³⁹ Sawyer used the Masons as an example of a comparable fraternity to the Klan in order to give the Klan credibility, and show that individuals may benefit from affiliation. Sawyer's focus upon molding the Oregon Klan into the respectable image of fraternal societies is clearest in his speeches in La Grande, a railroad hub in northeastern Oregon which eventually saw the highest levels of Klan infiltration in the state.

³⁷ Pope Innocent III, "Medieval Sourcebook: Twelfth Ecumenical Council: Lateran IV 1215," *Internet History Sourcebooks*, 68.

³⁸ Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK*, 30.

³⁹ Reuben Sawyer, *The Truth About the Invisible Empire: Knights of the Ku Klux Klan* (Beattie & Hofmann: Portland, 1922), 10.

David Horowitz, a Portland State University professor of populism in the twentieth century, described the residents of La Grande as wary of the sizeable Chinese minority in the city. When white business owners saw a decrease in their relative economic influence, they sought to create a cabal that could enforce their supposedly-deserved hegemony, Sawyer said that the best way to collectivize would be under a banner of “cleansed and purified Americanism.”⁴⁰ This was not unusual, as the Klan had created fraternal organizations for the express purpose of solidifying business sectors, with the Madison, Wisconsin chapter even becoming “the Loyal Businessmen’s Society.”⁴¹ The El Paso, Texas chapter was so affiliated with the Odd Fellows, they shared meeting spaces, and they met in conjunction with the El Paso Shriners and Las Cruces Masons.⁴² These four fraternal organizations enjoyed complete integration with each other, and the Klan was seen as a reputable alternative to the others in terms of social status and availability of events. This shows that Sawyer’s emphasis upon fraternity among Americanists and solidarity between white business owners was not at all unique, but in line with the Ku Klux Klan’s national stance.

The Klan, in Oregon and across America, fully mimicked fraternal organizations to great effect, parroting the YMCA and political parties by hosting Bible study groups, musical performances, and becoming social focal points of the community.⁴³ The most “American” things a young man could do in this era was play the national pastime, and the Klan created several travel baseball teams, including those in Oregon, that attracted praise from Major League

⁴⁰ Horowitz, “The Ku Klux Klan in La Grande, Oregon,” 186.

⁴¹ Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK*, 86.

⁴² Shawn Lay, “El Paso’s Frontier Klan No. 100,” in *The Invisible Empire in the West: Toward a New Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s*, ed. Shawn Lay (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 74.

⁴³ Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK*, 84.

Baseball. The Klan was intent upon making their brand ubiquitous in every aspect of life as other fraternal organizations were, down to the secretive nature of the initiations and symbolism, reminiscent of the Knights Templar and Masons.⁴⁴ The Oregon Klan is not unique in its focus on its public image, and Reuben Sawyer's influence over the Oregon Klan is, instead of making the local rhetoric more anti-Semitic based upon biblical pseudoscience, making the Klan into the most attractive organization to be a part of for white Protestants.

Reuben Sawyer's preeminent work, along with creating LOTIE was a lecture series that began in December 1921 in Portland's Municipal Auditorium. Entitled "The Truth About the Invisible Empire," it was attended by over 7,000 Portlanders, and by thousands more in Salem, La Grande, and Eugene, among other cities. In this lecture, Sawyer explained his Klan-based message clearly: that American values should be, and are, coterminous with the Protestant/Anglican theological relationship to God, and the British Empire's relationship to the rest of the world. Sawyer described Jews as unable to exist in his Americanist society "because of their lack of loyalty to American ideals," which he further defines as "the teachings of Jesus Christ."⁴⁵ The biggest point he underlines in this speech is that Klansmen should Catholics and Jews "not because they are Jews" or other denominations, but because they are either foreign born or take orders from foreign sources, namely the pope.⁴⁶ The line "not because they are Jews" completely shifts the sin of the Jewish people from the way they came to be, to the way they act in European society. From this sentiment, one would have no idea that Sawyer also advocates for expulsion of Jews upon racial grounds.

⁴⁴ Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK*, 70.

⁴⁵ Sawyer, *The Truth About the Invisible Empire*, 9.

⁴⁶ Sawyer, *The Truth About the Invisible Empire*, 6.

The pamphlet containing the constitution of LOTIE also includes prayers and dogma associated with initiation into the group. Much like the introductory statement of belief discussed in the paragraph above, the Anglo-Saxon race is only invoked when discussing the founding fathers and the definition of American that the Klan existed to uphold. Rather than worshipping the English bloodline because of its Israelite ancestry, Sawyer includes it in a list of traits the first Americans had, and therefore should be confirmed by the women of the Klan, along with “our Constitution and Flag, and all the sacred ideals and institutions given to our fathers.”⁴⁷ Charging the newly-ordained members of LOTIE with the mission of “keeping America a white man’s country, founded by our Pilgrim fathers, who were noble representatives of that imperial white race” is the closest Sawyer gets to a theological reasoning for his anti-Semitism.⁴⁸ Even still, the Jewish race is not outwardly compared to the Khazars or the spawn of Satan, as Sawyer does in writings for a British Israelite audience.⁴⁹ If Sawyer was attempting to indoctrinate his impressionable audience into British Israelism, he was failing. Sawyer’s role as the thought leader for the Oregon Klan’s women saw him recycle traditional Americanist views on the role of the housewife and reverence for the founding fathers, rather than convince them of the biblical rationale for Anglo-Saxon superiority. In the LOTIE auxiliary, as Sawyer puts forth the definitions for what he perceives to be the virtuous Anglo-Saxon American woman, it is easy to read a sociocultural moral tone into his writing. His goal in bringing together Klanswomen under a single banner is to create a unified image for what a Klanswomen, and what an American woman, should look like. There is no religious underpinning to the inherent necessity of

⁴⁷ Sawyer, *The Ladies of the Invisible Empire*, 11.

⁴⁸ Sawyer, *The Ladies of the Invisible Empire*, 29.

⁴⁹ Lipin, “Reexamining the Oregon Klan in the Age of Trump,” 8.

gendered dichotomies, but there is in the Victorian-inspired conservatism of Reuben Sawyer and the Ku Klux Klan.

Racialist Anti-Semitism

The belief that Jewish people were of less moral worth than Europeans and Anglo-Saxons in particular was not unique in the Western world. This primarily took the form of a racialist assessment of the problem with Jews, in that their “physical, linguistic, or ethnic group” was the unforgivable sin.⁵⁰ During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, there was a commonly held belief that Jews were unfit to exist in a European culture due to their supposed central Asian bloodline. Even Hitler himself used the claim that “the Jew is actually an Asiatic, not a European” to foster support his project of Jewish extermination.⁵¹ This talking point was promulgated by British Israelites in an effort to discredit the Jewish right to exist in Europe or North America. Hitler was steeped in centuries of thought to the effect that the Jewish minority in Europe was destined to never integrate into society. When prominent Jews took powerful jobs in the banking industry because so many Christians balked at the idea of usury, or charging interest, the narrative shifted to claim that Jews could only work with money because they could not comprehend more lofty ideas, nor did they have the fortitude for actual labor.⁵²

It logically follows, then, that those opposed to Jewish entrance into Western society would continue to have a problem with them even if they converted to Christianity or promised to integrate fully. Indeed, this was a movement in Europe as early as the Middle Ages, during Spain’s persecution of Jews and Muslims in its newly-recovered Christian nation. Many Jews

⁵⁰ Singerman, “The Jew as Racial Alien,” 104.

⁵¹ Singerman, “The Jew as Racial Alien,” 104.

⁵² Walter Laqueur, *The Changing Face of Anti-Semitism: From Ancient Times to the Present Day* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 28.

converted to Catholicism in order to try and avoid Isabella and Ferdinand's ire, but these converts, called *marranos* ("pigs") were hated for their "impure blood."⁵³

The smoking gun used to determine blood and by extension, whether a race was fit to live in Europe was mostly physical appearance. Antiquated clothing, conspicuous beards, and a general disregard for the Christian standards of dress was a leading reason for eighteenth-century Polish leaders to segregate Jews into their own communities, or shtetls.⁵⁴ Jews were also deemed to be "physically degenerate" for many reasons, including but not limited to short stature and "deficient lung capacity."⁵⁵ Some of the most prevalent anti-Semitic beliefs were tied back to their race, and the effect that their race would have on society through the mere act of their existence.

Among the most salient social changes in late nineteenth century America was the increase of European immigration, but from different sources than the Irish, British, German, and Scandinavian provenance of America's immigrants for its first hundred years. As Southern and Eastern Europe became the most common source of new Americans, many Jews were mixed in with Italians and Russians as Jews were forced out of the majority culture. With obvious rules dictating the lives of Jews in Europe, such as the aforementioned Polish policies, it became easy to idealize the United States as a place without institutionalized anti-Semitism. Unfortunately for them, they were met with xenophobia based upon the dubious origin of the Jewish bloodline. American Anglo-Saxons who prided themselves upon being the "old blood" of northern Europe and North America complained that the introduction of "lower races" invariably dragged the

⁵³ Marvin Perry and Frederick Schweitzer, *Antisemitism: Myth and Hate from Antiquity to the Present* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 128.

⁵⁴ Laqueur, *The Changing Face of Anti-Semitism*, 81.

⁵⁵ Singerman, "The Jew as Racial Alien," 107.

standard of a nation below its possible heights. Many who shared these ideals were proponents of the practice of eugenics, or selective sterilization of undesirable races. David Jordan, a prominent American eugenicist in the early twentieth century, denounced the incoming Jews, saying:

The children of Jews have their parent's (sic) prominent nose and other physical attributes. It is reasonable to conclude that the future American will be shorter in stature, swarthier of skin, that his skull will be shorter and broader, that probably his nose will be more prominent than is the case to-day.⁵⁶

British Israelism and Racialist Anti-Semitism

The belief that northern Europeans were “God’s chosen people” meant a belief that other races were by definition inferior, especially the Jewish ethnic group, who were deemed to be descended from nomadic Turkic tribes, among other theories.⁵⁷ Many of these other theories are disparate and contradictory, but their increasing incredulity does not seem to have lessened any of its appeal. While British Israelites believe the other races are fundamentally destined to hell, they do not see themselves as hateful. Instead, the choice was made by God, and it was made in service of the Anglo-Saxon race, not the denigration of other races. The role of dutiful Anglo-Saxons was to be stewards of the globe that God had created solely for them, and to subjugate the lesser races through the projects of imperialism and slavery.

The movement named British Israelism today only exists in small pockets in the United States, but the organization’s fingerprints on other movements live on, primarily in right-wing fundamentalist groups such as Christian Identity. The Christian Identarians take the anti-Semitism inherent in British Israelism and remove some of the theological trappings and

⁵⁶ Singerman, “The Jew as Racial Alien,” 108.

⁵⁷ Lipin, “Reexamining the Oregon Klan in the Age of Trump,” 9.

support for Zionism, leaving only the hatred. Christian Identity theology uses tropes such as the descent of Jews from Cain, the human depiction of Eve's original sin, and "the seed of all evil," including the Canaanites and Judas Iscariot.⁵⁸ In fact, Ann Burlein claims that "a Vancouver-based group of British Israelites published the first statements identifying Jews as the literal offspring of Satan," showing that Reuben Sawyer and his Vancouverite British Israelites did have international sway.⁵⁹ Critically, the Christian Identity movement views Reuben Sawyer as a founding thinker in mobilizing Americanist rhetoric with a Protestant liturgical backing.⁶⁰ The United States is also discussed as a promised land for the Jews that left Israel and sailed to England, implying that North America was always designed to be the home of the Anglo-Saxon people.⁶¹ These talking points are borrowed straight from British Israelism, and are therefore responsible for many of the repugnant acts orchestrated in the name of securing America as an Anglo-Saxon ethnostate, such as the Oklahoma City bombing of 1995 and the bombing of the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta.⁶² The connecting thread between Christian Identity and British Israelism is the anti-Semitism based on the very nature of the Jewish people, and that their presence in Europe and North America is an existential threat to the wellbeing of Anglo-Saxons.

As British Israelism became more and more accepted as a racial theory, the implications of the Protestants as "god's chosen people," and everyone else as the "other" became more evident, specifically in the theater of anti-Semitism. Detroit British Israelites were ardent

⁵⁸ Burlein, *Lift High the Cross*, 54.

⁵⁹ Burlein, *Lift High the Cross*, 40.

⁶⁰ Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 52.

⁶¹ Tourish and Wohlforth, "Prophets of the Apocalypse," 14.

⁶² Tourish and Wohlforth, "Prophets of the Apocalypse," 35.

believers in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a popular text that claimed to detail the Jewish conspiracy to take over the Western world through cinema and news organizations.⁶³

Sawyer and Racialist Anti-Semitism

Between his speeches as Imperial Kleagle of the Klan and his writings as the leader of the Ladies of the Invisible Empire, Reuben Sawyer stayed focused upon Klan issues to avoid alienating his consumers. However, it could still follow that Sawyer would use his Klan beliefs in interactions with his contacts in the British Israelite community in order to knit the two white supremacist groups together. Through examination of his extensive correspondence with members of the British-Israel World Federation, Sawyer is shown to use two completely separate foundations for his white supremacy, depending on the audience.

In a letter to the Rosamonds, a British Israelite couple, he expresses his single goal as “teaching ISRAEL in every lecture,” and fighting “against the ancient enemies of our race.”⁶⁴ The first quote is completely unrelated to any rhetoric Sawyer has used when speaking to a Klan audience, and while he does cite Jews, among others, as the enemies of Protestant Americans, he couches those claims in terms of immigration and socialism rather than racial pseudoscience. Sawyer does claim in another letter that he is using his position as Grand Lecturer in the Klan to “reach thousands of our very best citizens with our message to Israel,” and that the Klan is “made up of men who are ready to devote their lives to the preservation of the sacred ideals of our race.”⁶⁵ Sawyer’s Klan lectures describe his mission as righteous, but not sacred, implying

⁶³ Burlein, *Lift High the Cross*, 39.

⁶⁴ Correspondence from Reuben Sawyer to Herbert Rosamond, June 12, 1922, MS-488, Box 1, Folder 2, Reuben Sawyer Papers, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

⁶⁵ Correspondence from Reuben Sawyer to — — — Richards, December 27, 1921, MS-488, Box 1, Folder 2, Reuben Sawyer Papers, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

that the Klan's issues with Jews and other immigrants are based upon turn-of-the-century *realpolitik* rather than their roles in the Garden of Eden.

In the same letter to the Rosamonds, Sawyer underlines his ends as to "convince more good men and women that we are ISRAEL," capitalizing the final word for emphasis.⁶⁶ The term "good men and women" refers only to who he has already defined as the Anglo-Saxon whites to whom he is writing. Since he lays out so clearly in his letters to British Israelites who he considers an ally and who he considers an enemy, he creates his own terms on how modern scholars can analyze his rhetoric, and it is clear that the British Israelite point-of-view he puts forth is completely missing from his Klan lectures.

Even the valedictions of Sawyer's letters change depend on the target audience; when writing a fellow Klansmen, Sawyer signs his letters "Yours in the Sacred Bond of Klansmanship."⁶⁷ When signing off on British-Israel World Federation letterhead, Sawyer uses "Yours in the Hope of Israel."⁶⁸ While Sawyer may have thought that he was communicating the same idea across both organizations, his codeswitching was distorting his message so that neither group saw the other as having anything to do with their specific cause. The most consistent thread between Sawyer's speeches in support of the Klan and those in support of British Israelism was the militant anti-Semitism. The difference in the rhetoric still betrays a basic difference in ideology that forever revealed the disagreements in their foundations. When speaking of the problem of Jews in America to the Klan, Jews are almost entirely described as a race antithetical to the vision of America Sawyer has in mind, the objection is their tendency to

⁶⁶ Sawyer to Rosamond, June 12, 1922.

⁶⁷ Correspondence from Reuben Sawyer to William Mahoney, February 23, 1922, MS-488, Box 1, Folder 2, Reuben Sawyer Papers, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

⁶⁸ Sawyer to Richards, December 27, 1921.

be “bolshevists, undermining our government,” or their roles as “shylocks in finance or commerce who gain control and command of Christians as borrowers or employers.”⁶⁹ This is in stark contrast to Sawyer’s letters between other members of the British-Israel World Federation, in which Jews are denounced for having betrayed Jesus Christ. All Jews, of course, except the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, which British Israelites claim migrated en masse to northern Europe following the Assyrian captivity. In a letter to Reuben Sawyer, self-proclaimed British Israelite William Chadwick described the Jews as Mongols put upon the Earth to doubt and betray Jesus.⁷⁰ His speeches to the Klan did not mention the Anglo-Saxon bloodline’s eternal connection to the tribes of Judah, and his letters to British Israelites did not use the threat of Jewish Bolshevism to harangue his followers. His use of political and social warnings in Klan newsletters and scripture when speaking to British Israelites meant that his message was not constant between the two, and it kept Sawyer from creating an alliance between his two white supremacist houses.

Sawyer, as president of the British-Israel World Federation, was in near constant correspondence with A.A. Beauchamp, the editor for the Boston-based British Israelite newspaper *The Watchman of Israel*, while hosting a column in the paper. Beauchamp founded *The Watchman of Israel* in 1918 with the goal of showing “the English-speaking peoples of today are the lineal descendants of the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel and must fulfill in these latter days the responsibilities decreed for them through the patriarchs and prophets.”⁷¹ Despite their close relationship, Beauchamp was a harsh critic of the Klan; the Second Klan was not nearly as

⁶⁹ Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 25.

⁷⁰ Correspondence from William Chadwick to Reuben Sawyer, April 23, 1922, MS-488, Box 1, Folder 2, Reuben Sawyer Papers, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

⁷¹ Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 21.

powerful in New England as it was on the West Coast. Beauchamp was particularly critical of Sawyer's use of his platform, condemning Sawyer's December 1921 lecture in Portland as a gross misuse of the audience he had gained. Beauchamp seems to be disgusted with the Klan, calling it an "un-American organization," and something that is "over with" in terms of national importance.⁷² Sawyer responds to this charge by accusing Beauchamp of naïveté and sympathy toward the "Roman Catholics, Jews, Negroes, and Japs especially active in the war" against the Klan and British Israelites alike.⁷³ Sawyer seems to be genuinely disappointed when his ideological advances were rebuffed, telling Beauchamp that both of their jobs would be much easier if they were able to "swing *The Watchman* into line with this great all-American movement."⁷⁴ This suggests that Sawyer was trying as hard as he could to make Klan beliefs compatible with British Israelism. However, Beauchamp, while maintaining a close personal friendship with Sawyer, continually disavowed any connection between British Israelism and the Klan, and refused to print openly Klan-centric propaganda. While Sawyer tried to bring the two movements closer together in ideology, Beauchamp, as one of the most influential British Israelites, seemed to purposefully to keep the ideologies separate. This may have been because he knew that printing them coterminously may have ruffled feathers or compromised his position of power, but any systemic opposition Sawyer would have faced in combining his beliefs shows just how conflicting they were.

⁷² Correspondence from A.A. Beauchamp to Reuben Sawyer, January 30, 1922, MS-488, Box 1, Folder 2, Reuben Sawyer Papers, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

⁷³ Correspondence from Reuben Sawyer to A.A. Beauchamp, February 8, 1922, MS-488, Box 1, Folder 2, Reuben Sawyer Papers, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

⁷⁴ Correspondence from Reuben Sawyer to A.A. Beauchamp, February 2, 1922, MS-488, Box 1, Folder 2, Reuben Sawyer Papers, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

Soon after this hostility with Beauchamp, Reuben Sawyer saw his column in *The Watchman* revoked, largely due to debts owed.⁷⁵ Beauchamp converted to Christian Science around this time, an ideology largely consistent with British Israelism, even intriguing founder Mary Baker Eddy into attending several meetings.⁷⁶ Beauchamp also continued to express his displeasure at Sawyer's affiliation with the Klan, disagreeing with the use of American sociocultural norms to whip up hatred for Jews, when the crime of the Jewish people is based in their ancestry.⁷⁷ When there are such disagreements between anti-Semites at the crux of why they are anti-Semites to begin with, it is difficult to see how the disparate ideologies can coexist. Sawyer's winks to both racist anti-Semites in the British Israelite movement and sociocultural anti-Semites in the Ku Klux Klan are impossible to take account of in any way but labeling Sawyer a disingenuous demagogue.

Comparing Sawyer's Texts by Audience

In order to determine where Sawyer's loyalties lay with regards to his anti-Semitic convictions, it may be helpful to examine cases when he had an opportunity to create a consensus between the Klan and British Israelites. When Oregon's Ku Klux Klan infiltrated the state government to the extent that they could influence policy, arguably their most successful piece of activism was the purging of Catholics from the state education system, culminating in the Oregon School Bill of 1922. Eckard Toy, a historian who specializes in study of the Oregon Klan, uses Sawyer to describe how one city was persuaded toward Klan domination by appealing to their Protestant "American" values in "Robe and Gown: The Ku Klux Klan in Eugene,

⁷⁵ Lipin, "Reexamining the Oregon Klan in the Age of Trump," 10.

⁷⁶ Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 26.

⁷⁷ Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 23.

Oregon.” Although Sawyer had given up his religious authority, having left the pulpit to take on his role as Grand Lecturer of the Klan’s western region, he spoke in Eugene with all the trappings of Christianity that the largely Protestant population respected: a Bible, vestments, and the Klan’s infamous burning cross.⁷⁸ The process of “de-Romanizing” began by purging the Catholic school teachers in individual towns with heavy Klan influence, such as Eugene. Importantly, anti-Catholic sentiment was already prevalent in Eugene, with a small group of incoming Catholic loggers facing heavy criticism in the local press as early as the 1890s.⁷⁹ The city government was also a target of anti-Catholic purges; the Eugene mayor, chief of police, and city attorney were all ousted and replaced by Klansmen. In Sawyer’s personal writings, he is encouraged by Eugene’s example, not only as Imperial Kleagle, but as a British Israelite. It was here that Sawyer attempted to find a synthesis between British Israelism and the Second Klan; Protestants enjoyed freedom from their fear of being replaced, while believers in British Israelism saw the Klan’s ascent as the rightful domination of God’s chosen people over unclean races.⁸⁰ Sawyer seems to be the only British Israelite commenting upon the Catholic purges in Eugene, partially because there is very little material from the British-Israel World Federation on the role of Catholics in their world order; while Catholics were not God’s chosen people, they were not the spawn of Cain as the Jews and Semitic peoples were.⁸¹ By way of comparison, anti-Catholicism was the central driving influence by the Second Klan, especially following an

⁷⁸ Toy, “Robe and Gown,” 153.

⁷⁹ Donald Kinzer, *An Episode in Anti-Catholicism: The American Protective Association* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1964), 95.

⁸⁰ Toy, “Robe and Gown,” 174.

⁸¹ Tourish and Wohlforth, “Prophets of the Apocalypse,” 17.

1894 papal bull that forbade Catholics from entering secret services; the idea that Catholics had ultimate allegiances toward Rome instead of Washington was tantamount to treason.⁸²

As the Eugene Klan began setting designs on removing Catholic influence from their schools and hospitals and replacing them from within their own ranks, Sawyer, along with other Oregon Klan bigwigs such as Frank Gifford, supported the cause. Sawyer had already made implicit statements to the positive concerning the ferreting out anyone less than “America’s best citizens” from public office.⁸³ He even gave an encore presentation of “The Truth About the Invisible Empire in Eugene” three weeks after he sold out Portland Municipal Auditorium. Eugene’s populace, even among the non-Klan affiliated, was very supportive of the Klan’s endeavors to reduce Catholics’ role in the town. The Oregon School Bill, which enforced compulsory public education throughout the state, was passed with the highest rate in the state.⁸⁴ If Sawyer believed that Klan followers were against the Jews, Catholics, and Asians entering Oregon because for racial reasons, rather than their unwillingness to conform to the American way of life, as well as exerting their cultural influence upon whites, Sawyer would have appealed to them using the dogma and racist tropes he used adeptly when speaking to British Israelites. Instead, Sawyer only mentioned the apparent scourge of Catholics, since they were the largest denomination that would be affected by the School Bill. Sawyer claimed the governor’s denouncement of the bill “bears all the earmarks of Roman politics,” and “the Ku Klux Klan have been bitterly attacked by certain politico-religious interests.”⁸⁵ That Sawyer uses the term

⁸² Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK*, 45.

⁸³ Sawyer, *The Truth About the Invisible Empire*, 12.

⁸⁴ Toy, “Robe and Gown,” 167.

⁸⁵ “Sawyer Makes Statement,” *The Oregonian*, 14 May 1922, Oregon Historical Newspapers, Eugene, Oregon.

“politico-religious” is telling because that phrase has a very similar meaning to sociocultural, and has nothing to do with genetic makeup like his British Israelite teachings, that also look down upon Catholics, use. If Sawyer were trying to stitch the beliefs together, he missed a golden opportunity with the Oregon School Bill, and thus one cannot assume that that was his intention. Even while Sawyer assured Beauchamp that he was “teaching ISRAEL,” there was no evidence that he tried to combine his audiences.

Was Sawyer a Genuine Believer?

The ease Reuben Sawyer seemed to have in his rhetorical sleight-of-hands between Klan and British Israelite crowds seems to indicate his own intrinsically held beliefs were not important in his rhetoric. If Sawyer’s personal brand of anti-Semitism was that important to him, and stretched across his disparate organizations, one would assume that he would try and stitch the groups together. But, from his pulpit at the East Side Christian Church in Portland to being a Kleagle across the Western United States to being a founder of the British-Israel World Foundation, his anti-Semitic remarks changed their tone.

Before joining the Klan and B-IWF, Sawyer’s primary forum was his Southern Baptist church in eastern Portland. In 1919, a leader in the Portland Jewish community wrote to Sawyer saying that his address to them was a triumph for Judeo-Christian relations. This respect for the Jewish community may stem from the reference to Jews in the final book of the New Testament, Revelations, which claims that 144,000 Jews will be present in Israel to usher forth the final judgement of God. This tenet of Christianity is one that is currently used by conservative and right-wing politicians to justify their support for Israel and a Jewish state.

In the year following the foundation of the British-Israel World Federation, Sawyer still had not taken up the mantle of racial anti-Semitism that defined his British Israelite letters from 1922 onwards. At the time, British Israelism as a whole supported Anglo-Saxons being paternal influence for the Jews of Europe, wishing them to be given a homeland in Palestine, and supporting the Zionist cause of Theodor Herzl, effectively removing the non-Europeans from their nation and giving them a homeland in Asia. Sawyer spoke to that effect, saying that “Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely,” quoting scripture.⁸⁶ Michael Barkun notes that these beliefs are antithetical to the party line of the Klan. There is absolutely no syncretism between Sawyer’s writings and lectures from this time, and syncretism would have been his goal if Sawyer truly held these views.

By Sawyer’s heyday of late 1922 and 1923, his Klan speeches were incredibly racist, using the terms “shylock,” “sheenie,” and “kike.” However, early in 1921, he made clarifications to his anti-Semitism on racial grounds, making claims similar to the party line of the B-IWF. Sawyer makes distinctions between “true Jews” who are true descendants of the tribes of Israel and the “objectionable Jews” who lack moral and mental fortitude, and thus the ability to cohabitate with distinguished races. Sawyer claimed that the some of the true Israelites moved to western Europe, and thus some Sephardic Jews of the Iberian Peninsula had some hope, but none of the Ashkenazi from Eastern Europe that made up the overwhelming percentage of American Jews.⁸⁷ Around this time, Sawyer also spoke to the effect that Jews were “virulent opponents who were trying to usurp the role of Chosen People from the rightful representatives, the British

⁸⁶ Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 24.

⁸⁷ Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 25.

and Anglo-American white Christians.”⁸⁸ Barkun concludes that Sawyer “obviously saw no incongruity” between his Klan and British Israelite writings, but his purposeful rhetorical choices is undeniable.⁸⁹ Sawyer kept his dogwhistles discrete depending on the group, and by doing so contradicted himself such that one person could not possibly truly hold all these discordant beliefs.

While Sawyer left the Kleagle position in 1924, he stayed in contact with many of his contemporaries. He also stayed close with the B-IWF after leaving its leadership ranks, acting as host for British delegations visiting Canada in 1929.⁹⁰ He even attended the Convention of the Anglo-Saxon Association of North America in 1937, a splinter group from the B-IWF that nevertheless shared many views and goals.⁹¹ However, Sawyer forewent his gift of public speaking to become a recluse, turning to the written word to interact with the world. The next time Sawyer gained any measure of fame, he was associated with the fantastical fringe beliefs that he was steeped in with the Klan and British Israelism, but in medicine rather than politics. By 1930, Reuben Sawyer was the spokesperson for the Theronoid Society of Milwaukee, Wisconsin (although he is believed to have lived in Colorado at this time).⁹² Theronoid was an off-brand version of the Ionaco, a non-scientific form of healthcare popular in the 1920s. The Ionaco consisted of a metal coil with a very low level electric charge. The belt also had a dial measuring pressure, which Gaylord Wilshire, the inventor, admitted was there to “enhance the power of suggestion,” thereby showing that even he did not fully believe in the charge’s healing

⁸⁸ Katz, “Israel in America,” 116.

⁸⁹ Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 26.

⁹⁰ Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 26.

⁹¹ Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 50.

⁹² Correspondence from Reuben Sawyer to Theronoid Society of Milwaukee, July 14, 1930, MS-488, Box 2, Folder 1, Reuben Sawyer Papers, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

properties.⁹³ The weak electric charge was purported to cure everything from low iron in the blood to adding waves to lifeless hair.⁹⁴ Ionaco, however, was reputable compared to the Theronoid, a Boston-based company whose grandiose claims for health benefits could not be recreated by the medical community, which determined “that [Theronoid belts] had no therapeutic value other than that inherent in mental suggestion.”⁹⁵

In spite of all the medical evidence against Theronoid and Ionaco, Sawyer spent the late 1920s sending weekly letters to to the Theronoid Society of Milwaukee, reporting the health benefits in prevention and curing. Almost all of these claims were anecdotal, with stories such as “ladies who tell us that their skin in marvelously improved by daily treatments.”⁹⁶ The thrill of electricity being available to the average American seemed to be one of Sawyer’s main messaging points, as the charm of Theronoid treatment can be more easily explained if electricity was a novel thing that many did not interact with on a daily basis. Sawyer equates Theronoid use with the radio, the telephone, and the railroad as blessings of their era that ought to be accepted if one wanted to be on the side of progress.⁹⁷

While one could view these various phases of Sawyer’s life as unrelated to each other, there are similarities in the way Sawyer takes to writing on behalf of all of these disparate causes. Whether it was from the preacher’s pulpit, the lectern as a Klan lecturer and British Israelite, or

⁹³ Morris Fishbein, *Fads and Quackery in Healing; An Analysis of the Foibles of the Healing Cults, with Essays on Various Other Peculiar Notions in the Health Field* (New York: Covici-Friede, 1932), 153.

⁹⁴ Stewart Holbrook, *The Golden Age of Quackery* (New York: Macmillan, 1959), 141.

⁹⁵ Associated Physicians of Long Island, “The Theronoid,” *Long Island Medical Journal* 24 (1930), 36.

⁹⁶ Sawyer to Theronoid Society of Milwaukee, July 14, 1930.

⁹⁷ Correspondence from Reuben Sawyer to the Theronoid Society of Milwaukee, January 21, 1931, MS-488, Box 2, Folder 1, Reuben Sawyer Papers, Oregon Historical Society, Portland, Oregon.

behind a desk on behalf of pseudoscientific medical fads, Sawyer took to each of these enterprises with characteristic zeal, including the hatred of their opponents usually reserved for ardent lifetime supporters. But, much like there is no evidence that Sawyer used electromagnetic therapy before writing for Theronoid, there is no indication that Sawyer held the same beliefs concerning the Jewish people from 1921–1924 and before or after. Even if Sawyer harbored some sympathy for the British Israelite cause after he left their service, taking thirteen years away from the cause cannot be spun as strict adherence. Reuben Sawyer's cavalier attitude toward taking on movements lessens the ability of readers, and even believers, to take him at his word.

When assessing the nature of the Second Klan's anti-Semitism and how they sold their worldview to the residents of Oregon, the most important figure to examine may be Reuben Sawyer. His language lacked political correctness and refinement, while keeping the religious trappings and mentality that tugged at the heartstrings of Oregonians who saw themselves as Americans first, Protestants second, and saw those two identities as interrelated. When speaking to Klan audiences, he echoed the concerns of Oregonians that incoming non-white populations would destroy their way of life with their anachronistic traditions and hatred of Christian society. Dupliciously, Sawyer also carried water for the British Israelite movement, and based his anti-Semitism upon the original sin of Eve as proof of Jewish inferiority. The many British Israelite theories as to the true ethnic origin of Jews, incongruent though they may be, served to pat Anglo-Americans on the back and rationalize their hegemony over North America, and Sawyer's greatest talent was convincing Americans and Canadians that the continent was God-given to the Anglo-Saxon race. However, the ease with which Sawyer changed his word

choice between these groups, as well as his Baptist ministry and his later career as a peddler of medical quackery, lends itself to the conclusion that Sawyer was a great lecturer, but that our best knowledge of his true beliefs are dubious at best. This does not absolve him of any guilt or blame for the actions of his devotees, but it does add to the discussion of why people were so drawn to the Ku Klux Klan.

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