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THE PAST IS A FOREIGN COUNTRY THEY VIEW THINGS DIFFERENTLY THERE: THE PERCEPTION OF “THE INVISIBLE EMPIRE OF THE KU KLUX KLAN” AS A BENEVOLENT SECRET SOCIETY FROM 1915 TO 1965

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The Past is a Foreign Country They View Things Differently There: The Perception of “The Invisible Empire of the Ku Klux Klan” as a Benevolent Secret Society from 1915 to 1965

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ABSTRACT

This presentation looks at the history of Americans’ changing attitudes toward the Ku Klux Klan, and contributes to the scholarship on Civil War history and domestic terrorism through the case of the KKK. The journalist Edward Pollard’s book, *The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates* (1867), influenced generations of Americans both south and north by writing a revisionist history of the Civil War, painting confederates as rebels who should still fight to maintain white supremacy. The belief in this “lost cause” led many Americans, in the south especially, to support and have positive attitudes toward the KKK. However, even as the Klan claimed to support the ideals of the “lost cause,” their actions often undermined their claims of benevolence and of upholding southern value. The Klan, especially after its revival post-WWI, terrorized anyone they deemed not “pure American” through violent acts. Today, it is unlikely that the Klan will ever be positively regarded as it once was, even if similar hate groups still plague society.

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