

“As Citizens of Portland We Must Protest”

Beatrice Morrow Cannady and the African American Response to D.W. Griffith’s “Masterpiece”

Promoters of ‘The Birth of a Nation’ film petitioned the city council again on last Wednesday morning for a rehearing to show the film in Portland. The editor of The Advocate was summoned and spoke against the film, pointing out that it was not only historically untrue but that it incited hatred between the races.

— *Advocate*, April 11, 1931

ON SATURDAY, AUGUST 28, 1915, a full-page advertisement promoting the Portland debut of *The Birth of a Nation* ran in the *Evening Telegram*. The silent film about the Civil War, Reconstruction, and rise of the Ku Klux Klan had taken eight months to shoot, featured a cast of eighteen thousand, and cost \$500,000 — more than ten times its initial budget. It took three hours to view the twelve reels, three times longer than other films playing in 1915. And, for the first time, theater owners set their top admission prices at two dollars. Portlanders were urged to act quickly to reserve seats at the Heilig Theatre on Southwest Broadway for one of two daily showings of “The Most Talked of Production in All the World.”

Moviegoers may not have needed much coaxing. The film had been getting rave reviews since its February 8 premiere at Clune’s Auditorium in Los Angeles and its subsequent East Coast debut at New York City’s Liberty Theatre. The *New York Times* judged that the film included “many fine views

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D. W. GRIFFITH.
The man who invented KODAK, and whose great vision and execution "The Birth of a Nation."

BEGINNING TODAY

Reserve Your Seats Early

The most talked of production in all the world. It has created a sensation wherever shown



JAMES G. CLUNIE.
The man who made KODAK to bring to Portland GRIFFITH's masterpiece, "The Birth of a Nation."

THE BIRTH OF A NATION

Adapted From Thomas Dixon's Story "THE CLANSMAN" *A Historical Drama of the Reconstruction Period*

Most Tremendous Dramatic Spectacle That the Brain of Man Has Yet Produced



Fighting for the South.



Abraham Lincoln at Ford's Theatre.

Three Hours of Gripping, Appealing, Blood-Tingling, Soul-Stirring Interest



Fighting for the North.

Accompanied by Augmented Orchestra

GREAT MINDS PRAISE

COMMISSIONER SAMUEL GLASSCOCK speaks highest—Magnificent. Greatest thing I have ever seen.

NEW YORK EVENING SUN—None before has such a whirlwind combination of story, spectacle and human drama been revealed before New Yorkers.

JAMES S. MEDCALF—In drama in an interview that it brings the audience to their feet as no theatrical play has ever done.

C. F. HETTEL (New York Journal)—It is worth \$100 a seat to see "The Birth of a Nation."



Gathering of the Six Miles Run.

GREAT MINDS PRAISE

REV. DR. CHAS. E. PARKER D.D.—"The Birth of a Nation" has no unequalled achievement.

GOVERNOR MORTON, of California—"The most glorious accomplishment in any art I have ever seen."

REV. THOS. B. GREGORY—"The Birth of a Nation" is by all odds the greatest drama that has ever come to New York.

DEBORAH BEN—I've seen on the screen looking down from heaven must have seen the scenes that led to the civil war.

Highly Important—"The Birth of a Nation" will never be presented in any but high-class theaters and at prices customarily charged in such playhouses.—D. W. GRIFFITH.

MADISON 7:00 **BEGINNING TODAY—** **EVENING 8:00**
Madison 9:00 **HEILIG** **Evening Prices**

Lower Floor \$1.00 First Five Rows of Balcony \$1.50 Best of First Five Rows of Balcony \$2.00 Box Seats \$5.00	Lower Floor \$1.00 First Five Rows of Balcony \$1.50 Best of First Five Rows of Balcony \$2.00 Box Seats \$5.00
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RESERVE YOUR SEATS EARLY **RESERVE YOUR SEATS EARLY**

The Sunday Oregonian included this full-page advertisement for The Birth of a Nation at the Heilig Theatre on August 29, 1915.

from the standpoint of photography, those showing the nocturnal gatherings of the Ku-Klux Klan being unusually effective.” An opening-night review in the *Moving Picture World* noted that “no picture presented in New York” had “elicited such spontaneous and frequent applause.” The film’s portrayal of the rise of the Klan particularly affected patrons, who “felt the grip of the story and sympathized with the work of the Ku Klux Klan battling against negro domination.” Director-screenwriter D.W. Griffith and writer Thomas Dixon, Jr. — whose books and play, *The Clansman*, had inspired the film — were called from the theater wings to address the “capacity audience.” Dixon called his colleague “the greatest director in the world,” and Griffith “thanked the audience for the reception being given ‘The Birth of a Nation.’”¹

A second article in *Moving Picture World* was more restrained. Although W. Stephen Bush acknowledged that Griffith’s mastery in “creating and prolonging suspense to the agonizing point” was evident in his “treatment of the Ku-Klux Klan,” he was critical of the film’s “undisguised appeal to race prejudices.” Francis Hackett, a reviewer for the *New Republic*, wrote that “as a spectacle” the film was “stupendous,” but he objected to the motion picture because it was much more: “It is an interpretation, the Rev. Thomas Dixon’s interpretation, of the relations of the North and South and their bearing on the negro.” Hackett compared Dixon to a “yellow journalist” who writes inaccurate or misleading stories:

He is yellow because he recklessly distorts negro crimes, gives them a disproportionate place in life, and colors them dishonestly to inflame the ignorant and the credulous. And he is especially yellow, and quite disgustingly and contemptibly yellow, because his perversions are cunningly calculated to flatter the white man and provoke hatred and contempt for the negro.

Hackett also criticized the film’s intertitles — the printed narration or dialogue displayed on the screen between scenes — for contributing to audience reactions:

The effect of these lines, reinforced by adroit quotations from Woodrow Wilson and repeated assurances of impartiality and goodwill, is to arouse in the audience a strong sense of the evil possibilities of the negro and the extreme propriety and godliness of the Ku Klux Klan.

Blending excerpts from Wilson’s *A History of the American People* with historical quotes, fictional narrative, and “faithful” reconstructions of events such as the surrender at Appomattox lent presidential authority to the picture and added to the belief that the film was historically accurate.²

Both Griffith and Dixon defended the film and denied its racist overtones in letters to the *New York Globe and Commercial Advertiser*. The director

wrote: “We show many phases of [Reconstruction] and we do pay particular attention to those faithful Negroes who stayed with their former masters and were ready to give up their lives to protect their white friends.” Dixon wrote: “I am not attacking the Negro of today. I am recording faithfully the history of fifty years ago.”³ Yet, it was that “faithful” retelling of history that offended African Americans across the country — including Beatrice Morrow Cannady in Portland, Oregon.

Texas-born Beatrice Morrow had attended school near Austin and graduated from Wiley College in Marshall, Texas, in 1908. She taught school briefly in Louisiana and Oklahoma, but her passion was voice and piano, which she studied at the University of Chicago.⁴ Apparently, her decision to leave Illinois in the spring of 1912 and move to Portland — a city with just one thousand black residents — was inspired by a long-distance relationship with Edward Cannady, who worked long hours checking hats at the elegant Portland Hotel and was a cofounder with nine other men of the *Advocate*, a newspaper established in 1903 for African Americans.⁵ By the summer of 1915, when *The Birth of a Nation* was scheduled for its Portland premiere, twenty-six-year-old Cannady had established herself as a civil rights activist and the city’s unofficial “ambassador of good will between the racial groups.”⁶ Just the year before, she had helped found the Portland Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and served as its first secretary.⁷

Shortly after her marriage to Edward, Beatrice had assumed most of the responsibility for running the weekly newspaper. Edward seems to have grown weary of the time-consuming demands of publishing, and Beatrice, not content to settle into homemaking, found herself drawn to social reform. She thrived on the challenge of beginning a career in journalism and worked as the *Advocate*’s business manager, associate editor, linotype operator, and editorial and news writer. At its peak, it is likely that some three thousand people subscribed to the paper — including many influential people such as Governor A.W. Norblad and Oregon Supreme Court Justice John Rand — and Cannady exchanged issues with 250 editors of other black publications across the country.⁸ Until 1936, current and former Portlanders relied on the newspaper for national and local news, birth and death announcements, hotel and society news, and general “good news about ‘the race.’”⁹ In a 1931 interview, Cannady described the paper as “an advocate for the colored race, championing equal rights in all lines of endeavor.”¹⁰ One study noted that the black press was “one of the most important African American institutions” in Portland because of its “ability to counter-balance the neglect and distortions African American news and individuals suffered in the hands of the dominant press.”¹¹



Beatrice Cannady stands between her son George and her husband Edward in about 1912. George would become a successful athlete in high school and at Willamette University and would receive a law degree from Howard University.

Cannady's status as editor of the *Advocate* — later combined with the novelty of being the first black female to practice law in Oregon after graduating in 1922 from Portland's Northwestern College of Law — put her in a unique position to challenge controversial issues such as *The Birth of a Nation*.¹² She was a popular speaker, often giving as many as a hundred talks a year to high school and college students as well as civic and religious groups, and many considered her the unofficial spokesperson for the city's African American population. This ability to navigate within and between the white and black communities is part of a larger pattern of resistance articulated by countless other African American women. Following Reconstruction, Southern "black women discovered fresh approaches to serving their communities and crafted

new tactics designed to dull the blade of white supremacy.” In the process, they assumed a “greater role . . . in the interracial public sphere” and “became the black community’s diplomats to the white community.”¹³

African American women were public actors long before the Civil War, however, and long after Reconstruction had collapsed. Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, and Maria W. Stewart, among many others, stepped boldly into the public sphere to advocate equal rights for women and men. Cannady would later join the ranks of these women, who “saw themselves not as a marginalized group but as the vanguard of their race and sex.” She took this role seriously, once describing how the “interpretation of [her] race to others” was at the forefront of her work “on the public platform and in pulpits.” Cannady’s double role — as interpreter and intermediary — was tested repeatedly between 1915 and 1932. During those years, D.W. Griffith’s film, *The Birth of a Nation*, played in Portland many times, and each time Beatrice Cannady editorialized and spoke out against the film that she referred to as a “vicious photoplay.”¹⁴

On July 4, 1915, the *Morning Oregonian* announced: “Protests from the negroes are the result of reports that the photoplay ‘The Birth of a Nation,’ known also as ‘The Clansman,’ is to be shown in Portland soon.” While the nation was celebrating Independence Day, African Americans found themselves on the defensive, protesting a film that exacerbated their second-class status in America. The Portland Branch of the NAACP, with Beatrice Cannady as its secretary and spokesperson, made its purpose clear: “As citizens of Portland we must protest against this play because the peace and harmony that has existed between the two races may be destroyed. Portland cannot promote progress when twenty-five hundred citizens are held up to public shame and ridicule.” Further, Cannady added, “The picture offers a false and erroneous excuse for discrimination and segregation. It poisons the minds of the young. It displays the worst side of the colored people. The whole play is a diabolical scheme of wrong impressions.”¹⁵

With this public declaration of the Portland Branch’s position on the film, Cannady entered a debate being waged by black editors across the country: Should newspapers keep silent or editorialize against the racist film? W. Calvin Chase, editor of the *Bee* in Washington, D.C., observed: “The *Bee* has long since come to the conclusion that this frequent agitation of and protest against the presentations of the ‘Birth of a Nation’ tends to advertise [*sic*] the photo-play which pleases the author.” On the other side of the argument was Harry C. Smith, publisher of the Cleveland, Ohio, *Gazette* who devoted “more space to his campaign against the film than he gave to any other political topic” in 1915. Like Chase, Cannady acknowledged that the Branch’s efforts to ban the film might “help to advertise the play further,”

but she believed that the issue was too important to keep silent. “I think we as citizens owe it to ourselves to enter a protest and let it be known that the types of colored people shown and the American sentiment expressed do not meet our approval,” she wrote.¹⁶

The Birth of a Nation perpetuated many of the myths Cannady sought to erase through her public lectures. Cannady specifically included the “Gus chase” among the long list of “revolting” scenes that she believed were “bent on prejudicing the public mind against the colored American.” Gus, a “renegade Negro,” surreptitiously follows Flora, a white woman, from her home to a nearby spring. He rushes from the bushes, grabs the woman’s elbow, and announces that he wants to marry her. Apparently aghast at the thought, she breaks free and runs to the top of a hill. From there, wild-eyed, she watches Gus — by now foaming at the mouth — scramble toward her, leading audiences to believe he wants to rape her. “Stay away or I’ll jump!” she screams, as the intertitle flashes on the screen. He continues to advance, forcing Flora to jump to her death rather than face him. Gus’s “villainy,” according to historian Robert Lang, “does not derive simply from his apparently rapacious intentions. Nor does it derive ultimately from the stark fact of his obvious *difference* from Flora — that is, his blackness, or his maleness — but rather from the fact that he has compromised his identity as a loyal slave. He is called a ‘renegade’ because, after the Civil War, he betrays his white masters.” Justice is served when the newly organized Klan pronounces Gus guilty and dumps his body — with a note bearing a skull and crossbones and the letters KKK — on the porch of a power-hungry mulatto.¹⁷ For many people, this scene reinforced long-standing fears about miscegeny and a distrust of African Americans who were achieving a degree of economic, social, and political power.¹⁸

In her talks, Cannady also stressed the movie’s historical inaccuracies, adding to her efforts to inform audiences about African Americans’ contributions “to the progress of mankind.”¹⁹ Cannady believed *The Birth of a Nation* was a direct challenge to her efforts to improve race relations in Portland, and called on “all well-thinking men and women in this city to suppress” it. After detailing the reasons why the film was deleterious to race relations, she appealed “to the civic organizations, churches and societies of Portland to protest against the showing of the vicious photoplay . . . anywhere in this city.”²⁰ Four months earlier, a city ordinance had gone into effect creating a seven-member Board of Motion Picture Censors with the authority to prohibit the showing of films in the city that were deemed offensive, immoral, violent, or apt to “disturb the public peace.”²¹ Cannady and other members of the Portland NAACP may have hoped that the new

board would rise to the occasion and bar *The Birth of a Nation* from the city's movie houses.

Despite her efforts, *The Birth of a Nation* debuted in Portland on Sunday, August 29, 1915. That morning, the *Oregonian* added to moviegoers' anticipation by publishing a column by Edith Knight Holmes, who had been "fortunate enough" to attend the "exhibition . . . given before the Portland censors." Holmes described the movie as a "superb achievement" and "a triumph in film production" and proclaimed every one of the film's twelve reels "a brilliant gem, a marvel to the beholder." The following day, a review in the *Oregon Daily Journal* noted that the "crowded audience passed through three intensely emotional hours" and "cheered when the Ku Klux rode into sight" and forced "the negroes to disarm." The *Morning Oregonian* reported on September 6 that a "number of society matrons" were "planning box and line parties . . . to witness the production of 'The Birth of a Nation'" at the Heilig.²²

Meanwhile, Cannady hired attorney A. Walter Wolf to take the issue to the court. "The colored people think that the picture should never have been passed by the [Portland] censorship board on the ground that it is libelous to that race," Wolf argued, and he asked Judge John H. Stevenson "to issue a warrant for the arrest of the owners and managers" of the film. Stevenson refused the request, reportedly because "he did not feel like taking any action after the picture had been passed by the censorship board." Bart Bertelson, the film's manager, responded to the protest: "I can see no reason for the colored citizens seeking to stop the exhibition of this film, which has been shown in almost every large city in the country." Further, he added, "In view of the reception the film has received in many places, I think the action of the colored people is discriminatory and unfounded. What reason they can find for objecting to a film which has been passed by a board that is known to be more painstaking than the average censor board, neither I nor anyone else can see."²³

If there were further protests by Cannady and other black Portlanders, they were drowned out by the applause of enthralled audiences. John W. Kelly wrote in the *Evening Telegram* on August 30: "'The Clansman' was a mediocre novel; dramatized it was a cheap play, but under the directing genius of D.W. Griffith it is expanded and transformed into a photoplay of such resplendent power that it can hold an audience for three solid hours." Moviegoers, he reported, were "as completely carried away as though it was a spoken drama instead of a photoplay and they applauded and cheered insistently."²⁴ "Cheers Greet Film," the *Morning Oregonian* announced:

The audiences that witnessed the marvelous film production, "The Birth of a Nation," at the Heilig yesterday went wild with enthusiasm. They applauded, they cheered, they

stood up in the intensity of their emotions as they saw the great army of mounted Ku Klux Klan sweeping down the road, fording streams, dashing to the rescue of either Northerner or Southerner in peril.

When veterans of the blue and gray clasped hands and became allied forces against the mad rabble, the applause reached its height. The great picture-drama gripped the hearts and the imagination of that audience with its realism.

Adding to the spectacle, the boxes and balconies of the Heilig were draped with flags, and a twelve-piece orchestra “played the incidental and descriptive music that add[ed] greatly to the effect.”²⁵ Selections included compositions such as Tchaikovsky’s *1812 Overture* and Wagner’s *Ride of the Valkyries*.²⁶

These kinds of artistic touches, the Boston Branch of the NAACP argued in a nationally circulated booklet, were among the reasons for banning the movie: “We deplore the insidious influence of this play in the manner of its presentation — before audiences whose judgment is misled and whose passions are inflamed by a most clever combination of spectacular and musical art.” The Boston NAACP called on “all fairminded people [in Boston] and throughout the country, to use every effort to counteract the malign influence of this play, through . . . more friendly and helpful relations between the colored and white citizens of our land.” The former secretary of the National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures had his own solution to the controversy brewing over the film. In a letter published in the *New Republic*, W.D. McGuire first argued that the board had no role in the discussion: “That the picture places its dramatic emphasis in such a way that sympathies are aroused for one set of characters and against another is outside the Board’s province of control.” Then, in one sentence, he dismissed the national outcry by African Americans: “Spasmodic individual protests and protests of societies having special objects to further [screenings] are not to be considered as representative of any wide public opinion.”²⁷ Cannady and other African Americans were not to be silenced so easily.

THE BIRTH OF A NATION — billed almost three years after its release as “the most stupendous photoplay in film history” — returned to Portland for a seven-day run at the Sunset Theater beginning on Palm Sunday 1918. Once again, Cannady led a “storm of protest” over the film, which reportedly resulted in a number of objectionable scenes being deleted from the film.²⁸ After viewing it again, however, Cannady remained convinced that the film should not be shown and renewed her objections during a meeting at Mayor George L. Baker’s office.

Baker found his hands tied. Although he agreed that the picture was “decidedly bitter” toward “the colored race,” he did not have the authority



The Birth of a Nation made its Portland debut at the Heilig Theatre on Sunday, August 29, 1915. The boxes and balconies were draped with American flags, and a twelve-piece orchestra accompanied the film.

to halt “motion pictures or other entertainments of an undesirable nature” after they had been approved by the local Board of Motion Picture Censors. Still, he instructed the city attorney to draft an emergency ordinance giving him and two commissioners the legal authority to prevent the film from being shown because of the “race hatred element involved.” Unwilling to pay

THE MOST STUPENDOUS PHOTOPLAY IN FILM HISTORY
Directed by That Master Mind, D. W. Griffith

NOW PLAYING TO CAPACITY HOUSES

**THE
BIRTH
OF A
NATION**

STARTS
10 A. M.
DAILY

BE THERE!

Cost \$500,000

FIRST TIME AT
THESE BARGAIN PRICES

25c Wk-Day Mats. 35c Eve's, Sundays

5000
SCENES

18,000
PEOPLE

SUNSET

On March 29, 1918, the *Morning Oregonian* published this advertisement for *The Birth of a Nation*, playing at the *Sunset Theatre* beginning on Palm Sunday.

nothing that should cause race hatred or should be distasteful in any way to the colored people.”²⁹ Cannady and other black Americans, however, saw *The Birth of a Nation* as “a rough and cruel racist slander upon Afro-Americans during Reconstruction” and vowed to continue to protest its showing.³⁰

Despite the setback in 1918, Cannady objected again to the film four years later. For white Oregonians who were eager to forget the trials of World War

\$750 to \$2,000 to the *Sunset Theatre*’s owner, who threatened to sue for lost revenue if the movie were banned, the divided city council rejected the proposed ordinance and allowed the film to continue its run. Cannady took the decision personally. “Soon after the action by the council,” the *Morning Oregonian* reported, she “broke down and wept bitterly in the council chamber because she had failed after nearly a week’s fight to get the picture stopped.” Cannady told the reporter that “she had gone for a week with little sleep and irregular meals and the strain was too great after her mission failed.” The theater’s manager, John A. Jennings, complained that “an injustice [had] been done him in the criticisms of the production at his showhouse” and reminded critics that he had “agreed voluntarily . . . to make whatever eliminations the colored people asked in the film.” Further, he maintained that the “film in its present form depicts nothing

I, the 1920s were a time of hope, celebration, debauchery, and jazz. But the Roaring Twenties also represented a period of distrust — of foreigners, labor unions, Communists, and big business. Those suspicions — coupled with concerns over social immorality, bootlegging, and general lawlessness and a strong desire to protect what was known as “pure womanhood” — contributed to the resurgence of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.

Klan organizers pushed north from California into Oregon in the spring of 1921; and, by the end of 1923, the public affairs journal *Oregon Voter* reported that there were fifty-eight chartered klaverns in the state with a membership of between fifteen thousand and forty-five thousand white men.³¹ For African Americans trying to eke out a living in Oregon, the Klan’s arrival was terrifying. KKK initiation ceremonies were held on Portland’s Mt. Scott, where burning crosses could be seen for miles. In Salem, some fifteen hundred robed Klansmen participated in the “longest parade ever held” in that city; overhead, an airplane circled, towing an illuminated cross and a banner urging people to “Join the KKK.” Adding to the climate of fear were near-lynchings in Medford and Oregon City and an unsolved racial murder in Marshfield (now Coos Bay) in the summer of 1924. “Considering the racism, discrimination, and brutality at large in that historical moment,” Ed Guerrero argues, “African Americans had every reason to fear that what was depicted on the screen could easily be acted out against them in reality.”³²

At the end of March 1922, Beatrice Cannady sent an urgent telegram to NAACP headquarters in New York:

Wire immediately what governors prevented *Birth of Nation* photoplay from showing in their states and on what grounds. Advertised to begin showing here Saturday [at the] Blue Mouse Theatre. Has endorsement of mayor. Wire Governor Olcott [in] Salem to prevent showing here. Over five thousand clansmen reported here.³³

The day after Cannady’s telegram was received, the NAACP wired Governor Ben W. Olcott. “This film has caused serious race clashes in many places by stirring up race prejudice,” wrote NAACP secretary James Weldon Johnson. “It is based on distorted facts of [the] Reconstruction period. . . . In the interest of law and order we urge that you prohibit this exhibition.” Executive secretary Walter White, responding to Cannady’s request for information, told her that the NAACP had “a good deal of information on what has been done in other states in fighting *The Birth of a Nation*,” but “it would be impossible for us to get it to you by Saturday in time to prevent the showing of the film in Portland.” Instead, he urged her to get in touch with E. Burton Ceruti, a founder of the Los Angeles NAACP Branch who had waged a successful fight against the film in California. According to

STARTING TODAY
AT 10:30 A. M.

ADAPTED FROM A GREAT STORY HEARD
ON THE 11th, 12th, 13th & 14th APRIL 1915

D. W. GRIFFITH'S

NO WONDER OF THE WORLD
ADAPTED FROM THOMAS
DEWON'S "THE CLASSMAN"

A BRAND NEW BEAUTIFUL
PRINT OF "THE BIRTH OF A
NATION" IN ITS ENTIRETY

THE BIRTH OF A NATION

COLossal, Magnificent,
Wonderful, with the
Greatest Cast of Actors
Ever Assembled In-
cluding—

LILLIAN GISH
MAE MARIEN
MORAN COOPER
HENRY D. WALTHALL
ROBERT HARDON
"WALLY" REED
GEORGE SEEGAN

AND OTHER FAVORITES
SUPPORTED BY A COMPANY OF
18,000 PEOPLE

 **ANTONE SYCHELE**
and the Big Ten
Blue Mouse
Orchestra

NO ADVANCE IN PRICES

BLUE MOUSE THEATRE

STARTS AT 10:30

Oregonian, April 1, 1922

White, Ceruti had managed to ban the film “for all times from the state.” Meanwhile, Cannady was encouraged to continue her efforts: “We are much interested in the fight and hope that you will advise us of its outcome.”³⁴

But the fight did not end as Cannady had hoped, and *The Birth of a Nation* began a limited engagement at the Blue Mouse Theatre on April 1, 1922. Advertisements in the *Morning Oregonian* proclaimed the film the “8th wonder of the world” and noted that the Blue Mouse Orchestra would play the “famous original ‘Birth of a Nation’ musical score” five times daily. With its “many memorable scenes” and an all-star cast that included Lillian Gish, the *Oregonian* judged, “there is little wonder that ‘The Birth of a Nation’ is still such a great production.” What the reporter failed to mention was the movie’s depiction of the birth of the Ku Klux Klan. But Cannady and other African Americans in Portland undoubtedly noticed the fine print in the advertisement for the film, which read “100% John Hamrick.” The Klan boasted that it stood for “100 percent pure Americanism,” and the theater manager’s public declaration of his Klan membership, coming less than two weeks after the near-lynching in Medford, undoubtedly added to the growing sense of alienation and fear felt by Portland’s black citizens.³⁵

The *Advocate* carried numerous editorials and articles about lynching, and Cannady often criticized the federal government for its failure to condemn lawlessness and protect the rights of citizens. Following the suspicious murder and mutilation of Timothy Pettis in Marshfield in July 1924, she asked: “Isn’t it about time for the Federal government to speak or step out against the many brutal murders, whippings, intimidations and the branding of peaceful, law-abiding citizens by mobs, which are being

done in many parts of the country?”³⁶ Like her predecessors in the black press after Reconstruction, Cannady continually called attention to the absence of civil rights and liberties for African Americans in the United States and urged the government to stop atrocities committed against its black citizens. The reference to branding in her July editorial may have been an oblique reminder of the attack on Elise Reynolds in the fall of 1921. According to the *Portland Telegram*, police had been “trying to determine whether the attack was due to robbery, an effort by residents of the district to drive out the negro family, or to the Ku Klux Klan.” A large “K” reportedly was etched on her cheek with acid while she was unconscious, and a “threatening note signed ‘KKK’” was left on the door by the two assailants.³⁷ The Klan disavowed any knowledge of the attack.

THE BIRTH OF A NATION returned to Portland in December 1923, but this time there apparently was no outcry from the black community. Beatrice Cannady had been injured in an automobile accident in the middle of December and was confined at home. Nevertheless, she continued to work on the *Advocate*, which carried a short but pointed reference to the community’s silence:

“The Birth of a Nation” photo play, which was billed to show in Camden, N.J., has been barred through the efforts of the NAACP Branch. Recently the picture was shown in several motion picture houses in Portland, but not a word of protest was heard from the local branch.³⁸

Fear of reprisal may have kept people at home. At the time, the Portland Klan outnumbered African Americans in the city by as much as ten to one, and another near-lynching in nearby Oregon City was still fresh in people’s minds.³⁹ In 1978, one native Portlander still remembered clearly the night he encountered a tall man in downtown Portland wearing “his sheet . . . and peaked cap.”⁴⁰

When *The Birth of a Nation* was released as a talking picture in 1931, Cannady once again found it necessary to editorialize about the “dangerous” film:

The Birth of a Nation film has been recast and comes out all dressed up as a talkie. It was vicious as a silent drama but now that it talks we are of the opinion that it is much more vicious. Down in the south white people are protesting . . . its coming there. It might be advisable for the people of Portland, the local N.A.A.C.P. in particular to get busy before it is too late. The *Advocate* and others waged a battle against it years ago when it came to Portland, succeeding in many eliminations and finally in running it off the local screen. With such pioneering already done, it wouldn’t be hard to keep it out of the city entirely.⁴¹

As Cannady feared, renewed interest in the film spread quickly across the country.⁴² One month after her editorial, a film company petitioned the city council to show *The Birth of a Nation* in Portland. The local NAACP Branch acted, and a “successful protest against the showing of ‘The Birth of a Nation’ film was made.” The victory was shared with the national office, and Cannady expressed her gratitude on March 14:

The *Advocate* wishes to take this method of expressing its sincere thanks for itself and the people it represents to the Mayor and City Commissioners for their manly stand in refusing to grant permission to the promoters of the “Birth of a Nation” film for exhibition in Portland theaters.⁴³

The “film is most dangerous,” she cautioned, because “it essays to portray a true picture of the conditions, politically, socially and otherwise in the South immediately following the Civil war.” Further, those “who are close students of history, declare that the film fails utterly in depicting the true history” of events during that period. “For these and many other reasons,” she concluded, “the *Advocate* is especially thankful to the mayor, the city council and the motion picture censor board for its stand in barring the film from our fair city.”⁴⁴ Just one month later, however, Cannady reported that:

promoters of “The Birth of a Nation” film petitioned the city council again on last Wednesday morning for a rehearing to show the film in Portland. The editor of The *Advocate* was summoned and spoke against the film, pointing out that it was not only historically untrue but that it incited hatred between the races.⁴⁵

The “petition was unanimously denied,” but once again the fight was only temporarily over, much to the “surprise and shock [of] the colored population and others in Portland.”⁴⁶

On December 23, 1931, it was reported that the Board of Motion Picture Censors had approved a weeklong showing of *The Birth of a Nation* at the Heilig Theatre, and the *Oregon Daily Journal* announced that Portlanders were in for a “holiday treat unusual” when the “favorite of old” began on Christmas Day. “Untold multitudes were thrilled by this great picture” when it was first released sixteen years ago, the article continued, and the “sound reissue is said to have lost none of its poignant appeal.” Cannady observed that people were stunned by the decision. Even the *Oregon Daily Journal* seemed a bit surprised, noting that the city council had rejected the film numerous times due to “vigorous protests from Negro leaders and others.” Hunter Glover, who owned the rights to show the film in Oregon, assured the Board of Motion Picture Censors and the city council that “all the objectionable features and scenes had been deleted, and with the [addition of] sound, the picture was the kind that any one would desire to

see.” Edits notwithstanding, two of the four city councilmen judged that “the colored people should be given an opportunity to view the picture and see what they thought of it since its ‘revision.’”⁴⁷ Eleanor T. Colwell, the board’s secretary and an outspoken critic of the movie, got in touch with Cannady.

Cannady mobilized the black community and white supporters and encouraged people to attend a private viewing of *The Birth of a Nation* on December 23. “It was the consensus of opinion” following the viewing, she reported in the *Advocate*, “that no material deletions had been made and that the picture was just as objectionable now in its present form as ever before.”⁴⁸ Cannady, as chair of the hastily assembled group, urged the representatives of the various clubs, churches, and other organizations present at the showing to attend the special meeting of the city council the following morning. She also asked them to try to reach more supporters during the night and urge them to attend.

Meanwhile, Cannady met with Floyd Maxwell, the theater’s general manager, and “urged him to abandon the idea” of showing the film because it was “a detriment . . . to the peace and harmony between the white and colored races.” She noted that he “was quite frank in his position, stating that he had not thought of the picture in that light and expressed his appreciation for the call and for the information regarding the play, its history and its detrimental effect.” Whether Maxwell truly had a change of heart is impossible to say, but the *Advocate* reported that he promised Cannady he would contact members of the American Legion, which was to share in the ticket proceeds, and see what could be done. The next morning, “everyone was agreeably surprised when Mayor Baker announced that Mr. Maxwell had telephoned . . . stating that he wished to withdraw” his application to show *The Birth of a Nation* over the holidays.⁴⁹ The mayor adjourned the special meeting, and Cannady reported to her readers that “for the fourth time the ‘Birth of a Nation’ was denied exhibition in the ‘City of Roses’ [through] the beautiful spirit of co-operation.” But the *Oregon Daily Journal* reported a different version of events. On December 24, the paper reported, the city council “turned down the promoters who were to give the Portland post of the American Legion 15 per cent of the proceeds. This is the fourth time that the council has refused applications for permits to show this picture. Each time there have been protests from Negroes and various organizations, including the Council of Churches.”⁵⁰

Cannady summarized the fight to ban *The Birth of a Nation* in a three-word headline: “That film again.” She wrote: “Just when it seemed inevitable that the Xmas Spirit in Portland would be marred by the exhibition of the obnoxious film, . . . the City Fathers, Colored people, the Council of



Because of her civil rights work, Beatrice Cannady became a well-known figure in Portland. In this 1926 portrait, Cannady displays a shawl she made, which was exhibited in the show windows of a downtown Portland department store.

Churches and individuals got busy . . . [and] barred it from Portland picture houses. . . .” Despite being tired of the sixteen-year struggle to prohibit showings of the film, Cannady focused her editorial on positive aspects of the most recent fight. She commended the cooperative effort of the various groups and individuals and praised Maxwell for exhibiting “splendid sportsmanship” by withdrawing his application to show the film. Also, she observed that over the years some people had changed their opinion of the film and “decided that [it] was an enemy to interracial peace and harmony.” This sign of progress, of goodwill between the races, led her to proclaim that “human rights, the greatest of all rights and human happiness again triumphed” in Portland. The NAACP quickly issued a press release celebrating the Portland Branch’s good work.⁵¹

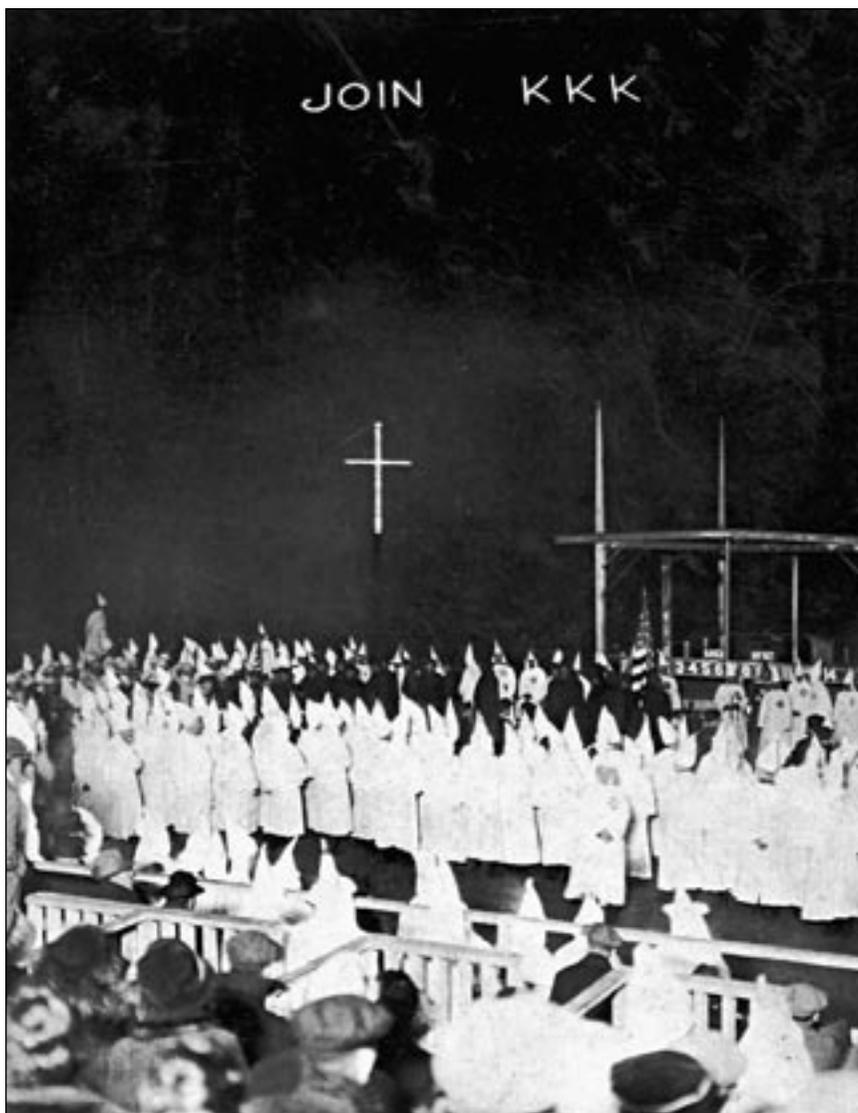
But Cannady’s joy was short-lived. “Those who thought that *The Birth of a Nation* picture was dead in Portland . . . had another thought coming,” she wrote in the *Advocate* just two weeks later. Hunter Glover had sued the city council for “interfering with his right to exhibit the picture.” Glover claimed that the Board of Motion Picture Censors had granted him a permit to show the movie, while the city contended that the board had overstepped its bounds when it issued the permit without consulting the city council. Cannady quickly notified people of the circuit court date, and she and many of those who had attended the private viewing of the film were at the afternoon hearing. Also in the courtroom, she observed, “were a good many colored people who had expressed opposition to the picture on numerous occasions before.” Judge Jacob Kanzler listened to arguments before dismissing the suit without comment. “The merit of the picture was not considered at the hearing,” Cannady reported, even though “the colored people who were there [were] prepared to testify against the picture if necessary.”⁵² For the time being, the fight to prevent showings of *The Birth of a Nation* in Portland was over.

Seventy-five years later, the film remains one of America’s most talked-about motion pictures. Film historian Donald Bogle describes it as a “legendary classic, a racist masterpiece. Technically innovative and sweeping.” *The Birth of a Nation* was voted among the top one hundred American motion pictures by the American Film Institute, but a Los Angeles theater owner decided against showing the film in August 2004 after callers threatened him and his theater. Turner Classic Movies included it among the thirty-eight movies shown in May 2006 during a month-long examination of “the varied concepts, stereotypes and imagery of African-Americans as represented in classic Hollywood cinema.” As Bogle points out, “The treatment of [*Birth of a Nation*’s] black characters . . . made this possibly the most controversial American film ever released.”⁵³

Ed Guerrero suggests that “the struggle over *Birth’s* racist ideology and its public exhibition signaled how deadly serious the new medium, barely twenty years old, had become as a tool to create and shape public opinion and racial perceptions.” The *Globe and Commercial Advertiser* observed in 1915 that the author’s intended meaning was secondary to the “meaning” that “spectators naturally and inevitably derive from” a creative work. “It is not open to question that ‘The Birth of a Nation’ is calculated to increase a prejudice against Negroes already cruelly and unjustly strong. It is only necessary to watch the behavior of the spectators at a performance . . . to know what they understand.” Beatrice Cannady joined with her peers in the NAACP in arguing that *The Birth of a Nation* contained “scenes untrue in history, misleading and revolting, especially designed to convict the . . . colored man of unspeakable crimes.” Further, she pointed out in 1915, “We should protest against these pictures being shown here because they revive and incite race rancor and prejudice. They offer a false and erroneous excuse for discrimination and segregation.”⁵⁴

Guerrero argues that the “intense organized protest” against D.W. Griffith’s film can be seen “as a good index of the brutal climate that African Americans faced under the Wilson administration, a historical moment marked by frequent lynchings throughout the South, a resegregated federal government, and the rise of a reinvigorated and popular Ku Klux Klan.”⁵⁵ Similarly, Cannady’s protests reflect both the national state of affairs and illuminate the second-class status of African Americans in Oregon. Her opposition to *The Birth of a Nation* may not have been as vocal as those in Boston or as successful as the campaign waged in Los Angeles by E. Burton Ceruti and other NAACP members, but keeping the issue on the public agenda enabled her to continue to defend the black community’s right to coexist peacefully with Portland’s white residents.

CANNADY’S ADVOCACY FOR African Americans was both challenged and constrained by the sociopolitical climate and the small, isolated black population in Oregon. In 1920, just fifteen hundred African Americans, approximately 0.6 percent of the total population of 258,288, lived in the state’s largest city. As Portland native Otto Rutherford observed, “It wasn’t that we lacked unity, it was just that we lacked numbers.”⁵⁶ By the 1920s, color lines had hardened in Portland and discrimination was commonplace in restaurants and other public venues, where whites-only signs were displayed prominently. Rutherford, who became president of the Portland NAACP Branch during the 1950s, remembered that some places “had a great big ‘NO,’ they had a dog, they had a black guy lookin’ like little black sambo, and they had an Indian, and they had [a picture of] that in the window. If you



During the time that Beatrice Cannady was protesting the showing of The Birth of a Nation in Portland, the Ku Klux Klan gained increased membership in Oregon. Rallies such as this one in June 1924 at the Lane County Rodeo Arena drew large crowds. At this rally, the public was invited to hear a speech by C.R. Mathis, imperial lecturer for the state of Oregon, and to view the initiation ceremonies.

couldn't read, you could see the picture."⁵⁷ In 1933, Cannady reported that she had persuaded the chief of police "to order an obnoxious sign, 'We cater only to white trade,' down out of the restaurant on the corner of Broadway and Glisan." The victory was fleeting. The next week, the *Advocate* carried a

news brief about a waiter who had been arrested after tearing down another sign from the window of Heller's Café.⁵⁸ A few years earlier, in 1928, Cannady described the humiliation she and her sons experienced at the Oriental Theater when an usher tried to seat them in the balcony rather than on the main floor, which was reserved for white patrons. The following year, the *Advocate* reported that someone was refused admission to the Pantages "on account of his color." Inez Mayberry, a longtime resident who moved to Portland in 1917, remembered the city as being "very prejudiced," and Arthur Cox recalled that discrimination at theaters was "just one of the indignities that blacks suffered in Oregon."⁵⁹ During the 1920s, that humiliation included repeated showings of *The Birth of a Nation* and "necktie parties" staged by the Ku Klux Klan in an effort to rid cities such as Medford, Roseburg, and Oregon City of its African American residents.

Historian Quintard Taylor has observed that African Americans who immigrated to Oregon in the 1840s and 1850s were dismayed to find that "the very conditions they thought they were leaving behind had already taken root west of the Cascades." In 1857, the editor of the *Oregon Weekly Times* spoke for many when he observed: "Oregon is a land for the white man, and refusing the toleration of negroes in our midst as slaves, we rightly and for yet a stronger reason, prohibit them from coming among us as free negro vagabonds." The state constitution, with its exclusionary "black laws," reflected the desire to keep the state white and sent the clear message to African Americans that they were not welcome in Oregon. Until well into the twentieth century, Taylor tells us, blacks "in the Pacific Northwest faced a special and common problem" — the struggle to maintain "their existence in an area that was increasingly hostile to their presence."⁶⁰

Cannady feared that repeated showings of *The Birth of a Nation* would reinforce stereotypes and exacerbate race antipathy, making it even more difficult for African Americans to live and work in Portland. Millie Trumbull, one of the Cannady's white friends, discussed interracial relations on the occasion of the *Advocate's* twenty-second anniversary in 1925: "It is not an easy task to preach tolerance when in this 'land of the free and the home of the brave,' our black men and women are sacrificed to the hate and cruelty of the white race; it is not easy to preach love and kindness under the weary pettinesses of social ostracism which we white people do not hesitate to practice against our black neighbors."⁶¹

Nevertheless, Cannady continued to try to educate white Portlanders about race relations, African American history, and "The Negro's Contribution to Civilization."⁶² She particularly valued opportunities to share information with students at Reed College, Lincoln High School, and Willamette University because she believed that prejudice was "the inevitable outcome

of thorough instruction to the effect that the Negro has never contributed anything to the progress of mankind.”⁶³ Those stereotypes — and more — were reinforced in *The Birth of a Nation*. As Cannady observed in 1915, “The whole play is a diabolical scheme of wrong impressions.”⁶⁴

In 1929, the Portland Council of Churches nominated her for the Harmon Foundation’s annual award for Distinguished Achievement Among Negroes in the field of race relations. She was in good company; Dr. Robert R. Moton, president of Tuskegee Institute, NAACP cofounder Mary White Ovington, and California journalist Delilah Beasley were among the contenders that year. Eleanor Colwell, secretary to Portland’s Board of Motion Picture Censors, wrote a letter in support of Cannady’s nomination:

She is the outstanding woman of her race in Portland and in Oregon, to whom we look for leadership, especially in my own field, that of censorship of motion pictures. She has been invaluable to us when any decision was necessary on any point affecting the harmony of relations between the races. . . .

Others called her an “outstanding citizen,” a “figure of consequence,” and a “leader among the people of her race.”⁶⁵

An unspoken component of the race relations award was the need to agitate for reform. Cannady used her prominent position in the community to gain access to the mayor, and she used the *Advocate* to keep people informed about her activities to promote better race relations. John F. Moreland, minister of the First African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, wrote in 1928 that the newspaper had “played well its part in the building of the community life of Portland,” and Otto Rutherford recalled that the *Advocate* “was very instrumental in keeping the black community informed.”⁶⁶ By the 1920s, a long-standing prejudice against blacks, combined with the activities of the Ku Klux Klan in Oregon and repeated showings of *The Birth of a Nation* confirmed the *Advocate*’s importance as a voice for the African American community. During that decade and into the next, Cannady defended the community against covert and overt racism by writing editorials, reporting acts of discrimination, and participating in the nationwide debate about civil rights and liberties. Reports in other black newspapers across the country increased her visibility among African American leaders such as W.E.B. Du Bois and James Weldon Johnson and lent support to her efforts to secure equal rights for blacks in Oregon. In 1932, Cannady tried to capitalize on her status in Portland by running for state representative from Multnomah County’s fifth district. After twenty years of working to improve interracial relations in the city, she may have believed that the best way to effect reform was to agitate full time from the capital. Some eight thousand voters believed she was the right person

for the job. Considering that there were only 1,243 African Americans over twenty-one years of age in Portland in 1930, the tally is a good indication of her standing in the city. Still, she did not garner enough votes to advance to the general election.⁶⁷

By protesting *The Birth of a Nation* and its historical inaccuracies and stereotypes, Cannady also sought to correct the erasures that were common in the early 1900s. Governor Olcott told his colleagues at a conference in West Virginia in 1922: “We have no negro population there, only a total of about 1,800 negro votes in the whole state of Oregon.”⁶⁸ A reporter discussing the “Ku-Kluxing of Oregon” for *Outlook* similarly dismissed the black population when he observed the state did not have “enough Negroes to man a Pullman car.”⁶⁹ These kinds of descriptions have led some scholars to ignore the African American experience in Oregon during the early 1900s, perpetuating the myth that blacks were inconsequential in the state until World War II. Such incomplete — and sometimes erroneous — accounts of race relations in Oregon have neglected the work that Beatrice Morrow Cannady and others did to promote goodwill.

After devoting nearly twenty-five years to the fight for equal rights in Oregon, Beatrice Cannady left Portland at the end of 1936. She spent the next four decades in the Los Angeles area, still pursuing the things she was passionate about but in a far less public way. She wrote for the *Precinct Reporter*, a newspaper in Perris, California, and held informal interracial gatherings — she called them “fireside meetings” — at the Perris ranch she shared with her third husband, Ruben Taylor.⁷⁰ Beatrice Cannady-Taylor died on August 19, 1974; she was eighty-five. The simple funeral program features a photograph of the activist when she was in her eighties; markedly absent are the biographical details that would have memorialized permanently her long career as a journalist, editor, and civil rights leader.⁷¹ Cannady’s work was not formally recognized until after her death, when the Oregon Lung Association and the Women in the History of Oregon committee included her in its 1982 publication honoring outstanding women in fields ranging from art to politics.⁷² The project’s coordinator told the *Oregonian* that the undertaking “was designed to honor women who had made significant contributions to Oregon but whose accomplishments largely have not been recorded in history.” A reporter for the *Portland Observer*, a newspaper for African Americans established in 1970, put it more simply: Cannady “was a pioneer feminist, as well as a pioneer in her style as a combatant in the seemingly interminable fight for civil rights for Black Americans.”⁷³

NOTES

1. Bosley Crowther, "The Birth of Birth of a Nation," in *Black Films and Film-makers: A Comprehensive Anthology from Stereotype to Superhero*, ed. Lindsay Patterson (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1975), 77; *The Birth of a Nation*, VHS, produced and directed by D.W. Griffith (Fort Mill, S.C.: United American Video, 1988). See also John Moffatt Mecklin, *The Ku Klux Klan: A Study of the American Mind* (New York: n.p., 1924); David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*, 3d ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987); Advertisement, (*Portland Evening Telegram*, August 28, 1915; *New York Times*, March 7, 1915; "Griffith Film Scores," *Moving Picture World*, March 13, 1915, 1587. Dixon wrote *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1970) and *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden, 1865-1900* (Ridgewood, N.J.: Gregg Press, 1967, 1902). His play, *The Clansman*, incorporated material from the novels. See, for example, Raymond Allen Cook, *Fire from the Flint: The Amazing Careers of Thomas Dixon* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: John F. Blair, 1968).

2. W. Stephen Bush, "The Birth of a Nation," *Moving Picture World*, March 13, 1915, 1586; Francis Hackett, "Brotherly Love," *New Republic*, March 20, 1915, 185; Woodrow Wilson, *A History of the American People*, 10 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1902). One intertitle drawn from the book by the historian-turned-president was about the κκκ: "The white men were roused by a mere instinct of self-preservation . . . until at last there had sprung into existence a great Ku Klux Klan, a veritable empire of the South, to protect the Southern country." "The Continuity Script," which appears in *The Birth of a Nation: D.W. Griffith, Director*, ed. Robert Lang (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 94. See also Vincent F. Rocchio, *Reel Racism: Confronting Hollywood's Construction of Afro-American Culture* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2000); Mimi White,

"*The Birth of a Nation: History as Pretext*," in Lang, *The Birth of a Nation*, 214–24.

3. (*New York Globe and Commercial Advertiser*, April 8, April 9, 1915.

4. See Millie R. Trumbull, "A Modern Joan of Arc," (*Portland, Ore.*) *Advocate*, Illustrated Feature Section, September 28, 1929; and Frank Lincoln Mather, ed., *Who's Who of the Colored Race: A General Biographical Dictionary of Men and Women of African Descent* (Chicago: n.p., 1915), 59.

5. In 1910, Portland had a population of 207,214, including 1,045 Negro residents. See the *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910*, Abstract of the Census with Supplement for Oregon (Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, 1913), Table 19, 95. According to one account, the couple had never seen each other but "through friends had been intrigued to exchange letters purely platonic." See Clifford L. Miller, "I Dress to Vamp the Judge' So Says Mrs. E.D. Cannady, an Attorney of Portland, Oregon," *New York Amsterdam News*, August 27, 1927, reprinted in the *Advocate*, September 10, 1927. The July 26, 1928, *Oregonian* reported that Edward Daniel Cannady was born in Texas on November 27, 1867, and died on July 26, 1941, at the age of seventy-three. Another brief biographical sketch states that Edward was born in Jefferson City, Missouri, on November 27, 1877, and that he was in the "money broker business" in Portland between 1904 and 1912. See Mather, *Who's Who of the Colored Race*, 59. The June 16, 1928, *Advocate* notes that Cannady worked at the Ryan Hotel in St. Paul, Minnesota, and assisted with the *Appeal: A National Afro-American Newspaper* in that city. See also G. Douglas Nicoll, "The Rise and Fall of the Portland Hotel," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 99:3 (Fall 1998): 298–335.

6. Daniel G. Hill to the Harmon Foundation, August 30, 1929, Beatrice Cannady Scrapbook, 1929-1936, p. 27, Mf 160, Research Library, Oregon Historical Society, Portland [hereafter Cannady Scrapbook].

7. See the Constitution of Portland Branch of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, January 27, 1914, NAACP Portland Branch files for 1914-1955, Mss 2004-2, Research Library, Oregon Historical Society [hereafter NAACP Portland Branch files].

8. See *Advocate*, February 15, 1930, May 16, 1925, June 2, 1928, February 9, 1929, September 27, 1930; Daniel G. Hill, Jr., "The Negro in Oregon: A Survey" (M.A. thesis, University of Oregon, 1932), 55.

9. *Advocate*, February 7, 1925. Although several sources list 1933 as the *Advocate's* final year, Cannady apparently published the paper until at least 1936. Issues typically were four pages long. According to the Oregon Regional Union List of Serials, the *Beaver State Herald* became the *Mt. Scott Herald*, which became the *Advocate* on May 2, 1923. The *Advocate* had been founded in September 1903, and the Cannadys took over its advertiser and subscriber lists when the *Mt. Scott Herald* ceased publishing.

See *Mt. Scott Herald*, April 27, 1923; *Advocate*, May 2, 1923. Because the December 2, 1933, issue was the last one micro-filmed, researchers have assumed that the *Advocate* ceased publication then. See, for example, The Bosco-Milligan Foundation, *Cornerstones of Community: Buildings of Portland's*

African American History (Portland, Ore.: Bosco-Milligan Foundation, 1995), 37; Elizabeth McLagan, *A Peculiar Paradise: History of Blacks in Oregon, 1778-1940* (Portland, Ore.: The Georgian Press, 1980), 112.

10. *Sunday Oregonian*, September 6, 1931.

11. Bosco-Milligan, *Cornerstones of Community*, 36, 38-39.

12. See, for example, (*Portland*) *Oregon Daily Journal*, June 5, 1922; and "Social Progress," *Crisis* (November 1921), 37. The Oregon

State Bar has no record of Cannady ever passing the Bar exam, though her family maintains that she was an accredited attorney. The December 21, 1935, minutes from the Oregon State Bar Board of Governors meeting indicate that she failed to pass the Bar on several occasions but continued to practice law. For discussion of her court cases, see, for example, *Advocate*, December 10, December 17, 1927, September 7, 1929, July 30, 1932; Beatrice Cannady to Robert Bagnall, April 13, 1926, NAACP Portland Branch files.

13. Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 147, 148.

14. Maria W. Stewart's biographer suggests that one reason African American women have been omitted from the canon is the lack of primary sources. See Marilyn Richardson, preface to *Maria W. Stewart, America's First Black Woman Political Writer*

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), xv; Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*, xv; *Oregon Daily Journal*, July 4, 1915, August 29, 1929.

15. On the number of African Americans in Oregon, see note 7. *Morning Oregonian*, July 4, 1915.

16. (*Washington, D.C.*) *Bee*, April 1, 1916; William G. Jordan, *Black Newspapers and America's War*

for Democracy, 1914-1920 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 54; *Oregon Sunday Journal*, July 4, 1915.

17. *Oregon Sunday Journal*, July 4, 1915; Thomas Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film, 1900-1942* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 48; Robert Lang, "The Birth of a Nation: History, Ideology, Narrative Form," in Lang, *The Birth of a Nation*, 18; for a synopsis of the "Gus chase," see "The Continuity Script," in Lang, *The Birth of a Nation*, 118-28.



18. Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 16.

19. Cannady, quoted in the *Philadelphia Tribune*, March 12, 1927. See also *Advocate*, February 18, April 7, 1928, March 28, 1925, April 24, 1926, February 21, 1931.

20. *Morning Oregonian*, July 4, 1915; *Oregon Sunday Journal*, July 4, 1915.

21. *Morning Oregonian*, February 20, 1915. Also see *Morning Oregonian*, February 8, August 29, 1915.

22. *Sunday Oregonian*, August 29, 1915; *Oregon Daily Journal*, August 30, 1915; *Morning Oregonian*, September 6, 1915.

23. *Morning Oregonian*, September 1, 1915.

24. *Evening Telegram*, August 30, 1915.

25. *Morning Oregonian*, August 30, 1915.

26. *Boston American*, July 18, 1915, reprinted in Lang, *The Birth of a Nation*, 188.

27. Boston Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, *Fighting a Vicious Film: Protest Against 'The Birth of a Nation'* (Boston: Boston Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 1915), 7–8; W.D. McGuire Jr., “Correspondence: Censoring Motion Pictures,” *New Republic*, April 10, 1915, 263. State and local censorship boards were formed soon after the first nickelodeons opened in 1905

in the United States to monitor film content and prevent “unwholesome influence upon the minds of those witnessing” the movies. The National Board of Censorship was created in 1909. See Steve Goodson, “This Mighty Influence for Good or for Evil: The Movies in Atlanta, 1895-1920,” *Atlanta History* 39:3-4 (1995): 33; Kyonzte Hughes, “Rating & Labeling Entertainment,” First Amendment Center, online <<http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/speech/arts/topic.aspx?topic=rating>> (accessed August 20, 2006). See also Robert Fisher, “Film Censor-

ship and Progressive Reform: The National Board of Censorship of Motion Pictures, 1909-1922,” *The Journal of Popular Film and Television* 4:2 (1975): 143-56.

28. *Morning Oregonian*, March 26, 1918.

29. *Morning Oregonian*, March 26, March 27, March 28, 1918.

30. Cripps, *Slow Fade to Black*, 52.

31. “‘Purifying’ the Klan,” *Oregon Voter* 35:10 (December 8, 1923): 16. According to the report, seven more klaverns had provisional charters. Kenneth T. Jackson calculates there were fifty thousand men and women (as members of the Ladies of the Invisible Empire) initiated in the Oregon Klan between 1915 and 1944. See Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 237; and David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*, 3d ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 88. Chalmers estimates that fourteen thousand were naturalized during the Oregon Klan’s first year.

32. (*Salem*) *Oregon Statesman*, November 11, 1923; Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 14. See Kimberley Ann Mangun, “Beatrice Morrow Cannady and *The Advocate*: Building and Defending Oregon’s African American Community, 1912–1933” (Ph.D. diss., University of Oregon,

2005). See also, for example, *Oregon Daily Journal*, June 12, 1923.

33. Telegram, Beatrice Cannady to the NAACP, March 29, 1922, NAACP Portland Branch files.

34. Telegram, James W. Johnson to Ben W. Olcott, March 30, 1922, NAACP Portland Branch files; Walter F. White to Beatrice Cannady, March 30, 1922, NAACP Portland Branch files. There is no documentary evidence that she contacted Ceruti.

35. *Morning Oregonian*, April 1, 1922. On the Klan’s claim to “100 percent pure Ameri-



Three Hours of Gripping, Appealing, Blood-Tingling, Soul-Stirring Interest

Fighting for the South.

canism,” see (*Eugene, Ore.*) *Morning Register*, August 7, 1921; *Oregon Statesman*, November 11, 1923; Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 30, 327; Luther Powell to Ben W. Olcott, November 8, 1922, Benjamin Wilson Olcott Papers, Mss 308, Research Library, Oregon Historical Society, Portland [hereafter OHS Research Library]; Application for Membership in the Invisible Empire Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Ku Klux Klan Records/Folder 1 of 2, Mss 22, OHS Research Library. On the near-lynching, see *Oregon Daily Journal*, July 26, 1922; and *Oregon Statesman*, July 7, 1922. For an account of the incident, see Mangun, “Beatrice Morrow Cannady,” chap. 7. On feelings of alienation and fear, see Petition from the Portland Branch Committee on Legislation and Legal Redress to Oregon Governor Ben W. Olcott, August 18, 1921, NAACP Portland Branch files; and Beatrice Cannady, quoted in the draft of Trumbull, “A Modern Joan of Arc.” Cannady’s comments about the KKK were omitted from the final version published in the *Advocate*, September 28, 1929. For the draft, with handwritten notes and edits, see Cannady Scrapbook.

36. *Advocate*, July 19, 1924. See also *Advocate*, March 30, April 6, 1929, October 20, 1923, February 2, 1924, August 25, 1928.

37. *Portland Telegram*, October 21, 1921.

38. *Advocate*, December 22, 29, 1923.

39. See (*Oregon City*) *Morning Enterprise*, June 3, 1923, *Advocate*, June 9, 1923.

40. Otto Rutherford, interview by Helen Warbington and Elizabeth McLagan, March 3, 1978, SR 270, transcript, OHS Research Library.

41. *Advocate*, February 14, 1931. See also *Advocate*, March 14, 1931. I could find no evidence that previous protests had been successful.

42. See, for example, *Advocate*, February 14, February 28, April 11, December 12, 1931.

43. *Advocate*, March 14, 1931; See also Robert W. Bagnall to Carrie Ingersoll, March 11, 1931, NAACP Portland Branch files.

44. *Advocate*, March 14, 1931.

45. *Advocate*, April 11, 1931.

46. *Advocate* January 2, 1932.

47. *Morning Oregonian*, December 24, 1931; *Oregon Daily Journal*, December 23, 1931; *Advocate*, January 2, 1932.

48. *Advocate*, January 2, 1932.

49. *Ibid.* See also *Morning Oregonian*, December 25, 1931. The *Advocate* and *Morning Oregonian* list Maxwell as a member of the Board of Motion Picture Censors, which would appear to be a conflict of interest. See also the discussion of her civil rights work in Vernonia, Oregon, in Mangun, “Beatrice Morrow Cannady,” chap. 9.

50. *Advocate*, January 2, 1932; *Oregon Daily Journal*, December 24, 1931.

51. *Advocate*, January 2, 1932. See also Clarence E. Ivey to Robert W. Bagnall, December 30, 1931, NAACP Portland Branch files; “‘Birth of Nation’ Film Stopped by NAACP in Portland, Ore.,” NAACP Portland Branch files.

52. *Advocate*, January 16, 1932. See also *Oregon Daily Journal*, January 13, January 14, 1932; *Morning Oregonian*, January 14, 1932. Had the application to show the film been voluntarily withdrawn, as both the *Advocate* and *Morning Oregonian* had indicated in December, there would have been no reason for Glover to file the lawsuit.

53. Donald Bogle, *Blacks in American Films & Television: An Illustrated Encyclope-*



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- dia* (New York: Garland, 1988), 19; National Public Radio, *Weekend Edition*, August 14, 2004; American Film Institute, online <<http://www.afi.com/tvevents/100years/movies.aspx>> (accessed August 20, 2006); Roger Fristoe "Introduction to Race & Hollywood," Turner Classic Movies, online <<http://www.tcm.com/thismonth/article/?cid=133205&mainArticleId=133204>> (accessed August 20, 2006).
54. Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 15; *Globe and Commercial Advertiser*, April 8, 1915; and *Oregon Sunday Journal*, July 4, 1915.
55. Guerrero, *Framing Blackness*, 15.
56. *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920*, vol. 2, General Report & Analytical Table (Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, 1922), Table 13, 47; Oregon Black History Project, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 41, OHS Research Library.
57. Otto Rutherford, interview by Helen Warbington and Elizabeth McLagan, March 3, 1978, SR 270, transcript, OHS Research Library. See also "Window Signs and Race Relations," Cannady Scrapbook, 64.
58. *Advocate*, July 8, July 15, 1933.
59. *Advocate*, December 8, 1928, August 24, 1929; Oregon Black History Project, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 41, OHS Research Library.
60. Quintard Taylor, "Slaves and Free Men: Blacks in the Oregon Country, 1840-1860," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 83:2 (Summer 1982): 170. See also Lawrence B. de Graaf, "Race, Sex, and Region: Black Women in the American West, 1850-1920," *Pacific Historical Review* 49:2 (May 1980): 285-313; (*Portland, Ore. Territory*) *Oregon Weekly Times*, November 14, 1857. See also K. Keith Richard, "Unwelcome Settlers: Black and Mulatto Oregon Pioneers," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 84:1 (Spring 1983): 29-48; Richard, "Unwelcome Settlers: Black and Mulatto Oregon Pioneers, Part II," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 84:2 (Summer 1983): 172-205.
61. *Advocate*, August 29, 1925.
62. *Oregon Daily Journal*, June 4, 1930, reprinted in the *Advocate*, June 7, 1930.
63. Quoted in *Philadelphia Tribune*, March 12, 1927. See also "Kathryn Hall Bogle's 'An American Negro Speaks of Color,'" *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 89:1 (Spring 1988), 73.
64. *Morning Oregonian*, July 4, 1915.
65. William E. Harmon Awards for Distinguished Achievement Among Negroes 1929, Records of Harmon Foundation, Inc., 1913-1967, Mss 51615, Container 59, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress; Eleanor T. Colwell to the Harmon Foundation, Inc., August 28, 1929, Cannady Scrapbook, 26; Levi T. Pennington to the Harmon Foundation, Inc., August 8, 1929, Cannady Scrapbook, 6-7; Franklin T. Griffith to the Harmon Foundation, Inc., July 31, 1929, Cannady Scrapbook, 14. Tuskegee's Dr. Moton received the award.
66. *Advocate*, September 1, 1928; Rutherford, Oregon Black History Project, MSS 2854, Box 1, Folder 41, OHS Research Library.
67. *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930*, vol. III, part II, Montana-Wyoming (Washington, D.C.: U.S. GPO, 1932), Table 15, 628. For more about Cannady's bid for office, see Mangun, "Beatrice Morrow Cannady," chap. 6.
68. Ben W. Olcott, "America Adrift," in *Proceedings of the Fourteenth Conference of Governors of the States of the Union*, held at White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia, December 14-16, 1922 (n.p.), 138. For a draft of his remarks, see the Ben W. Olcott Scrapbook, vol. 8/General Correspondence, AX 81, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Oregon.
69. Waldo Roberts, "The Ku-Kluxing of Oregon," *Outlook* (March 14, 1923): 491.
70. Barbara Redwine, telephone conversation with the author, February 1, 2006.
71. Copy in the author's collection.
72. Oregon Lung Association, Women in the History of Oregon Committee, *Notable Women in the History of Oregon* (Portland, Ore.: Oregon Lung Association, 1983).
73. *Oregonian*, April 19, 1982; *Portland (Ore.) Observer*, October 9, 1980.