

# The History of the Twentieth Century

## Episode 104

### “The Birth of a Nation”

#### Transcript

[music: Fanfare]

Beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and continuing into the early twentieth century, the United States saw laws restricting the rights and freedoms of African-Americans proliferate. Voting rights were restricted. Segregated public facilities were introduced. Laws were enacted to regulate where African-Americans could live, what jobs they could hold, even who they could play checkers with.

On February 12, 1909, the one-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln, a group of African-American and white activists for racial equality met to create a civil rights organization to push back against this steady encroachment on the rights of African-Americans. In 1911, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the NAACP, was formally incorporated.

The fledgling organization filed lawsuits against discriminatory laws and called attention to lynchings and other such outrages. But in just a few years, its highest-profile conflict would be with the most successful motion picture producer of the time, as well as with the President of the United States.

Welcome to *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

[music: Opening War Theme]

Episode 104. The Birth of a Nation.

On December 26, 1908, an African-American boxer named Jack Johnson defeated the world heavyweight champion, the Canadian fighter Tommy Burns, in a match held in Sydney, Australia.

In this podcast, we’ve already seen that it was a common belief among white Americans of the time that white people were inherently better athletes than people of other races. In the 23 years since the Marquess of Queensberry Rules had been promulgated—not by the Marquess himself,

but that's another story—every world heavyweight boxing champion has been either a white American or Englishman or Canadian.

Jack Johnson was the child of former slaves and was born in Galveston, Texas in 1878. He began boxing at the age of twenty in 1898 and within five years, he had won the World Colored Heavyweight Championship.

The World Heavyweight Champion at this time was the American James J. Jeffries, who had won the title in 1899, just shortly after Johnson had begun his career. Johnson coveted an opportunity to fight Jeffries for the title, but under the rules of the time a white boxer was not required to defend his title against a non-white challenger.

In 1905, Jeffries retired from boxing undefeated. That was when Canadian Tommy Burns won the crown. Johnson pursued and taunted Burns for two years, garnering plenty of publicity along the way, until Burns finally agreed to fight him. The fact that all the publicity Johnson had generated led to a nice fat \$30,000 purse for Burns probably had something to do with this decision. That would amount to about US\$750,000 today.

Johnson won that fight, and thus became the first black World Heavyweight Champion, and thus a source of pride to African-Americans, and a source of annoyance to many white boxing fans, particularly the sort who clung to racial theories that said such a thing was impossible. And in 1908, that was most of them. Many were eager to dismiss Johnson's win as a fluke. It tells you a lot about the tenor of the times that boxing fans and the press spoke wistfully of the longed-for white boxer who would come along and set things right by taking the championship away from the mouthy and flamboyant Johnson. It tells you even more about the tenor of the times that they referred to this hypothetical challenger as "The Great White Hope."

"The Great White Hope" proved to be James J. Jeffries, who was lured out of retirement to challenge Johnson for the title by an offer of \$120,000, or about three million US dollars in today's money. This was an incredible sum for an athlete at the time. Jeffries was just three years older than Johnson, a more experienced fighter, and he had never lost a match in his career, which was more than Johnson could say. His fans felt confident in his ability to put the uppity Johnson in his place. The bout was held in Reno, Nevada on July 4, 1910, Independence Day in the US, and was billed as "The Fight of the Century." Johnson dominated the match until Jeffries' corner threw in the towel in the fifteenth round.

Jack Johnson had won an undisputed victory against the most successful boxer of the age. It was no longer possible to dismiss him as a fluke. There was jubilation in the African American community, while white Americans across the country, um, rioted in the streets and attacked groups of celebrating African Americans. Over 20 Americans were killed and hundreds injured on that Fourth of July, America's birthday.

The match was filmed and exhibited across the US. It became the most popular motion picture of all time in that still-young industry, at least until *The Birth of a Nation* comes along, but I'm getting ahead of myself. Because of the passions the film aroused, it was banned in much of the American South and in South Africa, and there were calls to ban films of boxing matches altogether. Famous boxing fan and former President Theodore Roosevelt joined in this call, and in 1912, Congress actually enacted legislation banning the interstate distribution of boxing films. This ban would remain in force until 1940.

Jack Johnson, like Jim Thorpe, became one of the first celebrity superstar athletes. He made huge amounts of money from endorsements, and was frequently in the news, as often for his flamboyant lifestyle as for his boxing accomplishments. He bought cars and expensive clothes. He became a history buff and a devotee of the opera. He opened a nightclub in Harlem, which would later become the Cotton Club. And he married three times, in 1911, 1912, and 1913, all three times to white women, and he had many white women lovers on the side. In short, Jack Johnson did everything an African-American man wasn't supposed to do in America, and he flaunted all of it in front of outraged white Americans. He was easily the most famous—and the most hated—African American of the age.

A lot of white Americans longed for the day Jack Johnson would finally get his comeuppance, and if not in the boxing ring, perhaps in some other way. In 1910, the United States Congress passed a law to criminalize interstate prostitution and human trafficking. This law was known at the time as the White-Slave Traffic Act, and more recently as the Mann Act, after James Robert Mann, the Illinois Republican Member of Congress who sponsored it. The Mann Act targeted interstate prostitution, but it included in its language a prohibition on transporting women across state lines for “any immoral purpose.” Soon after it became law, US courts were permitting Mann Act prosecutions for transporting women across state lines for consensual acts, such as adultery.

Over the years, the Mann Act was used in a number of notorious prosecutions of famous men guilty of nothing worse than adultery, including Charles Chaplin, until the Act was finally amended in 1986 to exclude prosecutions of any act that was otherwise legal. But the most notorious Mann Act prosecution of all was the one brought against Jack Johnson in 1912, for the crime of transporting his white lovers across state lines. Many white Americans of the time agreed that sex between a black man and a white woman was immoral *per se*, though in our day there is near-universal agreement that the prosecution was racially motivated. Johnson was convicted and fled the country—first to Canada, then to France—to avoid serving his sentence.

Johnson continued to box in France and continued to defend his title until April 5, 1915, when he was knocked out by fellow American Jess Willard in the 26<sup>th</sup> round of their title match in Havana, Cuba. It has been suggested that Johnson threw the match in the belief that his Mann Act sentence would be suspended if he surrendered his boxing title. If that was the case, then he was mistaken. The sentence stood, and Johnson eventually returned to the US in 1920 and served

a year in the United States Penitentiary at Leavenworth, Kansas. Jess Willard has been quoted as saying, “If he was going to throw the fight, I wish he’d done it sooner.”

[music: *Carmen Suite No. 1*]

The deteriorating legal position of African Americans in the US led to the formation of the NAACP, as I described at the top of the episode.

In its early years, the organization went to court to fight voting restrictions aimed at African Americans in the South and to oppose segregation. Segregation in public facilities in the United States was legal at the time, under the 1897 *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court ruling that coined the phrase “separate but equal.” Segregated public facilities were always separate but too often not equal, and so the NAACP would go to court to enforce the second half of that rule.

The organization also lobbied for Federal legislation to fight lynchings. Here they were repeatedly frustrated by Southern Democratic Senators who used the Senate’s filibuster rules to prevent passage of any anti-lynching bill. To call attention to the problem of lynchings, the NAACP had a large black flag, onto which were stitched the words “A Man Was Lynched Yesterday,” and they would fly the flag from the window of their New York headquarters the day after a lynching, which were all too common.

The leadership of the NAACP was mostly white at this time. The most prominent African-American member was W.E.B. DuBois, whom you no doubt remember from episode 25. He was named the organization’s Director of Publicity and in that role served as editor of its magazine, *The Crisis*, which is still published today and is said to be the world’s oldest black publication. Under DuBois’s editorship, there was much political and social commentary on race relations published in the magazine, no surprise there, but the magazine would also champion African-American art and literature.

I’ve already mentioned how by this time, African-American voters, who had traditionally voted the party of Abraham Lincoln were increasingly being drawn to the Democratic Party in the cities of the northern United States. Republican Presidents Roosevelt and Taft had disappointed their African-American constituents with their lukewarm responses to encroachments on the rights of African Americans until some activists, including DuBois, began urging African-American voters to vote Democratic in the 1912 Presidential election, as a way of punishing Roosevelt and Taft for neglecting their interests. And that brings us back to Woodrow Wilson.

Recall that when we last checked in with Woodrow Wilson, his administration had introduced new segregationist policies for employees of the Federal government. Segregation had been on the rise throughout America, but US government employment had been a bastion of resistance, until Wilson came along. There was also increasing pressure to introduce segregation into the District of Columbia, which is administered by the Federal government, as well as efforts to introduce segregationist legislation in states outside the South. To African-American Democratic

voters, who had helped elect Wilson, this felt like betrayal. The NAACP tried to pressure the new President to change course, but their efforts didn't go very well.

The organization's representative in its first meeting with the President was William Monroe Trotter and outspoken African-American newspaper editor and co-founder of the *Boston Guardian*. As editor of the *Guardian*, Trotter campaigned against the rise in segregation in hotels, restaurants, and other businesses in his home city.

Trotter met personally with Wilson in November 1913 and again in November 1914. Wilson would take the position that his administration's segregationist policies weren't actually segregationist, but respected the dignity of both races. Trotter dismissed this claim as "preposterous" and told Wilson at their 1914 meeting that segregation was humiliating to African Americans. Wilson replied, "If you take it as a humiliation, which it is not intended as, and sow the seed of that impression all over the country, why the consequences will be very serious." When Trotter reminded Wilson of the African-American support he had received in his election, Wilson kicked the NAACP delegation out of his office, saying, "If this organization wishes to approach me again, it must choose another spokesman," and "You have spoiled the whole cause for which you came."

Controversy followed. Many whites attacked Trotter for his disrespect of the President, as did some African-Americans, whereas others judged Wilson guiltier of rudeness and applauded Trotter for standing up to him.

So the year 1915 opened on a United States fraught with racial tension. It was like...you know those old Road Runner shorts where Wile E. Coyote hides inside a deserted shack? And it's dark inside? And he lights a match so he can see, and discovers that the shack is packed full of explosives? Yeah, it was like that. And the role of Wile E; Coyote will be played by David Wark Griffith. And the match is entitled *The Birth of a Nation*.

[music: *Ride of the Valkyries*]

Thomas Dixon, Jr. was born in 1864 in Shelby, NC. That means he grew up in the American South during Reconstruction. He attended Shelby Academy, Wake Forest College, then studied political science at Johns Hopkins University, where he befriended fellow Southerner and poli-sci major Thomas Woodrow Wilson.

Dixon left Johns Hopkins to attempt a career as an actor in New York City, but that didn't work out. He returned to North Carolina, studied law, became a lawyer, a state legislator, and a Baptist minister. His brother Amzi also became a Baptist minister and would become one of the editors of *The Fundamentals*, that series of books that would become the foundation of what we now call fundamentalism, and which I talked about back in episode 13.

But Thomas Dixon never lost his love for the theatre, and if he couldn't be an actor, then by golly, he would try his hand at writing plays. Then he branched out into novels and even screenplays for the fledgling motion picture industry. Dixon wrote a trilogy of novels meant to expose the evils of socialism, but he is most famous today for his other trilogy of novels, set in the South during Reconstruction.

These three novels, *The Leopard's Spots*, published in 1902, *The Clansman*, published in 1905, and *The Traitor*, published in 1907, depict the Reconstruction as a period when violent and rapacious African Americans seized political power in the South and oppressed helpless whites. In Dixon's telling, African Americans disenfranchised white voters, raped white women, terrorized white Southerners, raped white women, robbed and pillaged honest white men, raped white women, and...did I mention there's a lot of rape? Yeah, I think I did. Dixon clearly had issues with sex between black men and white women.

Dixon's version of American history goes on to claim that when the South was on the brink of collapse into barbarism, it was the heroic vigilantes of the Ku Klux Klan who restored law and order and saved civilization...by denying African Americans the vote and other civil rights.

Dixon's "creative" version of history was roundly denounced. I mean, in 1902, the Reconstruction period was still in living memory. People knew perfectly well that Dixon's novels were bogus and that the Ku Klux Klan had been a band of murderous thugs who had had to be put down like a pack of rabid dogs by the United States Army. And yet these novels were bestsellers anyway. The middle book in the trilogy, *The Clansman*, was adapted into a play in 1905, the same year it was published, with Dixon writing the script. The play was controversial, especially in the North, with protests and efforts to close down productions of the show, including a campaign by William Trotter's *Boston Guardian*.

Enter D.W. Griffith. David Wark Griffith was born in Kentucky in 1875. His father had been a colonel in the Confederate Army during the Civil War. Like Dixon, Griffith pursued a career in acting. Unlike Dixon, he was successful at it, and by 1908, he was acting in motion pictures. It was a very young industry at the time, growing rapidly, and Griffith moved from acting to directing in a matter of months. The motion picture business was mostly in New York City at this time, but in 1910 Griffith directed what is said to have been the first motion picture filmed in Hollywood, California. Hollywood would quickly become the center of the industry—all that California sunshine has something to do with it. Motion pictures need a lot of light. Even indoor scenes were illuminated by sunlight in those days, and so the more sunshine was available in your location, the faster you could produce films. So southern California emerged as the ideal location, and the very name "Hollywood" would soon become a metonym for the US motion picture industry.

In 1914, Griffith decided to make *The Clansman* into a motion picture. The fact that he would choose this novel out of all novels tells you something about Griffith. And given the controversy

that the book and the play had already engendered, surely Griffith must have known that the film would also be controversial, although later he would profess surprise at the backlash it drew. *The Clansman* was not going to be just another “movie”—as they were by now beginning to be called, at least in the United States—it was going to be unlike anything anyone had ever seen before. In more ways than one.

To counteract the outcry that *The Clansman*—oops, excuse me, the film version is going to be called *The Birth of a Nation*—to counteract the outcry that *The Birth of a Nation* is going to arouse, and to call attention to its undeniable artistry, Dixon and Griffith are going to strike the most brilliant publicity coup in the history of motion pictures. And that’s saying something in an industry famous for its shrewd use of publicity. This film is going to be the first motion picture exhibited at the White House and it is going to win the endorsement of no less a figure than the President of the United States. Or at least, Griffith and Dixon are going to try their best to make everyone *think* it had.

Remember that Thomas Dixon and Woodrow Wilson were college buddies. Dixon contacted the President and persuaded him to allow a special showing of *The Birth of a Nation* at the White House on February 18, 1915, just ten days after the film’s release.

So how did Wilson like the film? It is often claimed that Wilson said afterward that “It is like writing history with lightning. And my only regret is that it is all so terribly true.” But this claim is problematic. The quote does not appear until 1937, over a decade after Wilson’s death. Thomas Dixon failed to mention any such remark by Wilson in his memoirs, which seems suspicious, and we have an eyewitness account that Wilson seemed bored during the three-hour running time of the film and left soon after it was over.

But whatever Wilson actually thought, Dixon and Griffith did their best to tout the special White House showing and create the impression that the film had a Presidential seal of approval. The film even included a title card with a quote from Wilson’s *History of the American People* that seemed to endorse the film’s starry-eyed adoration of the Ku Klux Klan.

Now, there’s no denying that *The Birth of a Nation* was and is a monumental work. Griffith spent over \$100,000 to make it, an amount equal to about US\$2,500,000 today, far more than had ever been spent on a single picture before. At that time, movies were released on reels of film, and each reel held about fifteen minutes’ worth of footage. Most films of the day were one or two reels long and they were shown in vaudeville houses as one part of a larger program. *The Birth of a Nation*, by contrast, was twelve reels. That’s three hours. In other words, *The Birth of a Nation* introduced the feature-length film as we know it today.

But it was not just in length that *The Birth of a Nation* was innovative. It told a more complex tale than any film before it, a story of two families with intertwining plot lines and scenes that switched back and forth from one story thread to the other. The battle scenes were epic and thrilling. As a producer and a director, Griffith introduced innovations that we take for granted

today but were stunning in their time: panoramic shots, close and long shots intercut, carefully choreographed battles with hundreds of extras filmed to make it look like tens of thousands, night photography, all employed to create a sense of spectacle never before seen. *The Birth of a Nation* was the world's first blockbuster.

This was a silent film, of course. All films were silent films in 1915. But Griffith had prepared a score for live musicians to perform as accompaniment to the film, a score that drew upon various sources in classical music, most famously—or maybe I should say, “most infamously”—calling for Richard Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries* to be performed when the Ku Klux Klan charges into battle.

Sadly, all this artistry and innovation was employed to breathe life and realism into Thomas Dixon's twisted fantasy of American history, a fantasy in which freedom for one race must inevitably lead to the oppression of another, and in which the Ku Klux Klan are the avenging angels of justice.

Griffith not only reproduced Dixon's racism, he embellished it with his own touches, such as using white actors with their skins painted dark to represent the principal African-American characters in the film. They look all the more ridiculous in contrast to the *real* African-American extras on the screen behind them. But Griffith was careful to make certain that only white actors in blackface portray African-American men in the scenes in which black men make sexual advances on white women, which, this being a film based on a Thomas Dixon novel, happens frequently. I guess Griffith thought that the sight of an authentically African-American actor putting the moves on a white woman would offend people, and we wouldn't want to make a movie that offends anybody, now would we?

The NAACP tried to get the film banned, or at least have some of the more offensive parts edited out, in a campaign that began as soon as the film was announced. Booker T. Washington urged Americans to boycott the film. Stephen Samuel Wise, a prominent American rabbi and Zionist leader, called the film “an indescribable foul and loathsome libel on a race of human beings.” There were incidents of violence against African-Americans that were blamed on the film, which led to it being banned in several American cities, including Pittsburgh, Chicago, St. Louis, and Denver.

But in spite of the controversy, the film was a huge success. More than a million Americans watched *The Birth of a Nation* in the first year of its release, despite ticket prices of two dollars or more—about fifty dollars in our day. The overall gross of the film is a disputed figure, but estimates range as high as fifty million dollars, a phenomenal sum of money for the time. It made Griffith and his backers rich. It was likely the highest-grossing film of its time, and would remain so until the release of *Gone with the Wind* in 1939, another film that would offer an historically dubious reinterpretation of the Civil War. It spread Thomas Dixon's vision to a far larger number of people than ever would have read his books or seen his play, and in that regard it represents

perhaps the biggest single blow to racial harmony in the United States since the end of the Civil War.

To summarize, then, *The Birth of a Nation* is a groundbreaking film dazzling in its energy and innovation. Every feature film made in the 103 years since owes a debt to it. It is a cinematic masterpiece, marred only by the fact that it's also a filthy racist piece of trash.

That's my opinion, but I'm going to give the last word to someone who says it better than I can, film critic Roger Ebert, who wrote this about *The Birth of a Nation*:

“The film represents how racist a white American could be in 1915 without realizing he was racist at all. That is worth knowing. Blacks already knew that, had known it for a long time, witnessed it painfully again every day, but *The Birth of a Nation* demonstrated it in clear view, and the importance of the film includes the clarity of its demonstration. That it is a mirror of its time is, sadly, one of its values.

“To understand *The Birth of a Nation* we must first understand the difference between what we bring to the film, and what the film brings to us. All serious moviegoers must sooner or later arrive at a point where they see a film for what it is, and not simply for what they feel about it. *The Birth of a Nation* is not a bad film because it argues for evil...it is a great film that argues for evil. To understand how it does so is to learn a great deal about film, and even something about evil.

“The crucial assumption here is that art should serve beauty and truth. I would like to think it should, but there is art that serves neither, and yet provides an insight into human nature, helping us understand good and evil. In that case, *The Birth of a Nation* is worth considering, if only for the inescapable fact that it did more than any other work of art to dramatize and encourage racist attitudes in America.”

[music: *Carmen Suite No. 1*]

Leo Frank was a Jewish American, born in Texas in 1884. He grew up in Brooklyn and earned a degree in mechanical engineering from Cornell University in 1906. Shortly after graduating, Leo accepted a position with the National Pencil Company in Atlanta, Georgia. His uncle Moses was a major investor in the company. Leo spent nine months in an apprenticeship at the Eberhard Faber pencil factory in Germany, then moved to Atlanta to take up a management position in the factory there. In 1910, he married a Jewish woman from Atlanta named Lucille Selig. By 1912, Frank was president of the Atlanta chapter of B'nai B'rith, a Jewish fraternal organization. You know, like the Odd Fellows or the Rotary Club, only for Jewish people.

That same year, a 12-year old girl named Mary Phagan, who came from a poor Atlanta family, got a job at the National Pencil Company. She worked 55-hour weeks for ten cents an hour,

operating a machine that inserted the erasers into the metal bands at the ends of the pencils. The space where she worked was on the second floor of the factory building, just across the hall from Leo Frank's office.

On Monday, April 21, 1913, the now 13-year old Mary Phagan was laid off. She returned to the factory a few days later, on Saturday, April 26, to claim her final pay packet. Leo Frank acknowledged that she had seen him in his office that afternoon. As it would turn out, Frank would be the last person to admit to seeing Mary Phagan alive. A night watchman found her body in the basement of the factory in the early hours of Sunday, April 27. She had been strangled, and there was evidence both of a struggle and of a sexual assault.

The case was a press sensation, with heavy coverage that included all manner of rumor and wild speculation. The brutal murder of a teenage girl reopened old debates about child labor, but more importantly, the press was demanding the murderer be found and punished.

The evidentiary issues in this case get pretty complicated and I don't think we need to get into all the details, but here are a few key facts. Two notes were found with the body, notes that were written poorly, with almost incoherent grammar and spelling, that purported to have been written by Mary herself and implicated the night watchman who found her body. Police questioned a number of suspects including Leo Frank and Jim Conley, an African-American janitor at the factory. Conley's story changed a few times, but there was reason to believe he wrote the notes. He eventually confessed to that, but claimed he did so only because Frank had offered him money and had dictated the contents of the notes to him.

Leo Frank was charged with the murder, and the intense press coverage whipped the population of Atlanta into a fury. Conley was the principal witness against Frank. Conley himself would be convicted as an accessory and sentenced to a year in prison for his role in the crime, and he would later be convicted of other crimes related to violence against women.

The furor in Atlanta was huge, and the newspapers largely accepted the prosecution's theory of the case. But there were many holes in the evidence; modern historians think it far more likely Conley was the murderer. On the day that the jury verdict was to be announced, the prosecution and defense agreed that Frank and his attorneys would not be present in the courtroom for the announcement, because of the high likelihood that an acquittal would spark violence against them. Frank was convicted and sentenced to hang.

New York newspapers took up the story in pieces mostly sympathetic to Frank and blaming his conviction on Southern anti-Semitism. Jewish-American philanthropists and organizations raised money to aid Frank in his appeals. In October, B'nai B'rith formed the Anti-Defamation League to resist attacks on Jews and the Jewish people, an act inspired by incidents like the Frank case. But Jewish efforts to aid Frank largely backfired. They were seen by many Georgians as a

Jewish conspiracy to protect a fellow Jewish man, no matter how heinous his crime, while callously brushing aside the murder of a sweet little Gentile girl and impugning the legal system of the entire state of Georgia.

Frank's appeals were unsuccessful and with the date of his execution approaching, it fell to the Governor to decide Frank's application for a commutation of his sentence. The Governor, John Slaton, studied the case carefully and came to be convinced of Frank's innocence. This was in spite of numerous death threats made against the governor, should he agree to the commutation, and at least one offer of support for a campaign for the US Senate for Slaton, provided he allow Frank's execution.

On June 21, 1915, with only days remaining in his term as governor, Slaton commuted Frank's sentence to life in prison, saying, "I would be a murderer if I allowed that man to hang." The public exploded in outrage. Slaton and his wife fled the state and would not return for over a decade. His political career was finished.

There were calls in the press to lynch Frank, which was presented as a corrective that would undo Governor Slaton's improper interference in the course of justice. A number of prominent Georgians answered the call, including a former governor. They organized themselves as "The Knights of Mary Phagan," and on August 16, 1915, in a well-organized operation, they broke into the prison where Frank was being held, seized him, and took him by automobile to the town of Marietta, 175 miles away, which was Mary Phagan's home town. There, the following morning, Frank was bound and hanged from a tree.

Photographs of the lynching were taken. They were made into postcards and sold as souvenirs. So were bits of Frank's clothing, pieces of the rope, and branches from the tree. It is said that the lynchers did such a good business selling souvenirs that the local police compelled them to buy a business license. The new governor of Georgia, Nat Harris, pledged to prosecute the leaders of the lynching, but in fact no prosecution was ever made and Frank's killers were never punished.

The Leo Frank case has been called America's Dreyfus Affair. Lynchings were all too common during this period. This particular case serves to remind us that although the overwhelming majority of lynching victims were African-American, not all were. There were victims of every race, including white ethnic minorities.

[silence]

The United Daughters of the Confederacy was formed in 1894 as a social organization to raise money for widows and orphans of slain Confederate soldiers, to build Confederate monuments, and to uphold the memory of Confederate veterans. By 1914, the organization had over 100,000 members, and had taken on a project to carve a Confederate memorial onto the face of Stone

Mountain in Georgia. In November 1915, three months after the lynching of Leo Frank, a group of Georgians, including some of Leo Frank's lynchers, held a rally at Stone Mountain. Inspired by the release of D.W. Griffith's film, *The Birth of a Nation*, they burned a cross and held a ceremony that marked the re-founding of the Ku Klux Klan. This new Klan was claimed to be a fraternal organization. You know, like the Odd Fellows or the Rotary Club, only for white supremacist vigilantes. The new Klan adopted the regalia depicted in the film, and by 1925, its membership numbered in the millions.

The project to carve a Confederate memorial into the mountain took decades to reach fruition. The United Daughters of the Confederacy raised funds, with an assist from the US Treasury, which issued a commemorative silver half-dollar in 1925 depicting Stonewall Jackson and Robert E. Lee as a fundraiser for the project, but the memorial project ground to a halt in 1928, and so the situation remained for thirty years, until 1958, when the State of Georgia purchased the mountain and resumed work on the sculpture in 1964. The memorial was completed in 1972; it depicts Jefferson Davis, Stonewall Jackson, and Robert E. Lee in bas-relief figures over fifty feet high.

[silence]

We'll have to stop there for today. Thanks for listening, and I'd like to thank Alan for making a donation to the podcast, and thanks to Matthew for becoming a patron of the show. If you'd like to make a one-time contribution, or become a patron, visit the website and click on the PayPal or Patreon buttons. You can also help out by leaving a rating and review at the iTunes store. You can tweet at us on Twitter, like us on Facebook, or if you're really into history, you can come to the website, [historyofthetwentiethcentury.com](http://historyofthetwentiethcentury.com) and post a comment, just like our primitive ancestors used to.

And I hope you'll join me next week on *The History of the Twentieth Century*, as we return to Africa. We've told the stories of Germany's other African possessions, and now we turn to German East Africa. This is going to be more than a one-off episode, because the German defenders in East Africa held out all the way to the end of the war. In fact, the resistance in East Africa fought on even after the Armistice took effect on the Western Front. So next week will be the beginning of a series on German East Africa that will continue for the rest of the war. The Action of a Lunatic, next week, on *The History of the Twentieth Century*.

Oh, and one more thing. The cases of Jack Johnson and Leo Frank have both been the subject of innumerable articles, books, television programs, films, comic books, and at least one stage musical over the past century. There are both documentary and fictionalized accounts. In recent years we have seen the 2005 documentary film *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson*, directed by Ken Burns, and the 2009 documentary film *The People v. Leo Frank*, directed by Ben Loeterman.

There have also been movements over the years pushing for posthumous pardons for these two men. Leo Frank was finally pardoned by the State of Georgia in 1986. Efforts to secure a Presidential pardon for Jack Johnson have been unsuccessful, so far.

[music: Closing Theme]

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