



Thomas Dixon Jr. and the Birth of Modern America (Making the Modern South)

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Thomas Dixon Jr. (1864–1946) is best remembered today as the author of the racist novels that served as the basis for D. W. Griffith's controversial 1915 classic film *The Birth of a Nation*. But in his lifetime, Dixon also enjoyed great renown as a minister, lecturer, lawyer, and actor. And although the native southerner's blatant racist, chauvinist, and white supremacist views are abhorrent today, they found enthusiastic reception among his audiences throughout the country.

This book explains why. Distinguished scholars of religion, film, literature, music, history, and gender studies offer a provocative examination of Dixon's ideas, personal life, and career and in the process illuminate the evolution of white racism in the early twentieth century and its legacy down to the present.

The contributors analyze Dixon's sermons, books, plays, and films, seeking to understand the appeal of his message within the white culture of the Progressive era. They also explore the critical responses of African Americans contemporary with Dixon. Dixon proves to have been a pioneer in understanding modern methods of moving mass audiences. He experimented with tricks to excite a crowd—intermingling politics, religion, and entertainment in ways that still reverberate today. He pushed for the war in Cuba, advocated the subservience of blacks and women, and was avidly anti-Communist as a writer and stage director.

By delving into the context and complexity of Dixon's life, this splendid book raises fascinating questions about the power of popular culture in forming Americans' views in any age. Contributors: W. Fitzhugh Brundage, Jane Gaines, William Link, Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, Louis Menand, Charlene Register, Scott Romine, John David Smith, David Stricklin.

AUTHOR BIO: Michele K. Gillespie is the author of *Free Labor in an Unfree World: White Artisans in Slaveholding Georgia, 1789–1860* and a coeditor of several books, including *Neither Lady nor Slave: Working Women of the Old South* and *The Devil's Lane: Sex and Race in the Early South*. She is Kahle Associate Professor of History at Wake Forest University.

Randal L. Hall is the author of *William Louis Poteat: A Leader of the Progressive-Era South* and coeditor of *The Southern Albatross: Race and Ethnicity in the American South*. He is associate editor of the *Journal of Southern History* at Rice University.

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