

# American Religion and the Rise of Internal Security

## *A Prologue*

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### THE OFFICIAL ORIGIN STORY

The sanctioned history of the birth of the Bureau of Investigation (renamed the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 1935) is tightly tied to the Progressive Era. The bureau was officially created in 1908 as the brainchild of Attorney General (AG) Charles Bonaparte and President Theodore Roosevelt. The president and his AG appointee, the bureau's official history notes, "were 'Progressives.' They shared the conviction that efficiency and expertise, not political connections, should determine who could best serve in government." Their "progressive" notions posited that "government intervention was necessary to produce justice in an industrial society," and thus they "looked to 'experts' in all phases of industry and government to produce that just society."<sup>1</sup>

When Roosevelt and Bonaparte took their respective offices, the investigation of federal crimes did not reflect a wholesale and permanent commitment to proficiency and professionalism. From its creation on July 1, 1870, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) did not have its own detectives or investigative force. Rather, U.S. attorneys—when not laden with court proceedings—investigated crimes, interviewed witnesses, and collected evidence themselves. When the work of an "expert" investigator seemed warranted, the DOJ utilized two strategies. First, the AG had a small team of special-assignment agents as well as accountants. Second, the DOJ possessed a small discretionary fund for hiring

detectives from private agencies (usually the Pinkerton Detective Agency) and skilled operatives from other agencies, namely the Treasury Department's Secret Service.<sup>2</sup>

Congress put a stop to both policies. In 1892, in response to the use of Pinkerton agents as strikebreakers, the legislature outlawed the DOJ and other federal agencies from hiring persons employed in the private sector. Contracting with the Secret Service came to an end on May 27, 1908, when it was discovered that the DOJ hired Secret Service agents to investigate and later convict two U.S. congressmen. Congress believed that such activities not only posed a threat to American democracy but also reeked of totalitarianism. An alarmed legislative branch warned that the executive branch must be stopped from "employing secret service men to dig up the private scandals of men."<sup>3</sup>

A seemingly powerless and exasperated Bonaparte petitioned Congress twice for funding to employ his own investigative force. True to his Progressivism, he argued that it was "absolutely necessary" for the DOJ to have a "continuous" team of professional detectives hired by and dedicated to the DOJ. Hiring investigators on short-term contracts was inefficient at best, haphazard at worst. He testified before Congress, "You must remember that the class of men who do not work as a profession is one you have to employ with a good deal of caution." Nevertheless, Congress denied his request both times.<sup>4</sup>

A savvy Bonaparte, however, went beyond Congress. On June 29, 1908, during the summer congressional recess, the AG used the DOJ's "miscellaneous expense fund" to hire ten former Secret Service agents as DOJ employees. The following month, on July 26, 1908, Bonaparte increased the number of agents to thirty-four and appointed Stanley Finch the chief examiner of the squadron. Finch was charged with leading the modern investigative force. "This action," the bureau's official history marks, "is celebrated as the beginning of the FBI."<sup>5</sup>

In January 1909, the president and AG convinced Congress that the AG's actions during the recess had been justified. As both elected officials prepared to leave office in March of that year, they pleaded that a fixed detective force at the DOJ was an absolute necessity for the efficient and professional enforcement of federal laws. Congress accepted the recommendation and adopted the caveat that the DOJ's skilled agents would not carry guns or be empowered to make arrests. Rather, they would be limited to the mission of the DOJ: "the detection and prosecution of crimes against the United States." On March 16, 1909, AG George Wickersham, Bonaparte's successor, dubbed the DOJ's

detective squad the Bureau of Investigation, and changed the title of chief examiner to chief of the Bureau of Investigation. The bureau was officially born.<sup>6</sup>

This origin story suggests that the Federal Bureau of Investigation's roots extend back only as far as the Progressive Era. The story of the FBI typically continues with the influence of J. Edgar Hoover, the bureau's longest-serving director, whose fingerprints on the bureau remain to this day. Under Hoover's twentieth-century leadership, which began in 1924 during the "return to normalcy era," the bureau engaged in its most notorious activities. Hoover's leadership yielded the voracious pursuit of alleged subversives during the Cold War—surveillance and counterintelligence aimed at socialist and communist political organizations, civil rights reformers, student activists, and Vietnam War protesters, among many others. Such activities have forever shaded the history of the FBI. Indeed, the name of the FBI headquarters is the J. Edgar Hoover FBI Building. The shadow of the twentieth century thus looms large over the FBI.

However, the FBI was also shaped by and took deeper root in the religious landscape of the nineteenth-century United States. To be sure, twentieth-century developments gave way to the "official" birth and expansion of the FBI. Nevertheless, detailing how the DOJ hired Secret Service agents to investigate the competing civil religions of the postbellum era offers much-needed perspective on the bureau's origins. Moreover, examining the cultural milieu of the broader nineteenth century—particularly the themes of the aftermath of emancipation, industrialization, and immigration, in addition to Progressive reform—gives further context for the storied and enduring relationship between religion in America and the FBI.

## COMPETING CIVIL RELIGIONS

The competing civil religions that emerged following the Civil War threatened the internal security of the nation and spurred the initial steps that would ultimately lead to the establishment of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The massive bloodshed of the Civil War, in the words of historian Harry Stout, "taught Americans that they really were a Union." He continues: "Something mystical and religious was taking place through the sheer blood sacrifice generated by the battles."<sup>7</sup> Stout and others have pointed to the Civil War as a watershed moment in the creation of an American civil religion, when the state became a unifying object of

worship for a bitterly divided citizenry. A nation arose from the “altar of sacrifice,” and Americans ceased to refer to the nation as *these* United States—a loosely bound federation of largely independent regions—and began referring to the country as *the* United States—a singular, unitary entity. In the years after the Civil War, this sacralized nation-state greatly expanded its borders, bureaucratized its government, consolidated its security measures, and broadened its ambitions overseas.

But alongside all these developments came another, an alternative civic religion that competed with the federal government for the allegiance of Americans: the religion of the Lost Cause. The religion of the Lost Cause grew from the antebellum South’s sense of itself as distinct from the North—as a chivalric society based on the assumption that hierarchy was the natural order of things and that Southerners were the true keepers of Puritan piety. It flourished after the war, as Southerners, including ministers, lionized Confederate soldiers as crusading Christians fighting against infidel Yankees. Just as Christian tradition posits God’s eventual triumph after an initial age of trials and tribulations, so the religion of the Lost Cause held that Southern victory would eventually come to pass despite the defeat and humiliation imposed by the Civil War. The Confederates might have lost the battle, but by staying faithful through the trials of the subsequent age, they would ultimately prevail and reassert themselves. As Charles Reagan Wilson puts it, “The idea that Confederate defeat was a form of discipline from God, preparing Southerners for the future, was fundamental to the belief in ultimate vindication.”<sup>8</sup>

But Lost Cause devotees were not content simply to sit back and wait for “ultimate vindication”: they also threw themselves into the defense of White supremacy after the war’s end. Another component of the Lost Cause was the juxtaposition of supposedly familial and gracious Southern planter paternalism against grasping, unscrupulous northern Yankees, who after the Civil War were not content to leave the defeated South alone. Of course that was a fiction—the South was every bit as capitalistic as the North, if not more so—but the Lost Cause religion spun an image of the Yankee as an alien of questionable White identity or foreign origin because of the North’s association with immigration, and maliciously motivated. Both sides had of course demonized each other during the war, and their mutual vilification laid the groundwork for the competing civil religions that emerged in its aftermath.<sup>9</sup> Defenders of the Lost Cause fought tooth and nail against Radical Reconstructionists, who would allow them back into the fold only when satisfied that they were submitting to the Republicans’ demand for racial justice.

The Ku Klux Klan emerged as one of the most visible signs of the religion of the Lost Cause. In 1866, in Pulaski, Tennessee, six Confederate-veteran college students organized in order to “play ‘pranks’ on the residents of Pulaski and uplift the spirits of the war-torn region.”<sup>10</sup> Their “pranks” understandably intimidated the region’s newly freed slaves and Northern “carpetbaggers.” Emboldened, the group soon organized more “clubs” to spread this climate of terror, adopting a costume meant to invoke “the ghosts of the Confederate dead”—“tall conical witches’ hats of white cloth over cardboard” that “exaggerated the height of the wearer, adding anywhere from eighteen inches to two feet to his stature.” By the spring of 1867, this group of Ku Klux Klansmen, as they became known, had morphed from a prankster club to a “paramilitary movement” bent on defending White supremacy by any means.<sup>11</sup> By 1868, the same year as the ratification of the Fourteenth Amendment, the Klan had spread to nine Southern states. The religion of the Lost Cause had its Knights Templar in the crusade against Reconstruction.

The federal government responded to this internal security crisis by creating agencies to secure and defend the newly reconstituted nation. In 1870, the Department of Justice (DOJ) was established to assist the attorney general in “the detection and prosecution of crimes against the United States.”<sup>12</sup> Among its most important duties was to ensure compliance with the three Enforcement Acts passed by Congress in 1870 and 1871. These laws were aimed at stopping the Klan’s racial and sexual violence against African Americans and their White allies by ensuring the safety and the vote of the largely Republican freedmen. The laws made it a federal crime to interfere with or infringe on the right to vote, established a procedure for federal supervision of registration and voting, and authorized the military to enforce such laws. Under the Enforcement Acts, White terrorism was deemed an insurrectionary act, and the DOJ designated the leader of the KKK as the greatest internal security threat to the nation.<sup>13</sup>

The newly established Justice Department, lacking its own bureaucracy, relied on U.S. Marshals and borrowed Secret Service agents from the Treasury Department—both versed in undercover work—to investigate and provide intelligence. The crew of federal investigators focused on uncovering plans and actions that violated the Enforcement Acts, but in a broader sense their role was to enforce fidelity to the civil religion of the union. To this end, the assembled team constituted the nation’s first federal antiterrorist intelligence program. Its directives against the Klan and White terror yielded one of the largest investigations in American

history, leading to hearings that lasted for several months and produced thirteen volumes of firsthand testimony from both White and Black citizens. Federal grand juries, in turn, issued more than three thousand indictments. The results of its efforts were mixed, however. An underfunded DOJ, a ballooning case volume, and a wavering commitment to racial equality led the Grant administration to implement a policy of leniency against racial terrorists. Nearly two thousand cases were dropped, and in the summer of 1873 a newly reelected President Grant released from jail all those who had been convicted of White terrorism. In all, the large-scale investigation netted about six hundred convictions, with only sixty-five receiving federal prison sentences of up to five years.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the outcome of their extensive investigation of the KKK, the DOJ and its host of “borrowed” investigators learned a lesson that would also be taken to heart by the Federal Bureau of Investigation many decades later—that religion, in this case the religion of the Lost Cause, could be dangerously subversive, a motive for the commission of “crimes against the United States.”

#### EMERGING AFRICAN AMERICAN AUTONOMY

The bureau’s approach to religion was influenced not only by the religion of the Lost Cause but also by another trend that took shape in the final decades of the nineteenth century—an ethos of self-determinism and institution building among African Americans.

In the midst of the reign of White terrorism, the Supreme Court’s decision in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896 made “separate but equal” the law of the land. Clergy, race leaders, teachers, business owners, and Black citizens alike debated what the future of their race would and should be in a legally segregated America, and how Blacks should relate to a White American culture. One position in this debate called for greater Black autonomy. Two years after the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision, W.E.B. Du Bois advocated that, to achieve their “destiny,” Blacks should not aspire to “absorption” by White America or to the “servile imitation of Anglo-Saxon culture.” Rather, Du Bois maintained, the future of African Americans rested on a “stalwart” commitment to “Negro ideals.” African Americans, he argued, had a “duty” to conserve their gifts and “spiritual ideals” and to dedicate them to the establishment of race unity and race organizations inspired by “the Divine faith of our black mothers.” The creation of a Black parallel society, Du Bois proffered, was not a capitulation to race prejudice and segregation. Rather, Black organizations

would provide African Americans the opportunity and means for racial progress, even as they provided shelter from and criticism of White supremacist thinking.<sup>15</sup> Du Bois, it turns out, was articulating a religiously inflected aspiration to achieve self-determination embraced by many other African Americans.

To be sure, Whites who felt threatened by emerging Black autonomy were forceful in defending themselves. Almost 2,000 African Americans were lynched between 1877 and 1899, with 104 meeting this fate in 1898 alone. But African Americans made great strides in creating independent organizations for themselves, and religion played a seminal role in this process. Dating back to colonial America, independent African American churches were among the earliest Black organizations to be established, and this form of self-organization exploded following the Civil War, giving birth to the two kinds of Black institutions that would go on to transform Black life and the relationship of African Americans to the nation-state: independent religious denominations and schools, the latter often initiated by churches. These institutions not only offered Black citizens a measure of autonomy but also constituted the foundation of Black civic life.<sup>16</sup>

The Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America (CME) was the first independent Black denomination founded following the Civil War. The CME was founded in 1870 in Jackson, Tennessee (in 1954 it was renamed the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in America). Born out of the desire for self-determination among African Americans in the Methodist Episcopal Church South, the denomination was a response to that church's desire to separate from its formerly enslaved members. Thus, for example, in South Carolina, Black membership in Southern Methodist churches declined from 42,469 in 1860 to 653 in 1873, while, conversely, the nascent Colored Methodist Episcopal Church had a membership exceeding 100,000 by 1890. Similarly, Black Baptists also expressed a strong desire for autonomy following the Civil War. In 1858, South Carolina's Southern Baptist Black membership numbered some 29,000. In 1874 there were fewer than 2,000 members. In a related trend, Black Baptist clergy grew nationally from slightly more than 5,000 in 1890 to more than 17,000 in 1906. The explosion of independent Black Baptists across the country organized into state conventions and eventually came together to form the National Baptist Convention USA in 1895 (incorporated in 1915), which remains the largest organization of African Americans.

Several Black-sanctified churches were also established around the turn of the century. The most notable of these is the Church of God in

Christ (COGIC), the focus of chapter 2, by Theodore Kornweibel Jr. Incorporated in Memphis in 1897, the COGIC remains the largest body of Black Pentecostals in America. The two independent Black denominations founded during the antebellum period also grew exponentially following the Civil War. The African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) boasted a membership of almost half a million by 1880, while membership in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ) grew from 27,000 in 1860 to 200,000 in 1870. Both continued to flourish well into the twentieth century.<sup>17</sup> Of the 8.3 million African Americans in the country by 1890, 2.7 million, or about 33 percent, were church members. Fewer than forty years after emancipation, in other words, the independent Black church movement had managed to encompass a critical mass of the Black population. Black America, it seemed, was uniting and consolidating its resources under the banner of Christianity.<sup>18</sup>

The reach of Black denominations extended beyond church membership. For Black faith communities, Black destiny and self-determination were nothing without education. Thus, in addition to the host of Black schools founded by White missionary societies, such as Morehouse and Spelman, Black faith communities also started their own schools following the Civil War. The AMEZ Church, for example, founded Livingstone College in Salisbury, North Carolina, in 1879, while the AME Church established several schools, including Morris Brown in Atlanta in 1885. Black Baptists also established schools such as Arkansas Baptist College in Little Rock in 1884, and the CME Church founded Lane College in Jackson, Tennessee, in 1882. By 1930 the total number of Black college graduates produced in the twentieth century, largely from Black colleges, was four times greater than the number produced in the entire previous century.<sup>19</sup> Black America was increasingly formally educated, and this transformation was largely initiated by faith communities.

While these newly formed Black institutions were shrines of autonomy for some, for others this trend was deeply troubling, suggesting a Black race no longer content to accept second-class status and increasingly willing to challenge or break free from the status quo. Thus, in the very period when the bureau was being established, the emergence of autonomous Black religious communities came to be seen as a threat to the nation's internal security. The federal government was contending with the Klan and the insurgent civic religion of the Lost Cause, even as the South was being shaped by independent Black churches, clergy, and their respective offspring institutions. Collectively, this Black Protestant establishment amounted to the largest and most influential force in a



segregated Black America, as it set the discourses, practices, morals, and ideals that governed Black political, cultural, and religious life well into the twentieth century.<sup>20</sup> Taking shape in the same period as the Black Protestant establishment, the nascent Bureau of Investigation would soon learn that it needed to engage Black America through its faith communities.

#### INDUSTRIALIZATION AND IMMIGRATION

The intersection of religion with the processes of industrialization and immigration that would reshape America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also influenced the bureau's approach to religion. The sequence of events that marked the transition from the age of Reconstruction to the age of big business—the depression of 1873, the breakdown of Radical Reconstruction, and the corrupt compromise that ushered Rutherford B. Hayes into office in 1877—turned the focus of the federal government away from enforcing civil rights toward protecting business and free enterprise. The growing conflict between labor and capital and rapid immigration from Europe threatened—or were seen to threaten—the nation's domestic security and economic well-being. The changes also had a major impact on religious life as the nation's White Protestant establishment, already feeling menaced by more autonomous African Americans, also felt threatened by Catholic immigrants. The bureau emerged in an age of economic conflict that also had a sectarian dimension, and its role was to protect a certain conception of the social-economic-religious order.

This was the so-called Gilded Age of American history, during which a veneer of prosperity masked profound social inequality and unrest. Advantaged by the support or at least the blind eye of the government, the new captains of industry—railroad magnates, steel and oil barons, real estate and retail titans—amassed capital with abandon, while the laboring classes saw no such gains. Journalists and authors armed with new flash photography brought the disparity to the broader public. Jacob Riis's articles, which later culminated in the publication of *How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements of New York* (1890), vividly described the wretched conditions of tenement housing, the lack of sewage and garbage collection that plagued workers' surroundings, and the sweatshop conditions and paltry wages of workers and laboring children.<sup>21</sup> The disparities between the haves and have-nots reached unprecedented levels.

As overwhelming poverty and blatant disparity pushed some to the brink of violence, the struggle between labor and capital was fought in the streets, but it also played out in debates within the church. As violent confrontations between striking workers, law enforcement, and armed militias became more common, Catholics and Protestants alike wrestled with what their faith had to say about the blessings and ravages of industrial capitalism, and advocates of both labor and capital sought religious support for their respective stances.

Thus, for example, reformers such as Nannie Helen Burroughs, Reverdy Ransom, Jane Edna Hunter, Henry Hugh Proctor, Walter Rauschenbusch, and Washington Gladden called on the church to respond to the needs of the working classes. Faith communities, they contended, needed to aggressively engage labor and the poor even as secular society needed to be Christianized. To put Christianity into practice, they argued, was to support labor unions and their collective demands (such as the eight-hour workday and child labor laws). Opponents, however, such as the Reverend David Swing, vehemently disagreed with these Social Gospellers, as they become known. “The conflict between classes in the cities of our country is not a conflict between labor and capital,” Swing argued in an 1874 editorial, “but between successful and unsuccessful lives.” In other words, poverty and the social unrest that threatened to tear society apart were the result of individual moral failure, not industrial capitalism. Other opponents went further, seeing the Social Gospel and its advocacy for workers and labor reform as a radical socialist-inspired takeover of the church and the nation under the guise of social Christianity. Collective bargaining, they argued, was unchristian at best, socialism and anarchy at worst.<sup>22</sup>

The influx of immigrants from Europe and Asia only compounded concerns about the growing chasm between the classes, and it also added another religious dimension to the extent that many of these immigrants were not Protestant. Immigrants not only threatened the economic security of those already in America but also brought with them Catholicism, atheism, and other creeds antithetical to the belief system of Protestants.

One person who held this attitude was Josiah Strong, a Protestant minister and Social Gospel proponent who cast immigration and its religious effects as a “crisis” for American identity and security. He famously warned about the perils threatening “our country” in his 1885 book of the same name: immigration, Roman Catholicism (which he saw as connected to the immigration issue), Catholic and secular influences in the

public schools, Mormonism, intemperance (which he also largely blamed on immigrants), socialism, materialism, and rapid urbanization (again traceable to immigration). Strong articulated an anxiety and sense of siege felt by many Americans who identified as Anglo-Saxons. “Immigration is detrimental to popular morals,” he warned, and “has a like influence upon popular intelligence. . . . [I]mmigration complicates our moral and political problems by swelling our dangerous classes.”<sup>23</sup> Strong also articulated the backlash that such anxiety triggered. The White Anglo-Saxon was the chief representative of a “pure, spiritual Christianity,” a racial-religious class with a special role in history decreed by God.<sup>24</sup> This class had the power to shape its own destiny and was destined to survive: “Men of this generation, from the pyramid top of opportunity on which God has set us, *we look down on forty centuries!* We stretch our hand into the future with power to mold the destinies of unborn millions. . . . Notwithstanding the great perils which threaten it, I cannot think our civilization will perish.”<sup>25</sup> Strong sought to reassure his White Protestant readership that “its present crisis” could be reversed, but only if it seized its God-given destiny. That meant resisting the influence of Roman Catholic immigrants and others and working to imprint the Anglo-Saxon Protestant stamp on the American West and the rest of the world. For Strong, protecting the nation’s Anglo-Saxon population and the integrity of its faith was the key to its domestic security. This kind of nativism developed in tandem with growing anxieties about other social problems associated with immigration. Worries about organized crime networks, for example, raised questions about who would investigate a criminal force that had overseas connections.

Charged with the role of safeguarding the nation, the Bureau of Investigation had to pursue its mission in an increasingly industrialized, economically divided, urbanized, and heterogeneous society, and the position of the DOJ and the bureau in the resulting conflicts was solidified when anarchists declared war on capitalists, sending a bomb to the tycoon John D. Rockefeller and successfully bombing the home of U.S. attorney general A. Mitchell Palmer in 1919. It was at this time, in August 1919, that a young J. Edgar Hoover, then only twenty-six, was appointed head of the bureau’s General Intelligence Division, which set the stage for a massive roundup of presumed radical labor union members and anarchists, the Palmer Raids. From the perspective of the DOJ and the bureau, advocates of the labor movement and immigration, and religious leaders sympathetic to the same, were security threats, and it fell to officials like Hoover to defend against them.

## PROGRESSIVE REFORM

In its role as a defender of American society, the bureau, as we have seen, also drew on the legacy of Progressive Era moral reform, influential between the 1890s and 1920s. Progressives, often motivated by strong religious beliefs, responded to the pressures of modernity and industrialization by trying to assert some control over society through self-discipline, vigorous activity, efficiency, and social and political interventions. In this they were following the example of antebellum reformers.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, antebellum reformers targeted many of the same issues that the reformers of the Progressive Era would address, including temperance and prostitution. While the latter reformers exhibited similar moral concerns, however, the experience of the Civil War imposed a change of tactics.<sup>27</sup>

The primary tactic of antebellum reformers was moral suasion, trying to convince fellow Americans that their immoral behaviors would imperil not only their own individual souls but also the welfare of the nation. They also stressed the importance of self-discipline, as when Catharine Beecher urged readers of her *Treatise on Domestic Economy* to pursue “a habit of system and order” in order to have enough time to devote to religious reflection, and minister John Todd explained to readers of his *Student’s Manual* how to eat, exercise, and brush their teeth as a preparatory step in the disciplining of their hearts.<sup>28</sup>

After the Civil War, reformers began to back up their calls for moral self-improvement by seeking legislation—“tough purity laws,” as political scientist James Morone puts it—driven by the aspiration to enforce proper moral behavior or protect against immoral behavior deemed a threat to society. For example, the politician Anthony Comstock, who founded the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice in 1873 to supervise the public’s morals, induced Congress to pass the Comstock Law in the same year, which outlawed the transport and delivery of any “obscene lewd or lascivious . . . print or other publication of an indecent character or any article or thing designed . . . for the prevention of conception or procuring of abortion, nor any article or thing intended or adopted for any indecent immoral use or nature.”<sup>29</sup> Another example is the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), founded soon after passage of the Comstock Law. The WCTU enlisted women in fighting impurity and intemperance because “liquor turned men brutish” while “mother love” had the power to triumph over it, and it too sought legal changes in order to advance its moral agenda.<sup>30</sup> Frances Willard, president of the WCTU from 1879 to her death in 1898, was a

supporter of women's suffrage, for instance, because she believed that women's votes would help protect the virtue of society and the sobriety of men.

Moral reformers in the late nineteenth century also tended to treat urbanization as a major threat to individual and collective well-being. This led another Social Gospeller and supporter of woman suffrage, Jane Addams, to found Hull House, a settlement house in Chicago, in 1889. The house was conceived as an "experimental effort to aid in the solution of the social and industrial problems which are engendered by the modern conditions of life in a great city."<sup>31</sup> Life in the big city lacked outlets for one's active impulses, and Hull House was designed as a solution to this problem. Young people "hear constantly of the great social maladjustment," she wrote, "but no way is provided for them to change it, and their uselessness hangs about them heavily. . . . These young people have had advantages of college, of European travel, and of economic study, but they are sustaining this shock of inaction."<sup>32</sup> Other late-nineteenth-century outlets for the malaise of White middle-class youth included the YMCA and YWCA, the muscular Christian vogue for exercise and gymnasiums, and the trend of seeking adventures in the West to prove one's mettle and manliness. Theodore Roosevelt, the president under whom the bureau was founded, embodied the ideal, a man mocked for his effete background who achieved a manly character through exercise and adventure (working as a rancher in the Dakota Territory, killing a buffalo, and so on).<sup>33</sup>

This era of Progressive reform, coupled with the idealization of muscular activity as a form of salvation, forms part of the background from which the Bureau of Investigation emerged and from which it developed its vaunted culture of virility, excitement, morality, purity, and discipline. Consider as an example the role of discipline in the bureau's culture. From its very inception, the bureau was supposed to be composed of highly disciplined men—and by discipline, we mean a moral discipline. In a letter to President Roosevelt half a year after the July 1908 inauguration of the bureau, AG Bonaparte acknowledged that it was difficult "recruiting a trustworthy and efficient detective force." Detectives "must have some acquaintance with the haunts and habits of criminals," Bonaparte stressed, "and its members are obliged to frequently associate with and use in their work persons of extremely low moral standards."<sup>34</sup> While detectives had to be conversant in immorality in order to police it, however, it was equally crucial that they have the character to avoid falling into it themselves.

To prevent his force from degenerating into “the evils which have caused, and in some measure, justified, the dislike and suspicion entertained for the profession,” Bonaparte proposed that the bureau provide compensation and prestige sufficient to “render the service attractive to intelligent and courageous men of good character and adequate education.” He also flagged the importance of “extremely strict discipline” in the ranks, “so that they may understand that any exhibition of insubordination or other form of official misconduct, or any serious delinquency in morals or decent behavior, will result in immediate separation of the guilty person from the force.”<sup>35</sup> Bonaparte’s concept of the ideal detective echoes the role of discipline in Progressive reform as the key to protecting the boundary between morality and immorality.

The bureau did not simply emulate the ethos of moral reform; it also continued the mission of reform. Because such moral reforms now had a legislative dimension, the newly formed bureau also addressed some of the same social ills. It was the bureau’s responsibility, for example, to enforce the Comstock Law, along with the 1910 Mann Act, which outlawed the interstate transportation of women “for the purpose of prostitution or debauchery, or for any other immoral purpose.” (For more on how the later FBI sought to combat sex crimes and obscenity, see chapter 8, by Douglas M. Charles.) The Mann Act, incidentally, illustrates the intersection of moral zeal, concern for the welfare of women, anxiety about the effects of urbanization, and the racism fused into some versions of Progressive reform: this law (also known as the White Slave Traffic Act) was motivated in part by a desire to protect susceptible young, single, White women who had moved to find work in cities where, among other perils, they ran the risk of entering into interracial relationships. This is how the bureau came to use the Mann Act to pursue and eventually convict Jack Johnson, the famous African American boxer, for having relationships with White women—a tragic example of how the bureau’s activities advanced both the moral objectives of White Progressive reform and its biases as well.<sup>36</sup>

## CONCLUSION

We have sketched the fraught religio-racial landscape in which the Bureau of Investigation was founded at the beginning of the twentieth century, a context that would condition its approach to religion and religious communities in later periods. In geopolitical terms, the nation was perhaps stronger than it had ever been, not only unified after vanquishing the

Confederacy but now also an international colonial power in the wake of war in Cuba and the Philippines. Still, American culture was also riven by racial, economic, and religious differences. Indeed, as the bureau's very own *The FBI: A Centennial History, 1908–2008* argues, “by 1908, the time was right for a new kind of agency to protect America.”<sup>37</sup>

In this charged atmosphere, the bureau arose as a major effort by the federal government to establish racial, ethnic, economic, and social order. That mission led to encounters with religion: conflicts with the Klan, pro-union Social Gospellers, Black Protestant congregations, and others it deemed a threat, and alliances with those who would defend the social order or who sought to curb the moral ills of modern life. In this early period, the bureau was a tiny operation—in 1908 it had only twenty-three agents and a limited jurisdiction, and its first major field office was created only when the bureau began to enforce the Mann Act—but it was arguably already on the path that would later shape its interaction with various religious actors during the interwar period, the Cold War, the civil rights era, the Branch Davidian standoff, and the age of 9/11.