Perspectives

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The Writings of Green Clay painted a picture of post-Civil War Richmond and Madison County

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Guy Ephrium Herrick (1871-1962 was the son of John Frank and Mary Clay Herrick, whose father was Cassius Marcellius Clay. According to the Green Clay Papers, located within the Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) Special Collections, after her divorce, Mary renamed him Green Clay. His education consisted of elementary and high school in Richmond, Kentucky and Ann Arbor, Michigan. His study culminated with an earned law degree from Columbia in Washington D.C. in 1893 and he proceeded to practice law in Richmond and Cincinnati. He wrote articles about Richmond and Madison County as well as newspapers in Ohio, New York, and Tennessee.

The EKU Collections include numerous historical narratives about the turmoil within Madison County when lawlessness and violence ran rampant during the post-Civil War. Clay authored three essays during the early 20th century regarding this topic: 1) A Kentucky Feud of Reconstruction Days, 2) Home Rule—The Klan Way, and 3) The Ku Klux Klan I Knew. The Klan activity represented an extension of the breakdown of civilized norms of society following the war. It surpassed war in its nefariousness because during battle one knew where the danger lay whereas Klan violence was furtive. One's friends could suddenly become his executioners.

Amid this atmosphere, Clay wrote that "For a full year the Sheriff and his force (were) practically inactive. Jurors refused to act. Witnesses were driven off or killed." As Klotter and Harrison phrased it, "---the main source of feuds was the ineffectiveness of the law and the consequent lawlessness." There were five armed gangs that threatened the Madison County Community. His A Kentucky Feud read: "During those years of the Reconstruction period the children living alongside the well-traveled streets of the town were told to drop to the floor—".

The case of Frank Searcy exemplified this scenario. According to Clay's Home Rule, he was a local resident and after the war he engaged in illegal activities. In fact, Clay maintained that he was a "lone bandit who had flourished grandly" during and after the War. In one case he hijacked a large quantity of cut timber and hauled it near the river. The wood was loaded on his rafts for transport and sale at New Orleans. During this period, he joined Klan and appeared to have obtained a good standing with them.

This symbiosis with this belligerent organization proved short lived as he began openly defied them with such rhetoric as "I don't give a damn what you Klanners tell me to do. —Do your Damndest." Clay even maintained that Searcy was the first and only man to utter such disdain towards them. Frank's fortune changed in 1869 after he fatally shot a man in the back during a brawl on Main Street in Richmond. According to Partial List of Ku Klux Activities in Kentucky, 1867-1871, Shaking Paper 2015) this incident occurred during November of 1869. The casualty attempted to leave the premises when the bullet found him. Frank then pinned a KKK note upon his remains.

The Klan soon reacted because the deceased person had brothers who were members. They launched an assault upon Searcy's house but at first, they were repulsed with one Klansman wounded. They finally disabled and lynched him in Richmond, leaving a note warning the residents not to remove the corpse for 24 hours. There were dozens of witnesses to this illegal execution, but no one attempted to intervene or bring charges.

Aside from Klan activity, Clay's A Kentucky Feud mentioned the rouge behavior of one Walter Saunders. Despite his thievery, he became Sheriff and appointed himself as sole lawgiver and executioner in the Crab Orchard vicinity. By 1877, he allegedly slew up to eight men, three of them while Sheriff, including one Bob Bethuram, for taking a wagon load of corn.

Meanwhile Walter's brother George Saunders and some friends went to a fair in Richmond and caught the attention of Marshall Gus Edwards by exhibiting unruly behavior. The lawman warned the 18-year-old stop the disorderly conduct or face jail. Saunders felt insulted with this reprimand, so he and his entourage initiated a drunken mock brawl in a local bar, which involved destruction of property. Edwards arrived and during an altercation, inflicted a solid blow upon George's head. At that point Edwards and his two deputies retreated as the Sanders faction, led by Tuck Ballard, became poised to attack.

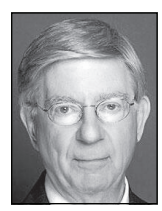
Later that evening, the Saunders group went into the Garnet House lobby. By the next day, Walter Saunders arrived on the scene and took command while Edwards obtained a warrant from a nearby Justice of Peace against his injured brother, George. When he and his four deputies arrived Ballard uttered threats, which sparked Edwards to obtain a second warrant against him. The factions eventually agreed that George would later surrender to authorities other than Edwards, so Walter returned to Crab Orchard.

Unfortunately, a member of the Edwards faction sent a taunting letter to Sheriff Saunders daring him to "take Richmond. "Saunders could not ignore this challenge, so he rounded up the Ballards and other allies. On August 28, 1877, he returned and a gunfight erupted in downtown Richmond, resulting in several deaths, including Walter Saunders and Tuck Ballard. With the two most belligerent leaders gone, cooler heads prevailed and the Edwards-Saunders conflict of Madison County ended.

Green Clay authored many other articles which describe life and culture in Madison County and other locations within our Commonwealth. While he is not well known to the modern reader his work appears to emit images of our community's past and is of value to lay people and scholars.

The EKU archive collection has grown, and sound primary source material is now available for researchers.

Behold, a Democrat who doesn't preach from the Church of Progressivism



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The Democratic Party's future — if it wants one; the evidence is mixed — should be based on candidates who understand that U.S. politics, when healthy, takes place between the 40-yard lines, contesting the center of the field. People such as the 37-year-old Marine (he served in Afghanistan, and is in the Corps' Individual Ready Reserve) who now is a Whiggish (his description) congressman.

A substantial portion of his Massachusetts district, including some Boston suburbs, typifies what now is his party's affluent, educated base — people who have flourished in the knowledge economy that globalization fostered. Another large portion of his district resembles what used to be his party's base: blue-collar manufacturers.

The district's largest city, Fall River, in 1880 was the nation's foremost textile manufacturing powerhouse, with more than half a million spindles. In 2024, for the first time in a century (in 1924, it voted for Massachusetts's former governor, who was then president, Calvin Coolidge), the battered city voted for the Republican presidential candidate.

In 2020, during the pandemic, when Jake Auchincloss won his first congressional term, he was dismayed by Democratic-run cities that ignored public-health experts and kept schools closed: "There was a condescending attitude to parents who were rightfully frustrated watching kids atrophy at home," he told the Wall Street Journal in August. This oblique, but clear enough, criticism of teachers unions indicates his desire to push against the boundaries of acceptable speech within his party.

By calling himself, in passing, "Whiggish," Auchincloss implies intellectual kinship with those British who favored parliamentary power capable of trimming the king's sails. And with 19th-century Americans who favored congressional supremacy: Whiggish politics implies less president-centric politics.

Auchincloss, who writes on Substack that he thinks many voters regard his party as "weak, woke and whiny," wants a more "muscular" vocabulary about "upholding social order." He has a Marine's way of discussing guns, a way probably grating to some in his party: "I slept, ate, trained, and patrolled with an assault weapon for four years. I cleaned it before I ate or slept every night. Selling AR-15s at Walmart to teenagers is not just dangerous, it also undermines the military ethic ... and degrades warrior craftsmanship."

When was the last time a Democrat said anything so interesting about this issue? He is equally distinctive when discussing a subject that today disturbs the tranquility (elusive as it might be) of every American family with children in or approaching adolescence: smartphones and social media.

Twenty years ago, the technology that torments today's parents did not exist: The iPhone arrived in 2007. Now, Auchincloss has written, "Kids in America spend less time outdoors than federal inmates." Social media corporations are "attention fracking." They have "monetized children's attention," making many adults, too, "angrier, lonelier, and sadder."

The companies are more than just enabling, they are encouraging "hyperventilating meanness" and "endless scrolling," a society where everything "is instant, easy and alone." Auchincloss wrote in the New York Times in September: "The Consumer Product Safety Commission insists that pharmaceutical companies put medications in child-safe bottles. It should be the same for apps that deliver digital dopamine."

In the years since the smartphone's debut, parents have grappled with the unique dangers it poses for children — dangers far more sinister than comic books (yes, really), television and other cultural panics of the post-1945 era.

Rahm Emanuel — former Chicago mayor, likely 2028 presidential candidate — recently posted online,"It's either going to be adults or the algorithms that raise our kids." So, "no child under the age of 16 should have access to social media" — TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat and others — because they are "too addictive, too alluring" for parents to push against, given the power of the companies pushing the apps.

Auchincloss proposes a 50 percent tax on the companies' advertising revenue over $2.5 billion to help finance "1,000 new trade schools across the country." This is a timely proposal: While the Trump administration is deporting workers, Ford Motor's CEO Jim Farley laments that the nation has "over a million openings in critical jobs, emergency services, trucking, factory workers, plumbers, electricians and tradesmen."

Auchincloss's (and Emanuel's) proposals involve thorny philosophical, constitutional, legal and practical problems. But leave aside the wisdom or feasibility of his desired policies. He is exemplary because he talks about topics that resonate with centrist voters, using sometimes surprising language (see above: guns) to persuade the probably 80 percent of Americans who are not communicants in the Church of Progressivism.

"The country is in crisis," Auchincloss says, "and Democrats are in the doldrums." But politics is mostly talk, at which some Democrats are getting better.