Big Jesus:

Christian Tourism and Far-Right Influence in the Arkansas Ozarks

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by

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled:

BIG JESUS: CHRISTIAN TOURISM AND FAR-RIGHT INFLUENCE IN THE ARKANSAS OZARKS

presented by Kaylee Cook,

a candidate for the degree of Master of Arts,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Professor Darren Dochuk

Professor Victor McFarland

Professor John Wigger

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BIG JESUS:

CHRISTIAN TOURISM AND FAR-RIGHT INFLUENCE IN THE ARKANSAS OZARKS

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ABSTRACT

The following contains the masters thesis, "Big Jesus: Christian Tourism and Far-Right Influence in the Arkansas Ozarks," by Kaylee Cook. The title refers to *Christ of the Ozarks*, an imposing, stark-white Jesus statue built atop Eureka Springs, Arkansas. Gerald L.K. Smith, after decades of fringe, far-right political activity, built it in 1966 before constructing additional, adjacent shrines, including a largescale production of the Passion Play, a religious performance depicting Jesus Christ's last week on earth. The first two chapters explore Eureka Springs' history, Smith's controversial career, his eventual delve into Christian tourism in the Ozarks region, and his complicated relationship with residents there. Smith's projects revitalized Eureka Springs' economy, but residents, including a growing influx of countercultural back-to-the-landers, faced the dilemma of being associated with the notorious extremist, anti-Semite, and political outcast. The town eventually displayed a seemingly contradictory embrace of Smith. This thesis explores how these outwardly progressive Americans decided to engage with, or at least tolerate, a far-right figure to stimulate their struggling local economy, and how Christians similarly overlooked or even endorsed his harmful beliefs to advance their religious cause. The concluding segments utilize Gerald L.K. Smith and Eureka Springs as a case study on compromised values in the search for economic or religious gain.

Dedicated to my loved ones, living or buried, in the Ozarks.

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Finding Eureka

Inhabitants of Eureka Springs, in northwestern Arkansas, assert that it has a strange magic. This conviction comes up in countless interviews and conversations: there is something distinctive in the pines, the rock walls, and the old streets. In the beginning, it was in the water. A multitude of natural springs, the purportedly curative kind, flow throughout town and supply its namesake. The springs existed long before the people, but it only took one person a moment to attach meaning to them. Once he made the water miraculous, hordes came to drink, bathe, bottle, and buy it, and eventually create a town. The possibility of healing was the compelling factor. It made skepticism ignorable, at least for a while. From its inception, Eureka Springs followed an unsubstantiated idea that people wanted very badly to believe in. Though the foundation and the eventual trajectory of the town are otherwise unsimilar, they have this in common. Both early visitors and later tourists to Eureka Springs arrived in droves on some evident faith.

The town was settled on a contradiction: that the region could forever be secluded by its rugged, Ozarkian geography but sought after, populated, and sustained by tourists. The region's dense woodland hills had been hard to capitalize on throughout early industrialization. This kept the land largely as it had been even as the outside country changed. A modest number of people made a home in the hills but stayed hidden away, surviving on little. Alvah Jackson was like this. In an eventual public statement, Jackson described a bear-hunting trek along a tributary of the

White River in northwestern Arkansas that took him to a life-altering spring.[1] It was only a small lap of water when he spotted it. He pondered a bit before he succumbed to his suspicions, digging and clawing at the dirt and rock surrounding the wet spot. When he located a basin cut from the rock, he used a crowbar to dig out the debris. Cool, clear, spring water pooled out from the ground below and stood at about a bucket's worth. There, sheltered in the woods, Jackson could have kept it to himself. But there was no profit in secrecy, and Jackson had much to gain. His first idea was to sell the water, not the spring, but the secret of its origin would not hold for long, even in this secluded place.

Before the discovery, Jackson described himself as a mechanic and farmer. He had eight children and a wife under his roof, and around fifty acres of land outside.[2] Years passed in isolation. The family fared well enough to survive. They must have known that this part of Arkansas was not the place to become rich when they left Kentucky. The state's wealth was uneven for a glaring reason: hundreds of thousands of enslaved people labored in the southern and eastern lowland's cotton frontier. The crop was lucrative for enslavers, but impossible to grow in the dense Ozark hills up north. An increasing economic dissonance arose from these disparities. However, when the Civil War began, the state acted altogether in favor of secession. Arkansas intended to hold white-knuckled onto the institution of slavery and the profits it allowed. No other place had a larger proportion of military-age men enlist in the Confederacy

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[1] N.D. Ingraham, "The Only True Story," *The Lexington Intelligencer*, February 05, 1881, 1, Newspapers.com.

[2] The 1850 census tells us Jackson's property was valued at 400 dollars. According to farm real estate values, Carroll County in 1850 averaged a seven-dollar value per acre.
Charles H. Barnard & John Jones, "Farm Real Estate Values In the United States by Counties, 1850-1982," U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 1987, 8.
https://www.card.iastate.edu/farmland/history/Barnard-and-Jones-1987-Farm-real-estate-values-in-the-United-States-by-counties-1850-1982.pdf.

than Arkansas.[3] These actions promised chaos and eventual punishment for the state. For Alvah Jackson, though, the war was a promising opportunity to reintroduce himself.

On the hillside near the newfound spring, Jackson took shelter in a cave. When soldiers sought refuge in the surrounding nothingness, this den was a welcome beacon. Even better was the self-proclaimed medical man inside and his curative supply. He offered "Dr. Jackson's Eye Water," as it was bottled and advertised, to the wandering and wounded. As word spread, some sought the healing out, too. Jackson hosted parties of haggard Confederates at war's end, who "recovered completely" after months spent immersed in the "archaic simplicity" there by the spring.[4] Any pay from them was poor, but the publicity was good. The news travelled to a storeowner named Levi Saunders in Berryville, who went by "Judge Saunders" despite having never served in such a role. It was a title he adopted when he came to Arkansas from Texas after the war. Apparently, the title was similarly well-accepted as "Doctor Jackson" was.[5] The dubious judge became acquainted with the dubious doctor, and Saunders explained his ailments: he was overweight, suffered from a skin condition, and the other springs his friends recommended were completely ineffective. He hoped Jackson's spot would be different.[6] In the spring of 1879, Saunders, his wife, and their son started a ten-week stay at Jackson's cave.

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[3] "Civil War through Reconstruction, 1861 through 1874," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, Central Arkansas Library System, https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/civil-war-through-reconstruction-1861-through-1874-388/.

[4] "History of Carroll County," originally published 1889, reprinted by *The Green Forest Tribune*, February 23, 1912, 3, Newspapers.com.

[5] Towards the end of his life, Jackson claimed to have graduated from the Douglas Medical School of Kentucky. However, neither the Kentucky Historical Society nor Filson Historical Society have records to confirm this school existed. Jackson did live in Kentucky for a stretch of time as a young man. He did not claim a medical practice or medical training before promoting the spring water.

[6] "The True History of the Discovery of the Famous Eureka Spring," *Fayetteville Weekly Democrat*, March 20, 1880, 3, Newspapers.com.

In an age of local and faraway boosterism, a testimony from Saunders had potential. Indeed, there was power in his eventual insistence that he had experienced dramatic, unique rejuvenation there, more so than a person could expect from other, less-impressive springs in the country. He felt renewed. His whitish hair was growing in black, like old times. He lost forty pounds.[7] The days were quiet and restful, with nothing to look at and nothing to listen to beyond the all-encompassing nature. Though Saunders felt sufficiently healed, he was not ready to leave the spring. He set up a makeshift campsite for his family next to it, and invited others, too. As a merchant in nearby Berryville, he had plenty of potential connections to call on. Soon, twenty families circled the round spouting of water. Some called it "Big Spring" or "Basin Spring." According to legend, someone there similarly first suggested calling it "Eureka," the Greek word for "I have found it."[8]

"Our state seems destined to become celebrated for its health-giving springs," the *Daily Arkansas Gazette* declared in 1880.[9] The bathing tourist had options in Arkansas. Thermal waters, luxury hotels, and a recent railroad line brought many of them to Hot Springs in the south. Thousands settled there, and thousands more visited. The town was an unignorable success story, and similar spa-towns started to appear around wherever an attractive spring (thermal or not) could be found. There seemed to be an endless supply of people who wanted healing from a long list of ailments: pain, arthritis, bronchitis, indigestion. Sickness was a dependable business factor. And without advanced, or merely available, medical practices at hand, tours to curative waters represented an attractive, hopeful chance for recovery. Some of the

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[7] "The True History," *Fayetteville Weekly Democrat*, 3.
[8] June Westphal & Catherine Osterhage, *A Fame Not Easily Forgotten: An Autobiography of Eureka Springs* (River Road Press, Conway, AR, 1970), 2.
[9] Dean Adams, "Another Wonderful Spring, *"Daily Arkansas Gazette*, May 08, 1880, 4, Newspapers.com.

early tours to Alvah Jackson's spring came from Fayetteville. If his spot was successful, it would cut travel time for these city-dwellers in half compared to Hot Springs. Its chance at success was a hopeful premise for both sides of the table.

The early visitors' formal acquaintance with Eureka Springs was unsophisticated. The town had been founded and given its name only a month before on July 4, 1879. Makeshift shacks still crowded around the central point of interest. Other "common" springs had been found close nearby, but this one, the original, remained the most popular. One member of the Fayetteville tours went up to it, peered deep into the basin, and claimed to see hundreds of feet down into the mountain.[10] The clear water trickled out, and was eagerly received by the campers. The visitor estimated there were as many as 600 of them staying there at that point. Beyond the spring-site, some had started to cut cave-like homes into the rock or use pilings to hoist their shacks against the steep hillside. The natural obstacles were a challenge, but an evidently surmountable one. The water was worth it. It seemed that every Eurekan the visitor spoke to had experienced a miracle or expected that one was on the way.

For those unconvinced by trial and testimony alone, shipments of water went out for scientific testing. Charles Wait, a chemistry professor in Rolla, Missouri, found some minimal mineral qualities in the water.[11] Frank Clarke, a chemist conducting a federal geological survey, tested four springs in Eureka for himself and noted their sulphates, carbonates, and chlorides.[12] Neither scientist concluded that any peculiar healing property might be present. In fact, the content of the water was similar to most well water at the time. A handful of newspapers reported

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[10] H.M.B., "The Eureka Springs-Wonderful Cures-500 to 600 Visitors," *Arkansas Democrat*, August 20, 1879, 3, Newspapers.com.
[11]W.R. Conant, "Eureka Notes," *Daily Miner and Mechanic*, October 16, 1879, 1, Newspapers.com.
[12] John C. Branner, "Annual Report of the Geological Survey of Arkansas for 1891," *Little Rock Press Printing Company*, 1892, 45, https://www.geology.arkansas.gov/docs/pdf/publication/annual_reports/ann-rpt-1891-vol1-min-water-ar.pdf.

on this, some vindicated by the possibility of the magical curtain lifting. Russellville, to the south, noted alongside these results that the legitimate cause of betterment in Eureka Springs was more likely the change of lifestyle, lessening of worry, and a sense of community.[13] Regardless, it was unlikely that early scientific studies could depopulate or deter travel to the new town. "Crowds will continue to flock there, drink the water, and be benefitted by the change," the article concluded, regardless of the true source of the spring-goers' newfound goodness.[14]

The original, curious drip of visitors quickly became a flood. Three months after its founding, Eureka Springs was well-known to the outer world. Despite its strong appeals to some natural seclusion, sick and curious people determinedly came. They rode along impossible roads or made forested paths of their own. They were Arkansans, or Missourians from across the border, or even from farther away places. The first thousand overwhelmed the makeshift tent population. By winter, the number tripled, and increasing amounts of transient visitors intended to stay permanently. The little area had been given a town's founding, but it in no way resembled a town yet, and its burial in the hill crags and forests proved just as troublesome for residents to stay as to arrive. The need for homes, hotels, and businesses hinged on the ability to creatively address this lay of the land. Homesteaders had long ignored or abandoned this task; the reward of the rocky soil was not worth it.[15] However, tourism created an economic incentive in northwestern Arkansas that farming could not. Investors were going to figure out how to make the land profitable.

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[13] J.E. Battenfield, "Eureka Springs," *The Russellville Democrat*, March 25, 1880, 2, Newspapers.com.
[14] Battenfield, "Eureka Springs," 2.
[15] In 1880, one farmer reportedly bemoaned having given up and sold the rocky soil that the springs now made valuable.
S.O. McDowell, *Columbus Courier*, January 15, 1880, 2, Newspapers.com.

Based on land patents, two people in particular bought the newfound Eureka Springs. Between 1879 and 1882, Peter Van Winkle purchased over 800 acres and Francisca Massmann bought more than 2,000.[16] Both buyers were deeply involved in the local lumber industry and bought the land for a dual benefit: to harvest and sell the vast swaths of pine forest wood, and then to sell the increasingly in-demand land beneath it. Buy, strip, and sell. Van Winkle had spent the previous fifteen years or so building a fortune on this strategy, aided largely by a great need for lumber to rebuild post-war Arkansas. He called himself the "Pine King of the Mountains."[17] However, he would not have time to see a return on his Eureka investment. He died suddenly in early 1882 in nearby Rogers, Arkansas.[18] Francisca Massman had been hauling in lumber for years to feed her family's sawmill business. The thousands of acres she purchased in Carroll County were lucrative, making her one of the wealthiest women in the area.[19] Both Van Winkle and Massman struggled to keep their supplies-land and lumber-in stock at the town's onset.[20] New faces were drinking the water, walking the woods, and looking to set down their stakes every day. The county had ten thousand more people in it than the decade before.

It was unclear how many more people would be able to adapt their lives permanently there, but the Eureka Springs Railroad, formed in 1882, asserted that tourism was only going to

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[16] General Land Office Records, Courtesy U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management, https://glorecords.blm.gov/details/patent/default.aspx?accession=AR2360 .425&docClass=STA&sid=oefikffi.wzs.
Calvert Southerland, "Big Four Map of Benton, Washington, Carroll and Madison Counties in Arkansas," Map1578, Map collection, Arkansas State Archives, Little Rock, Arkansas, https://digitalheritage.arkansas.gov/maps-collection/34/.

[17] N.P. Ingraham, "From Eureka Springs-The Fountain of Youth," *Galena Miner*, January 25, 1880, 2, Newspapers.com.

[18] Mark K. Christ, "Peter Van Winkle," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, June 16, 2023, https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/peter-van-winkle-3605/.

[19] "Wealthy Woman Dies," *The Carlisle independent.* (Carlisle, Ark.), March 01, 1906, 2. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn92050006/1906-03-01/ed-1/seq-2/>

[20] *Fayetteville Weekly Democrat*, January 31, 1880, 1, Newspapers.com.

grow. On the long railway from St. Louis to San Francisco, the new line starting at Seligman, Missouri, would take travelers the twenty miles south to Eureka Springs. Whilst awaiting the railroad's completion, the option was a long, crooked stagecoach ride through the hills. One September morning, enroute across the state line, a stagecoach driver came to a sudden halt. Two masked men, rifles in hand, were waiting. A second, smaller coach, also known as a "hack," soon arrived at the trap, too. The nine passengers in the former and three in the latter were made to get out and be searched. The masked men took watches and chains, jewelry, pocketbooks, cash. They cut open the mail bags and stashed the letters, presumably hoping they contained bonds or checks.[21] Then, as anonymously as they had arrived but suddenly wealthier, they escaped back into the trees. This crime was well-publicized (though never prosecuted) in the following weeks. It may have aided underlying suspicions about the undeveloped Ozarks: the danger, the mystery, the desperation. It was just another reason that the coming railroad was a needed thing, argued Powell Clayton.

Clayton served as governor and senator for Arkansas throughout the post-war Reconstruction Era. After the lifetime's turmoil that such a career promised for an out-of-state politician, Republican, former Union general, and anti-Klansman like Clayton, he semi-retired to newfound Eureka Springs. Clayton created what he called the Eureka Improvement Company, which championed the new railroad line to town, as well as a sewer and water system, a street railway, and a luxury hotel, "The Crescent."[22] Clayton consulted contractors, sought out the press, and brought investors and architects with plans in hand to Eureka Springs.[23] The days of

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[21]"Plundered: The Eureka Stage Stopped by Two Masked Men," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, September 11, 1882, 7, Newspapers.com.
"Masked Highwaymen in Arkansas," *The New York Times*, September 12, 1882, 2, Newspapers.com.
[22] Carl H. Moneyhon, "Powell Clayton," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, March 6, 2024, https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/powell-clayton-94/.
[23]"Local Paragraphs," *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, March 20, 1885, 8, Newspapers.com.

encampment were over. The spring-shacks were gone. Establishing a health resort meant creating a place that catered to those visiting, not residing. Of the tall buildings that soon extended into the mountainous skyline, a majority were hotels. They huddled together above newly built streets and sidewalks and greeted each season's new tourist hordes. Clayton's improvements seemed successful. An unprecedented number of people now arrived every season.

Tourism was a booming but unstable business for Eureka Springs. Though the town attracted tens of thousands of visitors in its first years, a much smaller number of people actually resided there, and their principal occupation was hotel and resort keeping. The economy relied on tourist interest, and tourist interest concerned the water. "This is the whole life of this city, the healing water," one account warily noted.[24] Beyond the healing enclaves were only oceans of rock and heavy timber, remnants of what Eureka Springs once was and might return to again. After all, it was not the landforms, the nature, or even the springs themselves that made the town; it was the beliefs attached to them. Local livelihoods in Eureka Springs depended on a broader faith in their water's magical, curative potential. This was a high but precarious ledge for the local economy, as faith is something fickle and hard to sustain.

Promoters had predicted that the small town's reputation would be as lasting as the rocks that it clung to, but they were wrong.[25] By the turn of the twentieth century, advances in medicine made Americans nationwide less inclined to travel to springs. Increased medical knowledge grew alongside individual skepticism of water's power. Eureka Springs was not exempt from this turn. The number of visitors slowly declined as discouraging testimonies began to replace miraculous ones. The early years' enticing spell was wearing off, and Eureka Springs

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[24]T.J. Richardson, "Eureka Springs Ark., March 8, 1882," *The Morning News*, March 18, 1882, 4, Newspapers.com.
[25]Adam Clark, "The Eureka Springs," *The Southern Standard*, July 18, 1885, 2, Newspapers.com.

stared down a new century. Its constructions made it a strange, architectural time capsule: ornate Victorian buildings, retaining walls, and steep, stone streets which refused to cross, only meeting at V-shaped intersections before snaking off to other segments of town. Remaining residents scaled these paths uphill and down and directed the streetside springs throughout town. They were a reminder. The boom was over, but the town remained a novel fixture in the landscape, something to be rediscovered. A tourist public would meet Eureka Springs again, but in a much different way.

On a springtime Sunday night in 1970, a worried treasurer deliberated the fate of her town. Georgia Ziffzer had been in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, for nearly two decades, navigating the declining spa town's economic turmoil. In that time, a newfound wave of religious tourism sparked hope for revival, but with it came a great foe: Gerald L.K. Smith. This April evening, Ziffzer invited similarly concerned, anti-Smith individuals to her Spring Street apartment. The small coalition shared their fears of a coming takeover of their city as they typed, enveloped, and sealed letters. It was a small but hopeful mail campaign. Later, Ziffzer also typed a letter to her correspondent at the *Arkansas Gazette*, James Powell, and described the evening's activities. "This is to let you know we are not sleeping on the job," she wrote, "and have no intention of letting Smith take over without a fight."[26] Beyond her apartment window, the adversary's crowd-drawing construction-a towering, alabaster Jesus statue-peered down over the town.

The big Jesus statue was still a fairly new fixture at that time. Its foundation levied its odd newness and eye-catching whiteness from the newly bald, ancient mountaintop. Eurekans below

[26] Ziffzer to Powell, April 28, 1970, "Ziffzer, Georgia," James O. Powell Papers, MC 1313, Box 24, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville, AR.

awoke every morning to the changed skyline. They saw the Victorian houses, the old hotels, the treetops, the hills, and then, jutting out from the familiar, was Big Jesus. "Christ of the Ozarks" was his proper, Smith-given name. Smith had imagined him for some time, but any actualization had been delayed. Smith was ever-busy, always travelling, and never without a self-enforced writing deadline. It might have been too lofty of a thought to slow down and pursue something like this. In 1964, he was still on the road: from New York to Washington D.C., to Tulsa and then back to Los Angeles, his work's home base.[27] His magazine, *The Cross and the Flag*, published monthly and relied greatly on his contributions. Staff awaited his instructions. Subscribers and rally-goers wrote endless letters. Daily events in an ever-changing world opened new paths for Smith to follow to his same conclusions. He rambled into his tape recorder and on his typewriter and then spread the information as diligently as possible. The idea to build Jesus hung in the air, partly due to this question of time. The other question was, where?

Smith wanted to be everywhere and inaccessible at the same time. He had a home in Apple Valley, California, and another in Tulsa, Oklahoma. He was from Wisconsin but had lived all over: Shreveport, Cleveland, Detroit, St. Louis. His present office was in Los Angeles. He traveled often, typically for work, but also sometimes traveled with his wife, Elna, to add to their antiques collection. These trips circled shops in Oklahoma and Arkansas and eventually landed Smith in Eureka Springs, which he deemed "the most thrilling area in the entire Ozarks range."[28] It was a far different town than his typical spots. Beyond the many items Gerald and Elna saw for sale in the various shops, Eureka Springs itself sat like a big, Victorian antique. It was an old, subdued place. The nearby, ongoing construction of a major dam and reservoir project suggested

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[27] Gladwin Hill, "Gerald L.K. Smith Still in Business," *New York Times*, October 11, 1964. Box 59, Folder: "1964 Newspaper Clippings," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[28] Gerald L.K. Smith, Memo, 1962. Box 55, Folder: "1962 Antiques," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

some incoming change or potential revival, but its effects had yet to trickle to town. Its main offering in the early 1960s still seemed to be solitude for its thousand or so residents. Smith was needed back on the West Coast, but Eureka Springs must have stuck in his mind.[29] He would be back many times, eventually with an objective.

One of Eureka Spring's notable boomtime residents was William Evander Penn, a lawyer and Confederate turned Baptist minister and hymn composer. Penn was a successful but aging evangelist when he settled in the healing spring-town in the late 1880s. He commissioned a home atop a hill colloquially called "Penn Castle" for its elaborate, towering design. Multiple stained-glass windows, some depicting Christian scenes, filled the home. It had delicate wooden details, steeple arches, and imported stonework throughout its fourteen rooms and three stories. It was a churchly place, presumably as Penn intended. He died there in 1895, and the home slowly deteriorated as years progressed. It was on the market and struggling to sell well into the next century when Gerald L.K. Smith's loyal subordinate, Charles Robertson, toured it. He took photographs, copied the realtor's information, and sent them to his boss out west. Smith was intrigued enough to offer half of the asking price.[30] Perhaps to both his and Robertson's surprise, this offer was accepted. Smith, under the purchasing guise of the "Elna M. Smith Foundation," was a new homeowner in old Eureka Springs.

Eccentric places attract eccentric people, and Eureka Springs was no exception. Carrie Nation, the famed hatchet-wielding temperance advocate, retired there and lived to see one of the springs named after her. Norman Baker, a notorious fraud, came to town in the late 1930s and

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[29] Gerald L.K. Smith to Olive Ellis, November 28, 1960. Box 55, Folder: "1962 Antiques," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[30] Glen Jeansonne, *Gerald L.K. Smith: Minister of Hate* (Yale University Press, 1988), 188.

turned The Crescent hotel into a phony cancer hospital.[31] A few years later, he was serving time in federal prison. The silent-film era star, Irene Castle, settled on a farm near Eureka Springs with her fourth husband in the 1950s. Some artists, like Harry and Elsie Freund, gravitated to the town, even if only for brief periods of inspiration. The town was a retreat from the typical. It had kept its old qualities, even as the rest of the country tore down and rebuilt. It did not have little boxes all in a row. It had winding streets and rock alcoves and dissimilar dollhouses, all haphazardly stacked. It had charm, and enough remaining ruggedness to somewhat isolate its citizens from the outside world. It could not quell small-town discussions, including over any peculiar newcomers to town, from happening within.

The news of Penn Castle's sale spread quickly. The name attached, Elna Smith, was not a famous one, but was still intriguing in connection to the purchase of this historic property. Louise Williams, an older widow living across the street from Penn Castle, awaited her new neighbors.[32] Amongst the boxes and furniture, she might have seen Elna in her usual fashion: coifed whitish-blonde hair, pearls, and a stylish dress on her short frame. She would have also seen Gerald close behind, the contradictorily more infamous and mysterious of the two. Smith had plans for this place that extended far beyond Penn Castle. He had not come to Eureka Springs to retire. However, he still sought out whatever anonymity was possible in the beginning. Once more under his wife's name, he purchased 160 acres of land-including a mountaintop, partly within city limits.[33] He had a perfect view of this pinnacle from his eastward porch at Penn Castle,

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[31] Andrea DenHoed, "The Haunting History of a Huckster's 'Cancer Cure," *The New Yorker*, April 26, 2022, https://www.newyorker.com/culture/photo-booth/the-haunting-history-of-a-hucksters-cancer-cure.
[32] Gerald L.K. Smith to George Maines, June 2, 1965. Box 60, Folder: "1965, Maines, George," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[33] Gerald L.K. Smith to George and Elizabeth Maines, May 4, 1965. Box 60, Folder: "1965, Maines, George," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

which was critical. It ensured that Smith would have the best vantage-point to his coming creation.

Smith was a quiet newcomer to unsuspecting Eureka Springs. In Fayetteville, though, the *Northwest Arkansas Times* connected Elna's name to her husband's and were soon investigating this big-spending Ozarkian transplant. Ted Wylie was editor at the time. He was an Arkansas native, having only left briefly to complete his journalism degree at Columbia University in New York.[34] Wylie first published Smith's identity as the new Penn Castle resident in the summer of 1964. He heard some vague rumors about Smith's controversial reputation, but nothing substantial. He was not able to catch and question the stranger driving around the winding streets or having breakfast in Eureka Springs. Even if he had, he might not have known how to start a conversation without sounding accusative. It was not a crime, Smith might have said, to be a mysterious newcomer, and certainly not an egregious thing to introduce new money to Eureka Springs' economy. Wylie wanted to know more, but likely did not realize what kind of discovery awaited him. Months passed but the question remained: who was Gerald L.K. Smith? And what did he want in Arkansas?

The first week of November 1964 was a busy time for the local journalists. The election for governor had just happened. Eureka Springs and Fayetteville were in the minority counties that selected the Republican nominee, but to no avail. The news broke that the Democratic incumbent, Orval Faubus, had won a sixth term. A decade prior, Faubus' name became widely known for refusing to comply with the *Brown v. Board of Education*'s desegregation decision in Arkansas schools. Faubus ordered the Arkansas National Guard to keep the nine, newly enrolled black students from integrating Central High School in the Little Rock Crisis of 1957. When

[34]"After 30-Year Career, Wylie Leaving Times," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, June 02, 1973, 9, Newspapers.com.

President Eisenhower federalized the troops and effectively removed them from the governor's orders, Faubus retaliated by shutting down Little Rock high schools for a year. These actions cemented Faubus' legacy; his political career had brought national attention to Arkansas in a disgraceful way. But in the fall of 1964, once more, he easily won another term.

Ted Wylie was likely hard at work to break this disappointing political news to his northwestern constituents when an employee rushed in with something to show him; not about the election, but about Gerald L.K. Smith.[35] It was a copy of Smith's *The Cross and the Flag* magazine. His name, face, essays, and ideologies covered it inside and out. Wylie tore through the publication page by page, absorbed by the nature of its content. He could hardly believe it. In the next addition of the newspaper, in his editor's column, he relayed what he had learned, concluding:

"Mr. Smith makes us sick!"[36]

Gerald L.K. Smith could have been more successful if he better hid his core beliefs. At the beginning of his career, before he became openly fixated on what later consumed him, people liked him. When he spoke, crowds listened. Away from the fringe and in the public eye, Smith could have made a comfortable career for himself. He might have avoided an impending landfall of controversy. But Smith gave in to the worst of his ideas: the conspiracies, the hatred, the distrust. He steered himself to the isolated, far-right edge of influence, away from the opportunities and alliances he once enjoyed. He pushed these alienating convictions for decades, until the peripheries of belief were his chief ring of influence. There was some success in this, enough to sustain him, but the popularity from the fringe could never outweigh the disdain from

[35] Ted Wylie, "Local Line," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, November 03, 1964, 4, Newspapers.com.
[36] Wylie, "Local Line," 4.

the mainstream. The promise of his early career turned to a seemingly inescapable pattern of digging deeper into obscurity. After decades of this, when he stared down the final phase of his life, Smith took what opportunity he had left to the Ozarks.

Smith was born in 1898 in Wisconsin. When he went to Indiana for college, he developed a penchant for preaching that he carried back home.[37] He also met and married Elna Sorenson. He was a Christian Church preacher and her family was Methodist, but he won her over. Throughout the course of their long marriage, Elna would adapt to all sorts of Gerald's convictions. It is hard to tell how far she expected they would go in those early years. In 1929, Gerald Smith accepted a fateful church call to minister at the Kings Highway Church in Shreveport, Louisiana. He garnered a notable reputation there, not necessarily for the contents of his preaching but for the delivery. Smith was a powerful speaker. "He is the Reverend Gerald L.K. Smith," H.L. Mencken, a provocative and influential figure in his own right, reported, "the gustiest and goriest, the loudest and lustiest, the deadliest and damndest orator ever heard."[38] The church ignited this skill but could hardly contain it. Smith was soon speaking for outside, often political, causes: at clubs, conventions, before civic leaders, and even all the way in Washington D.C.[39] It seemed only a matter of time before he yielded the life of a pastor for the promise of being a politician. In early 1934, he resigned from the church.[40] Rumors suggested that one impetus for Smith's resignation was his recent friendship with Louisiana Senator Huey Long.

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[37] Jeansonne, *Gerald L.K. Smith*, 19.
[38] Julian Hall, "Mencken on Gerald Smith," *The Dothan Eagle*, September 13, 1936, 4. Newspapers.com
[39] Smith represented the Louisiana Federation of Labor in 1934 in a meeting with Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor.
DeForest Sanford, "Gerald Smith Named as Labor Representative," *Industrial Democrat* (Leesville, LA), February 1, 1934, 4. Newspapers.com
[40] "Gerald L.K. Smith," *The Daily Courier* (Hammond, LA), February 14, 1934, 3. Newspapers.com.

Long's career was already fabled for its own reasons. He was the "Kingfish," reputed demagogue, and enemy to wealth inequality in the impoverished South.[41] His proposals and social reforms, like the Share Our Wealth movement, combined with his brand of unprecedented executive control in state government, garnered national attention.[42] Smith admired him greatly. He described Long as a superman, the greatest political strategist alive.[43] When offered, Smith was happy to extend his speaking skills to Long's campaign. Within only the first week in his new campaign role, Smith helped enlist 16,000 new followers into Long's network.[44] Tens of thousands more came to hear Smith speak along his designated trails in Louisiana and beyond. Whether he fully agreed with or understood the political plans he was helping to endorse, Smith was eager to be in front of Long's crowds. Smith's ability to enthrall audiences, coupled with newfound political association, helped him form a new, larger identity. He had a clear path to further opportunities in the political world because he had Long. However, he would not have him for long.

On September 8, 1935, Huey Long was shot in Louisiana's capitol building in Baton Rouge. It was late, he had just finished introducing a new batch of bills, and he was leaving with an entourage. Smith followed, needing to discuss an upcoming speaking tour with him. "Just as I stepped across the threshold of the door, I heard Senator Long cry out loudly," Smith recalled, "I

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[41] J. Michael Hogan and Glen Williams, "The Rusticity and Religiosity of Huey P. Long," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 7, no. 2 (2004): 149–71, http://www.jstor.org/stable/41939906.
[42] Snyder, Robert E. "Huey Long and the Presidential Election of 1936." *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 16, no. 2 (1975): 117–43. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4231456. Edward F. Haas, "Huey Pierce Long and Historical Speculation." *The History Teacher* 27, no. 2 (1994): 125–31. https://doi.org/10.2307/494714.
[43]Gerald L.K. Smith, "Huey Long," *The Enid Morning News* (Enid, OK), February 20, 1935, 4. Newspapers.com.
[44] "16,000 Join Share Wealth in Louisiana," *The American Progress*, March 29, 1934, 1. Newspapers.com.

knew instantly it was his voice."[45] Sounds of gunfire and screams followed, echoing throughout the capitol's marble hallways. When Smith entered, Long was already enroute to a nearby hospital and a stranger, riddled with Long's bodyguards' bullets, lay dead on the floor. The assassin was later identified as Carl Weiss, a young, prominent physician. Long's notoriety and political power was an obvious potential motivator for this violence, though Weiss was killed before a conclusive motive could be established. Long's condition was not deemed critical at first.[46] Smith publicly encouraged their purported ten million members of the Share Our Wealth societies to pray for his recovery, but it did not come.[47] Two days later, Huey Long died, and Gerald L.K. Smith's future fell apart.

Hundreds of thousands of people came to see Long interred on the grounds of the Louisiana state capitol. They flooded Baton Rouge and packed together in the late-summer heat. Smith delivered the day's final speech to the crowd. He eulogized Long as a martyr: "He fell in the line of duty. He died for us."[48] Sunken gardens and circles of greenery surrounded Long's copper and concrete tomb.[49] Smith stood at its edge and spoke at-length on principles, influence, heaven, and grief. He was clearly devastated, stopping his speech at one point to proclaim: "Oh, God, why did we have to lose him?"[50] Over thirty years later, Long's death still weighed heavy on Smith's mind, but had long intertwined with prejudice. "Huey Long was killed by a Jewish doctor (…) and but for the bodyguards, this Jew doctor would have shot me," he wrote, then concluded that the "Jew-controlled press" had "protected the assassin" since, but that he knew

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[45] "Share Wealth Society Calls for Prayers," *Oakland Tribune*, September 9, 1935, 2. Newspapers.com.
[46] "Huey P. Long is Shot," *Guymon Daily News* (Guymon, OK), September 8, 1935, 7, Newspapers.com.
[47] "Share Wealth Society," *Oakland Tribune*, 2.
[48] "Self-Erected Monument," *The Knoxville Journal*, September 13, 1935, 1, Newspapers.com.
[49] "Groups Still Standing About Tomb of Huey," *The Huntsville Times*, September 13, 1935, 5, Newspapers.com.
[50] "Text of Funeral Oration," *Chattanooga Daily Times*, September 13, 1935, 24. Newspapers.com.

the truth.[51] His grief turned to a fixation on Long's death that grew for years after that fateful September night. The added element of anti-Semitic conspiracy was not unique to Smith's conceptions of the assassination, either. It visibly bled into nearly all other aspects of Smith's life after Long.

Unattached to a cause and cast out into the political sphere, Smith needed something or someone to grasp onto. He still understood the value of aligning with prominent figures. He first sought out Francis Townsend, the Depression-era advocate for the national old-age pension called the Townsend Plan. He also reconnected with Charles Coughlin, a widely known radio speaker and political commentator.[52] The three briefly aligned and formed the Union Party, which they presented as a third-party, populist alternative to Roosevelt and the New Deal. Both the party and the alliance were short-lived. Questions arose of self-interest and conflicting ideologies. Smith was outlining a separate organization to "seize the United States government" and "preserve America's nationalistic identity."[53] This greatly unsettled Townsend. He publicly disavowed Smith in 1936 as a potential fascist; Coughlin did not comment.[54] Smith was a powerful speaker and had enthralled numerous crowds, but his budding reputation was a liability for mainstream political legitimacy, particularly in the lead-up to the Second World War. Smith remained defiant in the face of the falling out, though. "Even if I were a fascist, neither

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[51] Gerald L.K. Smith to John A. Patterson, June 27, 1968, Box 62, Folder: "1968, P" Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[52] Smith first met Coughlin on behalf of Long in 1935 in an attempt to gain Coughlin's allegiance. Jeansonne, *Gerald L.K. Smith*, 51.
[53] "Smith is Ousted by Townsend," *The Oshkosh Northwestern* (Oshkosh, WI), October 20, 1936, 1, Newspapers.com.
[54] "Townsend Ousts Louisiana Smith, Assails Fascism," *Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat*, October 21, 1936, 1, Newspapers.com.

[Townsend] nor anybody else could oust me from anything," he commented. "I work for no one."[55]

On his own again but in need of followers, Smith's new movements took on many names: the Committee of One Million, the Inner Circle, the (second) America First Party, the Christian Nationalist Crusade. He established headquarters in Cleveland and then Detroit, where in 1942 he published the first issue of his magazine, *The Cross and the Flag*, and campaigned for the Republican nomination for the Senate.[56] When he won only a third of the total votes, he ran again as an independent and lost again. He then turned to a more grassroots approach, and dedicated his time to mail, radio, publication, and personal appearances.[57] Smith touted a plan: ultra-patriotism and authoritarian, right-wing, Christian leadership for the country's future. Enough curious followers listened and read Smith's declarations to urge him onward. He increasingly dwelled on potential enemies to the Christian religion and America.[58] His attacks, void of decency and riddled with conspiracy, ceaselessly targeted those he envisioned the key threats: Jews, African Americans, and communists. By the time he moved his headquarters to St. Louis in 1947, his reputation proceeded him.

It was clear that widespread political success was no longer viable for Smith, but he remained steadfast in his efforts. He was still able to affect people, even if on a smaller scale than he hoped. His ideology flourished best in privacy anyway. *The Cross and the Flag was* published bi-monthly for over ten thousand subscribers. Smith was its main contributor, and his name, face, and beliefs filled the pages. Article topics ranged from "is an undercover Jewish machine

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[55] "Townsend Ousts Louisiana Smith," *Muskogee Daily Phoenix and Times-Democrat*, 1.
[56] Morris Janowitz, "The Technique of Propaganda for Reaction: Gerald L. K. Smith's Radio Speeches," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (1944): 84–93, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2745690.
[57] Jeansonne, *Gerald L.K. Smith*, 68.
[58] Gerald L.K. Smith, "My Fight for the Right!", Newsletter, N.D., Box 68, Folder: "Christian Nationalist Crusade, f.2 tracts, 1945-1951," State Historical Society of Missouri, St. Louis, Missouri.

attempting to rule the world?" to "what is the meaning of racial self-respect?"[59] He sent out tracts and literature with the titles, "The Plot of the Jews," "Jews in Government," "Does the White Race Deserve to Die?" and "The Jew Created Communism."[60] He compiled a list of what he deemed crusading literature and placed the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* as his top recommendation, along with *The Jews and Their Lies* and *The Negro's Place*.[61] Beyond the pages of his publications, Smith's latest organization, which he named the Christian Nationalist Crusade, aimed primarily to "preserve America as a Christian nation" whilst being conscious that there was a highly organized Jewish campaign attempting the opposite.[62]

The overt anti-Semitism and racism at the heart of Smith's aims kept many people away. Those who agreed, though, supported passionately; if not openly, at least monetarily. Smith had donors from all over the United States, but some of his largest donations came from California.[63] Smith had spent time there in years past for both his own campaigns and others, always leaving with varying degrees of success, controversy, and new supporters and enemies.[64] The annual Christian Nationalist Crusade conventions happened in Los Angeles. Smith's self-reported thirty-plus employees and other interested, paying parties would take a long charter bus ride there from

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[59] Gerald L.K. Smith, "The Magazine of the Century," Leaflet, N.D., MC 1812, Box 1, Folder 2, University of Arkansas.
[60] *Christian Nationalist Crusade Collection, 1945-1968*, 6 Folders, State Historical Society of Missouri, St. Louis, Missouri.
[61] Gerald L.K. Smith, "The Real Issues in this Fight," N.D., Box 68, Folder: "Christian Nationalist Crusade, f.4, *The Cross and the Flag* September 1950-July 1952," State Historical Society of Missouri, St. Louis, Missouri.
[62] "The Magazine of the Century," Leaflet, N.D., Box 56, Folder: "1963, E" Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[63] "Large Donor Letters," Box 60, *Gerald L.K. Smith Papers: 1922-1976*, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[64] Darren Dochuk, "Christ and the CIO: Blue-Collar Evangelicalism's Crisis of Conscience and Political Turn in Early Cold-War California." *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 74 (2008): 76–100, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27673125.

St. Louis.[65] Smith was living in Tulsa, when he decided to relocate headquarters to Los Angeles in 1953. Because of his notoriety, Smith struggled to smoothly integrate anywhere he went, including there. His meetings drew protesters and heckling.[66] His beliefs were detailed and berated in local columns. The postcards he randomly distributed to warn of "Communists, New Dealers, and Jewish gestapo organizations" were typically not well-received.[67] He found that Los Angeles was not the place to offend in obscurity.

Yet Smith was not deterred. He could benefit in the long run from any revived, albeit negative, relevancy. For every new person exposed to Smith's bigotry who was disgusted, there might be another enticed. Smith's followers were growing. Along with subscription fees for *The Cross and the Flag*, Smith pleaded for donations, whatever his admirers could spare for the cause, through his mailing list. Though many donations were modest (five, ten, or twenty dollars in an envelope), some of Smith's efforts garnered substantial returns. In 1956, Smith was only required to file contributions of one hundred dollars or greater. This size of donation totaled $36,957 for the Christian Nationalist Crusade that year, and Southern Californians contributed over a third of it.[68] Two years later, the number was reportedly up to $139,374, and then around $209,000 the next.[69] The money coursed in, and the pamphlets, magazines, and newsletters shipped out. Smith and his employees were eager to continue the spread, and not merely for the

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[65] Gerald L.K. Smith, "Special Bus for Los Angeles," *The Cross and the Flag*, V. 7, N. 11, February 1949, Box 68, Folder: "Christian Nationalist Crusade, f.2, Tracts, 1945-1951," State Historical Society of Missouri, St. Louis, Missouri.
[66] Richard Bergholz, "Big Fuss at Hate Meet," *Los Angeles Mirror*, March 29, 1957, 1. Newspapers.com.
[67] Eleanor Roosevelt, "Using Religion to Mislead," *The Hanford Sentinel* (Hanford, CA), May 11, 1953, 2, Newspapers.com.
[68] Bergholz, "Big Fuss at Hate Meet," 1.
[69] "Anti-Semitic Group in U.S. Reports Raising $139,374 in Eight Weeks," *The Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle*, October 31, 1958, 1, Newspapers.com.

prospect of material growth. They surely trusted their convictions, and their capability to change the world. Charles Robertson, Smith's right-hand man, wrote:

> "The grisly thought of a world government tyranny would not be so shocking and so chilling if a majority of the world was Christian. But when you think of a world majority made up of pagans, atheists, and Communists, manipulated by the organized enemies of Christ-the international Jew-you can easily imagine the restraining influences that would be brought to bear…"[70]

Smith enjoyed churning this discontent and fear amongst his adherents in the seemingly endless barrage of his publications. He warned that cities were infected with "a Negro problem," and the symptoms were rape, juvenile delinquency, and murder.[71] America was being flooded with unsavory immigrants and communists were gaining power.[72] The future was materialistic and godless.[73] Smith urged his followers to follow the principles of various proclaimed patriots, like MacArthur, McCarthy, Goldwater, and, of course, himself. Smith had no intention of retiring and abandoning his small but strong fringe following. "Someone has well said that the oldest man on earth is 45," Smith wrote a former partner. "I agree with you that time is passing, but it is far from gone."[74] There was no resolve to Smith's conspiracies and no end to his hate, and therefore he could not imagine permitting an end to his work. It seemed he truly believed in it.

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[70] Charles Robertson, Personal Account, N.D., Box 57, Folder: "1962, R" Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[71] Gerald L.K. Smith, "I Accuse the Kennedys," Newsletter, N.D., Box 59, Folder: "1965, Circulars" Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[72] "The Magazine of the Century," Leaflet, N.D., Box 56, Folder: "1963, E" Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[73] Gerald L.K. Smith, "New York City Diary," Newsletter, N.D., Box 57, Folder: "1962, Manuscripts" Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[74] Gerald L.K. Smith to Don Lohbeck, May 29, 1962, Box 55, Folder: "1962, L" Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

And though *Time* magazine supposed there had been bigger, more successful bigots than Smith, few proved so stubborn, so durable.[75]

The County Commission on Human Relations in Los Angeles met in the spring of 1962 to discuss three local hate groups: Rockwell's American Nazi Party, Swift's Church of Jesus Christ-Christian, and Smith's Christian Nationalist Crusade. The fifteen-person committee expressed fear that more hate was being expressed in their community than ever before. Smith had drawn crowds of thousands of people, and doubtless more were on his mailing lists. Their eventual report asserted that the Christian Nationalist Crusade unquestionably had the largest following of any anti-Semitic group in the area.[76] But what could be done? They recommended city ordinances to prohibit wearing military style uniforms by unauthorized groups. They recommended control of the distribution of "hate literature," but did not go into specifics as to how to do it. Their mention of constitutional limitations dually signified some worry. A general concern arose that Smith's influence would not go away unless he chose to leave or stop.

It was around this time that Robertson fatefully notified Smith about Penn Castle in Eureka Springs, Arkansas. It was only intended as a part-time, vacation home. The town was peaceful and secluded. The couple, now in their sixties, might enjoy some relaxation away from their business and contention on the coast. But Gerald was not content to rest at all, including in Eureka Springs. His work gave him purpose. As quickly as Smith was moved in at Penn Castle, he was busy with his letters and articles. He updated his donors as usual on impending doom at the hands of their imagined Jewish overlords. He alluded to enthralling forthcoming plans and

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[75] "Arkansas: A Monument to Himself," *Time*, July 22, 1966, https://time.com/archive/6629917/arkansas-a-monument-to-himself/.

[76] "Probe of Hate Groups Urged by County Unit," *Los Angeles Times*, May 8, 1962, 26. Box 57, Folder: "1962, Newspaper Clippings," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
"Hate Groups' Curbs Given Supervisors," *Los Angeles Herald-Express*, May 8, 1962, 26. Box 57, Folder: "1962, Newspaper Clippings," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

asked for money. By 1967, Smith's adherents annually donated an average of $325,000.[77] By that time, they were no longer incentivized only by the ideals of the Christian Nationalist Crusade or Smith's insistence. A physical, visible achievement hung in the balance of their monetary contributions. They were helping pay for Big Jesus.

When Gerald L.K. Smith first stood atop the mountain where his creation would go, the beauty absorbed him.[78] The hills beyond went on and on. He imagined he might be looking out past Arkansas all the way west to Oklahoma or north to Missouri. To the south he saw Eureka Springs. He had taken in the beauty of the Ozark mountains before but only then understood the potential of owning one of its peaks. Eventually, Smith would name it "Magnetic Mountain." He would strip it, build on it, bring hordes of people to drive up it, walk around its top, and gawk at his manmade monuments on it. In that initial visit, though, the mountain was as it had always been. As a friend later recalled, Smith turned to Elna and informed her that this was the spot, "right here, facing the town."[79] Eureka Springs, younger than that peak but much older than Smith's plans, sat unsuspectingly in the dip below. "I'm going down to the press and then I'm going to build it," he said, and then when Elna asked why in that order, responded: "So I can't back out."

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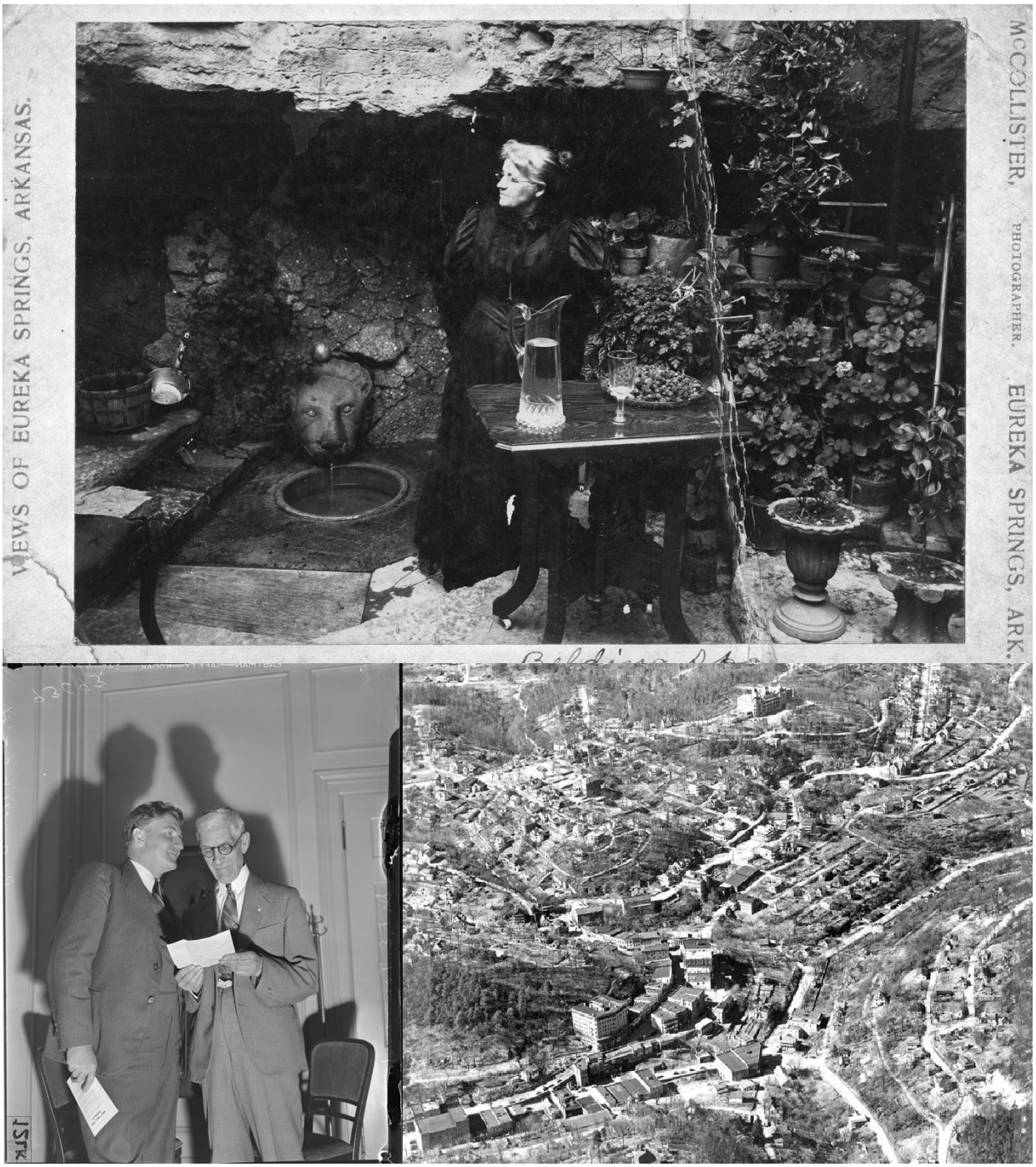
[77] Leo Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Far Right from the Great Depression to the Cold War*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 1983, 234.
[78] Gerald L.K. Smith to George and Elizabeth Maines, May 4, 1965, Box 60, Folder: "1965, Maines, George," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[79] John F. Cross, interview with the author, June 5, 2024.



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[80] "Eureka Springs, Arkansas," Photographer unknown, 1885, Lucille Morris Upton Papers, Folder 557b, Collection C3869, State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, MO.
"Dr. F.E. Townsend and Reverend Gerald L.K. Smith, Hotel St. Francis," Lester Kevie, 1936, Fang family San Franscisco Examiner Photograph Archive Negative Files, © The Regents of the University of California, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.
"Aerial view of downtown Eureka Springs (Carroll County); circa 1940s," photographer unknown, Encyclopedia of Arkansas, Courtesy of Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville, AR.

2

The Juxtaposition

Nostalgic images of the Ozarks halt in time by the 1960s. This decade disproved ideas of a place unaltered and lost to modernity. The landscape and its people changed dramatically, particularly in northwestern Arkansas. Over 28,000 acres of land went underwater to make Beaver Lake. The towering dam stretched across it powered nearby cities, while the reservoir provided new municipal and industrial water supply. Manufacturing plants followed these developments and built a trail of low-wage labor across the state as residents increasingly traded small-scale farming for factory work and left rural isolation for life in the city. Their work propelled future billionaires. Tyson Foods, whose original poultry plant was in Springdale, was becoming one of the largest meat-processing companies in the world. The successful trucking company, J.B. Hunt Transport Services, grew out of Benton County. In the same time and place, Sam Walton made his first millions with an experimental new chain of stores in the region called Walmart. Old hillbilly imagery, unfit to the new reality of the Ozarks, fell to the touristic endeavors of Silver Dollar City and Shepard of the Hills. Towns contorted themselves overnight to adapt to their region's changing economy. In Eureka Springs, this change partly came in the form of a Big Jesus.

When Gerald L.K. Smith broke the news about *Christ of the Ozarks*, people reacted based on how well they understood who he was. He recounted shock, doubt, praise, and ridicule. Local newspaper editors, like Ted Wylie, took particularly strong stances against Smith tying himself to an image of either Christ or Arkansas. Smith sheltered under principles of Christian

forgiveness, noting that we all have our shortcomings.[81] Wylie reminded readers that being a "raucous purveyor of racial and religious bigotry" was not a typical or particularly forgivable shortcoming.[82] Smith also relied on his reminder that the statue was to be funded and built by the Elna M. Smith Foundation, with his right-hand, Charles Robertson, handling publicity. He had built in personal distance that way. But it was not a secret that Smith originated and propelled the project, as he continually gravitated to the center of its attention.[83] Once he cleared any physical barriers to his plans, most potential harms he faced concerned his reputation, but he was used to that. The difference now was that he had a much more defensible, popular cause to martyr himself for: the Christian faith. In the process of implementing his Christian shrine, Smith reconfigured outside dissension that was once anti-Smith to now be anti-Jesus. Once the statue was built, it could be a strong metaphorical shield for Smith's legacy. He just needed to build it.

Smith's search for a sculptor brought him to Emmet Sullivan. Though Smith perpetrated the notion that Sullivan had assisted on the Borglums' Mount Rushmore, there was no evidence that this was true. Sullivan had indeed spent decades making large and small sculptures in South Dakota, but not of faces. He was a dinosaur man. In the 1930s, he presented the Works Progress Administration with small-scale dinosaur replicas and a plan, upon funding, to make them life-sized. After a year of steel, cement, and paint, Dinosaur Park was complete.[84] The five sculptures stared down over downtown Rapid City and the extending skyline, and they cast shadows over

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[81] Gerald L.K. Smith, "The Story of the Statue the Christ of the Ozarks," Booklet, 1967, MC 1412, Box 40, Folder 46, University of Arkansas Libraries, Special Collections, Fayetteville, AR, 13.
[82] "Gerald L.K. Smith Revealed As 'Christ of Ozarks' Backer," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, April 1, 1965, 16, Newspapers.com.
[83] Gerald L.K. Smith, "The Story of the Statue the Christ of the Ozarks," Booklet, 1967, MC 1412, Box 40, Folder 46, University of Arkansas Libraries, Special Collections, Fayetteville, AR.
[84] Pat Roseland, "Dinosaur Park Sculptor Emmet Sullivan," South Dakota Public Broadcasting, April 19, 2023, https://www.sdpb.org/rural-life-and-history/2023-04-19/dinosaur-park-sculptor-emmet-sullivan.

the park's concession area, where Emmet and his wife, Lorraine, resigned to work.[85] They sold miniature replicas of the dinosaurs at the gift shop. Years passed but the tourist attraction remained a feature for passing road-trippers. In the 1950s, Sullivan added two more varieties of dinosaurs to the park near his spot at the concessions. He also built an 80-foot, green brontosaurus for nearby Wall Drug. In northwestern Arkansas, Sullivan helped create a second, privately funded dinosaur park down the road from Beaver Dam and a short distance from Eureka Springs. However, this new sculptural endeavor did not open until 1967. Sullivan was held up the year before unveiling a different project: *Christ of the Ozarks*.

It is unclear whether Sullivan came to Arkansas to build his typical dinosaurs and was sidetracked by Smith's plans, or the other way around.[86] By 1965, they were working alongside each other to actualize Smith's ideas. Smith trusted Sullivan to make a statue worthy of worship. He enjoyed an early sketch that strongly resembled the existing *Christ the Redeemer* statue in Brazil.[87] However, there remained an element of uncertainty in Sullivan's plans. When asked what the face would look like, he noted that no one actually knew what Jesus looked like, but that he was striving for an appearance of meekness and humility.[88] Smith insisted it was going to be a work of art.[89] He hired an additional artist, Adrian Forrette, and a structural engineer, McKinley Weems, brought in consultants from Tulsa, and enlisted a handful of local laborers.[90]

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[85] Carolyn Torma, "Dinosaur Park," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1978), https://s3.amazonaws.com/NARAprodstorage/lz/electronic-records/rg-079/NPS_SD/90000956.pdf.

[86] One interview subject claimed that Smith's people reached out to Sullivan in South Dakota, only to discover that he was already in the Ozarks. He recounted this as one of the "three miracles" that led to the statue's successful completion.
John F. Cross, interview with the author, June 5, 2024.

[87] Bill Butler, *Tulsa Sunday World*, November 21, 1965, 9.

[88] Bill Butler, *Tulsa Sunday World*, November 21, 1965, 9.

[89] Charles F. Robertson, "Christ of the Ozarks," *Eureka Springs Times-Echo*, October 21, 1965, 1.

[90] "Christ Statue To Be Dedicated," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, June 21, 1966, 12, Newspapers.com.

He refused to be outwardly nervous about the statue's outcome and instead insisted that Sullivan was working by divine inspiration.[91] As the time drew nearer to implement the statue's visible features-beyond the steel, mesh, and concrete that Sullivan was used to with his dinosaurs-he needed all the inspiration he could get.

Eric Allen, a reporter for Fort Smith's *Southwest Times Record*, sat down with Sullivan in 1966 at a long, smooth-topped table in a Eureka Springs council room. The sculptor spun his usual round-brimmed hat around his finger. The charm of his bolo tie shone. When Allen asked him about his potential contributions to Mount Rushmore, he deflected. "I have an utter abhorrence of persons who attempt to sit in the limelight cast by famous figures," he said.[92] Instead, Sullivan wanted to talk about cowboys and cattle, and the life he knew growing up. He described long days out on the short-grass range, where he discovered a propensity for modeling riverbank clay into little figures. This seemingly led him to dinosaurs and then to Jesus. Allen reported that by the end of their conversation, Sullivan was gazing up at the room's ceiling and smiling softly. "When it's all said and done, what do I have to brag about?" he said. "My ability to do sculpture work is a gift."[93] The coming completion of his latest work would leave Allen, and other critical observers, questioning the extent of this gift.

Along the statue's cyclical, concrete base, a rudimentary elevator carried Sullivan up to Jesus' head.[94] From there, he could walk out on scaffolding to the end of one of the arms, which stuck straight out at ninety-degree angles on either side of the body and formed a cross shape. He

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[91] Jeansonne, *Gerald L.K. Smith*, 191.
[92] Eric Allen, "Emmet Sullivan, Sculptor," *Southwest-Times Record*, re-printed in *Eureka Springs Times-Echo*, ND.
[93] Eric Allen, "Emmet Sullivan, Sculptor," *Southwest-Times Record.*
[94] John F. Cross, interview with the author, June 5, 2024.

looked out from the sixty-seven-foot concrete creation and felt the head tower over him.[95] It was nearly fifteen feet tall itself. Sullivan had chiseled a face from concrete and mortar in town to be trucked up the mountain, hauled up to the head, and attached. Weems brought it in his flatbed trailer, same as he had done with the hands, and hooked a sturdy cable to it to hoist it up while Sullivan directed, seated in his chair up on the scaffolding.[96] When a circle of workers started to lift the apparatus, the face wobbled, slipped from its hook, and fell facedown into the mud and flint rock below.[97] It survived the nosedive, and Smith, who had been keeping watch from afar, was relieved by its durability. From the start, he was determined to ensure the statue's longevity. He wanted it to withstand 500-mile-per-hour winds and be earthquake proof.[98] He wanted cars to be able to dangle from its fingertips without any damage done.[99] At his command and Weems' direction, they had tried to weld its 340-ton foundation into the rock of the mountain. Smith hoped that the statue might stand forever, and that his legacy would go on with it. He had already decided he wanted to be buried by it.[100]

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[95] According to one source, Smith wanted to keep the statue's height under 70 feet tall to avoid federal regulations which would require a red aircraft light to be installed on top of Jesus' head.
Bill Bowden, "Christ of the Ozarks statue turns 50," *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, August 21, 2016, https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2016/aug/21/christ-of-ozarks-statue-turns-50-201608/.

[96] Bob Wheeler, "An Artistic Masterpiece," *Eureka Springs Times-Echo*, May 26, 1966, reprinted in *Hope Star* (Hope, AR), June 3, 1966, 7. Newspapers.com.

[97] Bill Bowden, "Christ of the Ozarks statue turns 50," *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, August 21, 2016, https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2016/aug/21/christ-of-ozarks-statue-turns-50-201608/.
Chris Branam, "Christ of the Ozarks marks 40 years atop mountain," *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, June 4, 2006, Eureka Springs Carnegie Library, Special Collections.

[98] Elna M. Smith Foundation, "Over 100 Portrayals of Christ in Collection for Sacred Art Gallery," *Eureka Springs Times-Echo*, December 9, 1965, 1. Box 61, Folder: "1965, Statue, Eureka Springs (clippings)," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

[99] "Lu Verne couple returned from trip to Kansas," *The Humboldt Republican* (Humboldt, Iowa), September 13, 1967, 9. Newspapers.com.

[100] Gerald and Elna publicly announced their decision to be buried in the statue's shadow at the dedication ceremony in June 1966.
Travis Mayo, "Christ of Ozarks Statue Towers Above Eureka Springs," *Morning World* (Monroe, LA), July 3, 1966, 16, Newspapers.com.

Below in Eureka Springs, there was an air of anticipation. Allan Gilbert, writer for the *Northwest Arkansas Times*, noted it on his May trip there in 1966. His winding trek from Fayetteville provided a scenic view of Ozarkian springtime. The dogwood was blooming, the streams were moving, and even the rocks seemed "fresher than usual" to him.[101] Upon reflection, his standout memories of Eureka Springs all included some element of natural wonder like this, but he had not been in a couple of years. This time, he was there to meet with Gerald L.K. Smith. He knew about Smith's reputation. He also knew that the figure was embarking on big changes to northwestern Arkansas. Gilbert, as a journalist and lifelong area resident, was very concerned with such changes. Nearby Beaver Lake was nearly full of water. It seemed sufficient evidence for Gilbert to admonish readers who considered Eureka Springs a dead city. However, he was more interested in the tourist dealings happening at Smith's command than at the lake. When he went to Penn Castle for the interview, Elna and Gerald were gone, apparently on an emergency errand to a different city. When he went into town, he noted the antiqueness, the age, the "genteelly faded grandeur," that Eureka Springs was known for.[102] But he fixated on his premonition of coming change and eyed the veiled creation on the northern mountaintop. What was Smith going to do to this town?

In the warm final week of June 1966, for the first time in a while, Eureka Springs' hotels filled up. Shuttles waited outside along the curving, stone streets. Downtown stores opened their doors to new visitors. Their curious wanderings eventually led to the same main attraction. It was not quite complete yet, but the dedication ceremony was set to continue regardless.[103] Hundreds

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[101] Allan Gilbert, "Eureka Springs Revisited," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, May 3, 1966, 16, Newspapers.com.
[102] Gilbert, "Eureka Springs Revisited," *Northwest Arkansas Times*.
[103] Charles Robertson, Smith's right-hand man, estimated that the statue would be about 95 percent complete by the time of the dedication.
"Car Shuttle to Run to Eureka Statue," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, June 18, 1966, 12, Newspapers.com.

of people, Arkansans and outsiders alike, gathered in the Saturday sun to see *Christ of the Ozarks* up-close, scaffolding still intact, and hear from its creator. Smith later recalled a visitor taking a picture of the statue and lamenting that it was incomplete for their souvenir photograph. "A picture of the statue with the scaffolding on will be much more rare than a picture of the completed statue," he reassured them, "because people will be taking pictures of the completed statue for a thousand years."[104]

More imposing, well-beloved statues of Jesus Christ already existed around the world: *Christ the Redeemer* in Brazil, *Christ of the Otero* in Spain, and *Christ the Redeemer of the Andes* between Argentina and Chile. The new monument in Arkansas seemed to many like a poor man's version of any of these. It was smaller, squarer, and more crudely made. Its stark white form protruded from the mountaintop and gazed blankly below. No movement or expression graced its features, except when the setting sun's light stirred its otherwise blank eyes.[105] Compared to what might have been, the statue was decidedly unexciting. Neither that nor the heat could deter the excited group gathered on Magnetic Mountain, though. And perhaps no one there was more elated than Gerald L.K. Smith. He had the statue, the crowd, and presumably a sense of public acceptance or even admiration that had long been absent from his life. When he took the podium before these people, he did not need to explain himself as a bigot, an agitator, or an outcast. He was simply the man who built the big Jesus statue.

The dedication ceremony consisted of prayers, scripture reading, and remarks. Those responsible-including the Smiths and Emmet Sullivan-praised their creation and reveled in the process to make it. They were all inextricably tied to this monument, regardless of its

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[104] Gerald L.K. Smith, "The Story of the Statue the Christ of the Ozarks," Booklet, 1967, MC 1412, Box 40, Folder 46, University of Arkansas Libraries, Special Collections, Fayetteville, AR, 31.
[105] "Blames 'Moving Eyes' on Sun," *Hope Star* (Hope, AR), June 3, 1966, 4, Newspapers.com.

reception. However, another speech was planned concerning the town it overlooked, whose connection to the project was yet unclear. Jan Bullock, the mayor of Eureka Springs, stepped to the podium. Only a year prior, Bullock became Eureka Springs' youngest mayor ever at the age of 30. His term was complicated. His police chief and fire chief both resigned that year. Bullock was brainstorming their replacements on a trip back from Washington-where he had tried to secure federal funding for the town-when he read in the newspaper that he was being sued.[106] Six Eurekans filed a taxpayer suit to either remove or restrain the mayor for various accused transgressions: not calling commission meetings, holding secret meetings, taking unauthorized action, diverting funds, mismanaging the city's affairs.[107] The resulting trial placed the young, new mayor at the forefront of smalltown attention. In March of 1966, the judge ruled in Bullock's favor.[108] His next real public appearance was outside on that mountain, in the summer sun, addressing town from the feet of Jesus.

Bullock briefly praised the statue itself before turning to what seemed to weigh on him. "A statue of Christ should remind each of us of the tenets he taught. His teaching of the brotherhood of man…" Audience members peered out from beneath wide hats and shade umbrellas. The Smiths listened on the side as Bullock continued. The speech was unsimilar to any Gerald gave. "Each of us is a child of God in his sight, regardless of the color of one's skin, the origin of one's birth, the purity or the mixture of races in one's bloodlines," he said. "May it never be said of anyone in our city that a single person, regardless of his race, his religion, or his

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[106] "Eureka Springs Mayor Served with Subpoena," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, August 7, 1965, 8, Newspapers.com

[107] Bill Williams, "Taxpayers' Suit Asks Removal of Mayor at Eureka Springs," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, August 5, 1965, 1, Newspapers.com.

[108] "Judge Finds No 'Acts of Bad Faith' on Part of Eureka Officials," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, March 16, 1966, 3, Newspapers.com.

nationality who comes here as a visitor is ever treated discourteously or unkindly."[109] Eureka Springs residents wanted the town to be a mecca for all, he explained. He did not directly mention Smith, the antithesis to this, who stuck out like a beacon of hostility next to the statue he created with money made pursuing the opposite. Wayne Leeman, reporter for the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, later approached older attendees about Smith's reputation, but failed to find one who openly associated him with his far-right activities.[110] Even in Bullock's potentially pointed speech, Smith's work was swept under the rug.

Mayor Bullock wanted Eureka Springs to succeed again. He organized beautification initiatives like debris clean-up days. He planted dozens of pink dogwoods in the town's central areas.[111] He desperately pursued federal grants to fund local rejuvenation efforts. The town still had potential for tourism and economic development, and Bullock considered the two codependent. The economic success of decades prior was a worthy goal, but he would have settled merely for some stability. Eureka Springs' financial problems were deepening. The strain fell largely on Bullock, and his relationship with the rest of town reflected it. Gilbert described Bullock as having the rare gift of "leaving very few constituents on the fence" about him.[112] According to another reporter, efforts to end Bullock's "stormy career" were well-underway in the "badly-divided" Eureka Springs.[113] He needed something to show for his efforts. In a battle between economic prospects and moral implications, Bullock stood by Smith's ventures. His

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[109] Wayne Leeman, "Tranquility Marks Dedication of Arkansas 'Christ of the Ozarks," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 28, 1966.
[110] Leeman, "Tranquility Marks Dedication of Arkansas 'Christ of the Ozarks," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.
[111] "Clean-Up Days Set at Eureka Springs," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, March 23, 1966, 19, Newspapers.com.
[112] Allan Gilbert, "Conversations in Eureka," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, May 4, 1966, 19, Newspapers.com.
[113] "Eureka Plans to Appeal Vote Order," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, October 4, 1967, 1, Newspapers.com.

cosign encouraged a new chapter of influence for Smith, but it was too late for Bullock. The next year, a few days after a new petition called for his removal, he resigned as mayor.[114] Eureka Springs-with its new tourist attraction and renewed interest-moved forward without him.

The Smiths promised at length in their pamphlets, press releases, and indeed in the dedication ceremony itself that there would be no commercial aspect to the statue. There would never be an admissions charge, nor souvenirs sold. No donations would be requested.[115] "Even if it destroyed the old age security of Mrs. Smith and myself, which had been guaranteed by inheritances and modest savings," Smith pined in a promotional booklet, "we resolved that, if necessary, everything we possessed would be dedicated to this project."[116] He also promised the general public that the statue was not related to any particular movement, and the grounds would never be used to promote an organization or sect. This was a far cry from the messaging he used with his followers to convince them to donate the funding for it. Smith's crusading qualities faded to timidity, a projection of newfound innocence, in front of Eureka Springs and the press. None of his previous ideologies or plans had changed, but he could let the public believe so if it meant continuing his path. At the dedication ceremony, Elna announced that they were also opening the "Christ Only Art Gallery" in town, which would funnel entry fees to a trust fund in the Bank of Eureka Springs.[117] They were circulating their ideas down from the mountain and into the town, and statues and artwork were only the beginning.

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[114] "Eureka Mayor Unexpectedly Resigns Job," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, October 6, 1967, 1, Newspapers.com

[115] These early tenets, which were widely publicized and seemingly very important to the Smiths, were quickly abandoned with the Passion Play's introduction. Not only were admission tickets introduced, but gift shops began to sell souvenirs, including mini models of the *Christ of the Ozarks* statue.

[116] Gerald L.K. Smith, "The Story of the Statue the Christ of the Ozarks," Booklet, 1967, MC 1412, Box 40, Folder 46, University of Arkansas Libraries, Special Collections, Fayetteville, AR, 26.

[117] Smith, "The Story of the Statue the Christ of the Ozarks," Booklet, University of Arkansas Libraries, 49.

If Smith built *Christ of the Ozarks* for an audience beyond himself, it was for the type of people who financed it and whose names lined the site's bronze donor plaque. He represented the aging, right-wing, white Americans who doled over *The Cross and The Flag*, went to Smith's Christian Nationalism rallies, and sent him concerned letters about race-mixing, communism, and Jews. Smith wanted to associate himself with affluent figures, as his incessant call-backs (and often over-inflated relations) to famous figures like Huey Long or Henry Ford proved. But his support base was the foundation of his work, and he needed to please them. Beyond his faithful adherents, Smith also aimed his creations towards those who would appreciate grand religious gestures, who viewed Christianity as a threatened American value, and might accept Smith as an imperfect champion for it. This description fit the profile of many of the retirees who made up Eureka Springs and the broader Ozarks region when the Smiths dedicated Big Jesus. However, this demographic was almost immediately upended on the young backs of incoming "back-to-the-landers" seeking affordable, rugged solace amongst the old-timers of Eureka Springs. Counterculture was coming.

Present-day Eureka Springs is one of the most progressive places in Arkansas. It is the "Bible Belt's oasis" and "mecca for Ozarkian counterculture."[118] It was one of the first towns in the South, and the first in Arkansas, to issue same-sex marriage licenses.[119] In 2015, the town passed an ordinance to ban discrimination based on categories like race, sexual orientation, and

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[118] Scottie Andrew, "Inside Eureka Springs, the Bible Belt's LGBTQ oasis," *CNN*, June 29, 2022, https://www.cnn.com/2022/06/29/us/eureka-springs-lgbtq-arkansas-town-cec/index.html.
Jared Phillips, *Hipbillies: Deep Revolution in the Arkansas Ozarks* (University of Arkansas Press, 2019), 63.
[119] Doc Louallen, "LGBTQ+ residents find safe haven in Arkansas town steeped in history," *ABC News*, July 2, 2024, https://abcnews.go.com/US/lgbtq-residents-find-safe-haven-arkansas-town-steeped/story?id=111513189.

gender identity. Though larger cities enacted similar ordinances for city employees, Eureka Springs' ordinance uniquely applied to all citizens.[120] Modern residents consider themselves the most diverse community in Arkansas.[121] Politically, they inhabit a consistent blue island in an Ozarkian sea of red.[122] Activist demonstrations for left-leaning causes are common, as Eurekans take to the streets for gender equality, LGBTQ rights, and abortion access.[123] In 2021, a group secretly, just before sunrise, attached a piece of protest art to Big Jesus. They strung a white banner with red lettering, "God bless abortions," across the statue's 65-foot arm span. There was some backlash, but mostly from outside of town. "It is really horrible that you have groups like this who support this level of death in our society today," an Arkansas senator commented, after describing abortion as a crime against humanity.[124] Eureka Springs' mayor was less affected. He noted that he agreed with the pro-choice sentiment but generally discouraged trespassing.[125] The banner was removed, security was added to the statue, and life went on in Eureka Springs. This

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[120] HRC Staff, "Breaking: Eureka Springs Votes to Uphold Ordinance Protecting LGBT Residents," Press release, *The Human Rights Campaign*, May 12, 2015, https://www.hrc.org/press-releases/breaking-eureka-springs-votes-to-uphold-ordinance-protecting-lgbt-residents.

[121] Tom Dart, "Welcome to Eureka Springs, Arkansas: a desirable homosexual destination," *The Guardian*, April 5, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/05/arkansas-religious-gay-discrimination-eureka-springs.

[122] It is worth noting that Eureka Springs' population has failed to turn their county blue for recent presidential elections. In 2016, 2020, and 2024, Donald Trump won in Carroll County.

[123] For example:
Jacqueline Froelich, "Eurekans Protest Political Attacks on Arkansas' Drag and Trans Culture," *KUAF National Public Radio*, February 6, 2023, https://www.kuaf.com/show/ozarks-at-large/2023-02-06/eurekans-protest-political-attacks-on-arkansas-drag-and-trans-culture.
Becky Gillette, "Protesters show solidarity with women's right to choose," *ES Independent*, January 24, 2023, http://eureka.news/protesters-show-solidarity-with-womens-right-to-choose/.

[124] Casey Frizzell, "Activists bring attention to Arkansas abortion laws at Christ of the Ozarks statue," KFSM, Fort Smith, Arkansas, July 9, 2021, https://www.5newsonline.com/article/news/local/abortion-banner-christ-of-the-ozarks-statue-eureka-springs-arkansas-indecline-art-activist-group/527-d31b38be-0bfb-42d6-ae1e-bf680bc5c682.

[125] Mary Jordan, "God bless abortions sign hung on Christ of the Ozarks statue," *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, July 10, 2021, https://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2021/jul/10/god-bless-abortions-sign-hung-on-christ-statue/.

moment of contrast makes sense for the unique mountain town; it fits its reputation. In many ways, that reputation began with Gerald L.K. Smith and the back-to-the-landers.

In the 1960s and 70s, large groups of young people came to the hills of northwestern Arkansas to homestead. If they did not know how, they tried to learn as they went. The mission was to live in simplicity and be more self-sufficient, and the Ozarks were an ideal setting for this. The region was still reputed as being archaic, quiet, and hidden. Walmart and Tyson were steadily spreading, but their effects had not yet overturned outside perceptions. The inexpensive hill-land was not farmable enough to sell in large swaths, but it was enough for an individual or small commune to envision living on. The BTL movement extended across the United States and found different experiences in every region. In northwestern Arkansas, the movement might have romanticized a unique opportunity for new, separate lives, away from wartime stress, corporate greed, consumerism, and pollution. The Ozarks were already a popular destination for retirees seeking similar escape from a perceived outside world. Born-and-raised Ozarkians, who might have considered themselves "real hill-folk," remained, too. These groups intermingling in the 1960s produced what *The New York Times* described as a "spectacle of long-haired refugees from the urban middle class living in peace and mutual admiration along old-fashioned farmers," in the Ozarks and beyond.[126] In the hills surrounding Eureka Springs, this coexistence was more complicated and bound more by desperate necessity than mutual respect.

Farming is difficult. Popular stereotypes arose about the lazy, drugged-out hippies in the BTL movement, but regardless of work ethic, living off the land is challenging, and more so if you have limited prior experience. Many back-to-the-landers were young, middle-class, and from

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[126] Roy Reed, "Back-to-Land Movement Seeks Self-Sufficiency," *New York Times*, June 9, 1975, 1, https://www.nytimes.com/1975/06/09/archives/backtoland-movement-seeks-selfsufficiency-the-growing-backtotheland.html.

large cities, with identifiable long hair and untrained hands.[127] They faced the trials of self-sufficiency with varied success. For many, the experiment ended when their savings depleted. For others, not content to uproot, time with the land gradually became time in town, looking for work. Townspeople in Eureka Springs became well aware of their new separatist neighbors. Many worked together, oscillating between the limited small-town, money-making opportunities. There were little shops, restaurants, a clinic, and the old hotels. None of it was particularly profitable, and both locals and newcomers felt the strain. The draw of the Ozarks may have been isolation and underdevelopment. However, newcomers struggled under the realization that these appeals were also symptoms of economic starvation. For Eureka Springs, renewed economic success still seemed to rest on what worked in the beginning. Unknowingly, the back-to-the-landers had removed themselves from regular society only to occupy what would soon be the largest tourist attraction in Arkansas.

Gerald L.K. Smith was predictably unimpressed with hippies. When they first settled into town, he avoided them. The first threat was in the mornings, when he had his chauffer and bodyguard, Michael Mountjoy, drive him into town to have breakfast. The streets were as winding and perilous as ever, perhaps more so with the newfound tourist traffic. Smith observed the passerby's beyond his car window. When he saw someone he considered offensive-long hair, youthful attire-he felt uncomfortable. "Speed up, driver," he would tell Mountjoy.[128] Smith promoted conspiracies about secret, incoming evils in the United States, but counterculture was a visible, tangible problem for him to catastrophize over. In early December 1968, he penned a

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[127] Phillips, *Hipbillies*, 22.
[128] John F. Cross, interview with the author, July 18, 2024.
Roy Reed, "Freaks Meet the Crusader," *San Antonio Express-News*, September 8, 1972, 31, Newspapers.com.

letter where he lamented birth control and described the 1960s as a dark moment in history: "so dark that only a miracle can save us."[129] "I sometimes think that God will use the atom bomb to thin us out the way he used the flood," he concluded. "It is my hope that he will remember that I was on the right side."[130] From this place of perceived superiority, Smith watched the so-called "long-hair takeover" of Eureka Springs.[131] He was ideologically opposed to their new-age ideals of brotherhood, love, peace, and charity.[132] However, for what was to come, he needed to more than coexist with them. He needed their labor.

At the end of 1966, Smith conceptualized a lofty construction on the hilltop adjacent to *Christ of the Ozarks*. He sent out donation requests to his followers and designated a minimum gift of a thousand dollars.[133] It was a worthwhile payment, he urged, to keep alive an all-important sacred story.[134] Smith wanted to produce a version of the Passion Play, a religious performance depicting Jesus Christ's last week on earth. He envisioned it as a popular, recurring attraction that could utilize its central location in the country to reach hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people. He also saw it as another, large-scale platform to share his antisemitic beliefs. His announcement promised no dilution or deletion of his interpretation of the dramatic Biblical tale.[135] He wanted his followers to know that a major motivating factor for the play was to portray the Jews as responsible for Christ's death. By donating, they would help thwart "the

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[129] Gerald L.K. Smith to L.E. Marshall, December 5, 1968, Box 62, Folder: "1968, M (4)," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[130] Smith to Marshall, December 5, 1968, University of Michigan.
[131] Letter to the editor, "The Long-Hair Takeover," *Eureka Springs Times-Echo*, March 29, 1973, Eureka Springs Carnegie Library, Special Collections.
[132] Letter to the editor, "The Long-Hair Takeover," *Eureka Springs Times-Echo*.
[133] Charles Robertson, promotional letter, ND, Box 61, Folder: "1966 (fragments), Smith (E.M.) Foundation," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[134] Charles Robertson to Richard Thompson, July 25, 1967, Box 61, Folder: "1966 (fragments), Smith (E.M.) Foundation," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[135] Allan Gilbert, "Just in Time for Easter," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, March 16, 1967, 11, Newspapers.com.

organized Jews responsible for the crucifixion of Christ," and continue Smith's decades-long crusade.[136] He scheduled a groundbreaking ceremony and banquet for May 1967, regardless of donation turnout. He was likely confident that his followers would support the mission. A new Passion Play, with an "emphasis on the Jews-killed-Jesus theme," seemed a perfect fruition of their decades-long support of Christian Nationalism, antisemitism, and public controversy.[137] Smith's paying followers were seemingly easy to convince because they already aligned with his mission. The rest of the country, though, including Eureka Springs itself, would be harder to win over.

Before the play even premiered, it garnered criticism. When the Arkansas Council of Churches met that year, its executive secretary John Norton Williams voiced concern about Smith's plans. He described the man as a "prophet of discord," whose Passion Play would surely garner "animosity toward the Jews."[138] The council agreed to adopt a stance against Smith and against antisemitism. The *Northwest Arkansas Times* intercepted one of Smith's donation request letters, where he openly described his intentions for the production. Gilbert published the details right before Easter and asked his audience to consider the effect that Smith's interference would have on local image.[139] Letters back to the editor admonished the project, calling it appalling and nonsensical. "Let those few who misguidedly may hope to 'cash in' on this enterprise know that we shall not contribute even one mite to their 30 pieces of silver by either subsidizing the project or by attending a performance," one reader wrote.[140] When the *Arkansas Gazette* followed with a

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[136] Gordon H. McNeil, letter to the editor, *Northwest Arkansas Times*, March 25, 1967, 5, Newspapers.com.
[137] McNeil, *Northwest Arkansas Times*, 5.
[138] "Churches Unity is Discussed," *The El Dorado Times*, January 30, 1968, 6, Newspapers.com.
[139] Allan Gilbert, "Just in Time for Easter," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, March 16, 1967, 11, Newspapers.com.
[140] McNeil, *Northwest Arkansas Times*, 5.

similarly apprehensive article, Smith sent them a critical letter. "You refer to the Statue and the Passion Play as memorials to my name, which, of course, is not correct," he wrote.[141] He then became accusatory. The fault was really theirs, not his, he claimed. The papers had been advertising his connection to the projects since he began them, while he had attempted to publicly subdue it. "Thousands of people would not know that I had any interest in the enterprise if it had not been for your highly critical editorials," he concluded.[142] The media had made the local public well-aware of Smith, his plans, and the intentions behind them, but it was up to them how to respond.

After announcing the Passion Play, Smith wrote the *Eureka Springs Times-Echo* to urge local citizens to focus on their newfound and increasing economic boom. Over one million people had already visited the statue, he claimed, and countless more would come for the play.[143] Eureka Springs was going to experience a degree of popularity unheard of in Arkansas.[144] It was something to rejoice over, and profit from. Longtime locals would benefit from a renewed tourism economy, with new money coming into their restaurants, stores, and hotels. This created a chance for economic gain for unemployed newcomers, too, including at Smith's new enterprise. The nightly Passion Play required a cast of hundreds of characters, animal handlers, ticket booth attendees, and maintenance workers. Smith was eager to extend his perceived incoming prosperity to locals not only to win their favor, but because he did not have a choice. He needed their help. Fortunately for Smith, the need was mutual.

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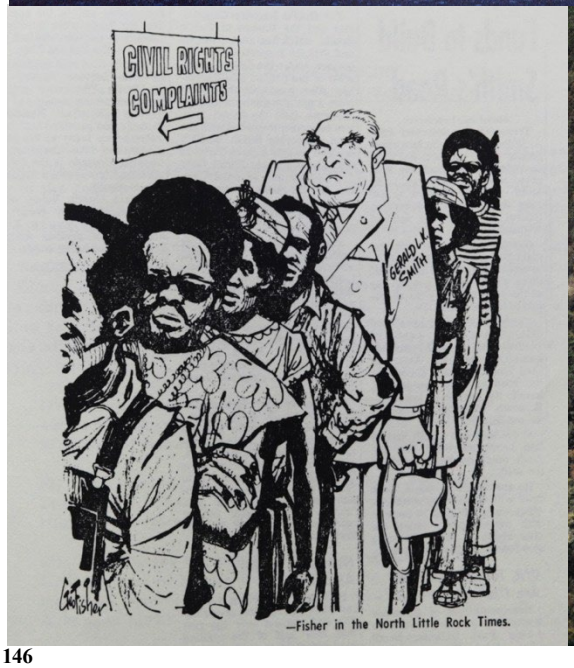
[141] Gerald L.K. Smith to *Arkansas Gazette*, April 6, 1967, Box 61, Folder: "1966 (fragments), Smith (E.M.) Foundation," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[142] Smith to *Arkansas Gazette*, April 6, 1967, University of Michigan.
[143] Ted Wylie, "Local Line," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, November 21, 1967, 4, Newspapers.com.
[144] Allan Gilbert, "Time for Planning," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, July 11, 1968, 11, Newspapers.com.

The back-to-the-landers, increasingly coming to town from their mountainous homesteads, were desperate for supplemental income. It was the key to finding some longevity in the area, and to keep their communities from floundering under the economic stress of their unique lifestyles. Smith, ever as controversial and hateful as they knew he was, offered them an opportunity to stay in the area and survive. His projects promised economic revival. They just needed to be willing to overlook their differences and agree to collaborate. Otherwise progressive residents could work with Smith and enhance his mission for the purpose of their own hopeful financial gain. Though he disliked and did not respect the hippies, Smith would hire them because he needed their cheap labor to continue bringing his projects to life. This offering-a mutual compromise of values for separate but interdependent outcomes-would define the two groups into the next decade, in what *The New York Times* described as a very uncertain détente.[145]

[145] Roy Reed, "Hippies and Gerald L.K. Smith Make Ozark Resort Town a Model of Coexistence," *The New York Times*, July 27, 1972, 33, https://www.nytimes.com/1972/07/27/archives/hippies-and-gerald-l-k-smith-make-ozark-resort-town-a-model-of.html.



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[146] Images of *Christ of the Ozarks*, dates and photographers unspecified, courtesy of The Great Passion Play's webpage, greatpassionplay.org.
Political cartoon, courtesy Billy James Hargis Papers, Box 40, Folder 46, University of Arkansas Libraries Special Collections, Fayetteville, AR.
"Eureka Springs, Arkansas," Photographer unknown, N.D., Gerald L.K. Smith Papers, File "Eureka Springs, Arkansas-Passion Play," Box 100, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

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Compromise and Consequence

Despite his public appeals, Gerald L.K. Smith's ventures into Christian tourism were not a pivot from his far-right activities but merely an extension. His anti-Semitic production of the Passion Play in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, confirmed this suspicion for some, but its success threatened to overshadow Smith's intentions. To his opponents, which included the region's Anti-Defamation League, a local anti-Smith coalition, and reporters across the country, Smith's Christian projects were not an absolution from his lifetime of bigotry. They were another medium for him to publicize his beliefs. And to their alarm, the Passion Play was an incredibly popular medium. Smith's production of it eventually witnessed hundreds of thousands of attendees every season; it became the biggest tourist attraction in the state and the most popular outdoor play in the country.[147] Tourists poured into Eureka Springs' already-crowded townscape in even greater numbers than the once-boomtown was built for. The crooked streets and Victorian buildings were full again, and business was booming. In the decade after Smith's arrival, Eureka Springs' economy expanded from less than $1 million to nearly $15 million.[148] As the line between support and opposition for Smith's projects grew starker, it was clear what was at stake for the people of Eureka Springs: a stand against Smith or an economic revival.

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[147] Dennis Schick, "Great Passion Play," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, Central Arkansas Library System, https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/great-passion-play-5651/.
Suzi Parker, "Once-popular Arkansas Passion Play of Jesus' life closes," *Today*, December 6, 2012, https://www.today.com/news/once-popular-arkansas-passion-play-jesus-life-closes-wbna50106048.
[148] Brooks Blevins, *Hill Folks: A History of Arkansas Ozarkers and Their Image* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 241.

Smith described his projects as gifts to humanity.[149] Though public opinions of Big Jesus' aesthetic outcome were mostly negative, the persistence Smith extended to bring the statue to life demonstrated his seriousness for the shrine. He explained these feelings in a letter to Robertson, his right-hand man, about landscaping at the statue. Even "little eccentric whims," he explained, like a plot of grass, become paramount when someone "is giving away about everything he has and has nothing to live for except beauty and inspiring sights."[150] Smith was nearing 70 years old when he announced his version of the Passion Play, one of his life's most ambitious projects. He wrote his secretary Renata that he was determined to keep working and die in his boots.[151] "I have a horror," he admitted, "of becoming one of those glass-eyed old men wandering around, trying to figure out what to do."[152] After unveiling *Christ of the Ozarks*, Smith did not waste time immersing himself into the Passion Play's development. It was a massive undertaking, but he wanted it that way. He also continued to write and publish *The Cross and the Flag* and solicit donations from his subscribers to support the new project. After typing up his typical hate speech against African Americans, immigrants, homosexuals, communists, feminists, and Jews, Smith thanked his followers for supporting his Christian mission.

Though some uneasy eyes were already on Smith, a violent plot in June 1968, one month before the Passion Play debuted, increased concerns about his influence. In southeastern Mississippi, a twenty-six-year-old Klanswoman named Kathy Ainsworth, alongside an additional assailant, attempted to murder a Jewish community leader and vocal civil rights supporter at his

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[149] Gerald L.K. Smith, "The Great Passion Play and Allied Sacred Projects," souvenir program, n.d., Eureka Springs Carnegie Library, Special Collections, Eureka Springs, AR.
[150] Gerald L.K. Smith to Charles Robertson, Memo, March 16, 1970, Box 68, Folder: "1970: Robertson, Charles F," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[151] Gerald L.K. Smith to Renata Legant, Memo, January 6, 1972, Box 78, Folder: "1974: M (3)," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[152] Smith to Legant, memo, January 6, 1972.

home. Unbeknownst to the pair, law enforcement agencies awaited them there. Before they could successfully plant their bomb on the intended victim's residence, police officers opened fire and killed Ainsworth. Aided by her standing as a white, Christian woman and pregnant schoolteacher, Ainsworth became a martyr figure for many far-right, white supremacist groups.[153] To others, she was a cautionary tale of the dangers of violent extremism. In Ainsworth's purse, she reportedly carried a pistol, a calling card for the Klan, and a tract from Smith and his Christian Nationalist Crusade.[154] Ainsworth had also reportedly travelled to see Smith's shrines in Arkansas, first with her mother and then again for her honeymoon.[155] The ADL found this association equally fitting and disturbing, and would reference it in their opposition to Smith's continued success in northwestern Arkansas. Smith's business was bigotry, they insisted, and his influence was dangerous.[156]

Less than two months after Ainsworth's death, *Esquire* published an interview with Smith in which he proudly rebuked notions of retirement and detailed his daily work routine. John Fergus Ryan, the interviewer, noticed Smith's delight in self-describing his extensive publications as propaganda. "He boasts that he has been instrumental in organizing more than seventeen hundred right-wing groups in this country," reported Ryan.[157] He went on to ask Smith

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[153] William Robert Billups, "Martyred Women and White Power since the Civil Rights Era: From Kathy Ainsworth to Vicki Weaver," *Journal of American History*, Volume 109, Issue 4, March 2023, Pages 804–827, https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jaad002.

[154] Leonard Greenwood, "Cleric says Bombing Suspects Worked Closely with Ku Klux Klan," *The Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 1968, p. 12.
A.I. Botnick, "The Business of Bigotry," n.d., Box 4, File 1, Gerald L.K. Smith Materials: 1954-1963, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville, AR, 3.

[155] Michele R. Johnson, "Women of Intention: Women in the Ku Klux Klan and Massive Resistance, 1954-1968," August 2019, Dissertation, University of Arkansas, 120, https://scholarworks.uark.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4890&context=etd.

[156] Botnick, "The Business of Bigotry," 3.

[157] John Fergus Ryan, "Twilight Years of a Kindly Old Hatesmith," *Esquire*, August 1968, Box 40: Series 2, File 46, Billy James Hargis Papers, University of Arkansas Libraries, Special Collections, Fayetteville, AR.

if the *Christ of the Ozarks* statue and the Passion Play were his focus now, but Smith replied no, not at all. "My main concern is the Christian Nationalist Crusade."[158] Yet, his number of paid subscribers to *The Cross and the Flag* hovered around 30,000-a concerning number for the subject material, but not a mass audience.[159] He had a much larger reach with his new projects. Vans and buses full of tourists, church groups, and wandering Christians were already arriving in droves to the Big Jesus statue. Though Smith claimed to be more focused on his crusade than his religious projects, the coming popularity of the Passion Play made it logical for him to want to combine the two. People who had never, and likely *would* never, have touched one of Smith's fringe publications would soon fill the thousands of auditorium seats to witness whatever vision he conspired to give them.

Smith chose Robert Hyde, an aspiring stage and movie man, to help direct the project. Hyde was critical to its success in many aspects. He directed the construction of the 400-foot stage and the various settings raised on it: the streets of Jerusalem, the temple, the Garden of Gethsemane, Golgotha's Hill. He helped acquire the sound and lighting equipment. He hired the first 200 cast members and recorded them reading their lines. Projecting the tape in the auditorium for each performance, he told Smith, would ensure a good performance; all the actors had to do was mime along.[160] Hyde himself took on the most critical role, Jesus Christ. Smith voiced his complete confidence in Hyde's capabilities and in the script they created. Unlike in other versions of the Passion Play, Smith's production, which he deemed *The Great Passion Play*, would not be subdued by "Jewish pressure."[161] He made it an immersive spectacle. The

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[158] Ryan, "Twilight Years of a Kindly Old Hatesmith," *Esquire.*
[159] Botnick, "The Business of Bigotry," 3.
[160] Jeansonne, 193.
[161] Thomas R. Moster, "A Comparison of the Staging of the Passion Plays of Oberammergau, Germany, and Mount Oberammergau, U.S.A.," December 1971, Thesis, North Texas State University, https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc798410/m2/1/high_res_d/1002773915-Moster.pdf, 55.

costumes were elaborate and hand tailored. He gathered donkeys, sheep, goats, doves, horses, and even camels for the show. Music and dialogue poured from the speakers. The hillside auditorium's thousands of seats wrapped around the stage and peered into the show, the tree line, and Big Jesus beyond.

The play opened on Sunday, July 14, 1968. A rainstorm delayed the start by a few minutes, and only a quarter of the seats were full. Regardless, the show left an impression. The *Northwest Arkansas Times* admitted that at the two-and-a-half-hour runtime's conclusion, "it was obvious" that Smith had a "tourist bonanza" on his hands.[162] They reiterated this sentiment a couple of months later, after thousands more people had come to witness for themselves. "It has been a smash hit with the general public," they wrote, even despite the "element of anti-Semitism in the theme."[163] A later director deduced that the original script contained three-parts direct scriptural quotes and one-part "creative writing."[164] As opponents predicted, it posited Christ's execution as the demand of the Jewish people. The script depicted them asserting malevolence and blood lust upon the innocent, unwilling Roman leaders to achieve their much-desired crucifixion. They cheered an iteration of the controversial line from Matthew 27:25, "His blood is on us! And on our children!" before Hyde, playing Christ, was led off to suffer and die.[165] His burial, then resurrection, then ascension followed. The play's conclusion centered on a clear triumph both over death and over the story's Jewish villains.

Smith was elated by the project's early success and the message it conveyed. In response to one supporter's letter and donation, he described the fraught path to prevail over real and

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[162] John R. Starr, "Rain Reduces Crowd at Passion Play Premier," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, July 15, 1968, 13, Newspapers.com.
[163] "Eureka!" *Northwest Arkansas Times*, October 8, 1968, 4, Newspapers.com.
[164] Robert Hyde, "The Gift of God," Script, August 19, 1966, Note by Ken Faulkner, 1, https://greatpassionplay.org/uploads/1/5/6/5/15651412/great_passion_play_script_1966.pdf.
[165] Robert Hyde, "The Gift of God," 45.

imagined enemies. “The enterprises in Eureka Springs are so tremendous,” he wrote, “that it finally broke through in spite of the Jewish sabotage and their attempt to quarantine our efforts and downgrade our tribute to Jesus Christ.”[166] He was eager to posit the play as a major victory for Christian Nationalism and anti-Semitism, but wrongfully assumed that early visitors came because they agreed with these beliefs. Most of the families, church groups, couples, and other interested parties presumably travelled there because they were interested in watching a large-scale, dramatic production about Jesus Christ. It was one of the largest of its kind, and a nearby location for believing residents of the Bible Belt region. The performance portrayed their faith’s pinnacle moment, albeit through Smith’s untrustworthy lens, in an exciting, tangible way. It was a mutual exchange. Christian tourists were able to enjoy a meaningful, spiritual theater experience, and Smith was allowed to feel as though he was finally winning his crusade.

Night after night on the hillside, Smith peered out from his box seat on the front row, where he chatted with spectators and occasionally signed autographs.[167] One night, historian and future Archivist of the United States, Robert Warner, joined him. Warner, still early in his career, was working with Smith in the hopes of securing his life’s materials for the University of Michigan’s Bentley Historical Library, where he was the new director. He wrote: “I could not help but think, particularly in witnessing the scenes of the trial of Christ before the Sanhedrin and the language used there, that Smith envisioned himself in his career as parallel to Christ in this situation.”[168] Warner and the other spectators watched as the drama unfolded. The sunset shone in the view beyond and illuminated Big Jesus. In darkness, ground lights lit up the square,

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[166] Gerald L.K. Smith to Helen Wright, November 18, 1971, Box 71, Folder: “1971: W (4),” Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[167] Jeansonne, footnote 35, 262.
[168] Robert M. Warner, Report, September 12, 1967, Box 94, Folder: “Impressions recorded by J. Fraser Cocks (Sept. 12, 1967) and Dr. Robert M. Warner (June 28, 1969),” Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, 6.

white statue's foundation, next to the plot where Smith planned to someday be buried. By the show's nighttime end, the spot shone. One "long-haired," or countercultural, actor described seeing the *Christ of the Ozarks*, illuminated and floating above all else, as a ubiquitous reminder of *The Great Passion Play* and the back-to-the-landers' possibilities of "making enough next summer to get through the winter months."[169] It was a visual recall to the economic dependency that tied them to Smith.

Though not in the play himself, Smith was always its largest celebrity. Due to the "sacred nature of the production," Smith reported that all cast members, besides Hyde, wanted to remain anonymous in their participation.[170] Though he clarified that they were local people, they were unnamed and underpaid, if paid at all. At first, Smith claimed that participants' percentages of the play's profits should be donated to a church or charity organization.[171] Meager salaries replaced this idea. Based on their role, actors were paid anywhere from $1.50 to $8.50 for a night's performance.[172] Besides keeping his payroll slim, Smith might have hoped that the low pay would have motivated a certain kind of participant: Christian, charitable, and involved for the sake of the cause, not for monetary gain. This may have been the case for some participants, but many were motivated by desperation rather than a spiritual calling. Eurekans largely survived on an unpredictable collective income-whatever money could be made from their tourist economy. Odd, part-time, and seasonal jobs were standard. Smith's enterprise represented

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[169] "Goodbye Eureka," *Down Home*, April 1973, Eureka Springs Carnegie Library, Special Collections, Eureka Springs, AR, 4.
[170] Thomas R. Moster, "A Comparison of the Staging of the Passion Plays of Oberammergau, Germany, and Mount Oberammergau, U.S.A.," December 1971, Thesis, North Texas State University, https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc798410/m2/1/high_res_d/1002773915-Moster.pdf, 175.
[171] Robert M. Warner, Report, September 12, 1967, Box 94, Folder: "Impressions recorded by J. Fraser Cocks (Sept. 12, 1967) and Dr. Robert M. Warner (June 28, 1969)," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, 4.
[172] Jeansonne, 194.

another economic thread and another opportunity to get by. From early on, the economic revitalization Eureka Springs expected Smith to bring was not equally rewarding.

In *To Serve God and Walmart*, Bethany Moreton described Eureka Springs as a thriving capital of mid-twentieth century Christian tourism, nestled fittingly into its broader spiritual geography in the Ozarks.[173] However, the town's method of development harshly strained its resources. Institutions that had once focused on local needs changed their priorities to serve and profit from the tourist revitalization. In a few years, housing availability was down, and costs went up. In 1969, a reporter for *The New Yorker* interviewed a real estate agent in town who allegedly said he would not have complained if the Devil himself came to town if only he brought all of the business and money to it as Smith had.[174] But his benefit was another's burden. In *Down Home*, the town's underground, countercultural magazine, an anonymous writer condemned the new housing market's barriers to finding somewhere affordable to live, noting that they and others were now homeless.[175] Whether or not the "powers that be" recognized it, they wrote, Eureka Springs' economy now relied on its back-to-the-lander population and the exploitation of their cheap labor and temporary employment.[176] To deny them a decent living and place to stay in the name of greed was "the height of unChristianess," but it seemed to be the incoming standard.[177] "Think about what we have to lose if this town becomes even more the

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[173] Bethany Moreton, *To Serve God and Walmart: The Making of Christian Free Enterprise* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 94.
[174] Calvin Trillin, "The Sacred Project," *The New Yorker,* July 26, 1969, Eureka Springs Carnegie Library, Special Collections, Eureka Springs, AR, 79.
[175] *Down Home*, August 15, 1972, Eureka Springs Carnegie Library, Special Collections, Eureka Springs, AR, 6.
[176] *Down Home*, August 15, 1972, 6.
[177] *Down Home*, August 15, 1972, 6.

Disneyland of the Ozarks," another contributor wrote. "Eureka Springs is fast becoming what a lot of us came to get away from."[178] The tourism stream was only growing stronger.

In its formative years, annual Passion Play attendance rates multiplied rapidly, from less than 30,000 in 1968 to nearly 130,000 in 1972 and over 180,000 in 1975, "even improving in 1973, the year of the gasoline crisis, the only tourist attraction in Arkansas to do so."[179] As Brooks Blevins notes in *Hill Folks*, Smith's status as an engineer of prosperity in the region helped shield him from his otherwise rocky relations with locals.[180] *The New Yorker* pointed out with some surprise that it was not unusual for the same residents who condemned Smith as a hatemonger to also appear in his controversial play.[181] This sort of compromise even turned to praise at some points. In 1969, the Eureka Springs Chamber of Commerce voted to publicly honor the Smiths for their impact on town. The chamber had a number of new faces; about half of its members were recent residents who relocated and started businesses in Eureka Springs after Smith's projects began.[182] The new president, Gordon Kennett, owned a motel in town. "Anyone in the motel or restaurant business can tell the nights when the Passion Play is not presented," he said. "Those are the nights when we have vacancies."[183] The chamber's proposed recognition was a formal thank-you to Smith for this economic gain.

Georgia Ziffzer, the town treasurer, was horrified. She voted against the notion but was defeated twelve-to-two. [184] In response, she resigned from the chamber and planned to continue

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[178] "Goodbye Eureka," *Down Home*, April 1973, 5.
[179] Jeansonne, *Gerald L.K. Smith*, 195.
[180] Blevins, *Hill Folks: A History of Arkansas Ozarkers and Their Image*, 241.
[181] Trillin, "The Sacred Project," 79.
[182] John R. Starr, "The Ozark Town Gerald Smith Turned Into a Tourist Mecca," *Detroit Free Press*, November 7, 1971, Box 70, Folder: "Newspaper clippings," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, n.p.
[183] Starr, "The Ozark Town Gerald Smith Turned Into a Tourist Mecca," *Detroit Free Press*, n.p.
[184] Ernest Dumas, "Little Ozark Town Awakening to Gerald L.K. Smith's Grip," *San Bernadino County Sun*, December 5, 1969, 35, Newspapers.com.

to organize outside of it. The local press, keeping their usual close eye on Smith's Arkansas dealings, quickly picked up on the story. "Mrs. Ziffzer says she feels there are values above and beyond a bit of better business, long-range values of conscience and integrity," the *Northwest Arkansas Times* reported.[185] The 57-year-old, "little grey-haired widow," as multiple reports described her, provided a press-statement that she was "impelled by a deep sense of moral obligation" to oppose Gerald L.K. Smith's growing influence in Eureka Springs. [186] She was starting to track a new avenue of how to do it, too. As *The Great Passion Play* continued to grow, there was an emerging crack in Smith's plans for the future.

In 1969, Smith received a funding agreement to pay for an enhanced, asphalted road up to his "sacred projects."[187] He later claimed that he needed to be convinced, over the course of three long-distance calls to his other home in California, that the road was worth tearing through more of the mountain's forest.[188] In a different letter, he claimed that the decision was made almost without his knowledge, based on the county's desire for an improved road, not his.[189] The goal of the road project was to provide a more even, reliable path up the mountain for the thousands of automobiles now making the trek to see his work. Similar to how hordes of the sick and hopeful had journeyed to town in the century before, busloads of eager Christians now poured in and out of Eureka Springs to see Smith's shrines, and he (or the county, as he claimed) wanted them to be as accessible as possible. Whereas Smith's previous endeavors relied on private fundraising, this new initiative was uniquely public. The Ozarks Regional Commission, a

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[185] "Seeing It Like It Is," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, November 1, 1969, 4, Newspapers.com.
[186] Ernest Dumas, "Eureka Springs Now Showing Alarm at Influence of Gerald L.K. Smith," *Nashua Telegraph*, December 3, 1969, 11, Newspapers.com.
[187] Jeansonne, 203.
[188] Gerald L.K. Smith to Editor, Voice of the People, October 22, 1970, Box 92, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, 2.
[189] Gerald L.K. Smith to Mary Jordan, December 9, 1969, Box 67, Folder: "1970: J," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

commission designed to promote economic growth in the region, and the U.S. Department of Transportation agreed to set aside $182,000 of federal funds for the project's completion. One of the leaders of the Ozarks Regional Commission, and presumably a driver in the decision-making process, was Arkansas' governor, Winthrop Rockefeller.

The *Arkansas Gazette* in Little Rock expressed shock that these agencies and the governor would promote, even for the sake of profitable tourism, the work of the "most notorious anti-Semite in the United States."[190] The article questioned whether Governor Rockefeller had fully contemplated his involvement in this decision and if he had read an issue of *The Cross and the Flag* recently.[191] In response, Smith wrote a lengthy letter to the editor on the principles of freedom and civil rights, and the rightfulness of the road. "You cannot say that those who favored the road were blind," Smith argued, because the press had already previously published numerous articles meant to "warn, awaken, and stimulate the people to think less" of him.[192] They knew who he was, and yet they decided to work with him, just as Eureka Springs had already decided. Smith presumed that the press should abide by the public's decisions. Besides, he argued, "the real purpose of the road was to give work to the unemployed and the economically handicapped in the Ozark area."[193] He was merely trying to benefit, once more, the poor people of the region he descended on, and his opponents were threatening to ruin his acts of Christian charity.

After responding to the newspaper, Smith penned a letter to Rockefeller. It was a few days before Christmas, and Smith was writing from his home base in California. He must have

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[190] "A New Partner for G.L.K. Smith," *Arkansas Gazette*, December 5, 1969, Box 40: Series 2, File 46, Billy James Hargis Papers, University of Arkansas Libraries, Special Collections, Fayetteville, AR, 21.
[191] "A New Partner for G.L.K. Smith," 21.
[192] Gerald L.K. Smith to Editor, Voice of the People, 3.
[193] Gerald L.K. Smith to Editor, Voice of the People, 3.

considered it urgent. Besides the quick condemnation from the state's press, Smith worried about who else might organize against him. "This [funding] will give the Jews and the Anti-Defamation League and the enemies of Christ something to vibrate about," he lamented to a supporter.[194] Smith needed Rockefeller and the rest of the commission to not rescind the proposed agreement. In his letter, he congratulated the governor on his apparent objectivity in setting aside funds for the road improvements.[195] He promised not to make any public statements using Rockefeller's name. "I am a controversial figure and I realize it," he said, but further assured that allowing the funding was the right decision and good for the governor's overall public image.[196] When Rockefeller took office, he was the first Republican in Arkansas to do so in nearly a century. He faced a challenging Democratic political machine and a state population burned by a decade of Orval Faubus. Smith might have hoped that these existing challenges would distract Rockefeller from the incoming dissent about the commission's decision to fund the road.

In late February of 1970, Georgia Ziffzer met with Governor Rockefeller at the state capital.[197] The journey south to Little Rock from her Spring Street, Eureka Springs, apartment was tedious, but she wanted to talk to him in person. He allotted her thirty minutes, a small fraction of her travel time, but she was confident that she could get her point across.[198] Ziffzer was prepared, and this was just the latest iteration of her efforts. Her local anti-Smith coalition had developed a small mail campaign to help injure Smith's influence. They routinely met at

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[194] Gerald L.K. Smith to Mary Jordan.
[195] Gerald L.K. Smith to Winthrop Rockefeller, December 22, 1969, Box 65, Folder: "1969: R (3)," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, 1.
[196] Gerald L.K. Smith to Winthrop Rockefeller, 1.
[197] Georgia Ziffzer to James Powell, February 19, 1970, Box 24, File 14, University of Arkansas Libraries, Special Collections, Fayetteville, AR.
[198] Georgia Ziffzer to James Powell.

Ziffzer's place with members of the regional ADL branch and the ACLU. She corresponded extensively with Jack Anderson for his "Washington Merry-Go-Round" column, and with James Powell, editor, and Ginger Shiras, investigative reporter, of the *Arkansas Gazette*. She provided all with information on Smith's activities in Eureka Springs, including copies of his newsletters, which bolstered their frequent reports on the situation. She was deeply concerned about the City Council. She heard rumors that scarcely any of its previous members planned to run again for office, and that multiple staunch Smith supporters were running to take their places.[199] She hoped to organize oppositional candidates to prevent a city government take-over. Ziffzer was a local face of opposition to Smith, and her efforts carried onward to public and institutional decisions.

Smith often portrayed himself as someone not easily upset by detractors and their criticism. Over the course of his long, controversial career, he became accustomed to being ill-received by most people. However, the confrontation surrounding the federal road project seemed to especially bother him and become a point of obsession. When addressing his followers, Smith attributed the funding's potential demise as the would-be result of a covert, far-reaching Jewish conspiracy-the same as he usually deduced-rather than the efforts of a local opponent. Smith seemingly avoided directly referencing Ziffzer's specific criticisms to his followers or to the press altogether. Describing himself as a veteran in fending off personal attacks, and noting their gendered differences, Smith stated: "it would be an unchivalrous thing to even comment on the statements of the woman."[200] Instead, he sent out a newsletter which claimed that eleven Jewish organizations around the world were the real cause for the backlash

[199] Georgia Ziffzer to James Powell, April 28, 1970, Box 24, File 14, University of Arkansas Libraries, Special Collections, Fayetteville, AR.
[200] Dumas, "Eureka Springs Now Showing Alarm at Influence of Gerald L.K. Smith," 11.

and asked for financial donations to help expose the conspiracy. [201] He asked that supporters make their checks payable to "Gerald L.K. Smith, Civil Rights Fund."[202] This particular genre of newsletter was one that Ziffzer intercepted and sent to her connections. Upon hearing Smith's claims, Jack Anderson corrected the anti-Semitic assertions in his column, presumably referring to Georgia Ziffzer. "[Smith] fumed that a conspiracy of 'organized Jews' had killed his pet project. Actually," Anderson wrote, "this column was tipped of the project by a Protestant in Arkansas."[203]

In the summer of 1970, the road funding reached a final hurdle. Winthrop Rockefeller met with the U.S. Department of Transportation as one of the representatives of the Ozarks Regional Commission. Their central concern was whether to go ahead or halt the funds for the project in Eureka Springs. In the beginning, they had agreed that the road would be beneficial for the Ozarks' economy, the central purpose of the ORC, and that Smith's unpopularity was not grounds to cancel. However, public scrutiny strained their decision. Rockefeller reportedly admitted that he was privately opposed to the road, but did not want to take a public position "for fear of antagonizing the local interests."[204] His federal co-chairman, E.L. Stewart, condemned Smith but expressed similar hesitancy to cancel the funding. The final decision fell to John Volpe, the Secretary of Transportation. Volpe had recently resigned in his second term as the governor of Massachusetts to accept this appointment. He was focused on implementing a

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[201] Gerald L.K. Smith, Newsletter, June 24, 1970, Box 24, File 14, University of Arkansas Libraries, Special Collections, Fayetteville, AR, 1-2.
[202] Gerald L.K. Smith, Newsletter, 2.
[203] Jack Anderson, "Bigot Loses $182,000," *Red Bluff Tehama County Daily News*, June 20, 1970, 4, Newspapers.com.
Smith would later rant: "There is no way to answer the lies of Jack Anderson. He is an agent of the ADL. He is a notorious liar and there are many people who believe he is even a blackmailer." Gerald L.K. Smith to Wm. R. Scott, February 12, 1973, Box 76, Folder: "1973: S (1)," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[204] Anderson, "Bigot Loses $182,000," 4.

government-subsidized passenger rail system in the United States, though the idea was politically unpopular.[205] The Smith issue, and particularly its pipeline to negative press, might have created a simple decision for him. After their meeting, Volpe sent orders to the department's Federal Highway Administration to kill the funding.[206]

Smith was livid. He wrote to the *Northwest Arkansas Times* that "political and religious bigots" were denying him his civil rights because of his "particular type of Christian faith."[207] He threatened legal action. He paid for a full-page advertisement in Eureka Spring's local newspaper that detailed the injustices he faced.[208] Back in Little Rock, Governor Rockefeller held a press conference. He said that he did not endorse Smith's ideas but was still sorry to hear that the road funding was cancelled; he clarified that it was Volpe's decision, not his.[209] The road funding's demise was the first large-scale moment of opposition between Smith and his Eurekan neighbors, but it was not meant to be the last. Ziffzer and her coalition had developed a restoration plan for Eureka Springs that would re-center their tourist economy on the town's original landmarks and architecture in the hopes to destroy any reliance on Smith and any synonymity with his legacy.[210] A resistance to compromise and turn to community alliance seemed to be the only solution. However, in only a couple of years, it was clear that these proposals had quietly failed.

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[205] Volpe's legislative efforts contributed to the creation of Amtrak in 1971.
[206] Anderson, "Bigot Loses $182,000," 4.
[207] "Volpe, Victim of Pressure, Says Eureka's Smith," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, June 19, 1970, 2, Newspapers.com.
[208] John O. Maberry on behalf of Gerald L.K. Smith, "John O. Maberry Files Brief with Attorney General Mitchell on Behalf of Gerald L.K. Smith," *Eureka Springs Times-Echo*, July 9, 1970, Box 68, Folder: "1970: Newspaper clippings," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, 9.
[209] "WR Says Smith Road in Eureka 'Long Needed," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, June 20, 1970, 10, Newspapers.com.
[210] Ernest Dumas, "Gerald K. Smith Becomes Issue in Ozarks," *The New York Times*, November 28, 1969, Box 65, Folder: "1969: Newspaper Clippings," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, 30.

In 1972, Georgia Ziffzer moved away from Eureka Springs after nearly twenty years there. Ziffzer's nephew, Doug, recalls her in her later life as thoughtful and politically minded. However, he does not remember her ever mentioning her time in Eureka Springs or her confrontation with Gerald L.K. Smith.[211] In Arkansas, lasting evidence of her efforts, beyond the unpaved road to Smith's projects, faded. In the same year she left, an article solemnly concluded that Ziffzer's movement of opposition against Smith had failed to get off the ground, and that people would continue to visit and partake, oblivious to Smith's hateful ideas, for years to come.[212] After singling out Ziffzer as the only person to openly critique Smith in the community, reporter John Starr concluded that the rest of Eureka Springs must not have cared that much about Smith, the otherwise "friendly patriarch, waving to pedestrians as he drives through the twisting streets."[213] His religious projects continued to expand. *The Great Passion Play* welcomed its millionth attendee by the mid-1970s, *Christ of the Ozarks* was already an iconic feature on Eureka Spring's visual landscape, and Smith-never content to quit-contemplated his next move.[214]

Smith spent countless summer evenings gazing into his production's sets. The immersive, open-air design invited the auditorium's guests to imagine themselves in the play's various Biblical scenes. Smith must have imagined it, too, but the set was not enough. Back at his office, he became fixated on the idea of replicating a "New Jerusalem."[215] Larger, more spectacular, and more permanent than the Passion Play's efforts, Smith envisioned tours through ancient-looking streets and past replicated architectural wonders and shrines in the Ozark's own new Holy Land.

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[211] Doug Osa, interview with author, April 17, 2024.
[212] "On Gerald L.K. Smith," *The Courier News*, July 29, 1972, 4, Newspapers.com.
[213] John R. Starr, "Controversial Figure Called Hate-Mongering Bigot, Christian Patriot," *The Lawton Constitution and Morning Press*, November 14, 1971, 13, Newspapers.com.
[214] Jeansonne, *Gerald L.K. Smith*, 196.
[215] Moster, "A Comparison of the Staging of the Passion Plays," 174.

He called it his most sensational project.[216] Before breaking ground, he laid out ideas for twenty-five potential shrines, all life-sized and gathered on the mountaintop above town. When he solicited donations in *The Cross and the Flag*, he assured his followers that the replication efforts would contribute to their long, shared crusade. He described how the "enemies of Christ in the Holy Land" were misusing sacred sites to "glorify the antichrist," and that only in Eureka Springs, with their financial help, could he guarantee a safe, Christ-centered experience.[217]

In early 1973, Smith met with an old friend at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles to catch up on their Christian endeavors. Charles Coughlin was older than Smith and had retired to the shadows many years before. His old radio audience of millions had moved on to other voices.[218] He left the political sphere for the pulpit, then retired from it, too, in the mid-60s.[219] He noted that he had much to reflect on in his old age; all of the things he said and did back then, when "people still listened" to him.[220] He welcomed the reconnection with Smith's familiar face and ideologies. "I truly am overwhelmed with you and your lovely wife and your genuinely sacred works at Eureka Springs," he wrote him after.[221] "I ask God to spare you both for many years. The world right now has much need of you and is richer, much richer, because of you." Smith was determined to show Coughlin his projects in person. He gifted him the money for the

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[216] Gerald L.K. Smith, "The New Holy Land: The Most Sensational Project of the Century," Advertisement, N.D., Box 92, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[217] Gerald L.K. Smith, "The New Holy Land: The Most Sensational Project of the Century," Advertisement, N.D., Box 92, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[218] Albin Krebs, "Charles Coughlin, 30's 'Radio Priest, Dies," *The New York Times*, October 28, 1979, https://www.nytimes.com/1979/10/28/archives/charles-coughlin-30s-radio-priest-dies-fiery-sermons-stirred-furor.html.
[219] Krebs, "Charles Coughlin, 30's 'Radio Priest, Dies," 1979.
[220] Krebs, "Charles Coughlin, 30's 'Radio Priest, Dies," 1979.
[221] Charles Coughlin to Gerald L.K. Smith, Letter, March 14, 1973, Box 74, Folder: "1973 (C)," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.

plane ticket to come visit.[222] However, it is unclear if a reunion there ever happened. Coughlin was settled into his general reclusion from the world, while Smith was as bold and busy as ever. He confided that he had never been so burdened yet so encouraged in his work.[223]

When Smith announced his latest plans, he anticipated that the project could take as long as a decade to complete.[224] In a letter to Robertson and Hyde, he revealed that he had earmarked certain personal possessions to be sold to continue financing the New Holy Land's construction upon his death, if he died before the extensive work finished.[225] His impacts in Eureka Springs had clearly grown far beyond what anyone, perhaps even Smith himself, had expected when Penn Castle sold in 1964, and showed little indication of stopping. For townspeople, their limited alliance now appeared less like a temporary or begrudging compromise for residents to survive a summer or two; Smith's influence and legacy seemed there to stay. One resident, Edna Bergdorf, had lived in Eureka Springs since its original boom. She remembered the winding streets when they were first built, and when the springs were still medicinal and crowded with tourists. She also witnessed the town's harsh decline before Smith brought people back. "The [sacred] projects have made our town," she concluded.[226] Even with the memory of life before, Smith's impacts seemed significant enough to be inescapable. The town might not have just needed him to restart, but to continue. Their uneasy compromise was slipping into long-term coexistence. Is this what they wanted to be known for? Was it too late to decide otherwise?

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[222] Gerald L.K. Smith to Charles Coughlin, Letter, March 19, 1973, Box 74, Folder: "1973 (C)," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[223] Gerald L.K. Smith to Max A.X. Clark, Letter, February 20, 1972, Box 72, Folder: "1972 (C)," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[224] "Smith Plans to Build a 'New Jerusalem," *Hope Star*, February 6, 1971, 1, Newspapers.com.
[225] Gerald L.K. Smith to Charles Robertson and Robert Hyde, Memo, January 6, 1972, Box 78, Folder: "1974, R (3)," Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan.
[226] "Ozark Mountain Town in Tourist Business," *The Daily Freeman*, November 3, 1971, 17, Newspapers.com.

At a summer banquet in Springfield, Missouri, two bank presidents reportedly heralded Smith's shrines as amongst the most valuable tourist projects in the Ozarks.[227] Yet, in a coinciding article in the local newspaper titled, "The Rebirth of Eureka," its writers focused on Eureka Springs as a lake-adjacent, art-fueled spot for natural wonder and Ozarkian culture. Smith felt unjustly unrecognized. He wrote a letter to the editor to remind the newspaper staff and its audience that his "multimillion dollar development" had much to do with "the growth of this little village."[228] He boasted that more than one million people had already visited the statue, droves more were pouring in to attend the play, and he had hundreds of people on his payroll. He reminded them that his newly inaugurated project, the New Holy Land, had projected costs upwards of $15 million, which would be supplied entirely by his own, long-suffering efforts. Smith saw no reason to be modest about his accomplishments and wanted them at the heart of conversations on Eureka Springs' revival. It was strange and potentially spiteful, he concluded, for those who benefitted from his efforts to be so conservative in their praise.[229]

As the newest construction entered its early stages, the Smiths prepared to celebrate a separate accomplishment. At the Ozark Gardens restaurant, on the southern side of town, a large crowd of people awaited their arrival. It was their anniversary. The couple's fifty years married had led them to all kinds of places, including the small Arkansas town where they now commemorated. They made an open invitation for everyone in Eureka Springs to attend, and hundreds did. Roy Reed, reporter for *The New York Times*, observed the large, mixed crowd: the town's mayor, Smith's associates, groups of "longhairs," and even former Governor Faubus, all

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[227] Gerald L.K. Smith, "Gerald L.K. Smith Writes Again," *Springfield Leader and Press*, July 2, 1972, 5, University of Arkansas Special Collections, Edgar A. Albin Papers, Box 10, Folder 5.
[228] Smith, "Gerald L.K. Smith Writes Again," *Springfield Leader and Press*, 5.
[229] Smith, "Gerald L.K. Smith Writes Again," *Springfield Leader and Press*, 5.

watched over by two policeman and a hired private guard.[230] Reed examined with astonishment how everyone interacted, a coexistent marvel he deemed worthy of a Nobel Peace Prize.[231] Perhaps they were bound by a common understanding of unbelonging. "As someone who has been misunderstood and misrepresented down through the years, perhaps I am in a better position to understand other (…) victims of those misrepresentations," Smith reflected after the event.[232] In a downtown ceramics studio, Reed met a resident whose main grudge with Smith had been his bad artwork. "It looks like a milk carton with a head and arms," he said, about Big Jesus. But "if I'm going to be free in this town, certainly [Smith] has to be free."[233]

Each fall, the enterprise on the hill and the town below prepared to shelter the off-season together. *The Great Passion Play* performed a final fall show before Hyde boarded their props, costumes, and camels for winter. Locals danced and sang on the Basin Park Hotel's platform for the hordes of tourists crowding and moving through the street's various souvenir shops and art stores.[234] Most places would close within a week or so after peak fall foliage. The back-to-the-landers wandered the quiet, dead town for remaining economic resources and housing. When the tourist season ended, around 15,000 for-rent spaces freed up, but they were almost always overpriced.[235] Many young people relied on shared housing and cooperative efforts outside of town. The yearly housing swing was difficult to beat, but the other aspects of communal life in the Ozarks maintained its incoming stream of adherents.

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[230] Roy Reed, "Freaks Meet the Crusader," *San Antonio Express-News*, September 8, 1972, 31, Newspapers.com.
[231] Reed, "Freaks Meet the Crusader," 31.
[232] Roy Reed, "Hippies and Gerald L.K. Smith Make Ozark Resort Town a Model of Coexistence," *The New York Times*, July 27, 1972, https://www.nytimes.com/1972/07/27/archives/hippies-and-gerald-l-k-smith-make-ozark-resort-town-a-model-of.html.
[233] Reed, "Hippies and Gerald L.K. Smith Make Ozark Resort Town a Model of Coexistence," n.p.
[234] E. Lawson May, "Ozarks Bursting into Fall Color," *The Hutchinson News-Herald*, October 31, 1971, 48, Newspapers.com.
[235] May, "Ozarks Bursting into Fall Color," 48.

When Edd Jeffords returned to the area after a stint on the West Coast as a fine arts journalist, he claimed to find around 200 countercultural farms and communes in a 100-mile radius around Eureka Springs.[236] The residents were bearing Arkansas' "hot, cold, and tough" environment. [237] They were busy and hungry, and immersed in the mountainscape's demands. Jeffords, then in his mid-twenties, was interested in northwestern Arkansas' BTL community, their struggles with the land, and the unique hub of them in Eureka Springs. In 1973, he published the first volume of the *Ozark Access Catalog*, a quarterly magazine to help young newcomers learn to live off the land. Contributors shared information regarding shelter, gardening, herbal remedies, livestock, tools, and more. Jeffords believed that the Ozarks were at a "cultural turning point," with the region's worth diminishing daily beneath billboards and bulldozers.[238] "We think there's something here worth saving," he wrote, and the "future of the region certainly lies in the hands of its youth."[239]

The expanding "sacred projects," the tourist influx, and the changed economy presented consequences for residents and the environment, and more people-young or old, local or outsider-recognized it. Mary Mitchell had eyed Eureka Springs as an ideal escape from life in the city years before Smith arrived. When he did, she watched "one thing lead to another:" the statue, the play, and now the mock-city.[240] She knew that each step poured money into some pockets, but the costs were immense, too. Tourists swelled the town, parked and wedged their cars to capacity, strained local resources, and left litter and exhaust when they drove away for

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[236] Jenkin Lloyd Jones, "The Children of Nature," *The Logansport Press*, March 11, 1973, 11, Newspapers.com.
[237] Jones, "The Children of Nature," 11.
[238] Edd Jeffords, "Using this tool," *Ozarks Access Catalog*, April 1973, 3, University of Arkansas Libraries Special Collections, Fayetteville, AR.
[239] Jeffords, "Using this tool," 3.
[240] Mary Mitchell, "Says Leave God's Sugar Loaf Alone," *The News* (Frederick, MD), April 22, 1972, 4, Newspapers.com.

winter.[241] Housing remained sparse and expensive, and money was difficult to find when visitors migrated away. Mitchell found herself in a place that was very changed, but not necessarily better than before. Upon reflecting on the hills, the green, and the quiet she once knew, she urged another town considering a similar predicament to decide that the beauty of the land was already pleasing to God, "as he created it," and to not be "tempted to add to his handiwork."[242] To her and other locals, the mountain before had already been a shrine.

In 1975, Edgar Albin, a former art professor at the University of Arkansas, wrote: "We hope that time will destroy the works of Smith and that the mountains will return to their original beauty; that the 64 springs will recover from their present pollution and flow pure, and that stately trees will once again declare the glory of God where now a tawdry concrete statue stands."[243] He had held this discontent for years, since the first tourists made the trek up the flinty mountain path, laid eyes on the first site, and spoke in awe in hushed tones, "as if they were in some great cathedral." [244] But this was not a worthy worship place, Albin argued. Visitors were merely attaching their own sentimental meanings to an otherwise unforgiveable creation. "The symbol strikes the tourist with awe," he wrote, but they are "blind to its ugliness and sham."[245] This type of disapproving rhetoric had existed since Smith's first construction efforts began, but it had little effect on their general popularity. Albin was right: the meaningful connections that visitors created for themselves regarding Big Jesus and the Passion Play were

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[241] Mitchell, "Says Leave God's Sugar Loaf Alone," 4.
[242] Mitchell, "Says Leave God's Sugar Loaf Alone," 4.
[243] Edgar Albin, "Smith is great at glorifying himself," Newspaper clip, September 28, 1975, Edgar A. Albin Papers: 1969-1978, MC 623, Box 10, Folder 5, University of Arkansas Libraries Special Collections, Fayetteville, AR.
[244] Edgar Albin, "The Ungainly Christ," *Northwest Arkansas Times*, June 28, 1971, 4, Newspapers.com.
[245] Albin, "The Ungainly Christ," 4.

far more powerful and enduring than any of the ways Smith and his legacy should have besmirched them.

In 1976, Gerald L.K. Smith died. He was buried in the crypt he had built at the bottom of the *Christ of the Ozarks* statue. It was no longer only a statue, but a towering, plaster tombstone, too. Smith's biographer, Glen Jeansonne, saw his pre-determined burial spot as a way to bolster his image as a Christian hero and to add a sense of importance to his legacy. "Masquerading as a monument to Christ," Jeansonne concluded, "Smith intended it in reality as a monument to himself."[246] In the decades following his death, both aware and increasingly oblivious numbers of visitors observed, prayed, took pictures, and developed memories at the base of his creation, merely feet away from his burial place. The longer that Smith's lifetime of hate faded into historical obscurity, though, the easier it was for Eureka Springs and tourists alike to separate the shrines from his memory.[247] In some ways, it seemed to be an intentional thing. His involvement is only sparsely indicated on the statue's modern markers. His impact is not commemorated anywhere in town. More than sixty years after his arrival, Gerald L.K. Smith and his lifetime of hate evades the minds of tourists and locals alike. Yet almost anywhere you go in Eureka Springs, there is Big Jesus on the mountaintop, staring at you below.

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[246] Jeansonne, *Gerald L.K. Smith*, 205.

[247] Smith's right-hand-man and longtime editor of *The Cross and the Flag*, Charles Robertson, became both Eureka Spring's mayor and commander of Smith's works shortly after Smith's death. Robertson seemed more focused on the commercialization of the "sacred projects" than Smith had been. He reworked *The Great Passion Play* to exclude its brazenly anti-Semitic aspects, expanded its amphitheater, and increased admission fees.
Robert Edwards, "Eureka Springs criticized for 'selling out," Newspaper clip, N.D., Edgar A. Albin Papers: 1969-1978, MC 623, Box 10, Folder 5, University of Arkansas Libraries Special Collections, Fayetteville, AR.

The New York Times (by Gary Settle)

Mrs. Georgia Ziffzer, who has received support from neighbors in Eureka Springs in her opposition to Gerald L. K. Smith, stands on a hill near his seven-story statue of Jesus.

—Fisher in the North Little Rock Times.

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[248] Photo of Elna and Gerald and political cartoon, courtesy Billy James Hargis Papers, University of Arkansas Libraries Special Collections, Fayetteville, AR.
"Mrs. Georgia Ziffzer," Gary Settle, 1969, Gerald L.K. Smith Papers, File "1969: Newspaper Clippings," Box 65, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.
"The Passion Play," Photographer unknown, N.D., Gerald L.K. Smith Papers, File "Eureka Springs, Arkansas-Passion Play," Box 100, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

Epilogue

Conflicts and compromise exist perpetually in the Ozarks and beyond. Eureka Springs embodies something familiar, but in an unusually visible fashion. In an otherwise ocean of rural American conservatism and its familiar cultural markers, there remains an opposite stronghold there. Palm and tarot readers, energy healers, and crystal sellers fill storefronts, while devoted witch-hat and tie-dye wearers crowd the town drum circles and ghost tours. Done-up drag performers float in and out of downtown venues whilst motorcycle fleets ricochet engine noise off the small, stone streets. Pooled or dribbling along the town's turns and rises, the original source of the spring town's appeal still exists. But the healing water explains the foundation, not the trajectory. Eureka Springs' modern existence, and particularly the tourist town's continued contrast with its broader region and even within itself, reflects choices made in the 1960s. Though out of memory for most Eurekans, the era lives on in the economic structure of the town, its demographic features, and its remaining, evident cultural juxtaposition: a hatemonger's final efforts at the top of the hill and the countercultural free spirits in the town below. The two no longer rely on or particularly interact with each other but endure a continued proximity and comingled legacy as the result of their previous compromise.

My first time at the foot of Big Jesus was that year's warmest week in Arkansas. The triple-digit July heat hounded the town and shone brightly off the overlooking statue's white plaster. I had seen him beaming from afar plenty already. My nineteenth-century accommodations, which retained their boomtown character but lacked air conditioning, had a large, wrap around porch facing the eastern skyline. Even through the season's dense, green foliage, it was easy to see the statue from the rocking chair there. In person, he towered over the

day's small stream of onlooking tourists. They craned and squinted up from the sidewalk and neat patch of grass at his feet, nearby to Gerald L.K. Smith's final resting spot. I was trying to stay in the shade, sat beneath a wooden pavilion to the side and thinking about my parents and my grandparents. Both couples, at different points in the sixty years since Smith started this construction, had been here. Our motives were entirely dissimilar, though. They had no knowledge of Smith, no critical lens of his projects, and no research incentive that drove them to this Ozarkian hilltop. The visits were personal. They were there because they believed. Observing from afar, it was clear that the same sort of motive continued to drive others there, too, and over great distances. One family had travelled from Guatemala to see the projects. Their excitement was palpable; they were eager for me to help them take smiling pictures with the creation as their backdrop. When the sun lowered and the heat of the day finally lessened, they would watch *The Great Passion Play* in its latest season. The complicated historical legacy of these religious tourism projects was far removed from the family's hopeful pilgrimage there, despite its heavy weight on my mind.

The end of Smith's life does not effectively illustrate Christianity as means to insulate from critics, but the fate of his Christian tourism sites suggests a connection between religious belief and ideological negotiation. This is evident on Magnetic Mountain both at the individual and institutional level. Visitors do not concern themselves with the controversial origins of the shrines they seek, instead prioritizing the importance of their own beliefs and spiritual inclinations, and generations of new ownership benefit from and encourage this fact by exempting their unattractive past from the public eye. Economic insecurity, rather than matters of faith, was at the heart of the countercultural and local compromise with Smith in the 1960s. His tense relationship with these groups, who otherwise ideologically opposed his far-right influence,

survived via their desperate financial need. Though outspoken local critics at the time, such as Georgia Ziffzer, condemned this type of compromise, even she would have recognized the economic reasons behind her community members' often uneasy coexistence with this figure and his projects. The motivations behind the Christian tourism that propelled his success and carried the operations into the present is more difficult to tangibly explain, but-as with the healing water in the beginning-must rely on some faith that there is something special and personally beneficial to be found there.

Smith's legacy lacks formal commemoration beyond its silent intermingling within his self-described sacred projects. The markers and listings for his creations mention his name meagerly, and do not address his career at all. Visitors would need to seek his story out elsewhere, though most accounts of Smith's life halt before Eureka Springs and Big Jesus. The historiography exists but ends too early or speaks too briefly on what he did in northwestern Arkansas. Leo Ribuffo spends a handful of pages on it in *The Old Christian Right*, but Smith is more often utilized for his early connections to figures like Huey Long and Charles Coughlin, such as in Alan Brinkley's *Voices of Protest* or David Kennedy's *Freedom from Fear*. Even Glen Jeansonne's thorough biography, *Gerald L.K. Smith: Minister of Hate*, addresses Smith's religious endeavors in the Ozarks sparingly, despite them being some of his most visible, and arguably most impactful, ventures. Smith's attempts at mainstream politics and makeshift campaigns failed. His fringe readership remained relatively small and reclusive. Copies of his prolific publications, including decades of *The Cross and the Flag*, have been discarded or stashed in rarely re-opened boxes. Big Jesus and the Passion Play (though slightly different in appearance and wordage now than in their beginning) live on better than these, but Smith has faded quickly amongst them.

The most compelling questions brought to mind by the history of Big Jesus concern the confluence of commercial interests, religious ideology, and far-right influence, with particular consideration to the eccentricities of the broader Ozarks region in its precarious development era. Beyond researching the clear contrasts of the groups present in Eureka Springs in the 1960s, their recurring themes of failed resistance and unlikely collaboration further shaped some initial questions and challenged previous assumptions about rural interests and right-wing Christianity. For example, what did it mean for these outwardly progressive residents to essentially engage in quid pro quo with a known mouthpiece for the far right? Was their economic desperation the sole enabler to trump moral resistance in this situation, or were there other distinctive factors?

When considering these questions in the present, such as when sat beneath the straight, outstretched arm of Big Jesus himself, they melt into thoughts on historical memory, modern repercussions, and the ways that people ignore, acknowledge, or defy a complicated past. Eureka Springs' residents acted against their values but in favor of their interests when confronted with an ideological-economic dilemma. The resulting consequences for future generations of residents are difficult to discern from the modern surface, dually aided by Gerald L.K. Smith's increasing historical obscurity and the town's widely known left-wing reputation. Still largely supported by a seasonal tourist economy but decidedly progressive, Eureka Springs' appeal to visitors and locals alike seems to have outrun their past unscathed. If this phenomenon continues, Big Jesus may become more and more like an out-of-place but ignorable ornament on the Ozarkian skyline.