



## Was the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s an Extremist Movement?

**YES:** David H. Bennett, from *The Party of Fear: From Nativist Movements to the New Right in American History* (University of North Carolina Press, 1988)

**NO:** Stanley Coben, from *Rebellion Against Victorianism: The Impetus for Cultural Change in 1920s America* (Oxford University Press, 1991)

### ISSUE SUMMARY

**YES:** Professor of history David H. Bennett argues that the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s was supported mainly by fundamentalist Protestants who were opposed to the changing values associated with the Catholic and Jewish immigrants.

**NO:** Professor of history Stanley Coben believes that local Klansmen were solid, middle-class citizens who were concerned about the decline in moral standards in their communities.

There have been three Ku Klux Klans in American history: (1) the Reconstruction Klan, which arose in the South at the end of the Civil War and whose primary purpose was to prevent the newly emancipated blacks from voting and attaining social and economic equality with whites; (2) the 1920s Klan which had national appeal and emerged out of disillusionment with the aftermath of U.S. intervention in World War I and the changing social and economic values that had transformed America as a result of the full-scale Industrial Revolution; and (3) the modern Klan, which arose after World War I in the rural areas of the Deep South and (like the Reconstruction Klan) came about to prevent blacks from attaining the political and legal rights guaranteed by the passage of the civil rights legislation in the 1950s and 1960s.

The Klan of the 1920s was founded in 1915 by William J. Simmons, Methodist circuit preacher, and 15 of his followers. For five years the restricted Klan consisted of only 4,000 or 5,000 members in scattered Klans throughout Georgia and Alabama. On June 7, 1920, Simmons signed a contract with two clever salespersons, Edward Clarke and Elizabeth Tyler, who

pioneered some of the most remarkable organizing and mass marketing techniques of the pro-business decade of the 1920s. The campaign was an immediate success. Between June 1920 and October 1921, 85,000 men joined the Klan. Total membership figures are difficult to ascertain, but somewhere between 3 and 5 million people joined the Klan. This means that one of every four Protestant males in America was a member of the Klan.

The 1920s Klan differed greatly from its predecessors and successors because it had wide-ranging influence in politics across the nation. The Klan was not merely a southern movement but a national movement that was strongest in the Midwest and Southwest. Politically, Klan members dominated state legislatures in Oklahoma, Texas, and Indiana, and city councils in such far-western places as El Paso, Texas; Denver, Colorado; Anaheim, California; and Tillamook, Oregon. The Klan of the 1920s was the most powerful right-wing movement of the decade.

While the 1920s Klan disliked blacks, it focused its attacks upon the Catholic and Jewish immigrants who had been coming to America since the 1890s. Klansmen particularly disliked Catholics, who constituted 36 percent of the nation's population in 1920. Catholics were accused of placing loyalty to the pope ahead of loyalty to the nation. If Catholics gained political control, the Klan asserted, separation of church and state would end, and freedoms of speech, press, and religious worship would also be abolished.

The Klan was also inspired by the xenophobic (fear of foreigners) atmosphere of the time. America's participation in World War I had ended in public disillusionment. The U.S. Senate reflected the country's dislike of all things foreign when it refused to ratify President Woodrow Wilson's Treaty of Versailles. Antiforeign feelings were also reflected in the passage of the 1921 and 1924 reform laws, which severely curtailed immigration from southern and eastern Europe and completely excluded Japanese and other oriental groups.

Most explanations for the fall of the 1920s Klan seem unsatisfactory. Greed may have been one cause. There was a lot of money involved—it has been estimated that as much as \$75 million in Klan initiation fees and wardrobes ended up in the pockets of various Klan leaders—and everyone seemed to have their hand in the till. Moral hypocrisy also infiltrated the Klan. While many Klan members were afraid of the changing standards of morality and supported Klan politicians who preached law and order, the opposite was often the case. Third, the depression of the 1930s and World War II may have contributed to the Klan's fall by directing people's energies elsewhere.

Was the 1920s Ku Klux Klan an extremist organization? According to David H. Bennett in the following selection, the Klan was a traditional nativist organization supported mainly by fundamentalist Protestants who were opposed to the changing social and moral values of the 1920s associated with the Catholic and Jewish immigrants. In the second selection, Stanley Coben asserts that most Klansmen were ordinary white, middle-class Protestants who composed what he has described elsewhere as "the largest grassroots conservative . . . movement in American history."



David H. Bennett

## Traditional Nativism's Last Stand

### Restating the Themes of Nativism

The Ku Klux Klan under Hiram Wesley Evans and associates offered a program reminiscent of its nativist progenitors, the Know Nothings and the APA. Klan papers and magazines, books and articles by Klan leaders, laid out the appeal of the new nativism.

One spokesman, Reverend E. H. Laughler, in *The Call of the Klan of Kentucky* explained that "the KKK is not a lodge or a society or a political party." Rather, it is a mass movement, "a crusade of American people who are beginning to realize that they have neglected their public and religious duty to stand up for Americanism." This meant remembering that America was discovered by Norsemen, colonized by Puritans, that the United States was "purely Anglo-Saxon and Nordic." It was essential to "preserve our racial purity," he insisted, to avoid "mongrelization." It was imperative to maintain separation of church and state because "the forces of Protestantism" were protectors of the "doctrine of Americanism." The Roman Catholic church, appealing to the polyglot peoples who threatened the good and pure society, must be blocked in its drive to dominate and destroy the great nation.

In *The Fiery Cross*, *The Kourier*, *The American Standard*, *Dawn*, *The Imperial Night-Hawk*, and other publications, Klan ideologists assaulted Catholics, Jews and aliens. "Jesus was a Protestant," the faithful were told, he had "split with the priests" because he had truth and right on his side. The Roman Catholic church, laboring under "the growth of Popish despotism," was irreligious and un-American. In fact, the "Papacy's campaign against liberalism and freedom made it a proper ally of Mussolini's fascism," just as the church had been on the side of other autocracies since medieval times. In America, the "spirit of Bunker Hill and Valley Forge," that longing for democracy and individualism which informed the Revolution and the words of the Founding Fathers, was at odds with a "hierarchical Church, which, like an octopus, has stretched its tentacles into the very vitals of the body politic of the nation." The church's effort to undermine the public schools, to "reach out for the children of Protestantism," to "hit anywhere with any weapon" in an unscrupulous campaign to impose its will, meant that every Catholic in public life, from school board member to national politician, must be watched carefully. "Do you know?"

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a Klan editorialist asked, "that eight states have Roman Catholic children's institutions, 690 public schools teach from the Roman Catholic catechism, sixty-two percent of all elected and appointed offices in the United States are now held by Catholics, who also are a majority of the teachers in many major city school systems?"

The threat of the church was everywhere. The "Romanized press" tried to propagandize a gullible public. Catholics evaded taxes as a matter of course, refusing to share the burdens of government, preferring to subsidize sinister schemes hatched by their prelates. The church used Jesuits to engage in "occult mental manipulations" and tried to "subjugate the Negro race through spiritual domination." The pope favored child labor, and because "20,000 ordained priests in America are vassals to this Imperial Monarch in Rome," the same could be expected of church leaders in the United States. Indeed, Catholics were in no sense trustworthy Americans; during the Great War, "German sentiment was the fruit of carefully prepared and skillfully disseminated Roman propaganda." But it would be wrong to conclude that the Klan was anti-Catholic, leaders insisted, because its arguments were "wholly and solely concentrated on being one hundred per cent American." In fact, one writer suggested, the Klan is "no more aimed at Roman Catholics than it would be aimed at Buddhists, Confucianists or Mohammedans, or anybody else who owes allegiance to any foreign person and/or religion."

Like the nineteenth-century nativists, Klan initiates were asked to protect America from the diabolical plans of Jesuits and other leaders of this un-American presence. From colonial days, anti-Catholicism had been a dominant theme in the history of these movements, a way of displacing fears and angers on alien intruders. In the 1920s, with Irish Catholics maintaining positions of prominence in urban and national politics, continuing to gain greater influence in a growing economy, Klan spokesmen returned to the old themes. The assault on the church was repeated in almost every Klan speech, article, and editorial. This modern Ku Klux Klan dressed its members in garb borrowed from the Reconstruction vigilante organization, but its real roots were in traditional nativism, stretching back much further in the American experience.

But to its attack on Catholicism, the modern Klan added an anti-Semitic element. The APA, emerging during the new immigration, had touched on this theme; Klan writers developed the argument. "Jews are everywhere a separate and distinct people, living apart from the great Gentile masses," said the author of *Klanism: Guardians of Liberty*. But these people are not "home builders or tillers of the soil." Evans had made a similar argument in a speech at Dallas in December 1922: "The Jew produces nothing anywhere on the face of the earth. He does not till the soil. He does not create or manufacture anything for common use. He adds nothing to the sum of human welfare." Yet not only were Jews unproductive, Klan theoreticians insisted, they were un-American. They were not interested in integration: "No, not the Jew . . . he is different." These people, who "defied the melting pot for one thousand years," believed in their own superiority, in "Jewry Uber Alles." They hatched secret plans to advance their interests to "cause wars and to subjugate America." Certain conspiratorial Jews must be "absolutely and eternally" opposed when they plotted

their "crimes and wrongs." They were nothing more than money-grubbing and immoral vultures, "moral lepers who gloat over human tragedy, rejoice in the downfall of the guileless and inexperienced." The unethical practices of Jewish businessmen—often seen as winners in the economic competition of the boom years—and the radical schemes of Jewish Marxists were considered equally repugnant, dangers to America. But so, too, was the cultural depravity of strategically placed "Semites" in the media. "Jew Movies Urge Sex and Vice," the Klan headline shouted like an echo from Ford's *Dearborn Independent*: "Jewish corruption in jazz" was a result of "their monopoly over popular songs." In the big cities, "ninety five per cent of bootleggers are Jews."

It was the Roaring Twenties, and as mores changed, as traditional social arrangements were overturned, as skirts went up and speakasies flourished, as the movies and radio made their mark with Tin Pan Alley songs popularized by so many show business celebrities, the Klan found a way of identifying these disturbing developments in an antialien context, of standing up for America by assailing yet another band of un-Americans.

Still, the Jews were only one part of a larger alien problem in America. Again, like the Know Nothings and the patriotic fraternalists of the 1890s, these nativists were concerned with the threat they saw posed by all non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants and their descendants. Imperial Wizard Evans spoke of "the vast horde of immigrants who have reached our shores," these "Italian anarchists, Irish Catholic malcontents, Russian Jews, Finns, Letts, Lithuanians of the lowest class." Even after the Immigration Act of 1924, which Evans characterized as a "new era dawning for America" and took full credit for security—"typifying the influence exerted by our organization"—he warned that undesirable "are still bootlegged into the nation," still try to "flaunt our immigration laws." This "polyglotism" was intolerable, for many of the most recent immigrants from southern and eastern Europe and from Asia still could not read and write English. They were unfamiliar with American history and tradition, "were unaware that America is fundamentally an Anglo-Saxon achievement." And because these alien peoples "congregate in our great centers, our cities are a menace to democracy," they are "modern Sodoms and Gomorrah." Is "Petrograd in its ruin and desolation a picture of New York in the future?" There was only one possible response. "America for the Americans," Evans exhorted, for if "this state of affairs continues, the American race is doomed to cultural destruction." In words that might have been lifted from a Know Nothing broadside, he continued: "Illiteracy, disease, insanity, and mental deficiency are still pouring in among us."

The "foreigners" were responsible for a host of social problems. Evans lectured on "our alien crime-plague" and Klan papers reported on alien thugs Italian mobsters and rum runners, even a "Newark alien hiding whiskey in U.S. flag." The aliens threatened female virtue: "Foreign women sell their bodies for gain." They threatened the safety of American womanhood: "Women Are Struck Down by Foreign Mob," screamed one headline, "Aliens Poison Hoosier Women," said another. Some aliens were radicals: "Russians Would Make America Red, Peril is a Very Real One." Others would destroy the nation through political sabotage: "Use the Ballot, the Italian Ambassador Recommends, to

Advance the Interests of Italians' Native Land." And over all these perils loomed the threat of Irish Catholic party machine manipulators. Leaders of the church in America, most formidable of the foreign operatives, these "Irish Romanists in Tammany . . . lead the Jews, Poles, Italians, Germans, Czechs, Magyars"; it was a "vast army under command of the Irish Roman ward heelers." The only way to deal with the foreign devils, to safeguard our sacred institutions, was to re-Americanize the land. Evans announced: "Against us are all the forces of the mixed alliance composed of alienism, Romanism, hyphenism, Bolshevism and un-Americanism which aim to use this country as a dumping ground for the fermenting races of the Old World." But "we of the Klan are on the firing line . . . like the soldiers of the American Expeditionary Force in France, we stand up for America and take pride and joy in the wounds we receive . . . the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan have become the trustees under God for Protestant American nationalism."

The cause of the Klan, in the phrases of its spokesmen, could not have been more noble, more dangerous, or more urgent. But among those many American values that Klansmen were sworn to protect, one had particular urgency. This was the protection of "womanhood." In pursuing this goal, the Klan invoked memories of that long line of femininity's defenders who marched under the banners of nativism, back to the days of Maria Monk.

A Texas Klansman, author of *Religious and Patriotic Ideals of the Ku Klux Klan*, reminded initiates that they had sworn to "promote good works and thus protect the chastity of womanhood, the virtue of girlhood, the sanctity of the home." Spokesmen repeatedly used the term "chivalry" in describing the movement's principles. The role of women in the literature of the Klan was explicitly traditional. They were the moral arbiters of society, for "even in the midst of all the pressing duties of maternal care and home making, women have found time to keep the spiritual fire of the nation burning on the altar . . . women have been the conscience keepers of the race." But the role was not so traditional that women would be repressed, for it was "Rome Which Opposes the Advancement of Womanhood," said the headline, the Jesuits who favor policies pushing women into "semi-oriental seclusion." The Klan would preserve and protect women so they might aid in the shaping of American destiny; "the fate of the nation is in the hands of women." As one Klan newswriter put it, they can be "not only help meets but help mates." After all, the "very mentioning of the word 'woman' always arrests the attention of every true man. Whatever else the human heart may forget in the rough experiences of life, it cannot forget its mother."

The call to protect these fragile, sensitive, vulnerable women led to violence. Local Klans were accused of floggings, tar and featherings, and beatings in several states in the South, Southwest, and lower Midwest. The victims of the masked night riders often were alleged adulterers and wife-beaters, men said not to be supporting their families, men who had deserted their women. But the enemies of "pure womanhood" included sinners of both sexes. "Fallen women" were the targets in some rural bastions. Young women accused of prostitution or adultery were stripped naked, tarred, left half-conscious with their hair shorn. The sexual frustrations of these bands of

white-robed small-townsmen, envious of the freedom exercised by millions of more liberated urbanites in the jazz age, finding perverse pleasure in this part of their crusade for morality, reveling in the projection of their anger and the displacement of their resentments of these symbolic villains, recalled the nursery craze of the early nineteenth century.

In fact, another generation of nativists meant another resurgence of convent tales. *Dawn* [a major Klan paper in Chicago] offered "Convent Cruelties: The True Story of Ex-Nun Helen Jackson," advertising offprints of this sadomasochistic piece for many months after initial publication. Other Klan journals featured, among several exposés, "Behind Convent Walls" and "Roman Priest Alienates Innocent Women's Love."

Women who knew their role and understood their place were offered membership in affiliate groups open to "patriotic ladies." Simmons's Kamela had been disbanded, but Hiram Evans introduced the Women of the Ku Klux Klan, an organization which absorbed such local groups as Ladies of the Invisible Empire in Louisiana and the Order of American Women in Texas. This new national organization established its own Imperial Palace, a pillared mansion in Little Rock, Arkansas. It sent its own keagles [officials in the Klan] into the field, calling on Klansmen to influence wives and sisters to join. By fall 1924 when the Ku Klux Klan said its membership numbered in the millions, the women's auxiliary claimed a following of two hundred thousand. The initiates were not, as one anti-Klan writer suggested, "nativist amazons." They were expected to perform customary housewifely chores; they prepared food for Klan outings, picnics, and klambakes. In fact, their order was little more than the instrument of one man's authority. James Comer, Evans's early ally and grand dragon of the Arkansas Klan, bankrolled the Women of the Ku Klux Klan and controlled its activities. He forced the resignation of its imperial commander to install Robbie Gill, an initiate friend who would soon be his wife, as new leader. It was Commander Gill who told the Second Imperial Klonvocation "God gave Adam Woman to be his comrade and counselor . . . Eve's name meant life, society, company. Adam was lord and master." Like earlier nativists Klansmen never questioned the assumption of male dominance. The American dream they sought to protect had no room for sexual equality. But the image of threatened womanhood was essential to their own search for masculine validation, even as it had been in the days of *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk*. That had been another age in which economic growth and status anxiety served as a setting for the resurgence of the antislavery crusade.

The attacks on Catholics and foreigners and the vows to protect imperiled American women tied the Ku Klux Klan to a long history of similar movements. It was traditional nativism's last stand. Its emergence in the 1920s raised questions to which contemporary journalists and academics offered a variety of answers.

Reporter Robert L. Duffus, author of a series of anti-Klan articles in the *World's Work*, argued that many recruits came from "the back counties of the south and lower midwest," where men carry guns, women are objects of the deference but also of exploitation, and the disappointed seek causes outside themselves. Professor Frank Tannenbaum, writing in 1924, agreed in part,

seeing Klansmen as seekers after "artificial truths" as a way of dealing with the boredom of small-town life, people ready to use coercion in defense of social status, people "losing their grip" in a world of change. But Tannenbaum also looked to recent events as a source of this mood of restlessness. The Great War aroused human passions, he suggested, the "hope of a new and beatific world after the defeat of the German evil." The Klan offered an explanation of why the war brought no "dawning of Utopia." It was the Catholic, the radical, the foreigner who was in league with the devil.

Later, scholars would embrace some of these views. Though not sharing pro-Klan journalist Stanley Frost's rosy vision of Klansmen as a knighthood of admirable reformers, they agreed that the Klan represented a response to the war, a zeal to cleanse and reform American society. The rise of fundamentalist fervor in the 1920s, which provided an additional setting for the Klan, was seen as another reaction to the war. Anti-Catholicism was in the air in many parts of the nation in these years. As with fundamentalism, the Klan's crusade for conformity to old values and old social arrangements was seen as a "characteristic response to a common disillusion."

The Ku Klux Klan, like the Red Scare, was given new life by the souring of the international crusade. Almost all students of the Klan have made this point. But the reason why the Klan grew in the 1920s had more to do with social and economic strains in a society experiencing almost unprecedented growth.

Those who joined were not, as Duffus suggested, only losers in the boom years. Along with poor farmers, blue-collar workers, mechanics, and day laborers, some bankers, lawyers, doctors, ministers, and prosperous businessmen were recruited in different regions. There were communities in which political careers and professional success depended on membership. But the Klan appealed more to those who were not members of any elite. Imperial Wizard and Emperor Evans observed: "We are a movement of the plain people, very weak in the matter of culture, intellectual support and trained leadership. . . . We demand a return of power into the hands of the everyday, not highly cultured, not overtly intellectualized but entirely unspoiled and not de-Americanized average citizens of the old stock." The Klan everywhere appealed to those who believed that their older vision of America was at risk. In the struggle to preserve enduring American values, the movement offered a sense of common purpose in service of a cause greater than self. It offered an idealism that had a magnetic pull for many. Its shrewd managers, interested in money, power, and influence for themselves, knew how to package the movement. But the popularity of the Klan, once it began to spread across the land, did not depend on the Clarkes and Tylers or their successors as marketing specialists and salesmen. Like the earlier nativist fraternities, it was rooted in a longing for order, in misty memories of some stable and happy past, in fears of what new perils modernity might bring, in the search for community in an age of flux.

The movement provided community. Local Klans sponsored Sunday dinners and square dances, basketball tournaments and rodeos, carnivals and picnics, fireworks displays featuring "electric fiery crosses," social events of all kinds. It was comforting to be in the Klan, and it could be fun. Klansmen also took care of each other. Businessmen placed ads for Klan Clothes Cleaned or

Krippled Kars Kured, expecting fraternal ties would result in new customers. Other activities offered bonding through unified action to clean up the community: boycotts of businesses run by "immoral men," committees to ferret out bootleggers and bars.

The communal ties seemed at one with religious conviction. The movement that defended Protestantism won the tacit endorsement of many clergymen, some who joined the order. Most nationally prominent church leaders stayed away from the Klan, and some Methodist, Presbyterian, and Episcopalian notables and publications even attacked it, but these assaults from influential cosmopolitans only served to underscore Evans's claims that his movement was the instrument of the mass of common people. The Klan made inroads in many Protestant communities, particularly among Southern Baptists and others influenced by fundamentalist concerns. A major part of the Protestant press remained silent on the issue, but many local church papers endorsed the goals of an organization that appealed for support in the name of old-time values and that old-time religion.

The Klan's growth was meteoric. In 1924, Stanley Frost reported that "some say it has six million members." Frost himself claimed only some 4.5 million in the movement. Robert Duffus put the number at 2.5 million in 1923. Other guesses ranged upward of 5 million. It was impossible to be certain; the Klan left only fragmentary local records and no national archives. But one modern scholar, using available data, estimated it had over 2 million recruits in 1924; another, in a careful review of conflicting claims, put it at over 2 million initiates across the years, with some 1.5 million at any one time. What is certain is that it had become a true mass movement, one of the major developments in the history of the 1920s, a great monument to the antialien impulse in America.

## The Klan Across America

But it did not prosper equally in all sections of the country. In the Deep South where the Klan was born, it exerted considerable influence in some states. Still its membership never exceeded a quarter of a million. . . .

The Klan lasted longer in Indiana, home of its most powerful, most successful organization in the United States. The man who was instrumental in recruiting a quarter of a million knights statewide—almost forty thousand in Indianapolis—was Grand Dragon David D. Stephenson. Only thirty years old in 1921, Stephenson had been one of the four key state leaders helping Evans oust Simmons before the first national meeting in Atlanta. Rewarded with the organizing rights for twenty-three states in the North, this charismatic figure who liked to compare himself to Napoleon, already was a successful coal dealer when he joined the Invisible Empire. But in the Klan, he would make a fortune in recruitment fees and build a reputation as a mesmerizing orator, the super-salesman of the national Klan.

In Indiana, his order sponsored parades and athletic contests, field days and picnics. It offered community and festivity, but always in the name of protecting Protestant America from its enemies. In "Middletown," the Lynds found it had become a working-class movement and "tales against the Catholics ran

like wild fire" through Muncie. Local Klansmen vowed they would unmask only "when and not until the Catholics take the prison walls down from the convents and nunneries." Anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic, antiblack rhetoric filled Stephenson's colorful speeches: the Klan stood for temperance and patriotism, the aliens were threatening traditional American values. This appeal was so successful that store owners soon put TWK [Trade with a Klansman] in their windows; the secrecy of the order could be violated with little fear of retaliation in a state in which hundreds of thousands were flocking to join the most popular movement in memory. In fact, so many initiates paid their klock-token to Stephenson that it was estimated he made between \$2 and \$5 million in eighteen months. The grand dragon acquired a ninety-eight-foot yacht, which he kept on Lake Huron, a fleet of automobiles, a palatial suburban home, and elaborate offices in downtown Indianapolis. There, the mayor opposed "Steven" and his order until a Klansman named Edward Jackson won the Republican primary for governor in 1923. Now the Klan took control of the county party machinery. Jackson's subsequent election gave Stephenson and his movement state power unmatched by any other Klan.

A high point was reached with the fabled Konklave at Kokomo, when 200,000 men and women filled with love of country—in the words of the *Jiffy Cross* (Indiana State Edition)—gathered for the Klan's greatest single meeting. Tens of thousands of cars brought members from across Indiana and Ohio. Stephenson, attired in a sequined purple robe and escorted by his team of personal bodyguards, finally mounted the rostrum. He explained that he was late for the meeting because "the President of the United States kept me counseling upon matters of state." He proceeded to deliver a quintessentially nativist exhortation, filled with pleas for America and plans for vigilant opposition to the aliens. Always a riveting stump speaker, Stephenson was most respected for his organizational skills. But his Bonapartist complex and rumors for numerous sexual indiscretions and alcoholic binges soon led to conflicts with state and national Klan leaders. Evans turned against him, and he resigned as state grand dragon in September 1923. But D. C. Stephenson was not through. He marshaled support for a special state meeting the following May, in which his followers elected him once against their grand dragon, thus rejecting the authority of national headquarters. Stephenson continued to flout the hierarchical authority of the national Klan, staying in power during the election year of 1924, a time which marked the KKK's most significant impact in American politics. But by 1925, the Indiana chief was caught up in the scandal that ended in his prison sentence, a sordid affair that fatally wounded not only the Indiana Klan but the national movement as well. . . .

Although the Klan had suffered setbacks in Oklahoma, Texas, Colorado, Oregon, Illinois, and other states by early 1925, it still seemed a formidable national movement in the year after the election. Then came the Stephenson scandal in Indiana. The grand dragon was implicated in the death of a state-house employee named Madge Oberholzer. Although it was widely reported that he had known many attractive women in Indianapolis, D. C. Stephenson chose to lavish particular attention on Oberholzer. She later testified that he compelled her to drink with him, finally forcing her at gunpoint to a train. In

the private compartment he attacked and "sexually mutilated" her. Oberholtzer took a fatal overdose of drugs after this incident, but she lingered for weeks before her death; she had time to dictate the entire story to the prosecuting attorney, one of the new officials Stephenson could not control in Marion County. The revelations devastated the entire movement. The desperate grand dragon, on trial for murder, was abandoned by his former henchman, Governor Ed Jackson. Panicky Klan papers now assailed their leader. The *Indian Courier* headline declared: "D. C. Stephenson Not a Klansman," and called him an "enemy of the order," reporting that he had been "reputiated by all true Knights of the Empire." Stephenson responded by revealing the contents of his "little black box," which contained records implicating many highly placed Klan-backed officials as corrupters, providing evidence of their malfeasance of office. The movement did not recover in Indiana. While Stephenson languished in jail (he would not be released until 1956), the Klan found its political influence evaporating, its membership deserting by the thousands. Hypocrisy, greed, and dishonesty by the leadership was bad enough, but Stephenson's violation of the symbolic crusade for purity, chastity, womanhood, and temperance was too much. As the greatest of the state Klans dissolved, the national empire of the Ku Klux Klan began to crumble everywhere.

By late in the decade, the Klan was a shell of the powerful movement of 1923-24. Although thousands of hooded men marched in the last great parade down the boulevards of Washington in the summer of 1925, many more were abandoning the order. Al Smith's presidential candidacy in 1928 was the occasion for one final, convulsive anti-Catholic effort by the Invisible Empire, but Herbert Hoover's victory owed little to the Klan. In the 1930s, the shriveled movement receded from public view, and its remaining publicists turned away from Catholicism to communism when seeking the alien menace within. Hiram Wesley Evans, before he lost what had become the all but meaningless title of imperial wizard in 1939, even accepted the invitation of church leaders to attend the dedication of the Roman Catholic Cathedral, ironically built on the site of the old Imperial Headquarters in Atlanta. The old order was no more. By 1944, with the federal government pressing for the payment of back taxes on Klan profits from the prosperous 1920, remaining national officers officially disbanded the Ku Klux Klan.

Although small state and local organizations calling themselves Ku Klux Klan, using the terminology of the earlier movement, and dressing members in similar regalia would reemerge in the late 1940s to play occasional roles in anti-black and anti-civil rights violence up through the 1980s, the great Klan of the 1920s was long dead. It had faltered so quickly after the spectacular growth early in the decade for many reasons. It lacked a clear legislative agenda. It experienced heavy weather in the political struggles in several states, where adroit enemies could use its weaknesses to build support for their own interests. It was led, in many areas, by people who were the embodiment of precisely those qualities that Klan ideology asked initiates to oppose: heavy drinkers and swindlers, sexual exploiters and dishonest manipulators of the theme of patriotism. In the end, the movement that offered fraternity to men in tumultuous times, that provided a nativist response to the crisis of values

troubling so many in the Roaring Twenties, could not endure the revelations of scandal, the lack of constancy, the confused policies of the leadership. Like its antialien progenitors, the Ku Klux Klan was a movement that symbolized a longing for order, a desire to displace anger and anxiety. With no programmatic reason for being, men would desert it if it ceased to fulfill its symbolic function. As major newspapers turned against it, as articulate figures in the ministry and education, as well as in public life, pointed to its hypocrisy and treated it with scathing contempt, the mass of members simply drifted away. As with the Red Scare, the patriotic activity of the 1890s, and the antialien excitement of the pre-Civil War years, nativism's last stand had a relatively short run.



## The Guardians

The early twentieth-century assaults on Victorianism provoked a strong organized defense by fundamentalists, Prohibitionists, and various conservative and patriotic organizations. However, the huge nationwide Ku Klux Klan, with at least three million members, emerged as the most visible and powerful guardian of Victorianism during the 1920s.

Unlike the vigilante groups which had used the name Ku Klux Klan after the Civil War and during the mid-twentieth-century battles against integration, the Klan of the 1920s did not focus on protecting white supremacy in the South. At the height of the Klan's power in 1924, Southerners formed only 16 percent of its total membership. Over 40 percent of early twentieth-century Klan members lived in the three midwestern states of Indiana, Ohio, and Illinois. The Klan enrolled more members in Connecticut than in Mississippi, more in Oregon than in Louisiana, and more in New Jersey than in Alabama. Klan membership in Indianapolis was almost twice that in South Carolina and Mississippi combined.

Also, Klan members in the mid-1920s were not any more violent than other native, white, middle-class Protestant males. After the Klan organized nationally for maximum profit and political action in 1921, the organization expelled members and whole chapters charged with having taken part in vigilante activities. However, inconclusive newspaper and government investigations into the activities of a small minority of early Klansmen during 1921 gave the organization a violent image. The name Ku Klux Klan (adopted mainly because of the Klan's role in the immensely popular film, *The Birth of a Nation*) the Klan's secrecy, and the order's refusal to admit anyone except native white Protestant males contributed to this image, especially among blacks, Catholics, Jews, and champions of civil liberties.

The image of the Klan held by critics of the organization during the 1920s was affected too by the Klan's rhetoric. That rhetoric reflected still widely accepted Victorian ideas about a racial hierarchy and about the dangers to American society posed by Catholics, blacks, Jews, and Asians. These popular beliefs had assisted the passage of immigration-restriction acts and had helped to defeat the presidential bid of Al Smith. They already had led to nationwide segregation and to disenfranchisement of southern blacks. Therefore, almost nowhere that Klans-backed politicians won power did Klan racist rhetoric need

From Stanley Coben, *Rebellion Against Victorianism: The Impetus for Cultural Change in 1920s America* (Oxford University Press, 1991). Copyright © 1991 by Oxford University Press, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press, Inc. Notes omitted.

to be transformed into legislation. Nowhere did Klansmen running 101 office need to advocate violence under any circumstance, even against blacks in the South.

The near absence of Klan violence against southern blacks was explained, in part, by a perceptive editorial in the Savannah, Georgia, *Tribune*, a black-owned newspaper which strongly supported Marcus Garvey's black nationalist Universal Negro Improvement Association and was outspoken about civil-rights violations. The *Tribune's* editorial (whose conclusions were corroborated by other evidence), published July 13, 1922, stated:

The evidence is that in the South the Ku Klux are not bothering with the Negroes. The naked truth is that when a band of lynchers sets out to kill a Negro they do not take the trouble to mask. They do not think it necessary to join a secret society, pay initiation fees and buy regalia when Negroes are the quarry.

A Georgia mob did not find it necessary to don masks before lynching Leo Frank in 1915, the year that the early twentieth-century Klan met to organize outside Atlanta.

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The Klan's primary objectives consisted of guarding the major Victorian concepts and the interests these protected. The ideas of character, largely reserved for white Protestants, the home and family in which character was formed, and distinctly separate gender roles stood foremost among these concepts. A series of articles entitled "The Klansman's Criterion of Character," published weekly from March 1 to March 29, 1924, in the Klan's national newspaper *Searchlight*, illustrated what the Klan expected of its leaders as well as of its ordinary members.

Jesus provided the chief model for *Searchlight's* definition of character: "He never compromised when dealing with the leaders of the Jews. He would not lie in order to save his own life." Jesus "was the unflinching, accomplished, achieving Christ, because he was the purposeful, steadfast, determined Christ." Furthermore, Jesus accomplished his great mission on earth without the advantages enjoyed by members of the privileged business elites and the intelligentsia: "He controlled no centers of influence; He commanded neither learning nor wealth."

*Searchlight* implied that Klan members had undertaken the task of guarding, in the United States, Jesus' accomplishments:

The Klan is engaged in a holy crusade against that which is corrupting and destroying the best in American life. The Klan is devoted to the holy mission of developing that which is right and clean and beneficent in our country. The Klan is active in its ministry of helpfulness and service. . . . Such enthusiastic devotion to right principles and the holy cause must characterize true Klansmen, if they are to be like Him whom they have accepted as their "Criterion of Character."

The "Kloran" of the "Knights of the Ku Klux Klan," the order's ritual book used to conduct all meetings and initiations, declared on its cover the order's dedication to "Karacter, Honor, Duty."

Every recent study that has examined the characteristics of Klan members—in urban and rural communities of California, Colorado, Georgia, Indiana, Ohio, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, and Utah—has found that Klansmen constituted a cross section of the local native white Protestant male population, except for the very top and bottom socioeconomic levels of that population. Virtually every Klan candidate for state and local office appealed to this constituency—Klan and non-Klan—with promises to reduce or eliminate those results of character defects which threatened the home and family: violations of Prohibition especially, but also drug abuse, prostitution, gambling, political corruption, traffic violations, and Sunday blue-law offenses.

As local Klan chapters, or Klaverns, prepared to sweep almost every political office in rural Fremont County, Colorado, the county's Klan leaders invited a national Klan lecturer, "Colonel" McKeever, to help bring out the Klan vote. Speaking to an overflow audience in the Canon City armory (1920 population of 4,551), the county's largest community, McKeever proclaimed a typical Klan message.

The Klan stands for law enforcement; money and politics must cease to play a role [particularly in Prohibition enforcement] in our courts. The Klan stands for the American home; there is no sanctuary like a mother's heart, no altar like a mother's knee. The Klan stands for good men in office.

The Klan attempted to combat all "forces of evil which attack the American home." Threatening the "purity of women," claimed an editorial in the *Fier Cross*, Indiana's Klan newspaper, were businessmen who employed female secretaries: "Everyone knows of instances where businessmen insist on dating secretaries and imply that should they refuse, their jobs are in danger." . . .

Klan membership held a strong attraction for large numbers of men who already belonged to secret white Protestant fraternal organizations. . . . The Klan offered a more blatant racism, anti-Catholicism, and anti-Semitism, as well as direct participation in politics to members of such societies as the Masons, Odd Fellows, and Knights of Pythias. Moreover, the basic objectives of these other orders resembled those of the Klan in respects more important than ritual and fraternity. The most recent and discerning historian of the Freemasons, Lynn Dumenil, summarized the fundamental Masonic aims: "Not only would America become homogeneous again, but the perpetuation of the values of native, Protestant Americans would be assured."

Kleagles received instructions to contact local ministers, fraternal lodge members, and potentially favorable newspaper editors upon entering a community. They were to ascertain the strongest needs of local white Protestants with the aid of these contacts and to begin enrolling members. . . .

The most thorough statistical analyses of Klan membership during the 1920s have been written by Christopher Cocoltchos, Leonard Moore, and Robert Goldberg. A clear pattern emerges from Cocoltchos's information about Orange County, California, Moore's study of Indiana, and Goldberg's analysis of the Colorado Klan. Other recent books and articles support their conclusions.

These studies of members' characteristics found that Klansmen represented a near cross section of the white Protestant male population in their communities: Everywhere, the Klan fought to overcome the power of business and professional elites, except in some small towns. Outside those towns, few members of these elites joined the Klan, and those who did tended to be the younger members who evidently believed that their ambitions could be best furthered by the Klan.

In these communities as a whole, Catholics, blacks, Jews, and recent immigrants formed a very small part of the population. The few exceptions were the black population of Indianapolis, which almost equaled the proportion of blacks in the country; the German Catholic population of Anaheim, California, which led the anti-Klan elite there; and the Mexican-American Catholic population of Orange County, which was thoroughly segregated when the Klan was organized and which the Klan consequently ignored altogether. The percentages of those minorities in these communities were insignificant compared with the proportions of these same minorities in major cities like New York, Chicago, Cleveland, and St. Louis, where native white Protestants constituted a minority of the residents (in some cases, less than one-quarter).

Klansmen were concentrated in middle white-collar positions and among small businessmen. Those who were blue-collar workers were overwhelmingly in skilled positions. Members belonged to all major Protestant denominations, but the Klan included very few members of fundamentalist sects. They attended services in Northern Methodist and Disciples of Christ churches especially. Klansmen generally had lived in their communities longer than nonmembers, usually at least ten years before they joined the order, yet they tended to be younger. Well over three-quarters of them were married. They belonged to more civil and fraternal organizations, particularly to the Masons. They possessed greater wealth, more property, and registered to vote in 1924 in much larger proportions than did nonmembers in their communities. Klansmen in the mid-1920s decidedly were not a fringe group of vigilantes; they were solid middle-class citizens and individuals of high Victorian character.

Indiana served as the focal point of Klan power in America. The Indiana Klan enrolled more members and a much larger proportion of the state population than did the Klaverns of any other state. The state capital, Indianapolis, was referred to by a leading historian of the Klan as the "Center of Klandom."

Information about Klan members' characteristics in three Indiana communities, representative of the states' large and small cities and of its rural town, illustrates the Klan's composition in Indiana. The three communities are Indianapolis, a major industrial and commercial city whose population in 1920 was 314,000; Richmond, an industrial city with a population of 27,000 in 1920; and Crown Point, a commercial township of 4,312, which served the surrounding farming area.



Individuals in high white-collar occupations among Indianapolis's Klan members equaled almost exactly the proportion of men with that status in the city as a whole. However, the Indianapolis Klan contained none of the high executives of the city's largest corporations—such as Van Camp, one of the largest food canning companies in the nation; Eli Lilly, a major pharmaceutical manufacturer; and the Stutz and Dusenburg motor-car companies. Disciples of Christ, Lutheran, and United Brethren ranked highest among the church affiliations of Indianapolis's Klansmen.

About 75 percent of Richmond's Klan members occupied white-collar or skilled-worker positions compared to 64 percent of non-Klansmen in such positions. However, non-Klansmen filled the city's highest white-collar jobs in considerably larger proportions than did Klansmen. The greatest differences between the Protestant church affiliations of Richmond's Klan members and those of Richmond's citizens as a whole lay in the much higher proportion of Klansmen who belonged to Presbyterian, United Brethren, Disciples of Christ, and Episcopal congregations.

The occupational profile of Crown Point's Klan members resembled that of Indianapolis and Richmond Knights. Moore found that "Crown Point's wealthiest citizens did not appear to play any role in the Klan." Sixty-one percent of Crown Point's church-member Knights belonged to Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, or Disciples of Christ congregations.

In each of these three Indiana communities, Kleagles and local Klan organizers used vocal and written criticism of American Catholics, blacks, Jews, and recent immigrants as part of their recruiting rhetoric. However, Moore concluded that the Indiana Klan "did not employ violence as a strategy, and only a tiny fraction of the hooded order's membership ever engaged in violent or threatening acts."

The characteristics of Orange County Klansmen differed little from those of the Indiana members. For fast growing Anaheim, the county seat, Cocoltchos derived statistical information for Klan, non-Klan, and active anti-Klan residents. The latter included those who had joined the club devoted to defeating the Klan politically and also those who had signed both of the petitions opposing the Anaheim Klan.

A much higher proportion of Anaheim Klansmen held professional and administrative jobs than did non-Klansmen, but twice as high a percentage of active anti-Klansmen—who included the city's established business, professional and farming elite—occupied such positions as Klan members. Klansmen worked in trade, service, and skilled positions in greater proportions than did either of the other groups.

Over half the Anaheim Klansmen with a specific church affiliation belonged to Disciples of Christ and Northern Methodist congregations. Catholic was the largest single church affiliation among those actively opposed to the Klan—over 25 percent.

Cocoltchos also collected statistics for Anaheim Klan leaders and the anti-Klan elite, which led activities in the city directed against the Klan. His data proved very informative for an understanding of the Klan's conflicts with the Anaheim business and professional elite.

The anti-Klan elite of three hundred individuals overlapped to a very large extent Anaheim's traditional elite. The median age of the elite in 1924 was fifty-four years compared to forty-two-and-a-half years for Klan leaders. The median years of prior residence in Anaheim was thirty-and-a-half years for the elite and fifteen years for Klan leaders in 1924. Ninety percent of elite members belonged to civic clubs, while 72 percent of Klan leaders did.

Forty-five percent of the elite occupied professional and administrative positions compared to 27 percent of the Klan leaders. Half of the latter worked in the retail and wholesale trades. The median wealth of Klan leaders amounted to \$7,460 compared to \$36,534 for members of the anti-Klan elite. Seventy-two percent of Klansmen had already run for or held public office in 1924 compared to 55 percent of the elite. The Klan leaders, despite their role as prosperous community activists, faced a near united front of Anaheim's wealthy, well-entrenched business, professional, and large farmer elite.

In the smaller city of Fullerton, California, Klansmen differed from the non-Klan population largely in their much larger proportion of members working in service and skilled jobs. Klan members owned more property and acknowledged much greater median wealth. A significantly higher proportion of them were married, belonged to civic clubs, and voted in 1924. Klansmen belonged predominantly to Disciples of Christ, Northern Methodist, Episcopalian, and Northern Baptist churches.

Half of the Ku Klux Klan's members in Colorado lived in the capital and largest city, Denver. A much higher percentage of Denver's Klansmen worked in both high and middle white-collar occupations than did members of the male population as a whole. However, Goldberg found that "Denver's elite clubs listed only a handful of Klansmen among their members," and none belonged to the most prestigious social clubs, such as the Denver Club, the Denver Country Club, and the University Club. Only one Klan member was listed in Denver's Social Register. A much lower proportion of Klansmen than male citizens of Denver worked in skilled, semi-skilled, and unskilled labor jobs. Goldberg was unable to collect information about individual church membership, but over 70 percent of Denver's Disciples of Christ churches, 33 percent of its Methodist churches, and 25 percent of its Baptist churches actively supported the Klan.

A Kleagle did not arrive in Canon City, Colorado (with a population of 4,551 in 1920) and surrounding rural Fremont County until 1923. Of the Klan's members between 1924 and 1928, 40 percent occupied high or middle white-collar positions. Only 1.5 percent worked at unskilled jobs. One-quarter of Canon City's Klansmen belonged to the Masons as well. Klan-member ministers guided the town's Methodist and Baptist churches and the fundamentalist Church of Christ congregation.

These statistics bear out Leonard Moore's conclusions about the meaning of the latest books and articles about the Klan:

Together, these recent works make it nearly impossible to interpret the 1920's Klan as an aberrant fringe group. . . . In-depth analysis of state and community Klans from different regions of the country make it

clear . . . that the Klan was composed primarily of average citizens resenting nearly all parts of America's white Protestant society. . . .

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Leonard Moore summarized what he called the Klan's "basic message":

The average white Protestant was under attack: his values and traditions were being undermined; his vision of America's national purpose and social order appeared threatened; and his ability to shape the course of public affairs seemed to have been diminished.

Basing its political activity upon this message and the failure of state and local elites to address it satisfactorily, the Klan won a high degree of political power and influence in the states of Alabama, California, Colorado, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Texas. It took political control of hundreds of American cities and towns, including Akron, Atlanta, Birmingham, Dallas, Denver, El Paso, Evansville, Gary, Indianapolis, Little Rock, Oklahoma City, Portland, Oregon, Terre Haute, and Youngstown.

However, the powerful business elite of Richmond, Indiana, thwarted the Klan's political efforts. Richmond's major employers were International Harvester and the Pennsylvania Railroad. The successful anti-Klan forces were led by members of the Rotary Club, limited to representatives of the city's industrial corporations, top executives of its other businesses, and its most successful retail merchants. The Rotary received aid from the Kiwanis Club, dominated by small businessmen and city officials.

Explaining the Klan's near-total triumph in Indiana, Moore concluded that the state and local elites "stood nearly alone as a white Protestant social group unwilling to support the Klan." That group, he declared, surpassed Indiana's Catholics, blacks, and Jews as the order's chief opponents. When Indiana's Klan chapters sought political power, Moore found "their most powerful rivals were . . . the Rotary Club and the Chamber of Commerce, not the powerless or nonexistent ethnic minorities." When the Klan swept the state election of 1924 "the real victims were not the state's Catholics but the Republican . . . political establishment, which, almost overnight, found itself removed from power."

In Indianapolis, businessmen organized in the Chamber of Commerce and the Indiana Taxpayers' Association formed an important component of the Old Guard Republican establishment. School issues symbolized the conflict between the Old Guard and the Klan. Voters, led by the Klan, approved a series of school bond issues, meant to renovate dilapidated schools and to alleviate overcrowding in the city's elementary and high schools. The Chamber of Commerce and the Taxpayers' Associations organized a Citizen's League to hide their own opposition to all spending for schools, except for a segregated high school to educate the city's black children. The school board refused to appropriate funds for any other construction. In the school-board election of 1925, the Klan elected all five of its candidates to replace the five Citizen's League incumbents. A school construction program started soon afterward. Aided by

voter mobilization for the school-board election, the Klan won virtually every city political office in 1925.

In Lake County, where Crown Point served as county seat, Moore concluded: "Prohibition enforcement and public corruption had a . . . preponderant influence on Klan political victories." Exports of liquor by Chicago criminal organizations had left Lake County soaked in alcohol and full of corruption. In the November 1924 elections, every Lake County candidate endorsed by the Klan—including those in Crown Point—won election. . . .

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Starting in the mid-1920s, the Ku Klux Klan ebbed in numbers and in influence. The three chief reasons for this decline were the inability of the order to achieve its promises, the demoralization of members because of scandals involving Klan leaders and spokesmen (whom members expected to appear and act more honestly than their opponents), and counter-attacks by the ethnic and religious groups and business elites which held political control of the nation's major cities.

After an initial burst of enthusiasm for the Klan, when it gained control of city, county, and state governments, inexperienced Klan elected officials found their programs rendered ineffective by professional politicians. Therefore voters—including Klan members—who had supported the Klan were disappointed by the order's accomplishments.

For example, in Indiana, where the Klan elected its candidate for governor and won large majorities in both houses of the legislature in 1925, Klansmen enacted only one of their proposals into law. That measure, obliging all public schools to teach their students about the United States Constitution, obtained bipartisan support.

Other bills introduced by Klan legislators—such as legislation mandating daily Bible reading in Indiana's schools, forcing parochial schools to use the same textbooks as public schools, and compelling public schools to hire only public-school graduates as teachers—failed to pass. Legislators, especially in the state senate, and the Klan governor killed such measures rather than face the controversy that such blatant attacks on religious liberty would cause. The near certainty of adverse judicial decisions increased the reluctance of these politicians (particularly those who hoped to seek national office) to risk their careers.

Indiana Grand Dragon David C. Stephenson's crimes damaged the Klan most. Stephenson collected over a million dollars from Klansmen between 1922 and 1924. Most of this was used to support a most un-Klansmanlike lifestyle. He bought luxurious automobiles, an imposing suburban home, and a yacht on which he entertained numerous women. He also purchased a large liquor supply. Several times, his drinking binges brought him close to arrest by police.

In April 1925, Stephenson took one of his female companions, twenty-eight-year-old Madge Oberholzer of Indianapolis, on an overnight train ride to Hammond, Indiana. During this trip, Stephenson repeatedly raped Oberholzer. When they arrived in Hammond, she bought and swallowed a deadly poison.

A group of Anaheim's ministers sent Bulgin and local newspapers a letter inquiring whether he had been brought to Anaheim "for the express purpose of assisting in the re-election of the members of the city council whose removal is being sought because of their Klan affiliations." Bulgin proclaimed his neutrality concerning the election. At the following evening's revival meeting, however, Bulgin told his assembled flock that "the way to vote right and never make a mistake is to find out what side the ex-saloonkeepers, the bootleggers and the harlots are on and get on the other side." Bulgin's nightly meetings attracted large and enthusiastic audiences.

Representatives of the Chamber of Commerce and of the Rotary and the Lion's clubs of Anaheim contacted the Knights of Columbus and the Catholic Truth Society in many parts of the West, asking for information about Bulgin. An Okmulgee, Oklahoma, attorney replied that Bulgin's real specialty was selling stock in fictitious or worthless mining companies. In return, he had taken deeds to some citizens' homes. Telegrams from Eastland, Texas, and Lewiston, Idaho, stated that Bulgin had been chased out of those cities after being charged with fraud in numerous lawsuits. Two of Anaheim's newspapers printed these replies.

On February 3, 1925, almost 77 percent of Anaheim's voters—a larger proportion than the record turnout less than six months before that had elected the Klan councilmen—went to the polls. Every Klan-endorsed council member was recalled by a substantial margin.

The Ku Klux Klan paid dearly for its obvious role in reinvigorating Victorian racism and religious bigotry. Kenneth Jackson pointed out that "Relatively few reports of Klan-related violence between 1915 and 1924 are contained in the files of United States Department of Justice." However, in September 1923, the *Literary Digest*, a Klan opponent, published an article entitled "The Klan as a Victim of Mob Violence." The Indiana state *Fierly Cross* complained in 1924 that "The list of the outrages against Klansmen is so long that it would take weeks to compile even an incomplete list."

In dozens of cities—such as Fort Worth; San Antonio; Terre Haute; and Portland, Maine—Klan headquarters and meeting places were bombed and burned. After numerous warnings, the shop believed to be the publication headquarters of the Chicago Klan's journal, *Dawn*, was gutted by a bomb. An editorial in the *Fierly Cross* asked plaintively: Why does not anyone "ever read about halls of the Knights of Columbus being destroyed mysteriously?" Catholics and blacks had threatened the Klan with violence. The editor of the *Catholic World*, published by the Paulist Fathers, warned early in 1923 that because of the Klan, Catholics "may be driven to self-defense, even to the extent of bloodshed." The equally staid *Bulletin* of the National Catholic Welfare Council declared:

In this struggle for the supremacy of law and order over lawlessness and despotism, no quarter should be given those self-appointed patriots who distort and disgrace our Americanism and whose weapons are darkness, the mask, violence, intimidation and mob rule.

The Harlem-based radical black nationalist African Black Brotherhood proclaimed in its journal that "The nation-wide mobilization under the Christian

It took effect during the return trip to Indianapolis, but Stephenson refused to let the suffering woman see a physician until they reached Indianapolis. By then it was too late.

Before Oberholtzer died, she gave police a full statement. The State of Indiana charged Stephenson with causing her suicide because he had forced her to lose "that which she held dearer than life—her chastity." Stephenson was indicted and convicted of kidnapping, rape, and second-degree murder. He received a sentence of life imprisonment.

Stephenson confidently expected a pardon from Indiana's Governor Ed Jackson, a Klansman. When Jackson refused his request, Stephenson offered to testify about the corruption of Jackson and other state and local Klan officials. As a result, Mayor John Duvall of Indianapolis went to prison for violating the Corrupt Practices Act—so did the county sheriff, its congressman, the city purchasing agent, and a large number of less important Klan officeholders. Based on Stephenson's testimony, a grand jury indicted Governor Jackson for bribery, but he escaped prison because the statute of limitations on his offenses had expired. Soon after these revelations Klan membership in Indiana began shrinking. Fewer than seven thousand members remained by 1928.

Stephenson's trial, well publicized by newspapers and magazines, distressed Klansmen throughout America. Their outrage increased when they learned about the crimes of Dr. John Galen Locke, Colorado's Grand Dragon and Denver's Exalted Cyclops. In January 1925, Locke arranged the kidnapping of Klan member Keith Boehm, a high-school student. Taken to Locke's office and threatened with castration unless he married his pregnant girlfriend, Boehm agreed to the marriage. Locke explained to the *Denver Post* that "When I learned of what happened . . . I meant to see to it that young Boehm, as a Klansman, should do the manly thing." The district attorney brought kidnapping and conspiracy charges against Locke. Luckily for Locke, Klan opponent Judge Ben B. Lindsay of the juvenile court disqualified himself from the case. Locke's attorney engineered changes of venue until the case landed before a Klansman judge who found technical reasons to dismiss it.

Then federal Treasury officials charged Locke with failing to report any income or to pay income taxes despite the fees he earned as a physician and from Klan initiation fees and commissions on the sale of Klan robes. Locke went to prison until Colorado's governor, who had been chosen by the Grand Dragon, established a fund to pay Locke's back taxes. Other Klansmen paid Locke's fine. Mass defections from Colorado's Klan began. Imperial Wizard Hiram Evans requested Locke's resignation, and Locke immediately complied.

In Anaheim, the politically defeated Chamber of Commerce and Rotary Club collected sufficient signatures on petitions late in 1924 to force recently elected Klan city council members into a recall election. Minor scandals and a failure to appreciably diminish Prohibition violations already had cost the Klan some support. Anaheim's Klan leader, Reverend Mr. Meyers, sought to renew Klan members' enthusiasm by bringing Protestant evangelist E. E. Bulgin to the city in January 1925 to conduct revival meetings. Bulgin arrived on January 11, set up his tent, and began the services.

cross and the Stars and Stripes of cracker America is plainly an act of war . . . The war of the cracker element of the white race against the whole Negro race." The *Chicago Defender*, the most widely read black newspaper in the United States, urged its readers in a front-page editorial to prepare to fight "against sons who now try to win by signs and robes what their fathers lost by fire and sword."

When the Klan began organizing in and around the nation's largest cities, members of the order soon discovered that white Protestant authority no longer prevailed throughout the land. In these cities Catholics, blacks, Jews, and recent immigrants formed a majority of the population—sometimes a very large majority.

Soon after Kleagles ventured into New York City, Irish Catholic Mayor John F. Hylan told his police commissioner in 1922: "I desire you to treat this group of racial and religious haters as you would the Reds and bomb throwers. Drive them out of our city." Two New York City grand juries commenced investigations of the Klan, and the New York City Council quickly passed legislation forcing associations not incorporated in New York to file membership lists. Klan members in New York and suburban Westchester County during the 1920s totalled about 16,000, less than Klan membership in Akron or Youngstown, Ohio.

Chicago's large Klan chapter did nothing to help enforce Prohibition laws. However, the West Suburban Ministers and Citizens Association organized to help enforce those laws in and around Chicago. Soon afterward, the association's leader, a minister, was found shot to death a block from Al Capone's headquarters in suburban Cicero. This warning ended private attempts to fight Prohibition offenses in Chicago.

The Chicago City Council appointed a five-man committee in December 1922 to investigate the Klan and then report back to the council. The five members were identified as Ald. Robert J. Mulcahy, Irish; Ald. Louis B. Henderson, black; Ald. U. S. Schwartz, Jewish; Ald. S. S. Walkowiak, Polish; and Ald. Oscar H. Olsen, Norwegian. Largely as a result of the committee's unanimous report, the city council resolved by a vote of fifty-six to two to rid Chicago's municipal payroll of Klansmen. The Illinois legislature also received the report and consequently passed a bill prohibiting the wearing of masks in public. The measure cleared the Illinois House of Representatives by a vote of 100 to 2, and the Illinois State Senate by 26 to 1. Illinois's Klansmen were thus forced to hold most of their parades, picnics, and other gatherings in Indiana and Ohio.

Boston's Mayor James Michael Curley barred Klan meetings in Boston, and the city council approved his order. He gave speeches before burning crosses and in an emotion-choked voice always proclaimed: "There it burns, the cross of hatred upon which Our Lord, Jesus Christ, was crucified—the cross of human avarice, and not the cross of love and charity. . . ." Homes and stores of suspected Klansmen in Boston were bombarded with bricks and stones.

On the outskirts of major cities, where the Klan sometimes dared to march or meet, the Knights received even worse treatment. Ten thousand Klansmen gathered near Carnegie, just outside Pittsburgh, on August 25, 1923, to witness an initiation featuring an address by Imperial Wizard Hiram Evans. When they tried to march back to the heavily Catholic, immigrant, and black

town, however, a mob stood in their path. The Klansmen continued marching through a hail of rocks and bottles. Then a volley of shots rang out. One Klansman lay dead, a dozen others fell seriously wounded, and about a hundred more suffered minor injuries. The other Klan members turned and ran.

Commenting on the Carnegie massacre, the *Washington Star* declared that "Parades of the Klan, with its masked and hooded members, tend to create disorder and rioting." An editorial in the *Washington Post* stated that the paper agreed with the *New York Times* that "The Klan is merely reaping as it has sown."

Other Klan meetings were broken up by lethal shotgun blasts. In New York's suburban county of Queens, police ended a Memorial Day parade of 4,000 Klansmen by waving waiting cars through the whole parade line.

Hiram Evans summarized the Klan's plight when he stated in March 1926 that "The Nordic American today is a stranger in large parts of the land his fathers gave him. Moreover, he is a most unwelcome stranger, and one most spat upon."

Evans described accurately the result of the Klan's defense as Victorianism's essence. The most important social trends and the great social reform movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had indeed left Klansmen strangers in most of the land their ancestors had settled.

