The Ku Klux Klan In Montana During The 1920s

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THE KU KLUX KLAN IN MONTANA DURING THE 1920s

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATION WITH HONORS IN THE HISTORY PROGRAM

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY

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I would like to acknowledge the sacrifices of my mother and father. It was through their encouragement and support that my studies at Carroll College became a reality. They have been financially possible. I also want to thank Mary Rank, who typed this entire manuscript, and Sjohn Stahlmyer, who helped me with the editing.

I would like to thank my director and readers, Dr. Robert Swartout, Rev. Jeremiah Sullivan, and Prof. John Downs. I not only had the opportunity to work with them on this honors thesis, but I also had them as professors. They represent what it means to be truly excellent teachers. Thank you for your time, support, and comments in- and out- of the classroom.

Most of all, I would like to thank my director, adviser, and professor, Dr. Swartout. It was because of him that I pursued an education in history. Thank you for all of your patience, support, and your caring way. It was through your faith in me that I learned to have faith in myself, which made the writing of this honors thesis possible. I am ever grateful.
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PREFACE

The Ku Klux Klan was an impressive force in Montana during the 1920s. There were nearly 3,000 Klan members in at least 46 different Klan chapters throughout Montana. The most significant aspects of the Montana Klan included its opposition to many immigrant groups in the state, its involvement in key political issues, and the Klan leaders' use of the fraternal order to lure many Montanans into the organization by playing on their personal insecurities.

In order to understand the dynamics of the Klan in Montana during the 1920s, however, it is important to examine the Klan at the national level, and see why the movement was prevalent in the United States at the time. Many of the characteristics of the national Klan parallel those of the Klan in Montana.

It is equally important to look at the setting in Montana to understand why the state was ripe for such an organization as the Ku Klux Klan, and why so many Montanans found it appealing. The Klan's presence in the state symbolized many of the social and economic tensions arising in Montana during and after World War I.
CHAPTER 1

KU KLUX KLAN IN THE 1920s

The Ku Klux Klan at the national level was an extremely powerful force in America in the 1920s. The first Klan, which appeared after the Civil War, was mainly in the South and was primarily anti-black. However, the Klan in the 1920s appeared throughout the United States and was anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant, as well as anti-black. These groups became scapegoats for the white, native-born American who felt anxiety over the changing society in the United States during the 1920s. The K.K.K. provided a sense of security for Klansmen because they could belong to this social fraternal order. Although the Klan confessed to support social morality and uphold the values of pure Americanism, it encouraged racism and nativism which caused incidents of intimidation and violence.

Six former Civil War Confederate soldiers started the original Klan in 1865 in Pulaski, Tennessee, as a "social club."¹ They named their club from the Greek word "kuklos," which means circle, and added "klan" to the end because of its sound and spelling.² This "social club," however, gradually became an organization involved in violence, terror, and bloodshed when it was reorganized two years later with a more defined purpose—to stop the reconstruction process of the South. In April 1867 the Klan met at the Maxwell
House in Nashville, Tennessee, with Nathan Bedford Forrest, former Civil War Confederate general, presiding as the Grand Wizard, to talk of the Klan's new purpose.³

After the Civil War, the Union's goal was to create a restored South through Reconstruction where blacks and whites shared equal opportunities. However, certain white Southerners did not want blacks to have these rights. In essence, they wanted to keep the blacks as second-class citizens, and the Klan saw itself as the enforcer of this philosophy. Forrest described the purpose of the Klan, stating that it was for those exploited white Southerners who felt threatened by the freed blacks. According to Forrest, the Klan would restore the antebellum hierarchical class order in which whites completely dominated all phases of life, and blacks enjoyed few privileges.⁴

Five years later, through intimidation and violence, the Klan succeeded. The Reconstruction Era was gone, and black interests fell to the wayside leaving racism out in the open. Having accomplished the goal of defeating Reconstruction, Forrest disbanded the Klan in 1872, and it disappeared from the scene until its reappearance in 1915.

From 1915 the Klan grew to an impressive force in America until the mid 1920s. The new Klan existed not only in the South, but also in the Midwest and Far West, reaching such states as Indiana, Oregon, and Montana. By the mid 1920s, there were more than five million members in the Klan. In order to qualify as a member, one had to be a white, Protestant, native-born American. Those attracted to the Klan were generally low-wage workers with no more than a
sixth-grade education. It was these uneducated blue-collar workers who were seeking a sense of stability and a sense of worth in the ever-changing society of the 1920s. Many felt anxiety because they were not fulfilling the "American dream" which promised them personal and financial success in exchange for hard work, perseverance, and honesty. Because they were not receiving the perceived fruits of their labor, they looked for scapegoats to blame for their predicament.

The Klan of the 1920s was against blacks, Catholics, and immigrants. Blacks were perceived as a threat because, with their new freedom, more of them were able to compete against whites for jobs. Catholics, who supposedly swore allegiance to a foreign pope, challenged the predominant Protestantism in America, and with more Catholics coming into the country, more hostility was directed toward them. Immigrants, especially those from southern and eastern Europe, also presented a threat. They were seen as un-American because they had darker skin, spoke no English, and were non-Protestant. These were all new faces in American society who were seen as a threat during this time of rapid change.

In fact, the dramatic rise of the K.K.K. reflects some of the most important tensions and fears surfacing in American society at the end of World War I. Some of these changes taking place included industrialization, urbanization, and the rise of immigration. These changes helped to fuel the feeling of paranoid nativism felt by the American people and would lead them to seek solutions to resolve their uneasiness.
The war "unleashed a nationalistic spirit that craved unity and conformity." Because of this, Americans became suspicious of anything that threatened their way of life. An example of this paranoia was the great fear that communism was rising within America's borders. As a result, the Red Scare emerged in 1919. During 1919-1920 suspected communists were rounded up and deported from the United States. Though the Red Scare did not last long, it continued to influence society in the U.S. through the 1920s. An example of this bigotry was the execution of two Italian aliens, Nicola Sacco and Bartolemeo Vanzetti. Sacco and Vanzetti were arrested for robbery and murder; however, the jury and the judge were blatantly biased against them because of their nationality, and they were executed in the electric chair in 1927. This exploitation of anti-immigrant sentiments would lay fertile ground for the K.K.K.

America in the 1920s had a tremendous impact on worldwide commerce. America's industrial output nearly doubled at this time, and the gross national product rose 40 percent. The symbols for post-World War I America became the shopping center, the skyscraper, the refrigerator, and the automobile. The danger, however, was unequal distribution of wealth. Only the upper and middle class did well in the 1920s. The engineers, bankers, and executives were the ones who enjoyed the new luxuries. Those in agriculture were the hardest hit. The average American's yearly wage was $681, compared to a farmer's wage of only $273 a year. Along with industry came urbanization. Historically, America had been a land of farmers, but by 1880 this concentration began to
change. According to the census taken in 1920, half of the American population was living in the city for the first time. This caused a sort of "rural counterattack." The group most bitter about the urbanization taking place in the U.S. was the white, native-born Protestants residing in rural areas who condemned urban crime and modernism. The rural counterattack--often marked by prejudice, bigotry, hate, and intolerance--presented a striking contrast to the popular image of the "roaring twenties." Rural citizens felt their way of life being threatened, and they wanted to regain what they saw as the lost purity of American life. The issue of Prohibition was an example of this growing tension. Rural areas supported the Eighteenth Amendment because drinking symbolized the city, saloons, and urban immigrants. However, "the most ominous expression of rural protest against the city was the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan." William J. Simmons, whose father was in the original Ku Klux Klan, organized the new Klan on Thanksgiving Day, 1915, in Georgia. Simmons had dreamt about the Klan and saw it as a sign to rebuild the K.K.K. Simmons was a southern romantic who tended to glorify the days of the Confederacy. However, at the same time, a film was produced which also may have had some impression on Simmons. D.W. Griffith made this first feature length film called The Birth of a Nation based on the book Klansmen. This epic film was about the Civil War and Reconstruction, and it romanticized the first K.K.K. The movie's moral message made it clear it was the Klansmen, and people like them, who saved the South and the whites from the
villainous blacks, carpetbaggers, and scalawags. The movie was extremely popular, grossing almost eighteen million dollars.\textsuperscript{13}

By 1919 the Klan was growing, and people were joining by the thousands. To increase membership, Simmons hired two promoters for the Klan, Edward Clark and Elizabeth Tyler. Both Clark and Tyler had sales experience, and they saw the Klan as a great financial opportunity. To become a member, a klansman had to pay ten dollars, eight of which was pure profit for the leaders. However, by 1921 the new Klan was in a stage of flux, which made it possible for a new leader to come on the scene, Hiram Wesley Evans.

Simmons was an alcoholic and in bad health. Clark got into trouble for having intercourse with a friend's sister out of state, therefore violating the Mann Act.\textsuperscript{14} Tyler, who had an affair with Clark, was disillusioned by the whole thing. In 1922 Evans, a dentist, envisioned the Klan as a great investment and purchased it for $146,000. Thus, he became the Imperial Wizard of the Invisible Empire and would remain in that position throughout the 1920s.\textsuperscript{15}

The volatile society of the 1920s had an immense impact on the average American. The Klan leaders responded to these changes by playing on the fears of the ordinary people. In an era so rich in cultural conflict, leaders used terms such as "idealism" and "morality" because they knew people would identify with and respond to such terms. David Horowitz makes the following comment that these "Klan expressions related to the world of white, native-born Protestants and portrayed a society in which traditional virtues were to be honored only among those sharing an inherited culture. Even
though Klan leaders distrusted formal ideology, their approach to social and personal morality is revealing of their movement and their age."16

The Klan offered psychological support to its members, providing them with a sense of belonging. Being part of the Klan relieved their anxiety about living in a rapidly changing society. By being a member of this fraternal group, the klansmen could participate in mass invitations, parades, picnics, barbecues, and the night rides and meetings wearing their white robes. It also brought excitement to their lives because they could participate in secrecy and mystery in an "exotic world of titles and practices."17

When members were newly selected into the Klan, they would have to be sworn into the order. The candidates would thus experience the full effect of the Klavern, the Klan's gathering place, for the first time on their initiation night (for a diagram of the Klavern, see figure 1, page 9). Each Klan had officers who would perform certain duties during the meeting (for a list of officers, see figure 2, page 10). As the men entered into the outer den, they would be checked by the Klextor. As they proceeded into the Klavern itself, they would be cleared once more by the Klarogo, or inner guard, to ensure that only those permitted would enter. Once all were settled inside, the Kladd, or conductor, would then signal for the meeting to begin. Once receiving his cue, the Kludd, or chaplain, would evoke a blessing of deity. When it was time, the Klokkard would then bring the candidate in front of the Exalted Cyclops who was the president of the Klan. Once there, with the Night Hawk on
Fig. 1. A Diagram of the Klavern. Box 4, Folder 9, Ku Klux Klan Collection, MSSC 236, Eastern Washington State Historical Society, Spokane, Washington.
Exalted Cyclops ................. (President)
Klaliff ................................ (Vice-President)
Klokard ................................ (Lecturer)
Kludd .................................... (Chaplain)
Kligrapp ................................ (Secretary)
Klabeec .................................. (Treasurer)
Kladd .................................... (Conductor)
Klarogo .................................. (Inner Guard)
Klexter .................................. (Outer Guard)
Klokan (singular) ....................... (Investigator)
Klokann (plural) ....................... (Board of Investigators)
Night-Hawk ......................... (Chg. Candidates)

Fig. 2. A List of Klan Officers. Box 4, Folder 9, Ku Klux Klan Collection, MSSC 236, Eastern Washington State Historical Society, Spokane, Washington.
the right holding the fiery cross, the inductee was sworn into the Klan. In this oath of allegiance "he swore obedience, secrecy, fidelity, and klanishness." He was now "in the unfailing and sacred bond" with the other Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.18

The Knights saw themselves as loyal American citizens who needed to protect America and their ideals of "pure Americanism." This included such things as upholding the American flag, constitution, free speech, free press, separate church and state, liberty, just laws, womanhood, and social morality. However, the Klan went a step further and supported white supremacy, suppression of parochial schools, Prohibition, and restricted immigration.19 Within this fraternal order lay a great paradox. While claiming to support the U. S. Constitution, the Klan "went beyond these formal stances to express direct hostility and prejudice towards immigrants, Jews, Catholics, and blacks. Occasionally such blatant nativism and racism erupted into ugly incidents of intimidation and violence."20 The Klan leaders were involved in corrupt political machines and encouraged mob excitement, race hatred, and religious prejudice. They became obsessed with material gains, and therefore increased financial demands on the rank and file Klansmen. The leaders also pushed their members to support certain political figures at both the local and national level who were sympathetic to the causes of the Klan.21

An example of the Klan's interest in politics at the national level was in the 1928 presidential election. Candidates Al Smith and Herbert Hoover ran against each other, and the Klan violently
disapproved of Al Smith because he represented everything the
K.K.K. considered to be "un-American." Smith was an urban
Democrat; a Catholic; and a wet, which meant he was against
Prohibition. Herbert Hoover, on the other hand, was a Protestant, a
dry, and one of the old stock Americans. In an effort to prevent
Smith from being elected, Klan leaders nationwide wrote letters to
the Klans throughout the U. S. to ensure they would vote for
Hoover.22

Through such letters the Klan's national leaders could
communicate with the different state realms of the Ku Klux Klan. It is
important to understand the Klan at the national level because its
social, economic, and political views were, in many instances, the
same as those of the Klan in Montana.

6Walter LaFeber, Richard Polenberg, and Nancy Woloch, The
American Century: A History of the United States Since the 1890s,
7Divine, America, 413.
8Ibid., 414.
9Ibid., 405-9.
10Ibid., 414.
11Ibid.
13Chalmers, Headed Americanism, 37.
ENDNOTES

1"Constitution and Laws of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan" (Atlanta, Georgia: Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Inc., 1921), 48, Box 4, Folder 1, Ku Klux Klan Collection, MSSC 236, Eastern Washington State Historical Society, Spokane, Washington (hereafter cited as Klan Collection).

2Elsie P. Johnston, Laurel's Story, A Montana Heritage (Laurel: Artcraft Printers, 1979), 34.


4Ibid., 20.


7Divine, America, 413.

8Ibid., 414.

9Ibid., 405-9.

10Ibid., 414.

11Ibid.


13Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, 27.
The Mann Act was a law which prohibited the transporation of women across state lines for illicit purposes.


Divine, America, 415.

"List of Officers," Box 4, Folder 9, Klan Collection.


Horowitz, "Oregon's Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s," 366.

Ibid., 365-6.

LaFeber, The American Century, 162; Divine, America, 419.
CHAPTER 2

THE SETTING IN MONTANA: 1917-1921

In order to understand why the Ku Klux Klan was prevalent in Montana in the 1920s, it is important to examine the economic, social, and cultural setting in the state during and after the World War I. The war itself unleashed a great deal of patriotic sentiment. These nationalistic feelings were sometimes taken to an extreme in Montana. One example was the Montana Council of Defense, in which some members became so fanatical that their actions resulted in the suppression of rights of other Montanans. Along with the unrest caused by the war, postwar Montana faced an enormous economic crisis. Most parts of the economy were declining because of the end of the wartime demands, but agriculture especially suffered because of the great drought affecting the eastern two-thirds of the state. All these factors created an unstable atmosphere, and certain groups were sought out as scapegoats. Given the fact that Montana had a variety of ethnic groups, many of these people could become prime targets. All of these elements would help to explain the rise of the Ku Klux Klan in Montana in the 1920s.

Because of these super patriotic sentiments during World War I and the period immediately following the war, there was a kind of mass hysteria in Montana. As a result of these nationalistic feelings, some committees harassed suspected traitors, suspended civil
liberties, and burned German books. Reflecting on this time in Montana, K. Ross Toole remarked that "Montana might look back on the bizarre stories and remember the hysteria with good-humored embarrassment except for what happened day by day to their fellow citizens and the structure of government by law."¹

The groups in Montana whom these committees often viewed with suspicion were the German Americans, Finns, Irish, Poles, and anyone with a foreign accent. Those involved in labor unions were seen as a threat as well.² One of the committees formed in the state was the Montana Council of Defense. The M.C.D. was originally formed to aid the Council of National Defense and to resolve the problems in Montana caused by the war.³ However, the M.C.D. had become involved to such an extent that it denied basic rights to many fellow Montanans.

William Campbell, editor of the Helena Independent and member of the Montana Council of Defense, remarked in his newspaper:

The time has come. The Independent cannot comprehend why the United States government has not long ago established prison camps and interned there the enemies of the American government. It is beyond the comprehension of the average citizen why the War Department has not ordered certain leaders arrested and shot. The people will not stand for much more. . . .⁴

Will Campbell's sentiments reflect the thinking of many intensely patriotic Montanans and those who ran the M.C.D.⁵

In 1918 the Montana Council of Defense was concerned with the labor force in Montana. The Council believed that all available
manpower was essential on the home front for the war effort. The Council attempted to exert social control by wanting it to be illegal for vagrants, beggars, and any healthy person from wandering place to place without lawful business. Furthermore, every person, if able to do so, was ordered to work five days a week for the duration of the war. According to Campbell, "Work, War or Jail" became the M.C.D. slogan.

The Council also tried to exert social control by making "every lewd and dissolute person, who lives in and about houses of ill fame, or who lives with or upon the earnings of a woman of bad repute, and every common prostitute and common drunkard" subject to arrest. This attempt to uphold and control moral behavior was similar to that of the Klan's.

Although not officially authorized, the members of the M.C.D., and other committee members like them, saw it as their duty to investigate those Montanans whom they thought were guilty. This inquisition caused hundreds of Montanans to be investigated, humiliated, or jailed. Most were accused of being pro-German or not buying a certain number of Liberty Bonds. Along with the investigation of suspected traitors, the M.C.D. censored books, newspapers, and films. The Council also opposed the teaching of the German language in the high schools and burned many German books.

As a direct result of the general hysteria in the state, Montana also passed special legislation during this period. Senator Henry L.
Myers of Montana introduced a bill on August 13, 1917, which suppressed freedom of speech by making

... it a crime to "utter, print, write, or publish any disloyal, profane, or scurrilous or abusing language" about the government, constitution, or armies of the United States. Furthermore, anyone who showed "contempt, scorn, contumely, or disrepute" towards the Army, Navy, flag, or government could be fined a sum not to exceed $10,000 and given a prison sentence not more than twenty years.7

On May 25, 1921, Governor Joseph M. Dixon terminated the Montana Council of Defense. According to Arnon Gutfeld, this "ended one of Montana's most shameful institutions."8 However, the fanatical sentiments remained in the state, thus laying the groundwork for an organization like the Ku Klux Klan to rise in Montana. On the home front, from 1917 to 1921, Montana displayed these irrational and emotional reactions to the war effort. Along with the intolerance and hysteria, Montana went through an immense economic dislocation after the war.

The United States as a whole suffered a sharp recession after the war, but the depression hit harder and longer in the agriculturally dependent region of Montana. Between 1910-1920, 94.5 million acres of new farms existed in the United States, and of this number 21.5 million acres were in Montana.9 America became the bread basket for Europe, which caused a boom in the economy during 1915-1918. Many people came to Montana and pursued a living in agriculture. The number of farms rose dramatically from 1900 to 1920. In 1900 there were 7,000 farms in Montana, a
number which increased to 46,000 farms by 1920. However, by the end of World War I, Europe once again became self-sufficient, and therefore less dependent on America for food. This change caused a sharp drop in prices.\textsuperscript{10}

The agricultural crash of 1919-1921 was caused by both nature and man. Because of the drought, 1919 was one of the worst years in Montana agriculture, resulting in a light harvest. For example, prior to 1919 the average number of bushels of wheat per acre was 25, but by 1919 farmers averaged only 2.4 bushels of wheat per acre. The blow was compounded by the end of the wartime economy and the drop of government price controls. Wheat which sold for $2.40 per bushel in August 1920 fell to $1.25 by October of the same year. Both light harvests and low prices caused one of every two farmers to lose his land.\textsuperscript{11}

Many of these farmers, who were foodless, seedless, and moneyless, left Montana. In fact, the most ominous sign of the depression in Montana was the great exodus of the state's rural population. Montana was the only state to lose population during the "prosperous 1920s." An estimated 70,000-80,000 people came into eastern and central Montana between 1909-1918, and at least 60,000 left before 1922.\textsuperscript{12} This exodus caused much unrest among Montanans. As Malone and Roeder note, "Indeed, Montana lost more in the post-war depression than merely its marginal farmers. To a considerable extent, it also lost its self-confidence and its faith in the future."\textsuperscript{13} Because of this unstable atmosphere in the state, many
white, native-born Montanans might find an order like the Klan appealing.

Along with agriculture, the end of wartime demands on raw materials affected the mining and lumber industries of Montana. This shift caused local shutdowns and unemployment. An example of this decline after the war occurred in the lumber industry in Montana. By 1920 production reached 409,000,000 feet. However, production decreased by almost 50 percent by 1921, which forced 38 percent of the mills out of production.¹⁴

Turmoil because of World War I caused much tension in the mines as well. An example of this dissension took place in the mines in Butte. Copper and zinc became vital for the wartime effort. As prices increased, the Andaconda Company in Butte increased production in the mines. At the same time the cost of living rose, but wages did not increase, and working conditions worsened.¹⁵ In 1917 the Department of Labor conducted a study in Butte because of the strife in the city. The study found that for minimum subsistence level, a family of four needed $1,106 per year. To reach the comfort level, they needed $1,413. However, in 1917 Butte miners made an average of $1,215--just enough to stay above subsistence level, but below the comfort level. The wartime fears and suspicion worsened the situation.¹⁶

Another area hard hit during this time were the banks of Montana. Between 1920-1926 more than half of Montana's commercial banks failed. Over 200 banks closed their doors, carrying thousand of family savings down with them. Montana had
the highest bankruptcy rate in the United States. The superintendent of the Bank of Montana described the years of 1920-1924 as "one long dripping tunnel--a veritable nightmare." 17

Because of all this, "the Montanan, once the classic frontier optimist, became more and more the cautious cynic, hardened to adversity and suspicious of change." 18 With all the changes taking place in America, Montanans tried to hang onto their traditional values of independence, individualism, hard work, and agrarianism. Immigrants came to be seen as a threat to this traditional way of life. Such organizations as the Ku Klux Klan sought out the foreign-born as scapegoats.

From the beginning of its history, Montana has attracted a wide variety of people. Different ethnic groups came to Montana during the various frontiers in the state. For example, Frenchmen and Scots arrived in Montana during the fur trade frontier. The Irish, English, German, and Scandinavians came for the placer gold. Many Chinese arrived during the gold frontier and helped to establish mining camps that attracted Jewish merchants. The lumbering communities had a high concentration of Norwegians, Swedes, Danes, and Finns. Finally, agriculture brought Scandinavian and German farmers, among others, after 1910.

In fact, by 1910 one-fourth of Montana's population was foreign born. Immigrants from Canada, Ireland, Germany, and Scotland made up the largest group. However, by this time newcomers from central and southern Europe were coming into
Montana as well. Among this group were Serbs, Croatians, Bulgarians, Romanians, Poles, Finns, and Italians.

These immigrants brought with them their religious practices. Roman Catholic, Methodist, and Episcopal were the most common denominations during the time of the gold frontier. Presbyterians, Baptists, Lutherans, and Congregationalists arrived later. Of these groups, Lutherans, who were mainly German and Scandinavian, rose to be the second largest denomination in the state by 1920. However, the dominant religion was Catholicism. In fact, in 1906, 74 percent of those with religious affiliation were Catholics. The western part of Montana had a high concentration of Catholics. In part, this was due to the large number of Irish in that region. For example, the western city of Butte had 2,376 of Montana's 7,260 Irish.

The wartime hysteria and subsequent economic crisis in the state caused an unsettled atmosphere in Montanan, which increased social and economic tensions. The Klan provided an escape that appealed to those white, native-born Protestants who felt alienated by the changes occurring in their state and communities. Given the high percent of Catholics and immigrants, the Klan could use these groups as scapegoats for their own insecurities.
ENDNOTES


2 Ibid., 140.


4 Helena Independent, 12 August 1917, 2.

5 Gutfeld, Montana's Agony, 32.

6 Ibid., 64-5.

7 Ibid., 43.

8 Ibid., 67-9.


10 Toole, Twentieth Century Montana, 51, 61; Malone and Roeder, Montana, 217.

11 Ibid., 216-9.

12 Ibid., 218; Toole, Twentieth Century Montana, 26.

13 Malone and Roeder, Montana, 219.

15 Toole, *Twentieth Century Montana*, 143-4.

16 Ibid., 147; Burlingame and Toole, *A History of Montana*, 196.

17 Toole, *Twentieth Century Montana*, 81.


CHAPTER 3

THE KU KLUX KLAN IN MONTANA DURING THE 1920s

There were approximately 3,000 members in the Montana Realm of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s. The Klan in Montana would ultimately exhibit organizational, fraternal, social, and political traits common to the other Klans in the country. The Montana Klan had approximately forty-six city charters. The Klan also had different subgroups, such as the Junior K. K. K. and the Women of the Ku Klux Klan. However, the qualifications of its members remained the same as for the national level. Only those who were white, native-born Protestant Americans could be members of the Klan.

The fraternal characteristic of the Order was the reason most people joined the Klan. Events such as the midnight ceremonies and statewide meetings helped the members feel a part of something during this time of flux in the United States, as well as in Montana. The most dominant activity of the Klan in Montana was its involvement in politics. The Klan was concerned with the election of politicians who were sympathetic to Klan principles. These principles, according to the Klan, represented "pure Americanism."

Lewis Terwilliger was the Grand Dragon of the Klan in Montana, and he held this position throughout the 1920s. Terwilliger was born on August 1, 1860, in Clinton County, Michigan, to Homer and Lucinda Terwilliger. Lewis's father, Homer, greatly influenced his
son with his political, religious, and patriotic views. Homer Terwilliger was reared in Michigan and was a Republican and a devout member of the Methodist church. At the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, being "filled with loyalty and patriotism," he joined the Union Army. While serving in the army, Homer was wounded four times and held prisoner on Belle Isle in Virginia for six months. After being released, Homer married Lucinda Lewis. They had three children, and Lewis was the oldest.

Lewis Terwilliger grew up in Clinton County, Michigan, received his primary education at the local schools, and graduated from high school in Maple Rapids in 1887. Terwilliger obtained a college education at Ferris Institute located in Big Rapids, Michigan, receiving his diploma from there in 1890. In 1895 he married Mary Bennett, and they came to Montana in June of that year. Terwilliger held the position of teacher, principal, and school superintendent in various towns in Montana. In 1903 he was selected as principal of Park County High School in Livingston--a position he held for ten years. In 1913 he resigned as principal to devote his time to business. He handled abstracts and real estate, and owned a 640-acre grain and stock ranch. Terwilliger and his wife had two children, Vena and Homer. Homer, after graduating from Park County High School, helped his father with his businesses. Homer was also actively involved in the Klan, and he would take over as Grand Dragon when Lewis was out of town.4

Politically, like most of the Klan members, Lewis Terwilliger was a Republican. He was quoted as appreciating "the duties of
citizenship[.] and exercis[ing] his franchise in support of the Republican party."5 Terwilliger became active in politics in 1919 when he was elected mayor of Livingston for a two-year term.

Along with the Klan, Terwilliger was involved in other fraternal groups in which he held high positions. He was a 33rd degree Mason, which is the highest degree in Masonry. He was also involved in the Knights of Pythias, the Eastern Star, and the Elks Club.6 His most prominent position, however, was as Grand Dragon of the Montana Klan. At a statewide meeting, called a Klorero, resolution number four stated, "Be it resolved that we express our appreciation for the faithful, untiring, business-like administration of Lewis Terwilliger as Grand Dragon of this Realm, and renew our pledge to him of our loyalty and support."7 According to the Klan's financial reports, Terwilliger received $1,150 per year as the leader of the Montana Realm.8 This was a sizeable amount at the time, considering the average American yearly wage was $681, and the farmer's average wage was $273 a year.9

Terwilliger also was an officer of the Klan on the national level. In the proceedings of the Third Biennial Klonvokation held in Washington, D.C., in 1926, Terwilliger was listed with four others on the Imperial Kligrapp's Committee. The other men were from Mississippi, Massachusetts, and Louisiana. At the same meeting, Terwilliger was inducted, along with 15 others, into the Kloncilion by the Imperial Wizard, Hiram Wesley Evans.10

The organization of the Klan in Montana under Terwilliger was the same as the organization at the national level. There were
officers for the state Realm, as well as officers for the various Klan chapters in cities throughout Montana. There were up to forty-six different cities in Montana which had Klans. Some of the Klans were named differently from their city names. Cities with Klan chapters included: Havre, Laurel, Columbus, Glasgow (Valley County Klan), Billings, Big Timber, Lewistown, Livingston, Bozeman, Helena (Kapital Klan), Ronan (Mission Valley Klan), Polson (Lake City Klan), Red Lodge, Missoula (University City Klan), Roundup, Great Falls (Kascade Kounty Klan), Terry, Miles City, Kalispell, Bridger (Karbon Kounty Klan), Glendive, Choteau, Thomson Falls (Power City Klan), Superior, Harlowton (Wheatland Klan), Butte (Kontinental Klan), Powell, Plentywood, Hardin, Stevensville (Ft. Owen Klan), Townsend, Conrad, Whitehall, and Bainville (Robin Hood Klan).  

The Klans were divided into four provinces: Kalispell, Great Falls, Miles City, and Billings. The centers for Klan activity were Missoula, Livingston, Miles City, Great Falls, and Billings. Terwilliger corresponded with the Klans through a newsletter called the "Official Circular."

There were different subdivisions of the Klan. The American Krusaders was an organization for foreign-born, white Protestants who supported Klan principles. Though they were not part of the Klan, the group worked with the K.K.K. There was a Junior Ku Klux Klan for boys under the age of eighteen. The Junior K.K.K. was part of the Klan, and the members had to pay a $5.00 Klectokon fee. The largest subgroup, however, was the Women of the Ku Klux Klan. To solicit members, the Klan ran an advertisement in the Miles City Star.
for the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan and the Women of the Ku Klux Klan, stating its principles and ideals (for a picture of the ad, see figure 3, page 30). The women, like the men, had to be white, native-born Protestants and had to pay the same fee, as the men did, which was $5.00 for initiation and $5.00 for the robe.

The Women of the Ku Klux Klan were invited to the Klan's meetings and events. When the Imperial Wizard, H. W. Evans, visited Billings, Montana, in 1925, the Women of the Klan were invited to meet at the Methodist church to hear Evans speak. Mrs. Evans, also a member of the Klan, was present as well. Though it is not known just how many members there were in the Women of the Ku Klux Klan, Whitehall may have had approximately forty in its Women's Klan. In a letter from the Exalted Cyclops of Whitehall, there was a request for forty extra robes so the Women of the K.K.K. could wear them in the local parade.

Although the Klan had these certain subgroups, it did not make any exception for those people who were not completely white Americans. Terwilliger received a letter from Albert Jones of the Butte Klan concerning an applicant for membership in the Klan. One Mr. Gabe Garparipe, whom Jones said was raised on an Indian Reservation, reared in the Catholic faith, and was part Indian, wanted to be in the Klan. Jones added, "I feel the Indian blood would barr [sic] him and again I done [sic] think we are so hard up for members." Terwilliger replied:

No one who is not absolutely White is eligible to membership in the Klan. I have had many questions
KNIGHTS of the KU KLUX KLAN
and
WOMEN of the KU KLUX KLAN
Their Principles and Ideals

2. Upholding the Constitution of the United States.
4. Separation of Church and State.
5. Religious Liberty.
7. Compulsory Education in Free Public Schools.
10. Limitation of Foreign Immigration.

This organization is not anti-Jew, anti-Catholic nor anti-Negro but we do restrict our membership to native born white, Protestant, Gentile, American citizens. In exercising this right we do not become "anti" in any respect. Consider the fact that the Jewish people have their B'nai B'rith, the Catholics their organizations known as the Knights of Columbus and the Daughters of America. Consider also that every organization in the United States places some limitation of one nature or another upon its membership.

ARE WE NOT ENTITLED TO THE SAME PRIVILEGE?

We stand for law enforcement by the legally constituted officers of the law. At no time do we take the law into our own hands.

If you are a native born White, Protestant, good moral character, useful occupation, belief in the tenets of the Christian Religion, not to God, nor allegiance to any foreign power, you are asked to fill out the following blank and return it in the envelope. We want your consent to send you our propaganda.

Name
City
License

We stand for Religious Liberty and recognize the constitutional right of every man to worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience. Be he Jew, Human Catholic or Protestant, regardless of any reports you may have heard to the contrary.

Fig. 3. Klan Advertisement. From the Miles City Star, 12 October 1924, p. 3.
regarding quarter breed Indians on reservations in Montana, but the only answer we can give is that if any person has any Indian blood it would bar him from membership in the Klan just the same as though he had Negro or Chinese blood.20

All those members that were in the Klan or of a subdivision were constantly told to keep secret their affiliation. In an "Official Circular" Terwilliger told the members to give no hints that they were part of the Klan. He stressed the importance of secrecy at the Klorero in Billings stating, "There must be a greater degree of secrecy and an insistence upon the identity of members being undisclosed." He summed it up in the motto, "GET THE VISION THROUGH THE VISOR."21

Butte, however, had a hard time preserving the secrecy of its members. This problem was probably due to the high percentage of Catholics in the city. After the Butte Klan received its charter on December 26, 1923, the members apparently had to be very careful about their affiliation in the Order. Four months after its charter, the Butte Klan wrote Terwilliger saying, "Things here, as you know, are very tender." Other Klansmen in Montana sympathized with the Butte Klansmen. In a letter from Belgrade, a Klansman there noted, "I understand something of the particular conditions surrounding your work in Butte, and appreciate to a high degree the courage and daring shown by yourself and the other good brothers under such circumstances." Apparently, the mailman in Butte was not delivering the Klan's mail, and the Kligrapp of the Butte Klan had to change his mailing name to "Knute Karl Knutison."22 The Butte Klansmen continued to have problems throughout the decade. Terwilliger
wrote a letter to the Butte Klan in 1927 stating, "I know how careful you have to be in Butte."23

The Klan would not support businesses that it felt were undeserving. An example was Eddy's Bakery in Butte. Terwilliger wrote to the Kligrapp in Butte wanting to know if Eddy's Bakery was "O.K. or not" and needed information that "might be of interest to dealers belonging to the Klan." The reply stated that Eddy's was owned by the O'Connell's, an Irish Catholic family, and that the name was significant as to who they were.24 The Klan discontinued business with Eddy's Bakery after that.

The Klan, on the other hand, offered donations to the institutions it felt were "worthy" of Klan support. Most of these institutions were Protestant-affiliated. Among these different institutions was the Havre Deaconess Hospital, which, Terwilliger stated, was "threatened to be confiscated by our enemies unless it has aid." Also, he wanted support for the Billings Deaconess Hospital, which, according to Terwilliger, "the enemies of Protestantism are trying in every way to kill." There were many institutions in Helena that the Klansmen were encouraged to support, such as the Montana Deaconess School, Intermountain Union College, the Florence Crittenden Home, and the Children's Home Society.25 Some of the institutions would call on the Klan for support. Joseph Hawk, superintendent of the Children's Home Society, wrote a letter to Terwilliger in 1924 asking for financial help from the Klan to send some of the homeless children to high school and college. Hawk
made it clear that the Children's Home Society was a purely Protestant organization.26

There were reports that the Klan gave donations to certain organizations. In 1922 four Klansmen, in their white-hooded robes, donated money to the Salvation Army in Missoula. They presented the captain of the Salvation Army with an envelope, and then quickly left. The enveloped contained $50.00 and a letter. The heading of the letter read, "We are for you and the work you are doing."27 The Klan also gave money to Methodist churches throughout the state. For example, in 1927 forty white-robed Klansmen proceeded up the aisle in the Laurel Methodist Church, gave $50.00 in donations from the Klansmen, and left before the end of the service. After they left, the pastor, B. A. Shively, gave a sermon on American patriotism.28

Along with the various institutions, the Klan also gave money to its members who were in need. In 1924, a Relief Committee was set up to aid those members in the Klan who needed money or to those families in need of aid after the death of a Klansmen.29 After a Klansmen died, the Klan also performed a funeral rite. Often the Order would have the deceased Klansmen buried with his hood and robe.30 A resident from Roundup, Louise G. Rasmussen, remembered witnessing two funeral rites performed by the local Klan. A Roundup Record article described local Klansmen who were seen at the grave of the late Dr. L. H. Thurston. At 11:00 p.m. 18 uniformed Klansmen went to the cemetery with an American flag
and a burning cross to commemorate the death of their fellow Klansman.\(^3\)

It was the Klan's fraternal characteristics that perhaps made it so appealing to Montanans. Knowing that someone would commemorate the member's death and help the family left behind must have offered reassurance. The picnics, barbecues, midnight ceremonies, and meetings also provided the Klansmen with a sense of belonging.

The Klansmen participated in many night ceremonies. During these ceremonies the Klan would often install the new members into the Klan. During a demonstration on the fourth of July on the Heights north of Roundup in 1923, there were bonfires, brilliant fireworks and a fiery cross. Several hundred Klansmen were involved, with 94 new members initiated into the order.\(^3\)\(^2\) A larger ceremony occurred later in 1923. This Klan gathering was held in a 160-acre field ten miles north of Lewistown. There were an estimated 2,700 cars carrying 7,000 people to the occasion. There were fireworks and two burning crosses in the middle of two 400-500-foot-diameter circles. Almost 300 candidates were installed into the Klan. There were 150 guards hired to aid the sheriff in ensuring a peaceful demonstration.\(^3\)\(^3\)

In 1925 the Klan appeared on top of Square Butte, four miles north of Laurel. This gathering had almost 2,500 people attending, with 100 members initiated. A spectator who witnessed the ceremony made these comments:
It looked like all the dragons, wizards, witches, ghosts, or whatever they are called from all over the country had gathered there. Not since the days when Indians held ceremonies on the Butte has there been the spectacle of burning fires and moving of figures such as were seen Thursday night.34

The Klan also had meetings throughout Montana for the Klansmen. Terwilliger would list in the "Official Circular" the information about the meetings. In the November 11, 1924, "Official Circular," Terwilliger announced the coming visit of the Imperial Wizard, Evans, to Montana. Terwilliger stated, "The Great Leader will visit Montana at Billings on the evening of Friday, November 14. . . . This will be the first time Montana has ever had the opportunity to welcome our Imperial Wizard. . . . It will be worth traveling across Montana to get the message our beloved and worthy Commander in Chief will bring us."35

About 800 Klansmen and sympathizers of the order went to the meeting. Evans talked about some of the Klan's social goals. He encouraged the Klansmen to support such ideas as restricted immigration, expanded public schools, and Prohibition. The Klan's first goal, according to Evans, was to secure legislation that limited immigration. Evans was quoted in the Billings Gazette:

For a hundred years, he said, the country has been a hospital for all the sick, physically, mentally and morally, from all the world until there had come about a lowering of our level of health, intelligence and virtue. The remedy was to stop the influx of foreign ideals and customs and to re-establish the American principles.36

An act was passed in 1924 by the United States Congress which curbed the influx of immigrants. The passage of the National Origins
Act signified the cultural tensions occurring at the time. The act limited the number of immigrants allowed into the United States to 164,000 per year, and then in 1927 only 150,000 immigrants were able to enter America. Those from Great Britain, Ireland, Germany, and Scandinavia still enjoyed liberal quotas. However, those from Southern and Eastern Europe had smaller quotas, and Oriental immigrants were banned altogether.37

For those immigrants who were in the United States already, Evans said that they needed to be Americanized. "This is to be done," stated Evans, "by educating America to a common standard of thinking, acting, believing and seeing, until all Americans think in terms of America." This improvement would be done by educating "all the people to a common set of instincts and to replace the present polyglot groups with a homogeneous people."38

This goal would be obtainable through the public schools, concluded Evans, and that was the reason why Klansmen needed to secure legislation which banned parochial schools. The Klan, however, did not see this goal reached. The public schools issue was settled on June 1, 1925, when Pierce versus the Society of Sisters went to the United States Supreme Court. Walter Pierce, the governor of Oregon, was in favor of banning parochial schools, but the United States Supreme Court decided that the law requiring monolithic school programs was unconstitutional.39

According to the New York Times, this issue of public versus parochial schools caused strong tensions, and the "lies of the Klan cut deeply into the feelings of many Catholics," becoming "one of the
most hateful by-products of the Ku Klux Klan.\textsuperscript{40} Louise Rasmussen remembered how the issue over the Catholic schools affected her home town. When the Catholic schools were established in Roundup in the 1920s, Rasmussen said that this issue divided the town. There were also fights among the kids, and they even refused to play ball with each other because of the tensions.\textsuperscript{41}

To try to obtain and preserve certain legislation like restricted immigration and the banning of parochial schools, the Klan became involved in politics. In fact, the Klan's involvement with the election of candidates was perhaps the most dominant activity of the Montana Klan.

The K.K.K. was active in political elections on both the national and state levels. The New York Times said that the voting power of the Montana Klan was estimated to be between 15,000 and 20,000.\textsuperscript{42} Terwilliger noted in an "Official Circular" that "[t]he politicians are afraid of our power at the polls"\textsuperscript{43} The Klansmen were encouraged to vote for those candidates on the national and state levels who sympathized with Klan policies. Terwilliger urged the klansmen to vote for certain candidates:

Those who are not willing to go with us with their whole heart and soul and vote, should be asked to withdraw, and let us know that they are with our enemies. Every person should be allowed to vote as his conscience dictates, but no one should continue as one of us who is not willing to back up his obligation, irrespective of political affiliation.\textsuperscript{44}

In 1928, when Al Smith and Herbert Hoover were running for the presidency, Terwilliger wrote to the Montana Klansmen in an
effort to persuade them not to vote for Al Smith. He stated, "Our fight on the Al Smith, wet, Tammany political program in their effort to put a wet, Catholic into the White House is beginning to hurt. . . . The hour is here for us to understand that America cannot live as a free country and be dominated by the doctrine of Catholicism."45

In another letter concerning the Al Smith-Herbert Hoover election, a Klansman from Bozeman made the following remarks:

Never in the history of our great nation has there been a time when it has been in as great danger as it is today. . . . The danger is not from the Catholic religion, but from the scheme of the political hierarchy trying to get political control of our country. . . . We have to have your votes to save our country.46

In the election of 1928, Hoover carried Montana and the nation as a whole, perhaps in part because of Klan support. Although the election was over, Terwilliger reminded the Klansmen that they must continue to fight in order to protect pure American ideals. "The Ku Klux Klan is unlike all other organizations," remarked Terwilliger. "To my mind the most important work of the Ku Klux Klan is the creating of a mind in America in favor of all that is good and right and against all that is evil and wrong."47 This way of seeing things in black and white terms is epitomized by the coding system that the Klan had for political candidates in Montana.

Terwilliger told the Klansmen to "vote 100% for candidates advised by the political committee."48 The political committee sent out a list of the nominees with letters posted after each name. The letters were a code which determined the status of each candidate.
For example, "B" stood for "Branded by our Imperial Office as having an undesirable record in regard to Klan principles. They recommend that this candidate be defeated." "I," on the other hand, meant "Indorsed by Imperial Office on previous record. They recommend that this candidate be elected." "W" meant the person was a "Wet" and against Prohibition, whereas, "D" stood for "Dry." "R" indicated the candidate was a "Roman Catholic," and "P" indicated "Protestant." 49

One of the most controversial elections in which the Klan took special interest was the 1924 senate race between incumbent Senator Thomas J. Walsh and Frank Linderman. The Klan's political committee coded Walsh with B.O.R.U., whereas Linderman received M.P.I. (for a breakdown of these codes, see figure 4, page 40). In regard to the election, The New York Times declared that the "Ku Klux Klan is the dominant issue in the Walsh-Linderman fight for Senator." The article went on to state: "The Republicans admit that Mr. Linderman... won the nomination mainly because of Klan support." Linderman was known as being very anti-Catholic, and the race between the two was based on religion.50 David Chalmers commented, "Whatever views the Invisible Empire in Montana had on the Jews and the Negroes, it certainly had its mind made up about the Catholics, and in 1924 it almost defeated the state's most noted son, Senator Thomas J. Walsh, because of his religion."51

Nevertheless, Walsh did win the election by nearly 8,000 votes. Even though the Klan had some strength in certain parts of Montana,
B. Branded by our Imperial Office as having an undesirable record in regard to Klan principles. They recommend that this candidate be defeated.

C. Considered as candidate of the A.C.M. Company.

D. Dry.

E. Member of the Eastern Star.

F. Favorable to the Klan and to Klan principles.

H. His wife is a Roman Catholic.

I. Indorsed by Imperial Office on previous record. They recommend that this candidate be elected.

K. Member of Knights of Pythias.

M. Mason.

N. Not considered a desirable candidate because of personal record.

O. Opposed to the Klan.

P. Protestant.

R. Roman Catholic.

U. Unworthy of the support of Klansmen, because opposed to our principles.

W. Wet.

X. Ex-Service Man.

* Present or Former Klansman.

Fig. 4. The Klan Committee Political Code, Box 4, Folder 32, Ku Klux Klan Collection, MSSC 236, Eastern Washington State Historical Society, Spokane, Washington
it clearly was not strong enough to determine the outcome of a statewide election. After Walsh won, he characterized his victory as a "rebuke to that evanescent uprising proclaiming its [the Klan's] exclusive and superior Americanism, while professing sentiments and advocating policies notoriously repugnant to the fundamental principles of American liberty."52

Just one example of this suppression of American liberty was the view the Klan held about Native Americans. The Klan not only banned Indians from being members, but also opposed giving Indians the right to vote. After Indians were granted this right in 1926, the Klan continued to oppose Indian voting rights because, according to the Klan, Indians were "a menace to clean elections and good government." The K.K.K. urged the Klansmen to talk to their local state senators and representatives to persuade them to change the legislation in the coming state legislative assembly.53

These efforts to use government to try to ensure their principles were typical of the Klan in Montana. On the outside the Klan claimed to support traditional American ideals, yet their political goals denied basic rights to other Americans.

A significant percent of Klansmen joined the Order because it provided them with a degree of security, and they believed it was a way to uphold traditional American values. It is a mistake, however, to view the Klan simply as some sort of social organization. The Klan's political agenda, and its expressed bigotry towards non-WASP groups, indicated that there was a darker and more negative side to the Klan.
ENDNOTES


5 Progressive Men, 884.

6 Stout, Montana, 234.

7 "Minutes of the Klorero Held in Odd Fellows Hall-City of Billings" (24 August 1924), Box 5, Folder 1, Klan Collection.

8 "Financial Report of the Grand Dragon of the Realm of Montana" (16 September 1923 to 1 September 1924), Box 5, Folder 1, Klan Collection.


11Boxes 1-5, Klan Collection.

12"Official Circular," letters to all the Klans in Montana signed by Lewis Terwilliger (June 1925), Box 5, Folder 2, Klan Collection.

13In an "Official Circular," Terwilliger announced that Klansman Dr. G. M. Baumgardner of Columbus, Ohio, would give five lectures in Montana, and that "it has been deemed advisable to have these lectures given in cities which are centers of Klan activities so far as possible." The cities listed are Missoula, Livingston, Great Falls, Billings, and Miles City. "Official Circular" (6 December 1924), Box 5, Folder 1, Klan Collection.

14"Official Circular" (24 October 1924), Box 5, Folder 1, Klan Collection.

15"Official Document" by the Imperial Kligrapp (3 March 1925), Box 1, Folder 30, Klan Collection.

16Miles City Daily Star, 12 October 1924, 3.

17Reply Letter to Walter Olson of Butte from Lewis Terwilliger (10 March 1924), Box 5, Folder 1, Klan Collection; the membership fee, however, changed to $15.00 for Klansmen and women on July 1, 1927. "Official Circular" (24 June 1927), Box 5, Folder 3, Klan Collection.

18"Official Circular" (11 November 1925), Box 5, Folder 1, Klan Collection; Billings Gazette 15 November 1925, 1.

19Letter to Butte from the Exalted Cyclops of the Whitehall Klan (12 August 1927), Box 1, Folder 6, Klan Collection.

20Letter to Terwilliger from Albert Jones of Butte (14 November 1927), Box 5, Folder 3, Klan Collection; Reply letter to Jones from Terwilliger (15 November 1927), Box 5, Folder 3, Klan Collection.
21 "Official Circular" (13 June 1924), Box 5, Folder 1, Klan Collection; "Minutes of Klorero in Billings," Box 5, Folder 1, Klan Collection.

22 Butte Charter, Box 1, Folder 25, Klan Collection; Letter to Terwilliger from Butte (27 April 1924), Box 5, Folder 1, Klan Collection; Letter to Floyd Johnson of Butte from Belgrade, Montana (7 October 1924), Box 1, Folder 24, Klan Collection; Letter from John Martin to "Knute Karl Knutison" of Butte (18 October, 1924), Box 5, Folder 1, Klan Collection.

23 Letter to Albert Jones from Terwilliger (18 October 1928), Box 5, Folder 1, Klan Collection.

24 Letter to James Bray of Butte from Terwilliger (22 April 1925), Box 5, Folder 2, Klan Collection; Reply to Terwilliger from Bray (23 April 1925), Box 5, Folder 1, Klan Collection.

25 "Official Circular" (6 December 1924), Box 5, Folder 1, Klan Collection; "Official Circular" (10 December 1925), Box 5, Folder 2, Klan Collection.

26 Robert Raymer, Montana: The Land and the People, 3 vols. (New York: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1930), 2: 90; Letter "To Klansmen of the Realm of Montana" (7 November 1924), Box 5, Folder 1, Klan Collection.

27 Great Falls Tribune, 2 July 1922, 1.

28 Laurel Outlook, 13 July 1927, 1.

29 Letter from Relief Committee (24 February 1924), Box 3, Folder 21, Klan Collection.

30 "Funeral Service of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan," Box 3, Folder 29, Klan Collection.
31 Louise G. Rasmussen, interview by Laurie Mercier, 11 October 1984, Oral history 812, tape recording, Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana; Roundup Record, 1 June 1923, n.p.

32 Ibid., 6 July 1924, n.p.

33 Lewistown Democrat News, 3 September 1923, 5.

34 Laurel Outlook, 16 September 1925, 1, quoted in Elsie P. Johnson, Laurel's Story, A Montana Heritage (Laurel: Artcraft Printers, 1979), 34.

35 "Official Circular," (11 November 1924), Box 5, Folder 1, Klan Collection.

36 Billings Gazette, 15 November 1924, 1-2.


38 Billings Gazette, 15 November 1924, 2.


41 Rasmussen, Oral history 812.


43 "Official Circular" (2 June 1924), Box 5, Folder 1, Klan Collection.
44 "Official Circular" (11 November 1924), Box 5, Folder 1, Klan Collection.

45 Letter from Terwilliger to all the Klansmen in Montana and Wyoming (27 April 1928), Box 5, Folder 5, Klan Collection.

46 Letter from the Bozeman Klan to all Klansmen in Montana (June 1928), Box 1, Folder 3, Klan Collection.

47 "Official Circular" (3 December 1928), Box 5, Folder 5, Klan Collection.

48 "Official Circular" (3 August 1924), Box 5, Folder 1, Klan Collection.

49 "Code," Box 4, Folder 32, Klan Collection.


52 *Billings Gazette*, 8 November 1924, 4.

53 "Official Circular" (6 December 1924), Box 5, Folder 1, Klan Collection.
In the mid 1920s, the Klan had almost 3 million members, but by 1928 there were only several hundred thousand Klansmen in the Order. Many of the reasons for the sharp decline of the Klan's membership across the country were the same factors that caused the demise of the Montana Klan.

One reason that the Klan failed at the national level was because many of the fears that the Klan focused on had begun to fade by the late 1920s. The unrest caused by World War I had started to settle down. Racial tensions decined, and the influx of immigrants into America was more restricted. The Klan's greatest concern was over the increased influence of Catholicism in America. These efforts to uphold social morality, however, were being contradicted by certain Klansmen, as well as the leaders of the Order. It was the Klan's own ineptness which ultimately caused the Order to decline.

At the national level, the behavior of Klan leaders began to contradict the professed moral integrity of its organization. An example was the account of the Grand Dragon, David Clark Stephenson. Stephenson was the leader of 23 Northern and Midwestern states, and he located his Realm headquarters in Indiana. He became a powerful driving force behind the Klan. By
1925, however, Stephenson's personal practices were exposed when he "made an impetuous, horrifyingly, false step, [and] his power and life, and perhaps that of the Klan itself, paid the forfeit." One night early in March of 1925, Stephenson telephoned his secretary, Madge Oberholtzer, and had her come to his house. He had been drinking and coerced Madge to drink with him. Stephenson then forced Madge into his drawing room on the train to Chicago, and he attacked her. After the incident, Madge took poison and died several weeks later in her home. Before she died, however, Madge left a detailed account of what Stephenson had done. He was found guilty of second-degree murder and sent to the Michigan City penitentiary. This story was well publicized and hurt the power of the Klan and signified the dark side of the Order.

Another account of the Klan's immoral activities which caught much attention occurred in 1927. A group of Klansmen from Pennsylvania seceded from the Order. In response, Imperial Wizard Hiram Evans sued them for $100,000 in damages. By bringing the case to court, however, many of the Klan's secrets were brought out into the open. The horrors of its activities, such as the whippings, floggings, and lynchings, became known to the public.

Many Klansmen believed that the violence had gone too far. The exploitation and misdirection by the leaders at the top caused the Order's ultimate downfall. Many Klansmen of the Montana Realm joined the Order because they saw it as a way to uphold social morality. The corruption at the national level, however, probably caused many of the rank-and-file Klansmen in Montana to become
disillusioned with their affiliation, and led to the subsequent demise of the Klan in Montana.

The emergence of the Klan in Montana symbolized many of the tensions occurring in the state during the 1920s. A historian of the Oregon Klan stated that Oregon, with its strong identity to a pioneer past, made it ripe for an organization like the Klan to infiltrate the state, and the same could be said of the rise of the Klan in Montana. Many of the unsettled feelings caused by World War I made many WASPs in Montana believe that their virtues of individuality, American nationalism, and Protestantism were being threatened. Furthermore, all the social changes taking place, along with the economic dislocation in the state after the war, aroused feelings of insecurity.

The rise of the Klan in Montana also signified the strong cultural tensions in the state. The Klan sought out the various non-WASP groups in Montana as scapegoats because they were seen as a threat to this traditional way of life. In an effort to maintain a sense of stability in society during the 1920s, Montanans joined the Order. They could uphold American values by establishing a tie between their identity and their perceived past.

Even though the Klan professed not to be against the non-WASP groups in Montana, it did show blatant bigotry toward them. Such examples as not wanting Indians to vote or not wanting the parochial schools to have access to "their" books from the public schools demonstrated the Order’s bigotry. The Klan masked its
discrimination by reasoning that these measures were necessary in order to preserve pure Americanism.

The Klan carried its nativism into the political elections in the state. The political coding system epitomized the Klan's way of seeing things as light versus dark or good versus evil—the evil being the wet, Roman Catholic candidate whom the Order branded as being unworthy of Klan support.

In an effort to crusade against the “immoral” or “un-American” Montanans, several thousand white, native-born Protestants were persuaded to join the Klan. In doing so, the members could do their part in upholding the values of their perceived pure Americanism. The leaders of the Klan, who were primarily white collar workers, played on the insecurities of the rank and file Montanans to lure them into the Klan. The fraternal ties made the average member feel a part of something important in a changing society. Frequently, the leaders used these tactics for their own financial gains.

Even though the Klan virtually disappeared from the scene in Montana by the 1930s, the social insecurities, prejudices, and nativism that it represented have continued to haunt American society well into the late twentieth century.
ENDNOTES


2 Ibid., 168.

3 Ibid., 171-2.

4 Ibid., 298-9.

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