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“Yesterday, Today and Forever” : The Mythic Foundations of the Ku Klux  
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Thesis**

**“Yesterday, Today, and Forever”: The Mythic Foundations of  
the Ku Klux Klan in the United States and Canada**

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## **Abstract**

The Ku Klux Klan has been active in North America for 139 years and organizations like the Klan have existed in North America since before the United States and Canada became independent nations. The white supremacy advocated by the Klan mimics the justifications used by colonial powers, and though the United States and Canada have espoused egalitarian ideals for quite some time the Klan continues to attract members.

Mircea Eliade and Claude Levi-Strauss have argued that history and myth share many characteristics, and that sometimes history can act as myth. Understanding how North American history can be a mythic model for the religious formation of North American people one can better explain the long-term viability of the Klan and its ability not only to inspire violence, but to articulate a particular kind of white North American identity. This study examines how the religiosity and action of the Klan has been informed by mytho-historical influences in the United States and Canada and, consequently, how these influences effect other people formed in this context.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

The Ku Klux Klan is “the oldest single-purpose terrorist organization in the world maintaining the same title and focus,”<sup>1</sup> is credited with countless acts of violence, has attracted millions of members, and continues to attract members in both the United States and Canada. The Klan is often dismissed as a racist organization, racism being similarly dismissed as a manifestation of ignorance or delusion. This categorization, however, disavows the racist reality of North America and places the Klan in opposition, as anomalous, to the North American context and prevents an honest examination of racism in North American society. Because racism in society is not acknowledged as normative, racism within individuals must similarly be considered anomalous, and individuals cannot acknowledge the way racism has informed their existence. The existence of the Klan has, in an unspoken way, contradicted attempts to describe North America as the steadily progressing harbinger of liberty. This is in part because proponents of these narratives do not properly, and to some extent charitably, understand the religious character of North America, or of the Klan and also because the liberty discussed has always been understood in relation to the white liberty. If regarded as a primarily religious organization within the mythic context of North America the Klan and its longevity and periodic popularity can be better explained. This requires an understanding of North American mythic structures that are usually understood in historical terms, and a resultant re-examination of the nature of history. This enquiry will demonstrate that the Klan is not only a problem for law enforcement, but also is a manifestation of North American mythologies with which every North American person must contend.

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<sup>1</sup> Chester L. Quarles, *The Ku Klux Klan and Related American Racist Antisemitic Organizations: A History and Analysis*, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co, 1999), 8.

The Klan is a continuation of the British colonial endeavor in North America. This colonization has defined the religious contours of both the United States and Canada and reinforced the notion that the Anglo-Saxon race and Protestant religion were chosen by God to inhabit this space and civilize the world. This basic belief, which justified the European mercantile expansion throughout the world, is at the foundation of the colonial enterprise and has defined hundreds of years of settlement and government in North America. The Klan's goals are the same as those of North America's colonial governments, namely the enslavement of non-whites, the exclusion of non-Protestants, and the relocation of aboriginals in order for Europeans to attain more land and wealth. British colonialism created the United States and Canada as they are today, and so the definition of this continent as a white-Protestant place through the exclusion of others continues to inform the formation of North Americans. The central argument of this paper is that the existence of the Klan in Canada and the United States indicates the viability and, potentially, the immutability of colonial discourse, which describes these countries as being white-Protestant to the violent exclusion of all others within the religious understanding of white North Americans. One possible reason for this is that the colonial foundation of both countries has been enshrined in the historical narratives of each without criticism or acknowledged other understandings of the potentiality of colonial contact on this continent and these sorts of colonial stories can assume the role of myth in the formation of individuals as well as nations.

This study examines the Klan in the United States and Canada from its inception in 1865 to the mid 1990s. The United States and Canada are necessarily the geographical bounds for a study of this kind. Klan salesmen wanted to extend the Klan to all Anglo-

Saxon, Scandinavian, and Germanic portions of the world, and there are reports of short-lived Klan chapters from New Zealand to Shanghai to Czechoslovakia, but there is no indication that any of these overseas organizations either became popular or persisted for any length of time.<sup>2</sup> The only place other than the United States where the Klan became a major force is Canada, where it is estimated the Klan enlisted tens or hundreds of thousands of members and, though substantially diminished, is active to this day.<sup>3</sup>

### **Definition of Terms**

In her edited volume *Religion and Global Culture: New Terrain in the Study of Religion and the Work of Charles H. Long* Jennifer Reid articulates both an accurate and operative definition of religion. Citing the work of Mircea Eliade, Marcel Mauss, and Charles H. Long, Reid defines religion as the process through which human beings negotiate the boundaries between themselves and other things, such as the physical world, other people, or the sacred. Material exchange is the means of negotiating these boundaries and it is through these exchanges that humans develop and sustain a sense of meaning for themselves both individually and communally.<sup>4</sup> According to Eliade human consciousness develops through ongoing confrontation and negotiation with external objects, and the religious consciousness is therefore consciousness of something other

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<sup>2</sup> Germany was the only country outside North America where the Klan made any headway. In 1925 an estimated three hundred members were recruited in Berlin; however, they soon disbanded due to internal conflict and the German press denounced them saying that Germany was “full of such groups of ill-balanced and romantic youths,” who were “silly rather than dangerous”. David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965), 279.

<sup>3</sup> See Julian Sher, *White Hoods: Canada's Ku Klux Klan*, (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1983). Marci McDonald, “The Enemy Within: The far right's racist war against society is opening new fronts across Canada”; Chris Wood, “‘Aryan of the Year’: A White Supremacist Campaigns in British Columbia,” *Maclean's*, (May 8, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Jennifer I. M. Reid, “‘Faire Place à une Race Métisse’: Colonial Crisis and the Vision of Louis Riel,” in Jennifer I. M. Reid, *Religion and Global Culture: New Terrain in the Study of Religion and the work of Charles H. Long*, (New York: Lexington Books, 2003), 55-6.

than the self.<sup>5</sup> According to Mauss the act of exchange and the matter exchanged have the power to define the individuals involved.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, according to Reid, “exchanges occur at boundaries, and what is conveyed across a boundary negotiates an initial incompatibility.”<sup>7</sup> Therefore, religion is how human beings negotiate their existence in the world around them.

The existence of the individual, or community, and the rest of the cosmos is explained by myth. Myth is the story of how reality came into existence, whether it is the whole of reality or only a part such as an animal, plant, human community, or institution. Myth describes how humans became who, what, and where they are.<sup>8</sup> Eliade further articulates some characteristics shared by myths; he suggests that myths are true and sacred stories that are primarily concerned with creation,<sup>9</sup> and that their most important function is to provide a template for human action.<sup>10</sup> In short, religion is the process people go through to negotiate their material reality and myths describe how both people and material reality came to be while providing a template for action.

Wendy Doniger has suggested that myths are not active forces on their own, but tools to be used by human beings who will use and define myth in different ways.<sup>11</sup> While interpretation can change some of the meaning of a myth, an emphasis on interpretation ignores the exemplary aspects of myth for human action and underemphasizes the immutability of the myth itself. A story, if sufficiently altered, is no

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<sup>5</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), 10.

<sup>7</sup> Reid, (2003), 55.

<sup>8</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Myth and Reality*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 5-6.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 18-9.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>11</sup> Wendy Doniger, *The Implied Spider: Politics & Theology in Myth*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 2.

longer the same story. An interpretation of a myth can emphasize certain aspects while ignoring others; however, it cannot significantly alter the basic story within the myth too much. Therefore, the possibility of interpretation is already circumscribed by the myth itself.

Another word for stories that describe how things came to be the way they are is history. In this discussion history very much fills the role of myth insofar as the religiosity of the people studied depends on history in the same way as more traditional understandings of religion depend on myth. For nineteenth and twentieth century North Americans history accounted for the status of the world and provided a template for human action. The works of Claude Levi-Strauss and Mircea Eliade allow for a discussion of this sort. According to Levi-Strauss history is “never history, but history-for”<sup>12</sup> and is always partial, meaning both incomplete and biased. The gargantuan entirety of history is far too vast and confused to be accounted for within a single narrative and, therefore, the selection of facts is necessarily a product of a cultural milieu. In addition, history strives to create meaning and must therefore give primacy to particular events and causes that can be arbitrary and may, in fact, be merely coincidental. The people who internalize history, whether historians or individuals living within history, should not or may not be able to sever themselves from this history; but they would be wise to realize that their meaningful history, which has been constructed into a confluence of events, is no more objectively true than myth.<sup>13</sup>

Eliade’s analysis does not so much criticize the construction of history as articulate the functions it performs in human consciousness. According to Eliade human

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<sup>12</sup> Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 257.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 255-8.

beings are constituted by events that transpired before their birth, whether mythic or historical,<sup>14</sup> and the impetus for historical inquiry, the desire for meaningful existence and a model for action, are all motivations behind humanity's mythic consciousness.<sup>15</sup> In addition, Eliade claims that historical events do not remain in the popular memory unless they closely resemble a mythical model<sup>16</sup> and that in order to make history meaningful we transform historical figures into manifestations of archetypes and otherwise mythicise history.<sup>17</sup>

The conclusion drawn from these two scholars is that history shares a number of characteristics and functions with myth. According W. Taylor Stevenson history gives its community their "true story" about human beings, nature and the divine... it is based on certain originating events which are not demonstrably true in terms of other, more fundamental categories."<sup>18</sup> "Historical [events] cannot be dissociated from [their] linguistic description"<sup>19</sup> and, therefore, their cultural context. In short, history provides the same function, has the same impetus, creates meaning, and provides a model for action in the same way as myth.

### **Methodology**

Using this definition of religion, the meaningful negotiation people undertake with the world, and myth, the description of what has come before and exemplification of what must happen, the history of the Ku Klux Klan will be recounted and analyzed as taking part in national forms of North American religiosity. This analysis demonstrating

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<sup>14</sup> Eliade, (1963), 92.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 134-8.

<sup>16</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 42.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>18</sup> W. Taylor Stevenson, *History as Myth: The Import for Contemporary Theology*, (New York: The Seabury Press, 1969), 6.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 5.

the role played by the Klan in North American religiosity will provide insight into both what kind of future the Klan has and what sorts of mytho-historical templates gave rise to the Klan and are still viable within North American society.

Chapter two outlines what sorts of mytho-historical templates are present in the United States and Canada on a very broad basis with attention given to specific historical precedents that seem to influence the Klan's operation. In addition patterns of action that were present before the Klan in which the Klan participates will also be delineated.

Chapter three begins with a critical analysis of the Klan's creation story and situates this event within its immediate historical surroundings. The history of the Klan's rhetoric and action within the United States reconstruction period are considered separately as there is substantial disparity between the two. The chapter closes with the continuation of the Klan into the twentieth century.

Chapter four situates the rebirth of the Klan within its historical context and gives separate historical descriptions, again, of Klan rhetoric and action as this incarnation demonstrates the same disparity, also because the rhetorical aspect of the Klan is more readily available. This chapter closes with the dissolution of the Klan at the hands of the U.S. government and its loss of popularity in Canada.

Chapter five is an historical account of the post WWII Klan broken into three fairly distinct periods, 1946-1954, 1954-1970, and 1970-1990s. This is partially because of the proliferation of separate Klan groups and partially because each period contains changes in Klan membership, tactics, and aspirations. This chapter closes with predictions about the future of the Klan as presented by Klan historians.

Chapter six synthesizes the mytho-historical patterns discussed in chapter two with the historical reality of the Klan to demonstrate how the Klan has taken part in the national religious movements of North America and how it has followed historical templates for action within both countries. This synthesis of the Klan's action and the religiosity of North American nations delineates parts of nationalist mythologies that remain problematic and demonstrate the inability of alternate interpretations of an historical template to compensate for the textual problems of the template itself. This chapter will close with possible changes in the national mythological structures that could render the Klan ineffective or diminish its potential for popular support.

#### **Previous work in the field**

Scholarship on the Ku Klux Klan has been primarily historical, charting the organization's birth, "disbandment," rebirth, and continuation since 1865. These works, with some exceptions, simply provide an historical examination of Klan activity. Each author provides areas of expertise to a particular era within Klan history. For example Allen W. Trelease<sup>20</sup> provides what is probably the most comprehensive account of the Reconstruction Klan while David Mark Chalmers<sup>21</sup> gives an in depth regional and chronological account of the 1915 Klan. Additional sources of note on the Klan are Chester L. Quarles<sup>22</sup> sociological examination of the Klan throughout its history and Gladys-Marie Fry's<sup>23</sup> account of the Klan and other night-riders in the oral histories of

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<sup>20</sup> Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1971)

<sup>21</sup> David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965)

<sup>22</sup> Chester L. Quarles, *The Ku Klux Klan and Related American Racialist Antisemitic Organizations: A History and Analysis*, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co, 1999)

<sup>23</sup> Gladys-Marie Fry, *Night Riders in Black Folk History*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975)

black Americans. In addition J.C. Lester and D.L. Wilson's<sup>24</sup> Klan history has the unique perspective of having been written by one of the original six founders of the Klan. Most Klan historians spend some time talking about the involvement of Protestant ministers in the Klan, and Quarles provides a more in-depth analysis of the Klan's association with Christianity. However, scholarship on the Klan has generally ignored the Klan's nationalistic religiosity or the effect of national mythologies on the Klan.

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<sup>24</sup> J.C. Lester and D. L. Wilson, *Ku Klux Klan: Its Origin, Growth, and Disbandment*, (New York: Da Capo, 1973)

## Chapter II

In order to understand North American religion we must understand what template is used to define people, their exchanges, and their understanding of how the world came to be the way it is. This chapter examines the historical and mythological stories that formed the template in which the Klan operated. It is also important to mention certain redemptive features of both American and Canadian history are not covered by this section, and though these features of North American culture are also important, they do not mitigate the fact of the Klan's existence nor can they compensate for or overcome the impact of the mythological framework discussed in this chapter.

The first three sections will discuss overarching national patterns present in the United States and Canada, the fourth and fifth sections concern historical precedents that influence the Klan's activity in both countries. The interpretation presented depends heavily on the work of Robert Choquette, Charles H. Long, and Jennifer Reid. Canada and the United States have a great deal in common within their colonial histories. Both conquered the aboriginal inhabitants of this continent and instituted reserve systems, both have founding documents that establish the status of aboriginals as well as blacks or French Canadians within the country, although the status of the two groups is vastly different. Both the U.S. and Canada have experienced varying degrees of religious xenophobia, persecuting Catholics, Jews, and even Protestant denominations such as Mormons and both have segregated and otherwise limited the rights of racially classified groups of people. Finally, notions of Anglo-Saxon superiority and the desire to maintain racial, cultural, and religious purity justified the imperialism practiced by both countries.

There is, however, one vitally important difference in the cosmogony of these two countries. In America bloody revolution became the originating event of the nation, with consequences that will be discussed shortly. Canada had no such single cosmological event, both French and English historical interpretations of the beginning of the country had to acknowledge a multiplicity of interpretations because of their proximity and required cooperation, and therefore was unable to create a single cosmological story. There are cross-raising, settlements, the establishment of missions, conquests, legislative acts, and a slow drive towards confederation and independence from Britain, but no single unifying popular movement that has captured the mythic imagination of Canadians as defining what Canada was and must necessarily become. This lack of unifying principle is by no means unfortunate as such a cosmology would circumscribe Canada's potentiality and may have contributed to the Klan's relative failure in Canada.

#### **Overarching patterns in North American religious negotiations**

There are two attitudes that apply to the Klan in both the United States and Canada; the first can be understood using Mary Douglas' work on purity, and the second is the attitude concerning the frontier in both countries. Mary Douglas helps elucidate a number of characteristics of purity that help us to understand the Klan in both of its North American contexts. Among these characteristics is the fact that the status of individuals within society can be disputed by claims of pollution. Marginalized persons are a source of danger and potential pollution, their power comes from being outside the social structure and while they must be handled with great care they can also be justifiably destroyed as their very presence threatens the purity of the entire community. Additionally, persons and things that are anomalous to the accepted cultural definitions

within a society are often controlled physically, often through the destruction or isolation of the offending agent. Finally, where legal sanctions do not exist to punish immoral behaviors pollution beliefs can be used for enforcement.<sup>25</sup> In the United States and Canada persons who the dominant culture considers threatening to the purity of the nation are non-whites, immigrants, French Canadians, and, to varying degrees, Catholics and Jews.

American frontier language concerns infinite possibility and the potential to plant America in an uninhabited space. The conquest of wilderness is a process through which the individual becomes more powerful and more able to realize true freedom.<sup>26</sup> While the standing armies and police forces of England and subsequently the United States took part in the conquest of the frontier, it is the settlers themselves, the armed citizenry, who are credited with both the initial aggression and defense against reprisal. The Canadian mode of settling the frontier differs greatly from the American model. British sovereignty in Canada was at first dependent on cooperation with French and Native American peoples and as a consequence Britain had to pursue other approaches to homogeneity. Before any Englishmen settled in Canada there were military forces and colonial administrators present. When westward expansion began Canada similarly deployed the forces of the RCMP and the Canadian Pacific Railroad before settlers.<sup>27</sup> While citizens have sometimes been involved, aggression and defense on behalf of the colony have been primarily the concern of the government in Canada, and therefore when oppressive actions have been taken they are often passed through legislation and executed

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<sup>25</sup> Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, (New York: Routledge, 1966), 3, 40, 96-8, 105, 133.

<sup>26</sup> Reid, "'A Society Made by History': The Mythic Source of Identity in Canada," *Canadian Review of American Studies*, 27: 1 (1997), 12.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 12-3.

by the government. Consequently the Canadian Klan has been far less violent and more politically motivated than its American counterpart.

### **Overarching forms; The United States.**

In 1630 Governor John Winthrop gave a sermon to his colonists aboard the *Arbella* in which he said, "For we must consider that we shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eyes of all people are upon us."<sup>28</sup> The hope of the Puritan separatists was that by building a perfect society in a covenant with God they would attract the attention of England and eventually not only complete the Protestant Reformation, but entice the rest of the world to follow as well. This was the beginning of American Exceptionalism, the belief that America and its people hold a special and redemptive place in the world and are required by a higher power (sometimes God, history, or civilization) to live as moral exemplars in order to inspire other nations. Exceptionalism is not necessarily contingent on the attention of the world. The crisis of the second generation of the Plymouth colony was that having perfected their society England was no longer interested, the Puritan government of England that had taken power had even reprimanded the colonists for their banishment of dissenting groups. As Perry Miller argues, "Having failed to rivet the eyes of the world upon their city on the hill, [the New England Puritans] were left alone with America."<sup>29</sup> So while Exceptionalist rhetoric may or may not involve the attention of the rest of the world it always concerns the special place America supposedly holds. This is easily demonstrated in a passage of Melville's *White-Jacket*:

The Future is endowed with such a life, that it lives to us even in anticipation... the Future is the Bible of the Free... [Thus] in the Past, seeing that, ere long, the van of the nations must, of right, belong to

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<sup>28</sup> Cited in James Kirby Martin ed, *Interpreting Colonial America: Selected Readings*, (New York: Dodd, Mead & co, 1973), 55.

<sup>29</sup> Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 13-5.

ourselves... Escaped from the house of bondage, Israel of old did not follow after the Egyptians; to her were given new things under the sun. And we Americans are the peculiar, chosen people – the Israel of our time; we bear the ark of the liberties of the world... God has predestinated, mankind expects, great things from our race; and great things we feel in our souls... Long enough have we been skeptics with regard to ourselves, and doubted whether, indeed, the political Messiah had come. But he has come in *us*.<sup>30</sup>

The rhetorical form that Exceptionalism often takes is the American Jeremiad. New England Puritan clergy used Jeremiads extensively and even when setting out for the New World the Jeremiads used seemed to preclude the possibility of failure. As the colony grew and the second generation was seen to stray from its moral ideals, the Jeremiads promised harsher tortures than had been previously threatened, with a distinctive change; the new punishments were not destructive but corrective because the errand of the Puritan colonists was too important to simply destroy.<sup>31</sup> The Jeremiad form in America continued to change over time and in some instances becomes, instead of a condemnation of the flock, a self-congratulatory condemnation of others. Therefore the characteristics of the American Jeremiad appeal to some kind of higher power and condemn certain actions or groups of people and offer America itself or its ideals as a means of redeeming the situation.

Examples of American Exceptionalism and Jeremiads are quite numerous. The belief in America's exceptional nature was probably best exemplified by the concept of Manifest Destiny. Many Americans sincerely believed that American democracy would eventually spread across the world and that in order to survive America must grow. Spreading democracy was also seen as the moral responsibility of America in order to

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<sup>30</sup> Cited in Sacvan Berkovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 177.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 7-8.

relieve the suffering souls who did not have its benefit.<sup>32</sup> So American expansion was justified because it would not only benefit America but also every place into which it expanded, which is, in some ways, simply a continuation of the justifications used by the colonial powers of Europe.

Most American Jeremiads also exemplify Exceptionalism. Woodrow Wilson, in his message to Congress on April 2, 1917 justified American entry into World War I by presenting Germany as having strayed too far from the laws of civilization. He argued that the United States was thus compelled to show Germany the error of her ways.<sup>33</sup> Another example is when in his "I Have a Dream" speech Martin Luther King Jr. invoked President Lincoln, the writers of the Constitution, and God as forces that wanted to end discrimination against blacks in the United States; threatening that revolt would continue until America reformed itself.<sup>34</sup> The rhetorical form of outlining an outrage, to God, humanity, civilization, etc., offering America or its ideals as a remedy, and promising some sort of punishment if the problem is not voluntarily solved has been constantly repeated since the Puritans landed. The Confederate States of America believed the federal government had strayed too far from Constitutional ideals, and so seceded claiming they were reforming their country to the original constitutional ideals. The ideology of the first Klan was that of the Confederacy, and throughout its history the Klan has made use of these ideological and rhetorical forms.

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<sup>32</sup> Richard N. Current and John A. Garrity, *Words That Made American History*, volume 1 (Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1962), 437.

<sup>33</sup> Woodrow Wilson, "President Woodrow Wilson's War Message", (April 2, 1917), <<http://www.lib.byu.edu/~rdh/wwi/1917/wilswarm.html>> accessed September 9, 2004.

<sup>34</sup> Martin Luther King Jr., "I Have a Dream", (August 28, 1963), <<http://www.mecca.org/~crights/dream.html>> accessed September 9, 2004.

The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States have been regarded as “sacred scriptures.”<sup>35</sup> There is one particular aspect of the Constitution that requires discussion. Although there were delegates at the Constitutional Convention who wished to abolish slavery the compromise that was eventually not quite written into the Constitution continued the institution of slavery indefinitely. While agreeing that black slaves and all their children would be perpetually in bondage the framers, in Article I Section II, counted 3/5 of the slave population towards the representation of the states in which they were held captive. Additionally, Article I Section XI taxes the importation of persons, and Article IV Section II states that any person who is bonded to servitude cannot discharge that obligation by crossing state lines. These are the only parts of the original document that even come close to mentioning the institution of slavery, and never use either the word slave or slavery.

The choice not to use the words slave or slavery was deliberate, and, according to Charles H. Long this choice within the founding documents greatly informs American cultural language. Long continues:

The compromise over slavery at the beginning, in the formation and promulgation of the Constitution, is the archetype of that long series of compromises concerning the freedom of black Americans within the American national community. The first compromise sets the tone for what is almost a ritual language concerning the nature of black freedom and, consequently, the meaning of freedom in the American Republic.<sup>36</sup>

Long further argues that the Civil War in the 1860s and the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s and 70s represent the ritual cycles of America, and that each time similar compromises are again enacted, thus re-entrenching a “rationalized demonism” of black

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<sup>35</sup> Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Daedalus, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 96: 1 (Winter 1967), 6.

<sup>36</sup> Charles H. Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*, (Aurora, Colorado: The Davies Group, 1995), 164.

Americans. What is articulated by the black population during these periods, even though the same American cultural language is used, is the possibility of “another reality” which was not created by white Americans and which, were it realized would make the United States a radically different place.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately both the compromises concerning black freedom and the potential for America to become a radically different place are not always evident to those immersed in the American cultural language, and the role of the Klan in compromising black freedom is similarly obscured.

Racial oppression existed prior to the writing of the United States’ foundational documents, and, while questions of origins are exceedingly difficult to answer convincingly, Theodore W. Allen has made a powerful argument for his Marxist theory of the origin of racial oppression in the U.S. In two volumes Allen compares the social control apparatus of the petty bourgeois in England, Ireland, Virginia, and the West Indies. In each case the ruling class needed some sort of social buffer, people with something to lose, who would, through their identification with the ruling class, help prevent widespread revolts among the lowest-class portions of the population. In Virginia, and other American colonies, the ruling class gave whites more rights than any black person without regard to social status, and passed laws to deter intermarriage between blacks and whites.<sup>38</sup> This measure against class solidarity may have proved more successful than even its architects had dreamed as to this day Klansmen, few of whom are social elites, blame all of America’s troubles on communism in one form or another and fight vigorously against labor interests.

### **Overarching forms; Canada.**

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, 164-5.

<sup>38</sup> Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, volume 2 (New York: Verso, 1994), 242-5.

Despite the best efforts of transplanted Englishmen there has never been a single unified Canadian cultural language that can be as easily studied as that in the United States. According to Jennifer Reid the national identity of Canadians “has essentially revolved around a series of dichotomies: English/French, Catholic/Protestant, native/white, East/West” and this has informed the dominant cultural language. Furthermore a great deal of the history of Canada follows a rough pattern of French and aboriginal cooperation through trade and Catholicism followed by English conquest through which the French/English dichotomy overshadows French/aboriginal relations; religion is often credited with being a basis for this dichotomy.<sup>39</sup>

This pattern can be demonstrated in Acadia, Quebec, and the Northwest. In all of these areas French Catholic clergy often lived among, and converted, the aboriginal peoples. Usually the French did not present a serious threat to Native Americans as there was little settlement and a great deal of trade. There were problems between French and aboriginal peoples; however, in the face of potential cultural annihilation a large portion of both peoples turned to the Catholic Church for survival.<sup>40</sup> The violence of the British in their conquest is demonstrated by the mass deportation of Acadians and the reserve and pass systems created for Métis and aboriginal peoples in the Northwest. Quebec, though it has faced considerable problems at the hands of English Canada, is the exception to the pattern of mass relocation and may well have had the same story if not for the imminent threat of the American Revolution. If concessions had not been granted

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<sup>39</sup> Jennifer I. M. Reid, “Religious Orientations in the Formation of Canada,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (Macmillan, forthcoming), 10-11.

<sup>40</sup> Robert Choquette, *Canada's Religions: An Historical Introduction*, (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2004), 135.

to Quebec it may have joined the revolting American colonists and Britain would have lost all continental colonies in North America.

Since 1960 this pattern in Canadian history changed substantially. The process of secularization plummeted church attendance and Canada saw unprecedented cooperation between Protestant and Catholic churches, largely neutralizing the Protestant/Catholic dichotomy in the Canadian cultural language.<sup>41</sup> Additionally the English/French dichotomy came under threat of destruction as Quebec became more interested in separation.<sup>42</sup> Canada was more closely aligned with the United States in the aftermath of WWII and issues that dominated the United States, such as race and the civil rights movement. In 1967 the government of Canada officially ended white supremacy with new immigration legislation, which became permanent in 1982,<sup>43</sup> along with recognition of aboriginal rights. With the government no longer protecting white supremacy some Canadians became concerned that the well-being of the country might become threatened.

Racial tensions eclipsed the changing dichotomies of religion and ethnicity, which were usually the basis for Canadian exclusionary principles, and this can be seen in the Klan of the 80s, which was a very different creature from its Canadian predecessor. Homogeneity was no longer defined by a struggle between two white cultures, but in terms of racial dominance.

#### **Historical precedents; The United States.**

The thirteen colonies were heavily influenced by the Puritans and along with the ethos of being embattled with evil came days of fasting and thanksgiving, which were

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 368-9.

<sup>42</sup> Reid, (forthcoming), 15.

<sup>43</sup> Choquette, (2004), 404.

observed during the American revolution, often by order of the Continental Congress. The concern was that any sins that had not been repented could endanger the Revolutionary war effort and that thanks should be offered for successful military actions. Because Americans believed themselves to be engaged with evil their victory depended on righteousness in the eyes of God.<sup>44</sup>

The idea of ritual cleansing during times of trouble has been part of white American culture ever since, although the pollution avoided was not always sin. Potential pollutants include Native Americans, blacks, immigrants, immorality, and ideologies; this example will focus on black Americans as they are the constant victims of the Klan. Relevant examples of Mary Douglas' discussion of pollution can readily be found in the criteria for race of the U.S. Census. In 1860 if a person had one "colored" grandparent they were also considered as such, and in 1907 one "colored" great-great-grandparent bestowed the same classification.<sup>45</sup> This was extremely important as only white persons could testify in court or otherwise receive the rights of full citizens.

The fact that blacks were marginalized goes without question, but the danger embodied by black slaves was very real as there was little or nothing for them to lose. The first African slaves arrived in America twelve years after the first permanent British colony was founded in 1607. The first recorded instance of a plotted slave rebellion takes place only forty-four years later.<sup>46</sup> The majority of slave rebellions never proceeded past the plotting stage before they were betrayed to the authorities; however, there are a few, like the Southampton, Virginia slave revolt of 1831 that killed an estimated sixty white

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<sup>44</sup>Catherine L. Albanese, *America Religions and Religion*, (Belmont, California: Wadsworth, 1999), 439.

<sup>45</sup> Allen, (1994), 27.

<sup>46</sup> Michael Newton and Judy Ann Newton, *Racial & Religious Violence in America: A Chronology*, (New York: Garland, 1991), 9, 14.

people. Slaves also joined Native American tribes or formed guerilla bands in the forests and swamps of the South that would attack white settlements sometimes freeing more slaves.<sup>47</sup> However, the later fear of black citizens was not as well founded. For example Robert Shelton, a Klan leader, claimed that the full moon activated the “animal instincts” of blacks and that if one drop of black blood got in a baby’s food it would soon die of sickle cell anemia.<sup>48</sup>

The ability of the society at large to destroy marginalized persons without consequence is demonstrated time and again. Slave owners could torture or kill their slaves at will with no legal repercussions, the Klan and unmasked groups of white citizens lynched blacks frequently after emancipation, and even into the 1960s some whites who killed blacks were not charged with murder even in cases where there was overwhelming evidence against them, as will be discussed in chapter five. Additionally anomalies to white society such as interracial couples or affluent black people were often fiercely persecuted.

The final historical template formed early in the nation’s history that the Klan follows is the creation of nativist and secretive organizations, which are often one and the same. The fears of nativists had some basis in reality, although Americans were themselves guilty of what nativists accused immigrants of doing. American settlers were constantly pushing westward and settling land that was not part of the United States. In several cases these settlements resulted in the annexation of these lands by the U.S. government; this expansion is not considered deliberate, but a result of a great people

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<sup>47</sup> Vincent Harding, *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in North America*, (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, 1981), 46-100.

<sup>48</sup> Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 314.

who in their pursuit of liberty are liberating the savage lands they encounter. Therefore when large numbers of immigrants, primarily Irish famine refugees, started moving to America many people assumed the worst, that this settlement by aliens would result in a weakening or destruction of their "more perfect Union." The fear was that some foreign power would do to America what America was doing to Mexico, the Native American nations, and trying to do to Canada, even if Americans did not acknowledge their actions as such.<sup>49</sup>

For the most part English colonists on the Atlantic seaboard were devoutly anti-Catholic. Toleration and freedom of worship in the colonies only partially applied to Catholicism and perhaps the greatest unifying principle among Protestant denominations in America was their opposition to Catholicism.<sup>50</sup> The first secret organization in the United States was the Illuminati, who were vehemently anti-Catholic and blamed by some for the French Revolution. Founded in 1776 Bavaria, Illuminati groups spread across Europe and were transplanted into America, where they were denounced as being atheistic in the 1770-80s; however, these groups did not last in the United States beyond 1799.<sup>51</sup> Masonic Lodges and later Oddfellows and other fraternal orders became popular in the early nineteenth century, and the formula for secretive fraternal organizations was infused with nativism in 1850. The Order of United Americans, which was a public nativist group, formed in 1848 but was superceded in 1850 by the Order of the Star Spangled Banner, which combined secretive fraternity with nativism and political ambition; this group was commonly known as the Know Nothings. The Know Nothings

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<sup>49</sup> See John L. O'Sullivan, "Annexation", in Current and Garity, (1962), 437-45.

<sup>50</sup> David H. Bennett, *The Party of Fear: From Nativist Movements to the New Right in American History*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 19-20.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 23-4.

found widespread political support, claiming 1.5 million members in the election of 1854. At the time street gangs would battle on election days to intimidate voters from other groups and whether Know Nothings were involved or not they supported those who tried to intimidate immigrant factions. In 1855 the central leadership of the Know Nothings was taken over by southerners, who promptly issued proslavery statements and alienated most of their membership from New England, Ohio, Iowa, Indiana, and Wisconsin. Ultimately the national division over slavery destroyed the power of the Know Nothings and the antislavery Know Nothings joined defectors from the Whig party, the American party, and others to help form the emerging Republican Party.<sup>52</sup> The Know Nothings established the pattern for secretive groups working toward political ends by mobilizing their own voters and intimidating opponents.

The Christian Identity movement, which is based on British Isrealism and came to America in the 1920s, believes that whites are descendents of the ten lost tribes of Israel and are God's chosen people. Identity claims that Adam and Eve were the first white people and had been preceded by other races (who are, consequently classified as "the beasts of the field" referred to in Genesis 1:25) and that Eve, who was seduced by Satan, bore two lineages; Satan sired Cain and Adam sired Abel. Cain mated with non-Aryan races and created the Jews, and the Jews are therefore genetically predisposed to struggle against Aryans. Followers of Identity justify violence by claiming they are enforcing God's law, and as they also believe the U.S. government is controlled by Jews almost any illegal action can be condoned, if not encouraged, within the group.<sup>53</sup> The Christian Identity movement easily found support among a population who already believed their

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 106-134.

<sup>53</sup> "Christian identity," (last modified September 3, 2004), <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian\\_Identity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christian_Identity)> accessed September 12, 2004.

country had a special covenant with God and was chosen for greatness. One possible reason for the rise of Christian Identity is that for European Christendom the designation Christian generally referred to white Christians, Christianity itself could be used as a basis of racial exclusion without a Christian theology of racial exclusion. However, as Christianity found adherents among those considered non-white a new theological rationalization for white supremacy may have become necessary to maintain a basis for racial exclusion in Christianity.

### **Historical precedents; Canada**

When one studies the Klan in the United States and Canada one notices that for the thousands of violent acts attributed to the American Klan there are only a handful of violent acts attributed to its Canadian counterpart. This may be, in part, because of the attitudes towards the frontier as mentioned above; there may also have been a lack of trust for an American organization as the two instances of greatest English and French cooperation have been in wars with the United States. Additionally, the inability of the Klan to motivate Canadians through an appeal to a cosmological structure could be a factor. When dealing with the question of schooling for marginalized peoples Americans simply burned down black or integrated schools, sometimes flogging the teachers and forcing them out of town; Canada, on the other hand, had a provincially controlled public school system in which to battle.

The strongest advocates of separate schools when they were introduced in 1841 were anglophone Protestants in Quebec who wanted their children to attend schools where they would be instructed in their own language and faith.<sup>54</sup> Public schools outside

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<sup>54</sup> J. Donald Wilson, "Education in Upper Canada: Sixty Years of Change," in J. Donald Wilson et al. *Canadian Education: A History* (Scarborough, 1970), 210.

Quebec were strongly informed by English Protestant tradition, and French speakers and Catholics often found themselves alienated from this system. In response many took advantage of the Separate Schools Act and established their own institutions. Despite the initial demand for the separate school system by English Protestant interests, it came to be condemned as a Papist tool in the provinces west of Quebec. Despite legislation in the 1870 Manitoba Act, the 1875 Northwest Territories Act, and the 1877 amendment to the Northwest Territories Act, by 1880 the province of Manitoba no longer either used French or supported separate schools. There was a possibility that the federal government could intervene and protect separate schools but the British Privy Council decided that education was the responsibility of the province. Eventually the Laurier-Greenway compromise was worked out which allowed French instruction in primary grades and allowed religious instruction in the last half-hour of the day, but these could not compare to French Catholic education rights before 1890. There were similar battles in Saskatchewan and Alberta wherein the Laurier-Greenway compromise was eventually implemented,<sup>55</sup> and in Ontario a similar law was enacted between 1912 and 1944, although it proved unenforceable.<sup>56</sup> This demonstrates the tendency in Canada to use legislation instead of vigilantism when possible.

The English in Canada were never able to dehumanize the French as Americans dehumanized their black citizens. As a consequence English Canadians needed a different approach when it came to maintaining their linguistic and cultural purity. Assimilation of the French had been the official policy of the British government since

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<sup>55</sup> William Peter Baergen, *The Ku Klux Klan in Central Alberta*, (Red Deer: Central Alberta Historical Society, 2000), 34-43.

<sup>56</sup> Robert Choquette, *Ontario: An Informal History of the Land and Its People*, (Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Education, 1983), p. 38-39.

1760 and assimilationist attitudes continued well into the twentieth century; however, the initial compromise of the Quebec Act had set aside territory in which the French language and culture and the Catholic religion were protected. Quebec was a geographically separate place in which it was acceptable for French Catholics to live. This separation continued in the form of separate schools for English Protestants, French and English Catholics, blacks, and Asians; aboriginal peoples were separated entirely through the reserve, residential school, and pass systems. Some would argue that Multiculturalism and its related policies are also a means of separation.<sup>57</sup>

Finally, Canada was also no stranger to ultra-patriotic nativist organizations. The Orange Order was very popular in English Protestant parts of the country, claiming between twelve and fourteen percent of the Male population of Ontario in 1934.<sup>58</sup> The Canadian Orange Lodges were fraternal organizations for Protestants loyal to Britain; they participated in charitable community events and helped support Protestant immigrants. The Orange Order was also a powerful lobbying group as they could mobilize voters, and the lobbying power of the Orange Order is credited by some with influencing Sir John A. MacDonald not to commute Louis Riel's sentence. Additionally Orangemen tried to prevent Catholics and Jews from being economically successful.<sup>59</sup>

There are instances in Canadian history when the general population takes part in violence, such as riots between Orangemen and Irish Catholics in the 1840s, the militia comprised of settlers from Ontario who helped fight Louis Riel, and riots against the

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<sup>57</sup> See Neil Bissoondath, *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*, (Toronto: Penguin, 1994).

<sup>58</sup> Baergen, (200), 60.

<sup>59</sup> Cecil J. Houston and William J. Smyth, *The Sash Canada Wore: A Historical Geography of the Orange Order in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980). "The Orange Order in Canada," (last modified September 18, 2004) <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orange\\_Order#The\\_Orange\\_Order\\_in\\_Canada](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Orange_Order#The_Orange_Order_in_Canada)> accessed September 20, 2004.

Asian population of Vancouver in 1907. These instances demonstrate that the Canadian citizenry is sometimes willing to engage in violence, but it is the exception rather than the norm.

### Chapter III

Historical accounts of the creation of the Klan generally agree with each other. Given the tendency toward concealment and emphasis on social control noted in the previous chapter the common account will be given before a critical analysis of this account. This will be followed by a discussion of the rhetoric and activity of the bloodiest period of Klan history, and an overview of its continuation into the twentieth century.

#### **The beginning of the Klan**

The official story is that sometime between the spring of 1865 and the spring of 1866, most likely December of 1865, six young men, all college educated ex-Confederate officers, in Pulaski, Tennessee gathered in a local law office to form a fraternal organization. They rode around the town in costumes at night to amuse passersby and discovered that their antics frightened black citizens. Their gathering had initially been strictly for amusement, but soon found a much more sinister purpose. The organization grew and spread across the south either by other groups forming and imitating the Pulaski group or by similar groups taking on their name and trappings. When the 1867 Reconstruction acts were passed by congress local Klan leaders from all over the South met at the Maxwell House in Nashville, reorganized the Klan along military lines, and appointed Confederate Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest as their Grand Wizard, or national leader. The Klan's charter required the defense of people who were weak, defenseless, innocent, oppressed, and of the U.S. Constitution.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965), 8-9.

There are a few problems in the original story. The first have to do with the status of the original members and their intentions. According to Gladys-Marie Fry, “the Ku Klux Klan was simply a later form of the ante-bellum [slave] patrols.”<sup>61</sup> Both enforced curfews against Blacks, making sure those out after dark had a pass from their employer or owner, both whipped Blacks who they thought were misbehaving, and both tried to inspire fear of the supernatural through their costumes. Much of the amusement sought by those like the young men of Pulaski focused on frightening and assaulting the black population.<sup>62</sup> It should be noted that the slave patrollers and the Klan’s founders came from vastly different economic backgrounds. Lower-class whites were often either paid patrollers or were required by local governments to perform such tasks a certain number of nights each month. Given Theodore W. Allen’s analysis of the origin of racial discrimination in America it is certainly plausible that this garb was chosen by the founders of the Klan to form a racial solidarity between upper and lower class whites or perhaps to draw suspicion away from the class of people who were initially performing these crimes.

An indication that the historical accuracy of the Klan’s creation story is perhaps compromised is that in a number of versions the black population is referred to as superstitious or credulous. This is sometimes acknowledged as being based on the statements of Klansmen, and it unfortunately casts doubt on the credibility of some sources. Also, the social climate is described in such a way as to portray the south and its inhabitants as the hapless victims of Northern aggression. While this is a charitable

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<sup>61</sup> Gladys-Marie Fry, *Night Riders in Black Folk History*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975), 154.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 154-7.

interpretation and does accurately describe the feelings of the Southern population at large it ignores the complexities of the Civil War and of the victims of the Klan.

How the Klan came to be spread across the South is also a little bit of a mystery. There are accounts of how one or two other Klans got started across the Alabama border, but how they became so widespread that in two years there were representatives from all over the South to meet in Nashville is not well explained. If the Klan were simply a group involved in amusing upper-class southerners that closely imitated a college fraternity it is difficult to see how it would have amassed such widespread popularity. Klan sources credit this to their name, claiming that among a number of similar groups the Klan had the most interesting name, and as such the "movement" was labeled the Ku Klux Klan movement even though there was supposedly no central organization.<sup>63</sup> In addition, the organization's choice of a leader, Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest, is also rather telling. Forrest had been a slave trader in civilian life and on April 12, 1864 when he and his unit captured a Union garrison; Forrest ordered the mass execution of all black Union soldiers as well as the black women and children; some of the victims were burned alive or crucified.<sup>64</sup> By appointing Forrest Klan leader this organization's members showed that they were willing, from the moment of centralization, to commit atrocities in order to maintain the traditional social order.

### **Klan rhetoric**

Honesty, even under the best of circumstances is a rare commodity. Klan spokesmen made their statements concerning the organization's foundation and history

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<sup>63</sup> J.C. Lester and D. L. Wilson, *Ku Klux Klan: Its Origin, Growth, and Disbandment*, (New York: Da Capo, 1973), 24-5.

<sup>64</sup> Michael Newton and Judy Ann Newton, *Racial & Religious Violence in America: A Chronology*, (New York: Garland, 1991), 180.

under duress from Union military inquiries or congressional investigations. There is also evidence that Klan activity persisted long after Union troops were withdrawn from the South, and so there was likely also pressure from still-active Klan forces for informants not to compromise their position. In light of these factors and the evidence that will be discussed, a critical approach, if not a hermeneutic of suspicion, becomes necessary when regarding the Klan's statements about itself from this time period. The primary source for this section is a book written by J. C. Lester, one of the founding six Klansmen from Pulaski, and D. L. Wilson,<sup>65</sup> who was also closely connected to the Klan. In this book the authors praise Gen. Forrest for his performance during the congressional investigation, wherein he avoided talking about the Klan and instead talked about how terrible things were for white Southerners during reconstruction. The authors then use much the same tactic throughout their book. The book begins by denial; denial that any atrocities ever were committed, followed by denial of the Klan's participation in any of those atrocities, followed by a denial of wrongdoing in committing atrocities, etc. According to Lester and Wilson the Klan only hated lawbreakers, and consequently only lawbreakers hated the Klan.

The Klan considered itself a "self-appointed police organization" whose actions were justified because of the difficult times the South was facing. Klan loyalty took precedence over loyalty to the Northern controlled government and so Klansmen felt justified when lying to any government organization.<sup>66</sup> The Klan's story about itself, as illustrated above, is that it was started purely for amusement and became a banding together of citizens for common defense. Lester and Wilson additionally claim that the

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<sup>65</sup> Other sources regarding Klan rhetoric primarily cite this text. Unfortunately they also reproduce other parts of the text uncritically, including their descriptions of the historical context.

<sup>66</sup> Chalmers, (1965), 9-11.

reason the Klan did not operate much in the “black-belt” areas was that there was no division among the whites in those areas, and that because of this unity the blacks regarded them as “beings almost superhuman” and therefore offered no insubordination.<sup>67</sup> In addition, Lester and Wilson claim that difficulties in controlling the blacks in the piedmont were due to the fact that blacks did not always have respect for all whites, combined with the large numbers of outlaws and deserters who migrated to those areas. This story also claims that quite a few of the “genuine Unionists” became involved in the Klan as well as some blacks.<sup>68</sup> There may be some truth to the claim that some Unionists joined the Klan. There are reports from North Carolina of individuals who were approached by the Klan and told to join because their Republican relatives would be in danger if they did not join.<sup>69</sup> In addition, there were some blacks involved in Klan raids, three of whom were forced by Klansmen to take part in the raid, and subsequently testified against the Klan; two of the black Klan members were Democrats.<sup>70</sup> An estimate for Klan membership given by Gen. Forrest to Congress is around 550,000 members across the South. Lester claims that because the Klan was a police organization only and took no part in politics it died out when police and judicial systems were able to protect Klan communities. According to this account the Klan disbanded in 1869 after which time there had only been “few outrages” and the “evil deeds of outlaws” were hidden under the name of the Klan. These outrages, however, are presented as acceptable

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<sup>67</sup> Lester, (1973), 24.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 22-48.

<sup>69</sup> Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 58.

<sup>70</sup> Allen W. Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 296-7. Reports of blacks involved in Klan activities allowed the Democratic press to dismiss Klan activity as another outrage committed by Southern blacks.

because the Klan was able to prevent the “evil results of carpet bag governments” from ever becoming manifest.<sup>71</sup>

Curiously, Lester claims in the beginning of the book to have no knowledge of the secret signs, passwords, etc of the Klan even though he was a founding member. As the book was published in 1884 and the line Lester promotes maintains that it was disbanded in 1869 it seems strange that such an omission would be important enough to make, and important enough to mention right at the beginning.

Before 1867 Lester maintains that the Klan was “characterized by prudence and discretion” but then bad men infiltrated the order, despite their tight control over membership. It is interesting that this infiltration of bad men coincides so closely with the reorganization, militarization, and centralization of the Klan that took place in Nashville. The original leaders report that they had wanted to disband the organization; however, they were unable to because their secrecy prevented them from knowing the true extent of its influence and because in creating it they “had evoked a spirit from ‘the vasty deep’” and it was beyond their control.<sup>72</sup> This same secrecy did not prevent the 1867 meeting that divided Klan areas according to state lines, Congressional districts, counties, and municipalities, imitating the electoral map exactly despite the organizations’ supposedly apolitical nature.

Much is made of the injunction in the prescript (of a supposedly apolitical organization) to defend the Constitution of the United States. This oath is supposed to demonstrate the Klan’s law abiding nature, proving that it was not politically subversive

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<sup>71</sup> Lester, (1973), 22-48.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 83-4.

or treasonous; however, the wording within the prescript excludes the authority of reconstruction governments, claiming they were not in accordance with the Constitution.

Lester gives accounts of massive abuse heaped upon the Southern white population at the hands of blacks, Unionists, Republicans, Northerners, and Southern deviants, known as scalawags. He goes so far as to say about the atrocities committed by the Klan that “one cannot but be surprised that men so persecuted and oppressed remained so moderate and forbearing.” In other places he continues shifting blame for Klan activities as to say that blacks were dressing like the Klan in order to commit crimes, and goes on to say that everyone in Tennessee who was caught in a Klan robe was either black or Republican.<sup>73</sup>

In short, Democratic politicians maintained that the Klan and all its activities were lies made up by Republicans throughout the period to defame former Confederates. The Klan itself maintained that it was created purely for amusement, failing that it claimed it was purely for self-defense. When atrocities could not be denied the Klan claimed either that someone else had done them or that bad elements within the order had carried them out, and ultimately appealed to the badness of the times as justification for those atrocities. The Klan never publicly accepted that it was responsible in any way for any atrocities that were committed in the latter half of the nineteenth century South.

#### **Klan activities**

Whether Lester and the other six original Klansmen were guilty of starting a club for the express purpose of sedition and anti-government work with an expressly white-supremacist bent does not change the violent history of the organization. While it seems unlikely that the Klan was started purely for amusement the fact remains that the Klan

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 87, 89, 105.

was, and was famous for, being a white-supremacist anti-government paramilitary organization, and that this group commanded enough of the Southern population to prevent reconstruction for more than half a century. The reason for the focus on Klan rhetoric is that the claims of the original Klansmen serve not only to distance themselves from any guilt of atrocities, but they also serve to obscure the atrocities themselves by shifting the investigative focus away from Klan crimes and toward persecution of ex-Confederates. Additionally, if the authors of these denials of responsibility were as outraged by the Klan's atrocities as they pretend to be they would not spend so much time making excuses for Klan behavior. The reality of Southern life under the Klan is concealed by discussion of the founders' original intent and focusing on the narrative of the ex-Confederate makes the perspective of the Klan's victims secondary. The actions of the Klan put the rhetoric of Klan apologists into perspective.

Klansmen boasted of violence committed towards blacks in general and whites who were involved in reconstruction projects or who did not agree with their power structures.<sup>74</sup> The problems with documentation of this activity are obvious; if the violence were carried out successfully there would be no witnesses and if the intimidation were effective it would go unreported. There is one definite instance of a murder by the Klan in Florida two months before the 1867 reorganization of the Klan.<sup>75</sup> Klan violence cannot be overstated during this period. Thousands, probably tens of thousands of people were killed, tortured, intimidated, or had their property destroyed by the Klan. There has been very little speculation about the exact numbers and an exact figure would be impossible to find. The accounts are vague and many reports were denounced as

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<sup>74</sup> Chalmers, (1965), 10.

<sup>75</sup> Newton & Newton, (1991), 191.

fabrications, often by organizations friendly to the Klan. One does encounter reports of twenty-five blacks found half-buried in a mass grave in the woods, of thirty bodies counted as they float down the river, and of finding bodies in lime pits, ponds, lakes, hung from trees, and just lying in the street. The violence was so endemic that entire communities started sleeping in the woods in order to escape Klan violence. The victims include blacks of no particular category; some were targeted because they had achieved some economic success, some because the Klansmen perceived some disrespect directed towards whites, and some, ultimately, because they were simply around. Whites who taught at black schools, registered black voters, moved down from the North, advocated any status other than slave for blacks, or who were simply Republicans were also frequently targets of Klan violence.<sup>76</sup>

There are certain specific examples of Klan violence that are frequently repeated throughout reconstruction. Though the incidents recounted here are specific and limited their purpose is to demonstrate the kinds of violence employed by the Klan. These sorts of things happened hundreds of times all over the South with varying degrees of success.

Throughout the month of February, 1868 Klansmen removed more than 400 firearms by raiding black homes in Maury County, Tennessee. In October of 1868 Members of the Klan and other groups organized in the month preceding the presidential election to purge black voters and white Republicans, killing or wounding an estimated 1,723 people by November 8<sup>th</sup>. In October 1868 a black family in Florida is abducted and whipped for owning land and told to return to their pre-war owner.<sup>77</sup> There were organized efforts on the part of the Klan to prevent blacks and Republicans from voting

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 191-221.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 197, 198.

in the 1868 election in all of the Southern states.<sup>78</sup> The number of recorded incidents is incredible and while sometimes the Klan's victims were successful in their attempts to fight back or run away the Klan almost always returned with greater numbers, their ranks swelled with members from other dens. Klan violence became so bad that in September of 1868 farmers in Paris, Texas organized specifically to fight the Klan, creating an organization that was what the Klan claimed to be.<sup>79</sup>

The exact number of casualties will never be known. A large number of Klansmen were ex-soldiers, well armed, trained, and organized while their targets were primarily civilians who in many cases would not have been permitted to handle a weapon until just a few years earlier. Congressional hearings state that between 1868 and 1871 the Klan is responsible for 74 murders in Georgia, 109 in Alabama, 235 in Florida, 35 in Kemper county, Mississippi, and a six-month period in 1871 in South Carolina attributes "35 murders, 262 floggings, two rapes, and another 101 victims wounded, mutilated, or driven from their homes."<sup>80</sup> Chalmers estimates the death toll among blacks and Republicans at "close to a thousand."<sup>81</sup> Considering the difficulty of obtaining accurate estimates of Klan violence it seems probable that thousands or tens of thousands of people were tortured, lost their lives or property, or were otherwise brutalized by the Klan alone during this period. It should also be noted that violence that was a result of race riots or groups of armed whites against blacks at this time, though numerous, have been excluded from this estimate.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 199-200.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 197.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 191.

<sup>81</sup> Chalmers, (1965), 2.

Despite claims of the Klans apolitical nature a great deal of the most well recorded Klan violence was in relation to their political activities. The Klan operated mostly at a local level maintaining the pre-war status quo, and it also involved itself in national politics. The group published threats against voting Republican and warned all Republicans to leave town or not to vote. Klansmen marched past Republican meetings or past individual Republican homes armed and masked, and when that did not work they set meeting halls and peoples' homes on fire. At the time each party would hand out different colored ballots, which the voters would cast, as such there was no secret ballot and Klansmen would sometimes forcefully take Republican ballots. The Klan would raid black homes and abuse the inhabitants or steal their ballots or both. On Election Day polls were moved to places that only Democrats knew of, Klansmen blockaded roads leading to polling stations and fired on crowds of blacks. Plantation owners would not give their workers time off to vote and threatened unemployment. En route to the polls Republican voters would be stopped or fired on by armed Klansmen, and Republicans did not know if their families would be alive when they returned home from voting. Klansmen would disperse Republican poll-watchers and the Republican ballots would be destroyed.<sup>82</sup>

Resistance to the Klan took many forms, the most direct of which came from the military governors placed in control over the Southern states. Military governors were not given troops to aid in their efforts. Federal troops stayed, for the most part, on military bases and in Texas where there were skirmishes with Native American tribes. The war had already been fought and congress did not want to have to use Union army

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<sup>82</sup> William Loren Katz, *The Invisible Empire: The Ku Klux Klan Impact on History*, (Seattle: Open Hand Publishing, 1986), 31-4.

forces to govern. The governors were allowed to raise militia forces and when the governor of Florida was refused weapons and ammunition by the Federal government he procured them on his own. However, weapons bought by the governor disappeared from locked and guarded rail cars. Similar incidents plagued other governors; one steamboat that was carrying militia weaponry was attacked by Klansmen who threw the guns and munitions into the river.<sup>83</sup> The Klan seemed to understand better than Congress that a state's authority lay in its ability to control violence. It should also be noted that often when the military governors raised militias they were comprised of black soldiers, which did not make Northern rule any more acceptable to its white southern subjects.

The victims of Klan violence resisted their victimization with varying degrees of success. Some blacks were able to fight off Klan raids with guns,<sup>84</sup> an ax,<sup>85</sup> and, in one instance, a broom.<sup>86</sup> Others were able to escape unscathed, sometimes more than once, and some resisted by refusing to be intimidated by Klan violence and pressing charges. For example Allen P. Huggins, a Northern revenue officer and agent of the Freedman's Bureau, after being threatened with death and viscously flogged by the Klan not only refused to leave the South, but prosecuted two of his assailants, whose confessions led to the imprisonment of twenty-six other Klansmen.<sup>87</sup>

Finally, the greatest resistance came when in 1870 President Grant ordered Major Lewis Merrill and soldiers from the Seventh U.S. Cavalry to South Carolina to investigate matters. Merrill, a skeptic about the Klan, found within three months of investigation that the situation was worse than anyone in the North suspected. He sent

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<sup>83</sup> Chalmers, (1965), 13.

<sup>84</sup> Wade, (1987), 54-7.

<sup>85</sup> Trelease, (1971), 194.

<sup>86</sup> Katz, (1986), Dedication.

<sup>87</sup> Wade, (1987), 65-8.

spies into the Klan organization and compiled massive amounts of evidence from both spies and the frightened civilians who settled near his camp to avoid Klan violence. Merrill's orders did not allow him to prosecute state offenses, such as murder or arson, and the local authorities refused to act. With the war only five years past neither Grant nor the Congress wanted to admit failure; however, after the 1870 congressional elections showed vanishing Republican support in all the Southern states Grant gave Merrill four hundred soldiers and orders to start arresting Klansmen. Merrill sent the Cavalry to serve warrants, as he learned the local sheriff had been a Klansman all along.

The enormity of Klan membership made justice an impossibility. The best and brightest, the richest and most powerful townspeople, turned out to be Klansmen and the sheer volume of Klan membership flooded the courts. Klansmen came in willingly to denounce other Klansmen in exchange for shorter sentences. Merrill demonstrated "overwhelming evidence of a massive political conspiracy to undermine the democratic process by terrorizing entire communities... [using] the weapons of torture and death."<sup>88</sup> Most offenders served either suspended or short sentences. Prosecutors spread over the rest of the south arresting Klansmen throughout the former Confederacy and under this assault the Ku Klux Klan dissolved.

Grant's goal in prosecuting Klansmen was not to counter injustice but to restore political stability. The military governments were withdrawn from the South soon after and the few bi-racial governments that had been in power were toppled. The 1875 and 1876 elections saw violence reminiscent of the Klan's, and it was unclear who won the presidential race. A bi-partisan Congressional commission gave the victory to Rutherford

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<sup>88</sup> Katz, (1986), 54.

B. Hayes with the understanding that he would withdraw the last of the Federal troops from the South and re-establish "home rule."

The situation in the South returned to the way it was before the war, only now blacks were sharecroppers instead of slaves, not much of a change in their economic or social status, and they were still unable to vote or hold public office. Lynch law became the widespread means of controlling the black population and there was no need for a Klan as the white citizens could engage in these activities unmasked without fear of retribution. In short, the Klan faded because it was no longer necessary; it had won. Where Constitutional changes had enfranchised former slaves Jim Crow prevented them from acting on any of those rights, and the Southern aristocracy returned to power. Northerners were never particularly concerned with the status of blacks in the South and treated the blacks among them only slightly better than their Southern brethren.<sup>89</sup> These conditions remained long after the next section begins in 1915.

#### **Klan continuation into the twentieth century**

Congress failed to allocate the funding necessary to pursue justice for the Klan's atrocities. Because of this Major Merrill and the attorney general could only prosecute a small fraction of Klan cases, and had to content themselves with trying only the most heinous offenses. As Allen W. Trelease says: "Southern violence now assumed other forms, almost as lethal, probably more effective, and certainly more lasting than the Ku Klux Klan."<sup>90</sup> Once prosecution stopped and northern troops were withdrawn it became apparent that terrorism was the most effective means of keeping the South independent. However, the violence was no longer perpetrated by masked members of a secret order,

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 49-59.

<sup>90</sup> Trelease, (1971) 418.

but by white citizens who made no attempt to conceal their identities. Some later groups were obviously inspired by the Klan, such as the Whitecaps in Mississippi between 1892-3, but for the most part mob violence and race riots no longer needed the benefit of concealment. The entire country retreated from the position of black equality in favor of a new white supremacism typified by America's neo-colonialism in the Caribbean and South Pacific, as they could not simultaneously claim racial superiority over inhabitants of Puerto Rico and the Philippines and enfranchise African-Americans at home.<sup>91</sup> The violence done in the name of white supremacy cannot be overstated in this period, and although there was little political turmoil such as accompanied the Klan there were 742 reported lynchings that were based on race between 1882 and 1891 alone.<sup>92</sup> Given the fact that the same problems with reporting this kind of violence noted above are still present it is reasonably safe to assume that a great many more were not reported. Lynch law continued to rule the South well into the next period of Klan activity, and across the country organizations with goals and tactics similar to the Klan, such as the American Protective Association, rose and fell with goals similar to both the Reconstruction Klan and the Klan of 1915.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 419-20.

<sup>92</sup> Newton & Newton, (1991), 236-56.

## Chapter IV

Though the Klan was always a secret society the period starting in 1915 is marked by the Klan's reformation as a fraternal organization and its public operation as such and ends with the fall of the Klan's legitimate organization. Even though the national organization had a public face, a great deal was still done behind the mask. The timeline for the following section is as follows: In 1915 William J. Simmons incorporated the Klan in Atlanta, it spread at least to Alabama and recruited a few thousand members in the South. In 1920 Simmons, who was something of a dreamer and wanted the Klan closely associated with churches, hired Edward Young Clarke and Elizabeth Tyler and the Klan becomes a nationwide and international phenomenon. In 1922 Hiram Evans, who was mostly interested in political gains, manipulates the Imperial Wizardship from Simmons and the Klan quickly lost a great deal of popularity, influence, and capital. Evans eventually stepped down and appointed James Colescott as his replacement in 1939. Colescott, whose primary concern was membership, attempted to boost popularity in 1939-40 by cooperation with Nazi groups, which backfired when America entered WWII. In 1946 the IRS liquidated the Klan.

### **Historical developments**

The latter half of the nineteenth century and the first few years of the twentieth saw the United States continue its westward expansion and wars with their Native inhabitants. Industrialization continued and anti-immigrant sentiment resurfaced after the reconstruction period. The Spanish-American War gave control over Pacific and Caribbean islands to the United States, giving America the ability to re-supply its naval forces all over the world. The agrarianism that had defined the American way of life was

being threatened by the cities that grew up around the nation's new factories and the social role of women was being changed. Additionally the technological advances of railroad and radio made the world a vastly smaller place.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Fundamentalist Christianity was defining itself and becoming popular all over the United States. At the time Fundamentalism closely aligned itself with patriotism, Billy Sunday, a popular evangelist stated "Christianity and Patriotism are synonymous terms, and hell and traitors are synonymous."<sup>93</sup> The fundamentalist movement was typically Jeremiad in form, its main argument being that by embracing modernism America had fallen away from the principles that had founded the country and was thus being punished. Fundamentalists believed that the foundation of America had been the Bible, that the Bible was "the infallible Word of God",<sup>94</sup> and that only through a return to those roots would America become great again. Just as Klansmen and eventually a large part of the white population yearned for a return to pre-Civil war status for blacks, Fundamentalists yearned for a return to the pre-Civil war status of the Bible.<sup>95</sup> In each case both were appealing to an idealized version of the past, and in each case large numbers of people were motivated to try and make these visions manifest.

In 1905 Thomas Dixon Jr. wrote *The Klansman, an historical romance of the Ku Klux Klan*. In this novel Abraham Lincoln is the only man standing in the way of a vengeful Senate who wants to unleash the freed slaves upon the South. When Lincoln is assassinated the South is made to endure horrible barbarism until the Klan can rally its

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<sup>93</sup> Cited in Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 168.

<sup>94</sup> Cited in Ibid, 169.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 167-70.

forces and save Southern society. Dixon was not content to let his book remain only in print and adapted it for the stage. In the world of fifteen minute to half-hour shorts made for the nickelodeon D. W. Griffith forever changed the motion-picture industry. *The Birth of a Nation* was nearly three hours long and people paid a two-dollar admission to see it. Its portrayal of Northern involvement in the slave trade and occupation of the South as well as its representation of the “lust crazed freedmen” caused massive protests in New York, a riot in Boston, and the Massachusetts legislature almost banned it. Dixon fought back by appealing to his friend from college and fellow Southerner, President Woodrow Wilson. Dixon arranged for a private screening for the President and his cabinet; when the film was over the President said the movie was “like writing history with lightning” and “my only regret is that it is all so terribly true.”<sup>96</sup> Dixon met with Edward White, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, to propose that the Supreme Court also attend a screening, and during Dixon’s pitch White admitted to having been a Klansman during reconstruction. With the threat of censorship removed, *The Birth of a Nation* grossed close to eighteen million dollars.<sup>97</sup>

Dixon was encouraged to begin a new organization that would be like the Klan of old, however, he refused. William J. Simmons would be the man to bring the Klan back into existence. Simmons was a failed itinerant preacher turned failed salesman who became a “professional fraternalist.” He belonged to the Woodsmen of the World, several versions of the Masons, the Knights Templar, and probably another ten organizations.

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<sup>96</sup> Cited in David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965), 26-7.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 23-7.

While he was recovering from a car accident, he copyrighted the Klan's uniform, rituals, etc., and waited for an opportune time to found the group. On April 27, 1915 fourteen-year-old Mary Phagan was found raped and murdered in the basement of Leo M. Frank's pencil company. Frank, a Jew originally from New York, though acquitted in 1982 on deathbed testimony, was convicted of the crime. Because of the protests from civil rights groups the governor of Georgia commuted Frank's sentence from death to life imprisonment, causing outrage among elements of the community. Around one hundred men met on the grave of Mary Phagan and formed "The Knights of Mary Phagan" to lynch Frank. Frank's lynching was the first to make use of automobiles, and his assailants burned a cross on Stone Mountain around two months after his lynching; the community applauded both the cross burning and the lynching.<sup>98</sup>

One month after the Phagan cross burning and shortly before *The Birth of a Nation* opened, Simmons gathered around forty men from other fraternal organizations, two men who had been members of the original Klan, members of the Knights of Mary Phagan, and the Speaker of the Georgia Legislature and founded the new organization. On Thanksgiving Eve they ascended Stone Mountain outside Atlanta and set fire to a cross. The next week Simmons ran an advertisement for his new organization next to the ad for *The Birth of a Nation*. Although the publicity helped the new club gain notoriety, it was the mixture of fraternity, 100% Americanism, and white-Protestant xenophobia that really sold the group.<sup>99</sup>

Once again the Klan was presented as an innocent organization at its inception. It was supposedly only a fraternal organization concerned with Americanism and the

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<sup>98</sup> Wade, (1987), 144-5.

<sup>99</sup> Chalmers, (1965), 30-1.

supremacy of the white race, and this white supremacy is presented as so normative it need not be mentioned in the 1910s.<sup>100</sup> Few Klans historians mention that remnants from the reconstruction Klan had yet to disappear; in 1915 alone 56 blacks, 25 Mexicans, and one Jew, Leo Frank, were lynched in the South.<sup>101</sup> The new Klan was in many ways a business. It charged membership dues and collected millions of dollars from its members; it had non-profit tax status and had a vested interest in making sure it was perceived as respectable. While Simmons did not seem to have a problem with the violent nature of the organization he had to make sure the government thought of it as thoroughly legitimate and respectable. There were already mechanisms in place to deal with minorities all across the country, there were plenty of lynchings, occasional riots, and illicit violence that was not often successfully prosecuted, so the Klan in many ways, became the legitimate face of that violence. While Klansmen were often violent their public face was the face of law and order, temperance, and morality.

### **Klan rhetoric**

Rhetorically the Klan tapped into pre-existing veins of bigotry throughout the country and added very little in the way of new discourse. Klan salesmen were told to promote the Klan as being the solution for whatever was troubling a particular community. Because the Klan appealed both to a militant Protestantism and to people who felt threatened by minority racial or religious groups, immigrants, or lawlessness they became active in communities all over North America,<sup>102</sup> including at least one

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>101</sup> Michael Newton and Judy Ann Newton, *Racial & Religious Violence in America: A Chronology*, (New York: Garland, 1991), 356-9.

<sup>102</sup> Wade, (1987), 155.

prison in Colorado.<sup>103</sup> Though the Klan maintains that in this incarnation, as well as the last, it was not a night-riding organization but a fraternal one, very early in the organization it undertook the task of protecting the United States from “alien enemies, slackers, idlers, strike leaders, and immoral women.”<sup>104</sup>

At this time the entrenchment of secrecy as a method among the new Klan is attributed to the Klan’s connection to the American Protective League, an organization started to prevent espionage, sabotage, and any other potential sedition among the American population during WWI that was sponsored by the U.S. government. Simmons was able to spread the Klan to only a few other southern states and only had a few thousand members between 1915 and 1920; because he felt the organization had much more potential he enlisted help. After Simmons hired the Southern Publicity Association, consisting of Edward Young Clarke and Elizabeth Tyler, who received 80% of all Klan membership dues, the Klan really became a national phenomenon. Tyler told reporters that Jews disliked the Klan because it “teaches the wisdom of spending American money with American men,” Clarke argued in favor of sterilizing blacks, and Simmons, while probably not the first proposed that no “mongrel civilization” had ever survived in the history of the world.<sup>105</sup> Though Simmons had spread the Klan around the Southeastern United States, by 1920 the Klan under Clarke and Tyler became active throughout the continental United States and had moved into Canada by October of 1921.

It is estimated that at the height of Klan activity the organization had close to four million members. The estimated accounting is as follows: Indiana 500,000 members; Ohio 450,000; California, New York, Oklahoma, and Oregon had 200,000 members

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<sup>103</sup> Newton & Newton, (1991), 394.

<sup>104</sup> Chalmers, (1965), 31.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 33.

each; Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, Tennessee, Washington, and West Virginia had between 50,000 and 200,000 members each.<sup>106</sup> In Canada the numbers of Klan enrollment are considerably more vague and generous. Available estimates for the pre-war period are: Ontario 8,000; British Columbia 13,000; Saskatchewan between 10-50,000; and Alberta had between 5-7,000 members.<sup>107</sup> Considering that the platforms the Klan supported were in line with the prejudices of the population, and that they were frequently little more than a terrorist organization it is clear that even if the Klan's enrollment were half the estimate they were a force to be reckoned with.

One way the Klan swelled their ranks was through Protestant churches. Klan salesmen would often approach local ministers and offer them free memberships and minor leadership roles. Ministers came to represent a large portion of the Klan's officers and some left their churches to rise in the Klan structure or become speakers. In fact, a great majority of Klan speakers were ministers. Often the Klan would announce its presence in a particular town by interrupting Protestant Sunday services. They would silently march down the aisles of a given church, robed and masked, and present a gift to the minister. Sometimes, if they were expected, they would occupy the front pews and other times a Klansman or the minister would speak on the principles of the Klan and read from St. Paul's epistle to the Romans asking the congregation to support the Klan. Sometimes they would, after donating their money, simply march back out of the church as the choir sang some of the more militant hymns.

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<sup>106</sup> Arnold S. Rice, *The Ku Klux Klan in American Politics*, (New York: Haskell House, 1972), 13.

<sup>107</sup> Julian Sher, *White Hoods: Canada's Ku Klux Klan*, (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1983), 27, 32, 42, 50.

With the help of Clarke and Tyler the Klan, which was already against non-whites, immigrants, Jews, and Catholics, also became officially opposed to drugs, any violation of prohibition laws, non-observance of the Christian Sabbath, unfair business practices, all forms of illicit sex, and communism.<sup>108</sup> There is one exception to the generally anti-immigrant stance that began in Oregon. Canadian born American Citizens were allowed to join the Riders of the Red Robe, which was created by a Canadian, specially for “foreign-born, but otherwise eligible, right-thinking people” and was mostly populated by Canadians, although it accepted Englishmen and any other white English-speaking Protestants who were interested.<sup>109</sup>

Just as the Klan’s first Grand Wizard, Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest, faced a United States Congressional committee so too did Grand Wizard Simmons. On September 21, 1921 two congressmen, Peter F. Tague of Massachusetts and T.J. Ryan of New York, proposed a congressional investigation of the Klan. On September 30<sup>th</sup> Simmons sent over \$2,000 in telegrams to members of the U.S. House of Representatives requesting the investigation, which began in October.

The proceedings received nationwide coverage in the press, quite a few of whom portrayed Simmons in a charitable light. Where Forrest deflected Congressional inquiry into the badness of the times Simmons deflected inquiry into the public goings on of the Klan, financial records, copyrighted materials, and his version of the history of the Klan. In Simmons’ opening testimony he claimed grave illness, “tonsillitis combined with laryngitis which developed into bronchitis with threatened pneumonia”<sup>110</sup> and throughout the inquiry feigned slowly succumbing to his bad health. Simmons claimed that the Klan

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<sup>108</sup> Chalmers, (1965), 31-5

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 217, 279-80.

<sup>110</sup> Cited in Wade, (1987), 163.

did not discriminate in particular based on either race or religion, he argued that because the Klan was a Christian organization naturally Jews would not be welcome, and that they could not be expected to admit Catholics as the Knights of Columbus were not required to admit Protestants, and finally that all fraternal orders discriminated against blacks. According to Simmons the Klan's racial standpoint was not "race hatred" but "race pride" and that he personally had always been a friend to blacks. Simmons denied any wrongdoing on the part of the Klan stating "our mask and robe, I say before God, are as innocent as the breath of an angel."<sup>111</sup> Any night-riding was attributed to frolicking and Simmons went so far as to say that those who were ignorant of the work of the Klan were like those who had been ignorant of the work of Christ. At the end of his testimony Simmons fell out of his chair onto the floor, thus completing his spectacle. In the immediate aftermath of the congressional investigation, Klan membership rose by twenty percent and some people were using reprints of Klan applications found in newspapers reporting on the Congressional investigation to enroll.<sup>112</sup> Simmons is quoted as saying that "it wasn't until newspapers began to attack the Klan that it really grew. Certain newspapers also aided us by inducing Congress to investigate us. The result was that Congress gave us the best advertising we ever got. Congress *made* us."<sup>113</sup>

The Klan was by no means the only organization spouting bigotry, there were any number of organizations whose focus was a particular group of scapegoats; however, the Klan managed to synthesize this animosity into a single entity and motivate direct violence. Once again any sort of class solidarity was ignored for a version of racial and religious solidarity, the emerging middle class as well as lower class whites turned on

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<sup>111</sup> Cited in *Ibid*, 164.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, 161-6.

<sup>113</sup> Cited in *Ibid*, 166.

minorities with whom they likely had more in common than their upper class white allies and this standpoint is born out by the Klan's steady opposition to all forms of labor organization. This became so pronounced that during the thirties and forties the Klan officially lessened its opposition to racial and religious groups in order to more aggressively attack Communist and labor interests.<sup>114</sup>

In Canada the rhetoric of the Klan is almost identical to that in the United States, although it varies slightly from province to province. The Klan first arrived in Montreal and did not last long there. Initially Klan organizers claimed they would not oppose Catholicism in the general population, but membership soon faded after making Catholic buildings their only known targets within the province.<sup>115</sup> In the rest of Canada the Klan opposed bilingualism, the Catholic Church, and any group of immigrants that was deemed unable to be assimilated into the English-speaking population. Initially the Klan espoused a closer relationship between the United States and Canada, in the form of Canada being annexed by the United States, and their usual 100% Americanism. When this did not work the Klan turned to a slightly new mix of 100% Canadianism and the militant Protestantism that had made the organization so profitable. Which populations were demonized varied greatly depending on where the Klan operated. For example, in Ontario Klan rhetoric was almost exclusively directed against the French-Catholic population while in the west and British Columbia Eastern European and Asian immigrants were, at various times, more virulently denounced.

While the Klan certainly wanted to promote particular political agendas, as well as try to preserve white Protestant homogeneity, it seems from their regionalized interests

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<sup>114</sup> Chalmers, (1965), 317.

<sup>115</sup> Sher, (1983), 24-5.

as well as the lack of overall national/international leadership, except where membership dues were concerned, that the Klan's central organization was primarily interested in sales. Given the popular support they garnered and similar accomplishments in Germany and Italy by similar groups it may have been fortunate for North America that the Klan was so interested in its financial well-being. Most of the internal disputes concerned Klan finances, and when battles over copyright and ownership of Klan Inc. dragged their way through the courts and the press the Klan shed members by the thousands. Ultimately the salesmanship of Klan representatives could not conceal the greed at the top of the hierarchy and this rhetorical failure, as well as other factors, shortened the life of the incorporated Klan and helped to prevent greater gains in the Klan's power.

After the decline of Klan membership in the late 1920s the Klan de-emphasized its anti-Catholic standpoint in order to focus more on Communism. There was a great deal of admiration for Adolph Hitler among Klansmen and most observers noted the similarity between the Klan and the Nazi party. It should be noted that the admiration was not necessarily returned as Hitler destroyed the German Order of the Fiery Cross, the Klan's attempt to spread into Germany.<sup>116</sup> Hitler's reasoning in *Mein Kampf* was that:

the aim of secret organizations can only be illegal. In this way the scope of such an organization is automatically limited... Only very small societies might succeed in disciplining their members [but] the very smallness of such organizations would remove their value.<sup>117</sup>

Once again the Klan was called before Congress, this time before the Dies Committee, which would become the House Un-American Activities Committee. The committee chairman, Martin Dies of Texas, was a hard-core segregationist and used his committee, which had been created to investigate Nazi groups in America, to persecute

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<sup>116</sup> Wade, (1987), 266-8.

<sup>117</sup> Cited in *Ibid*, 267.

Communist and other left-wing organizations. Colescott appeared before the committee on January 22, 1942 and complimented the committee on the work it was doing against the Communists. After a great deal of friendly questioning had taken place Dies scolded Colescott, telling him to return to the "original objectives of the Klan." After the investigation committee members are quoted as saying that "the Klan was just as American as the Baptist or Methodist Church, as the Lions Club or the Rotary Club."<sup>118</sup>

When the Klan's official existence finally ended, the rhetoric did not diminish in any way. Colescott is quoted as saying "It was that nigger-lover Roosevelt and that Jew Morgenthau who was his Secretary of the Treasury who did it!"

### **Klan activities**

Klan behavior throughout the United States followed a fairly standard pattern. With minor variations the Klan would enter an area, attract a large number of members, start engaging in violence, elect some local officials, sometimes a governor or senator, and then decline as public opinion turned against their violence. The Klan expanded throughout the continent in 1920-1 and generally spent its political capital before 1928. The reason for the change in public opinion was usually the Klan's uncontrolled violence, but in the case of actual Klansmen many left because of the violence, because of the power struggles at the national level, and because of the lack of local control over Klan revenue.

Lynching in the South had been taking place since the Reconstruction Klan was active, spread across the country, and lasted well beyond the incorporation of the Klan. The Klan directed a great deal of its violence against white Protestants who were considered immoral. This statement should not be seen as discounting the suffering of

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<sup>118</sup> Cited in *Ibid*, 273.

other groups of people, who received an abundance of violence as well. It could be because the Klan mostly operated in predominantly white Protestant areas that many of its victims were not minorities, and that may have also contributed to the Klan's rapid decline. Klan groups were accepted into communities on platforms that opposed everyone but white Protestants, but their activities soon began to focus on members of the community they were trying to convert. Additionally the legal system was accustomed to systematically ignoring the protests of minorities but was ill-equipped to ignore the protests of the majority; even when sheriffs, juries, prosecutors, judges, and governors belonged to the Klan, people could always appeal to federal authorities or newspapers.

Another factor that dramatically changed the Klan's ability to operate was mass communication. Newspapers, telephones, and radios all greatly reduced the Klan's ability to act without notice and served to bring police, reporters, or federal authorities to areas where the Klan was acting before the Klan could disappear. One of the most notable actions against the Klan, although it also boosted membership, was an ongoing exposé the *New York World* published about the Klan. The newspaper would receive information about Klan activities from all over the country and publish it; in turn, other papers picked up the stories and the new Klan, unlike its predecessor, could not keep knowledge of its actions only within its own regions. Incidents of lynching also decreased during this period probably because of the availability of communication. If a sheriff were confronted with a lynch mob he could call for reinforcements and they would arrive before the mob had accomplished its task. The railroad network, the automobile, and, no doubt, automatic weapons also contributed to the ability of the authorities to respond quickly and effectively. In short, though the Klan received

widespread grassroots support during the early 1920s its power soon faded because the group could not easily cloak its actions in secrecy. Klansmen could not silence all of their victims because some were members of the dominant group, and they could not maintain their secrecy because communication made information about Klan activities widely available.

In Canada the first province to see Klansmen was Quebec even though the population was 80% Catholic in the twenties. A Klan meeting was reported in Montreal on October 1, 1921, and while at first the Klan said it would leave Catholics alone for demographic reasons, this attitude did not last long. In 1922 a series of fires that damaged or destroyed several Catholic buildings, including the rest house of the Gentlemen of Saint Sulpice and the Quebec Cathedral, were attributed to the Klan. Simmons denied any responsibility on the part of the Klan and shortly thereafter the Klan passed from public attention in Quebec.<sup>119</sup>

In the Maritimes there was also very little long-term Klan activity. A Boston organizer was "offered" the territory of New Brunswick in early 1925, and by August there were reported to be half a dozen lodges or more in towns like Woodstock and McAdam. There were cross burnings at Fredericton, Saint John, and Marysville; James Lord, the representative for Charlotte County in the provincial legislature was rumored to be a recruit. There were also rumors of Klan activity in P.E.I. and of a Klan trying to get a charter in Nova Scotia, but there is little information beyond this.<sup>120</sup>

Manitoba experienced a little more Klan activity, but the story was much the same. In 1922 St. Boniface College was destroyed in a fire killing ten Catholics.

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<sup>119</sup> Sher, (1983), 24-5.

<sup>120</sup> Martin Robin, *Shades of Right: Nativist and Fascist Politics in Canada 1920-1940*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 11-12.

Although the Klan had sent a warning message beforehand, Simmons again denied responsibility and no Klansmen were prosecuted. James R. Bellamy, who was involved in the Oklahoma Klan, tried to raise Klan support in Winnipeg during the summer of 1924, but little happened between his appearance and an organizational meeting in 1928. In 1930 the Klan passed a resolution condemning bilingualism, however, there was little known Klan activity beyond this.<sup>121</sup>

In 1923 the Klan's promise to protect an abused majority caught on well in Ontario where, as in the rest of Canada, it recruited heavily from Orange Lodges. There were separate factions of the Klan in Ontario, one calling itself the Ku Klux Klan of the British Empire who criticized rivals for their connection to the American organization. Klan locals were established in St. Thomas, Exeter, Sault Ste. Marie, Belleville, Kingston, Ottawa, and Richmond. Two Klansmen robbed and vandalized a Catholic church, and William Skelly, a Klansman in Barrie, was convicted of dynamiting St. Mary's Catholic Church. While Klan rhetoric in Ontario focused on anti-Catholicism Catholics were not the only group to become victims of the Klan. One night in late February 1930 75 Klansmen from Hamilton appeared in Oakville and marched through the main streets in full regalia. As spectators watched they set fire to a cross in the middle of Third Street and stood silently until the entire cross was burned. After this they went into a house where it was believed a black man and a white woman were staying, as they wanted "to stop a menace to the purity of the Anglo-Saxon race." The family of the black man was then told "if their son was ever again seen walking in the street with a white girl the Klan would attend to him."<sup>122</sup> Local police allowed the Klan to leave town

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<sup>121</sup> Sher, (1983), 25-6.

<sup>122</sup> Cited in Ibid, 28.

without incident; however, the publicity caused the Ontario attorney general to summons four Klansmen who were involved under a clause in the Criminal Code that made it illegal to wear masks or disguises at night without a lawful excuse. Only one Klansman was convicted and fined \$50; he appealed and the Ontario Supreme Court decided the Oakville magistrate's sentence was a travesty of justice and sentenced him to three months.<sup>123</sup>

In British Columbia the Klan held rallies in Vancouver and lobbied for tightened immigration as well as repatriation of Asian immigrants. While the Klan found widespread support among the conservatives in government and a large portion of the population it was mostly involved in spouting rhetoric. There was little the Klan could do to the minorities of British Columbia that was not already being done by the government and the white population. The Klan did try to make inroads into the rising labor unions, but they failed.<sup>124</sup>

Saskatchewan was the province where the Klan had the most popular support. It claimed 125 local chapters and helped overthrow the liberal provincial government, Moose Jaw claimed ten local chapters, and in the town of Woodrow 153 of 218 residents were reported to be Klansmen. The Canadian National Railroad provided a free train from Regina to Moose Jaw for a Klan rally in 1927, which drew between seven and eight thousand people. The Klan aligned itself with the emerging Conservative party, and this is where they found their greatest success. Conservatives and Klansmen were both trying to recruit the same groups of people, farmers and small townspeople, and Klansmen leafleted the Conservative convention of 1928. Future Prime Minister R.B. Bennett

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 27-9

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 32-9.

instructed his party not to be too open about their relationship with the Klan because of potential backlash, although this was the only semblance of opposition he gave the Klan until years later. In 1928 The Klan helped mobilize its members to support the Conservatives, Klan lawyer J.F. Bryant spoke along with John G. Diefenbaker in the town of Davidson against French language instruction and although the Tories lost that election it was only by 59 votes. The Conservatives won 24 of 61 seats in this election with which they were able to form a minority government. The minority government disallowed French as a language of instruction in the first grades and required school trustees to conduct their meetings in English. This action, however, greatly stirred national politics and Conservative leaders, including Prime Minister Bennett, felt it wise to distance themselves from the Klan. The last reported Klan activity for this era was an annual meeting held in 1930.<sup>125</sup>

Edmonton was the Klan's headquarters in Alberta where the Klan's newspaper, *The Liberator*, reported 250,000 subscribers. Klansmen signed petitions against the use of French on the radio and organized boycotts of Catholic businesses. One incident of Klan-perpetrated violence is almost certainly the result of Klansmen. In May of 1930 Fred Doberstein, a Lacombe blacksmith, was taken by six men in masks, stripped, driven out of town, tarred and feathered. Doberstein said the men told him they were Klansmen and accused him of promiscuity, making him promise "to take the first train south and never return."<sup>126</sup> Klan leadership denied involvement and two of the men involved were charged with assault and fined fifty dollars. There was no public outcry over the leniency of this sentence or the lack of a kidnapping charge, which carried a sentence of twenty-

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<sup>125</sup> Robin, (1992), 32-44. Sher, (1983), 48-58.

<sup>126</sup> Cited in Sher, (1983), 43.

five years. The Klan in Alberta supported the Conservative candidates of the province, helping at least two win office, and claimed that Premier J.E. Brownlee and some members of his cabinet were members. Brownlee's government did issue the Klan an official charter with the provincial Registrar of Joint Stock Companies, and Alberta was the only province to do so.<sup>127</sup>

This section concerns representative individual cases of Klan violence during this era. It should be noted that in the United States there are 31 known lynchings in 1920 and 38 in 1921 that are not attributed to the Klan in the two years in which the Klan spread across the United States.<sup>128</sup> This is important because the problems in accounting for murder and intimidation that were present during reconstruction were still a factor. The Klan Incorporated may well have been less lethal than its predecessor, or it may have more successfully concealed its violence. Either way the violence which can certainly be attributed to the Klan during this period indicate more interest in torture and intimidation than in murder. It should also be noted that during the twenties lynch mobs encounter a great deal more resistance than they had previously, sometimes in the form of armed black mobs who tried to protect the intended victim, and sometimes from well armed or quickly reinforced police officers, which may have contributed to the declining number of lynchings.

Most recorded incidents of Klan violence at this time are more concerned with torture than murder. For example in Texas a black bellhop named Alex Johnson was whipped and had KKK branded into his forehead with acid.<sup>129</sup> A doctor the Klan suspected of performing abortions was whipped, tarred, and feathered, and a black dentist

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 43-4.

<sup>128</sup> Newton & Newton, (1991), 373-81.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 376. Chalmers, (1965), 41.

and a white lawyer who accepted black clients were also whipped.<sup>130</sup> In Oregon a black bootlegger and a white salesman who may have been suing a Klansmen were both “convinced” to leave town through subtle Klan devices such as hanging the victim by the neck until their toes barely touched the ground.<sup>131</sup> In California a man in Taft who was getting divorced was hanged and whipped unconscious four times in a ballpark surrounded by spectators and another victim, a druggist, was found on a road surrounded by fires to keep the tar on his body hot.<sup>132</sup> There were instances where Klan violence was lethal such as on November 3, 1923 when Klansmen in Eufla, Oklahoma kidnapped a black man, Dallas Sewell, and hanged him for “passing for white and associating with white women” in a Klan member’s barn.<sup>133</sup>

Perhaps the most infamous incident of Klan violence for this period happened in Mer Rouge, Louisiana. The man authorities believed was the local leader of the Klan, Dr. B.M. McKoin, believed the Klan was not getting enough respect from the community, and in order to motivate his Klansmen he shot up the back of his car and claimed Watt Daniel and Tom Richards, two vocal critics of the Klan, had fired on him. The Klan abducted Daniel and Richards and gave them stern warnings, which had little effect as Daniel and Richards continued their criticism. On August 24, 1922 most of Mer Rouge attended a barbecue in the neighboring town of Bastrop to organize support for a bond issue. The phone lines out of Bastrop were disconnected and when the residents of Mer Rouge returned they encountered a car blocking the road, as they stopped at this unexpected obstacle Klansmen searched for Daniel and Richards. Daniel and Richards,

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<sup>130</sup> Chalmers, (1965), 40-1.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, 122.

<sup>133</sup> Newton & Newton, (1991), 385.

along with their fathers and another bystander were abducted, blindfolded, hog-tied, and thrown into the back of a truck. Daniel's father and the bystander were tied to a tree and flogged, Daniel escaped his bonds, tried to free his father, and unmasked a Klansmen in the ensuing struggle. Both Daniel and Richards recognized the unmasked Klansmen and were taken farther into the woods, never to be heard from again, as the three older men were released.

Federal agents were dispatched to Mer Rouge by request of the governor but could not prosecute without the bodies of Daniel and Richards, which were thought to be in one of the surrounding lakes. The governor ordered a company of infantry to protect investigators as they dragged the lakes, and one night somebody detonated dynamite in Lake Lafourche dislodging the mutilated bodies, even though rumors said the charges were set to destroy the evidence. The horribly mangled bodies were identified as being Daniels and Richards by pieces of clothing and later investigation revealed that they had been whipped, run over with a road-grading tractor, and dismembered before being dumped in the lake. The grand juries, consisting of known and suspected Klansmen, responsible for indicting the Klansmen involved recommended only a new jail and repairs to the courthouse roof, as the Klan intimidated witnesses, forged employee time sheets, and produced alibis and letters supposedly authored by the victims sent from other parts of the country.<sup>134</sup>

There was scandal, theft, and corruption in the Klan from the outset. In 1916 Simmons accused a member of stealing all the Klan's funds and Klan treasurers often left town with every dollar they could carry. Klan salesmen and officers were unable to account for the money they had collected and rival dens spied on each other and on

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<sup>134</sup> Chalmers, (1965), 61-3.

various headquarters and treasurers. Klansmen who believed themselves warriors protecting their country saw the men who convinced them their mission was necessary disappear with membership dues. Corruption at the local level was also rampant, from Klans sanctioning some bootleggers and persecuting others, to the empire of vice controlled by a Klansman who also happened to be chief of police, to Klansmen using their influence to secure their own liquor.<sup>135</sup>

At the imperial palace in Atlanta over forty million dollars had been collected in membership dues between 1920 and 1925, but leaders could not account for it. In 1922 Simmons agreed to step down as Imperial Wizard on a provisional basis and when his replacement, a Texas dentist named Hiram Evans, made it known he was there to stay the ensuing legal battles between Simmons who owned the copyrights to all Klan paraphernalia, texts, etc and Evans who had more support among the members and was the elected leader of the organization were directly responsible for at least one death and a great deal of hemorrhaging in the organization. Every maneuver and every tantalizing detail revealed in court made headlines across the nation and the condemnations made by fellow Klansmen were far more devastating than those of outsiders. The highest levels of the Klan proved to North America that they were far more concerned with money than their moral, racial, and religious crusade.<sup>136</sup>

Though political and financial scandals were damaging to the Klan there is another that did far more damage. D.C. Stephenson, the Grand Dragon (regional leader) of Indiana, after helping several politicians into office prevented a bill that would have eliminated a minor position in the office of the state superintendent of public instruction.

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<sup>135</sup> William Loren Katz, *The Invisible Empire: The Ku Klux Klan Impact on History*, (Seattle, Open Hand Publishing, 1986), 110-1.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid*, 111-2.

Madge Oberholtzer, a twenty-eight year old unmarried woman whom Stephenson dated, occupied the position. In early march of 1925 Stephenson sent one of his bodyguards to bring Madge to Stephenson. He had been drinking and forced her to as well, and then Stephenson abducted her and put her on a train to Chicago. In the car he raped and assaulted her. They left the train and went to a hotel on the Illinois border in Hammond, Indiana, just short of violating the Mann act, which prohibited the interstate transport of females for immoral purposes. Stephenson sent for his car in Indianapolis and Madge convinced Stephenson to give her money to buy a hat, while away from Stephenson (under the supervision of a bodyguard) she bought mercuric chloride tablets, which she took while Stephenson was asleep. When she told Stephenson what she had done he suggested bringing her to a hospital where they would sign in as husband and wife, Madge refused knowing that if they were registered as a married couple she could not escape him, and Stephenson returned Madge to her home more than a day later, at one point telling her "*I am the law in Indiana*"<sup>137</sup> and frequently asking her to marry him. Before Madge Oberholtzer died on April 14<sup>th</sup> she gave an account of her abduction and violation before her family doctor and two lawyers; and Stephenson, who was on bail for abduction and assault charges, was charged with second-degree murder. Stephenson was convinced the courts could not touch him, that Klansmen would find their way into the jury, that witnesses would be too intimidated to testify, or that a gubernatorial pardon would be handed down for him, but he was sentenced to life imprisonment. No pardon ever materialized, all of Stephenson's political allies refused to help, and the Indiana Klan went from 350,000 members to 15,000. When it became obvious he had been abandoned, Stephenson revealed to reporters that he had evidence that would damn many

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<sup>137</sup> Cited in Wade, (1987), 243.

Indiana politicians which, when revealed to the press, sent the mayor of Indianapolis and the head of the Indiana Republican Party to jail and ended the careers of the governor, city councilmen, judges, and hundreds of other officeholders in Indiana.<sup>138</sup>

### **The decline of the Klan Inc.**

Although many of the influences that had brought the Klan its popularity and profit had not disappeared by 1928 the majority of its membership had. The more upstanding citizens were disgusted by the violence, as were the clergy and the more Godly Klansmen. The depression hit and many members found better uses for their money than fraternal bigotry, and the Klan unsuccessfully challenged both Franklin Roosevelt and Huey Long. While the Klan had broken strikes and successfully spread rumors about a communist plot to take over the United States in the twenties they found a much less receptive audience in the thirties when labor unions started demonstrating their effectiveness as opposed to the Klan's remedy of returning to fundamental white-Protestant values in order to improve peoples' quality of life. After a number of failed legal battles, attempts to keep and boost membership, and the embarrassment of having the Imperial Palace sold to the Catholic church, Evans decided to retire and named James Colescott, a veterinarian from Indiana who had been one of D.C. Stephenson's Lieutenants, to replace him in June, 1939. Colescott toured the United States trying to raise support and membership but the violence continued unabated, and with more police, judges, and juries unwilling to cover the Klan's activities, enrollment continued to fall.

With Hitler's rise to power in Germany fascist organizations were cropping up all over North America. In Canada the Klan leadership was depleted and former Klansmen found a new home with the fascists whereas in the United States Colescott made another

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 239-46.

political mistake, allying the Klan with the German-American Bund. While this collaboration prevented Klansmen from being siphoned off by fascists, it proved to be an embarrassment. The publicity of their cooperation was so negative that Colescott denounced it and Klan publications became hostile to the Bund.<sup>139</sup>

When the United States entered WWII the Klan kept a low profile because so much of what they had built their organization on was far too similar to what the Nazi party stood for, and in 1944 the most feared crime fighting organization in the United States finally destroyed what was left of the official Klan structure. The Internal Revenue Service deemed the Klan ineligible for non-profit status and presented Colescott with a bill for over \$685,000 in back taxes. The Klan sold all its assets and gave the proceeds to the Government, officially disbanding.

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<sup>139</sup> Chalmers, (1965), 323-4.

## Chapter V

Both previous incarnations of the Ku Klux Klan valued their secrecy, but the postwar Klan operated almost entirely underground. Klan members and leaders realized that they would never achieve the popularity of previous eras and that the mainstream of society could no longer be rallied behind the Klan. They also realized that with law enforcement becoming ever more effective in prosecuting Klan crimes and law enforcement agencies closely watching for Klan violence the immunity from prosecution might soon disappear.

### Historical developments

In 1924 a young Indochinese man named Nguyen Sinh Cung, who had studied Haute Cuisine in Paris and worked on a French passenger liner that frequented American ports, wrote an article for the 1924 *Correspondance Internationale* in which he more graphically denounced the Klan and lynching than even W.E.B. DuBois had. Cung went on to study the Klan and wrote one of the first revisionist histories of the reconstruction era in French. Cung predicted the Klan would disappear when blacks unified and faced the Klan without fear, and that eventually the Klan's violence would turn the country against it as "20 million American Catholics, 3 million Jews, 20 million foreigners, 12 million Negroes [and] all decent Americans" would no longer stand for the Klan's violence. Though no Americans listened to him, Cung's predictions, for the most part, became reality in the 1960's, a time when Cung himself, having returned to Indochina and changed his name to Ho Chi Minh, would be fighting the worst aspects of American imperialism.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 202-4.

There was very little time between the disbanding of the Klan Incorporated and the salvage of its charter on the state level, which happened in 1946. While there was no official Klan activity and scholars generally treat the time between as somewhat of a dormant period the August 1945 murder of Porter Turner, a black taxi driver in Georgia, is attributed to Klansmen.<sup>141</sup> The war had changed America and those who thought of the war as an anti-fascist endeavor were solidly against the Klan. Black veterans who had fought to liberate European countries were unwilling to see the same liberties taken from their families and communities, and labor organizations saw the South as the next battleground for workers. Once again the interests of the Federal government and the southern black population coincided, except this time success would not necessarily be contingent on the presence of Federal soldiers.

#### 1946-1954

In 1946 an Atlanta obstetrician named Samuel Green, who had been a Klansmen since the twenties and had been a close advisor to Colescott, burned a cross on Stone Mountain and tried to breathe life into the Klan under a new title, the Association of Georgia Klans (AGK). There was renewed fear of blacks who had served in the army and who had worked decent jobs during the war and of the continuation of the Fair Employment Practices Committee in Congress. Quite a few of the die-hard Klansmen rejoined the new organization as well as a few new recruits.<sup>142</sup>

Unfortunately for Green and the new Klan U.S. Attorney General Tom Clarke almost immediately announced his opposition to the new organization; and by the

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<sup>141</sup> Michael Newton and Judy Ann Newton, *Racial and Religious Violence in America: A Chronology*, (New York: Garland, 1991), 420.

<sup>142</sup> David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1965), 325-6.

summer of 1946 both the FBI and the Department of Justice were investigating the Klan, and in 1947 the Klan found itself on the same list of subversive organizations as the Communist Party. Some state governments were also dedicated to preventing a Klan rebirth, banishing and outlawing the Klan as well as using police pressure to stop Klan organizers and in Georgia Green had to abandon the Klan's charter before it was revoked by the state.<sup>143</sup>

According to Dr. Green the "Klan has never been dead and the Klan is never going to die." In interviews he is quoted as saying "If God wanted us all equal, He would have made all people white men" and, when a reporter tried to explain how the idea of race was changing, "I'm still livin' in Georgia, no matter what the world and science thinks."<sup>144</sup> Quite a few southerners joined Dr. Green because the policies approved by President Truman promised to upset the social order. Truman, who had once joined the Klan but after his first meeting demanded a full refund of his membership dues,<sup>145</sup> approved a human rights commission in order to comply with the United Nations human rights standards and to stop a revival of the Klan. Truman also refused to approve discriminatory legislation, which in conjunction with his extension of the Fair Employment Practices Committee sounded dangerously radical to parts of the South already worried that the black population was demanding better treatment.

Perhaps more threatening to the social order were labor unions, which Green denounced saying:

I will tell you this – no CIO or AFL carpetbagging organizers, or any other damned Yankees are going to come into the South and tell Southerners how to run either their businesses or their niggahs, nor shout that the

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 327-9.

<sup>144</sup> Cited in Wade, (1987), 277.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 196.

niggah is equal to the white. The white man was born supreme. We won't tolerate any alliance between niggahs, Jews, Catholics and labor organizers either. We didn't want to be reconstructed, and we don't want to be organized! The Klan rides again.<sup>146</sup>

Green had, to some people, connected the push for civil rights and the organization of labor to the ultimate nightmare of the white South, reconstruction, and prescribed the Klan as the solution for this new problem just as it had solved the last one. By 1949 the AGK had dens in every county in Georgia as well as in Alabama, Florida, Tennessee, and the Carolinas.

After the Association of Georgia Klans' charter no longer guaranteed Green the copyright of Klan literature, costume, etc several Klans broke away forming what Green referred to as "Bolshevik Klans." Klan unity was also eroded when Dr. Green died suddenly in August of 1949. With no strong central leadership even more Klans broke away from the Atlanta organization. Sam Roper, a former officer in the Atlanta Police Department who could not keep even the Klans under the AGK loyal, succeeded Green. Before the year was over *Newsweek* documented more than a dozen Klans independently operating in the South. Some of the breakaway organizations were Dr. E.P. Pruitt's Federated Ku Klux Klan in Birmingham, Alabama, Thomas Hamilton's Association of Carolina Klans, and Dr. Lycurgus Spinks' Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of America also in Alabama. Spinks' group declared "war on bureaucracy" claiming that it was "the graveyard in which the mutilated and crucified bodies of American liberty and freedom are being buried."<sup>147</sup> These groups were prolific and sometimes quite ephemeral, their members often moved from one group to another, establishing a framework in which

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<sup>146</sup> Cited in Chester L. Quarles, *The Ku Klux Klan and Related American Racialist and Antisemitic Organizations*, (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 1999), 85.

<sup>147</sup> Cited in Wade, (1987), 291.

several groups with roughly the same agenda operated in overlapping areas, probably with some of the same members. This does, however, make it more difficult to investigate as the size of a particular Klan declined drastically and their secrecy became more easily maintained.

One instance wherein the Klan's secrecy failed, which proved to be one of their biggest embarrassments in this period, was through a young writer named William Stetson Kennedy. Kennedy had come from a fine southern lineage which included two signers of the Declaration of Independence, the hat manufacturer for whom he was named, a Confederate officer, and an active Klansman from the twenties. Kennedy vehemently believed in FDR's four freedoms, freedom of speech, religion, from want, and from fear, and decided to infiltrate the Klan. For his target Kennedy chose Atlanta's Nathan Bedford Forrest Klavern Number One where he was not only inducted but also joined the "Klavalier Klub" (the even more militant sub-group of the Klan who were responsible for the majority of its violence) in order to gather information. Kennedy exchanged the Klan's secret gestures with policemen and subsequently reported them to the Georgia Attorney General's office, and reported on Klan meetings to news agencies. Kennedy went so far as to give information, such as the Klan's latest plans and passwords, to the *Superman* radio show. When Klansmen heard news programs or read newspapers containing synopses of their latest meetings, heard their children playing Superman and fighting the Klan, and found their secret passwords broadcast to the general population it seriously infuriated them.

When Kennedy finally quit the Klan he wrote several books detailing the goings-on of the Atlanta Klan in damning detail. He presented evidence that helped convict the

leader of the Columbians, a neo-Nazi group that was responsible for a great deal of violence in Atlanta, and tried to charter his own Klan. Kennedy's idea was that if he could copyright the name, regalia, and literature of the Klan he could bring litigation against any group using any of the trappings of the Klan himself; however, this plan failed as no state in the Union would grant him a charter. Kennedy then offered the House Un-American Activities Committee all of the evidence he had gathered on the Klan, which the committee refused. Kennedy then traveled to Washington and appeared in the Committee's reception area dressed in full Klan regalia; he was arrested and later released but even after this the committee still declined, saying it was primarily interested in Communism. Kennedy then tried to present his evidence to the FBI, but J. Edgar Hoover disliked using Bureau resources on civil rights cases, and rejected the evidence. When this failed Kennedy tried to appear on national television to expose the FBI's disinterest in the Klan, but FBI agents contacted Gulf Oil, the sponsor of the show, and cancelled Kennedy's appearance. Even though Kennedy could not interest the Federal government in his information he continued writing and opposing the Klan, and is credited with helping prevent a Klan revival in the North after WWII.<sup>148</sup>

In the period between 1946 and 1954 there is quite a bit of recorded Klan violence. Possible reasons are that police organizations were more willing to prosecute and the Klan was under surveillance by federal, state, and some local law enforcement, or because the general population was no longer as supportive of Klan objectives and therefore less willing to remain silent. Nevertheless Klansmen fired at the homes of lawyers, threatened newspapermen, and in Tennessee made it unsafe to leave home after

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid, 280-9.

dark.<sup>149</sup> Klansmen in Georgia desperately wanted Herman Talmadge in the governor's mansion and drove motorcades through black neighborhoods, burned crosses, leafleted from airplanes, and left small coffins with the Klan's telltale initials on the porches of black organizers. The campaign of intimidation worked and their candidate won. Klansmen in North Carolina abducted two lovers and beat them severely, black homes that were in previously white neighborhoods were frequently bombed, and in Florida Klansmen bombed an NAACP organizer and his wife because he was involved in an investigation of Klan involvement in police forces.<sup>150</sup> There are also several instances wherein police arrested people, often for no legal reason, and handed them over to the Klan for flogging.<sup>151</sup>

During this period the Klan reformed itself into numerous smaller independent organizations with no legal rights or property to lose. Its focus on violence and white supremacy continued, sometimes in the face of opposition, and even the invocation of laws created during reconstruction to eradicate the Klan did not prevent its operation. The Klan became more secretive, more capable of violence, and more willing to operate without a legitimate face or under names of convenience, thus making it more difficult to fight; unity of purpose came on May 17, 1954 when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against school segregation.

#### 1954-1970

After the Supreme Court's ruling on segregation the governor of Arkansas promised President Eisenhower that the state would protect the integration of schools and consistently failed to do so. Eisenhower dispatched a thousand paratroopers and

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<sup>149</sup> Quarles, (1999), 87.

<sup>150</sup> Wade, (1987), 289, 293-5.

<sup>151</sup> Newton & Newton, (1991), 425, 427.

federalized ten thousand Arkansas National Guardsmen to protect de-segregation, and the Klan's allusions to a second reconstruction were made manifest in the minds of many white Southerners. However, the majority of Southerners did not turn to the Klan for salvation from this newest Yankee aggression, but formed White Citizens Councils. The Councils were transparent organizations who conducted meetings and actions in public and maintained their legality at all costs, having learned from the Klan's mistakes. They would legally intimidate blacks by publishing the names and addresses of individuals who fought for civil rights. These individuals would then face social and economic alienation as they were fired from their jobs, and refused service by merchants, and had their businesses boycotted. Several people alleged that the Councils were merely modified Klans whose hatred had only been made presentable. In fact it has been reported that after the Council meetings were dismissed the Klan leaders who had attended stayed behind to hold the real meeting, although at least one Klan leader, Bill Hendrix of Florida, denounced the Councils as "a movement full of Jews."<sup>152</sup> One purpose the Councils did serve was to siphon the respectable members of the Klan away and leave the Klan to the lower down, more violent members of society.<sup>153</sup>

Though the Citizens Councils hurt numerous individuals they were unable to stop the desegregation process, and the U.S. Supreme Court ruling against bus segregation in 1956 cost some Citizens Councils the majority of their membership as the Councils seemed ineffective. The various Klans, on the other hand were having something of a resurgence and claimed forty thousand members by 1957, as it became obvious that legal resistance to integration was not a viable option. The Klan mobilized for a membership

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<sup>152</sup> Cited in Quarles, (1999), 89.

<sup>153</sup> Wade, (1987), 297-300.

drive in 1960 lighting crosses on March 26<sup>th</sup> at ten o'clock all over the south, which civil rights advocates feared this was an effort to unify the Klans as well as bring in new members. Klansmen, though still convinced this latest black insurrection was inspired by communist instigators, ultimately knew that their primary concern was the same as their forebears of a century ago, maintaining the racial status quo. Klan leader Eldon Lee Edwards, who controlled the largest single Klan organization, appeared on national television saying that the Klan "has been accused for over ninety years as cutthroats and those who take the law into their own hands," and "If the Supreme Court can't maintain our Southern way of life than we *are* going to do something about it."<sup>154</sup>

The Friends' Service Committee, National Council of Churches of Christ and the Southern Regional Council reported 530 incidents of racial violence between the Supreme Court's decision on school segregation and 1959, and while the Klan was certainly not responsible for every incident they are implicated in quite a few.<sup>155</sup> Some instances of violence during this period are as follows. Members of Aca Carter's Original Ku Klux Klan of the Confederacy, whose initiates cut their wrists and signed documents in blood, abducted Edward Aaron, a black handyman, on Labor Day in 1957. He was castrated, tortured by having kerosene and turpentine poured on his wounds, and his testicles were passed around in a paper cup in order for a member to prove himself before becoming "captain of the lair."<sup>156</sup> Reasonably anonymous incidents in which the Klan was likely involved are bombings of 30 homes, four schools, eight churches, seven Jewish buildings, and one YMCA. In addition another eight homes, one church, and two

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<sup>154</sup> Cited in *Ibid*, 305.

<sup>155</sup> Chalmers, (1965), 349.

<sup>156</sup> Wade, (1987), 303.

schools were burned.<sup>157</sup> Though the majority of Klan violence at this time comes in the form of anonymous violence, such as bombings, arson, and drive-by shootings, they still found time to give violence a personal touch with the occasional flogging. For example a black man in Greenville, South Carolina who was baby-sitting for a white family was whipped by Klansmen on July 23, 1957 and a black civil rights worker named Rev. Charles Billups was abducted and beaten with tire chains in Birmingham, Alabama on April 10, 1959.<sup>158</sup> The Klan's violence between 1954 and 1960 had become more directed at the black population or at whites who support civil rights and no longer focused so heavily on morality. The crimes against Jewish people and buildings are indicative of the strong anti-Semitism that has become as much a part of the Klan as it was of German fascism, but maintains a connection to the civil rights struggle as Klansmen often equated communism with Judaism and attributed the desire for equality among the black population as a result of communist agitation.

During the '60s the Klan's position had not changed. A new leader, Robert Shelton, who had become Imperial Wizard of the United Klans of America now based in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, is quoted as saying "I don't hate niggers, but I hate the Jews. The nigger's a child, but the Jews are dangerous people... All they want is control and domination of Gentiles through a conspiracy with the niggers."<sup>159</sup> Their violent tendencies had also not greatly changed; however, their violence was more concentrated on reprisal for civil rights, they would fight civil rights protesters on the streets, try to assassinate its leaders, and use their violence almost exclusively to intimidate an end to civil rights. The Klans pattern was exemplified during the 1958 freedom rides, which

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<sup>157</sup> Chalmers, (1965), 350.

<sup>158</sup> Newton & Newton, (1991), 442, 447.

<sup>159</sup> Cited in Wade, (1987), 314.

were a protest of segregation in the interstate bus system, when Klansmen mercilessly beat the riders, bombed the busses, and in Birmingham the local police gave Klansmen fifteen minutes with the freedom riders before the police would intervene, even though the FBI had been informed of the arrangement three weeks earlier.<sup>160</sup>

The Klan's curious mixture of rioting, street fighting, and careful bombing and assassination indicate the slow transition of the Klan from a reactionary guerilla group, which would occasionally fight pitched battles, to a full fledged terrorist organization. The most famous incidents of premeditated murder or terrorist activity are as follows. On June 12, 1963 Medgar Evers, a NAACP leader, is shot in his driveway and in three separate trials his accused killer, Byron de la Beckwith who is a known member of the Klan, fails to be convicted.<sup>161</sup> The September 15, 1963 bombing of the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama that killed four black girls and blinded another also yielded no convictions despite eyewitness testimony against the FBI's prime suspects and the discovery of explosives belonging to these suspects.<sup>162</sup> The third example, and the only one in which the perpetrators were convicted was the murder of Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Chaney in Philadelphia, Mississippi. The three were civil rights activists who were trying to register voters, organize non-violent protests, etc. and were arrested for speeding. After several hours in police custody they were released to Klansmen, a not uncommon practice, murdered, and buried in a dam. J. Edgar Hoover did not like to expend his resources on civil rights cases, and had only reluctantly involved the FBI in any such investigations; however, he was accused of negligence by the Civil Rights Commission and wanted to disprove this charge. In addition Robert

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 310.

<sup>161</sup> Newton & Newton, (1991) 460.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, 462. Wade, (1987) 324.

Kennedy had ordered a special team from the Justice Department to investigate and the internecine rivalry cracked the case in six weeks. The state of Mississippi was unwilling to prosecute for murder and seven of the twenty-one suspects allegedly involved were convicted of civil rights violations in 1967.<sup>163</sup>

Hoover became more and more interested in stopping Klan violence as the decade progressed because of President Johnson's insistence that something be done to curb violence in the South and because of the murder of Lieutenant Lemuel A. Penn, a black army reservist and WWII veteran, at the hands of Georgia Klansmen. Klansmen had been praising the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) for their work against alleged communists when in 1965 Congress renewed its interest in the Klan. Shelton, the first witness called before the HUAC, had long stated that anyone who plead the fifth amendment was almost certainly a communist and his own answer, repeated 158 times, to the questions of the Committee was:

Sir, I respectfully decline to answer that question for the reason that I honestly feel my answer might tend to incriminate me in violation of my rights as guaranteed to me under the amendments five, one, four, and fourteen of the Constitution of the United States.<sup>164</sup>

The remainder of the investigation was equally unproductive, most leaders pleading the Fifth Amendment or answering only minor questions with a few leaders resigning from the Klan on the witness stand. Shelton and two other Klan leaders were indicted for contempt of Congress and served one-year prison terms in 1966.<sup>165</sup>

1965 also saw the first sign of renewed Klan activity in Canada in the small town of Amherstburg, Ontario. A cross was burned in the main intersection of the town and

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<sup>163</sup> Newton & Newton, (1991), 466-7. Wade, (1987), 339-42.

<sup>164</sup> Cited in Wade, (1987), 357.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 357-61.

graffiti messages such as "The Klan is coming," and "Niggers Beware" appeared on a Baptist church. Black residents reported obscene phone calls and some businesses started disallowing blacks. Authorities dismissed the incidents as teenage pranks.<sup>166</sup>

The groundwork for the reemergence of the Klan in Canada was laid in the sixties by a core group of fascists who created several fascist organizations throughout the 60s and 70s. The first was the Canadian Nazi Party in 1965, which was replaced by the Canadian National Socialist Party and then the Edmund Burke Society in 1968. After too many violent incidents and arrests this too was abandoned for the Western Guard, which specialized in anti-Semitism, anti-communism, and white supremacism, in 1972.<sup>167</sup>

In the United States the loss of leadership further divided the already competing Klans as lower-ranking Klansmen wrestled for leadership, often forming their own groups. In addition Hoover had unleashed the FBI on the Klan and developed a program, which would later be used on the Black Panthers and other organizations, called Cointelpro. Cointelpro was a campaign of annoyances, psychological warfare, pranks, and entrapment developed to demoralize an organization. The FBI would send Klansmen postcards criticizing their leaders, call hotels where Klansmen were staying for conferences and cancel reservations, and bribe Klansmen to break away and form their own organizations. FBI informants, who may have comprised as much as six percent of the overall Klan membership, were instructed to seduce the wives of other Klansmen and anonymous letters were sent to the wives of Klansmen reporting marital infidelity. Informers would spread rumors that non-informers were moles and in one case FBI informants convinced a known Klan bomber to bomb another target where he was killed

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<sup>166</sup> Julian Sher, *White Hoods: Canada's Ku Klux Klan*, (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1983), 75-6.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid*, 77-9.

in a firefight with police. When the FBI was forced to abandon Cointelpro in 1975 agents argued that it had worked perfectly because disruption instead of investigation was the way to stop the Klan and that Cointelpro was far more cost-effective than prosecution.<sup>168</sup>

According to a Gallup Poll in August of 1970 76% of Americans reported strong disapproval of the Klan with the rest registering no opinion or only mild approval. In the same poll the Klan was rated below the Viet Cong and in 1974 the FBI estimated that there were only 1,500 Klansmen still operating in the United States.<sup>169</sup> The Klan had lost the civil rights battle and the combined front of Congress, Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, and the quasi-illegal pranks of the FBI had devastated the most dangerous opponents to the civil rights movement, despite claims that civil rights leaders were communists and the persecution that came with such accusations.

#### 1970-1990s

In the late sixties after a trip to Chicago Martin Luther King Jr. commented that Mississippians could visit Chicago “to learn how to hate.”<sup>170</sup> This statement indicates that although the Klan was a Southern phenomenon during the sixties there was no shortage of racial tension in the North, which the Klan and its offspring would soon exploit. The early seventies saw Klan violence eclipsed by Black Nationalism, and under the steady assault of Cointelpro and law enforcement who were under increasing pressure to improve the reputation of the South the Klan did not accomplish very much. Additionally, the rise in Black Nationalism may have sufficiently intimidated the Klan insofar as Klansmen could previously have incited riots against an unarmed and non-

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<sup>168</sup> Wade, (1987), 361-3.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid, 367.

<sup>170</sup> Cited in Ibid, 364.

violent black population, and random acts of individual violence only rarely encountered armed victims; now a large portion of the black community had become as well armed as Klansmen.

The first post-WWII Canadian Klan was born in Alberta in 1972. Ivan Ross MacPherson, who later changed his name to Tearlach Mac a'Phearsoin, reported a following of seventy in Calgary and another 200 members throughout the province. Strangely Mac a'Phearsoin allowed a black man named Louis Proctor to join his Klan. Proctor is quoted as saying "I figure if we can get all the Jews and blacks to join the Klan, we can put a stop to the racial trouble in Canada." Little more was heard from this organization and two years later Mac a'Phearsoin was arrested and charged with criminal negligence and dangerous use of a firearm, after which the province dissolved his Confederate Klan of Alberta.<sup>171</sup>

In 1974 a new Klan leader emerged who invigorated and changed the Klan forever. David Duke became the new Imperial Wizard and tried desperately to clean up the Klan's image by "get[ting] out of the cow pasture and into the hotel meeting rooms."<sup>172</sup> He also purged a great deal of the ceremony and ritual associated with the Klan, used the media to his advantage, and tapped into the residual white backlash from the civil rights movement. Duke was, young, stylish, collage educated, and described as sexy by some female interviewers.

Under Duke the Klan now accepted women as full members, courted Catholic enrollment, actively sought media exposure, and appealed to Northerners as well as Canadians. Duke discouraged violence and instead tried to mobilize the expanding Klan

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<sup>171</sup> Stanley R. Barrett, *Is God a Racist?: The Right Wing in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 141-2.

<sup>172</sup> Cited in Wade, (1987), 368.

ranks as a political machine, believing that the best way to change the country was through political power. However, his organization was not without its paramilitary aspects as very early in his tenure as Imperial Wizard, 1977, Duke organized and participated in an anti-immigrant Klan "border watch" along the California/Mexico border. Duke tried to buy and certainly sold Klan mailing lists, a huge betrayal in the eyes of Klansmen, and finally left the Klan behind in 1979 to form the National Association for the Advancement of White People.<sup>173</sup> Duke had, however, more than doubled the Klan's membership, raising it to an estimated 3,500 from 1,500.<sup>174</sup>

At a Western Guard banquet in 1972 Rev. Robert Miles, a U.S. Klan leader who was charged with bombing schools in Michigan, announced the international alliance of the Western Guard, the Ku Klux Klan, and other American neo-Nazi organizations. At first the Klan was primarily a social club for people who were involved in right wing organizations but by the mid 70s American Klansmen pushed for a more serious kind of action in Canada. Alexander McQuirter, who would become the leader of the Canadian Klan, and others went to New Orleans to see David Duke's congress of white supremacist groups in 1976. McQuirter had just finished high school when he attended and within two years he and Wolfgang Droege, a committed Nazi born in 1949 Germany, brought together the smaller and unorganized Toronto groups under the new Canadian Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>175</sup> It is perhaps no coincidence that Duke's Klan caught on in Canada, as it was the most concerned in change through politics.

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<sup>173</sup> Martin A. Lee, "Insatiable," (2004) <<http://www.splcenter.org/intel/intelreport/article.jsp?aid-25&printable=1>> accessed September 4, 2004, 2-3.

<sup>174</sup> Wade, (1987), 371.

<sup>175</sup> Barrett, (1987), 125.

All the elements of a Klan revival were in place; in 1977 the Ontario Human Rights Commission warned that racial violence had increased dramatically and that economic constraints created hostility toward visible minorities, inflation and unemployment were rising by the early 80s, and social service cutbacks and layoffs hit immigrants first and hardest. Deportation laws were made more stringent and governmental immigration policy was changed because of the supposed threat a major shift in Canada's ethnic composition might pose to national identity. Additionally police forces in Toronto and Vancouver seemed to take little or no action in cases involving assaults of East Indians, blacks, and immigrants.<sup>176</sup>

With perceived encouragement the Klan opened its first office at McQuirter's home in the Riverdale community of Toronto. McQuirter marketed the group as "not anti-anybody... just pro-white" and said that the Klan wanted to "improve the quality of life for the people that built this country, the white people."<sup>177</sup> The Klan expanded quickly into southern Ontario and BC and had some success establishing itself in the prairies and the Maritimes, and claimed to have the support of fascists in Montreal, though McQuirter did not make any trips to Quebec. On McQuirter's expeditions he decried "multiracial crap" and suggested the government pay non-whites between \$30-35,000 to go back where they came from.<sup>178</sup>

Though McQuirter claimed 2,000 subscribers to the Klan's newsletter an undercover reporter for the *Toronto Star* estimated the press run at closer to 300,<sup>179</sup> just under ten percent of the estimated number of American Klansmen and probably a

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<sup>176</sup> Sher, (1983), 94-6.

<sup>177</sup> Cited in Ibid, 98

<sup>178</sup> Ibid, 98-106.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid, 114.

reasonably accurate figure given the relative populations of Canada to the U.S. However, another means of arriving at an accurate estimate would be to use the method of Richard Clutterbuck, a retired British SAS general, called the one percent theory. He theorizes that most people lack the conviction to become involved in violence and argues that most (99%) will go to great lengths to keep themselves and their families out of violence,<sup>180</sup> thus by knowing the number of committed Klansmen in Canada we could theoretically estimate the full membership. Julian Sher mentions seven core members of the Klan, Don Andrews, John Ross Taylor, Wolfgang Droege, Jacob Prins, Martin Weiche, Armand Siksna, and Alexander McQuirter. Assuming at least three other unknowns were willing to risk committing acts of violence for the cause the estimated number of more passive members, or even unknown supporters would be around 1,000. Certainly the Klan did not attract more than a few thousand members in Canada at this time.

The new Canadian Klan, like its American counterpart, recruited at schools and exhibited far more violent tendencies than its predecessor. In 1979 a black man was assaulted and sprayed with tear gas and the white woman accompanying him was verbally abused at a Toronto subway station by people carrying Klan cards. In Winnipeg three people were arrested for burning crosses into the lawns of five East Indian homes in 1980 and a group of whites wearing KKK T-shirts attacked four black people, cutting one of their victims' faces with a knife. Two families in Red Deer, Alberta had crosses burned into their lawns, and two Nigerian students studying in BC had "go home niggers – KKK" spray-painted onto their homes. All this occurred within the first year of the Klan's rebirth in Canada.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Quarles, (1999), 192.

<sup>181</sup> Sher, (1983), 405-6.

Back in the United States Bill Wilkinson had broken away from Duke only a year after Duke took power (1974) and formed his own Klan, and it was Wilkinson's Klan that would absorb the remnants of Duke's organization. Unlike Duke, Wilkinson started talking tough and traveled around with an extremely well-armed personal staff. The weapons Klansmen now wielded were not rifles and shotguns but assault weapons. The change in weaponry may have had the unexpected effect subsequently creating common ground between the Klan with more mainstream conservatives who own assault weapons and oppose governmental regulation of firearms, which becomes important later on. Additionally the Klan's violence was more likely to be resisted with violence and assault weapons were naturally more effective in this sort of conflict. What would become a staple in the canon of hate literature, *The Turner Diaries*, was published in 1978.<sup>182</sup>

*The Turner Diaries*, written by William Pierce, depicts a post-apocalyptic world in which White Supremacists have been pushed too far by the Zionist Occupied Government (ZOG) of the United States and white supremacists bomb the FBI headquarters. It is speculated that this description provided a model for the Oklahoma City bombing to Timothy McVeigh, who was carrying a copy at the time of his arrest. The government is overthrown by white supremacists during a simultaneous race war in which all non-Europeans are slaughtered. Additionally people who have married or dated outside their race or who did not support the race war are hanged by the same white supremacists. The book ends with the white supremacists conquering the rest of the world and destroying all the people of other races.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Wade, (1987), 374-5.

<sup>183</sup> Quarles, (1999), 121-3. James Ridgeway, *Blood in the Face: The Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nations, Nazi Skinheads, and the Rise of a New White Culture*, (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1990), 91, 94.

The Klan soon became a problem not only for civilian governments, but also for the armed services as the Department of Defense reported that there was Klan activity within every army command. One recruiter, John A. Walker Jr., who had been a shipmate of Wilkinson aboard the nuclear submarine U.S.S. *Simon Bolivar*, would later be convicted of spying for the Soviet Union. Members of the Air Force in Germany were especially concerned about Klan activity and Klan chapters were formed onboard the supply ship *Concord*, the aircraft carrier *America*, where a cross was burned in the mess, and possibly on as many as five other ships. Additionally the Klan began to appeal to some Vietnam veterans who were upset at the treatment they received upon returning home and the pardons President Carter gave deserters.<sup>184</sup>

The Klan was becoming more militaristic in their execution of violence. On May 26, 1979 demonstrators, protesting the conviction of a severely mentally retarded black man, were marching to the courthouse and encountered a Klan barricade, and when protestors refused to turn back the Klansmen opened fire on both the protestors and their police escorts with assault weapons.<sup>185</sup> In Greensboro, North Carolina the Communist Worker's Party (CWP), who had been trying to establish unions in the local textile mills, encountered Klan resistance to their efforts. Refusing to be intimidated they planned a "Kill the Klan" protest and received a parade permit from police, on the condition that no CWP marchers carried weapons and allowed the police to provide protection. Klansmen learned the location of the protestor's rallying point from local police and after roughly fifty demonstrators had gathered in front of television news crews on November 3, 1979 nine cars filled with Klansmen and Neo-Nazis arrived. The Klansmen, in front of

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<sup>184</sup> Wade, (1987), 376-7.

<sup>185</sup> Newton & Newton, (1991), 611. Wade, (1987), 377-8.

cameras, brandished weapons and fired on selected victims without taking cover or even watching for interference. After the Klansmen calmly stowed their arms and departed the five victims killed (one died of his wounds three days later, four are killed instantly) are identified as the leaders of the CWP. The shooters had been shown photos of CWP leaders weeks before the massacre. Sixteen of the forty assailants were arrested, six of these were tried, and nobody was convicted.<sup>186</sup>

In the 1980s the Klan underwent a major mutation. The Moral Majority rose in the United States and brought with it a revival of fundamentalism, although this time the advocates of fundamentalism would not closely align themselves with the Klan, even though some of their rhetoric was similar. Jerry Falwell is quoted as saying “the idea that religion and politics don’t mix was invented by the Devil to keep Christians from running *their own country*.”<sup>187</sup> The Klan started running paramilitary training camps and specifically trying to recruit children and adolescents, some of whom were responsible for a great deal of violence.

This new rise of the Klan was not without opponents, as most of the country was aware of what the Klan had been able to accomplish over the course of the last sixty years. Lawyers Joe Levin Jr. and Morris Dees along with a civil rights activist and former state senator from Georgia named Julian Bond started the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) in 1971. The SPLC used pro bono legal action to advance the rights of the poor and in 1980 the SPLC began its Klanwatch Project in order to track Klan activity on a national basis and litigate where possible.<sup>188</sup> To this day the SPLC is probably the best single non-governmental source of information on contemporary hate movements.

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<sup>186</sup> Newton & Newton, (1991), 612. Wade, (1987), 379-82.

<sup>187</sup> Cited in Wade, (1987), 383.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid, 392.

One of the SLPC's most successful cases came when a group of Texas fishermen tried to intimidate their Vietnamese competition.

In 1981 the Grand Dragon of Texas, Louis Beam, accepted a request for help from some American fishermen who wanted to scare about 75 Vietnamese refugee fishermen away from Galveston Bay. Beam brought his militia, the Texas Emergency Reserve, and began a campaign of intimidation both on land and at sea. May 15<sup>th</sup> was the start of the shrimp fishing season and in the days and weeks before the season began Beam's men burned an old shrimp boat named "U.S.S. *Vietcong*," two crosses, and two Vietnamese boats. Klansmen made threatening phone calls and harassed dock owners who did business with the Vietnamese, and the situation came to a head when American fishermen and Klansmen, dressed in everything from traditional robes to Klan T-shirts, to fatigues, sailed around the bay with small arms, including assault rifles and shotguns, and an effigy of a Vietnamese fisherman hanging from the rigging. When the patrol concluded Klansmen fired a blank round from a cannon onboard their boat at a dock where the Vietnamese worked on their boats. Shortly thereafter Morris Dees arrived and sought an injunction against the Klan's intimidation of the Vietnamese. The SLPC subsequently used an old Texas statute that forbade private armies against the Texas Emergency Reserve. After winning the injunction against the Klan Dees was joined by the Texas attorney general's office in his fight against the Texas Emergency Reserve, and won this case as well. After the trial Beam moved to Hayden Lake, Idaho where he started working for the Aryan Nations.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Morris Dees and James Corcoran, *Gathering Storm: America's Militia Threat*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 36-9.

There was a certain lateral mobility for members of the Klan, Neo-Nazi organizations, the Aryan Nations, and other far-right racialist groups, which are linked by the Christian Identity movement and the Klan. The number of Klansmen who have taken leadership positions in the other fringe-right groups can demonstrate this. Klan members, though they do not always start in the Klan, have been involved with organizations such as the John Birch Society, David Duke's NAAWP, the White Aryan Resistance (WAR) and their youth organization, the Skinheads, the Posse Comitatus, the Aryan Nations (and their militant wing the Order), the Church of Jesus Christ Christian, the Minutemen, the American Nazi Party, and any number of other organizations.<sup>190</sup>

Members of the Klan and its sister organizations are convinced that communists operate in every level of government, despite the fall of the Berlin wall and most communist governments throughout the world. It is this vast communist conspiracy that Klansmen believe persecutes them. Klan violence is targeted against Jews, communists, and non-whites. Catholicism has become less of an issue and some Klan groups theoretically accept Catholics into their membership. Klansmen believe that blacks are little more than animals who would be perfectly content to resume the role of slave were it not for communist agitators. The whole conspiracy fits nicely together as well because the Klan believes that Jews control the monetary and media resources of the world and support communist antagonism in order to subvert white supremacy.

Klan anti-Semitism also has its own unique reasoning. According to the Klan the Judaism that surrounded Temple worship had, in the time of Christ, become a rigid hierarchical structure (that they also claim exists in many churches today) where a very few Jews controlled everything and had no real relationship with God. Jesus supposedly

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<sup>190</sup> Ridgeway, (1990), 14-15.

exposed these Jews for the frauds that they were and they crucified him for it. At the time of Christ's resurrection all true Jews, the ones who had a relationship with God, were not part of the Temple hierarchy, converted to Christianity and only the false Jews did not; according to this logic, the only Jews alive today are the false ones. These Jews, who comprise the "synagogue of Satan", are the ones financing the communists who are taking over the world and inciting Blacks to rise up against their natural masters, white people.<sup>191</sup>

The latest Klan holds a stronger influence than any of its predecessors over the lives of its members. Where previous Klans would band people together to accomplish particular goals these did not function as a total system. Now, for many, Klan meetings take the place of church attendance. Klan services and communities replace other religious and communal affiliations. Klan meetings involve scripture reading and interpretation, hymn singing, and a kind of sermon. Children are raised in and made members of the Klan and the Klan doctrine takes the place of a denominational or secular educational doctrine. Additionally, the Klansman, as a general rule, only exposes himself to the ultraconservative press and right wing fringe Christian groups, and often home-schools his children.<sup>192</sup>

Klan violence at this time, despite communications technology and the ability of law enforcement to gather far greater information than ever before, remains somewhat shrouded. This is partially because the age-old problems of tracking successful murders or intimidations remain the same and partially because of the work of Louis Beam. After moving to Idaho to work for the Aryan Nations the U.S. Justice Department tried to

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<sup>191</sup> Quarles, (1999), 101-2.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid, 102-3.

convict Beam and a handful of other leaders of conspiracy to commit treason based in part on their publications and in part on actions of theirs or of members of their groups. After acquittal on these charges Beam published an essay in 1992 titled "Leaderless Resistance" that laid a template for terrorism now familiar to the world's general population in which individual cells of terrorists act independently without direct contact between the terrorist and their leaders.<sup>193</sup> This procedure shields both the organization and its leaders from liability whenever it carries out an attack and resembles tactics used by terrorist groups throughout the world.

Despite the newfound fervor for secrecy Klansmen still manage to be implicated in any number of criminal activities. In July of 1982 the body of a black teenage girl was found in Meridian, Mississippi with Klan graffiti all around her. In September a black man, Frank McGrone, who also happens to have had arson attempts on his house and car, was abducted and had KKK branded onto his chest as well as a single K on his forehead. Also in 1982 several interracial couples had their homes set on fire, fired into with small arms, and were themselves assaulted.<sup>194</sup>

Perhaps the most famous incident of aborted Klan violence concerned their planned coup on the Caribbean island of Dominica that involved Klansmen from both the United States and Canada. Mike Perdue, an American who was connected with the Canadian Klan through David Duke devised a plan in 1980 to establish a national base for white supremacists. Alexander McQuirter and other Canadian Klansmen secured financial support, organized, and tried to help execute Perdue's plan. Marxists in Grenada had recently overthrown Sir Eric Gairy and Perdue's plan was to launch a coup

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<sup>193</sup> Dees & Corcoran, (1996), 42-5.

<sup>194</sup> Newton & Newton, (1991), 626-7.

d'état from the neighboring island of Dominica and return Gairy to power in exchange for governmental concessions. The plan was radically altered when Gairy refused to accompany the mercenaries and white supremacists in their assault. The target for the coup became Dominica itself, which had recently deposed Prime Minister Patrick John over a scandal. A left-wing government was now running Dominica, and its overthrow might seriously anger the United States, a factor that led some of the more intelligent conspirators to decline the new mission. This was a wise decision as the new leader of Dominica, Eugenia Charles, received ten million dollars in aid from the U.S. and Britain.<sup>195</sup>

The plan continued and a deal was made with Patrick John so that white supremacist owned companies and John would profit from the exploitation of Dominica. Ten mercenaries comprised mostly of Klansmen and Neo-Nazis "armed with 33 guns, 20 sticks of dynamite, 30 blasting caps, 5,000 bullets, fatigues, walkie-talkies, a rubber raft, and Confederate and Nazi flags" would land on the island, rendezvous with local forces, and overcome the island's police force. Somehow the Dominican government learned of these plans and arrested Patrick John, but the Klansmen simply added plans to free John from prison.<sup>196</sup>

In addition to the Dominican government a reporter from CFTR, a Toronto radio station, learned of the plan and informed the Ontario Provincial Police, who in turn informed U.S. authorities. Perdue also bragged of his scheme to the captain of the boat they were renting for the trip, who happened to be an undercover U.S. Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms agent. The mercenaries were apprehended en route to the boat on

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<sup>195</sup> Barrett, (1987), 146-7.

<sup>196</sup> Sher, (1983), 168.

April 21, 1981 and sentenced in the United States on charges of conspiracy, weapons and explosives violations, and for planning to violate the U.S. Neutrality Act, which prohibits launching coups against friendly nations from U.S. soil. Klansmen from the U.S. and Canada who were working in support roles were arrested in the United States, Canada, and Dominica.<sup>197</sup>

This failure was the first of many setbacks for the Canadian Klan in the 80s, as shortly after McQuirter was sentenced to two years for his role in the Dominica plot he faced other charges. McQuirter had been forging passports and other identification in order to defraud banks and the O.P.P. had sent Gary MacDonald to infiltrate the Klan in 1982. McQuirter was forced out of his Riverdale residence in 1981 as a result of the Riverdale Action Committee Against Racism's efforts to remove the Klan from their community, and had moved in with fellow Klan members Gary MacFarlane and Jean MacGarry who were common-law partners. MacFarlane grew jealous of the relationship between McQuirter and MacGarry, killed two of McQuirter's dogs, quit the Klan and moved out. At this point McQuirter asked MacDonald, the undercover officer, to murder MacFarlane in 1982. The O.P.P. recorded a great deal of the conspiracy to murder MacFarlane and Armand Siksna financed the operation. McQuirter was sentenced to an additional eight years for the murder conspiracy and five concurrent years for forgery. Siksna was sentenced to six years for his monetary contributions and MacGarry was confined to a mental institution for three years or until fit to leave. The intended victim, MacFarlane, was later convicted of beating a man to death in Thornhill, Ontario.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid, 171.

<sup>198</sup> Barrett, (1987), 149-51

After the incarceration of most of the Klan's central leadership control fell to Ann Farmer, a B.C. Klan organizer. The installation of a woman as leader led Klans all across Canada to break away and form their own groups. Under Farmer the Klan started expressing a more political agenda.<sup>199</sup> Klan publications outlined a new program of political action the Klan would support such as "a return to the traditional white values on which Canadian society was built, a selective immigration policy; which includes the end of non-white immigration, repatriation [of non-whites] to their country of ethnic origin" as well as anti-abortion and military expansion goals. Also the new Klan expressed its intentions to "end the exploitation of Canadian resources by multinational corporations" and provide "political autonomy to the native Indian and Inuit nations."<sup>200</sup>

Another indication of the Klan's recent search for international organization and cooperation involved one of the most infamous former Canadian Klansman Wolfgang Droege and a CSIS informant named Grant Bristow. In the summer of 1989 Colonel Muammar Qaddafi invited representatives from the extreme right and left of several countries to a conference in Lybia in order to solidify support against the common enemy of Zionism. The gathering was not a success as no relationship ensued and the Canadian organization, currently called the Nationalist Party, received much less financial support than expected, only \$1,000US.<sup>201</sup> Clearly a certain kind of internationalism had become an interest of the far right.

In the late 80s and early 90s the Klan remained much the same as it had been, but its sister organizations started becoming more popular, and the Patriot movements in the

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<sup>199</sup> Sher, (1983), 183, 152-4.

<sup>200</sup> Cited in Ibid, 185.

<sup>201</sup> Andrew Mitrovica, "Front Man," *The Walrus*, 1: 7 (September 2004), 38-9.

90s were estimated to have around five million members<sup>202</sup> dispersed in 441 different militia groups that are active in every state of the U.S. and many of these subscribe to Christian Identity doctrines.<sup>203</sup> The rise of popularity among militia groups is demonstrated by Morris Dees. Fear of U.S. governmental aggression against its own citizens, a concern shared by many conservatives whether moderate or extreme, was ignited by a number of incidents. The Ruby Ridge confrontation between the federal agents and Randy Weaver, a member of the Aryan Nations and adherent to Christian Identity, was mishandled by the FBI and resulted in the death of Weaver's wife, two of his children, and one federal agent. This motivated a number of Patriot groups to band together in order to promote their goals and cooperate nationally. The raid, siege, and eventual tragedy at the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, though the agencies were officially exonerated of any mishandling, were seen by many as another example of the government's willingness to kill its own citizens. Shortly after the incident in Waco the Brady bill, which required waiting lists and background checks on purchases of handguns, was passed; further frightening those already concerned about government control over firearms.

In this climate the Patriot movements started promoting the formation of militias and sent organizers, who had previously worked with Klan groups, to start militia groups all over the U.S. These organizers toned down their racist rhetoric, instead appealing to their new members with anti-government and anti-gun control sentiment. The racial attitudes of the Klan are, however, simmering beneath the surface in many of these groups and it is unknown whether the racial agendas are hidden in order to attract

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<sup>202</sup> Quarles, (1999), 192.

<sup>203</sup> Dees & Corcoran, (1996), 199.

members or if they are hidden to avoid public suspicion.<sup>204</sup> One thing is certain, in July of 1995 a meeting of the Aryan World Congress, which attracted members from across the U.S. and Canada, implemented an intelligence protocol called SALUTE (indicating the type of information sought about possible adversaries: size, activity, location, unit, time, and equipment). This protocol, which Dees had never seen in years of monitoring these groups, was simultaneously introduced at a meeting of the Tri-State Militia, the largest umbrella organization for militias, which claims affiliates in over twenty states. Though certainty is impossible it is very likely that these militia groups have more than a casual relationship with the Klan and its brethren.<sup>205</sup>

In Canada the same movements are proliferating where the Klan has seemingly receded. The following are some of their activities. In 1990 Maclean's reported that there are skinhead groups active in Montreal, B.C., Alberta, and Ontario who, along with two known holocaust deniers in New Brunswick and Alberta, are promoting anti-Semitism.<sup>206</sup> In Prince Albert, Saskatchewan the provincial leader of the Ku Klux Klan and the Aryan Nations, Carney Milton Nerland, killed a Cree man named Leo LaChance in January of 1991.<sup>207</sup> There was at least one organizer for the Aryan Nations and minister for a Christian Identity church in Chilliwack B.C. in 1995, and Warren Kinsella, author of *Web of Hate*, reported that white supremacists groups claimed 2,000 members and an additional 2,000 supporters. Kinsella also reported that there were potential "Timothy McVeighs" in Canada. A 1993 raid found that George Burdi, a member of the

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid, 201-2.

<sup>206</sup> D'Arcy Jenish, "Bigotry's New Face: Anti-Semitism in Canada has Changed," *Maclean's*, 103: 16 (April 16, 1990), 27-9.

<sup>207</sup> Ron Bourgeault, "The Killing of Leo LaChance," *Canadian Dimension*, 28: 2 (March-April 1994), 21-6.

Heritage Front, had stockpiled “an automatic AR-15 assault rifle, an Uzi automatic machine pistol, a semiautomatic Ruger Mini-14, and 2,200 rounds of armor-piercing ammunition.” Apparently Montreal was home to two “Klaverns” in 1990 that had a disagreement over separatism. Additionally right-wing groups active in the United States have recruiters and members, even for the militia movements, in Canada as well.<sup>208</sup> An article in the August 1995 *Macleans* reported that a study by the Federal Justice Department concluded that there could be as many as 9,000 hate crimes committed annually, most of which are not reported to authorities. In 1993 there were 155 hate crimes reported in Toronto and the number jumped to 249 in 1994.<sup>209</sup>

One possible product of the militia movement is the April 19, 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City by Timothy McVeigh. His only reprimand while in the Army was for racial slurs and discrimination, and McVeigh was loosely tied to a white supremacist group in Arkansas called the Midwest Bank Robbers, who were later found in possession of the same kind of blasting caps used by McVeigh. McVeigh had been involved in militia movements, and he was almost certainly involved in a Christian Identity movement. Additionally, along with the concealed weapon for which he was arrested, McVeigh had a copy of *The Turner Diaries* on his person when taken into custody and the date of his attack, April 19, 1995, was the second anniversary of the fire in Waco. Throughout his trial and until his execution McVeigh insisted he acted alone; however, given his associations and his copy of *The Turner Diaries*, many

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<sup>208</sup> Marci McDonald, “The Enemy Within: The far right’s racist war against society is opening new fronts across Canada,” Chris Wood, “‘Aryan of the Year’: A White Supremacist Campaigns in British Columbia,” *Macleans*, 108: 19 (May 8, 1995), 34-9.

<sup>209</sup> Ken Alexander, *Avis Glaze Towards Freedom: The African-Canadian Experience*, (Toronto: Umbrella Press, 1996), 20-1.

have speculated that he was an exemplar of Louis Beam's "Leaderless Resistance" and was, at least, aided by white supremacists.<sup>210</sup>

### **The speculative future of the Klan**

The conviction of rank and file Klansmen, the ones who donate their incomes and perpetrate the violence, had never been questioned. The leadership of the Klan has never been far from the charge of using the Klan purely for financial gain, and this may still be the case. However, one thing is certain and that is that the Klan, to quote a phrase, is thinking globally and acting locally. The failure of the Klan to produce a fascist revolution in the United States during the 20s is often credited to the shortsighted greed of its leaders and though present Klan leaders may suffer from the same weakness they seem to be more focused on other sorts of power. The following are brief predictions or warnings about what can be expected of the Klan in the future as expressed by Klan historians.

The general consensus among historians of the Klan is that the Klan and its kin will remain as forces to be reckoned with, although some believe that were liberal goals realized the Klan would disappear, although Chester Quarles additionally prescribes vigilance in order to prevent another massive Klan revival.<sup>211</sup> The position is perhaps best presented by Wyn Craig Wade who says:

The ironic explanation for [the Klan's] longevity and persistence is that the Klan is indeed an American institution. No other country could have possibly produced it. In the long course of its bigotry and violence, the Klan has evoked the rebelliousness of the Boston Tea Party, the vigilantism of American pioneers and cowboys, and the haughty religion of the New England Puritans. In its corruption of American ideals, it has capitalized on some of the best-loved aspects of the American tradition.

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<sup>210</sup> Dees & Corcoran, (1996), 149-170.

<sup>211</sup> Quarles, (1999), 193.

The Klan has remained an American institution because it is an inversion, or shadow, of American democracy. It couldn't be the unpleasant thing it is were it not for the American ideals it mocks... As long as the concepts so powerfully expressed by Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence are less than fully realized in America, the Klan will be around to turn things backward whenever Americans let it.<sup>212</sup>

Wade has, in true Jeremiad form, predicted that so long as we fail to live up to Jefferson's ideals the Klan will remain to intimidate, torture, and kill those on the vanguard of freedom. Chalmers agrees, saying "the Klan persists because the stuff of which Klansmen are made is part of America."<sup>213</sup>

William Loren Katz and Julian Sher, in a similar vein, agree that the Klan is indicative of a greater problem within North American society and that until both the leaders and the citizens fight the racism upon which the Klan thrives there is potential for a resurgence.<sup>214</sup>

James Ridgeway contends that so long as social upheaval takes place Klan-like groups will arise and gain popularity,<sup>215</sup> and is joined in his position by David H. Bennett who contends that "there will always be a party of fear, offering a haven to those who fear that sinister enemies threaten the nation and its way of life."<sup>216</sup>

Finally, Morris Dees, also in true Jeremiad form, advocates that the citizenry of the United States abandon its fear of government and return to a stronger faith in the U.S. Constitution, as it successfully gives voice to even the dissidents who would overthrow the government.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> Wade, (1987), 402-3.

<sup>213</sup> Chalmers, (1965), 396.

<sup>214</sup> William Loren Katz, *The Invisible Empire: The Ku Klux Klan Impact on History*, (Seattle: Open Hand Publishing, 1986), 158-9. Sher, (1983) 213-4.

<sup>215</sup> Ridgeway, (1990), 189.

<sup>216</sup> Barrett, (1987), 408.

<sup>217</sup> Dees & Corcoran, (1996), 230-3.

## Chapter VI

Sacvan Berkovitch, the Canadian upon whom a great deal of this interpretation of America relies, described his encounter with the prophetic destiny of America as “[feeling] like Sancho Panza in a land of Don Quixotes.” In America Henry David Thoreau, Walt Whitman, Martin Luther King Jr., and the full spectrum of conservative and liberal politicians were using the same rhetorical model, the same appeal to America’s sacred mission to advance their various position. Berkovitch argues that America as a symbol can only be understood by its opposites and that such an analysis must therefore be bipolar, and, takes on qualities of sacred and profane. Because the sacred country has a particular history, that history also becomes sacred and must end with the defeat of what is profane. This history necessitates a constant state of struggle towards an ultimate victory of the sacred, which may help explain why America always seems to be in a state of war. Furthermore, Berkovitch says that the lack of ideological separation between America as a sacred symbol and America the country in which people live precludes the possibility of actual social change. Thus, to condemn someone or something as un-American is not to look for alternatives, but to reaffirm faith in the ideology of America and “transform what might have been a search for moral or social alternatives into a call for cultural revitalization.”<sup>218</sup>

On the other hand, Charles H. Long argues that in the struggle for black freedom the American cultural language is sufficient for expressing both the hypocrisy of the dominant mythology and the possibility of freedom for all American people; however, if this reform were realized it would radically change the symbol of America and what kind

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<sup>218</sup> Sacvan Berkovitch, *The American Jeremiad*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 11, 177-9.

of place America is.<sup>219</sup> Clearly the American cultural language and mythic template are sources of problems that would either need to be abandoned or radically altered if they are to adequately express human freedom for all groups within America.

Canada, on the other hand, never having the benefit/encumbrance of a single national language still has problems. Although the threat posed by the infrequent manifestation of the Klan is rooted within Canadian mythic templates these same templates are apparently capable of significant change, because of their lack of cosmological circumscription, and the prescribed action within these templates do not as easily lead to vigilantism.

### **The Klan and North American Mythological/Historical patterns**

#### **The United States**

In each of the manifestations of the American Klan the status quo in the United States was threatened, and therefore saw a threat to the greatness of America and its messianic mission. Victory over these threats required a return to righteousness and the cleansing of the nation, and this cleansing required marginalized peoples' liberty to be compromised and the maintenance of the separation of these people from society and from the national language. The cleansing is the business of the armed citizenry and its successful execution re-creates the foundation of the country and increases the freedoms of white Americans. Incidentally, as America is in a constant state of struggle and re-creation the freedoms of all individuals are in a constant state of flux.

The Klan's adherence to the American mythic template is easily demonstrated. In the reconstruction era the freedom of Southern whites was threatened by Northern troops

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<sup>219</sup> Charles H. Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion*, (Aurora, Colorado: The Davies Group, 1995), 166-8.

as well as the emancipation of the black population; the presence of “scalawags” and “carpetbaggers” further intensified this threat. The Ku Klux Klan purified the South through the murder, intimidation, and torture of both blacks and whites who opposed the status quo. When this purge was completed and maintained, the support for militarily occupying the South in order to ensure black freedom waned and Southern society returned to a state only slightly changed from the period before the Civil War.

In the 1920s the agrarianism and traditional values of the United States were perceived as disappearing because of migration to urban centers and a slight increase in the social mobility of blacks. Immigration was considered a threat to the character of the country as many of the immigrants brought Catholicism, Judaism, and unfamiliar languages and customs with them. A large portion of Americans believed that these immigrants did not share the national covenant of America and that the erosion of traditional values as well as the development of communist ideals might also break the national covenant. The Klan capitalized on this fear among Americans, promising to return America to its previous righteousness and greatness; however, even if the pattern could have been completed the corruption of Klan leadership soon drove the vast majority of its membership away. By appealing to the national mythic structures the Klan was able to profit handsomely, and, had it retained its four million members, may have been able to achieve the purge they promised.

In the 1960s America was at war with international communism and the black struggle for freedom again threatened the status quo and, therefore, the greatness of the nation and its victory over communism. The Klan equated the civil rights movement with communism and tried to purify the country once more, but opposition from the

government and lack of overt support among the white population as well as the determination of the black population prevented this purge from being successful, and though the Klan promised the same return to greatness and the same re-creation of the country they were unable to succeed.

After these two failures either to cleanse the nation or to return America to an idealized vision of the past it was the underground Klan now promises the ultimate purge of social pollutants and the ultimate return to greatness. They promise a race war that will see all non-whites killed along with all "race traitors" and the subsequent rise of a white supremacist government in America. This promised genocide is referred to as the Second American Revolution and in the face of determined governmental and popular opposition the Klan continues to use the American cultural language to justify actions against the government and citizens of America. The soldiers of the Klan are literally the armed citizenry who believe it is their duty to stop the present tyranny of the U.S. government.

In every American incarnation of the Klan it has been entirely immersed in the American mythological language and the template of struggle by an armed citizenry has always prescribed its actions.

### **Canada**

The Klan in Canada does not exhibit its adherence to the Canadian mythic structures as obviously as its American counterpart. In both manifestations of the Klan in Canada it has been less violent than in America, and both manifestations relied heavily on media attention and public relations; however, the two manifestations were markedly different from each other.

In the 1920s the Klan easily clothed itself in the English/French and Protestant/Catholic dichotomies and capitalized on the rising tide of nativism and the fledgling western alienation of the prairies. Additionally the Klan, except for a few instances, mobilized its members for political action instead of vigilante violence. While the Klan was clearly a Canadian institution at this time it may well have been happenstance that it caught on in Canada.

With the exception of the Klan's violence, it is not clear that the Klan's major accomplishments during this period were contingent on its presence in Canada. By 1928 the Klan had helped elect a number of Conservative politicians, and the trend toward deportation and restrictive immigration continued. The Conservatives also further restricted the use of the French language, but these trends were visible in Canadian society before the Klan arrived, long before the Klan helped elect politicians, and after the Klan was abandoned. An accurate description of the viability of the Klan at this time may be that American organizers moved north, grafted themselves onto the anti-French, anti-Catholic, and anti-immigrant elements of society, and left with their profits after motivating a few Canadians to take leadership roles.

What is alarming about this example is that a transplanted Ku Klux Klan thrived for several years in Canada despite opposition from newspapers, some politicians, and labor, which has always been more powerful in Canada than in the U.S. What this demonstrates is that while there was not always a Klan in Canada, there were elements that could have supported the Klan, and the Klan might have survived in the Canadian context with more dedicated and competent leadership.

However, the context in which the first Canadian Klan arose has changed significantly. As noted in chapter two the dichotomies in Canada that supported the Klan have become less powerful, and the newest incarnation of the Klan reflects this change. The new Klan may not be as profitable as its predecessor, but it is far more dangerous.

Canada does not have a strong internal mechanism for vigilante racial violence. Although Canada has hosted race riots and street fighting between various groups, the system of oppression has been centered around separation, through institutions like reserves and schools. When racial tensions superceded the old ethnic and religious dichotomies, Canada imported groups based on racial discrimination. The first groups, started in the 60s, were fascist organizations started by individuals like Wolfgang Droege, whose fascist tendencies originated outside Canada. The first native-born Canadian leader of racist groups in Canada was Alexander McQuirter, who went to America to import the Klan.

Since racial categories have become important in Canada Klan violence in its most recent incarnation has outstripped that of its predecessor, although it is still nowhere near the proportions of the American Klan. Even with more emphasis on violence this Klan is still somewhat obedient to the Canadian template of leaving action to the government. When McQuirter visited the United States there were several Klan groups from which he could have drawn his inspiration, but he chose the least violent and most politically motivated group, which belonged to David Duke. The new Canadian Klan occasionally fields candidates, usually in municipal elections, and has managed to find supporters all over Canada. Additionally, the new Canadian Klan seems far more interested in internationalism than its American counterpart, which is a far more

Canadian attitude. The official face of the new Klan looks as if it wants to follow the Canadian mythical template, even though its membership is more prone to vigilante violence.

### **Conclusions**

The category of civil religion has not been addressed in this study because when human religiosity is understood as the negotiation between humanity and their world using a mythical or historical template civil religion becomes a somewhat redundant category. Understanding the Klan as a Christian denomination is similarly limited. The Christianity professed by Klansmen is a reasonably unique interpretation of the Bible. For example Pete Peters, a Christian Identity pastor, cites Luke 22: 36 as a divine command to arm themselves even if they must sell their clothes to do so.<sup>220</sup> A more traditional interpretation of that verse is that Jesus was telling his disciples they would need to fend for themselves. Of course the disciples took Jesus literally and brought him two swords, (Luke 22:38) which Jesus said would be enough, meaning they would not be used at all.<sup>221</sup> This vein of Christianity is relatively recent in Klan consciousness and was either not available or to or not used by reconstruction or early twentieth century Klansmen and demonstrates that neither a study of civil religion or of Christianity is sufficient to explain the religiosity of the Klan.

The Ku Klux Klan has been active on this continent for almost a century and a half, and it may never fully disappear. What must be understood about the Klan is that it thrives on the same national mythological frameworks that support and provide the

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<sup>220</sup> Morris Dees and James Corcoran, *Gathering Storm: America's Militia Threat*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 21.

<sup>221</sup> Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), New Testament 117-8.

cultural languages of Canada and the U.S. The Klan should not be dismissed because it can help us understand what kind of place North America has been, is, and could become. Additionally, the racism espoused by the Klan may help us examine unrealized racism within our mythic histories, our societies, and ourselves. If the ideal of an egalitarian society is ever to be realized the causes and consequences of the Klan must be understood on a religious level. It is only by understanding the Klan on a religious and mythological level that we can understand how human beings formed within these national historical frameworks have the potential to become Klansmen, and to understand the interpretational limits of American and Canadian mythological history.

There are many possibilities for understanding the North American context that arise from this study but are not fully explored, and these must be addressed by another study. There are three distinct possibilities, unanswered by this work, that seem plausible. The first is that the Klan cannot exist with both popularity and longevity outside the United States. Canada, the closest and most similar neighbor, would naturally manifest the Klan the strongest and for the longest period of time, but neither incarnation of the Klan amounted to all that much when compared to what other Canadian movements were capable of.

The second, and most likely possibility, is that the Klan cannot succeed in a country without a strong national mythology. Because Canada was able to support other nativist organizations and because it does manifest the Klan from time to time there is obviously something within the national framework onto which the Klan can be grafted; however, given the importance of the national mythology in the United States and inability of the Klan to give itself a solid foundation in Canada, this seems a likely

explanation. Had the Klan successfully spread into another country this question could easily be answered, and may yet.

The third possibility is that the legally sanctioned white supremacism, such as the Social Credit Party, the Orange Lodges, and other various Canadian organizations helped to detract from the Klan's membership and prevented more people from becoming involved. Any one of these possible explanations for the relative power of the Klan in Canada and the United States is plausible, and therefore a lessening of the emphasis on national mythologies, or legally sanctioned (but still rather powerless) outlets for white supremacists might result in a lessening of the Klan's ability to influence individuals, or nations.

It is, to some degree, imponderable how national mythologies work, to what degree they influence people, and whether countries can exist without a national mythology. I would argue that because all of Canada's national mythologies, including the dominant one, have recognized (out of necessity) the existence of other mythologies none of them will ever be able to mobilize citizens in the same way as the American mythology. Though some may think this is a weakness in the national framework, or that a national mythology is necessary to prevent ethnic nationalism from destroying a country a nationalistic mythology, as has been demonstrated here, can also be harmful to a society. While Canada may not be as powerful as the United States it is not because Canada lacks a single nationalistic vision of its beginnings.

One potential interpretive framework that may help diminish the power of the Klan would be to emphasize cultural exchange and contact in the North American colonial period. Over the centuries that Europeans, Native Americans, Africans, and

Asians have lived together on the North American continent indelible changes have been wrought on each, and each bears some resemblance to the others. By studying the intersection of cultures in North America, however brutal, the humanity of each can be more fully realized and any claims to purity, whether cultural, racial, religious, or regional, become untenable. Additionally there have always been individuals who existed between the cultures on this continent. Using these individuals or those who opposed the colonial enterprise, whether inside or outside the colonial society, as exemplars for existence in this context could diminish the ability of the Klan to act.

One of the Klan's greatest fears is of race mixing, but that has been happening constantly on this continent since the idea of race was invented. Public acknowledgement of North America as a home of Creole nations where there are no pure blood lines, no pure cultural artifacts, and no pure languages and the enshrinement of this within our national mythologies would do a great deal of damage to groups who advocate racial or ethnic separation or oppression. Both the U.S. and Canada are Creole nations, but this is rarely, if ever, acknowledged in our cultural languages.

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