The Ku Klux Klan in Louisiana, 1920-1930.

Kenneth Earl Harrell

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses

Recommended Citation


This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
HARRELL, Kenneth Earl, 1932-
THE KU KLUX KLAN IN LOUISIANA, 1920—1930.
Louisiana State University, Ph.D., 1966
History, modern

University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan
The Ku Klux Klan in Louisiana, 1920 -- 1930

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of History

by
Kenneth Earl Harrell
B. A., Southeastern Louisiana College, 1955
M. A., Louisiana State University, 1959
May, 1966
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Sincere thanks to Dr. T. Harry Williams and to Ellen.
PREFACE

The emergence of the Ku Klux Klan during the 1920's is one of the most interesting developments of that complex decade. Because the Klan was a secret organization much of its history is shrouded in mystery. Precious few records have been left to aid the historian in reconstructing an accurate picture of the secret order. Most former members are dead. Those still living are often reluctant to discuss the Klan. Many who are willing to relate information regarding their activity in the Klan are victims of a clouded memory. Only a few former Klansmen are capable of providing the student of the Klan with useful material. The Klan compounded the historian's problem by purposely employing its secrecy to mislead the public and inquiring newspapers. It was standard Klan policy to exaggerate the size of its membership and thus its influence. Newspapers discovered early that the hooded order was good copy, and they printed the Klan's declarations as fact. The New York World's exposé of 1921 not only accepted Klan declarations, it built on them, and thus further distorted the image of the masked organization. Other contemporary exposés, published as books or in magazines, followed the path hewn by the New York World.
The Louisiana Klan presents an interesting area for intensive study. It was regarded as one of the Invisible Empire's more important Realms. Hiram Wesley Evans, the Klan's Imperial Wizard, included the Louisiana Realm among the nation's fifteen strongest. One of the most sensational Klan acts of violence occurred in Morehouse Parish, located in northeastern Louisiana. Louisiana was a Southern state, but it presented a peculiar problem to the Klan in the South because of the cultural and religious differences of its population. North Louisiana was Protestant, Anglo-Saxon, and bound to Victorian morality. South Louisiana was largely French, Catholic, and less concerned with the stern morality of north Louisiana. But in south Louisiana there were Anglo-Saxon, Protestant "islands," which were sources of Klan strength, although hard to organize. The period covered in this study is 1920-1930. Although the twentieth century Klan was organized in 1915, it did not expand into Louisiana until 1920. It reached the peak of its influence in 1923 and steadily declined after that date. By 1930 it was no longer a force of any consequence in the state.

The records of Klan activity in Louisiana are not extensive, but those which are available are quite valuable. The best sources are the W.D. Robinson Papers, and the John M. Parker Papers. Both are located in the Southern Historical Collection at the University of
North Carolina. The Parker Papers, which are still incomplete, contain a number of letters from Klansmen, Klan sympathizers, Klan opponents, and public officials that relate much about the organization in Louisiana. The Robinson Papers are also rich in Klan material. They contain scattered minutes of Klan meetings of the New Orleans chapter, two Bureau of Investigation reports on Klan activities in Morehouse Parish, reports that Robinson made to the New Orleans _Times-Picayune_, and a number of charter membership lists for various chapters in Louisiana. The New Orleans _Times-Picayune_, the Baton Rouge State _Times_, and the Shreveport _Journal_ are the best newspaper sources for material on the Louisiana Klan.

This study partially parallels a book, recently completed by Charles C. Alexander, entitled _The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest_ (1965). It agrees with Mr. Alexander's conclusion that the abiding concern of Louisiana Klansmen was moral reform. But it contests several of his conclusions. First, Louisiana Klansmen were more concerned with the so-called "Catholic menace" than Mr. Alexander is willing to admit. An examination of _The Winnfield News American_, published by a Klansman, reveals a violent anti-Catholic viewpoint. The Louisiana Klan employed anti-Catholicism to expand membership and to satisfy the prejudices of members. Occasionally Klansmen forced the removal of Catholic teachers and school officials. The
"Catholic menace" was constantly used to justify the necessity of the Klan. Secondly, the Louisiana Klan was not nearly as powerful as Mr. Alexander imagines. He claims that there were 54,000 Klansmen in Louisiana. Actually, the number was closer to 25,000. Finally, Mr. Alexander claims the Louisiana Klan was in an "enviable" position after the gubernatorial election of 1924. To the contrary, the Louisiana Klan was in a desperate position after that election. The inability of the Louisiana Realm to unite on one candidate produced a serious rupture in Klan unity. The organization divided into two factions, one of which later helped pass legislation requiring an annual filing of Klan membership lists and the abandonment of the mask. The rupture was never healed, and the Louisiana Klan rapidly declined.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENT ................................................................. ii

PREFACE .................................................................................. iii

ABSTRACT ................................................................................ viii

Chapter

I. RENDEZVOUS AT STONE MOUNTAIN .................................. 1

II. EXPANSION AND ALTERATION IN THE TWENTIES. .............. 29

III. SEEDBED .............................................................................. 75

IV. THE INVISIBLE EMPIRE COMES TO LOUISIANA ................... 107

V. THE BIG PUSH, 1922 ........................................................... 151

VI. THE MER ROUGE MURDERS: THE KLAN IN FULL FLOWER .... 183

VII. THE MER ROUGE MURDERS: A FAILURE OF JUSTICE ........... 215

VIII. THE KLAN IN THE COMMUNITY: ILLUSION AND REALITY ... 263

IX. POLITICS: THE ROAD TO RUIN ........................................ 303

X. THE FOLDING OF THE SHEETS ........................................... 348

BIBLIOGRAPHY ......................................................................... 363

VITA .......................................................................................... 377
ABSTRACT

Representatives of the Invisible Empire arrived in Louisiana in November, 1920. Chapters of the Klan were established in New Orleans and Shreveport before the year ended. During 1921 approximately seventy-three other units were chartered. Organization of the Klan in the Bayou State was accomplished with considerable secrecy. Operations of the Invisible Empire in Louisiana did not attract significant public attention until September, 1921, when the New Orleans Times-Picayune carried the New York World's exposé of the Klan. After the exposé Klan secrecy in Louisiana was seriously compromised.

Klan organizers utilized the whole spectrum of national Klan themes in recruiting Louisiana Knights; however, the secret society's potential as a counterforce to postwar lawlessness, Catholicism, and petty moral violations was the most appealing feature of the Invisible Empire to Louisianians.

The Louisiana Klan was never as powerful or as violent as contemporaries suggested. At its peak the Louisiana Realm had about 25,000 members and violence was centered in a few areas. Most Klans were essentially fraternal organizations engaged in normal
fraternal activities. Misconceptions about the Louisiana Klan arose from the Morehouse incident. In August, 1922, two men were kidnapped by a Klan raiding party. When a Morehouse Parish grand jury refused to act, Governor John M. Parker dispatched national guardsmen to the parish. Shortly before Christmas, 1922, the bodies of the two men were discovered in a bayou near Bastrop. Parker's intervention brought floods of reporters to Bastrop and the Morehouse murders became one of the most celebrated news sensations of the 1920's. Reports from Bastrop claimed Louisiana was controlled by the Klan. The reports were largely true for Morehouse Parish but not for Louisiana. In January, 1923, the state conducted an open hearing, hoping to present sufficient evidence to force a future Morehouse grand jury to act. Morehouse Knights were clearly implicated. Yet in March a second grand jury refused to return indictments.

Parker's intervention in Morehouse appeared a failure. But he won an important victory. The hearing revealed to Louisianians the danger of the Klan if it were allowed to continue to expand. Prior to the Morehouse incident Parker had failed to evoke significant sentiment against the hooded order. The hearing produced a groundswell of opposition to the Klan and was the first blow in the destruction of the Invisible Empire in Louisiana.
The second blow was delivered in the gubernatorial campaign of 1923-1924. The Klan won a few local contests during 1922 and openly boasted it would run a candidate for governor in 1923. But the Morehouse incident altered its position. When the primaries opened the Klan attempted to avoid political involvement. It was too late. Dudley Guilbeau and Hewitt Bouanchaud forced the secret society into the campaign. The other candidates, Huey Long and Henry Fuqua, were forced to declare they would support legislation against the secret order. The Klan's position was difficult, but when leaders of the organization failed to unite on one man it became impossible. Most Klansmen supported Fuqua, and when he won they cooperated in the passage of legislation requiring Klansmen to unmask and file their membership with the state.

In August, 1924, Imperial Wizard Hiram Wesley Evans expelled Klansmen who had participated in the passage of legislation against the order and appointed new leaders. Evans's high-handed action was the final blow. Some men abandoned the Klan after the Morehouse incident, but now they left in large numbers. By 1926 the Louisiana Klan had shrunk to about 3,000 members and was no longer a force of any consequence.
CHAPTER ONE

RENDEZVOUS AT STONE MOUNTAIN

Outside New York's old Liberty Theatre an excited crowd gathered to attend the world premier of the highly advertised motion picture *The Birth of a Nation*. The motion picture industry was still in its infancy, and the usual fare was slapstick comedies or "shorts" produced for nickelodeons. But tonight, if the extravagant claims of press agents were to be believed, New York audiences could expect something special.¹ The fantastic admission price of two dollars, at a time when normal admissions were fifteen cents, suggested a spectacle to which hardy supporters of film entertainment had been rarely exposed. A production of the scale proposed by advanced advertisement of the Liberty's feature attraction was not to be missed. It was the evening of March 6, 1915, a moment of historic importance for America's newest entertainment medium.

¹*New York Times*, March 6, 1915.
Although the motion picture production was new, New York audiences had witnessed essentially the same story in a moderately successful stage play nine years earlier. Both the play and the film were based on a novel, *The Clansman, An Historic Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*, a 1905 publication of Thomas Dixon, Jr., sometime preacher, author, and actor.\(^2\) *The Clansman* and an earlier novel, *The Leopard's Spots* (1902), were both literary sensations that related how Dixon's North Carolina home had twice been saved from Negro degradation. The motion picture version of Dixon's book was a David Wark Griffith production. Griffith, a young Kentuckian turned film producer, was rapidly building a well deserved reputation as a brilliant innovator in the new art form. *The Birth of a Nation* was the product of his latest achievement. Griffith and Dixon became partners when Dixon was unable to finance the movie alone. Griffith used the basic plot of *The Clansman* for his scenario, adding bits from Dixon's other books and American history when story improvement was needed.

The first half of the two hour and forty-five minute spectacle related the broad expanse of American history through the Civil War.

---

Huge battle scenes were captured on film as they had never been previously recorded. New techniques of camera action -- the close-up, the fade-out, panoramic shots -- were utilized with maximum effect. Against this backdrop a syrupy, romantic love story was woven. Ben Cameron, a gallant young Confederate officer, fell in love with his nurse, Elsie Stoneman, in a Union hospital. The plot thickened when Elsie's brother, handsome young Union officer Phil Stoneman, expressed equal ardour for Ben's sister. Stoneman's father, who was a congressman and symbolically Thaddeus Stevens, was the villain and was determined to punish the South for the rebellion. The instrument of punishment was to be the newly freed Negro, characterized by Griffith and Dixon as an inhuman brute preying on virtuous white women. Ben's sister ultimately threw herself over a cliff rather than yield her honor, and Elsie Stoneman, played by future star Lillian Gish, was at one point besieged in a cabin by lust-crazed Negroes.

Into this backdrop rode the Ku Klux Klan to save the South and equally important, the virtue of white women. With the appearance of the Klan came other Griffith innovations designed to heighten the intensity of the drama. In the orchestra pit "The Ride of the Valkyries" heralded the assemblage of the Klan, while passages from "The Hall of the Mountain King" accompanied their mounted dash to save the heroine from bestial Negroes. As the scene
shifted back and forth between the thundering hoofs of mounted horses and the heroine, surrounded by lustful freedmen, the tension became unbearable. Audiences, electrified by an experience not soon to be forgotten leaped from their seats shouting encouragement to the hooded saviors.  

3 The Liberty audience wildly applauded Griffith's masterpiece, and critics almost unanimously agreed the production was marked by technical genius. They were less satisfied with its theme.  

Griffith and Dixon may not have intended it, but The Birth of a Nation was a bitterly anti-Negro preaching of the Civil War and Reconstruction period. Reconstruction was portrayed as a period characterized chiefly by heroic Ku Klux Klansmen defending virtuous white womanhood from lecherous black men.  

It was the racial overtones of The Birth of a Nation New York critics found so distasteful. Others joined in the outcry. Harvard President Charles Herzl Avin, "The Ku Klux Klan, 1915-1925: A Study in Religious Intolerance" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, Georgetown University, 1952), p. 51. Apparently The Birth of a Nation lost little of its power to electrify audiences over the years. In 1956 it was shown as a curiosity piece in a Baton Rouge, Louisiana, theater, and it still evoked lusty cheers from the audience.  


Eliot, social worker Jane Addams, and Negro leader Booker T. Washington led an ever increasing protest ultimately culminating in riots and attempted censorship. In the South the reviews were dazzling.\(^6\)

One Negro leader, W. E. B. DuBois, found the movie's theme particularly painful. DuBois, an historian by profession and a Progressive in political alignment, opposed censorship, but reasoned that human beings were more important than new motion picture techniques. With the support of the National Association For the Advancement of Colored People, he undertook a campaign to prevent further exhibition of *The Birth of a Nation*. Confronted with the prospect that NAACP protests might endanger further exploitation of an obvious box office sensation, Griffith and Dixon moved to reinforce their position. Dixon rushed to Washington to enlist the support of federal officials. His success was complete. After arranging an interview with Woodrow Wilson, Southern-born President of the United States, and a man whose attitude on the race question was, to say the least, equivocal, Dixon convinced the

President he should see the controversial film. The talented Dixon then arranged the first showing of a motion picture in the White House. Wilson, deeply impressed with the film, remarked: "It is like writing history with lightning . . . and my only regret is that it is all so terribly true." According to Dixon's unpublished memoirs, Wilson offered enthusiastic congratulations, thus indicating the NAACP could expect no relief from his office.

The Carolina divine then turned his attention to the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, Edward Douglas White, who was, if possible, more enthusiastic than the President. "You tell the true story of the Klan?" asked the bearish Louisianian. "Yes, for the first time," replied the preacher. The Chief Justice leaned forward and quietly confided to his guest, "I was a member of the Klan, sir . . . Through many a dark night I walked my sentinel's beat through the ugliest streets of New Orleans with a rifle on my shoulder. . . . You've told the true story of that uprising of

7 Dixon had been a classmate of Wilson when both attended Johns Hopkins University during the 1880's. See Cook, "The Man Behind 'The Birth of A Nation,'" p. 523.


outraged manhood? " "In a way I'm sure you'll approve," replied Dixon. "I'll be there!" announced the Chief Justice with firm assurance. 10

Both Griffith and Dixon might well have felt smug over their complete victory. When National Association for the Advancement of Colored People leaders appealed to licensing bureaus to ban exhibition of the controversial film, Dixon was usually on hand to testify that the President and the Chief Justice of the United States had not only seen the movie but had given it their enthusiastic endorsement. In the face of such formidable opposition, appeals from angered Negro leaders proved fruitless. Exploitation of the highly successful motion picture continued unabated. Between April and September, 1915, over 400,000 spectators saw it at a single Boston theater and it set attendance records wherever it was shown. 11 Before it was retired as a museum piece its owners had grossed over eighteen million dollars.

10 Dialogue quoted in Goldman, Rendezvous With Destiny, pp. 228-229. See also Cook, "The Man Behind 'The Birth Of A Nation,'" pp. 530-531.

The organization depicted in Griffith's epic masterpiece was an outgrowth of the troubled period in the South following the Civil War. The Republican party, for both idealistic and selfish purposes, enfranchised the freedman, registered him to vote, and stationed troops in ten Southern states to insure his participation in politics. These acts, combined with mass disfranchisement of Southern whites, gave the party of Lincoln political majorities in five Southern states. Traditional white rule was then replaced with government by a combination of Northern men, popularly known as "carpetbaggers," Southern whites, who for various reasons were willing to cooperate with the Republican scheme and were popularly called "scalawags," and the freedman. Obviously, this was a circumstance the white power structure of the Southern states found intolerable, and the restoration of white rule or "home rule" became of primary concern. Any weapon which would promote this end was desirable, and the Ku Klux Klan was such a weapon.

Oddly enough, the Klan, which was to become an instrument for the restoration of white domination, was not organized for that purpose. During its Reconstruction existence numerous speculative theories were advanced regarding its origin, some by the Klan itself for the purpose of misleading investigations into its activities.
One Northern newspaper, for example, reported a reliable source had disclosed that Andrew Johnson was the head of the organization.¹²

The beginning of the original Klan was aimless and innocent; it grew out of nothing more sinister than the boredom of six young ex-Confederate soldiers who lived in Pulaski, Tennessee, a small community located south of Nashville. In December 1865, the young veterans decided to form a club with the purpose of filling the void in Pulaski's amusement potential. Calling their meeting place a "Den" and their chief officer a "Grand Cyclops," they proceeded to give other officers and members equally ludicrous titles. The second officer was the "Grand Maji;" the secretary was the "Grand Scribe;" rank and file members were called "Ghouls." The titles were meaningless except that they sounded weird and impressive. Richard Reed, one of the six original founders of the Klan, suggested the organization's name. He called it Kuklos, a Greek word meaning circle. Gradually Kuklos evolved as "Ku Klux," and "Klan" was added for its alliterative effect.¹³


Having established an organization and officers, the young adventurers next devised a costume. Because elaborate costumes were scarcely available in Pulaski, members improvised by using white bed sheets as robes and a high pointed headdress made of the same material. Robed in their new regalia, the members began riding around the community on horses, a practice which greatly excited the freedman, who were convinced the eerie figures were spirits of Confederate dead risen from the grave.

The reputation of the new organization spread rapidly, particularly in Tennessee and northern Alabama, and in a section where the traditional political masters suffered the indignity of rule by the former slaves, the possibilities of vigilante activity were quickly recognized. As new units spread across the South the Invisible Empire became an instrument to suppress the freedman, Negro militia units, and the Union League, an organization employed by the radical Republicans to control black voters in the South. Until May, 1867, there was no formal organization of the Invisible Empire beyond the local "Den," but in that year a secret convention was held in Nashville, Tennessee, to give to the movement centralized direction. The delegates elected the great Confederate cavalry officer, Nathan Bedford Forrest, as their "Grand Wizard" and adopted a Prescript, or constitution, which created other national officers. The Prescript asserted the Klan's purposes were "to
protect the weak, the innocent, and the defenseless from the outrages of the lawless. . . .”14 The real purposes of the organization were revealed in a series of questions to which all members were required to give an affirmative reply. "Are you opposed to Negro equality, both social and political?" "Are you in favor of a white man's government in this country?" "Do you believe in the inalienable right of self-preservation of the people against the exercise of arbitrary and unlicensed power?"15 These questions, devised to determine men's views on the vital matter of who would rule the Southern states, were more to the point in explaining why the original Klan rode.

By 1868 the Klan had spread to most Southern states, and the tempo of its activity was stepped up. Incidents of intimidation, whipping, and killing became common. According to the "lost cause" legend the old Klan was composed of the "better element" of the South; however, in many areas its membership was made up of irresponsible individuals who used the secret order for plain

---

15 Ibid., pp. 156-157.
criminal acts. By 1869 the lawlessness of the Klan became intolerable to its commander, Nathan Bedford Forrest, and he formally disbanded the Invisible Empire. By that time a general exodus from the Klan was everywhere in evidence, and by 1870 the organization was largely spent. Belatedly, Congress passed legislation to deal with the Klan in May, 1870, and April, 1871. The government secured a substantial number of convictions under these laws, particularly before 1874, but many were not connected with the Ku Klux movement.

In terms of assisting in the restoration of home rule, the Klan served a distinct purpose for Southern whites, in spite of the lawlessness which so frequently characterized its operations. And as the years passed Southerners remembered only the Invisible

---


Empire's positive contributions and left it to historians to chronicle its wrongdoings.

The twentieth century version of the Invisible Empire had its origins in the mental meanderings of William Joseph Simmons, a middle-aged promoter who was living in Atlanta, Georgia, at the time of the New York premier of The Birth of a Nation. Simmons's career is relatively easy to trace after 1920 because he was a national personality subject to extensive newspaper and periodical coverage. But that phase of his life prior to 1920 is marked by obscurity. Born in Harpersville, Shelby County, Alabama, in 1880, he was the son of a mill owner and doctor who had been an officer in the Alabama Klan during Reconstruction. As a child he was frequently exposed to tales of how white civilization in the South had been saved by timely night riding activities of the old Klan. During the Spanish-American War, when Simmons was eighteen, he enlisted in the army and served as a private in Company B, First Regiment of the Alabama Volunteers. But the crusade to free Cuba of Spanish domination was short-lived, and the youthful

farm boy left the army and turned to the church. Although lacking formal training, he was given backwoods circuits in Alabama and Florida by the Methodist church. He yearned for the larger churches of Southern cities, but Methodist divines consistently denied him promotion. In 1912 the Alabama Conference of the Methodist Church terminated his ministry for alleged inefficiency and "moral impairment." The exact nature of Simmons's "moral impairment" was never revealed, although the charges probably stemmed from the more worldly facet of the churchman's personality. He was in many ways typical of the Southern Protestant fundamentalist. He gave lip service to the Victorian standards of morality that were so widely accepted in rural America; he also loved horse racing, prize fighting, and an occasional drink with friends. These habits inevitably led to difficulties. Protestant fundamentalists tolerated few clerical departures from the "path of rightousness,"


21 Winfield Jones, The True Story of the Ku Klux Klan (Washington: no publisher, 1921), p. 34.
particularly intemperance. Yet the ill-fated apprenticeship proved valuable. From his religious training Simmons acquired one of the country churchman's most vaunted weapons -- the spellbinding quality of the revivalist preacher. Years later an Atlanta, Georgia, man who was prepared to reject everything Simmons said, paid tribute to his oratorical abilities. "He could have led that crowd anywhere," said the witness, "and I'm not sure I wouldn't have gone with the rest." In addition to his powerful voice Simmons had other qualities which would prove beneficial to him. He was an impressive person, stood over six feet tall, had a smooth-shaven face, and clear eyes. Perched atop a prominent nose were pince nez glasses which suggested wisdom and intellect rather than weak eyes. Moreover, his personality exuded sincerity. As one commentator expressed it, he was "as full of sentiment as a plum is full of juice."

22 Frank Bohn, "The Ku Klux Klan Interpreted," in The American Journal of Sociology, XXX (January, 1925), p. 391. See also Avin, "The Ku Klux Klan," p. 53. Avin asserts Simmons's moral impairment was a product of poor health, however there is no evidence to support such a conclusion.


Shortly after his dismissal from the Methodist church, Simmons appeared in Atlanta. It was there he began his career as a promoter of fraternal organizations. Fraternal societies, after a brief period of unpopularity in the antebellum period, had grown tremendously following the Civil War until they permeated not only college campuses but America's villages and cities as well. Most were secret or semisecret, and Americans displayed a great propensity for joining them. Usually they were not content with membership in a single fraternal society, but deemed it desirable to hold membership in several. Sinclair Lewis's literary character, George Babbitt, eloquently demonstrates the hold fraternalism had on America by the 1920's. Frequently one measure of a man's success was his fraternal or club affiliations.

It was as a promoter of such organizations that Simmons was to achieve his greatest success. Prior to 1915 he was most closely associated with the Woodmen of the World, a family fraternity which was also in the insurance business. He rapidly rose in the ranks of the Woodmen, attaining command of five regiments and the grade of Colonel. He employed the title the remainder of his life, never going to any great pains to explain its non-military origin. He also belonged to other organizations, including the Masons,
Knights Templar, and the Spanish-American War Veterans. "I am a fraternalist," he said when anyone asked his profession. 25

Tracing the elusive Colonel's movements becomes less difficult after 1915. The Atlanta City Directory reveals that between 1915 and 1921 he was engaged in several lines of activity. In 1915 he was listed as "Organizer, Woodmen of the World." The 1916 edition reported him as "founder and Imperial Wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan," and in 1918, the next year the directory was published, he was described as the "State Sales Manager, Heralds of Liberty." The 1920 edition listed him as a "Lecturer," and in 1921 he was again described as the "Imperial Wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan." 26 The years of World War One were not easy ones for Simmons, as the frequent changes in his employment indicate.

Exactly when Colonel Simmons first conceived the idea of erecting a new national fraternity on the edifice of the Ku Klux Klan of Reconstruction is impossible to establish. It is conceivable that The Birth of a Nation provided the notion, for it premiered fully six months prior to the reorganization of the Invisible Empire,

25 Quoted in Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, p. 25.

and some insiders claim Simmons's idea came from the movie. Moreover, it is a matter of record that he did exploit the film as publicity for the Klan when it appeared in Atlanta.  

There were also other possible sources. In 1914 the lynchers of Leo Frank had called themselves the "Knights of Mary Phagan," and Senator Tom Watson of Georgia was currently calling for the establishment of a new Ku Klux Klan.

Simmons vigorously denied his inspiration was the sensational motion picture or the murmurs of a racist politician. He contended instead that he had long determined to found a "fraternal, Patriotic, secret society . . . memorializing the great heroes of our national history, to teach and encourage a fervent and practical patriotism toward our country, and to destroy from the hearts of men the Mason and Dixon Line, and build thereupon a great American solidarity and distinctive national conscience . . . ."

From that noble purpose the flamboyant Imperial Wizard strayed into a mystical world apparently traversed by himself alone. The specific inspiration for the Ku Klux Klan came, he insisted, in a spectacular celestial vision. He was sitting outside his "cottage,"

---

27 Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, pp. 28, 30.

28 Higham, Strangers in the Land, pp. 185-186, 287.

29 Quoted in Duffus, "Salesmen of Hate," p. 32.
meditating on the hovering clouds above, he said. Suddenly, the billowy white forms reshaped themselves, moved rapidly across the horizon, and assumed the form of a vast army of warriors, superbly mounted and robed and hooded in white. Colonel Simmons accepted his vision as a call to save America. "Ere long," he said, "I clearly perceived the embryonic medium of its supply. I then and there solemnly dedicated my life, and consecrated my all to the task of maturing that medium. My first work and first duty were personal preparation. For fifteen long years I kept my own counsel and dreamed, worked, researched, studied, planned, prayed and persevered with all the earnestness, and unwavering devotion, of which my soul was capable."

Simmons wrote this explanation of the origin of the Klan in the 1920's, several years after the rebirth of the Invisible Empire. It has the sound of utter nonsense, but the alliterative Colonel probably believed his own words when they were penned. A close student of the Klan has observed: "One feels that without any conscious departure from the truth he could very easily convince himself, under the pressure of the immediate situation,


31 William Joseph Simmons, America's Menace or the Enemy Within (Atlanta, Georgia: Bureau of Patriotic Books, 1926), p. 65.
that the particular point he wished to make was the whole truth and nothing but the truth. . . .32

Arguments over the origins of the Klan are academic. William Joseph Simmons was the instrument of rebirth whatever the source of his ideas. In October, 1915, he gathered about him thirty-four Atlanta associates, including two members of the original Klan, and outlined his plan to organize a fraternal order based on the Ku Klux Klan of Reconstruction. The group agreed to formally associate themselves with the bespectacled former preacher and set in motion machinery to obtain a charter from the state of Georgia. A few weeks later Simmons and sixteen followers motored from Atlanta’s Piedmont Hotel to Stone Mountain, a solid mass of granite rising six hundred fifty feet above the surrounding countryside. There they enacted a peculiar ceremony which would have astounded persons unfamiliar with the purpose of the small group. Stone Mountain was a particularly good choice for the formal ceremonies of organization. For many years it had been the property of the Venable family, an impeccable clan of Southern lineage. It was ultimately purchased by the state of Georgia for the purpose of carving from its granite slopes a memorial to the

32 Mecklin, The Ku Klux Klan, p. 18.
"lost cause." There was no more fitting place for the rebirth of one of the more romantic symbols of the "lost cause" legend.

Once atop the granite mountain the small band "erected a fiery cross and spread an American flag over a crude altar builted with their own hands, and solemnly dedicated themselves, as Americans, to those principles of Americanism embodied in the Constitution of the United States, consecrated themselves as Protestants, to the tenets of the Christian religion, and pledged themselves, as white men to the eternal maintenance of white supremacy."33

Simmons was later to describe the event in more spectacular words. He wrote: "On the mountain top that night at the midnight hour while men braved the surging blasts of wintry mountain winds and endured a temperature far below freezing, bathed in the sacred glow of the fiery cross, the Invisible Empire was called forth from its slumber of half a century."34 A New York World reporter later unkindly proved the low recorded for Atlanta that evening was only forty-five degrees. Simmons rarely allowed

33This was Simmons's description of the event. Quoted in Duffus, "Salesmen of Hate," p. 32.

34Quoted in Avin, "The Ku Klux Klan," p. 56.
facts to obstruct his free literary style which one wag unsympathetically characterized as "neo-African." 35

The former preacher's account of the rebirth of the Invisible Empire attributes a magnificence the event did not enjoy. Of the thirty-four men he originally recruited, only sixteen joined him on the trek to Stone Mountain. Several months later, on July 1, 1916, when the state of Georgia granted the charter of incorporation, the original thirty-four associates had shrunk to twelve, including the Colonel. Indeed, the Invisible Empire had difficulty holding recruits within weeks after its reorganization, and that difficulty would be compounded in succeeding years.

A week later The Birth of a Nation opened at the Atlanta Theater, and Simmons moved to use the film as advertisement for the Invisible Empire. Appearing next to the movie announcement in the Atlanta Journal was a large drawing of a hooded and mounted Klansman proclaiming the organization of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, "The World's Greatest Secret, Social, Patriotic, Fraternal, Beneficiary Order." The Invisible Empire was further advertised as "A High Class Order for Men of Intelligence and

Character. The ad also claimed charter by the state of Georgia on December 6, 1915, although in actuality it was not finally granted until July 1, 1916.

The instrument of incorporation granted by Georgia bore considerable similarity to charters granted other fraternal societies. Indeed, the petition had specifically requested "such rights, powers and privileges as are now extended to the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, Free and Accepted Masons, [and] Knights of Pythias . . . ." The corporation was to be purely benevolent and eleemosynary, with no capital stock or provisions for gain for the incorporators; however, the charter granted to the incorporators the right to control the sale of all regalia, jewelry, stationery, and other materials required by subordinate branches. This privilege later proved to be a valuable source of income for the petitioners. Headquarters of the Invisible Empire was designated as Fulton County, Georgia, but it was granted authority to operate wherever it should be deemed desirable in the "conduct of its business." Executive authority was lodged in the office of the Imperial Wizard who was answerable to the legislative branch.

36Quoted in Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, p. 30.

37Charter of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, reprinted in Klan Hearings, pp. 101-102.
Simmons apparently assumed the office and executive authority of the Imperial Wizard inasmuch as there was no charter provision for his election. 38

Although a constitution was later drafted by Simmons, the simple structure of government outlined in the charter remained the guide for Klan administration until the 1920's. Only after he was succeeded as Imperial Wizard by Hiram Wesley Evans was this basic structure altered. In fact, all power rested in his hands for the next five years.

The Imperial Wizard shortly gathered ninety members to whom he sold memberships, raiment, and life insurance. He drew good, solid middle-class members including Robert Ramspect, future Georgia congressman, and Paul Etheridge, Atlanta lawyer and a member of Atlanta's Fulton County Board of Commissioners of Roads and Revenues. 39

But Simmons's initial success was short-lived. Under his leadership growth of the Klan languished fully five years before appreciable expansion occurred. As one observer has noted, in

38 Ibid.
its early career, the Invisible Empire was more "invisible than imperial."\(^{40}\)

For the new Imperial Wizard it was a period of very real poverty. Despite the use of what the Colonel termed "a logical businesslike plan," perfected while serving as organizer for the Woodmen of the World, he confessed to many setbacks. Once he explained: "The work was a tremendous struggle, made more arduous by a traitor in our ranks who held under me a position of trust, who embezzled all our accumulated funds in the summer of 1916 and went off to establish a counterfeit order."\(^{41}\) According to the Imperial Wizard, the theft left him penniless, and he was forced to mortgage his home to meet the debts of the order. In typical Simmons bravado he proclaimed: "During all this time of dread and darkness I virtually stood alone, but remaining true to the dictates of unsullied honor, I steered the infant organization through dangerous channels and finally succeeded in making good the payment of all debts, and starting the institution . . . upon nationwide expansion."\(^{42}\)

\(^{40}\)Higham, Strangers in the Land, p. 288.

\(^{41}\)Quoted in Duffus, "Salesmen of Hate," p. 33.

\(^{42}\)Quoted in ibid. See also Simmons, America's Menace, p. 68.
As a matter of fact, the self-glorifying Colonel's lack of business acumen was the weak link in early Klan operations. He wasted money, kept careless accounts, and in general followed impractical business procedures. He further held back the Klan's growth by insisting upon almost absolute secrecy. There was nothing wrong with secrecy, as later Klan developments were to demonstrate, but in its initial stages the Klan was too secret. Hardly known outside Alabama and Georgia, it attracted only one reference in the New York Times Index before 1920. There is good reason to believe that had the expansion of the Invisible Empire been left to Simmons alone, the Klan would have remained a Georgia and Alabama group exclusively. The Imperial Wizard, though physically impressive and a convincing speaker, was not made of the stuff necessary to organize and direct a national program of expansion.

Yet the snail-like expansion of the Klan was not due alone to Simmons's ineptitude. When the United States entered World War One, there occurred a temporary submergence of the normal racial and religious emotions on which the Klan would later feed. Americans were simply too occupied with winning the "Great War" to be moved by the exhortations of a former preacher concerning the dangers of racial amalgamation and the subordination of Protestantism to Catholicism. With a few exceptions, America's
native stock joined hands with minority groups in a great effort "to make the world safe for democracy." "Americans had no time for considering the color of skins," said William Robertson, the Southern historian, "nor time for quarrels and contentions about forms of worship and religious belief." Indeed, he claimed, "nativism was dead as a dodo." Fortunately for Colonel Simmons and the Ku Klux Klan, this happy circumstance would be only a brief passing phase. Normal times, emotions, and hatreds would return all too soon. The minor success achieved by the Klan during the war years resulted from temporarily abandoning racism and concentrating on a program of "one hundred percent Americanism," a profitable adoption continued after the war. During the war Simmons joined an auxiliary of the American Protective League and turned the Invisible Empire to the always popular task of spy-hunting. Exploiting this patriotic motif, the Klan, late in the war, held a public parade in Montgomery, Alabama, and warned "slackers and spies" to leave town. Other citizens were pressured to assist the Red Cross and purchase their fair share of Liberty Bonds. In Mobile, Alabama, the Klan intervened in a shipyard

strike. Elsewhere activity was limited to posting warnings and participating in patriotic parades.

By the end of the war the Klan could claim only a few thousand members. Four years of Simmon's leadership had failed to produce extensive growth. It was exclusively a Georgia and Alabama fraternal society struggling to retain its identity. Conditions wrought by a popular war had seriously hindered its growth, but brighter days were ahead -- days which would witness an unparalleled expansion of the secret society and make the words, "Ku Klux Klan" familiar and dreaded in every city and hamlet in America.
CHAPTER TWO

EXPANSION AND ALTERATION

IN THE TWENTIES

World War One ended amidst hopes of universal peace and tranquility at home. President Wilson carried his aspirations for a world free of conflict to Paris only to have them dashed on the rocks of national rivalry, war hatreds, and simple greed. The hope for domestic tranquility fared little better. Within weeks after the armistice difficulties wrought by two years of war tore gaping holes in the pattern of unity and common effort which had characterized the period of conflict. Labor, anxious for a greater share of the wealth it produced, adopted its most militant attitude ever, and strikes broke out from Seattle to Boston.

Accompanying the unprecedented labor difficulties was a new hysteria -- the so called red scare. Precipitated by the spread of Communism in Germany, Hungary, and other parts of Europe, and the establishment of the Third International in Moscow in 1919, the specter of radicalism in America became a matter of
serious public concern. The hysteria was climaxed by Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer's "raid" on the night of January 2, 1920, when some 4,000 persons were arrested for alleged Communist activities.

Troubled race relations added more fuel to the fires of discord. Serious race riots broke out in Chicago, Knoxville, Tennessee, Omaha, Nebraska, Longview, Texas, and Elaine, Arkansas. A final count at the end of 1919 revealed a total of twenty-five riots, millions of dollars of property damage, and, more tragic, hundreds dead. By the end of the progressive decade there was little evidence of the cohesive forces which bound America together during two years of war. Signs of new discord were emerging to join the revival of prewar animosities.

Meantime, the Imperial Wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, William Joseph Simmons, continued to experience adversity. The twelve months following the establishment of peace brought precious few recruits seeking membership in the Colonel's "classy order." Although the organization claimed 5,000 members by 1920, the best evidence suggests that the figure was exaggerated. Simmons's talent lay in the realm of fraternal ideas and ritual.

---

He lacked the capacity to execute his ideas and follow them through to victory; under pressure he tended to retreat. Capitalization on the vast potential of the Klan would require stronger and more capable hands.

Fortunately for the future of the Invisible Empire, Simmons shortly was to come upon better days. Early in 1920 he met Edward Young Clarke, bespectacled square-jawed brother of Francis Clarke, managing editor of the Atlanta Constitution. Although he was a member of a distinguished Georgia family, Edward Y. Clarke had yet to attain any real distinction. As a matter of fact, he often found himself in difficulties with the law because of his predilection for making easy money. He first experienced legal troubles in 1910 when he was charged with irregularities in church funds for which he was responsible. After this episode there followed a period in his life when he lived an honest but obscure existence as a reporter for the Atlanta

459, estimates the membership at that time to have been 5,000. Fredrick Lewis Allen, Only Yesterday: An Informal History Of The Nineteen-Twenties (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1931), p. 65, argues that Klan membership was only a few hundred in 1920. The total membership was probably close to 2,000. See Klan Hearings, p. 17.

Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, p. 31.
Constitution and as a solicitor and salesman of memberships for the Woodmen of the World. Like Simmons he was a dreamer, but his dreams were of more tangible stuff. During the war he was employed in war fund drives and had learned that people often give blindly to causes which on the surface seem worthy.

Associated with Clarke was Mrs. Elizabeth Tyler, a blue-eyed, auburn-haired widow of some feminine charm despite her more than ample figure. The widow favored black, from her patent leather shoes to her broadcloth cape, and her self-assured and decisive manner of speech gave her an air of forcefulness. A deceased husband had left her financially comfortable, though not wealthy. The slim, curly-haired Clarke met Mrs. Tyler when she was handling a publicity campaign for a "Better Babies Parade." Apparently they impressed one another, for they jointly formed the Southern Publicity Association which was largely financed by Mrs. Tyler, a fact which might explain her later influence over her partner. The partnership proved successful, and Clarke's

---


4Ibid. See also Duffus, "Salesmen of Hate," p. 34.

5Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, p. 31.
gifts of salesmanship were particularly manifested in the firm's handling of such blameless causes as the Roosevelt Memorial Fund and the Near East Relief Fund.  

No reliable evidence exists showing who initiated the meeting between Simmons and the Southern Publicity Association, although Mrs. Tyler later inferred that Simmons came to the firm. At any rate, on June 7, 1920, Colonel Simmons, acting in his capacity as Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan, executed a contract with Clarke which placed future expansion of the Invisible Empire in the capable hands of the genial promoter. Clarke was given the resounding title of "Imperial Kleagle," or general superintendent of the organization department. He was empowered to hire his own personnel, although they were required to be Klansmen in good standing and were nominally subject to the approval of the Imperial Wizard. The contract reflected the fact that imaginative recruiting

---

6 Allen, Only Yesterday, p. 65.

7 The Clarke-Simmons contract reveals much about the Klan in 1920. For example, the Invisible Empire was obviously Simmons's personal organization, because there is no evidence in the contract or elsewhere that anyone other than the Imperial Wizard participated in the decision to employ the Southern Publicity Association. See contract executed between William Joseph Simmons and Edward Young Clarke, June 7, 1920, reprinted in Klan Hearings, p. 32.
would cost big money. As Imperial Kleagle, Clarke was to receive eight dollars of each ten dollar initiation fee paid by charter members of Klans organized by himself or his subordinates. He was paid an additional two dollars from each membership added to Klans organized by himself or his subordinates for six months after issuance of their charter. The contract failed to spell out the division of fees received from members added after the six month period elapsed; however, part of it was allotted to the local Klan and the remainder was sent to Atlanta. Simmons received two dollars for each member added under the terms of his contract with Clarke and also office space and travel expenses to be furnished by the Imperial Kleagle. 8

The Clarke-Simmons contract marked the end of the initial phase of Klan development and inaugurated a series of important changes which dramatically altered Klanism as it had been practiced under the Imperial Wizard's singular leadership. In the first place, the power of Simmons was to gradually diminish as the more forceful personalities of Clarke and Mrs. Tyler were blended into the power structure of the Klan hierarchy. Although the diminution of the Imperial Wizard's authority was slow, and at times imperceptible, evidence of the growing importance of the Southern

8 Ibid.
Publicity Association was apparent by mid-1921. The steady erosion of Simmons's authority was largely the product of his disassociation with propagation, frequent illness, and an alarming tendency to go on drinking "binges" which often lasted for weeks. Thus, Simmons, by his own weaknesses, created a power vacuum which the aggressive owners of the Southern Publicity Association were eager to fill.

Secondly, the execution of the contract marked the end of the Klan as a purely Southern organization and inaugurated expansion of the Invisible Empire into the North and West. Expansion outside the South came more as a response to growing interest in the Klan than as a result of initial planning. Mrs. Tyler later explained that the triumvirate's hopes had been modest and primarily directed toward the South, but "the minute we said 'Ku Klux' editors from all over the United States began literally pressing us for publicity."9

So unprepared were Clarke and Simmons for their initial notoriety that they refused to pose for photographs for the New York Times. The reporter was undaunted. He had seen The Birth of a Nation and knew his stuff. Off he went, rigged his uniforms, hired the cheapest labor available, lit a couple of crosses, and snapped

9Quoted in Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, p. 32.
his picture. Much to its dismay, the Klan was later to discover that the first pictures of its hooded Knights to appear in America had been posed by "twenty sons of Ham at two bits a head."\(^{10}\)

Finally, Clarke's rise to power in Klan circles resulted in the extension and alteration of the secret order's program. A simple program of white supremacy, fraternalism, and patriotism had characterized Klanism under Simmons. In many respects it was not unlike numerous other fraternal societies which shrouded the mumbo jumbo of their ritualism in secrecy. Clarke retained the basic features of Klanism exploited by Simmons, but under his careful direction the Klan now assumed the motif which characterized its subsequent history. That motif was Anglo-Saxon nationalism. Anglo-Saxon nationalism meant more than simple white supremacy, although white supremacy was now proclaimed with renewed vigor. In its broader meaning it was an expression of the racial, cultural, and religious superiority of the old native-stock American who, correctly or incorrectly, traced his ancestral origins to Anglo-Saxons.

---

Perhaps its most vigorous tenet was the superiority of Protestantism, the overwhelming religious affiliation of old-stock Americans. Protestant superiority, as expressed within Anglo-Saxon nationalism, manifested itself as militant anti-Catholicism. The Klan's version of Anglo-Saxon nationalism was not a constructive program. Rather, it bore unmistakable markings of a defense mechanism determined to thwart "alien" or foreign influences which appeared to compromise the integrity of American culture. Concrete solutions were rarely offered. Instead, Anglo-Saxon nationalism, as expressed by the Klan, was a program of hate, designed to appeal to the uneducated, the village bigot, the joiner, and the opportunist.\(^{11}\)

Simmons's acquiescence in the expansion and alteration of the Klan program was dramatically illustrated when he appeared before an audience of Georgia Klansmen, removed a Colt automatic from his pocket, took a revolver from another pocket, removed a cartridge belt, unsheathed a bowie knife, and plunged it into the middle of the podium. "Now let the Niggers, Catholics, Jews, and all others who disdain my imperial wizardy, come on," he said.\(^{12}\)


\(^{12}\)Quoted in Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, p. 33.
The Imperial Wizard's ludicrous performance eloquently illustrated another important aspect of the Klan's use of Anglo-Saxon nationalism. The inference was simple. The Catholics, Jews, and Negroes were on the attack, and it was the duty of every "real American" to join hands within the Klan to promote a joint defense of America against a common enemy. On still another occasion, with reference to the threat of Negro domination, he reiterated his simple argument. "We must choose," he said, "between segregation, amalgamation, and extermination." Many Americans would find the argument alluring.

Edward Young Clarke and Elizabeth Tyler hoped to make money from the Klan, an inducement Simmons accepted willingly enough. The profit motive was the purpose of the alteration of the Klan program. Newspaper publicity had prompted some initial success in the South, but if the Klan was to be really profitable an elaborate organization capable of spreading the Invisible Empire's message from one corner of the country to the other was required. Clarke hit upon the idea of a national canvassing organization. Atlanta, the Klan's capital city, would serve as national headquarters. The United States was then carved up into

---

ten sales territories, called Domains. The size of each Domain was related to population, the obvious potential for profit, and each had a sales manager called the Grand Goblin. Domains were then sub-divided into Realms, or states, each under the direction of a state sales manager called the King Kleagle. The actual canvassing and organization of local chapters was the job of the Kleagle, whose territory might include a large city or several rural counties. The work, although strictly on a commission basis, proved remunerative.

The ten dollar initiation fee, called a Donation, was divided in the following manner. The local solicitor, or Kleagle, kept four dollars when he signed up a recruit, the King Kleagle with­held one dollar, and the Grand Goblin fifty cents. The remaining four dollars and fifty cents was sent to Atlanta and divided according to the Clarke-Simmons contract.

The local member proved a rich vein of income, and the Atlanta triumvirate tapped him liberally. Robes, manufactured by the affiliated Gate City Manufacturing Company, cost three

---


dollars and twenty-eight cents and were sold for six dollars and fifty cents. Newspapers, magazines, and other Klan printed matter were turned out at a substantial profit by another Klan enterprise, the Searchlight Publishing Company. Local chapters were supported by monthly dues of one dollar, part of which was sent to state headquarters. There must have been times when Klan leaders hummed the old refrain, "my, how the money rolls in."

Clarke recruited his local solicitors much in the same way modern sales organizations might recruit sales personnel, although preference was usually extended to men with fraternal backgrounds, particularly Masons. It was assumed they would not be particularly apprehensive about Klan denunciations of Roman Catholicism.

In time the demands of success prompted less care in the selection of recruiters, and newspaper ads became the standard device to find solicitors. A typical one appeared in a New York paper. "Fraternal Organization Men Wanted. Splendid Opportunity. High Class, Remunerative Work. Organization and Propagation of a Fraternal Order to Which Real Americans are

---

16 Ibid.

17 Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, p. 34.
Flocking. Applicants must have a clean record and must be a native born Gentile Protestant American. Some Eastern territory still open."\textsuperscript{18}

Too frequently the standard test of employment, aside from the white, gentile Protestant requirement, was not the possession of a "clean record," as the Klan advertised, but the ability to expand the membership rolls of the Invisible Empire. Salesmen of the 1920's were trained to believe that the end justified the means, and Klan solicitors practiced the doctrine with vengeance.\textsuperscript{19} Every local fear, anxiety, and hatred was exploited to enlarge Klan rolls. The success of Klan recruiters was phenomenal.

Although the Klan never developed a uniform procedure of propagation, certain practices became more or less standard. The method of recruiting was closely related to area (town or city), section, community racial structure, and religious distribution. Much of the Klan's success in recruiting members can be attributed to the flexibility of the propagation department. During the early years the Imperial Wizard might personally

\textsuperscript{18}New York World, September 8, 1921.

appear and speak to interested audiences, but soon increased efficiency under Clarke made it possible to leave actual recruiting to subordinates.

In small communities solicitors discreetly sought out individuals expected to be sympathetic to the Invisible Empire and enrolled them as members. Klan policy dictated particular attention to ministers, law enforcement authorities, and community leaders. Community leaders and churchmen were not only good sources for additional recruits, but in the event of difficulties with the law the community power structure was there for support.

In Tennessee, the King Kleagle of that state, J. M. McArthur, decided to recruit in the state executive mansion. The governor was reported interested and enthusiastic, but wished to discuss the advisability of membership with friends before committing himself. Local religious and fraternal lodges also proved fruitful fields for harvesting citizens for the Invisible Empire, especially the Masonic lodges in smaller communities.20

Once established, the Kleagle was to find out what troubled the community and offer the Klan as a solution. Frequently newly

20 Author's personal interview with Mr. Russell Pregeant, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, April 5, 1961. Hereinafter cited as Pregeant interview. See also Higham, Strangers in the Land, p. 289.
formed Klans wrote Atlanta asking instructions for a program of action. Almost invariably the answer was "clean up the town." The Klan's "town-tamer" reputation proved an effective agent of expansion for the organization. Leading businessmen brought the Klan to Muncie, Indiana, to deal with a corrupt Democratic city administration, and Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Herrin County, Illinois, brought in the Klan to halt bootlegging.21

As Clarke's expansion program reached into populous Eastern and Midwestern cities, organizational methods were adapted to meet the peculiar problems posed by metropolitan areas. Usually a skeleton force moved into the city, selected suitable office space, and recruited sales personnel. Propagation in a small town was an individual effort, but city recruiting involved teamwork. Once established, headquarters indiscriminately mailed out letters, apparently using telephone books and city directories as a source of names, appealing to "real men" and "one hundred percent Americans," who were white, native born and gentile, and who believed in "the tenets of the Christian religion and in separation of church and state."22 Accompanying the letter were

21 Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, p. 33.
22 New York World, September 8, 1921.
two enclosures, the ABC's of the Ku Klux Klan and a reprint from the April, 1920, issue of McClure's Magazine entitled "Scum O' the Melting Pot," by Herbert Kaufman, which protested the naturalization of undesirable aliens. Interested individuals were instructed to fill out a questionnaire relating to their race, religion, political affiliation, and attitude on white supremacy. After Klan representatives hastily screened returned questionaires, individuals who met the standards of the Invisible Empire were called upon by a Kleagle to "close the deal." It was in the big cities that Clarke's genius for organization really paid off. Two to four thousand members was not unusual for a metropolitan Klan.

Occasionally indiscriminate use of letters of inquiry backfired on the propagation department and provided some embarrassing moments for the Klan. One such letter was mistakenly mailed to a New York City Negro who unkindly turned it over to the local branch of the NAACP. On the surface the incident was humorous, but it eloquently demonstrated the difficulties the Invisible Empire had remaining invisible once it inaugurated its massive expansion program.

23 The question relating to political affiliation was apparently designed to weed out persons on the extreme fringes of the American political spectrum. The Klan made no distinction between Democrats and Republicans.

24 New York World, September 8, 1921.
The Klan had always appealed to white supremacy, but after Clarke assumed direction the exploitation of religious and racial prejudices was practiced with a vengeance. The Atlanta Searchlight, the rabid Klan newspaper, spread venom wherever it circulated. A typical letter to the editor signed simply "American," superbly typified its editorial slant. According to the "American," the "Negro situation was becoming worse because Jewish agitators were plotting to create a race war, not to benefit the blacks, but to destroy the government." He concluded his piece of hate with the remarkable conclusion that "in all my twenty-five years of traveling about this continent I have never met a disloyal American who failed to be either foreign born or a Semite." Other issues reflected a similar attitude. The July 23, 1921, issue condemned President Harding for appointing a Negro to public office and applauded Georgia Senator Thomas Watson's criticism of the assignment. Its front page headlines for February 26, 1921, literally screamed the Klan message, proclaiming "Clean Bill of Health Given KKK, Alien Invasion is Threatening, Foreign Born Menace to U S, America Teems With

25Atlanta Searchlight, July 30, 1921.
26Ibid.
27Ibid., July 23, 1921.
Agitators, Officials Pass Immigrants With Typhus Vermin, Aspirations of the NAACP, and A Jewish Rabbi Gets Rabid. "28

The Protestant, published in Washington, D. C., by vicious anti-Catholics, was also used by the Klan. The King Kleagle of Tennessee, J. M. McArthur, advised one of his Kleagles to subscribe to the journal because "it brings home in concrete form to them [Klan prospects] the things we have to guard against."29 The Kleagle reported that The Protestant was eagerly read by Klansmen wherever it circulated and was a valuable asset in securing recruits.30 In addition to the Searchlight and The Protestant, other journals, such as Henry Ford's violently anti-Semitic Dearborn Independent, served to spread the hate on which Klan organizers fed.

The imagination of the corps of Kleagles seemed almost limitless. They also used rabble-rousing public speakers, most of whom were Protestant ministers who surrendered their pulpits for the more lucrative career of a Klan lecturer.31 Movies,

28Ibid., February 26, 1921.

29Quoted in Fry, The Modern Ku Klux Klan, p. 118.

30Ibid.

31Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, p. 34.
Agitators, Officials Pass Immigrants With Typhus Vermin,
Aspirations of the NAACP, and A Jewish Rabbi Gets Rabid."

The Protestant, published in Washington, D.C., by vicious
anti-Catholics, was also used by the Klan. The King Kleagle of
Tennessee, J.M. McArthur, advised one of his Kleagles to
subscribe to the journal because "it brings home in concrete form
to them the things we have to guard against." The Kleinkleagle reported that The Protestant was eagerly read by
Klansmen wherever it circulated and was a valuable asset in
securing recruits. In addition to the Searchlight and The
Protestant, other journals, such as Henry Ford's violently anti-
semitic Dearborn Independent, served to spread the hate on which
Klan organizers fed.

The imagination of the corps of Kleagles seemed almost
limitless. They also used rabble-rousing public speakers, most
of whom were Protestant ministers who surrendered their pulpits
for the more lucrative career of a Klan lecturer. Movies,

---

28 Ibid., February 26, 1921.
29 Quoted in Fry, The Modern Ku Klux Klan, p. 118.
30 Ibid.
31 Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, p. 34.
among which was *The Birth of a Nation*, were used to arouse intense emotion and glorify the Klan. Commenting on one such film, one Klan official coldly ordered: "When they see the picture produce a membership form to sign. If they don't sign then they aren't the type of men we want anyway." 32 And sometimes, but not frequently, the Klan spread rumors of Negro uprisings in some distant community, hoping that the fear of possible race difficulties would produce recruits from the community being solicited. 33

Unfortunately, in many communities, sensationalism in recruiting brought to leadership of local Klans a hard core willing to use the Invisible Empire as an instrument to settle old rivalries, intimidate minority groups and religious dissenters, and seize the initiative from law enforcement officials in attempting to maintain community order. Students of the Klan have too frequently excused Simmons for this development and have placed the blame almost entirely on Clarke. 34 He was "a well-meaning dreamer, impractical and inefficient . . .,"

32 Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, September 22, 1921.
33 Ibid.
they argue. The inference usually made is that Clarke took advantage of an incapable mystic and turned his innocent fraternal and patriotic society into an evil organization peddling hate and prejudice. There is no evidence that William Joseph Simmons, as the Imperial Wizard, took any action to stem the tendencies developing under Clarke's leadership, but there is considerable evidence that he knowingly and willingly participated in virtually every line of action Clarke and his supporters followed. Simmons was no innocent "babe" mesmerized by the superior will of Clarke. Rather, he knew what was happening, took no action to prevent it, and therefore must equally share the blame for the direction the Klan took after 1920.

The headlong campaign to recruit new members soon bore fruit in the form of increased Klan activity. 1920 was a slow year, although there was some Klan night riding. In Jacksonville, Florida, five hundred masked Klansmen marched through the city streets distributing placards warning "undesirables, both black and white," to cease their "loafing, thieving, and

35 Ibid.
36 See quotation of speech made by Simmons before a Georgia Klan in Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, p. 33.
prowling around." During the same year the Klan took a hand in a vice crusade in Anniston, Alabama, and participated in another parade in Columbus, Georgia.  

Klan activity erupted with the fury of an angry volcano in 1921, with much of the violence centered in Texas. In January a Dallas Negro bellboy, Alexander Johnson, had the letters "KKK" branded on his forehead for the unpardonable crime of soliciting business for a hotel's white prostitutes. Had similar punishment been meted out for each such instance of this practice, the South would have become a veritable wasteland of branded bellboys. In February a Houston lawyer was treated to an unbecoming tonsorial operation and ordered to leave the community for trafficking with Negro clients. In Beaumont Dr. J. S. Paul was tarred and feathered for alleged malpractice, and in Houston J. W. McGee, a taxi driver, was whipped for flirting with women. In


38 Robertson, The Changing South, p. 250.

the six months prior to August, 1921, The Literary Digest reported forty-three "tar and feather parties" in Texas, including a white female victim.  

Violence in Texas was matched elsewhere. In various parts of the South the burning of cotton gins was attributed to the Klan. In May a huge Klan celebration was held in Atlanta, and in Cincinnati some 2,000 Klansmen openly staged ceremonies. In Missouri a sixty-year-old farmer was whipped, and in Florida an archdeacon of an Episcopal church was whipped and tarred and feathered.

By midsummer 1921 the brazen activities of the Invisible Empire were spreading alarm across the country, and public officials began to strike out at the intangible form of the Klan. The Boston district attorney appealed to the community to assist him in opposing the organization, while police officials in Connecticut were ordered to investigate the secret society. Detroit prohibited the showing of a Klan film, and the Chicago City Council barred the organization from the city.

---


41Higham, Strangers in the Land, pp. 289-290. Higham explains that although the Klan disavowed gin-burning, gin-burners frequently wore Klan uniforms.

Meanwhile, newspapers which originally exploited the Klan as a curiosity piece now exploited its news value as a danger to society. One of the first papers to unsparingly criticize the Invisible Empire was the Houston Chronicle. It bitterly asserted:

"It matters not who can get into your organization or who is kept out; any group of men can ape your disguise, your method and your practices. If outrages occur for which you are not accountable -- and they will -- you have no way of clearing yourselves, except by throwing off your disguise and invoking the publicity you have sought to deny. Your role of masked violence, of purification by stealth, of reform by terrorism is an impossible one. Your position is such that you must accept responsibility for every offense which smacks of tyranny."

The Chronicle early hit upon one of the central problems which would plague the Klan. In subsequent months masked violence -- non-Klan in origin -- frequently was blamed on the Invisible Empire. Although Atlanta piously denied responsibility, it never convinced substantial portions of the nation that while it might be directly innocent it was not indirectly guilty. The charge that masks created an atmosphere which encouraged individuals

---

to use them to settle old animosities or engage in crime was valid.

The Chronicle warning began a gigantic wave of publicity which soon enveloped the nation's metropolitan press. The Klan was big news, and enterprising reporters flooded their editors with factual and imaginary stories about masked night riders. Moreover, news of the Klan was quickly recognized as a circulation builder, particularly if stories were slanted toward sensationalism. And like most sensations, news reports on the Invisible Empire lacked proportion. Gradually, the press took sides. The metropolitan press was overwhelmingly anti-Klan, while small town papers tended to support the organization or ignore it.

In early July, 1921, in the midst of national newspaper coverage, Clarke wrote Simmons a glowing report of the growth of the order: "In the past three or four months we have added to our membership a little more than 48,000 members. In all my experience ... I have never seen anything equal to the clamor ... for the Klan. The headquarters of the domain chiefs are located in New York, Washington, Indianapolis, Denver, Dallas, Houston and Los Angeles. In all these cities our investigators are working eighteen hours a day, and in most instances are three or four months
behind the list of applicants. He then called attention to the secrecy the Klan had been able to maintain. "Although we are located in all the cities named ... the enemy has yet to locate us, even though they have made a diligent search. We are completely camouflaged in each of these places and it will be a miracle if we are located [discovered] in any city where headquarters have been established." 

Simmons made much of Klan secrecy and regarded the mysteries of the Invisible Empire as inviolable. Each individual Klansman was required to take a sacred oath never to divulge any information about the order, including his own membership. Violation of this oath carried extreme penalties; however, there is no evidence such penalties were consistently assessed. Both Simmons and Clarke recognized the value of secrecy to the Klan. They knew, for example, that it was a feature of Klanism which would sell memberships, that many individuals joined for that reason alone. Thus, they talked broadly about the Klan as "the most secret of all secret societies." What they failed to realize, or at least properly

44Edward Young Clarke to William Joseph Simmons, July 2, 1921, quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, September 9, 1921.

45Ibid.
appreciate, was that the national propagation campaign had seriously compromised Klan security. Moreover, as the Klan was recognized as a newspaper circulation builder, key members found it profitable to sell inside information. Finally, the impractical Imperial Wizard had copyrighted most Klan ritual. These documents were available in Washington for anyone curious enough to examine them. Despite such obvious holes in their security, Klan leaders publicly boasted about the secrecy of the Invisible Empire, virtually challenging outsiders to discover the "most sublime of all mysteries."

The pugnacious challenge was not long unheeded. In early July, 1921, Henry Peck Fry, a Kleagle in Tennessee, turned over to the New York World substantial documentary information relating to Klan activities in that state. The World's executive editor, Herbert Bayard Swope, then assigned Rowland Thomas to conduct an investigation to augment the information supplied by Fry.

On September 6, 1921, the World exploded the results of the investigation in banner headlines. For twenty-one successive days the New York paper devoted its front page to exposing Klan secrets, relegating even such burning current stories as the alleged murder

46See, for example, William Joseph Simmons, The Practice of Klannishness (Atlanta, Georgia: no publisher, 1918), no pagination.
of Virginia Rappe by movie comedian "Fatty" Arbuckle to the back pages. But the World series was more than a simple exposure, it was newspaper sensationalism at its worst. It pictured the Klan as a "militaristic organization," Simmons as a demon "hungering for dictatorial power," and unabashedly charged Klan leaders were attempting to establish an "invisible government" which would take over the United States and destroy constitutional government. The series was obviously designed to sell papers, an aim it more than successfully achieved. Carried by eighteen other metropolitan dailies the series reached 5,000,000 readers per issue. 47

The expose alarmed Clarke and Simmons. Four days after the World fired its opening blast Mrs. Tyler was dispatched to New York in an apparent attempt to offset what was believed to be damaging publicity. Her mission was partially successful. In New York she told a press conference the attacks on the Klan were unjust and emphasized the order's nobler aspirations. She was particularly emphatic in describing the Klan as the protector of "the purity and chastity of womanhood" and of "the sanctity of the home." Her choice of arguments proved to be a tactical error.

47 Fry, The Modern Ku Klux Klan, p. 223.
A few days after she returned to Atlanta, satisfied that her New York mission had been successful, the World published information relating to her private life which made a mockery of the widow's New York statements. The September 19 installment carried a story, with corroborating evidence, showing that Mrs. Tyler and Clarke had been arrested on October 31, 1919, "in their sleeping garments" at a "notorious underworld resort" run by Mrs. Tyler. The World spared no juicy detail, including the facts that the two Klan leaders gave assumed names at the time of arrest, that Clarke's brother, Francis Clarke, managing editor of the Atlanta Constitution, had put up the bail, that a conviction had been obtained, and that liquor had been found on the premises.48

Publication of the facts surrounding the Clarke-Tyler arrest topped the list of exposures by the World. Mrs. Tyler, pictured by the Klan as the epitome of female virtue and purity, had been sullied, and Clarke, who had helped make America dry by collecting funds for the Anti-Saloon League, had been linked with "demon" rum. It was a black hour! The incident was calculated to create serious repercussions from rank and file members. One New Jersey Kleagle, apparently a man who took his Klanism seriously, telegraphed Simmons demanding the immediate removal of the

48New York World, September 19, 1921.
scarred publicity agents. Other similar demands poured in from around the country. The Imperial Wizard was aware of the crisis, but he also recognized the value of his trusted lieutenants. He stood his ground, saying only that he had heard rumors of the arrests but attached to them no credence. A few weeks later when reporters went to Atlanta's police files to verify the charges, the documents relating to the incident had mysteriously disappeared.

In a rare display of strength Simmons stood his ground during the crisis, but Clarke was admittedly frightened. On September 24, he announced his resignation from the office of Imperial Klagle, claiming he did not wish to subject Mrs. Tyler to further criticism. In reality he feared Congress might heed the World's demands for an investigation. The credit for weathering the storm goes to Mrs. Tyler. She first heard of her associate's resignation from reporters. Furious, she denounced her partner as a "weak-kneed" quitter and announced her intention to stand by the organization. She undoubtedly sensed the situation better than Clarke. The exposures were free publicity. Moreover, the attack had come from an Eastern metropolitan newspaper. It could be used to the Klan's advantage, particularly in the South and the Midwest. The spirited female publicity agent carried the day. Clarke withdrew his

49 New Orleans Times-Picayune, September 25, 1921.
resignation within forty-eight hours, and the Klan took the offensive.\footnote{Loucks, \textit{The Ku Klux Klan in Pennsylvania}, p. 22.}

The Klan shored up its defenses at home by issuing an announcement to local chapters that the World's charges would be answered in a series of twelve pro-Klan newspaper articles.\footnote{Minutes of Old Hickory Klan Number One, New Orleans, March 20, 1922, in W. D. Robinson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Hereinafter cited as Robinson Papers.} The articles never appeared, but the announcement served to temporarily pacify the faithful. In the meantime, the Searchlight sprang to the defense of Mrs. Tyler. Adopting a tactic later made popular by Senator Joseph McCarthy, Carl F. Hutcheson disregarded the facts and penned a ringing, emotional reply to the World's attack on her character. "The womanhood of this country has been criminally assaulted," he said. Playing the country against the city he proclaimed: "The unwarranted murderous attack sprang from the brain of Pulitzer . . . . His paper is located in a city . . . where woman's virtue is played with . . . . Southern womanhood has been slaughtered! No woman's good name is safe . . . . Your mother, sister, and daughters are unsafe from the millionaire newspaper owners . . . . Who is back of this damnable juggernaut
which extinguishes a woman's life, character, and reputation? . . .

Patriots, I take pleasure in tearing from their demonical faces, the masks! Patriots, view the hellish countenances of Hundreds of Thousands of Knights of Columbus and Millions of the Roman Catholic Church. 52

Hutcheson's retort contained most of the ingredients of typical Klan answers to any attack. Evil Jews, power-grabbing Roman Catholics, and sinful cities became familiar stereotypes in Klan literature. As the movement matured, Klan lecturers consistently drove home the point that metropolitan newspapers could not be trusted, for they were controlled by Jews, Catholics, and foreigners.

The World intended its attack to be a fatal blow from which the Klan would not recover; unfortunately, the exposures had several opposite effects, all of which significantly aided the expansion of the Klan. First, apparently to add urgency to its cause, the World tremendously overestimated the size of the Klan. Their figures showed the Invisible Empire's membership to be between 500,000 and 750,000, when actual membership numbered less than 100,000. 53 The exposé thus attributed to the

52 Quoted in Fry, The Modern Ku Klux Klan, pp. 231-232.
53 Klan Hearings, p. 87.
organization an affluence and popularity it did not enjoy. Secondly, the attack itself was a tremendous boon in free publicity, publicity which the Klan could not have purchased at any price. It might be asserted that it was all hostile publicity, but as a close student of the Klan has observed, "opposition from anyone at anytime never seriously hurt the Klan." The argument is overstated, but the World attack certainly did not injure the Invisible Empire. Finally, it was instrumental in prompting a congressional investigation which kept the Klan in newspaper headlines for several weeks following the appearance of the series.

Students of the Klan have too frequently dismissed the World attack as an inconsequential episode in the organization's history or have failed to grasp its real significance. Simmons recognized its importance, pointing out later that many people had used the facsimile coupons reprinted in the World and other journals to apply for membership. "It wasn't until the newspapers began to attack the Klan that it really grew," he said.  


55 Quoted in Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, p. 38.
Even before Pulitzer's literary blasts, there had been insistent demands that the national government take action against the hooded order. The Klan was accused of a vast number of illegal acts, including violations of several constitutional amendments and avoidance of income tax payments. Many Klan opponents hoped the President and the Department of Justice would take action; however, the executive branch decided it was strictly a state matter and refused to intervene. Although government action against the Invisible Empire seemed timely, there were sound legal arguments for its position on the Klan. Judicial interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment had established fairly conclusively that individual civil rights would be protected from arbitrary state action; however, the idea that those same rights should be protected from arbitrary private (mobs) action was legally at low tide. After the Civil War Congress had passed a series of laws, including the Enforcement Act of 1866, the Enforcement Act of May 31, 1870, and the so-called Ku Klux Act of April 20, 1871, to deal with violations of civil rights by individuals or groups of individuals.  

56 The Act of April 20, 1871, was aimed particularly at the Klan. It prohibited forming conspiracies, resisting officers, threatening or injuring witnesses, and going abroad in disguise for the purpose of intimidating citizens. See U. S., The Statutes at Large and Proclamations of the United States of America From
of these laws had either been declared unconstitutional or weakened by judicial interpretation. Consequently, federal action against the Klan under existing legislation seemed to be of dubious legality, especially to a man with the temperament of Warren G. Harding.

Despite legal problems, the public outcry for action was becoming too insistent to go unheeded. Therefore, in early October the Rules Committee of the House of Representatives began hearings on the controversial secret society. Lasting only a week, the hearings were rambling rather than probing, causing one to wonder just how deeply Congress wished to delve into the matter. Rowland Thomas, reporter for the New York World, was the first witness examined. His testimony was little more than an aping of the stories he helped write a month earlier. C. Anderson Wright, a former Kleagle, and O. B. Williamson, a post office inspector, attempted to provide the committee with inside information on

---


Klan finances. Director of the Bureau of Investigation of the Department of Justice, William J. Burns, was called, but declined to testify because his organization was investigating the Klan.

Simmons was the last and the most spectacular witness. The Imperial Wizard always displayed a good conception of theatrics, and his performance before the committee proved his thespian capabilities. When Simmons was called by Committee Chairman Phillip P. Campbell of Kansas, Congressman D. W. Upchurch of Georgia insisted on reading a laudatory introduction of the Imperial Wizard into the official record of the hearings. Simmons was then allowed to read a prepared statement without interruption prior to his interrogation. Invoking the Almighty, the Imperial Wizard announced that if the charges against the Klan were proved true he would disband the organization. "Before God, I have never signed any instructions that could be construed or considered as a violation of the law," he said. "The Klan does not tolerate or teach lawlessness."58

Simmons was on the stand for three days, and his testimony fills most of the pages of the hearings. He consistently denied Klan responsibility for violence, attacked his enemies whenever possible, and heatedly charged the hearings were a persecution.

58 Quoted in New York Times, October 13, 1921.
of the Invisible Empire. Congressional investigators turned up little information Simmons did not want them to have. The climax of his testimony called forth the Imperial Wizard's best theatrics. Having previously complained of illness, "tonsilitis, which, combined with laryngitis, had developed into bronchitis and threatened pneumonia," he launched an attack on his persecutors, who he claimed were as ignorant of Klan principles as were others of the character of Christ. "I cannot better express myself than by saying to you who are persecutors of the Klan and myself, Father, forgive you, for you know not what you do, and Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Mr. Chairman, I am done." 59 With that -- in a brilliantly staged climax -- the Imperial Wizard tumbled face down to the floor.

A candid reading of the hearings conducted by Congress reveals that the government did not establish a case against the Klan. Simmons foiled every effort of committee members to officially connect the Klan with the crimes attributed to it by the press. Moreover, the committee allowed its chief witness to dominate the hearings. Simmons was later to attribute the failure of Congress to continue its investigation to Congressman D. W. Upshaw's threat to extend the investigation to all other secret organizations;

59 Quoted in Fry, The Modern Ku Klux Klan, pp. 249-250.
however, it is more probable that the Klan was an issue Congress wished to avoid for the immediate future. When Committee Chairman, Phillip Campbell, was defeated for reelection at the next election, able politicians nodded knowingly.  

The results of the World expose and the congressional investigation turned out as Mrs. Tyler had anticipated. The Southern Publicity Association had been successful in adding about 100,000 members to Klan rolls during the sixteen months between the execution of the Clarke-Simmons contract and the congressional investigation. After the investigation the membership of the Invisible Empire grew at an unparalleled pace. Klan officials reported gains as great as 5,000 new members per day. Clarke's income likewise soared to an estimated figure of forty thousand dollars per month.  

The concentration of Klan strength was not at first and never was in the older South -- Maryland, North Carolina, Virginia, and South Carolina. While there were active organizations in each of these states, Klan strength there never attained the proportions it achieved elsewhere.

60 Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, p. 38.
Initial Klan strength was greatest in the states of the older Southwest (Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas) which had led in the disfranchisement of the Negro in the 1890's. But by 1923 the center and source of greatest power was located in the older Northwest. A survey of total Klan memberships in May of that year revealed that Indiana claimed a membership of 294,000, Ohio 300,000, Illinois 131,000 and other Midwestern states had memberships ranging from 30,000 to 75,000. In the South and Southwest, Texas and Oklahoma reported 170,000 and 104,000 members respectively. Other Southern states usually counted less than 75,000 members. In the East, Pennsylvania led with 200,000 and New York, in second place, trailed far behind with 75,000 members. The Klan seems to have been weakest in the mountain states. Colorado, the strongest Klan state in that region, claimed only 34,000 members. Other mountain states lagged far behind. On the West coast Klan strength centered in California and Oregon, with the former counting 134,000 hooded warriors. Thus, by mid-1923 the Invisible Empire claimed between 2,500,000 and 3,000,000 members, and the center of its prestige was definitely the Midwest by that date.\footnote{Robert L. Duffus, "The Ku Klux Klan in the Middle West," in \textit{World's Work}, XLIV (June, 1923), pp. 363-364.} Thus, by
mid-1923, in terms of size and strength the Klan was a much
changed organization.

In the meantime other important changes occurred. Following
the congressional investigation, an abortive attempt was made by
four Northern regional sales managers to remove Mrs. Tyler
and Clarke from their positions. Simmons promised to take
action, but as time passed it became apparent that he had no
intention of keeping his word. By the spring of 1922 embarrassing
lawsuits related to the attempt to remove Clarke and Tyler had
been dismissed, and the complaining parties had left the Klan.
About that time Mrs. Tyler resigned also, claiming she needed
rest and that her daughter was ill. A year later the widow died. 64

The departure of Elizabeth Tyler left the residue of power in
the hands of Clarke. In March, 1922, upon the insistence of his
wife, Simmons appointed Clarke Imperial Wizard ad interim and
took a much needed six-months leave of absence because of ill
health, apparently aggravated by his excessive drinking. Shortly
before he departed for his self imposed vacation, Simmons, with
the approval of Mrs. Tyler and Clarke, called to Atlanta the
Exalted Cyclops, or head of the local Klan, of Dallas, Texas,

64 New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 5, 1922. See also
Hiram Wesley Evans. Evans was to fill the position of Imperial Kligrapp, or national secretary. The real purpose of Evans's elevation was to assist Simmons and relieve some of the tedious burdens of the Imperial Wizard's office.

The Dallas Exalted Cyclops was born in Ashland, Alabama, in 1881, received his formal education at Vanderbilt University and finally settled in Dallas where he practiced cut-rate dentistry. An inveterate joiner and lodge man, Evans liked to think of himself as "the most average man in America." But this round-faced, genial, "glad hander" was no average man. He had within him both the deep faith of Simmons and the immense practicality of Clarke. He was brighter and more articulate than Simmons, and his public utterances, when compared to those of Simmons, were lucid, logical, and convincing. Moreover, he was ambitious, and once in Atlanta he immediately sought ways to expand his influence.

During the absence of the Imperial Wizard, Evans and several other bright young men in the Klan ranks, recognizing the ineptitude of Simmons, the greed of Clarke, and the resultant damage to the Klan, quietly laid plans to remove the two from their seats

---

of power. Evans, Klan investigator Fred Savage, H. C. Ramsey, Louisiana Kilgrapp, Judge James A. Comer, Grand Dragon from Arkansas, Grand Dragon H. C. McCall of Texas, and David Stephenson, Klan boss of Indiana, were the chief plotters of the coup.

Simmons, not yet recovered, returned to his post in the fall of 1922. He realized the need for structural alterations of the Klan in order to meet the needs of the growing empire and to relieve some of the burdens of the Imperial Wizard's office. He finally determined to call a Klonvocation (national Klan legislature), have himself reelected Imperial Wizard, create the office of "Emperor" to handle administrative details, and leave propagation in Clarke's capable hands. The Klonvocation was set for November 27, 1922, in Atlanta. 66

Evans and his fellow conspirators realized the hour of decision was at hand. If Simmons were allowed to carry through his scheme, control of the national organization would be irretrievably lost. The stakes were too high for inaction. They met on the evening of November 26, at the Piedmont Hotel in Atlanta to finalize and execute their plans. Fred Savage and D. C. Stephenson were

66Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, pp. 100-102.
appointed to call upon Simmons and present the conspirators' case. They found him at his home at three a.m., November 27, only seven hours before the deliberations of the national convention were to begin. Simmons had been out drinking with friends only a few minutes before the meeting and might have still been drunk. Stephenson and Savage convinced him that if his name was brought before the convention for reelection as Imperial Wizard, there were men who would attack his character. Savage then blandly announced he had given orders to shoot any man who attacked Simmons's character. It was a moment of crisis, they argued. Would the Imperial Wizard, in order to avert trouble which might destroy the Klan, submit to the nomination of Evans as a temporary replacement until a more suitable candidate could be found?

Apparently alarmed and confused by the new turn of events, Simmons agreed but insisted he be installed as Emperor. The following morning the Klonvocation elected Evans as Imperial Wizard and ratified Simmons's elevation to Emperor after redrafting the constitution to provide for the new office.  

On the surface the changes seemed insignificant, but the changes were the most fundamental in nature. Evans and his followers were now solidly entrenched in power. All of the conspirators

---

took prominent and rewarding positions within the national Klan structure. The Klonvocation had continued Clarke in his position as Imperial Kleagle and also had tendered him the title of Imperial Giant, or Past Imperial Wizard. But the Klonvocations accolades were short-lived. In March of 1923 Evans exercised his prerogative to cancel Clarke's contract "for the good of the order." Clarke was at that time under indictment in Houston, Texas, for violations of the Mann and Volstead acts and was in no position for effective protest. 68

The second member of the original triumvirate was now gone. Only Simmons remained as a serious threat to the new power structure. Although the Klonvocation had elected him Emperor, it neglected to create constitutional prerogatives for the office, and the former Imperial Wizard soon found himself shunned at headquarters in Atlanta. Evans was not disposed to share his newly acquired authority.

A veteran of many fraternal and church battles, Simmons was not yet ready to admit defeat. Up until that time the Invisible Empire had not officially recognized women's auxiliaries to the Klan, although there were several already in existence, and there was a persistent demand for the formation of such an organization.

68 New Orleans Times-Picayune, March 25, 1923.
Simmons moved into the gap, took several local organizations and formed them into the Kamelia, or the woman's auxiliary to the Invisible Empire.

Then, in April 1923 he secured a court order restoring to him control of the national Klan. There followed a series of charges, countercharges, suits and counter suits which seriously hurt the Klan in many parts of the country. Final settlement came out of court in February, 1924. Simmons relinquished all claims against the Klan for a flat settlement of one hundred forty-six thousand dollars. Simmons was to continue to level charges against Evans and the conspirators, and Clarke was to offer his assistance to Calvin Coolidge to destroy the organization, but Evans's position was now secure. The Klan continued to grow after Simmons and Clarke were ousted, and administration under Evans was tightened and reformed. But the fight had been costly. The charges and countercharges, accusations, and lawsuits disillusioned many members who shortly left the order. After his ouster, Simmons spent several years in Atlanta, where he made numerous attempts to organize orders similar to the Klan. He claimed "The real Klan -- The Ku Klux Klan -- was never formed." The order he had formed was "K-UNO," he said.

69 "Colonel Simmons and $146,000, from K.K.K. to K.F.S.," in _The Literary Digest_, LXXX (March 8, 1924), pp. 36-40.

70 Simmons, America's Menace, p. 96.
Subsequently he planned to develop "K-DUO, K-TRIO and KWAD," which would have been the higher orders of the Klan. Evans, charged the former Imperial Wizard, had robbed the membership of its "sacred birthright" to the "higher, fuller, and REAL orders of Klankraft." Toward the end of his life Simmons moved to Luverne, Alabama, where he died in 1946.

In the meantime, Clarke organized a mystery cult called the Supreme Kingdom, made up largely of former Klansmen from Indiana, Ohio, Georgia, and Florida, which was committed to the destruction of evolution and the re-establishment of Christianity throughout the nation. 72

Thus, by 1923 the pattern of future Klan development during the twenties was firmly established. Evans would remain as Imperial Wizard until the mid-1930's. Under his leadership night riding and raiding were toned down, and Klan political activity was stepped up. Yet Evans's rise to power also witnessed the beginning of the end for the Klan as a powerful national organization. To be sure, its light would burn brightly for two or

---

71 Ibid., p. 93.

three years to come, but opposition to the secret organization was everywhere on the rise, and the days of Klan power were numbered.
CHAPTER THREE

SEEDBED

During the summer of 1924 young Hodding Carter, having recently completed his freshman year at Bowdoin College in Maine, returned to his grandmother's home in Concordia Parish, Louisiana, for the annual family reunion. "I was learnedly holding forth to a cousin on the evils of the resurgent Ku Klux Klan," he said. "I had just said that the Klan was a rotten, no-good, and un-American organization . . . when I became conscious of frightened signals from my cousin and a sudden, awesome hush."¹ Carter's grandmother, a "dainty little lady, given to delicate scents," and feminine in the tradition of her Southern forebearers, was obviously upset. "Stand up, young man," she commanded with her flair for the dramatic. The seventeen-year-old college student, despite his year away from the confines of Southern upbringing, respectfully obeyed. "Your

year in the North seems to have disagreed with you," she began. "Did they teach you to say what you have just said about the Ku Klux Klan?" His grandmother then lovingly related the familiar tale of the organization so dear to the hearts of Southerners, especially those whose family ties directly or indirectly touched the days of Reconstruction. She told how she had made Carter's grandfather's hood and robes with her own hands and how that beloved figure, almost singlehandedly, had saved a large part of the South through some well-timed night riding. Had it not been for his grandfather and a few lesser giants, he was told, no man's life nor any woman's virtue would have been safe during the turbulent years following the War Between the States. The Southern matriarch completed her admonition with a curt order. "Leave the table young man," she said, "you may apologize to me later." 

Like countless thousands of other Southerners, Carter's grandmother uncritically assumed the Klan of the 1920's was merely a continuation of the Klan of the Reconstruction period. This conception precisely explains the attitude of Chief Justice of the United States, Edward Douglas White, when he was approached by

---

2 Ibid., p. 17.
3 Ibid., p. 18.
the Reverend Thomas Dixon in 1915 for the Louisianian's endorsement of The Birth of a Nation. Indeed, it may be convincingly argued that most Southerners in 1920 were unaware that the Klan of Reconstruction had ever dissolved. Innumerable Southern families pointed with pride to beloved ancestors who had belonged to the old Klan, many of whom were still alive in the 1920's. Others knew the organization by reputation, and according to the "lost cause" legend, it had saved the South in the section's hour of greatest peril. Furthermore, like most legends, the romance of the old Klan was embellished with additional glamour and mystery with each passing year.

Thus, in terms of appeal to the people of the South, Simmons made a wise decision when he announced his Klan was a continuation of and a memorial to the illustrious Knights of the past. Men with any sense of history recognized the counterfeit quality of Simmons's claim; the purposes and activities of his organization differed considerably from those of the old Klan. Yet it was a fine distinction too few Southerners were capable of making -- or cared to make. The existence, then, of a remarkably colorful legend surrounding the Invisible Empire partially explains why

---

4Goldman, Rendezvous With Destiny, pp. 228-229.
many Southerners joined the Klan in the 1920's. Furthermore, that legend had acquired an appeal which pervaded more than the region of its origin. The Birth of a Nation not only reinforced the lingering romance of the organization in the South, but also introduced the Klan to other sections in the most appealing fashion possible. John Moffat Mecklin has observed: "It is simply impossible to estimate the educative effect of this film-masterpiece upon public sentiment. It is probable that the great majority of adult Americans have . . . seen this film."5 From April until September, 1915, it was shown at a Boston theater to over 400,000 spectators, and it broke attendance records in virtually every city it played. 6 Griffith's masterpiece, then, nationalized a sectional legend and gave it appeal outside the South. When couriers of the Klan message invaded Northern and Western communities, they found The Birth of a Nation's glorification of the hood and robe was of no mean benefit in securing members.

Yet the existence of a remarkably romantic legend surrounding the name Ku Klux Klan cannot sufficiently explain the popularity Klanism enjoyed during the years following World War One. The

5 Mecklin, The Ku Klux Klan, pp. 70-71
6 Ibid.
fact that the Klan was strongest in the Midwest, an area only incidentally acquainted with the legend and with no personal attachment to it, convincingly verifies this conclusion. What then, were the circumstances responsible for nourishing the secret organization at a time when Americans had just finished fighting a bloody war for the principles of democracy? Why should the Klan erupt into national significance in 1920 and not in 1900 or 1915?

The most plausible answer to this question has been advanced by Norman Weaver, the historian of the Klan in the Midwest, and John Moffat Mecklin, the Dartmouth sociologist who made a contemporary study of the secret organization. Both Weaver and Mecklin agree that the enormous success achieved by the Klan in the twenties was closely related to a deep sense of insecurity experienced by America's old stock during that decade. 7

Mecklin carefully delineated America's old stock, both culturally and geographically. Principally a resident of small towns, villages, and farms, the old-stock American was located in those sections of the United States least disturbed by

immigration and industrialism. The bastions of his strength were located in the South, where his percentage of the total population was highest, the Midwest, and Oregon on the West coast. He was Scotch-Irish or English in descent and was intensely Protestant in religious affiliation. Originally his forebearers had been Presbyterians, but by 1920 he had drifted into Baptist and Methodist churches. His influence was weakest in Eastern immigrant cities such as Boston, Baltimore, New York, and Philadelphia. His society was rural or rurally oriented; his values were the traditional values of rural America; his world was characterized by low mobility and rather rigid status arrangements. He was suspicious of things foreign and was not notably tolerant. Deeply wedded to the stability of his world, he had historically demanded conformity to his scheme of arrangements.

The cultural and geographical delineation of the old-stock American is important because it was from his segment of the population that the Ku Klux Klan recruited its membership. Those Americans who could not meet old stock racial and religious

---

8Ibid., p. 100.

standards were systematically excluded from the secret organization. The Invisible Empire achieved its greatest success in the areas of his numerical superiority; it did best in areas in which his churches -- the Baptist and the Methodist -- were strongest. It is true that the Klan failed to win great power in rural areas where the old stock was stronger than elsewhere, but that failure was due to geography and not the old-stock farmer's lack of inclination toward Klanism. He was simply too widely separated from other like-minded souls to effectively associate in Klan activity. Moreover, there were some areas, such as the Black Belt in Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi, and the coastal cities of the same states in which the dominance of the old stock was apparent and in which the Klan did poorly. But such areas were usually the home of the more cosmopolitan Southerner who generally lacked the enthusiasm for Klanism displayed by his upland neighbors.

During World War One, the old-stock American's natural inclination to force conformity to his scheme of things was reinforced by the Wilson administration's campaign to win public support for America's entrance into the global conflict. Recognizing that a substantial number of Americans were opposed to entrance into the war or lacked conviction that America's cause
was just, the administration quickly created the Committee on Public Information, headed by George Creel, old-time "muckraker" and progressive journalist. Creel, who admitted an open mind was no part of his inheritance, and that he took prejudice in with his mother's milk, surrounded himself with an imposing army of journalists, actors, scholars, and artists. Before the war's end his corps of molders of public opinion reached the staggering number of 150,000 persons, which constituted the most gigantic propaganda machine in American history.

During the following eighteen months, Creel and his subordinates fed the American public a steady diet of aggressive nationalism, chauvinism, "one hundred per cent Americanism," and hatred for the German "Hun," purposely characterized as the devil incarnate. The hatred for Germany grew so intense

---


that Americans demanded the suspension of German as a language in public schools. Sauerkraut was renamed "victory cabbage," German measles, "liberty measles," and in Cincinnati pretzels were removed from free lunch counters in saloons. As the war progressed, the mounting hatred for Germany was fed by rumors of spies, enemy agents, traitors, and atrocity stories.

A separate crusade for orthodoxy, that operated within the context of the Creel Committee campaign, was directed by various private organizations seeking the Americanization of the immigrant. Motivated by the recognition that the immigrant was necessary, perhaps indispensable, to victory, the Americanizers undertook a huge campaign to force upon him citizenship, the English language, and the standards of "one hundred per cent Americanism." The crusade to Americanize the immigrant was initially fostered by the twin motives of social consciousness and nationalistic anxieties. The former

13 Higham, Strangers in the Land, pp. 234-263. According to Higham the principal tenets of "one hundred percentism" were "the insistence upon a conformist loyalty intolerant of any values not functional to it; the demand for a high sense of duty toward the nation; the faith in a drumfire of exhoration and propaganda to accomplish desired social objectives; and the ultimate reliance upon coercion and punishment." Ibid., p. 247.
represented the best of American reform; the latter, motivated largely by fear of immigrant radicalism, prevailed by war's end.

Thus, the Great War was a significant force for conformity and intolerance of things alien to traditional American standards. Immigrants, Socialists, German-Americans, and all other persons who dared deviate from the narrow patterns of behavior demanded by professional patriots felt the sting of their whips. With the return of peace, liberal-minded individuals hoped the aroused emotions of Americans would subside. Had the war lasted the extra year which was anticipated, the emotions so viciously aroused by propaganda might have burned themselves out in the struggle for victory. However, when the Germans surrendered in November, 1918, the fiery spirit of patriotism and hatred for the enemy was at its peak. The "Hun" had been defeated, but not destroyed, and destruction seemed vital to satisfy the emotional needs of many Americans. Emotionally, the American people were unspent, and as Robert Coughlan so cogently put it, the nation found itself in a state of "coitus interruptus." It still throbbed with chauvinistic patriotism and hatred for the enemy. But suddenly the enemy was gone, surrendering before obliteration, and as far as many Americans
were concerned there had not been enough war to provide catharsis. Woodrow Wilson, in a moment of rare perception, had recognized the danger of leading a democracy into war. "Once lead this people into war," he said, "and they'll forget there ever was such a thing as tolerance." 

World War One also included a remnant of millenniumism which identified Germany with the devil and the hope of victory with a new and beautiful world. Had President Wilson not spoken of the conflict as "the war to end all wars," and had he not asked Americans to die to "make the world safe for democracy?"

There was a very real humanitarian crusade within the structure of America's involvement in the war. When it became apparent the utopian dream had failed -- and it was soon distressingly evident that it had -- the naive and unsophisticated sought a scapegoat. 

Thus, World War One served to reinforce the old-stock American's inclination to demand orthodoxy. By war's end

---

14 Haas, KKK, p. 50.

15 Quoted in Murphy, "Sources and Nature of Intolerance in the 1920s," p. 63.

16 Frank Tannenbaum, Darker Phases of the South (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1924), pp. 16-17.
orthodoxy had come to mean not only the maintenance of traditional arrangements in American society, but it was expanded to include virtually any deviations from the standards laid down by the "one hundred percenter." Yet, as peace returned, the maintenance of old-stock culture became more impossible than it had been during the war. On all sides alterations were evident. Some were rooted in the prewar period, and were accelerating ever more rapidly; others were new and frighteningly strange. Beset on every side by threats to the citadels of his world, the old-stock American moved to the attack and joined the Americanizers, still active in the postwar period, in proclaiming: "The battle to make the country safe is not won. The enemy but wears a different guise." The unspent emotions of the war were now to find release in a frenzied outburst against all who challenged established patterns of belief and behavior. In succeeding months the scapegoats would become victims of an unholy alliance between businessmen, self-seeking politicians, professional patriots, and other protectors of what the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies called the Gemeinschaft social structure.

17Quoted in Higham, Strangers in the Land, pp. 255-256.
Perhaps the most unfortunate victim of the postwar offensive was the American Negro. For the masses of the American Negro, life in the South was little different than it had been fifty years earlier. They still performed menial chores, frequently called "nigger work" by whites, or worked on a "share" basis for white land owners. But for others life was improving, and that was disturbing to a white power structure that believed the "nigger had his place." In many communities the Negro performed skilled trades, particularly in the construction industry. Many others entered business, and by 1922 there were 50,000 separate Negro business establishments doing an annual volume of one and one-half billion dollars of business. Negroes were operating banks, insurance companies, and mercantile establishments, and thousands of others were entering the professions. 18

The war had provided an opportunity for the Negro to continue the expansion of his horizons, but it also contributed to friction between the races. As unskilled jobs in the North were emptied by the draft and unfilled by the halted flow of European immigration, Southern Negroes were brought North in great waves by anxious

---

labor recruiters. Despite the ravages of the boll weevil to Southern cotton, which had reduced crops and thus the need for Negro labor, Southern whites were reluctant to lose their labor supply and frequently acted to prevent emigration. But the flow continued. In Indianapolis, for example, the Negro population more than doubled between 1910 and 1930. In nearby Gary, the Negro population increased from 383 to almost 18,000 during the same period. 19 Other communities, perhaps, did not encounter equally large waves of immigration, but for the first time many Northern towns faced serious race problems. When the war ended, the initial delight expressed by Northerners at the new source of cheap labor turned to hostility. They found Negro immigrants were more difficult to assimilate than Europeans, they resented the "loose morals" commonly attributed to the newcomers, and they gradually crowded them into ghettos which became powder kegs of tension.

There is still another key to the Negro problem arising from the conflict. Wartime propaganda emphasized that democracy was a principle for which America was fighting, and Wilson's speeches about the rights of subject nationalities clearly had

domestic implications for American Negroes, though they were probably not so intended. Moreover, some 400,000 Negroes were drafted, and one-half of these served overseas in France. Negro soldiers moved about France relatively free from discrimination, often to the chagrin of their white comrades in arms. The relative absence of racial discrimination in France was an unforgettable experience for the American Negro, and when he returned home emboldened and embittered he was in no mood to quietly slip back into the prewar racial patterns. 20

By war's end Southern whites complained that the Negro was insolent, and "uppity," that his labor was too expensive, and that he was "too proud to do nigger work." In the North whites found him competing for scarce jobs, encroaching on white neighborhoods, ruining property values, and morally repugnant. The Negro himself, now willing to fight for rights he regarded basic, prepared to resist before submitting again to the old caste system. It was an explosive situation, and the explosion actually began before the negotiators sat down at Versailles. East St. Louis, Illinois, was the scene of a bloody race riot in 1917.

in which forty Negroes were killed. At the same time lynching, which had been on the decline since the Populist heyday of the 1890's, took a sharp turn upward.\(^{21}\)

But wartime incidents were only a bloody prelude to the twelve months following the war. In the summer of 1919, Chicago was rocked with a week-long race riot stemming from the killing of an adventurous Negro boy who crossed an invisible line separating the races at a Lake Michigan beach. There followed a wave of terror which left fifteen whites and twenty-three Negroes dead and five hundred thirty-seven injured.\(^{22}\) The carnage continued in Longview, Texas; Knoxville, Tennessee; Omaha, Nebraska; and Elaine, Arkansas. Before the year ended no less than twenty-six race riots had erupted across the United States leaving hundreds dead and thousands injured. Lynching of Negroes reached its highest peak since 1908 as seventy-six blacks met death at the hands of mobs.\(^{23}\) If the means of lynching is related to the passion of the lynchers, the fourteen Negroes who were publicly


\(^{22}\) Allen, *Only Yesterday*, pp. 63-64.

\(^{23}\) Baton Rouge *State Times*, January 1, 1920.
burned is eloquent testimony to the emotions of white mobs. The old-stock American, particularly if he lived in the South, must have fretted about the "new Negro" and the possibility that he might get beyond control.

Accompanying the outbursts of racial violence was a new hysteria, the specter of spreading radicalism and Bolshevism. Americans had displayed much concern during the war about the activities of radical groups, but in 1919 the concern turned to fear, fear that America's tiny minority of Socialists and Communists would precipitate a red revolution. Newspaper headlines shouted news of labor strikes tinged with radicalism. Mayor Ole Hanson of Seattle warned Americans of an impending takeover by radicals hiding behind labor front organizations. In Centralia, Washington, radicals shot down Armistice Day paraders, and an outraged citizenry lynched an I. W. W. member in retaliation. An Indiana jury took only two minutes to acquit a man for killing an alien for uttering "to hell with the United States." In New York and Milwaukee constituents went without representation when elected representatives were refused their respective seats in the New York Assembly and the United States House of Representatives. Much of the concern about radicalism

24 Arthur S. Link, American Epoch: A History Of The United States
was caused by American manufacturing concerns who chose to
taint striking workers and their unions with radicalism. When
representatives from twenty-two manufacturing associations
met in Chicago and named their plan to combat unions the
"American Plan," the implication was obvious. Bombs delivered
to homes of prominent American leaders, the Wall Street
explosion, and the raid of Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer
seemed convincing proof radicalism posed a serious threat and
must be stamped out. The pattern of conformity developed during
the war and the "one hundred per cent Americanism" of super
nationalists both played important roles in the hysteria of 1919.

Closely related to Americans' concern for the safety of
their institutions from radical encroachments was the changing
old stock attitude toward the immigrant. Americans now believed
that the ideas activating labor radicals were products of the
alien hordes flowing in from Europe's cesspools. During the
war "one hundred percenters" had frantically tried to remold
the immigrant in their image, but by 1920 the determination to
Americanize aliens was largely spent. No longer concerned with

States Since The 1890's (2d ed. rev.; New York: Alfred A. Knopf,

Murphy, "Sources and Nature of Intolerance in the 1920s."
pp. 64-65.
assimilation, Americans were now ready to support an extensive program of exclusion. Several reasons explain why exclusion became a popular solution to the immigrant problem. Perhaps most important was that in 1920 the two traditional harbingers of xenophobia, depression and a new flood of immigrants, exerted their influence on old-stock Americans. New arrivals to America suddenly offered unwanted competition for hard to get jobs. By the end of 1920 many newspapers were suggesting the relationship between the torrential influx of immigrants and the worsening problem of unemployment.

Then, too, the end of the war witnessed the revival of the old nativisms of prewar origin. Consisting largely of hatreds toward Catholics, Jews, and southeastern Europeans, these emotions had been temporarily suspended during the conflict, but with returning peace they again reoccupied the field. Still another irritant to the old-stock American was his conviction that immigrants were responsible for the crime wave sweeping the United States after the war. Inevitably nativists' stereotypes of criminals included an array of foreigners.26

When the old-stock American sought intellectual justification for his animosity toward immigrants, he found it in the period's popular writers on race. By 1920 the popular press bombarded the public with articles and books appealing to Anglo-Saxon feelings of superiority. As early as 1916 Madison Grant, in his mildly successful book, The Passing of the Great Race, complained:

"The man of the old stock is being crowded out of many country districts by these foreigners, just as he is today being literally driven off the streets of New York City by the swarms of Polish Jews. These immigrants adopt the language of the native American, they wear his clothes, they steal his name and they are beginning to take his women, but they seldom adopt his religion or understand his ideals . . . ."²⁷ Four years later, in the introduction to a disciple's book, Grant argued that competition between the Nordic and the lowly immigrant "whether he be from southern or eastern Europe or whether he be the more obviously dangerous Oriental" was fatal for the Nordic. He concluded by warning that the mixing of Nordic blood with that of inferior races was "suicide pure and simple."²⁸ Although Grant himself was not

²⁷Quoted in Leuchtenberg, Perils of Prosperity, p. 206.

widely read, he did inspire a host of other writers on racism, including his best known disciple, Lothrop Stoddard, Harvard Ph.D., and member of the Ku Klux Klan. Stoddard, in 1920, published *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* in which he painted the Great War as a civil war between the races. Those who viewed world affairs from the "angle of politics," he said, should recognize the "basic factor in human affairs is not politics, but race." He feared the results of the more rapidly expanding population of colored races and warned of the deterioration of Nordics unless steps were taken to prevent mongrelization, which would produce, he gloomily predicted, "a walking chaos, so consumed by jarring heridities" as to be racially worthless.

The implications of continued immigration were clear to the old-stock American. Immigrants were inferior, they worked for cheaper wages and thus threatened the American working man; they were criminals, unmindful of American respect for the law; the tenets of their religious faith posed a threat to democratic institutions; and they were the source of radical "isms" which had no place in American life.

---

29Ibid., pp. 4-5.
30Ibid., pp. 6-16, 166.
Still another disquieting tendency faced old-stock Americans. It was the challenge to the fundamentals of their religious faith. The challenge had been underway since the late nineteenth century and many ministers had accepted modifications imposed by new scientific discoveries. But the ministers had frequently gone beyond their congregations who were only dimly aware that a challenge existed. In the early 1920's religious conservatives suddenly awoke to find that their authoritative faith was under attack from two equally dangerous quarters. On the one hand modernism, a movement stemming from higher criticism, had discarded antiquated views of the scriptures and thereby plunged a knife into the heart of orthodox creed. Fundamentalist religious belief was formed like a pyramid, each tenet resting upon the one below, with the infallible Bible as the broad foundation. Any attack which altered or removed one of the stones (i.e. the infallibility of the Bible) would send the whole structure crashing to the earth. 31 The second prong of the attack was the doctrine of evolution, brilliantly set forth in Charles Darwin's nineteenth century masterpiece *Origin of Species*. If Darwin was right, and his many disciples fervently argued that he was, then it could be asserted -- and it was -- that man was created not

---

by an infallible, omnipotent God, but that he had emerged from a lower form of animal life. Indeed, the theory of evolution did not even require a supernatural being, and many who adhered to it as the explanation of life had the effrontery to deny the existence of God. Evolution and modernism struck deep at the heart of the orthodox creed of rural small-town America, particularly in the South and Midwest. When sons and daughters, sent off to school at great sacrifice to their parents, returned home proclaiming they thought the evolutionists were correct, the impact on religious fundamentalists "was to produce terror or anger in one degree or another."^32

Accompanying the challenge to religious orthodoxy was a new and disturbing concept of morality. Everywhere the old standards were bending under the stress of new dimensions in American culture. The prohibition law, passed on a wave of public sacrifice, was violated with impunity. And the violators were not only the "town drunks" of Anti-Saloon League propaganda, but now included young people who seemed hell bent upon destroying not only themselves but the world of their fathers as well. Indeed, rural America's two-generation crusade to rid their world of "demon rum" was in jeopardy within three years of the dry crusader's

---

victory. If the "new attitude" on drinking was disturbing, the "new attitude" on sex was calculated to shake the very foundations of old-stock culture. Traditionally, chastity had been a fundamental of the rigid standards of morality in America. Modern psychology now questioned the unbending traditional attitudes on sex in general and chastity in particular. Inhibition, it was suggested, posed a threat to mental and emotional health. Armed with a medical rationalization for freer sexual activity and with the automobile as a parlor, American youth "took the oldest profession in the world and put it on an amateur basis." Sex has never been a subject which Americans have treated rationally, perhaps because of its essential emotional nature it defies rationality. Certainly the alterations in old standards of sexual behavior, which violated the beliefs of generations of Americans, were an unnerving experience for Americans who were bound to old ways.

Any one of the tendencies apparent in the years following the war would have proved disquieting to the old-stock American. Each, in its own way struck at the underpinnings of his culture.

---

But when they came simultaneously they created a very real insecurity, a deep sense of unrest, and a helpless feeling of being ground under. Unnerving? It was frightening!

The new tendencies caused the appearance of a national mood of intolerance. It was widespread and general during the twenties; it was participated in consciously or unconsciously by the great majority of people; and it involved many Americans previously immune to its toxicity. The intolerance of the twenties manifested itself on different levels in different ways. The business community expressed its hostility toward radical labor by demanding restrictive legislation. The American Legion hunted "radicals." The federal government deported them. Religious fundamentalists organized a concerted drive to sweep evolution and modernism forever from the face of America. On most levels intolerance was organized.

For the old-stock American, distressed with the disruption of his society, the Ku Klux Klan served as the means to counter-attack the assaulters of his world. As such, the Klan was both a product of the general intolerance of the twenties and a

---

34 Weaver, "The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan," p. 31.

35 Murphy, "Sources and Nature of Intolerance in the 1920s," p. 61.
purveyor of that same intolerance. Klan leaders recognized the insecurities of the old-stock American, perhaps because they too, as a part of that old stock, were deeply resentful of the newly developing patterns in American life. Both William Joseph Simmons and Hiram Wesley Evans expressed concern that control of their society was drifting from its traditional masters, and both admittedly were attempting to maintain the status quo. 36

The old-stock American found in the Klan the peculiar combination of objectives which offered to restore to him the control of his world, to cleanse it of its filth, to gird the underpinnings of his religious faith, to protect his children's morals, and to combat the malign influences afoot across the country. He naturally joined with those persons of his cultural group and gravitated into the Klan's orbit.

But there was still another side of Klanism that proved irresistible to unsophisticated Americans and in no small way explains its immense popularity. The Seattle Spokesman-Review, dumbfounded at Klan popularity, concluded it was "explicable only on the theory that a considerable number of the American people love mummeries, are fascinated by mystery, and dearly

love to be swindled." To be sure, Americans did love secret societies. By 1927 there were over 800 secret organizations with more than 30,000,000 members.

The Spokesman-Review, like many Americans, found it incomprehensible that mature men could find the mumbo jumbo of Klanism stimulating. It was more than stimulating; it was intoxicating. What they failed to appreciate was the level of sophistication of small-town Americans during the twenties, and more importantly the drabness of social activity which characterized the life of small-town inhabitants. That life was simply boring. It lacked interest and failed to provide means of creative outlet. In addition to the absence of positive qualities that made for personal growth and development, small towns contained negative factors that constrained and dwarfed. Small-town scrutiny, the compulsion to conformity, and the constant pressure to walk the straight and narrow path, propelled small-town inhabitants toward artificial thrills.

37 Quoted in "Quaint Customs and Methods of the Ku Klux Klan," in The Literary Digest, LXXIV (August 5, 1922), p. 44.


39 Tannenbaum, Darker Phases of the South, pp. 20-21.
To these emotion starved people the Ku Klux Klan offered one of the most exotic appeals ever developed by a secret society. The normal bombastic nomenclature of fraternalism was amplified almost beyond comprehension. The Klan leader was an Imperial Wizard (one wag failed to understand why he was not the Klimperial Klizzard in view of constant alliterative "k"); his immediate subordinates were Grand Dragons, Great Titans and Exalted Cyclops; individual members bore the chivalrous title of "Knights" in an Invisible Empire. There were secret handshakes, Klaverns, Klonciliumns, Konvocations and Klonventions, and there was a special Kalender which Klansmen could use to secretly specify the time and place of meetings at their Dens. Robes and hoods, simple white for the individual Knight, were more elaborate for officers. There was even Klonversation, a simple code in which Knights might secretly confer without fear of compromising Klan secrets. A typical conversation might begin:

AYAK Are You A Klansman?
AKIA A Klansman I Am.
CAPOWE Countersign And Password Or Evidence.
CYGNAR Can You Give Number and Realm?
Number One Klan Of Atlanta, Georgia.

Klansman, I Greet You.

In The Sacred Unfailing Bond.  

To compliment the colorful Klan organization there were ritual, poems (frequently plagiarized by Simmons), and songs.

Behold, the Fiery Cross still brilliant
Combined efforts to defame
And all the calumny of history
Fail to quench its hallowed flame.

It shall burn bright as the morning
For all decades yet to be
Held by hearts and hands of manhood
It shall light from sea to sea.

We rally around this ancient symbol
Precious heritage of the past
And swear our all to home and country
And to each other to the last.

Chorus

In the Fiery Cross I glory
'Neath its glow my oath was made
It shall live in song and story
I swear its light shall never fade.  

Oaths, always secret, were a final touch to tease the palate of the untutored. A former Kleagle, who observed the impact

---


41 Simmons, The Practice of Klanishness, no pagination.
of participation in the Klan on his recruits commented: "I have found that when you dress men in the hood and shroud of the Ku Klux Klan, men of brains, big men, will strut about like peacocks and act like children at play. In Klonklave assembled they have the courage of lions. When a fiery tongued orator has the floor and spits forth the venom of false Americanism . . . you will see their faces flush and they will seemingly take on the courage of the Knights of old."\(^{42}\)

Thus, Klanism was popular because it relieved the tedium and boredom of small town life. But therein lay one of its greatest dangers. It seized upon the monotony of the small town and gave it daily drama and perpetuated a state of excitation. Under such conditions the chance of overt activity by a secret organization -- activity outside the law -- steadily increased. Too frequently the constant excitation exploded into action.

Obviously all Klansmen did not join the secret order because they were insecure or because they were bored. Equally obvious is the fact that most individuals who were "one hundred percenters," white supremacists, or anti-Semites did not

\(^{42}\) Quoted in New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, April 15, 1923.
develop those attitudes from critical reflection. Rather, they acquired these mental attitudes from prevailing uncritical antipathies toward minority groups. It was primarily because of the absence of critical thinking on those questions that the Klan was able to exploit them to its advantage. Many individuals joined, according to one Kleagle, simply because of the influence of a friend, and still others because of curiosity, political ambition, or business reasons. And there were even sectional differences for joining. In his investigation of the Klan, John Mecklin mailed out questionnaires to Klansmen to determine why they joined. He found that "purity of womanhood" was a reason mentioned only by respondents from the South.

Thus, the Klan of the twenties flourished as a result of a number of peculiar circumstances associated with the war and its aftermath. Americans, who demanded conformity to their traditional cultural patterns, found in the war and postwar periods tendencies which to them necessitated an even greater need for orthodoxy. This need, combined with the stimulation of

43 Mecklin, The Ku Klux Klan, p. 38.
44 New Orleans Times-Picayune, April 15, 1923.
45 Mecklin, The Ku Klux Klan, p. 86.
emotions during the war, propelled them toward organizations
and movements which promised the security they so desperately
sought. The Ku Klux Klan was one of several organizations or
movements providing an outlet for unspent hatreds and the
machinery to restore the status quo. It was the organization
chosen by America's old stock because its program, designed
by men of that old stock, fitted their peculiar needs.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE INVISIBLE EMPIRE COMES

TO LOUISIANA

Louisiana emerged from World War One a land of promise on the verge of great growth and expansion, yet lingering in the twilight of the old order. 1920 would bring the inauguration of a progressive governor, 1921 a new state constitution and succeeding years road improvements, educational progress, innovations in social welfare, and industrial expansion. Modern Louisiana would not emerge without violent political struggles and a realignment of traditional political factions, but the forces of change were rapidly gathering.

As the 1920's opened, the Bayou State bore a close kinship to her sister Southern states. Like them, she had her metropolitan center, New Orleans, and several expanding smaller cities including Monroe, Shreveport, Alexandria, Lake Charles, and Baton Rouge. But Louisiana was still principally a state of small towns and farms. No less than two-thirds of the state's one and three-quarter million citizens still earned their living in
agriculture. A majority of Louisianians were Caucasian, although thirty-eight and nine-tenths per cent of the population still traced their ancestry to Africa, despite the heavy losses of Negro citizens to Northern industry during the war. Five parishes had less than twenty-five per cent white inhabitants, four less than one-third whites, and eleven less than one-half white residents.

Louisiana's foreign-born population was also relatively small, another factor she had in common with other Southern states. Only two and one-half per cent of the Caucasian population was foreign-born. New Orleans had been an important port of entry for immigrants during the mid nineteenth century, but by the twentieth century the European flow had subsided. Most twentieth century immigrants came from Sicily or Italy and settled in larger cities such as Shreveport, Alexandria, New Orleans, and Monroe. An exception to this generalization existed in Tangipahoa Parish,

---


2 Ibid., p. 392.

where twentieth-century Sicilian immigrants made up substantial parts of the white population of Hammond, Independence, and Amite. Primarily strawberry growers and small storekeepers, the Tangipahoa immigrants had achieved considerable economic success by the 1920's, although social acceptance by the parish old stock still awaited the future. 4 "Old-timers," frequently resentful of the success of the hard working immigrant, often could be heard complaining about "them God-damned Dagos." 5

Educationally, Louisianians also fitted the Southern stereotype. Only fifty-three per cent of school age children were attending classes, and the illiteracy rate for people over ten years of age was almost twenty-two per cent. Of individuals over twenty-one alone, an amazing thirty-four and one-half per cent were illiterate. 6 Obviously, the high rate of illiteracy was closely related to large numbers of Negroes in the population of the state who were denied satisfactory educational facilities. Yet the high percentage also reflects the niggardly support public education received, even

4 Carter, Southern Legacy, pp. 105-118.
5 Ibid.
for whites, until the implementation of Huey P. Long's school programs.

And like her sister Southern states, Louisiana in the 1920's was poor, a situation which partly explains the destitute condition which existed in Louisiana's educational system. Despite its industrial development, the state lacked an adequate proportion of high-productivity manufacturing industries which could contribute to per capita income and to the tax coffers of the state treasury. Moreover, while Louisiana offered industry cheap labor, that inducement was not sufficient to counterbalance its lack of raw materials and its remoteness from markets. In addition, industry which had located in Louisiana did not pay substantial taxes as later political developments would clearly demonstrate.

Similar in many ways to the rest of the South, Louisiana was distinctive in the dual nature of its religious establishment. That duality resulted from the curious history of the state during the eighteenth century. Louisiana was colonized during the closing days of the seventeenth century, not by English settlers who peopled the original Southern states, but by the French, who were late comers

---

in American colonization. French institutions were established in the colony. The most important of these was the Roman Catholic Church, which became the official colonial church. Although the colony was temporarily ceded to Spain in 1762 and then sold to the United States in 1803, the imprint of French occupation remained.

But the dominant French culture of the eighteenth century was short-lived. The creation of the Territory of Louisiana in 1803 opened the floodgates to immigrants, and by 1810 the flow was torrential. Immigration to Louisiana was heaviest from 1810 to 1820, and the state continued to populate at a more rapid pace than other Southern states until 1840. The new immigrants, predominately Anglo-Saxon Protestants from Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and Virginia, permanently altered the religious establishment in Louisiana. 8 As late as 1830 Louisianians of French ancestry outnumbered Bayou Staters of American origins two to one, but by 1850 the Latin stock was submerged numerically and economically below the swarming Americans. 9

Thus, in terms of religious affiliation, Louisiana had a split personality, one which still exists and is apparent to any


9 Shugg, Origins of the Class Struggle, pp. 80-81.
discerning observer. The religious division was simple to delineate geographically. North Louisiana was Protestant and south Louisiana was Catholic. A more exact description of Catholic Louisiana has been provided by Professors Homer L. Hitt and T. Lynn Smith, exacting students of Louisiana cultural geography. "It resembles a large triangle whose base consists of the Gulf of Mexico. One side is bounded by a straight line running from the southwestern tip of the state to the junction of the Red and the Mississippi rivers, and the other side is bounded by a straight line running from the latter point through the city of New Orleans to the Gulf of Mexico."10

In 1920 Roman Catholics constituted almost sixty per cent of total church membership in Louisiana. The Baptist and the Methodist ranked second and third respectively. 11 Despite


Louisiana's dual religious establishment, neither an aggressive Catholicism nor militant anti-clericalism had characterized the state.  

Thus situated in 1920, Louisiana must have seemed like a Kleagle's dream come true. It was a Southern state, which obviously gave it emotional ties to the Reconstruction Klan; it contained large numbers of Negroes to be "kept in their place;" there were Catholics by the score, who could be characterized as "plotters for the Pope;" and there was north Louisiana, replete with old-stock Protestants to whom the Klan message could be sold. Louisiana was an inviting field to the Klan salesman, one in which ill-educated people could be made to believe that the Ku Klux Klan could solve many of their problems.

Such tempting fruit was not to be plucked by unskilled hands.  

On Thursday afternoon, November 25, 1920, Colonel William Joseph Simmons appeared in New Orleans to organize the first Louisiana chapter of the Invisible Empire. The Klan product was obviously selling well in the Southeast, for Simmons waited five months after signing his contract with Clarke before entering Louisiana. Immediately upon his arrival in New Orleans, Colonel

\[12^{2}\text{Sindler, Huey Long's Louisiana, p. 33.}\]
Simmons received three representatives of the American Legion who were to determine the advisability of sponsoring the Klan in New Orleans. When the interview revealed one of the legionnaires was a Catholic and another married to a Catholic, the meeting ended, and the three men left determined that the American Legion of New Orleans would have no official relationship to the Invisible Empire.  

The following night, November 26, the Imperial Wizard, clad in the regal robes of his office, held a meeting at the Woodmen of the World Hall at 720 St. Charles Street. Fifty-one persons, gathered together by General A. B. Booth, Confederate veteran and formerly a captain of the Ku Klux Klan of the Reconstruction period, were present. Booth presided at the meeting and gave a short talk reviewing the conditions which brought the old Klan to power. After Booth's opening remarks, Simmons rose to speak. He did not mention the Catholic Church, nor did he make specific references to Catholics, but his speech was replete with the word "tyranny," and he made several references to "ecclesiastical tyranny."  

---

13 Frank S. Barlius, report to Mr. (?) Hammett, in Robinson Papers.

14 Ibid.
Avoiding a specific statement about what the Klan planned to do in New Orleans and Louisiana, the Imperial Wizard delivered a generalized discourse on "the spirit and being" of the Invisible Empire. He told his audience that the Ku Klux Klan was the embodiment of that attribute in the human race which ever strove to reach the ideals of liberty. According to the Imperial Wizard, the Invisible Empire was born "coevally" with the birth of the human race, only it was not known as the Ku Klux Klan, but manifested itself in every human endeavor toward human emancipation. The world got its start in liberty, he said, when Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to the church door at Wittenberg. He then traced the spirit of the Invisible Empire through Cromwellian England, the American Revolution, the War of 1812, the Civil War, and Reconstruction, apparently trying to prove that the Invisible Empire was the moving force of liberty and freedom motivating men since the Reformation. "His references to the Reconstruction were blood-curdling and one would have thought the blacks were about to descend on us in avalanche," noted a reporter covering the meeting. Simmons concluded his weird mixture of history and mysticism with the assertion that the Klan would make the

15 Ibid.
law "stout" where it was weak and assist in those cases where the "law could not reach."\textsuperscript{16}

In strange territory the Imperial Wizard had wisely avoided the religious question. It was one thing to attack Catholicism in Atlanta, but still another in New Orleans. Apparently his appeals fell on unreceptive ears, for of the fifty-one persons in attendance only three produced "Klecktoken," or the membership fee for entrance into the Invisible Empire.\textsuperscript{17}

But Simmons was not a man to rely on speeches alone. There was money to be made in New Orleans, and there were other tried and successful methods to produce fee-bearing members. A week before his address at the Woodmen of the World Hall a small advertisement had appeared in the classified section of the New Orleans Times-Picayune. It read: "Wanted -- High class solicitors for sure fire membership campaign. Big money for live men. Those experienced in soliciting members for fraternal bodies given preference. Give age, experience, and religion, and be sure to give references. All applicants will be thoroughly

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{16}\textit{Ibid.}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{17}John X. Wegman to editor, New Orleans \textit{Times-Picayune}, September 14, 1921.
\end{flushright}
investigated . . . " The advertisement was not unlike others appearing simultaneously in large Eastern and Midwestern metropolitan papers. The value of membership solicitors had proved successful in other states. They would now be employed in Louisiana.

Louisiana was a subdivision of the Domain of the Southwest. It was under the management of former ice cream salesman George B. Kimbro, Jr., who maintained his office as Grand Goblin in Houston, Texas. Directly subordinate to Kimbro in Louisiana was W. V. Easton, King Kleagle for the Bayou State Realm. As King Kleagle, Easton had general direction of the sale of memberships for the whole state. The Realm propagation headquarters were located in New Orleans at 414 Canal Street in the Commercial Bank Building. The Klan usually tried to hide its operations, at least until it was a powerful force in a community; therefore, it fronted its activities as the Metropolitan Lumber Company, listing W. V. Easton as its president. Leakage of the Klan's secret Louisiana hiding place brought heated denials from Morris St. L. Grundy, a Kleagle, but the New York World identified the spot

18 Ibid., November 20, 1921.


New Orleans was the hub of Klan activity in Louisiana in late 1920 and early 1921. Although the city was predominately Catholic, there were thousands of potential Protestant members, recent immigrants from country districts of Louisiana and southern Mississippi. In the six months following Simmon's visit to New Orleans, King Kleagle W. V. Easton and Kleagle R. H. Moodie quietly signed up over five hundred men and initiated them into the Invisible Empire. On July 1, 1921, Old Hickory Klan Number One of New Orleans formally received its charter and was officially admitted as a chapter of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. King Kleagle W. V. Easton was present to supervise the ceremonies.

---

20 Ibid., September 10, 1921.

21 Although the World erroneously listed Paul E. Perkins of Lake Charles as F. E. Perkins and Morris St. L. Grundy as N. W. Grundy, an examination of charters delivered by Louisiana Kleagles suggests the list was basically correct.
which included the installation of five hundred fifty-four members and the election of officers. New Orleans Klansmen elected L. A. Toombs, Adjutant General of the State of Louisiana, as their Exalted Cyclops, and Thomas DePaoli, state representative from New Orleans as Klaliff, or vice-president. Old Hickory members held their meetings at Shalimar Grotto. Easton and Moodie had hidden their moves well. They had conducted a quiet campaign, involving no public notoriety for the Klan; they had successfully avoided arousing the curiosity of the New Orleans press; they had held no huge rallies, nor had they resorted to ethnic or religious slander to secure the signatures of New Orleans members. Indeed, a survey of New Orleans newspapers prior to September, 1921, produced no substantial evidence relating to Klan activity in the city. The New Orleans Klan became newsworthy only after the New York World's exposé was published in the Times-Picayune in mid-September, 1921. By that time the organization was flourishing in the city and had moved beyond its boundaries into the rich hinterland of north Louisiana.

A brief examination of the New Orleans Klan indicates much about the operation of the Invisible Empire in Louisiana. The Old

---

22 Minutes of Old Hickory Klan Number One, New Orleans, July 21, 1921, in Robinson Papers.
Hickory unit was an important chapter in the Louisiana Realm until the mid 1920's when Klan influence waned, yet there is no evidence linking it with the night riding activities which characterized many other state units of the Invisible Empire. It is quite apparent that indulgence in clandestine operations outside the law was closely related to the size of Louisiana towns or cities in which the Klan was active. Large metropolitan centers simply did not lend themselves to kidnappings, whippings, or posted warnings for which the Klan was notorious. City residents either did not know who was drinking and wenching, or did not care. The city was impersonal, the small town intensely interested in the doings of its citizens. Moreover, New Orleans particularly, was not a city to be excited about liquor and vice, nor did it lend itself to religious diatribes which excited the minds of small town residents. Thus, the Old Hickory Klan was principally a fraternal society and a political organization. Its membership included a number of prominent New Orleanians -- lawyers, politicians, and an unusually large number of doctors. Many students of the Klan have suggested that aspiring politicians and young professional

23 Membership list of Old Hickory Klan Number One, New Orleans, ibid.
people frequently joined the Klan for the contacts which they could make.

A membership motivated only by self-interest obviously would lack the dedication to make Klanism a moving and vital force within the community. This was certainly the case in New Orleans. Scattered minutes of the Old Hickory unit reveal that after the original five hundred fifty-four members were initiated, total membership remained static, despite the fact that by the mid 1920's more than 1,000 men had been inducted into this unit.24

An equally important reason that the New Orleans unit failed to retain its members was the absence of night riding activities which fed starved emotions and maintained a constant state of excitement in small towns and villages. Thus, when a young Louisiana State University student attended a meeting at Shalimar Grotto and discovered the topics of discussion centered on politics, he found the organization too tame and resigned after one meeting.25 Thrill seekers found the Old Hickory Klan a pale

24 Minutes of Old Hickory Klan Number One, New Orleans, January 21, 1921, February 4, 1922, and April 3, 1922, ibid.

25 Author's personal interview with Dr. Edwin White, Hammond, Louisiana, February 27, 1960. Hereinafter cited as White interview.
imitation of the exciting Reconstruction organization whose name it bore.

Despite its tameness, the Old Hickory unit was an important outpost in Catholic Louisiana. It was the Invisible Empire's symbol of prestige in the South's largest and most Catholic city. Moreover, New Orleans supplied one of the state's most important Klan leaders, Thomas DePaoli, who, despite his Mediterranean name, was a Protestant. DePaoli was elected Klaliff of the Old Hickory unit in 1921 and served the New Orleans chapter in that capacity until February, 1922, when he was unanimously elected Exalted Cyclops to replace Louisiana Adjutant General L. A. Toombs, who resigned. The Orleans Parish state representative presided over Klan affairs in New Orleans until May 1, 1922, when he stepped down to be replaced by O. D. Jackson, head of the Pelican Detective Agency in New Orleans and later to be named director of prohibition enforcement in Louisiana.\(^\text{26}\) DePaoli's departure, however, was a step upward, for he was appointed Great Titan of the Province of Southeast Louisiana, a position which gave him one of the four most powerful Klan voices in the

\(^{26}\) Minutes of Old Hickory Klan Number One, New Orleans, May 1, 1922, in Robinson Papers.
state, and established New Orleans as headquarters for the Southeastern Province. The representative's appointment probably came from Atlanta, although this conclusion is based on later actions by national headquarters, which exercised both the power of removal and appointment for Realm and Province offices. Organization of New Orleans gave the Klan a base of operations from which the remainder of the state could be solicited. The state's largest city had been spared the worst features of Klan propagation, a fortunate circumstance many other Louisiana towns would not enjoy. The paucity of information left by Klan officials and the secrecy with which it operated creates unmanageable difficulties in tracing the evolution of the Klan in Louisiana. The problem is accentuated by the unwillingness or inability of former Klansmen to relate their experiences, a circumstance no doubt partially attributable to the post World War Two struggle over civil rights and segregation. Unfortunately, it is doubtful more evidence will ever be available.  

27 During the summer of 1960 the author talked to Paul E. Perkins, former Great Titan of the Province of Southwest Louisiana. Perkins initially expressed a willingness to discuss the Klan in Louisiana; however, he then changed his mind and refused to relate information of any significance. Author's personal interview with Paul E. Perkins, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, July 10, 1960. Hereinafter cited as Perkins interview.
a system of numbering its units within a state in the order in which they were chartered, a system which affords a broad outline of how the state was organized.

With New Orleans under its belt, the Invisible Empire moved upstate to the more fertile fields of Protestant Louisiana. The large towns were initial targets, which, when organized, served as secondary bases of operation for surrounding villages. Shreveport, Louisiana's second largest city in 1920, was organized a few days after New Orleans. On November 14, a small news story, buried on the inside pages of the Shreveport Journal, reported: "Definite announcement has been made today that plans are now being made for organizing in Shreveport a branch of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan." Several days later Shreveport Klan Number Two was installed. Louisiana had two Klansmen, L. P. Butler of Shreveport and A. B. Booth of New Orleans, who had been members since 1917. Both were active in the organization of the first two Louisiana units, and their earlier membership

---


29Ibid., November 24, 1920.
might explain why New Orleans and Shreveport were the first to be solicited.

Shreveport gradually assumed dominance over New Orleans as a Klan center and by late 1921 was the seat of state headquarters. Carey P. Duncan, Shreveport lumberman, was appointed Grand Dragon of Louisiana, the Klan's highest state office and headquarters were located in his hometown. Actually, the Louisiana Klan never established permanent offices; therefore, Realm and Province headquarters were the residences of the Klan's chief officials. An additional reason for Shreveport's primary importance was that it was not a true metropolitan center. It was, therefore, more receptive to Klan aims and more representative of the section of the state in which the secret society was strongest. All things considered, Shreveport was a fortunate choice. After 1922 large Klan gatherings in New Orleans would have doubtlessly caused trouble, but in Shreveport they were greeted with enthusiasm.

By spring, 1921, organizational schemes had produced over three hundred members in the northwest Louisiana town. The Klan made its first public appearance in Louisiana in Shreveport on April 9, 1921, when the city's whole Klan membership silently paraded through city streets.\(^{30}\) Six weeks later it demonstrated

\(^{30}\)Ibid., April 10, 1921.
to its south Louisiana counterpart the vigor which would not only
hold members but attract new ones. On May 25, Shreveport
police released wife-beater and vagrant Jack Morgan. Within hours
he was picked up by hooded Klansmen, tarred and feathered, and
run out of town. Here was action promising excitement to the
most rabid thrill seeker. Under the leadership of Exalted Cyclops
Dr. E. L. Thompson, pastor of the Central Christian Church,
the membership rolls of Shreveport Klan Number Two gradually
swelled to more than 3,000 members.

From Shreveport, Klan organizers fanned out to Monroe,
Haynesville, Rayville, Many, Bastrop, and Alexandria, establishing
new chapters as they went. Monroe Klan Number Four became the
biggest unit of the Invisible Empire in north central Louisiana,
and with the elevation of one of its members, R. Will Germany,
to the post of Great Titan of North Louisiana, it became headquarters
for that area. Ninety miles to the south Swords R. Lee and City Judge
A. V. Hundley became powerful leaders of the Klan in Alexandria.

31 Charles C. Alexander, The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest

32 Ibid., p. 98.

33 Membership list of Alexandria Klan Number Twelve, in
Robinson Papers.
In southwest Louisiana Paul E. Perkins, farm demonstration worker and organizer for the Ku Klux Klan, had established Klan Number Seven in his hometown of Lake Charles by early spring, 1921, and served it as Exalted Cyclops until he was elevated to the newly created post of Great Titan of the Province of Southwest Louisiana. Perkins proved to be one of Louisiana's ablest Klan leaders. During the remainder of 1921 he chartered another Klan in Calcasieu Parish at DeQuincy, two units in Beauregard Parish at DeRidder and Merryville, and two more in Allen Parish at Oberlin and Oakdale.

Perkins might have reasonably anticipated success in Lake Charles, which, despite its preponderance of Catholics, had substantial numbers of Protestants, and in Allen and Beauregard Parishes, both of which were top heavy with Protestants. But lying to his southeast toward New Orleans was Catholic country, which must have seemed forbidding to even the most hardened Klan campaigner. Undaunted, Perkins invaded the Roman bastion and by the end of 1921 had achieved some success. Klans were chartered

34 Minutes of Old Hickory Klan Number One, New Orleans, April 17, 1922, ibid.
35 New Orleans Times-Picayune, March 25, 29, 1923.
at Crowley, Lafayette, New Iberia, New Roads, Donaldsonville, and Plaquemine. 36

In DePaoli's Province of Southeast Louisiana, Baton Rouge Klan Number Three was the second to be organized. Kleagles moved into the capital city a few days after Shreveport was organized, and delivered its charter in April, 1921. 37 Exalted Cyclops J. D. Womack, heading a membership composed largely of Standard Oil Refinery workers, soon welded together one of Louisiana's larger units. 38 In nearby Tangipahoa Parish Klans were organized in Ponchatoula, Hammond, Amite, and Kentwood. The membership rolls of the Tangipahoa chapters read like a parish Who's Who. Slidell and Covington in St. Tammany Parish were also organized in 1921, as were Livingston Parish, St. Helena, and East and West Feliciana. In Washington Parish two Klans, Bogalusa and Franklinton, reportedly composed of outstanding citizens, were organized the same year, as was Al-Gre-Har Klan Number Forty-

36 Undated memorandum, in Robinson Papers. See also New Orleans Times-Picayune, March 23, April 2, 1923.

37 The Winnfield News American, July 21, 1922.

38 The Baton Rouge membership list, which is in the author's possession, reveals a substantial number of Standard Oil Refinery employees were Klansmen. The list of names was analyzed by a former employee of the Baton Rouge refinery who recognized many names of fellow workers.
Five, which was made up of citizens of Algiers, Gretna, and
Harahan, located across the river from New Orleans in Jefferson
Parish. Southeast Louisiana, particularly the Florida Parishes,
was exceeded in Klan strength only by the tier of north Louisiana
parishes adjoining the Arkansas border.

Bayou State Kleagles employed most of the Klan themes
exploited in other Realms, and each doubtlessly won converts to
the Invisible Empire. But in Louisiana, as in other states, certain
portions of the national program proved more effective than
others. For example, restriction of immigration, white supremacy,
and the so-called Jewish problem, successfully exploited else­
where, were not moving forces behind Louisiana enlistments.
Louisiana Klansmen paid lip service to these national themes,
but their promotion within the state arose from the willingness of
the Realm to maintain the official Atlanta line and not from any
particular merit they possessed for recruiting. For example,
when Senator Joseph E. Ransdell spoke out in support of the
unrestricted importation of foreign immigration to meet labor

39 New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 1, 1922, April 7,
8, 1923, and author's personal interview with George B. Campbell,
Hammond, Louisiana, June 20, 1961. Hereinafter cited as
Campbell interview.
shortages caused by Negro migration northward, the Louisiana Klan uttered no protests. 40

The maintenance of white supremacy, when held out as a reason for joining the Klan, was most effective in areas where there was some doubt that whites actually controlled the community. Few persons, during the twenties, particularly Negroes, doubted Louisiana was white man's country. The editor of the Ponchatoula Enterprise, protesting the appointment of a Negro as comptroller of the customs for the port of New Orleans, accurately painted the status of race relations in Louisiana when he wrote: "The South is the place for the Negro, and in fact, the only section where he can, as a race and as an individual, receive the fairest treatment and his just dues, yet there is an unwritten law that this is a WHITE MAN'S country [that] will be ruled and controlled by white men." 41 Moreover, Klan violence against Negroes was rarely the product of black " uppiness," but rather of Negro lawlessness, particularly bootlegging. At times the Klan was a real friend to

40Undated clipping from Vernon Parish Democrat, James B. Aswell and Family Papers, scrapbook number fourteen, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Hereinafter cited as Aswell Papers.

41Ponchatoula Enterprise, March 28, 1924.
the Negro. On one occasion, a greedy white attempted to take a poor Negro's land, only to have his scheme thwarted by Winnsboro Klansmen, exercising an old, if too rarely used Southern version of noblesse oblige. White supremacy, then, was an undoubted axiom in Louisiana and although Klansmen might talk at length about "maintaining the purity of the race," which to them meant eternal vigilance against Negro male and white female cohabitation, and "keeping the Nigger in his place," they nevertheless assumed Caucasian superiority just as they had done before the Klan and as they would continue to do after the Klan. The question might have been in doubt in Detroit, New York, Chicago, Indianapolis, or Philadelphia, but not in Louisiana.

Another national theme, anti-Semitism, was never particularly effective in the country as a whole, and certainly not in Louisiana, partially because the Klan was about ten years too early in promoting an anti-Jewish crusade. Louisiana's Jewish population, centered in towns and largely employed in retail merchandising,

---

42 Author's personal interview with George Hair, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, September 8, 1960. Hereinafter cited as Hair interview.

lacked the bulk to bring into play the two traditional harbingers of racial or national animosities, proximity and numbers. Infrequent, isolated cases of Klansmen doing business only with gentile establishments did occur. But the real tone of Klan opinion about Jews in Louisiana was expressed in Monroe, location of one of the state's strongest chapters, when that local chapter twice refused to campaign openly against incumbent Mayor Arnold Bernstien.

Why, then, did Louisianians join the Klan? A preponderance of evidence conclusively demonstrates that the most attractive features of the Klan in Louisiana was its potential as a law enforcement agency, its campaign against Catholics, and its promise as a fraternal organization.

Like most other states, Louisiana experienced a wave of lawlessness following World War One. The most common offense seemed to be bootlegging, frequently smiled at in Catholic Louisiana, but of deep concern to the heavily Protestant parishes, many of which had been dry by local option long before national prohibition.

44 Hair interview. See also The Winnfield News American, May 11, 1923.

Moreover, many Louisiana towns were centers of extractive industries during the twenties, as large corporations systematically removed the state's rich natural resources. Lumber towns, oil towns, and natural gas towns attracted an undue quantity of harlots, card sharps, procurers, and "hangers-on," ready to pluck from unwary farm boys, recent arrivals to the new industrial cities, their week's wages. 46

Proclamations issued by various chapters illustrate the Louisiana Klan's abiding concern about so called "bad elements" in their midst and its determination to end the problem. In southeast Louisiana the mayor of Covington heeded a warning to clean up the town by forcing six "objectionable Negroes," a preacher who was stirring up race prejudice, and the keeper of an "improper resort" to leave town. 47 In Kentwood a Klan parade warned law-breakers to leave the community, and in Baton Rouge Klan Number Three issued a warning "To the bootleggers, moonshiners, gamblers, 46Every former Klansman interviewed by the author emphasized the lawless conditions in Louisiana during the early twenties and the inability of officials to cope with the problem. See George B. Campbell to John M. Parker, March 26, 1922, in John M. Parker Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Hereinafter cited as Parker Papers.

47New Orleans Times-Picayune, March 17, 1922.
bookmakers, prostitutes, and owners of houses being operated as a common nuisance: We have given you asylum long enough. You have violated our laws, preyed upon . . . our youth . . . and exhausted the patience and forfeited the respect of all decent and law-abiding citizens. Cut it out or get out." In Slidell Mayor G. A. Baker was warned to "get busy" against bootleggers and "blind pig" operators, and in Hammond "bootleggers, gamblers, and loafers" were warned to "mend their ways."

Across the state, in Dequincy, the Klan issued a proclamation instructing "professional loafers, whiskey dealers, and law violators" that the town would become a decent place to live at once. Negroes who conduct themselves as they should need not fear us. We will help you," concluded the statement. In north Louisiana the same theme prevailed. In Sabine Parish, Klan Number Thirty-Nine objected to the mild punishment administered to youthful first offenders by Mayor G. C. Boswell and informed him it wanted "a clean town and a city court that will command

---

48 Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, July 17, 28, 1922


50 Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, October 5, 1921.
respect. Get busy and uphold the law as it should be and cut out suspended sentences or resign and make space for a man that will.\textsuperscript{51} North of Monroe, in the Ouachita River valley, indignant Louisiana and Arkansas Klansmen offered 1,000 men to rid the valley of moonshining.\textsuperscript{52}

The concern about lawlessness was not exclusive to Klansmen. Louisiana newspapers were frequently the recipient of letters to their editors from individuals denying membership in the Klan, but supporting its stand for law and order. "All bootleggers, anti-prohibitionists, gamblers, prostitutes and painted jezebels are anti-klan," wrote H. F. Killen, of Homer. "Mr. Editor, tell your readers I am not a klansman, but will never side with the bunch that fight the klan.\textsuperscript{53}

Of course, much of the "lawlessness" of which Klansmen complained was in the stricter legal sense immorality, and had nothing to do with the law. But Louisiana's hooded Knights included an extensive list of petty acts -- wife beating, extra marital

\textsuperscript{51}Quoted in The Sabine Index, March 4, 1922.

\textsuperscript{52}Baton Rouge State Times, October 24, 1922.

\textsuperscript{53}H. F. Killen to editor, Homer Guardian Journal, July 18, 1923.
affairs, loafing, non-support, and drinking -- all of which offended the community's moral standards, in their always flexible list of "illegal activities." It probably never occurred to most Klansmen that their clandestine activities in support of the law were frequently illegal or that their crime was compounded when they enforced morals as opposed to statutory prohibitions.

Any extensive examination of Klanism will reveal that some people used the Klan as a means to secure moral ends, and in Louisiana that facet of Klanism was largely responsible for its success. Louisianians wanted clean towns in which to raise their children, free of the human parasites and "hangers-on" who violated their Calvinistic conceptions of individual labor for every man and who evilly beckoned to their children. They wanted the moral standards so vigorously laid down on Sunday mornings by strait-laced pastors upheld, provided, of course, they were allowed to violate them, knowing no ill could come from their violations. It was the other fellow who would be dangerous if he were allowed to stray from the straight and narrow. It was for this very reason so many Southerners supported prohibition. Negroes and poor whites, they believed, could not be trusted with liquor. These were not tolerant people, but for that matter,
Americans in general have never been as tolerant as they would have outsiders believe. Yet they were sincere. They honestly believed the hood and mask was a device which could improve the quality of their world. They frequently complained that the properly constituted authorities were incapable or unwilling to do the job they wanted done, which was, of course, impossible, in view of the fact that authorities had no jurisdiction over petty moral improprieties. To the dissatisfied and disturbed the Klan afforded an opportunity to do the job themselves, a prospect that induced many members into the waiting portals of the Invisible Empire.

The Klan's preoccupation with "lawlessness," and particularly its determination to regulate the morals of the community, eloquently illustrate its basic failure to understand what the America, of which they were so chauvinistically proud, really stood for. The simple proposition that democracy involved observance of procedural justice for every man, toleration of

55See for example New Orleans Times-Picayune, March 5, 17, 1922.

56Campbell interview.
divergent views of morality and religion, and rejection of summary justice failed to penetrate the cheap cloth of their hoods.

Thus, in Louisiana, the Invisible Empire flourished on the misguided determination of its citizens to arrest the moral decay and lawlessness they believed threatening the welfare of their communities and the vision that the secret society might somehow serve to create a "bit of heaven here on earth." In short, Louisianians found in the Klan an opportunity to express their own moral idealism.

Anti-Catholicism was the second most successful theme exploited by Klan procurers in Louisiana, although the existence of Catholic parishes in south Louisiana necessarily circumscribed the Invisible Empire's utilization of that theme. The Louisiana Klan avoided references to Catholic dogma and concentrated on polity, although in the Roman church, polity is a part of dogma. But it was a delicate distinction Klansmen avoided. The principle theme exploited contended that the Roman church was a hierarchial institution, undemocratic in principle, dedicated to world domination and the destruction of Protestantism and democracy, and was, therefore, a menace to America's free institutions.

As Klan solicitors combed the north Louisiana hill country, they carried with them "Do You Know" cards, which they freely,
and apparently effectively, distributed to interested potential members. The small card was a masterpiece of propaganda, obviously designed to appeal mainly to the untutored. It contained fifteen assertions headed by a general prefix "Do You Know," claiming that the Pope was "a political autocrat," that he made a secret treaty causing the war, that he had courts enforcing canon law, that he controlled the daily and magazine press, that he denounced popular government as vicious, that his subjects controlled the war industries and the United States government, and that the Knights of Columbus were dedicated to making "popery" dominant in America. The card ended with an appeal to the people to "save our country as a beacon light of constitutional liberty and hope for the world."57

Augmenting the "Do You Know" cards in an enterprising Kleagles arsenal of anti-Catholic venom was the spurious Knights of Columbus Oath, a bloodcurdling document first used against Catholics in 1913, now resurrected by the Klan to strike terror in the hearts of insecure Protestants and convince them of an imminent papal takeover. According to the Louisiana Klan, each member of the Knights of Columbus took the oath when entering his fraternity's fourth degree.

57 New Orleans Times-Picayune, September 15, 1921.
I, (name of member), now in the presence of almighty God, the blessed Virgin Mary... declare and swear that His Holiness, the Pope, is Christ's vice-regent and is the true and only head of the Catholic or Universal Church throughout the earth; and that by virtue of the keys of binding and loosing given his Holiness by my Savior, Jesus Christ, he hath power to depose heretical kings, princes, States, Commonwealths, and Governments and they may be safely destroyed. Therefore to the utmost of my power, I will defend this doctrine and His Holiness's right and custom against all usurpers of the heretical or Protestant authority....

I do now denounce and disown any allegiance as due to any heretical king, prince, or State, named Protestant or Liberal, or obedience to any of their laws, magistrates or officers....

I do further declare that I will help, assist, all or any of His Holiness's agents, in any place where I should be... I shall come to, and do my utmost to extricate the heretical Protestant or Masonic doctrines and to destroy all their pretended powers, legal or otherwise....

I do further promise and declare that I will have no opinion or will of my own or any mental reservation whatsoever... but will unhesitatingly obey each and every command that I may receive from my superiors in the militia of the Pope and of Jesus Christ....

I do further promise and declare that I will, when opportunity presents, make and wage relentless war, secretly and openly, against all heretics, Protestants and Masons, as I am directed to do, to extricate them from the face of the whole earth; and that I will spare neither age, sex, nor condition, and that I will hang, burn, waste, boil, flay, strangle, and bury alive these infamous heretics; rip up the stomachs and wombs of their women, and annihilate their execrable race. That when the same cannot be done openly, I will secretly use the poisonous cup, the strangulation cord, the steel of the poniard, or the leaden bullet....
In confirmation of which I hereby dedicate my life, soul, and all corporal powers, and with the dagger which I now receive I will subscribe my name written in my blood in testimony thereof; and should I prove false or weaken in my determination, may my brethren and fellow soldiers in the militia of the Pope cut off my hands and feet and my throat from ear to ear, my belly opened and sulphur burned therein with all the punishment that can be inflicted upon men on earth and my soul shall be tortured by demons in eternal hell forever.

That I will in voting always vote for a K. of C. in preference to a Protestant especially a Mason, and that I will leave my party to do so.

That I will not deal with or employ a Protestant if in my power to employ or deal with a Catholic.

That I will provide myself with arms and ammunition that I may be in readiness when the word is passed.

In testimony thereof, I take this most holy and blessed Sacrament of the Eucharest and witness the same further with my name written with the point of this dagger dipped in my own blood.

According to former Louisiana Klansmen, the spurious Knights of Columbus oath was widely circulated in north Louisiana and the Protestant islands south of Alexandria. To the individual with any predisposition to suspect Catholics the oath was a heady wine.

---


59 Hair interview and Campbell interview.
Its appeal was mainly to the unsophisticated person who wanted to believe the worst about members of the Roman faith. It was good propaganda for the purpose for which it was designed, and its ability to withstand the test of time is eloquent testimony to its effectiveness.

The "Do You Know" cards and the spurious Knights of Columbus oath were imported anti-Catholic literature. But Louisiana Knights displayed no mean ability in writing their own brand of venom. A favorite vehicle of disseminating anti-Catholic information was the mimeographed essay. These essays were usually titled but unsigned, and bore the unmistakable imprint of the hooded order. A typical one, entitled "Tolerance," was a masterpiece of abuse. Beginning with a general condemnation of the Roman Catholic Church, the essay then proceeded to stress the dangers the Catholic faith posed to American institutions. On the wall of the Vatican, claimed the unidentified author, was a giant map of the United States which contained the information needed by the Pope to destroy the country and impose his will on Protestants. America was in danger but there was yet hope, said the author, because Americans were awakening from their long stupor and were

60 The oath was used in the 1960 Presidential election against John Fitzgerald Kennedy.
organizing for defensive action. The "enemy" was crying "intolerance" in the face of Protestant "defensive action," he said, but the newly awakened wave of Protestant, Anglo-Saxon Americanism would not be stemmed by "disloyal papists" invoking the democratic principles they sought to subvert. It was not the Klan but the Catholic Church which was guilty of the un-American practices of which the noble Knights had been accused. The Klan was merely "fighting fire with fire." 61

Anti-Catholic propaganda utilized by the Louisiana Klan was systematically and carefully employed. Leaders recognized the obvious dangers of circulating such printed material in Catholic Louisiana and for the most part were successful in preventing its departure from Protestant territory. That danger was dramatically illustrated in 1923 when a copy of The Protestant Standard, a violent anti-Catholic, pro-Klan journal published in Merryville, Louisiana, was circulated in New Iberia. It aroused bitter feelings in the sugar parish town and was responsible for

61 Mimeoographed essay entitled "Tolerance," in Ladislas Lazaro Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Hereinafter cited as Lazaro Papers.
the rapid demise of the Klan in that community. The Klan learned quickly. It was an error the hooded society would not repeat.

Moreover, the Louisiana Invisible Empire always concentrated its attacks on the Catholic Church as an institution or upon its practices, particularly those it believed to be inimical to a free democratic society. It never trafficked in personalities, as did segregationists during the school integration crisis in New Orleans during the early 1960's. Nor did the Louisiana Klan propose any solution to the so-called "Catholic problem" other than to invite all Protestants to join hands in the Invisible Empire to present a united front against further Roman encroachments. Thus, the Louisiana Klan's anti-Catholicism was negative in that it proposed no solutions and opportunistic in that it was directed toward augmenting membership rolls or satisfying the prejudices and suspicions of old members. Yet, despite its failure to suggest a positive anti-Catholic program, Louisianans, ever mistrustful of their Roman neighbors, found the Klan's program of anti-Catholicism satisfying. It was a rich vein the Klan had tapped, one which yielded rich harvests of north Louisiana Protestants for

the Invisible Empire. Indeed, many Pelican State Protestants were then, and are today, deeply distrustful of the Catholic portion of the state, and when gubernatorial elections occur one still hears disquieting murmurs of "papal domination" or "direction from Rome." Louisiana has not elected a Catholic governor in its modern political history, and the time may yet be distant when that eventuality is possible.

Another important motivating force prompting Louisianians to enroll in the Invisible Empire was the secret society's program of fraternalism. "The one great underlying principle of our noble Order, one which demands constant practice, is," said William Joseph Simmons, "KLANISH FIDELITY -- constancy in the performance of Klanish Practices." Simmons had created first of all a Protestant men's social fraternity, but historians, impressed with Klan night riding and violence, have too frequently devoted virtually all of their attention to the organization's more violent side and have all but ignored its social importance. The reason is not hard to find. Most Klan studies have been based on newspaper and magazine accounts which obviously found the tamer side of Klanism poor copy. The natural result has been an

---

63 Simmons, The Practice of Klannishness, no pagination.
overemphasis on the secret fraternity's more violent side, and most of Klan violence found its way into print.

Most Louisiana Klaverns never made headlines, principally because Klan violence in Louisiana was limited to a few scattered chapters. The logical conclusion to be drawn from this fact is that the majority of Louisiana's units in the Invisible Empire were chiefly social organizations engaged in normally harmless activities. Certainly Old Hickory Klan Number One in New Orleans and the Klans of Crowley, New Iberia, Lake Charles, and Lafayette could have hoped to be nothing more, and there is no evidence that they were. Louisianians, as other Americans, found the secrecy, the mask, and the mumbo jumbo ritual concocted by Simmons both adventurous and attractive, and they paid their ten dollars to be with their friends. "It was the thing to do," as one former Klansman put it. 64

In September, 1921, the New York World expose exploded on the front pages of the New Orleans Times-Picayune. The World attack, carried in its entirety by the Times-Picayune, was the first significant publicity the Klan received in Louisiana. The expose listed names of Louisiana Kleagles and gave the address of the

64 White interview.
Klan's New Orleans headquarters, but failed to identify other Louisiana Klansmen or assess the secret society's progress since November, 1920. Few letters crossed the *Times-Picayune* editor's desk commenting on the news stories, and no consensus can be established from those ultimately printed. A typical one commented, with considerable foresight, that "such a movement [the Klan] would inevitably disintegrate into the venting of private spites," but that such movements did not arise where the law was rigidly enforced. The letter writer then related an incident involving a "low dive" where Negro men met white women and "vice versa." 65

Publication of the series by the *Times-Picayune* also brought a scathing rebuke from Atlanta headquarters. Simmons wrote:

"You have printed in the last few days the most callous tissue of lies which, in my judgement, has ever been printed in any newspaper in America . . . ." 66

The most serious threat posed by the expose came from the Louisiana State Legislature in September, 1921, where Representative C. L. Chappius of Arcadia Parish introduced a bill in the

---

65 Unsigned letter to editor, New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, September 26, 1921.

66 William Joseph Simmons to editor, *ibid.*, September 19, 1921.
House making it unlawful to hold membership in an organization whose rolls were not open to public inspection. Meanwhile, Senator Jules Dreyfus of Iberia Parish proposed another bill in the Senate outlawing the mask except during Mardi Gras.  

Hearings on the controversial bills began on September 28, before the House of Representatives Judiciary "C" Committee. The galleries contained a capacity crowd, anxiously awaiting the arrival of Klansmen, who, according to persistent rumors in Baton Rouge, would make an appearance at the hearings. But the Klan thought better of the public appearance and left its defense in the hands of its legislators. Dreyfus and Professor R. L. Tullis, Dean of the Louisiana State University Law School, opened debate with impassioned denunciations of the mask. The Iberia legislator, speaking for his fellow Louisiana Jews and the thousands of Catholics in south Louisiana, boldly proclaimed he was "a 100 per cent American and a 100 per cent Jew" and that after two thousand years he would not go back on his ancestry.

---


68 New Orleans Times-Picayune, September 29, 1921.
Defending the Klan was Old Hickory's Klaliff, Thomas DePaoli of New Orleans. Although many legislators had letters accusing DePaoli of membership in the Klan, the New Orleans representative consistently denied being a Klansman. "I am not a Ku Klux . . . a Grand Goblin, or a Kleagle," he said. The time had not yet arrived when Louisianians, particularly politicians, would feel safe in openly admitting membership in the secret fraternity.

DePaoli cleverly gave committee members, not yet able to fathom the power and political significance of the Klan, a "political out" on the bills by strenuously arguing that the enactment of the proposed laws "would mean that the carnival organizations in Louisiana, which have worked so hard to make Mardi Gras so great, must go out of existence." When Drefus pointed out that amendments would protect masking on Mardi Gras, DePaoli countered: "Why the Ku Klux Klan could parade that day, masked in full regalia, and under your bill you could not stop them." When Representative A. W. Radescich, for whom the Winnfield Klan was named, asked what the committee planned to do about Santa Claus,

69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
he temporarily broke up the hearings. Chappius, recognizing the danger of frivolity, moved that both bills be sent to subcommittee for drafting into a single measure. The motion was accepted, but the bills died without further action. 72

The Louisiana Klan's first encounter with opposition left the organization unscarred. It is doubtful that members of Judiciary "C" Committee wanted to take action on the Klan in late 1921. Politicians instinctively avoid tackling organizations of political uncertainty, and the Louisiana Klan was not yet a politically measurable quantity.

72 Ibid.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE BIG PUSH, 1922

The distinguishing features of the early history of the Invisible Empire in Louisiana were the carefully guarded secrecy with which initial recruiting was accomplished and the reluctance of the Klan to engage in extensive acts of violence. As the ambitious representatives of the Invisible Empire scoured the state for potential members, they prudently avoided incidents which might have created hostile public opinion. Within ten months following Imperial Wizard William Joseph Simmons's New Orleans visit of November, 1920, Klans had been established in a majority of the state's parishes. Despite their wide-ranging activities, Klansmen successfully avoided the illumination of public attention until autumn, 1921. Certainly most Louisianians were aware of the existence of the secret society in their midst because public appearances were made by a few chapters, particularly Shreveport Klan Number Two, as early as spring, 1921; and those appearances were recorded in the press. But the specific location of individual
Klans, their membership, and their leadership remained mysteries to most Louisianians. So effective was the security of the Klan during the first ten months of its existence in Louisiana, that state newspapers during that period are virtually devoid of items relating to the secret order. Thus, the Louisiana Klan approached structural maturity before it attracted notoriety.

Strict security and the tameness of the Klan came to an abrupt end during early spring, 1922. Publication of the World expose by the New Orleans Times-Picayune in September, 1921, encouraged other state journals to follow the lead of the Crescent City paper and search out information on the Klan in their communities. As the winter wore on, the incidence of newspaper attention to the Klan rose sharply. When Representatives C. L. Chappius of Arcadia Parish and Jules Dreyfus of Iberia Parish introduced their anti-masking bills in the legislature, rumors circulated in the state capital that Representative Thomas DePaoli of Orleans Parish was an important member of the New Orleans chapter of the Klan. Although DePaoli vigorously denied association with the Klan, his protestations were unconvincing to his accusers. ¹ The linking of DePaoli with the Invisible Empire breached the vaunted Klan security, and before the onset of spring, 1922, much of the secrecy

¹Baton Rouge State Times, September 29, 1921.
of the clandestine society was in shambles. Key leaders of the organization had been identified, location of many chapters had been established, and the names of many prominent members had appeared in the columns of inquiring newspapers.

The glare of publicity apparently caught the Louisiana Klan off guard. The public attention aroused by the *World* attack and the subsequent introduction of anti-Klan bills in the legislature had not been foreseen, and Louisiana Knights were not certain what the implications of the publicity might be. Therefore, during the fall of 1921, activities of the secret organization were characterized by caution as it awaited the public reaction to its new notoriety.

The verdict was not long in coming. Neither the *World* stories nor the legislature's brief attention to the mask aroused an immediately significant opposition to the Invisible Empire. Indeed, there is good reason to believe newspaper publicity aided the Klan in Louisiana as it had elsewhere. The opposition of the *Times-Picayune* doubtlessly promoted expansion in north Louisiana, the section of the state most sympathetic to the tenets of Klanism and least sympathetic to a crusading city press, especially when that crusade was aimed at an organization defending the heart of Anglo-Saxon Protestant orthodoxy.
The failure of the Klan's enemies to construct immediate obstructions or an effective organization to check the growth of Klan influence doubtlessly encouraged the clandestine society to strike a bolder pose. But there were other reasons prompting alterations in the Klan's course which were apparent by the spring of 1922. First, the great emphasis on secrecy, although it had proved a valuable asset in early recruiting and was a feature of the Invisible Empire many members found attractive, was now of questionable value. In order to grow, the Louisiana Klan had reached the point that it needed to adopt the mass recruiting methods which had been employed with success in other Realms. It was clear that the utilization of mass recruiting methods involved possible security breaches, but evidence was everywhere apparent that continued attempts to maintain absolute secrecy would be futile. Not only were newspapers exploiting the secrets of the Invisible Empire in their columns, but also few thoughtful Klan leaders could have failed to realize that most rank and file members would sooner or later experience a strong urge (perhaps arising from the same need that prompted them to Klanism in the first place) to reveal their acceptance into the "in group" which the Klan represented. Thus, in view of the impossibility to maintain effective secrecy, the decision to subordinate security to growth and profits (which were
related to the number of Klansmen recruited) was not a difficult one. Furthermore, in the neighboring Realm of Texas, the Klan was rapidly becoming a powerful voice in both politics and the maintenance of conventional morality. Louisiana Klansmen must have been impressed by the antics of their fellow Knights in the Lone Star State and must have dreamed of the time they could exercise equal influence within their Realm.

Klan activity rose sharply in Louisiana in 1922. Evidence of a new and militant pose was everywhere apparent. Klansmen paraded openly in communities in which they had previously avoided public appearances. They boldly appeared in churches during evening worship and, by giving donations to the minister, thus expressed their approval of his work. Bootleggers, prostitutes, gamblers, and irresponsible husbands suddenly found themselves confronted by masked bands quite willing to employ intimidation and violence to achieve their goal of "cleaning up their towns." The Klan steamroller was in motion and seemed ready to chew up any opposition in its path.

Despite the menacing countenance of its new image, Klan militance in Louisiana was certain to attract enemies. Organized opposition to the Invisible Empire appeared first in Alexandria, seat of government for Rapides Parish. A masked parade through the city streets by Alexandria Klan Number Twelve provoked the
formation of a "law and order league," composed of four hundred seventy-eight citizens and headed by Andrew Melady and former Alexandria Mayor, J. P. Turregano. Adopting a resolution declaring the Ku Klux Klan was nothing more than a mob "attempting to gain public favor . . . by advertising its pseudo-patriotism and parading its pretended charity," the law and order league conducted a counter parade and demanded the Rapides Parish Police Jury outlaw masked parades. Although the police jury subsequently considered an anti-masking law for the parish, it failed by a vote of eight to six. Alexandria Klan Number Twelve was one of Louisiana's stronger units and included in its membership City Judge A. V. Hundley. It was a ticklish situation for members of the police jury. Both groups, the Klan and the law and order league, had political power, and it was not yet clear in which direction the path of political opportunity led.

Andrew Melady, president of the law and order league, carried the fight beyond the police jury by penning a letter to Louisiana Governor John M. Parker condemning the Klan in essentially the same language used in the original resolution. Parker, who was

---

2Ibid., March 15, 1922.

3New Orleans Times-Picayune, March 16, 1922.
the kind of governor too few states have and many need, telegraphed his agreement with Melady's sentiments. "I am thoroughly in accord with your views in your letter of recent date regarding the Ku Klux Klan," he wrote, "and at the proper time will take this matter up."4

The "proper time" came exactly one week later when Parker addressed an official statement to every sheriff, district attorney, and judge in Louisiana. He declared that Louisiana would not tolerate hooded men attempting to supplant properly constituted law officials. "In view of the pleas which I have received from various sections of the state, I will instruct state law enforcement officials to suppress with an iron hand the evil of Ku Kluxism wherever it raises its ugly head," he told reporters covering the event.5 Less than a week later, he issued another statement condemning the Klan as a danger to the supremacy of the law and, thus, to the security of society. In the meantime, Louisiana Attorney General A. V. Coco announced that a state anti-Klan act of 1872 was still in effect, and that it prohibited masked parades. Violation of the law, he said, would incur a penalty of a six-month

4 Ibid.
5 Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, March 23, 1922.
jail term or a five hundred dollar fine. The Governor announced he intended to act immediately on Coco's ruling and suppress every parade or public meeting of masked Klansmen.  

The reaction to the Governor's pugnacious challenge was immediate. Letters and telegrams flooded his office expressing varied opinions of his charge to the state's law officers. From Alexandria, Robert H. Hill, secretary of that city's law and order league, fired an ecstatic telegram announcing his organization, "1500 strong, sends congratulations." The American Civil Liberties Union expressed its approval, along with Albert DeSilver, journalists for The Nation and author of several articles on the Klan. From Shreveport, George Whitfield Jack, Judge of the United States District Court, Western District of Louisiana, penned his concurrence with Parker's evaluation of the threat posed by the Klan. "Your strong . . . expression on that form of lawlessness and violence which has come to be known as Ku-Kluxism is just

---

6 New Orleans Times-Picayune, April 6, 1922.
7 Robert H. Hill to John M. Parker, March 24, 1922 (telegram), in Parker Papers.
8 Albert DeSilver to John M. Parker, March 24, 1922, ibid.
exactly what your friends expected of you . . . . The Ku Klux Klan as a social fraternal organization has a perfect right to exist . . . but it may not arrogate to itself the right to enforce the law of the land. " And, in West Feliciana Parish, Sheriff F. C. Wilcox expressed the attitude of several Louisiana law officials when he promised Parker he would "live up to his oath of office regardless as to who the offenders may be." 10

Some officials supported the Governor's stand but complained that they were powerless to cope with the Invisible Empire. Mayor G. C. Boswell of Many, who had been the target of a Klan attack because he had been too lenient on first offenders, regretted that, although he supported Parker, he was "somewhat handicapped . . . because the Sheriff and his forces and the Marshall of the town are charter members of Sabine Klan No. 39 . . . ." 11 Charles M.

---

9 George Whitfield Jack to John M. Parker, March 24, 1922, ibid.

10 F. C. Wilcox to John M. Parker, March 27, 1922, ibid. For similar expressions of support from law officers see W. H. Elliot to John M. Parker, March 27, 1922; J. W. Payne to John M. Parker, March 27, 1922; ( ? ) Snyder to John M. Parker, March 27, 1922; and W. H. Vandegaer to John M. Parker, March 24, 1922, ibid.

11 G. C. Boswell to John M. Parker, March 28, 1922, ibid. See also The Sabine Index, March 4, 1922.
Barrow, a West Feliciana Parish planter, wrote of a similar problem in his parish. "I support your position," he said, "but unfortunately all of our parish officers . . . belong to the Ku Klux, with Judge Lawrason at the head of them . . . . We stand a poor chance for the enforcement of the law by our officers . . . ."12

Relatively few letters crossed Parker's desk lamenting the problem faced by West Feliciana and Sabine Parishes, but it was a situation which existed in several other parishes within the state.

The praise and pledges of support were clearly welcome because, for each letter commending the Governor's actions, his personal papers contain another which either evaded his charge or bitterly assailed him. E. B. Moore, District Attorney in Winnsboro, replied that he would hold the Ku Klux Klan accountable "to the same extent of other organizations," but that in his district the Klan had performed "only meritorious acts," and "it should be fostered and protected rather than ruthlessly suppressed."13 Sheriff Jesse S. Gilbert concurred with Moore's assessment of the Klan in Franklin Parish. There was no reason, he argued, to blame the

---

12 Charles M. Barrow to John M. Parker, March 29, 1922, in Parker Papers.

13 E. B. Moore to John M. Parker, March 27, 1922, ibid.
Invisible Empire for the lawlessness which had recently plagued the state. The Klan was composed of "law abiding citizens, much more so than some of the other organizations that are using every possible means of suppressing them . . . . I cannot," he said, "be counted upon to help break up any . . . organization . . . unless I have the evidence . . . to show the law had been violated."

Reluctance to support Parker's proclamation by Louisiana law officials was mild disapproval of his stand compared to other correspondence he received during the week following his initial proclamation. One unsigned letter reminded Parker that he was not "dealing with niggers and foreigners" who "owned and controlled" the state. "These are aided by a few unprincipled and unpatriotic American born," said the unidentified correspondent. He concluded with the assertion: "We are determined to Americanize this state." Another anonymous letter writer could not understand how the Governor could make such "an unmitigated Jack-Ass of his self," and declared that Parker "would not receive the support of a

---

14 Jesse S. Gilbert to John M. Parker, March 27, 1922, ibid. For similar expressions of the law-abiding nature of the Klan from law officers see J. E. Hewitt to John M. Parker, March 31, 1922; and T. R. Hughes to John M. Parker, March 28, 1922, ibid.

15 Unsigned letter to John M. Parker, March 30, 1922, ibid.
single man . . . unless it was a Catholic or Jew and possibly a negro . . . . I am forced to remain in the dark now but will be in the light if you ever run for office again," warned the writer.  

Several letters received by the Governor alluded to the political liabilities related to an anti-Klan crusade. From Hammond, Vanderbilt-educated journalist George Campbell wrote Parker that he had declined to print the Governor's proclamation because the members of the Klan in Tangipahoa Parish were "the best element of citizenship -- the same element instrumental in your election. . . . Should you issue the call to the Klan in Tangipahoa Parish," said Campbell, "more than 500 stalwart, upright, honest citizens -- friends of Jno. M. Parker, would respond nobly." Parker answered Campbell's letter the following day. He appreciated the fact that the Klan was composed of good citizens, he said, but he did not believe they realized their position. "You know and I know that respect for and obedience to the law are the foundation stones of civilization, and that when we pay no respect to the law, we

---

16Unsigned letter to John M. Parker, March 29, 1922, ibid. For similar expressions of opinion see "Parker supporter" to John M. Parker, March 26, 1922; H. T. Bevers to John M. Parker, April (?), 1922; and "A citizen" to John M. Parker, November 1, 1922, ibid.

17George B. Campbell to John M. Parker, March 26, 1922, ibid.
slip back to the days of barbarism . . . . The very statement that 'more than 500 stalwart, upright, honest citizens -- friends of Jno. M. Parker would respond nobly' intensifies my feeling that we must respond, let's do it in the open as men . . . . "

In New Orleans, one citizen who was impressed with the Governor's political courage wrote: "It doesn't make any difference how you feel about the Ku Klux -- you know the man who uttered those words [Parker's March 27, 1922 statement] isn't trying to carry water on both shoulders."

Louisiana Klansmen may not have realized it; but, in incurring the opposition of John M. Parker, they had aroused a hard-nosed reformer with a reputation for toughness and tenacity. When Ruffin G. Pleasant beat him in the gubernatorial race of 1916 a political opponent lamented: "I wish to heaven that Parker could have won. Now that he has lost he will be a perpetual candidate until he does win. That man never quits." The opponent's evaluation of his man was exact. Parker roared back in 1920 and won the governorship by constructing his own political organization in New Orleans

18 John M. Parker to George B. Campbell, March 27, 1922, ibid.

19 Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, March 29, 1922.

to neutralize the influence of the Ring, the city political organization, which had been influential in defeating him in 1916. Personally, the Governor was disarming. He was a quiet man, of medium height, with a mustache trimmed so neatly that he appeared a "dandy." But his appearance was deceiving. As the head of a cotton factor business in New Orleans, he had made a personal fortune; and, as the spokesman for Louisiana progressivism, he had led a continuing fight for clean government since 1912 when he helped in the formation of the Good Government League. Suddenly and dramatically, the Louisiana Klan, which had occupied an uncontested field for more than a year, was now faced with an opposing force -- a force which had behind it all the tremendous prestige of the state's highest elective office.

The Klan's reaction to Parker's attack was mild and designed to refute the charges of lawlessness leveled by the Governor. The Exalted Cyclops of Mansfield Klan Number Fourteen penned a conciliatory note to Parker defending his organization and inferring that the Governor had been misled about the Klan. Three days later the Mansfield Klan issued a more vigorous public statement.

---

21 Howard, Political Tendencies in Louisiana, pp. 107-122.

22 Exalted Cyclops of Mansfield Klan Number Fourteen to John M. Parker, April 1, 1922, in Parker Papers.
challenging Parker to show proof that the Invisible Empire had committed any act of mob violence. Monroe Klan Number Four issued a similar public statement, and Lake Charles Klan Number Seven addressed a proclamation to the principal law officers of Calcasieu Parish offering a two hundred fifty dollar reward for the apprehension of any person guilty of violating the laws of the United States or of Louisiana. Although the Klan's public utterances on Parker's allegations were mild and designed to allay public concern about masked lawlessness, its private opinion was doubtlessly contained in the several unsigned letters received by the Governor shortly after his initial proclamation.

During the next two weeks, Parker continued his assault on the Klan in speaking engagements before chambers of commerce in Alexandria and New Orleans. In New Orleans, he portrayed the Klan as the greatest menace facing the state; and in Alexandria,

\[23\] New Orleans Times-Picayune, April 4, 1922.

\[24\] Baton Rouge State Times, March 30, 1922, See also Lake Charles Klan Number Seven to Judge Thomas F. Porte, Jr., Judge W. W. Bailey, District Attorney Griffin T. Hawkins, Jr., and Sheriff J. H. Lyons, March 24, 1922, in Parker Papers.
after announcing his father and grandfather had been members of
the original Klan, he argued that a need had existed for the
original organization but that it could not be justified in the twentieth
century. 25 A few days later, the Governor utilized the new
electronic miracle, radio, to carry a message against the Klan
across the state. The radio message and chamber of commerce
speeches were designed to win public support for more stringent
measures Parker was planning. The Governor was at that very
moment initiating action to place the Klan issue before the state
legislature when it met in May, 1922. Parker had intended
confronting the Klan since he made his first anti-Klan proclamation;
however, the means of that confrontation were not determined
until early April. He first considered a proposal offered by William
Hill, of Alexandria, who was deeply concerned about Klan domi-
nation of juries. Hill proposed that the Governor include in any
anti-Klan legislation provisions requiring all persons holding
office or assigned to jury duty to take oaths that they were not
members of the Klan. 26 Although Parker did not immediately

---

25 Baton Rouge State Times, April 4, 1922, and New Orleans
Times-Picayune, April 5, 1922.

26 William Hill to John M. Parker, March 24, 1922, in Parker
Papers. See also John M. Parker to Walter Burke, March 27,
1922, ibid.
employ the Hill scheme, he tucked the idea away until 1923 when, in a slight variation of the proposal, he refused to appoint known Klansmen to the Louisiana bench or to promote any judge who held membership in the Invisible Empire. The approach finally decided upon, which New York and several other Klan harassed states would later copy, seems to have been original with the Governor. He would request legislation, he told the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce on April 4, which would require all organizations to submit annual membership lists to the secretary of state. The decision to require all organizations to file their membership lists might have grown from concern that a federal court would view legislation requiring only the Klan to file membership rolls as a denial of the equal protection of the law guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment. On April 10, Parker wrote state legislator John Dymond, Jr., and requested that he sponsor a bill containing the membership registration requirement at the May meeting of the state legislature. 27 Dymond replied three days later that he would happily sponsor the legislation. 28

27 John M. Parker to John Dymond, Jr., April 10, 1922, ibid.

28 John Dymond, Jr., to John M. Parker, April 13, 1922, ibid.
See also New Orleans Times-Picayune, April 5, 1922.
When announcements were made that grand juries in Jefferson and St. Charles Parishes planned to investigate Ku Klux Klan activities in their communities, hope was aroused that Parker's charge to state officials was bearing fruit. But neither investigation proved injurious to the Invisible Empire. As a matter of fact, the Jefferson Parish investigation gave Al-Gre-Har (Algiers, Gretna, and Harahan) Klan Number Forty-Five an opportunity to propagandize in its own behalf. When C. A. Buchler, Jefferson Parish District Attorney, denied Klan charges that lawlessness existed in the parish and requested that the Klan forward any evidence of law violations it had to his office, the Al-Gre-Har unit mockingly replied: "Why is it necessary for you to ask us to get evidence and come before the grand jury . . . ." Noting that parish law officials were well paid to prevent lawlessness and collect evidence, Al-Gre-Har Klansmen further observed: "It appears to us that if we as citizens can get evidence most assuredly those entrusted with law enforcement should be able to do so . . . . It does not require men with the ability of Sherlock Holmes . . . to unearth . . . the cases of law violation in Jefferson Parish." 29

29Al-Gre-Har Klan Number Forty-Five to C. A. Buchler, ibid., June 13, 1922. See also Baton Rouge State Times, April 4, 1922.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Meanwhile, the May meeting of the state legislature was approaching. Although Parker had made a promising beginning in his war on the Klan, he clearly relied too heavily on an aroused public opinion to force positive action against the Invisible Empire. He failed to appreciate that Klan activities, up to that time, were not unduly alarming to most people. Moreover, the Klan was effectively counteracting the Governor's charges by building a desirable public image. Its charitable acts, its demand for law and order, and its appeal to patriotism, all worked to offset Parker's arguments. If the Governor hoped to win legal restriction of masked activity, the organization of his forces in the legislature was vital. During the critical weeks before the meeting of the legislature he continued to carry his message to the people, but he failed to provide executive leadership in organizing legislative support behind Dymond. Neither his personal papers nor Louisiana newspapers reveal that Parker made a concerted effort to guarantee victory for his proposition. Thus, in early June, when Dymond finally introduced his bill, the House of Representatives unceremoniously postponed it indefinitely. The vote was forty-five to twenty-eight. The defeat was decisive. For the second time

\[30\] Ibid., June 2, 1922. Dymond's bill included provisions to compel annual registration of all organizations and to outlaw the wearing of masks.
in nine months, the Klan had successfully warded off legislative blows. But the defeat of the Dymond bill was less a Klan victory than it was a Parker failure. But the Governor learned from that failure. He continued to carry his message of the dangers of Klanism wherever he could find an audience; and, in a future encounter with the Invisible Empire, he would employ more of the massive power of his office in an attempt to bring about its downfall.

The defeat of the Dymond bill and the rising incidence of Klan raiding were not the only indications of growing Klan influence apparent in 1922. Several other developments gave unmistakable evidence of accelerated growth and spreading power. One such sign was the adoption of the massive outdoor initiation ceremonies which had characterized Klan growth in other Realms of the Invisible Empire. The public initiation ceremonies began during the summer of 1922, shortly after the defeat of the Dymond bill. In July, Baton Rouge Klan Number Three initiated two hundred Knights. A month later another public initiation was held in the capital city. In September Monroe Klan Number Three inducted about four hundred new members, while its counterpart in Shreveport inducted over five hundred members. The Homer Klan inducted seventy-five Knights the same month. Alexandria Knights

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
initiated one hundred fifteen members on the night of September 8, 1922. July, August, and September, 1922, were busy months for the Invisible Empire in Louisiana.  

The Louisiana Klan wisely held most of its public meetings in the more hospitable Protestant climate of north Louisiana; however, on two occasions, it ventured as far south as Lake Charles and Crowley, both communities with substantial numbers of Catholics. The Lake Charles initiation, held in late 1922, attracted 1,000 Klansmen and witnessed the induction of 300 members into the Invisible Empire. The Crowley gathering, held during early summer, 1923, was one of the most extravagant of all Klan initiations. Ten special trains of eight coaches each were chartered to transport Klansmen from Houston, Beaumont, and Port Arthur, Texas, and from Louisiana's small southwestern towns. Two thousand automobiles overflowed the state's inadequate dirt roads bearing still more Klansmen and their families to Louisiana's rice capital. Billboards and telephone poles leading into town were plastered with signs beckoning "Kum, Kum, Kum,"

---

31 Batun Rouge State Times, July 17, 28, September 5, 9, 1922. See also New Orleans Times-Picayune, August 15, 1922; Homer Guardian Journal, September 20, 1922.

32 Lake Charles Weekly American-Press, November 18, 1922.
and announcing an extravaganza which would include orators, an outdoor barbecue, a special Klan fireworks display (which invariably included the launching of rockets which would explode into a fiery American flag), and the singing of Klan songs. The Crowley meeting, which was staged for the purpose of initiating new members into the Invisible Empire, began with a parade before an estimated crowd of 10,000 persons and ended with the "naturalization" of an alleged 1,040 "aliens" from Arcadia, Iberia, and Jefferson Davis Parishes. 33

Three months later Shreveport Klan Number Two was the host for a massive Konklave which also attracted delegations from Texas and Arkansas. The fair grounds stadium was packed with spectators who came to witness a parade by 3,000 Shreveport Knights. The parade was followed by an impressive "naturalization" ceremony and speeches by Imperial Wizard Hiram Wesley Evans; Imperial Kligrapp H. Kyle Ramsey; and Louisiana's most well known Klansman, Captain J. K. Skipwith of the Morehouse Parish Klan. Promptly at ten o'clock p. m. a gigantic fireworks display was presented and was shortly followed by the firing of a rag-wrapped cross. As the flames from the burning Klan symbol

33 New Orleans Times-Picayune, June 17, 1923.
reached for the darkness of the sky, the whole assemblage voiced
the Star Spangled Banner. 34

Public initiation ceremonies would characterize Louisiana Klan
recruiting until the secret organization faded a few years later.
The willingness to use them, at a time when the Governor of the
state was marshaling an attack on the Klan, is apt testimony to
the confidence of the secret organization in 1922. There can be
little doubt that between the defeat of the Dymond bill and
January, 1923, most Louisiana Klansmen anticipated a time
when they might dominate the state.

Still another manifestation of the growing influence of the
Invisible Empire during 1922 was the organization of the Ladies
of the Invisible Empire, or as it was more popularly known,
"L.O.T.I.E." "L.O.T.I.E." was one of several women's
organizations that sprang up across the country which seized Klan
principles and espoused its program. The women's society
envisioned a union of "patriotic, Protestant women of America"
to preserve the ideals and institutions established by their "Anglo-
Saxon forefathers." They would, they claimed, "cleanse and
purify the civil, political, and ecclesiastical atmosphere of [their]

34 Shreveport Journal, September 15, 1923.
country, too long befogged by the erroneous teaching of alien minorities acting under the direction of their old world masters." 35 "L.O.T.I.E." also expressed great concern about the failure of schools to teach American ideals and was critical of the inclusion of foreign languages in public school curricula.

The leading light of female Klanism in Louisiana was Mrs. Rush H. Davis, wife of a prominent Shreveport Klansman. After organizing the ladies of Louisiana, she moved to Portland, Oregon, to serve the society as a national officer. 36 The Ladies of the Invisible Empire eventually enrolled about 2,500 women in approximately 30 chapters, but the organization never achieved real significance either in Louisiana or elsewhere. It held a state convention in Shreveport in March, 1923, and announced plans to construct a home for "wayward girls." The scheme never materialized, probably because the estimated cost of fifty thousand dollars was more than the small society could raise. 37

Although "L.O.T.I.E." was not officially an auxiliary of the Louisiana Realm, it actually served in that capacity. Klanswomen

35 Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, October 15, 1922.
36 Ibid., January 12, 1923.
37 Shreveport Journal, March 27, 1923.
were frequently at the public meetings of the Klan, at which they prepared and served meals. Furthermore, it is probable that most Klanswomen were wives of members of the male order. Most Louisiana observers saw significance of women in the Klan movement only in terms of politics. Organization of "L.O.T.I.E.," claimed some political prognosticators, was positive evidence that the Louisiana Realm planned to enter the 1923 primary elections. 38

Still another manifestation of Klan power in 1922 was the rise of a Klan press. In many Realms the Invisible Empire published official organs to spread their message. Although the Louisiana Klan did not have an official publication, three newspapers, The Winnfield News-American, The Protestant Standard of Merryville, and the Caldwell Watchman served the organization as its unofficial champions. The Watchman and The Protestant Standard were somewhat restrained, but The Winnfield News-American, edited by "Sergeant" N. C. Dalton, published weekly attacks on Catholics, Jews, and Negroes. Dalton described himself as "a country boy . . . just started in the paper business. Am one hundred per cent

38 Most "L.O.T.I.E." chapters were located in north, west, and central Louisiana. A list of chapters was filed with the Louisiana Secretary of State, December 30, 1924. See newspaper clipping, December 30, 1924, in Robinson Papers.
American and can prove it by two honorable discharges from the United States Army. I have gambled and cut it out. I have drank enough whiskey to float away any dry dock in New Orleans. But have cut it out and if possible I am going to help lots of others cut it out . . . . " The former soldier had experienced the best of sin and was now determined to shower the blessings of his newfound piety on those less fortunate persons who had yet to discover the path of righteousness.

Dalton took direct aim on the Catholic Church generally and the Pope particularly. The Holy Father was that "old dago on the Tiber," he said, reiterating one of the Klan's popular verbal abuses of the head of the Roman church. Writing under the thinly veiled pseudonym "Ike Fewclothes," Dalton proclaimed: "We Americans love our own America and we want it for our own, free from usurpations of 'papa's' exploiters . . . . Oh, if the people only knew the truth it would not take long to write the downfall of Rome. Catholics . . . live in ignorance . . . . They are fed on superstitions . . . . They hate our public school system above everything else. Personally, I believe that the Catholics were

---

39 The Winnfield News American, July 28, 1922.
instrumental in defeating the public school tax election in Natchitoches a few weeks ago . . . . This ought to be looked into. 40

Although the anti-Catholic propaganda espoused by Dalton was similar to official statements of the Klan, the Winnfield editor intensified it by combining anti-Negro proclamations with his attacks on Catholics. Invariably, the Negro was cast in the role of an unsuspecting tool of Rome. In one issue the editor published a cartoon picturing a nattily dressed Negro puffing a cigar. The caption read: 'Pope say he gwine mak' a Pries' out'n me.' 41 Accompanying the cartoon was a lead editorial asking Winnfield residents if they believed 'old Bill Jones . . . or old 'Crockshot,' who used to be the porter on the L & A, could pray [their] souls out of Purgatory or marry [their] daughters in the only true way . . . . 42 In still another issue Dalton reiterated the claim Catholics were training Negroes for the priesthood, but on the latter occasion suggested improper relationships between Negro men and white women by announcing that 'white girls were bowing

40Ibid., July 21, 1922.

41Ibid., August 4, 1922.

42Ibid.
before Negro priests in the South." In contrast to the Catholic Church, Dalton pictured the Klan as "the voice of the people," and the flaming cross as "the emblem of good American blood." It was, he said, "a Godsend to protect our womanhood from incomparable beasts in human clothes."  

Although Dalton's abiding theme was anti-Catholicism, his paper gave lip service to the whole spectrum of the Klan program. Law and order, implementation of "proper moral standards," and "honest politics" also received considerable attention in the columns of the News-American. And when the night riding of the Klan was attacked he replied with the question: "What are the real law-abiding citizens of a community to do when they don't elect a competent court?" To an organization like the Klan, the answer was obvious.

Toward the end of 1922 the News-American's format changed drastically. Compared to issues of the summer of 1922, winter issues were models of unprejudiced reporting. Vicious attacks on Jews, Catholics, and Negroes suddenly disappeared from its pages;
and the Klan, although still the recipient of warm remarks, was no longer so vigorously championed. The reasons behind the abrupt change are vague. In August, 1922, Dalton acquired the old Winnfield Times and consolidated it with the News-American. The News-American then became the official organ of Winn Parish, the school board, the town of Winnfield, and the police jury. Shortly afterwards, Dalton began publishing Sgt. Dalton's Weekly, which picked up the Klan message recently shucked by the News-American. Why should Dalton find it necessary to begin a new paper to promote Klanism? Probably some Winn Parish residents objected to their official newspaper serving as a violent mouthpiece for the Invisible Empire and demanded that Dalton make changes. Dalton continued to publish the News-American, but appointed James I. Smith to edit the paper. In the meantime he devoted his efforts to Sgt. Dalton's Weekly. Unfortunately, copies of that paper are not available; however, editorials from its pages were occasionally reprinted in other journals, and the tone of those editorials reveals that the twice discharged army sergeant had lost none of his ability to slander enemies of the Klan.

46 Ibid., January 26, 1923.
By late 1922 Louisiana Klan leaders could happily reflect upon almost two years of fruitful work. The Invisible Empire had won many converts in the Bayou State and was still expanding in the north Louisiana uplands. Its membership at that time probably totaled 25,000 men and included many local and state officials. On two occasions it had successfully warded off attacks by adversaries in the state legislature, and, in the meantime, had won the support of several small town newspapers. Wives of Klansmen had formed a female auxiliary which had obvious potential if the Klan became an active political organization. Throughout the state Protestant ministers were speaking in its behalf, and many citizens had accepted the necessity of a secret organization to win the war against crime -- a war they complained law officials were losing. Adoption of public initiation ceremonies promised to introduce Klanism to thousands of potential Klansmen who could not have been reached by individual Kleagles. Indeed, the future could be faced with confidence that Klanism would shortly be a vigorous force in Louisiana affairs, particularly political affairs.

But there was one vexing blur in an otherwise clear path to power. Since 1921 a small, but vociferous element had warned that the use of the mask threatened danger to the people of the state.
That opposition had been of little consequence during 1921; however, when Governor Parker assumed leadership of the anti-Klan forces in March, 1922, Klan opponents suddenly won prestige they had not previously enjoyed. Parker's position was a powerful one, and no thinking Klansman could have failed to understand that the Governor was an enemy not to be lightly regarded. Yet Parker and Klan opponents had been unsuccessful in arousing Louisianians against the Invisible Empire. Their protestations against Klanism were couched in language which had little meaning to the average citizen. They spoke of "invisible government," "plots to circumvent the Constitution," and "allegiance to a secret government." When one citizen complained that the Governor's charges against the Klan led people to regard their chief executive as a "jackass," he doubtlessly spoke for many Louisianians. The reason was simple. Parker's warning that the Klan promoted violence was irrefutable. But through late 1922 Klan violence had been minimal and in keeping with the form of violence to which many Louisiana communities had grown accustomed. "Nigger whippin," roughing up prostitutes, raids on bootlegger stills, and occasional whipping of white men who "wenched," or failed to adequately provide for their families was not the type of violence which would unduly alarm Louisianians. As a matter of fact, many citizens warmly approved of such violence. The very existence of the Klan verifies
this conclusion. It is important to remember that Klan methods of cleansing the moral life of the community were merely the organization of discipline historically enforced by mobs. It is open to argument whether typical Klan violence would cause serious alarm among most Louisianians or Southerners today. The period from 1930 to the present is replete with similar acts of violence, and successful prosecution of the guilty parties has proved near impossible.

Thus, if Governor Parker and Klan opponents were to win widespread public support for an anti-Klan crusade, they desperately needed a sensational demonstration that the Invisible Empire posed the dangers they charged. No such incident had yet occurred. But at the very moment the Governor's cause seemed most hopeless events took place in the two small northeastern Louisiana towns of Mer Rouge and Bastrop which provided the sensational Klan incident Parker needed. It was late summer, 1922, and in those small communities disaster was imminent.
CHAPTER SIX

THE MER ROUGE MURDERS: THE KLAN

IN FULL FLOWER

Mer Rouge, the oldest town in Morehouse Parish, was a small community whose history was traceable to the state's colonial period. The area was originally explored by a French expedition which made its way northward from New Orleans via the Ouachita River and Bayou Bartholemew to the site of the present town of Bastrop. According to legend, the explorers, impressed with the visual similarity of wind-blown native red sedge to water, gave the site its name meaning "red sea."¹ The Mer Rouge townsite was part of a 1,000,000 acre grant given to Baron de Bastrop by Charles IV of Spain in 1797. Unsuccessful attempts to colonize the area by Bastrop led to the transfer of sizeable portions of the grant to Aaron Burr and Abraham Morehouse. In 1807 Josiah Davenport, a retired Rhode Island sea captain, purchased a tract

¹New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 15, 1923.
of Prairie Mer Rouge and erected his home near the present town. Shortly Morehouse, for whom the parish would be named, settled about a mile to the east. Future settlement was slow, awaiting the onrush of Americans who poured into north Louisiana following the admittance of the state to the Union in 1812.

In 1844 the old Bastrop grant was divided into parishes, one of which was Morehouse. In Morehouse bitter rivalry between older communities ensued for the honor of being the seat of parish government. The dispute was settled in 1846 by the creation of a new town, Bastrop, which became the parish seat. In succeeding years Bastrop outdistanced its older rivals and became the commercial center of Morehouse Parish while Mer Rouge developed a plantation economy. By 1860 the differences between the two communities were glaringly apparent. When the vote for secession was taken in 1860, Bastrop opposed leaving the Union; however,


Mer Rouge and other planter communities, composed of men who owned slaves, carried Morehouse Parish in support of secession.  

The diversity of the two towns became even more pronounced after the Civil War. Mer Rouge remained a planter community, and as late as 1920 could count only slightly more than five hundred people within its limits. Meanwhile, important changes had occurred in Bastrop. In 1916 natural gas was discovered in the region, and the town experienced a mild boom. Older frame structures gradually gave way to modern brick and stuccoed buildings. Other industries followed, and now Bastrop's prosperity rested largely upon an industrial base rather than cotton and corn which supported surrounding communities.  

Even though Bastrop had experienced considerable industrial growth, the parish still bore unmistakable signs of its earlier plantation economy. Almost sixty per cent of its citizens were black. Furthermore, approximately the same percentage of parish residents still earned their living in agriculture. Despite its

---

Negro majority, Morehouse had no race problem. Whites controlled the parish government, and Negroes silently accepted their lot. If the average parish Negro had been touched by the idealistic concepts of equality growing out of World War One, he kept them to himself. Morehouse was white man's country, and its Negroes recognized the futility and danger of complaint.

The people were overwhelmingly Protestant, mostly Baptist and Methodist. The few Catholics and Jews were an insignificant minority. One could certainly not argue the existence of a religious problem. Moreover, Morehouse claimed a reputation as a law-abiding community, a distinction of which its citizens boasted. Thus, in some respects Morehouse appeared an improbable area for Klan exploitation. But the placidity of Morehouse's face was deceiving, for beneath the surface were latent tendencies which could erupt if properly exploited.

One source of discord was a long rivalry between Mer Rouge and Bastrop. It began when both communities were competing for the Missouri Pacific Railroad line. Much to Bastrop's dissatisfaction, the Missouri Pacific decided to run the line through Mer Rouge. A few years later Mer Rouge attempted to win the

---

7New Orleans Times-Picayune, March 4, 1923.
new courthouse to be built in the parish, and thus deprive Bastrop of its position as parish seat. Still another source of ill feeling was the resentment Bastrop citizens, who were largely Baptists, held for what they considered the free and easy morality of the smaller planter community. Bond issues, mill taxes, newspaper rivalry, and differences between leading families were other sources of discord between the two communities.

One other problem also made Morehouse Parish a potential trouble spot. During the winter of 1922-1923 Morehouse citizens, particularly those from Bastrop, were to boast about the peaceful quality of life in the parish during the years following World War One. They pictured their community as a veritable paradise of peace and tranquility. As a matter of fact, Morehouse Parish was plagued with crime following the war. Conditions had been so intolerable that citizens had organized a "law and order league,"

---


11 See, for example, New Orleans Times-Picayune, March 4, 1923.
similar to organizations being formed elsewhere in Louisiana at that time, to combat the lawless conditions of the postwar period. Thus, the Klan did not bring the idea of organized vigilante activity to combat crime to Morehouse. That practice was evident when the Klan arrived.

On October 6, 1921, R. H. Moodie, perhaps the most active of Louisiana's Kleagles, arrived in Morehouse Parish. That evening he held a meeting at the courthouse in Bastrop, to which he invited several of the community's leading citizens, including Captain J. K. Skipwith, former Mayor of Bastrop; Dr. B. M. McCoin, Mayor of Mer Rouge; James Norsworthy; Oliver Skipwith, the Captain's son; Ed Hart; Newt Gray; and several others. When Moodie revealed the purpose of the meeting, one far-sighted citizen arose and protested the organization of a Klan in Morehouse Parish, predicting it would lead to violence and bloodshed. He spoke so bluntly that he was asked to leave. Organization of Morehouse Klan Number Thirty-Four was then perfected. Captain J. K. Skipwith, the prewar Mayor of Bastrop, was elected Exalted Cyclops.

---


13 Photostat of Klan organization form for Morehouse Parish, in New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 5, 1923.
Skipwith, a resident of Morehouse since the early twentieth century, when he arrived in the area as a cotton buyer, was an unfortunate choice as Exalted Cyclops. Now an old man, the former Confederate soldier and member of the original Klan, failed to perceive the difference in time and circumstance in which the original and modern Klans operated. The original Klan rode when the vigilante influence was strong in the South; when Klan victims were usually Negroes; when the struggle in which it was involved concerned who would control government in Southern states; when it enjoyed the support of the masses of Southern whites. Southerners justified the violence of the original Klan on the grounds that conditions warranted the action taken. From the beginning Skipwith led the Morehouse unit as if the circumstances of 1870 and 1920 were identical, and he employed the type of violence which characterized the original Klan organization. But instead of concentrating on the elimination of Negroes from politics and the restoration of white rule, Captain Skipwith and the Morehouse Klan focused on law and order (at least their version of it) and the maintenance of community morals. Their view of morality

---

agreed precisely with the narrower view of morals then common in America's small towns.

One Klan scholar, David M. Chalmers, has contended that Captain Skipwith was only the nominal leader of the Morehouse Klan, that the real power rested in the hands of Mer Rouge Mayor Dr. B. M. McCoin. Although McCoin was a power in Morehouse Klanism and frequently led raids, the evidence does not substantiate Chalmers's conclusion. On the other hand substantial evidence does exist that the real Klan authority in Morehouse was in Skipwith's hands.

Within a few weeks after the organizational meeting Skipwith had surrounded himself with the parish power structure, including McCoin's successor as Mer Rouge Mayor, Bob Dade; Fred Carpenter, Morehouse Sheriff; Laurie Calhoun, Morehouse Deputy Sheriff; the parish prosecuting attorney; the postmaster; James T. Dalton, Morehouse Parish Clerk of Court; and Pastor L. W. Sloan of the Bastrop Baptist Church. Skipwith moved to close

---

15 Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, p. 61

16 See New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 10, March 4, 1923.

the power ring by attempting to enroll Fifth Judicial District Judge Fred M. Odom, who allegedly declined membership when the Exalted Cyclops refused to give assurances that the Morehouse chapter would abide by the printed declarations on Klan membership application forms. Skipwith supposedly informed Odom that conditions existed in the parish which the law could not reach, conditions which only the Klan could solve. Despite the circulation of stories to the contrary, Skipwith may have been successful with Odom. The judge's actions were at times highly suspicious, however, evidence justifying a categorical assertion of his membership in the Morehouse Klan is unavailable. 18

Recruiting a rank-and-file membership in Morehouse was easy. The bunkhouse dwellers of Bastrop's new industries, restless and unsatisfied with Morehouse entertainment, and citizens of the small villages of Jones, Bonita, and Gallion, rushed to join the Morehouse Klan until the total membership reached an estimated two hundred fifty. Leonard Cline, writing in The Nation, faithfully captured the spirit of adventure which made the Klan so alluring to northeast Louisianians. "It must have provided a real thrill

18New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 30, 1922. Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, p. 61, asserts Odom was a member of the Klan; however, there is insufficient evidence to justify that conclusion.
to go scooting through the shadowy roads in somebody else's flivver, to meet in lonely dingles in the pine woods and flog other men, to bounce down the fifteen-foot declivity where the ridge ends and swoop at twenty-five miles an hour through the flatlands around Mer Rouge, through phantasmal LaFourche swamp with its banshee live oaks waving their snaky tresses in the moonlight. It was perpetual Halloween. And even if one did not care much for church, and took one's shot of white lightning when one could get it, and would pay a dollar any day for five minutes in a trollop's arms, it was reassuring to know that religion approved and sanctified one's pranks. It made one bolder."

In many areas of Louisiana Klan leaders exercised care in the selection of members, realizing masked activity could get out of control. No such care was practiced in Morehouse. According to a federal investigator in Morehouse, the majority of members of Klan Number Thirty-Four were "uneducated" and "followed the lead of a few of the better educated who are only members of the klan in order to further their own ends, or use the klan to inflict revenge on someone who may at one time have offended them.

19 Cline, "In Darkest Louisiana," pp. 292-293.
This is especially true of the leaders of the klan at Bastrop ... 

The "better element" in many communities would later complain that Klan atrocities were the product of the "uneducated element" which had seized control of local units. No such rationalization could be made in Morehouse, for the "better element" proved itself no more responsible than the less fortunate who were usually deserted to shoulder the blame for masked tyranny.

In addition to other community leaders, the Morehouse Klan had a friendly ally in the editor of the Bastrop paper, The Morehouse Enterprise. Even before the Klan was formed, he was spewing forth the venom on which the organization thrived. "This country does not desire people who cannot conscientiously subscribe to the doctrine of '100 percent Americanism,'" he wrote a week before Moodie's organizational meeting. He further argued: "The man who lives up to this doctrine will have nothing to fear from any true American. The man who does not live up to it is the enemy of every true American. There is no middle course." Thus,


21 The Morehouse Enterprise, September 30, 1921. The editorial suggests the probability that Moodie made a visit to Bastrop prior to October 6, 1921, and made preparations with a small group of men, including the editor of the Enterprise, for the organizational meeting. The editorial has the ringing sound of Klan propaganda.
Morehouse Parish was denied a safety valve with which many other communities were fortunately endowed -- an opposition to the Klan. One ultimately developed, but only after events of such frightening consequence had occurred that the attention of America was showered on Morehouse. The absence of a significant local protest against Klanism allowed Skipwith and company to dominate the parish and ultimately replace the law as the dispenser of punishment for real and imaginary crimes.

Once established, Morehouse Klan Number Thirty-Four rapidly initiated its brand of law enforcement. A committee of Klansmen gathered information concerning alleged violations of the law or the community moral code and reported to Captain Skipwith, who then issued orders as to the disposition of the case.  The Klan's tie with Sheriff Fred Carpenter's office developed into a useful association. If Skipwith and his followers needed justification for their activities, fellow Klansman Carpenter was always available.

---

22 Testimony of James T. Norsworth at the open hearings conducted by the State of Louisiana, January 5-25, 1923, Bastrop, Louisiana, in New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 10, 1923. The records of the open hearing conducted by the State of Louisiana have been destroyed; however, the New Orleans Times-Picayune and the New York Times directly quoted much of the testimony given at the hearings. In subsequent citations the testimony of individuals will always be from the open hearings.
to claim he had deputized the raiding party.\textsuperscript{23} Ironically, Louisiana Assistant Attorney General T. Semmes Walmsley, later to be assigned to establish a legal case against the Morehouse Klan, demanded that evidence obtained against Negro bootleggers by Skipwith's hooded Knights be admitted before the Louisiana Supreme Court. Although the state supreme tribunal disapproved of the methods by which the evidence had been obtained, it was admitted.\textsuperscript{24}

By early 1922 the Morehouse Klan was running the parish. On January 2, a masked raiding party led by Dr. B. M. McCoin, pillar of the local Baptist church, broke into the home of Mrs. A. J. Hamilton, mother of sixteen-year-old Addie May Hamilton, and informed the frightened woman her daughter must leave town. Without explaining the nature of the child's misbehavior, the party of six Klansmen took her to the Missouri Pacific railroad depot, gave her seven dollars, and put her on the train to Little Rock, Arkansas.\textsuperscript{25} A few months later Klansman Hugh Clark encountered

\textsuperscript{23}\textit{Ibid.}, January 16, 1923.

\textsuperscript{24}\textit{Homer Guardian Journal}, June 27, 1923.

the young girl in Little Rock, and she begged him for permission to return to her home. Clark contacted Skipwith and a petition was signed by twelve Klansmen assenting to the girl's return.  

In the meantime, Morehouse Klansmen discovered the local school board had somehow employed a Catholic woman to teach in the parish schools. Pressure was applied, and the papal menace to Morehouse children was forced to resign. In July alert Klansmen discovered another papist plotter in their midst. G. A. Griffin, manager of the Bastrop Ice Company, was ordered to "soft peddle his tongue" when it was discovered he was guilty of anti-Klan utterances. When he continued to talk, he was driven out of town. Thus, the Morehouse Klan had determined to regulate a most fundamental right -- the right of persons to choose their places of residence.

Old Tom Robinson was a fifty-year-old farmer who lived near the Arkansas state line. On Sundays he served as song leader at the Sunrise Methodist Church. On Sunday morning, June 18,  

---

26 *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, January 12, 1923.


he arrived at church early, bringing with him two small children who were to help him arrange the morning music. Suddenly, automobiles drove into the churchyard and the children, thinking the congregation was beginning to arrive, rushed outside. Confronting the children were not members of the church, but a hooded mob, one of which brandished a pistol. "Uncle Tom, Uncle Tom, its the Ku Klux," cried the children. When Robinson reached the door, he found himself staring down the barrel of a Klansman's pistol. He was taken to one of the automobiles, driven to a secluded spot, sternly lectured, and whipped twice, without the benefit of clothing between the strap and his buttocks. The song leader was released, but not before he assured his assailants he "could straighten up, be a man, and quit the lawless gang."

Robinson later testified that the Klansmen accused him of blowing up dipping vats used to decontaminate animals when they were brought into Louisiana. A few weeks later another farmer, Arthur Meeks, was punished by the Klan for similar activities. 29

Alonzo Braddock lived about sixteen miles outside Bastrop. About two a.m. one morning he and his family were awakened by shouts and curses outside his home. Peering out the window, he

saw a mob, apparently unmasked, demanding that he come outside. Before he could dress, the men broke down his door, and Captain J. K. Skipwith curtly announced: "We want you for making whiskey." Braddock was placed in a car, driven to Bastrop with four Negroes that Captain Skipwith had also seized for bootlegging, and turned over to Sheriff Fred Carpenter. Without questioning any of the men, Carpenter locked them up. The following morning Braddock was released. No charges were filed. A few months later he said: "I am anxious to leave this parish for good. I no longer feel safe here. I am nervous at night, my wife is afraid, my children are frightened. Morehouse Parish no longer seems like home to me. I want to take my family and go away somewhere and live in peace."30

The Griffith, Hamilton, Braddock, and Robinson incidents evoked no more concern in Morehouse than did dozens of other cases of flogging and intimidation. The editor of The Morehouse Enterprise spoke for the majority of his fellow citizens when he wrote: "It may be a dangerous remedy to apply -- this Ku Klux business -- but sometimes bad diseases require heroic treatment. And the reason this old-timer welcomes the KKK is simply that what is called law is now so inefficient. It is a common expression

30Ibid., January 14, 1923.
that the length of time any case remains in court depends on the amount of cash the litigants can raise. When thieves and bootleggers make their open boasts and cannot be reached by the strong arm of the law then the community must protect itself and fight fire with fire." Unfortunately, the pro-Klan editor and Morehouse citizens failed to realize that in fighting fire with fire one flame would become indistinguishable from the other and both were equally consuming. Few incidents in Louisiana history better portray the inadequacy of the old adage "the end justifies the means."

But events more dramatic than flogging, deportations of undesirables, and raids on bootlegger stills were unfolding in Morehouse. Bastrop Klansmen and a few Mer Rouge members had always been certain that the small planter community of Mer Rouge was rife with lawlessness and immorality. To them the town was a veritable "den of iniquity." Dr. B. M. McCoin, former Mayor of Mer Rouge, was particularly anxious to "clean up" his town. A few weeks after the organizational meeting in Bastrop, Klansmen received reports that F. Watt Daniel, young war veteran and son of Mer Rouge planter J. L. Daniel, was

---

31 The Morehouse Enterprise, May 26, 1922.
operating a still. In November, 1921, the Morehouse Klan issued its initial order to Daniel, instructing him that it was aware he was making whiskey and warning him to close the still. Daniel apparently obeyed the warning, but the secret society had aroused the young war veteran. In succeeding months he became a bitter and vocal critic of the Klan, sparing no one the details of his animosity. Unfortunately, in venting his anger toward the organization, he unknowingly talked to the wrong people -- many of whom were Klansmen.

The following spring Daniel again unwittingly involved himself with the hooded order. Accompanied by Harry Neelis, Bastrop garage operator, and W. C. Andrews, recipient of a note signed "vigilance committee," warning him about the "late hours he was keeping on the road," Daniel trailed an automobile bearing three hooded Klansmen which the three men had encountered. Daniel followed apparently from curiosity; however, Andrews was anxious to determine if the Morehouse Klan was responsible for the warning note he had received. Three miles outside Mer Rouge Daniel overtook the Klansmen when the masked men stopped at the shack of a Negro tenant farmer. The young veteran's car was

---

\[32\] Testimony of W. C. Andrews, open hearings, in New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 11, 1923.
immediately surrounded by several pistol-brandishing Morehouse Knights, including Captain Skipwith, Dr. McCoin, Kelly Hart, Ed Ivey, and Robert Dade. Daniel was again accused of bootlegging, and escaped a severe whipping only because of Dade's intervention. Skipwith delivered a stern warning, and the three men were allowed to leave.

The adventurous Daniel encountered the Invisible Empire on still one other occasion before the end of summer, 1922. Hearing that a Klan meeting would take place outside Mer Rouge, he went to the meeting place, hid, and awaited the arrival of the masked order. Later, while the meeting was still in progress, Daniel decided to leave. As he stole away he made too much noise and was quickly flushed out by a searching party. Brought before the group, he announced that he had heard what happened. He was again released, but not before he was warned "to keep his mouth shut or suffer the consequences." Daniel, who was a principal actor in the strange and still mysterious drama of Morehouse

---

33 Testimony of Robert Dade, open hearings, ibid., January 13, 1923.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., December 23, 1922.
Parish, was in serious trouble with the Klan, because he did not keep quiet but immediately related the incident to friends.

Another principal actor in the unfolding drama in Morehouse Parish was Thomas F. Richards, a close friend of Watt Daniel, who worked as a mechanic in the Bastrop garage of Harry Neelis. Richards was a none-too prosperous, happily-married father of two children, who, according to acquaintances, was well liked. Daniel and Richards had served together in a tank battalion during the war and had renewed their wartime friendship when both returned to Morehouse. Richards's difficulties with Morehouse Klansmen arose out of a seemingly unimportant personal quarrel, which demonstrates how trivial and personal the Morehouse unit became. The incident substantiates completely a federal investigator's report that Morehouse Klansmen used their organization to settle personal grudges. During the summer of 1922, Dr. McCoin rented the front of the Neelis garage to stage a fraternal dinner. Richards, whose work stall was located in the rear of the building, requested that the physician arrange the tables with a passage through the center of the building in order that he could move vehicles to and from his work area. McCoin agreed to the request but when Richards was ready to remove cars which had been repaired he found the passage blocked. The young mechanic stormed from the garage, found McCoin on the street, and
complained bitterly. A brief, but bitter, exchange followed, during which McCoin allegedly cursed Richards. To the rural Southerner of the 1920's a curse was no mean insult, and McCoin escaped a severe beating only because of the intervention of bystanders. The fact that Richards was a close associate of F. Watt Daniel, an open enemy of the Klan, combined with the altercation with Dr. McCoin apparently explains his subsequent difficulties with the secret organization.

At this juncture the most puzzling incident of the Morehouse affair occurred. It is generally accepted that it was the incident which triggered subsequent developments in the trouble-ridden parish. Early in August, 1922, Dr. McCoin drove into Bastrop and claimed an attempt had been made on his life. According to the physician, he had been summoned by a mysterious telephone call to the White plantation to treat a sick Negro. However, when he arrived at the plantation he was informed its Negroes were healthy and that no call had been placed. On the return trip to town McCoin claimed two shots rang out, both fired from close range. Although his automobile was riddled with buckshot the Doctor was miraculously unhurt. McCoin's version of the assault received

\[36\text{Ibid.}\]
\[37\text{Ibid., August 7, 1922. See also W. D. Robinson to D. D.}\]
statewide press coverage, and The Morehouse Enterprise commented: "The citizens of Mer Rouge are much wrought up over the affair and if the guilty person or persons is apprehended summary punishment will doubtlessly follow." During the next few days McCoin received several letters threatening his life; consequently, he packed and moved to Monroe.

The alleged attempt on McCoin's life and the subsequent threatening letters are as unexplainable now as they were in 1922. Many Morehouse residents suspected friends of Dr. K. P. Thom, a physician of Gallion, Louisiana, who had been killed by McCoin a few years earlier in a gunfight. Although McCoin was released after a grand jury hearing, Dr. Thom's friends continued to claim that the Mer Rouge physician had shot Thom in the back because of professional jealousy.

Other Morehouse residents blamed enemies McCoin had made while attempting to enforce the community moral code. One parish resident claimed the doctor had many enemies, all of


38 The Morehouse Enterprise, August 4, 1922.

39 New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 30, 1922.
whom had motives for the assassination attempt. "What made these enemies?" he was asked. "His ideas of conduct and his notion of ruling the morals of the people," was the reply.  

David M. Chalmers, in his book *Hooded Americanism*, claims that McCoin faked the assassination attempt in order to dramatize lawless conditions in Morehouse and the absence of respect for Klan notions of morality. Mr. Chalmers's explanation sounds reasonable only in the context of his rather glib treatment of Louisiana Klanism and fails to explain why Dr. McCoin should deem it desirable to leave town shortly after such a convincing display of the necessity of "more dramatic" Klan action, particularly when he was a leading member of the organization which would take that action.

Subsequent investigation by federal agents revealed that the pattern made by the buckshot which struck McCoin's car precluded the possibility that the doctor could have escaped a genuine attack without serious wounds. The shots were fired through the rear curtain, passed over the driver's seat, and shattered the

---

40 Testimony of W. B. Stuckey, open hearings, ibid., January 14, 1923.

spokes in the steering wheel. Furthermore, the threatening letters received by McCoin, after analysis by federal agents, turned out to have been written on his own typewriter. The doctor claimed his office was always open and his typewriter easily accessible.

The possibility that the attempt on McCoin's life was less than genuine -- that he faked the attempt himself for some personal reason -- is appealing. McCoin was not the warm, kind personality one often finds in the country doctor. He was hard and cold, and it is not beyond the realm of possibility that he faked the attempt on his life in order to settle his debt with Richards. If the mechanic could be blamed, then the Klan would resolve the two men's differences. Whatever his motives, the incident lit a powder keg in Morehouse Parish. Klan friends of McCoin chose to believe the assault on one of their leaders was authentic, and they set about finding the guilty parties.

On August 18, Harry Neelis, operator of the garage in which Richards was employed, saw a band of masked men go into the garage and kidnap his mechanic. He rushed to report the incident

42 Farland Report, Robinson Papers.

43 New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 28, 1922.
to Sheriff Fred Carpenter, who he found on the courthouse steps, in plain view of the garage. Neelis, a newcomer to Bastrop, informed Carpenter of the kidnapping, but was told "it is best not to talk about these things if you want to get along here." Carpenter's unconcerned attitude tellingly revealed the extent of Klan authority in the parish.

Meanwhile, the hooded mob took Richards to a secluded forest outside Bastrop and accused him of attempting to murder Dr. McCoin. Richards denied the charge, arguing he was playing cards at the home of J. L. Daniel, father of Watt Daniel, on the night the attempt was made on McCoin's life. The Morehouse Klan temporarily accepted Richard's protestations of innocence, for they released him. He returned home, confident that he had satisfied the organization. However, he had recognized several members of the party, including Captain Skipwith; A. B. Campbell of Jones, Louisiana; and Jim Tisdale of Monroe. At that point someone gave Richards the name of the Klansman who reportedly had accused him of the attempt on McCoin's life. The mechanic

44 Testimony of Harry Neelis, open hearings, ibid., January 11, 1923.

45 Farland Report, Robinson Papers. See also New Orleans Times-Picayune, August 20, 1922, and January 11, 1923.
found the Klansman and warned him that if any further accusations were made against him he would hold the Klansman personally responsible.  

Apparently the news of Richards's clash with the unidentified Klansman irritated other members, because shortly thereafter Mrs. Hugh Clark, wife of a Mer Rouge Klansman, reportedly remarked in the Bastrop movie house that "Richards needn't be so smart, for they were going to kidnap him again." In the meantime, stories began to circulate that Richards was responsible for the attempt on McCoin's life, but now Watt Daniel's name was linked with the incident. It was obvious that the Klan was by no means satisfied.

A week later, on August 24, a mass meeting was held in Bastrop to secure support for a million dollar bond issue to build new roads in the parish. To attract people, a huge barbecue and a baseball game were planned for entertainment. Visitors arrived from all over the parish, and the crowd swelled to over 4,000 people. Late that afternoon the meeting broke up, and

---

46Ibid., December 28, 1922.

47Testimony of Mrs. Thomas F. Richards, open hearings, ibid., January 12, 1923.

48Farland Report, Robinson Papers.
people climbed into their buggies and cars for the trip home. The Mer Rouge contingent departed toward dusk, some fifty or sixty automobiles tooting merrily along. The procession had gone approximately two miles when it reached a point where the road dipped to cross a small stream. Suddenly the road was blocked by a crippled car, and the procession came to a halt. Within a few minutes the road was blocked for a mile and a half as traffic backed up on the narrow dirt road. As the confusion mounted, masked men, wearing the black Klan raiding garb, emerged from nearby woods carrying pistols, shotguns, and rifles. Moving with precision from car to car, they ferreted out their prey. "Here's one we want," growled a masked figure as he thrust a shotgun in the chest of J. L. Daniel. The old man was dragged from the car, bound and blindfolded, and forced to sit on a log while the mob continued its search. W. C. Andrews was found next. He too was pulled from his car, bound and blindfolded, and seated next to Daniel. In quick succession the mob picked up C. C. "Tot" Davenport, Thomas Richards, and Watt Daniel. While women screamed or fainted Andrews and J. L. Daniel were placed in a

---


50 New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 30, 1922.
Ford touring car, and Davenport, Richards, and Watt Daniel were loaded aboard a Ford truck. The masked mob then sped off as quickly as it had appeared.

The kidnapped men were driven several miles to a point near Collinston, where they were taken from the car and questioned about the alleged attempt on McCoin's life. J. L. Daniel was whipped and told that the Klan was aware that he knew who was responsible for the attempt on McCoin's life. He was also told that if he did not talk they would hang him. Daniel protested he could not answer their questions. The mob then removed his clothes and whipped him again. W. C. Andrews was also whipped and threatened with hanging if he did not talk. Like Daniel, he claimed he knew nothing. He was then asked if he recognized the kidnappers. He replied that he did not. He was then placed in an automobile with J. L. Daniel, and the two men were driven to Collinston, where they were released and told to take the Missouri Pacific train home. There they were joined by C. C. "Tot" Davenport, whom the mob apparently kidnapped by mistake. Davenport reported that he, Watt Daniel, and Richards were present while Andrews was beaten; that he had been released about nine-thirty p. m.; and that Richards and Watt Daniel were taken off in the Ford truck. 51

51Testimony of J. L. Daniel and W. C. Andrews, open hearings,
The kidnapping on the Mer Rouge-Bastrop road caused little excitement outside Morehouse Parish for several days. State newspapers accorded the incident only brief mention, usually on inside pages. However, in Morehouse Parish the daylight raid was having momentous repercussions. No one was certain what had happened to Richards and Watt Daniel. In Bastrop, where the Klan was strongest, the consensus was that the two missing men had "just kept on going," but in Mer Rouge opinion differed sharply. Citizens of the small planter community believed the two men were dead. And worse, they believed the murder of Richards and Daniel was merely the opening blast of a Klan campaign to clean up the whole town. 52

Shortly after the kidnappings a Mer Rouge businessman attended the Bastrop movie and encountered a Bastrop woman who asked him what he thought of the August 24 incident. "I believe if the two leaders of the Ku Klux Klan in Morehouse Parish are arrested," he said, "they will have two of the guilty parties." The following day a Bastrop Klansman appeared at his store, repeated his remarks, and warned him: "Keep your mouth shut and stop talking

52 New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 25, 1922.
about the kidnappings, or you'll get the same thing Richards and Daniels got." "I did not propose to be intimidated," claimed the businessman, "and since that time I have kept a loaded rifle and shotgun in my business establishment during the day and by my bed at night." 53

The Mer Rouge businessman's precautions were not unusual. During the days following the kidnapping, guns were kept handy in both Mer Rouge and Bastrop. A few nights after the kidnapping rumors circulated in both Bastrop and Mer Rouge that armed bands from the other community were poised and ready to strike. In Bastrop Captain Skipwith's Klansmen, armed to the teeth, barricaded themselves in and around the courthouse, while in Mer Rouge an ambush was arranged for any unwelcome visitors. On Sunday morning, August 28, after two nights of watchful waiting, the Bastrop courthouse square resembled a battlefield. Scattered everywhere were empty boxes which had contained ammunition supplied by the Monroe Hardware Company, of Monroe, Louisiana. 54 Fortunately for both communities, the feared attacks never

53 Ibid.
54 Farland Report, Robinson Papers.
materialized, but bitter feelings remained. Mer Rouge citizens continued to insist that the Klan was responsible for the kidnappings and that the two missing men were dead.

The news that his fellow citizens were issuing vocal outbursts against the Klan reached Dr. McCoin, a resident of Monroe since the alleged assassination attempt. The Mer Rouge physician, who often seemed more interested in taking lives than saving them, warned J. E. Inabnet that the talk against the Klan must stop or there would be serious trouble. Noting that Mer Rouge was surrounded by Bastrop, Collinston, Bonita, and Oak Ridge, McCoin compared the position of Mer Rouge to that of a criminal who had escaped into a canebrake which was surrounded by guards who were waiting for him to come out. 55

Events had obviously reached a crisis stage in Morehouse. Both Mer Rouge and Bastrop were powder kegs likely to explode at any moment. Into this critical situation stepped Monroe Klansman and President of the Ouachita Parish School Board, A. L. Smith, who was a close friend of the Davenport family, particularly young C. C. "Tot" Davenport. He arranged a meeting in Monroe between McCoin, the Davenport family, Flood Madison, John H.

55Ibid. Inabet related his conversation with McCoin to Farland.
Parker, James P. Norsworthy, and Captain Skipwith. The Monroe meeting temporarily calmed the turbulent animosities in Morehouse. McCoin asserted he had left the parish for good, feeling he had no friends there after the shooting incident. Skipwith agreed there would be no more trouble for anyone, save three Mer Rouge men named Milner, Campbell and Whipple, who, he said, must conduct themselves better or leave the parish. The participants in the Monroe peace conference left the meeting anticipating a quiet conclusion to the events of the previous two weeks. But the emotions aroused by mob action were not to be so easily dissipated. J. L. Daniel and W. C. Andrews still smarted from lacerations received at the hands of kidnappers, and two men were missing, possibly dead. Morehouse would need its temporary respite in order to gird for more difficult days ahead.

---

Testimony of A. L. Smith, open hearings, in New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 14, 1923. See also testimony of James P. Norsworthy, open hearings, ibid., January 10, 1923.
In early September, 1922, Governor John M. Parker received a pathetic letter from Mrs. T. F. Richards, wife of one of the two men missing since the August 24 kidnapping in Morehouse Parish. "I am left entirely without a home, no relatives or money for my two children . . . I have two little girls to raise and was absolutely dependent on my husband's daily labor for support. And just because he was not afraid of the Klan they have done this and they are now trying to make out it was not the Klan, but it was the Klan, as otherwise they would have been willing and ready to help me find my husband. I believe he is dead because he would have written if he is alive, and I am nearly crazy with suspense and pray to God for help. Won't you do what you can?"¹

¹Mrs. T. F. Richards to John M. Parker, quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, September 9, 1922, and Shreveport Journal, September 9, 1922. According to one source Mrs. Richards had previously telephoned the Governor on August 28. See Rogers, The Murders of Mer Rouge, p. 29.
Mrs. Richards had previously appealed to David M. Garrett, Morehouse District Attorney, and Fred M. Odom, Judge of the Fifth Judicial District of Louisiana, to assist in finding her husband. Garrett empaneled the Morehouse Parish Grand Jury on September 4 and laid before it the interesting theory that Watt Daniel was dead, but that T. F. Richards was still alive. According to Garrett, Richards had been kidnapped twice, primarily to give evidence against Daniel to the mob. "I am working on this theory now," he said, "with the hope that the grand jury will be able to prove the theory." But the grand jury exhibited little concern for the kidnapped men, calling only a half dozen witnesses who were confronted with perfunctory questions. One witness was dropped like a hot potato when he suggested that the grand jury might fathom the mystery by examining its own members. On September 8, the grand jury reported to Judge Odom that it had been unable to find any evidence regarding the identity of the persons responsible for the kidnapping or the whereabouts of the missing men. Ironically, the report concluded with the assertion of a marked decrease in crime in Morehouse Parish since the last meeting of the grand jury.

2Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, September 4, 1922.

3Ibid., September 9, 1922.
Many citizens of Morehouse knew what the outcome of the investigation would be before it began, for it was common knowledge that Garrett and nine of the twelve members of the jury were Klansmen.  

Fortunately, Mrs. Richards found Louisiana's mustachioed Governor more responsive than the Klan-dominated Morehouse Parish Grand Jury. The August 24 kidnapping was exactly the type of Klan incident Parker needed to drive home to Louisianians the dangers inherent in the hood and mask. On the basis of Mrs. Richards's letter and other correspondence he had received from Morehouse citizens, the Governor now took swift action. On September 8, he offered a five hundred dollar reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of the Morehouse kidnappers, and five days later, J. L. Daniel, father of one of the missing men, offered another five thousand dollars for the same information.  

Parker then issued orders to his Attorney General, A. V. Coco, which unmistakably declared war on the Invisible Empire in

4 New Orleans Times-Picayune, September 5, and December 28, 1922.

Morehouse Parish. "When mob violence and the 'invisible empire'
attempt to rise superior to the laws of our state every power at
our command should be exercised to stamp out such violence . . . .
The issue is clearly drawn. Neither mob violence nor the Ku Klux
Klan shall run this state. The law must and shall prevail . . . . 5
For the next three days Parker and Coco closeted for discussions
regarding the best route in attacking the Morehouse case.

The Governor's intervention and the attendant newspaper
publicity had repercussions in Morehouse. Captain Skipwith
submitted an open letter to Parker to the state's leading newspapers,
claiming that the kidnappings were perpetrated by friends of Dr.
McCoin and that the Klan was innocent of any wrong doing. "I want
to say to you and your attorney general," he wrote, "that the charge
against the Ku Klux Klan, if applied to the Morehouse Parish Klan,
is absolutely untrue and unjustified." 7 In Mer Rouge the Governor's
intervention prompted wholesale resignations from the Morehouse
Klan. "I was a klansman," said E. W. Andrews, brother of one of
the flogged men. "I am opposed to this terrorism, whether it is
the Klan or not. Every member of the Klan here has resigned. I

6Quoted in Shreveport Journal, September 9, 1922.

7J. K. Skipwith to John M. Parker, quoted in New Orleans
Times-Picayune, September 12, 1922.
know of no exceptions." J. A. Davenport, President of the Mer Rouge State Bank, asserted: "We have paid too high a price for what small benefits we may have received before this outrage. Terrorizing of women and children is coward's play . . . . Fear of the masked men may keep some of us closer to the straight and narrow path, but the price is too great to pay. Our community is split with friend against friend and suspicion everywhere. Our fellow spirit is gone. Masked terrorism must go." Davenport and Andrews were accompanied by Mer Rouge Mayor Robert Dade when they rejoined the world of "aliens" and gave up "citizenship" in the Invisible Empire.

The sudden notoriety, the Governor's proclamation, and wholesale Klan resignations in Mer Rouge upset the delicate structure of peace arranged in Morehouse in late August. Mayor Bob Dade and Mer Rouge became the objects of threats, as emotions were again aroused. On September 14, Mayor Dade received letters addressed "to the Mayor of Mer Rouge and all good citizens," charging that "your wallowing in a cesspool of corruption and lawlessness has become a menace to this parish . . . ." A second

8Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, September 11, 1922.

9Ibid.
letter, signed "100 percent American," charged "we have been reliably informed that there is an organization in your town which is called the Anti Ku Klux Klan . . . which is responsible for the McCoin case. We will give you ample time to clean up and if you fail to do this we will bring one thousand men to Mer Rouge and do the job right."  

At this juncture Morehouse peacemaker A. L. Smith of Monroe appeared in Bastrop, called another meeting of prominent Mer Rouge and Bastrop citizens, and pointed out that Governor Parker would probably declare martial law in Morehouse unless differences were quickly settled. "I tried to impress upon them the importance of getting themselves straight and calling the Governor off," he related. "We decided to select a leading man from each ward, irrespective of whether he was a Klansman or not. The Klan was to be represented by Skipwith and ten men of his selection . . . We would then inform the Governor that all was quiet and peaceful here. I saw Skipwith and he said it was not necessary to hold a conference; that if the other gentlemen felt that way about it he would speak for the Klan. We met and everyone was satisfied and contented."  

---

10 Unsigned letters to Bob Dade, quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, September 15, 1922.


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
The last peace conference, held in mid-September, again soothed frayed emotions in Morehouse, and had it been left to parish residents the matter might have ended with Smith's final peace mission. But in Baton Rouge and New Orleans plans were quietly put in motion to settle the Morehouse case to the state's satisfaction. In late September Paul Wooten, Washington correspondent for the New Orleans Times-Picayune, called upon J. Edgar Hoover of the federal Bureau of Investigation. Wooten, who was at that time working on an exposé of the Klan for the New Orleans paper, had been chosen by Governor Parker to serve as liaison between state officials and the federal government, which Parker had determined to draw into the Morehouse case. Hoover took the Times-Picayune reporter to Chief of the Department of Justice's Bureau of Investigation, William J. Burns, and to Postmaster General Hubert Work. Wooten outlined the situation in Louisiana, explained he was Parker's emissary, and presented the Governor's request for federal assistance.

---


13 Paul Wooten to D. D. Moore, September 26, 1922, in Robinson Papers. Parker allegedly used Wooten as a personal representative because he feared Klansmen were watching the mails and tapping his telephone. See Shreveport Journal, February 19, 1961.
A few days later Wooten was joined in Washington by Louisiana Attorney General A. V. Coco to assist in pressing Parker's case. Coco expressed the opinion to federal officials that nothing could be accomplished by initiating state proceedings in Morehouse, and that the only way "to accomplish anything was by making a federal case of it." The exact nature of federal intervention Parker had in mind in early October, 1922, is not clear. However, there is good reason to believe that Parker assumed federal laws had been violated in Morehouse, in which event the state needed federal assistance. Moreover, the abysmal example of the September grand jury in the north Louisiana parish probably convinced him that future parish grand juries would prove no more dependable. Burns granted leaves of absence to two of his agents and sent them to Baton Rouge to work under Parker's direction. Postmaster General Hubert Work also dispatched a postal investigator to Morehouse to determine if federal postal regulations had been violated. The agents reported to Washington for instructions and left for Louisiana.

14John Locgh (? ) to W. D. Robinson, October 7, 1922, in Robinson Papers.

15Paul Wooten to D. D. Moore, September 26, 1922, ibid.
By the end of October it was apparent that Parker was contemplating more federal assistance than he had yet received. On October 30, he penned a letter to Joseph Morningstar, an influential wartime friend of Watt Daniel, who had taken an active interest in Daniel's disappearance. Parker requested Morningstar's assistance with national officials. "It will be necessary to use all the influence at your command to get the national government to take an interest in this matter," he wrote. "Get in touch with all your Congressmen and Senators, requesting that they take the matter up with the Justice Department."¹⁶ At the time he wrote Morningstar the Governor had seen preliminary reports of Bureau of Investigation operatives in Morehouse. Agent A. E. Farland, after conducting his investigation of the events of the previous summer in the parish, had reported back to Washington. He returned to Baton Rouge in late October and informed Parker that the Bureau of Investigation would not initiate proceedings; and if the Governor wanted further federal assistance, he must invoke Article IV, Section 4, of the Constitution, which offered federal help, upon the

request of the governor or the legislature, to protect the state 
against domestic violence. 17

Parker suddenly found himself locked in the clutches of a 
difficult dilemma. On the one hand he had openly declared war on 
the Ku Klux Klan in Morehouse Parish, proclaiming he would stamp 
out hooded lawlessness. Preliminary information, however, 
indicated federal assistance would be necessary to prosecute the 
most flagrant example of masked terrorism Louisiana had yet 
experienced. If he was to fulfill his promise to end masked 
lawlessness in the state, federal aid seemed indispensable, but 
suddenly Washington was demanding that he invoke a seldom used 
constitutional guarantee as the price for its assistance. Submission

17Farland Report, Robinson Papers. An unsigned and undated 
memorandum in W. D. Robinson's papers expressed the federal 
government's attitude. "Assistant Attorney General Grim is of 
the opinion that this case to be properly worked would involve the 
assignment of a number of men, but that at the present time this 
department has no authority unless Governor Parker certifies to 
the President in accordance with Section 4, Article 4 of the U. S. 
Constitution . . . a condition of domestic violence with which the 
state is unable to cope . . . and formally requesting the assistance 
of the federal government through its Department of Justice . . . . 
Impress upon the Governor the fact that the Department regrets 
the present state of the law will not allow other action, but that 
should the above letter be sent, and the President approve, the 
entire resources of the government will be made available if 
necessary . . . ."
to the Washington proposition promised fulfillment of his original pledge to maintain law and order, but it also was politically dangerous. Invoking Article IV, Section 4, was tantamount to admission that, as Governor, he was incapable of upholding his sworn obligation to maintain law and order without outside assistance. One path promised the perpetrators of the Morehouse outrage might go unpunished, the other certain political danger. Either would be a difficult route to follow.

Unfortunately, the path Parker chose is impossible to delineate, for the whole problem of federal assistance was inadvertently thrust into the turbulent arena of Louisiana politics. However, Parker's actions suggest that he chose the road of federal intervention and then, in the midst of massive publicity and recrimination, altered his course. In mid-November the Governor and Attorney General Coco boarded a train in New Orleans. They were bound for Washington and direct conversations with President Warren G. Harding. Prior to his departure Parker granted an interview to special correspondent of the Washington Post, George Rothwell Brown. When Parker reached Spartanburg, South Carolina, he discovered Brown had exploded a news story in the nation's capital, based on the interview, declaring the Ku Klux Klan had "reached out boldly for civil power over officers of law and justice . . . and
had reduced the state of Louisiana to the vassalage of the Invisible Empire. The Governor of Louisiana is virtually helpless in the face of the power of the most gigantic organization which has ever reared its head in America." Brown then asserted that the machinery of state government had ceased to function and that Parker would request the federal government to take over law enforcement in certain portions of the state. Brown clearly gave the impression that his story was based on facts supplied by Parker in the Louisiana interview. Brown's sensational story was picked up by the wire services, and other newspapers built on the newspaperman's exaggerated claims. The Philadelphia Public Ledger, for example, made the ridiculous assertion that 145,000 hooded Klansmen were poised to strike the defenseless state.  

Parker reacted by denouncing Brown's exaggeration of conditions in Louisiana and the reporter's charge that he intended to ask the federal government to assume control of portions of the state. Even though Parker denied the statements attributed to him by Brown, the Governor's political opponents seized the

---

18 Quoted in New York Times, November 20, 1922.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
opportunity to attack him. Representative James B. Aswell, from Louisiana's Eighth Congressional District, which included Morehouse Parish, led the outcry. Aswell, who was a subscriber to the rabidly pro-Klan journal, Sgt. Dalton's Weekly, claimed that Parker was using the unfortunate circumstances of the kidnapping as a springboard to the United States Senate, or to the Vice-Presidential nomination on the Progressive Party ticket. The congressman also sent telegrams to the chief law officers of his district asking about lawlessness there. All reported conditions were peaceful. Parker countered with a broadside, charging that Aswell's statements were "a pack of lies" and that the congressman's district was "one of the recognized heads of the Ku Klux Klan in Louisiana."²¹

Senator Joseph E. Ransdell, whose Senate seat was the alleged object of Parker's ambitions, declared he was "shocked" to read the reports in Washington newspapers. He had heard of the Mer Rouge incident, he said, but it was insignificant when compared to the Chicago race riots of 1919 and the West Virginia miner's war in 1921. Certainly it did not justify federal intervention. "I traveled over several parts of Louisiana during the last few weeks

²¹Ibid., November 21, 1922.
and met a great many of its citizens," he said. "Conditions seemed to be normal everywhere; the courts were functioning as usual . . . . The press was free and outspoken on all subjects, including the Ku Klux Klan; there was no more crime than usual." Other members of the Louisiana congressional delegation bitterly denounced Parker, reiterating the charge he was making political capital through an attack on the Ku Klux Klan.

The loud protests of Louisiana's congressional delegation doubtlessly weakened Parker's position in Washington. Moreover, his opponents, recognizing the obvious political potential for Parker in his war on the Klan, cleverly avoided the probability that Brown's story was based on the reporter's exaggerations of the Louisiana interview, and leveled their guns directly on the Governor, accusing him of wild misrepresentation and undue alarmism.

Parker and Coco met with Harding, Attorney General Harry M. Daugherty, and William J. Burns on November 21, 1922. At the meeting Parker emphasized the need for federal assistance to check the operations of the Klan across state lines, but Harding

---

22 Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, November 22, 1922.

23 Clipping from Washington Herald, November 21, 1922, in scrapbook number fourteen, Aswell Papers.
and Daugherty were unconvinced. The same day the White House issued a simple statement that "federal intervention was not justified." However, Burns allowed Bureau of Investigation agents to continue to assist Parker in Louisiana.

The reaction to the Brown article wrecked the Governor's hopes of more substantial federal assistance in the Morehouse case. At home in Louisiana his friends recognized the Post story for what it was. T. H. Harris, State Superintendent of Education asserted: "I know there is not a word of truth in the ridiculous and scandalous statement," and the New Orleans Times-Picayune labeled it a "journalistic dud." However, in Mer Rouge the Post story prompted a petition proclaiming the Brown assertions to be true so far as Morehouse Parish was concerned. The reporter was invited to Mer Rouge to learn and write of the "true conditions in Morehouse," which, he would discover, "were worse than he had described in the article."

---

24 Clipping from Washington Herald, November 22, 1922, ibid.
26 New Orleans Times-Picayune, November 22, 1922.
27 Ibid., November 27, 1922.
Governor Parker's course was now clear. Morehouse officials, who were either Klansmen or Klan dominated, had demonstrated their unwillingness to take positive action, and federal officials claimed no jurisdiction. If justice was to prevail in Morehouse its burden rested squarely on the shoulders of Parker.

Fortunately, the Governor held good cards he had not yet played. The information on which he had been acting was supplied by irate Mer Rouge citizens; by federal agents A. E. Farland, J. D. Rooney, J. P. Huddleston and W. M. Atkins; and W. D. Robinson, a reporter for the New Orleans Times-Picayune, assigned to cover the Louisiana Klan by the paper's managing editor, D. D. Moore. Robinson and the federal investigators spent most of October and November in Morehouse slowly gathering information which they then relayed to Baton Rouge. The federal agents realized the impossibility of concealing their presence in the parish; consequently some of the agents operated openly, allowing Klansmen to boast they knew every move of the agents and Governor Parker. Meanwhile the remainder of the team quietly gathered incriminating evidence.

---

28 Robinson Report Number Two, Robinson Papers. See also Shreveport Journal, December 29, 1922.

29 New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 24, 1922.
By the end of November Governor Parker had on his desk a substantial amount of information about the Invisible Empire in Morehouse Parish. His information included names of parish Klansmen, incidents in which the Klan had been involved, and considerable detail on the August 24 kidnapping of Watt Daniel and Thomas Richards. The reports of Bureau of Investigation agents suggested that the two kidnapped men were dead and that their bodies were located in one of the several bayous surrounding Morehouse. Parker realized that unless he could prove Daniel and Richards dead he had no case, but the establishment of that fact required the location of the bodies, and that could be dangerous business in Morehouse. Men who had committed murder once could be trusted to do it again, especially if it appeared they were about to be apprehended. Also, the Klan was again active in Morehouse. During November three Negroes and two white men had been taken from their homes and whipped.30 Nor could Parker forget that during October, when federal agents were in the parish, Klansmen had openly boasted that they would "give the agents the same treatment Richards and Daniel got."31


31 New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 24, 1922.
On December 19, 1922, Parker seized the initiative, ordered a search for the bodies of the missing men, and dispatched Company G of the Louisiana National Guard to Bastrop to protect the searching operations. Three days later other national guard units were dispatched to Morehouse. Federal officials had narrowed the probable location of the bodies to Lake Cooper, Lake Lafourche, or Lake Boeuff. Dragging operations began at Lake Cooper, a shallow body of water seven miles northwest of Mer Rouge. Anxious Mer Rougians volunteered to assist in the dragging, and state officials readily accepted their services. However, a two day search of Lake Cooper's murky waters yielded no trace of the missing men.

Then the state got an unexpected break. On the night of December 22, national guard troops discovered men wading in Lake Cooper and fired upon them, but the intruders escaped through one of the several waterways leading into the lake's main body. All available evidence suggests that the intrusion at Lake Cooper was a ruse, designed to keep national guardsmen away from Lake Lafourche, which was the scene of more important events on the

---

32 New York Times, December 20, 1922. See also Thomas E. Dabney, One Hundred Great Years: The Story of the Times-Picayune From its Founding to 1940 (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1944), p. 420.
same evening. About midnight residents of Eason Ferry on Lake Lafourche were awakened by a terrific explosion which shook houses for miles around. The explosion took place at a point where the water was about sixty feet deep. The men who set it off had obviously intended to blast the banks of the lake into the watery crevice. About three a.m. J. C. Nicholas telephoned authorities and reported that J. L. Ellington, a commercial fisherman, had found two floating bodies near the scene of the explosion. The bodies were examined by Dr. O. N. Patterson, Morehouse Coroner, and then turned over to Bureau of Investigation agent A. E. Farland, who shipped them to Monroe for examination by two New Orleans pathologists.

Dragging of Lake Lafourche doubtlessly would have shortly produced the bodies, but the dynamite charge, which was intended to bury the incriminating evidence under tons of mud, blasted them free of weights to which they were wired. Both bodies were badly decomposed. When they floated to the surface, all that remained was the torso and fragmented appendages. Investigators initially assumed body extensions had been blasted off by the explosion, caused by an estimated 1,000 pounds of dynamite. In Monroe the

---

bodies were examined by pathologists Charles W. Duval and G. M. Lanford, were identified as Watt Daniel and Thomas Richards by fragments of clothings, and were shipped back to Mer Rouge for internment on Christmas Eve. 34

For dozens of metropolitan newspapermen the Christmas holidays of 1922 were spent searching for lodgings in a small north Louisiana town which was ill equipped to accommodate the flood of curious journalists. The arrival of the troops in Bastrop had been followed by a small army of reporters, all determined to cover personally what proved to be one of the year's biggest news stories. Morehouse lawlessness suddenly became the subject of headlines across the nation as correspondents related the events of the previous year in minutest detail. Coverage was overwhelmingly anti-Klan, and even Louisiana papers which normally opposed Parker had high praise for his actions to bring the Mer Rouge murderers to justice. 35

Unfortunately, the character of reporting in Morehouse was sensational and unreliable. In their rush to meet deadlines, reporters confused the incidents of prior Klan activity, treated rumor as fact, and

34 New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 23, 24, 1922.

35 "The Murders of Mer Rouge," The Literary Digest, LXXVI (January 13, 1923), pp. 10-12. See also Dabney, One Hundred Great Years, p. 421.
frequently fabricated news with sensational and suggestive writing. Established and usually reliable journals often printed two and three different versions of the same incident. One paper, for example, printed no less than three different versions of the Addie Mae Hamilton incident, all apparently written by the same reporter.\(^{36}\)

Conditions were bad in Morehouse, but it was safe to walk the streets of Bastrop, the reports of newspapermen notwithstanding.

The discovery and identification of the bodies of Daniel and Richards gave hope to the Parker camp. The Governor and Attorney General Coco had determined earlier to present publicly the evidence accumulated during the three-month investigation. The means would be an open hearing, a seldom used device in Louisiana, although it was provided for in the state constitution. Coco was empowered, as Attorney General, to seek an order through the district court to hold open hearings and to summon witnesses for the purpose of securing evidence.\(^{37}\) The state obviously hoped it could present such an imposing array of evidence in the open hearings that a future parish grand jury could not refuse to act.

\(^{36}\) _New Orleans Times-Picayune_, December 25, 1922, January 9, 12, 1923. For other examples see _New York Times_, December 20, 1922 -- January 1, 1923.

\(^{37}\) _The Colfax Chronicle_, December 2, 1922.
January 5, 1923, was set as the date to begin the hearings, and Coco selected Assistant Attorney General T. Semmes Walmsley, St. Clair Adams, and George Seth Guion as his assistants.

Coco and Walmsley arrived in Bastrop on Christmas Eve, accompanied by two additional companies of the Louisiana National Guard from New Orleans. Acting on information supplied by federal investigators, Coco signed an affidavit charging T. J. "Jeff" Burnett, an employee of the Southern Carbon Company at nearby Spyker, with the murder of Daniel and Richards. Fred Carpenter, Morehouse Sheriff and member of the Klan, arrested Burnett the same day and confined him to the parish jail in Bastrop, which was placed under heavy guard by the national guard, one unit of which was armed with machine guns. 38

Coco had a duplicate warrant for the arrest of Dr. B. M. McCoin, but the physician who had been so prominently involved in Morehouse Klanism, was suddenly nowhere to be found. However, three days later he was located in Baltimore, Maryland, at Johns Hopkins University Medical School, where he had enrolled for advanced study shortly after the kidnappings. Parker immediately dispatched a telegram to Baltimore officials requesting

38New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 24, 1922.
that they arrest McCoin on a charge of murder. When arrested, McCoin denied any knowledge of the kidappings or that he had been a member of the secret organization. "All I know is that both men who were killed were on the bad side, the side of bootleggers, gunmen, and men who associated with Negro women," he said. In Atlanta, national Klan headquarters suddenly developed an interest in McCoin and dispatched J. A. Bracewell to Baltimore to help the Mer Rouge physician fight extradition. Bracewell went to attorneys Ecke and Keck of Baltimore, who were later paid seven hundred fifty dollars for their assistance. Although the City Court of Baltimore refused to grant McCoin the writ of habeas corpus for which he applied, Governor Albert Ritchie of Maryland refused to honor the affidavits charging McCoin because they were based on "informational belief" and not on actual knowledge of the alleged crimes. At that point McCoin decided to return, provided Parker dropped extradition proceedings against him in Maryland. The Governor agreed, and McCoin returned to Bastrop under five thousand dollar bond in early January, accompanied by New Orleans detective James P. Glynn and Morehouse Deputy

39Ibid., December 27, 1922.

40Ibid., January 4, 1923, and October 31, 1923.
Sheriff Laurie Calhoun, a known Klansman who was purposely sent with Glynn in the hope he might reveal to the detective incriminating information about the murders. 41

In Bastrop Attorney General Coco was besieged by petitions protesting McCoin's Baltimore arrest. The Twin-Cities Ministerial Association of Monroe and West Monroe, the Monroe Baptist Church, and the Fifth Congressional District Physician's Association all adopted resolutions protesting the state action and avowing their "steadfast confidence" in McCoin. One such telegram from an individual physician prompted a sharp rebuke from Coco. "Your telegram in regard to Dr. McCoin is received. It is presumptuous of you to write me concerning a matter of which you have no information," he replied. 42

Burnett's internment and the state's abortive attempt to arrest Dr. McCoin left Morehouse intensely excited. Wild unsubstantiated rumors spread that the state had sufficient evidence to arrest forty-five other persons involved in the kidnappings. Actually, the state had no such intentions. Coco had two important witnesses he was particularly anxious to appear at the open hearing. One


42 Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 29, 1922.
was R. A. Whetstone, a witness against Burnett, whose life had been threatened and who had earlier been sent to the Louisiana State Penitentiary for safe keeping. The other, Harold L. Teegeston, a nineteen-year-old boy who was the timekeeper at the Southern Carbon Company where Burnett was employed, was regarded as a vital witness against the arrested Klansman. On New Year's Eve Teegeston disappeared shortly after he had been questioned by federal Bureau of Investigation agents. The carbon company timekeeper could not be found throughout the open hearings, although state officials frequently conducted searches for him on the basis of leads received from informants. Thirty days later he returned to Bastrop, where he was welcomed as a hero, and bragged that he had spent five days hiding in the shadows of the state capitol. "I could have talked to Governor Parker if I had wanted to as I saw him daily," said Teegeston. "I was tempted to go up to the executive mansion several times ... lay my cards on the table and ask him what I'd better do. I did not want to injure any of my friends however." The youth, obviously basking in the glow of his own misguided heroics,

---

43 Farland Report, Robinson Papers.
44 Baton Rouge State Times, January 1, 1923.
concluded his brash disregard for the law with the assertion: "I thought it best to let Mr. Jeff testify. I did not want to injure him or anybody else." The boy's attitude could not have surprised state officials. It was one with which they had become all too familiar during the month he was missing.

While Coco, Walmsley, and their assistants laid final plans for the open hearing which was scheduled to begin January 5, 1923, Klan leaders in Atlanta, New Orleans, and Bastrop acted to clear the Invisible Empire of the damaging charges. In Washington the new Imperial Wizard, Hiram Wesley Evans, proclaimed that the Ku Klux Klan was not responsible for the Mer Rouge murders. He was willing, he said, "that the life or death of the Klan should stand on the 1922 record of criminality in either Louisiana or any of fifteen other states in which the Klan organization is strongest." But for insurance, Evans sent S. N. Littlejohn, sometime Klan investigator, to Bastrop to work directly under Captain Skipwith "with the end in view that there might be no indictment." In New Orleans state Klan leaders met on December 29 and announced

45 Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 30, 1923.
46 Ibid., December 20, 1922.
47 Ibid., October 31, 1923.
they would conduct an investigation of their own. Said one state Klan official: "Columns have been printed and statement after statement has been issued by state authorities, all tending to fasten the blame on the Klan . . . I know the Klan is not to blame."48 The state leaders ended their declaration with the promise to banish and assist in the conviction of any Klansmen proved guilty in Morehouse.

In Bastrop "Old Skip" was enraged. Not only had Governor Parker curtly refused his generous offer of five hundred Klansmen to assist in locating the parties responsible for the murders, he had also published the Captain's Morehouse membership list, which, among other things, showed the old man to be a liar. Faced with the hearing, "Old Skip" changed his tone and emphasized the good work of the Invisible Empire. "They call the Klan murderers," he said, "but they do not speak of the good work of the organization. Yet there are many among us who are fully cognizant of all that the Klan has done for this community."49 Many Morehouse citizens would have agreed with him.

48Ibid., December 30, 1922, and Shreveport Journal, December 30, 1922.

49Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 31, 1922.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
On January 5, 1923, Judge Fred M. Odom opened the anxiously awaited proceedings. The parish courthouse at Bastrop bulged at its seams with curious spectators clamoring to witness the dramatic confrontation between the state of Louisiana and the Morehouse Klan. The air was tense with excitement, and when Judge Odom dramatically announced that no guns would be allowed in the courtroom the quiet murmurs of the audience audibly amplified. At the state desk were Coco, Walmsley, Adams, and Guion. Across the narrow aisle sat Judge William C. "Chris" Barnette of Shreveport and R. L. Todd, representing T. J. Burnett and Dr. McCoin particularly, and the Ku Klux Klan generally. In the weeks before the hearings unverified rumors had circulated in Bastrop that the Klan would employ Clarence Darrow for the defense, but Atlanta headquarters had settled on Barnette, an important Louisiana Klan official, as chief counsel.

The state's first important witnesses were Drs. Charles Duvall and G. M. Lanford, the New Orleans pathologists who made the examination of the bodies at the time of discovery. They formally identified the bodies, and then Duvall related the gruesome details

---

50Shreveport Journal, December 30, 1922. During the hearings it was assumed local Klansmen had paid Barnette's and Todd's fees; however, it was later revealed by a Klan official the money came from Atlanta. See New Orleans Times-Picayune, October 31, 1923.
surrounding the murders. According to the Tulane University Professor of Pathology, both men had been similarly mutilated before death. The hands and feet had either been cut off or mashed off, and the long bones in the arms and legs had been broken in three places. The medical examination further revealed that the victims' heads and chest had been crushed, probably by a specially constructed instrument. Duvall shocked the courtroom when he announced that Daniel's and Richards's private organs had also been removed. Coco, taking advantage of the horrified reaction of the spectators, asked: "Was the cutting done before or after death?" "The alterations we found," said Duvall, "could not have been done after death. There was much evidence that blood had flown."\textsuperscript{51} Coco then called Dr. Lanford, who in more technical language corroborated Duvall's testimony. The medical evidence furnished by Duvall and Lansford left no doubt that Richards and Daniel had been horribly mutilated by torture before death, apparently in an effort by the kidnappers to secure an admission of responsibility for the alleged attempt on McCoin's life. Evidence supporting this conclusion was contained in testimony given by J. L. Daniel, father of Watt, who was threatened with hanging if he persisted.

\textsuperscript{51}Testimony of Dr. Charles Duvall, open hearings, \textit{ibid.}, January 7, 1923.
in denying complicity in the McCoin affair. 52 W. C. Andrews, another victim of the August 24, 1922, kidnapping, supported the same conclusion. 53

In succeeding days Coco paraded dozens of witnesses to the stand. Piece by piece the history and effect of Klanism in Morehouse Parish was carefully recreated. Many witnesses, particularly those who had been victims of Klan night riding, expressed hostility toward the secret organization and attributed to it most of the lawlessness Morehouse had experienced in 1922. Frequently witnesses refused to answer obvious questions, fearing the wrath of Skipwith and the Klan when the national guard troops would leave. Still others, who were admitted Klansmen, were evasive in their testimony. A. L. Smith, Klan peacemaker from Monroe, was called January 13, and was asked if he gave information concerning the commission of crimes by members of the Klan, would he be violating his Klan oath. "I'm not so sure about that," he answered, as Bastrop spectators cheered his words. 54 Such

52 Testimony of J. L. Daniel, open hearings, ibid.
53 Testimony of W. C. Andrews, open hearings, ibid.
outbursts from the audience were convincing proof that while John M. Parker might have convinced many persons of the evil nature of the Klan, many Bastrop citizens clung to it loyally.

Coco obviously wanted to indict the Invisible Empire as a whole for the situation in Morehouse. But he also wanted evidence which would lead to the indictment of individuals for the murder of Richards and Daniel, and despite the fact that many witnesses were hostile to the state action, others stepped forward, however reluctantly, and afforded incriminating testimony. The state's chief suspects included Captain J. K. Skipwith, Oliver Skipwith, T. J. Burnett, E. N. "Newt" Gray, and Smith Stevenson.

The state's strongest case was against T. J. "Jeff" Burnett, employee of the Southern Carbon Company and sometime Deputy Sheriff for Morehouse Parish. Burnett, interned in the Bastrop jail and guarded by national guard troops, feigned illness as the hearings opened, apparently in the hope that the state would remove him to less confining quarters; however, an examination by Dr. Duvall revealed he was well and quashed his hopes. Coco's chief witness against Burnett was R. A. Whetstone, confined by the state in the Louisiana State Penitentiary for three months for his own protection, and returned to Bastrop under heavy guard to testify. Whetstone positively identified Burnett as one of the mob
who kidnapped the five men on August 24, 1922. He had been walking
to Mer Rouge after the Bastrop barbecue, he said, and had been
stopped by the mob on the outskirts of Bastrop and forced to carry
water for them. When asked how he knew Burnett was in the
mob, Whetstone replied, "I saw him take his hood off." "Do you
know Burnett well?" "I have known him all my life, his mother
and my mother are first cousins."

Burnett claimed he had been at work at the carbon plant in
Spyker on the night of August 24. But the state proved a discrepancy
in the hours for which Burnett was paid and the hours for which he
was credited on the company time sheet for the week of the
kidnapping. Moreover, when the company's books were produced
at the hearing, erasures by Burnett's name for August 24, 1922,
were readily apparent. Unfortunately, Coco could not produce
Harold Teegeston, the timekeeper for the Southern Carbon Company,
who could have explained the erasures. Mrs. B. B. Carlisle,
a resident of Bastrop, also identified Burnett as one of the men
in the mob which had kidnapped Daniel and Richards. She was

55 Testimony of R. A. Whetstone, open hearings, ibid.,
January 20, 1923. See also Farland Report, Robinson Papers.

56 Testimony of H. H. Riordan, open hearings, in New
Orleans Times-Picayune, January 25, 1923.
acquainted with Burnett and had recognized him at the time of the kidnapping.\(^{57}\)

E. N. "Newt" Gray, a deacon in the Baptist church and a "spotter" for the Klan, testified that he had spent the night of August 24, 1922, with a friend, William Higginbotham, who had allegedly received a letter threatening his life and feared being alone. But Coco produced Mrs. J. H. Inabnet, who reluctantly testified she had recognized Gray as one of the kidnappers. Her reluctance was based on a long friendship with Gray's family.\(^{58}\) The Baptist deacon was then identified by his brother-in-law, Fred Ubanks, who also recognized him at the scene of the kidnapping.\(^{59}\) Although the state did not call him as a witness, B. J. Peterson, of Mer Rouge, also identified Gray to federal investigators as one of the kidnappers.\(^{60}\)

\(^{57}\) Testimony of Mrs. B. B. Carlisle, open hearings, \textit{ibid.}, January 21, 1923.

\(^{58}\) Testimony of Mrs. J. H. Inabet, open hearings, \textit{ibid.}, January 20, 1923. See also Farland Report, Robinson Papers.

\(^{59}\) Testimony of Fred Ubanks, open hearings, in \textit{New Orleans Times-Picayune}, January 19, 1923. When Ubanks was first contacted by Bureau of Investigation agent A. E. Farland, he identified his brother-in-law as one of the kidnappers, and declared his willingness to "go into court when the case comes up any place but in Morehouse Parish." Farland Report, Robinson Papers.

\(^{60}\) \textit{Ibid.}
Oliver Skipwith and Smith Stevenson were identified by H. E. Blankenship, a Bastrop contractor. Blankenship testified that on the night of August 24, two automobiles loaded with hooded men, accompanied by a Ford truck containing Watt Daniel, Stevenson, and Skipwith, passed his home. "Are you positive of these men?" he was asked. "I am this positive," he answered. "If it had been my brother held in that car, Skipwith and Stevenson would have been the first men I would have looked for." Blankenship then testified that he knew the Ford truck by prominent markings and that two days later he sought it out and recorded its license number. The state then produced Stevenson's tag number, which matched the one given by Blankenship. Stevenson answered unconvincingly that he had loaned the truck to Lucy Evans on the night of August 24 and that he "believed" Evans had returned it that evening. He was "sure" it was in his front yard the following morning. The state quickly destroyed Stevenson's alibi by producing Mrs. Sallie Whetstone, who testified that her husband, Doster Whetstone, had

61 Testimony of H. E. Blankenship, open hearings, in New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 21, 1923.

62 Ibid.

63 Testimony of Smith Stevenson, open hearings, ibid., January 17, 1923.
been refused a lift by Stevenson on the afternoon of the kidnapping. He was driving his Ford truck. 64

Evidence against Captain Skipwith was more circumstantial. The old man was a loose talker, a circumstance which concerned Atlanta mightily, and several persons overheard him make incriminating remarks about the kidnappings. William Norsworthy, for example, testified that after the disappearance of Richards and Daniel, Skipwith remarked that "all of this trouble had occurred from two sorry boys" and that if "they hadn't been so smart we intended to give them a trial for shooting at Dr. Me Coin, but they got so smart . . . that the boys decided they knew too much." 65

More incriminating was Skipwith's visit to the office of the Cumberland Telephone Company on the afternoon of August 24. He requested that no calls be accepted between Mer Rouge and Bastrop. When this was refused, the lines linking the towns were cut. Moreover, the Captain claimed he was barricaded in a hardware store on the night of August 24, but H. G. Prophit told federal

64 Testimony of Mrs. Sallie Whetstone, open hearings, ibid., January 23, 1923.

investigators that he recognized the old man talking to hooded men on the road south of Bastrop on the night of the kidnapping. 66

One reason Governor Parker wanted federal assistance in the Morehouse case was the persistence of evidence that Arkansas Klansmen were involved in the kidnappings. North Louisiana Klansmen frequently operated in conjunction with their fraternal brothers in Arkansas, and Morehouse Knights particularly had banded with Ashley County, Arkansas, Klansmen to stem lawlessness on the border. 67 Moreover, it was common Klan practice to employ outside, and thus unknown, assistance for raiding parties. 68 The evidence of participation in the kidnapping by Arkansas Klansmen was circumstantial, but persuasive. Captain Skipwith was seen in the company of strangers at the Bastrop barbecue on the afternoon of August 24, and was observed pointing out Richards and Daniel to them. Support for the conclusion that Arkansas Klansmen were involved is found in the fact that the kidnappers used E. N. "Newt" Gray as a "spotter" during the kidnapping. A "spotter" would have been unnecessary had only

66Ibid., March 13, 1923.
67The Morehouse Enterprise, June 30, 1922.
68Hair interview.
Morehouse Klansmen been involved, for both Daniel and Richards were well known throughout the parish. Moreover, A. E. Farland's reports contain evidence showing that several Crossett, Arkansas, men were in Bastrop on the day of the kidnapping; and that one of them, Will Laney, was still there at ten-thirty p.m., "scared to death" and upset because he couldn't "get his crowd together to return to Crossett . . . ." Perhaps the most peculiar incident of the open hearings occurred when Morehouse District Attorney David Garrett asked witness W. B. Stuckey: "Did you not make the statement in Ashley County, during the progress of a court trial that you had recognized there five or six men that were in the mob that kidnapped Daniel and Richards?" Before Stuckey could answer, George Set'\: Guion, representing the state, hurriedly consulted with Garrett and the question was withdrawn. Neither Garrett nor Guion would discuss the incident with reporters at adjournment. Nor did Coco or his assistants ever reveal why they failed to pursue that line of questioning. Probably, they realized that to implicate Arkansas Klansmen would merely muddy the waters of the Morehouse case and therefore make their job

69Farland Report, Robinson Papers.

70Testimony of W. B. Stuckey, open hearings, in New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 14, 1923.
of fixing responsibility for the crime more difficult. Whatever Coco's reasons for failing to press the problem of Arkansas Klansmen's participation further, there remains the strong probability that they were involved in the murder of Richards and Daniel.

Klan leaders at both the national and state level realized that the Mer Rouge murders could injure the organization's image, not only in Louisiana but in other states as well. S. N. Littlejohn arrived from Atlanta on January 12, 1923, to work under Skipwith as a Klan investigator. He had been preceded by Sidney Mann and O. D. Jackson of the Pelican Detective Agency in New Orleans, which had been employed by Atlanta headquarters to investigate the case. Littlejohn's instructions were simple and direct. He was "to keep Skipwith quiet, so as not to crowd the issue." 71

But the Klan's principal offensive thrust was to confuse the issue in Morehouse with irrelevant and vicious propaganda. Klan publications in and out of Louisiana blistered Governor Parker with invective, accusing him of attacking the Morehouse Klan for publicity. 72 *Sgt. Dalton's Weekly*, the new pro-Klan paper, seized upon Coco's Catholic religious affiliation and asked: "Is his record

---

71 Ibid., October 31, 1923.
72 *The Winnfield News-American*, December 1, 1922.
such that he can investigate and prosecute Masons and Protestants of Morehouse Parish and the State of Louisiana? Shall he decide the use of the sword and bayonet in a Protestant country?"73 In the same issue editor Dalton, while not admitting Klan responsibility for the murder of Daniel and Richards, justified the act by asserting: "It was either surrender to the cut throats and lawless element or take strenuous steps to clean house."74

As the Klan attack mounted in intensity, two themes, frequently irrationally merged, stood out. First, Richards and Daniel were lawless criminals and Mer Rouge was a den of vice, and secondly, the charges against the Klan in Morehouse were the product of a Catholic conspiracy. A widely circulated reprint from the January 20, 1923, issue of The Fellowship Forum claimed that Roman Catholics were shielding in Mer Rouge "one of the rottenest situations" in any American community. "A great many of the married men, perhaps as many as fifty per cent of them, not only have a family of white children, but are also responsible for a family of half Negroes and half whites, maintaining what is

74Ibid.
commonly termed . . . as a 'Negro harem.' J. L. Daniel was accused of operating a gambling house frequented by both Negroes and whites. Watt Daniel and Richards had been "touts" for the gambling house, bootleggers, and "kept" Negro women. The article concluded with the assertion, widely circulated in Louisiana, that Richards and Daniel were not dead, but were hidden by the Roman Catholic Church in New Orleans, and that the bodies discovered in Lake Lafourche were supplied by the medical school in New Orleans at Parker's request.

In Louisiana the Klan attempted to fasten the blame on the Knights of Columbus by circulating the Catholic order's ritual printed beside pictures of men wearing black hoods similar to those worn by the Morehouse kidnappers. Louisiana Klan leaders also circulated a mimeographed essay entitled "The Ku Klux Klan And Mer Rouge," echoing the conclusions of The Fellowship Forum reprint. Like "Sergeant" N. C. Dalton, publisher of The

75 Reprint from The Fellowship Forum, January 20, 1923, in Robinson Papers.

76 Ibid.

77 New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 31, 1923.
Winnfield News American and Sgt. Dalton's Weekly, the author of the article justified the murder of Daniel and Richards.78

On January 25, after three weeks of testimony, the open hearings came to a close. Dr. McCoin and T. J. Burnett were placed under bond by Judge Odom, and the physician was allowed to return to Johns Hopkins University to resume his medical studies. When Attorney General Coco left for Baton Rouge, the national guard troops assigned to Bastrop were inactivated; however, Governor Parker warned Captain Skipwith that any further Klan activity in Morehouse would result in a proclamation of martial law. Both Skipwith and Morehouse Sheriff Fred Carpenter grudgingly accepted the Governor's terms.79 The same day, the Morehouse Klan leader granted an interview to reporters and reiterated the same charges against Daniel and Richards that Klan literature had previously leveled. The old man might have acquiesced in Parker's demands, but his heart was not changed.

The state had forced the case into the open, but the dispensation of justice rested in the hands of a Morehouse grand jury. Unconcern had marked the September, 1922, meeting, but the state entertained


79 New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 26, 1923.
hopes that the evidence revealed at the open hearings would prompt action from a new jury to be chosen in early March, 1923. Coco and his assistants used the six-week interim between the hearings and the seating of a new grand jury to strengthen their case, which, according to the Attorney General, had been done. 80 In the meantime, rumors circulated in Bastrop that the new panel from which the grand jury would be chosen was dominated by Klansmen or Klan sympathizers. On March 5, Judge Odom chose the new jury, which was predominately composed of farmers and merchants from Mer Rouge, Bastrop, Oak Ridge, Collinston, Bonita, and Gallion. He reminded the jury that "activities of hooded mobs in attempting to forcibly regulate the morals of others, if unchecked, will result in the breakdown of organized society." 81 When Captain Skipwith looked at the list of jurors, he announced: "This is the last you will hear of it. There will be no indictments." 82 His meaning was obvious.

The meeting of the new grand jury lasted ten days, during which it heard one hundred twenty-five witnesses who restated the evidence

80Ibid., March 14, 1923.

81Shreveport Journal, March 6, 1923.

82Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, March 17, 1923.
rendered at the open hearings. Coco, Guion, and Senator Howard Warren, representing the state as a special prosecutor, pressed home their case. On March 1, the twelve men closeted to consider the evidence. At five p.m. the following evening, J. C. Evans, foreman of the grand jury, submitted the jurors' report. By a vote of ten to two the new jury chose to follow the path hewn by its predecessor. "The majority of this body are of the opinion that the evidence furnished was not sufficient to warrant the finding of true bills against any particular party," said the report. The report concluded with a recommendation for the construction of a new jail and the repair of the roof of the courthouse. Odom had no comment, merely stating that the jury had been in session a long time and that he knew it to be a hardship.

The grand jury report caused no surprise in Bastrop. The outcome had been forecast when the grand jury was empaneled on March 5. Several hours before the report was made public, it was common street gossip that ten jurors would vote to reject all indictments. Captain Skipwith beamed with satisfaction. "It is needless to say that I am highly elated," he said. "The state

---


84New Orleans Times-Picayune, March 16, 1923.
has done its duty and I hope it is satisfied and will let the matter rest." 85

But Attorney General Coco was not satisfied, and he had no intention of allowing the matter to rest. In mid-April Coco called Morehouse District Attorney David Garrett to Baton Rouge for a special conference. Garrett returned to Bastrop and on April 18, on instructions from Coco, filed thirty bills of information against eighteen Klansmen, headed by Captain Skipwith and Dr. B. M. McCain, for carrying firearms on the property of another, compelling persons to leave their automobiles, conspiring to compel persons to leave their home, and assault with a dangerous weapon. 86 Bond was set for the Klansmen, and trial was set for November, 1923, before Judge Odom.

The Attorney General's decision to charge the Morehouse Klansmen with minor crimes was, unfortunately, an exercise in futility. He had been beaten, not by superior strength, but by apathy. In November the charged Klansmen appeared before Judge Odom, who found Skipwith, Benton Pratt, Marvin Pickett, and W. G. McIntosh guilty of carrying firearms on the premises of another

---

85 Quoted in New Iberia Enterprise, March 24, 1923.

86 New Orleans Times-Picayune, April 19, 1923.
person. They were fined ten dollars. At that point Klan counsel William C. Barnette demanded Odom recuse himself. When Odom refused, Barnette filed notice of appeal to the Louisiana Supreme Court, which subsequently denied the motion. Three months later the state finally dismissed the remainder of its charges against Morehouse Klansmen and thus ended the last opportunity to punish the Morehouse murderers.

In many respects the state's intervention in the Morehouse episode was an abysmal failure. Certainly the demands of justice were not met. But that failure was Morehouse's, not the state's. Moreover, what occurred in Morehouse is not particularly unusual, especially in the South. There are dozens of unpunished crimes blotting the span of Southern history which bear a disturbing resemblance to the Morehouse tragedy. It is almost axiomatic that when a Southern community tacitly approves of the crime committed, even though it might be murder, indictments are not returned. In the recent history of Mississippi alone, three such episodes have occurred, although all of the victims were Negroes. That

87 Ibid., November 6, 1923.
88 Shreveport Journal, November 22, 24, 1923.
89 The cases involved Emmett Till, Mack Parker, and Medgar Evars, all killed in Mississippi since 1955. All offenders remain unpunished.
citizens of Bastrop tactility, if not openly, approved Klan activities, up to and including the murder of Richards and Daniel, cannot be doubted in view of their actions and attitude toward the crime.

Yet, there was victory in the state's intervention -- perhaps not so clearly delineated as the defeat -- but triumphs of substance just the same. Morehouse Klan Number Thirty-Four was without doubt Louisiana's single most powerful unit of the Invisible Empire. It dominated parish life with an iron fist, its command was law, its displeasure sure punishment. It was in fact the perfect example of the dangers inherent in the hood and the mask. The state broke its back. Captain Skipwith for a time became something of a Klan celebrity, in demand at fraternal functions as a speaker, but his fame was short-lived. His leadership in Morehouse was challenged by members during the open hearings, and by April, 1923, they requested him to resign. But the old man held on until the fall of 1923, when at a meeting he announced the organization would oppose Judge Odom for reelection. Three men rose to object. Skipwith offered to resign as Exalted Cyclops, a motion was made to accept his offer, and he stepped down. Skipwith's resignation led to the gradual disintegration of Morehouse Klan Number

\[90\] New Orleans Times-Picayune, April 15, 1923.

\[91\] Ingram, "The Twentieth Century Ku Klux Klan in Morehouse Parish, Louisiana," p. 103.
Thirty-Four. It was never again a force of consequence in Morehouse Parish.

But there was still another victory in Parker's attack on Morehouse Klansmen -- immediately less spectacular than breaking the power of the Morehouse unit -- but in the long run more important. Information brought to light by the open hearings drove home to thousands of apathetic Louisianians the danger of the hood and mask -- the danger the secret society's stauncher opponents had vociferously preached since the Invisible Empire's beginnings in Louisiana. The terror of Morehouse was dramatically thrust into the light, where all could see, and the vision was disturbing. Individuals and institutions, previously unconcerned about the hood and mask, now took sides, usually against the night riding organization. For example, many newspapers, which prior to the Morehouse incident avoided all reference to the Klan, now filled their editorial columns with declarations that the hood and mask must go. Moreover, many responsible Klansmen, such as George B. Campbell, editor of the Hammond Vindicator, saw in the episode the dangers of hooded terrorism and demanded the abandonment of the mask. 92 C. P. Duncan, Grand Dragon of the Louisiana Klan,

92The Winnfield News-American, January 6, 1923.
also recognized the danger and ordered all Exalted Cyclops to more carefully supervise the use of the mask. 93 Campbell's and Duncan's fears were to be shortly reflected in legislation. Thus, the state's intervention in Morehouse fashioned a consequential opposition to Klanism in Louisiana. Had it accomplished nothing more, it would have justified Parker's actions, because without that opposition the Klan conceivably could have dominated the state as it did Indiana, Oklahoma, Arkansas, or Oregon. Louisiana was indeed fortunate that its opposing forces coalesced before the Invisible Empire had time to stabilize its position within the state. The Morehouse incident afforded the medium of union.

93 New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 16, 1923.
CHAPTER EIGHT

THE KLAN IN THE COMMUNITY:
ILLUSION AND REALITY

In July, 1923, the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan congregated at Asheville, North Carolina, for the first annual Klonvocation (or national convention of Klan officers) of the Invisible Empire. The influence of the Klan at the national level was then at its peak, and the delegates approached their work with the dedication of men on the verge of winning a long struggle. Twenty-six papers, covering a wide range of subjects of special interest to Klansmen, were read before the assembled delegates. The history of the Klan, a spiritual interpretation of Klancraft, the order's official policy toward the Catholic Church, and the attitude of the Invisible Empire regarding the Jew in American society were treated in considerable detail. The papers were the work of individual officers of the Klan from various sections of the country. ¹

¹Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Papers Read at the Meeting of Grand Dragons, At their First Annual Meeting, held at Asheville, North Carolina, July, 1923 (Atlanta, Georgia: no publisher, 1924). Hereinafter cited as Klan Papers.
One of the papers, which was an aimless, interminable exposition of Klan principles and purposes, was delivered by the Exalted Cyclops of Monroe, Louisiana, Klan Number Four. After delivering a general attack on Negroes, immigrants, Catholics, and various "isms," he turned his attention to Jews. The Jew, he claimed, excluded himself from the Klan because he refused to accept the Christian religion. Furthermore, he was an alien, "non-assimilative," and clannish. But "Klansmen commend the clannishness of the Jew," said the north Louisiana Klan leader, "knowing that it is one of the main reasons for his universal success. God Bless him," prayed Monroe's Exalted Cyclops, "[for] he takes care of his own and sees that no Jew goes without assistance in time of need."² A few paragraphs later the Monroe Klansman lost his Christian charity for the Jew he had so recently blessed. Now the Jew was allied with "every bootlegger, moonshiner, jakeseller, libertine, prostitute, and black-leg gambler" who wanted to put the Klan out of business.³

²Exalted Cyclops of Monroe, Louisiana, Klan Number Four, "Principles and Purposes of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan," ibid., p. 125.

³Ibid., pp. 126-127.
The Monroe Exalted Cyclops's lengthy discussion of Klan principles and purposes really contained no new exposition of doctrine. Everything he said had been said before, and frequently better. His attack on Jews was intriguing, if only because the chapter he headed had twice refused to campaign openly against the Jewish mayor of Monroe. Yet his expansive listing of Klan principles, his proclamations that all Klansmen would uphold those principles "until the last son of a Protestant surrenders his manhood, and is content to see America Catholicized, mongrelized, and circumcized," suggested a basic unity of purpose and action that the Klan rarely, if ever, achieved. Unity of purpose and action were certainly not characteristic of the Invisible Empire in Louisiana. Although the Louisiana Realm had an imposing structure of command and organization, paid lip service to the list of ideals expressed by the Monroe Exalted Cyclops, and frequently acted on the basis of some Klan principles, the state organization was characterized by local anarchy. Each individual Klan seized upon the particular facet of Klanism which it found appealing and acted on that basis. Thus, Morehouse Klan Number Thirty-Four was a "town taming" organization, New Orleans Klan Number One was a fraternal and political organization, and Shreveport Klan Number Two combined the two programs. Despite the existence of a
superstructure of Klan government, each individual unit followed a line of action approved by its members. Yet the lack of control of Klansmen did not end at the level of the local chapter. It is clear that many of the raiding activities of Louisiana Klansmen were carried out without the approval of the chapter to which they belonged. Obviously, not all Morehouse Klansmen were involved in the kidnapping of Daniel and Richards. The supposed unity of the clandestine organization was an illusion.

But the world of the Klan was a world of illusions. Because it was a secret organization, deception was a tactic which it could and did effectively employ. When it proclaimed that it could produce "1,000 Klansmen" to stamp out lawlessness in a particular area or produce a deluge of Klansmen at the polls, opponents of the organization were forced to view the claims with some respect, for they had no means of determining the veracity of Klan statements. In addition, when information on the Klan was published, it was frequently incomplete. The result was distortion, confusion, and uncertainty. In this manner, the New York World unwittingly contributed to the illusion of the strength of Klan government when it dedicated a substantial portion of its exposé to the structure of Klan government and the dictatorial authority exercised by the Imperial Wizard. Either a brief survey of the World series or
Henry Peck Fry's book, The Modern Ku Klux Klan, would convince the reader that no Klansman dared act without the approval of Simmons. Furthermore, when newspapermen published articles on the secret organization, they frequently treated speculation as fact, an unfortunate development which increased the difficulty of properly assessing the character of the Invisible Empire. Thus, illusions arose which still blur the real face of the Ku Klux Klan. It is the purpose of this chapter to clarify and bring into focus some of these illusions in Louisiana.

One of the most persistent illusions in the popular mind concerning the Klan was the lawlessness associated with the organization. To many people the mere mention of the words "Ku Klux" brought to mind visions of masked mobs whipping unfortunate Negroes, swooping down on stills, and running people out of town. To the extent that the Klan was guilty of such acts, that version of the Invisible Empire was accurate. But this image of the Klan came to dominate all other popularly held impressions about the secret organization, and eventually violence and the Klan became synonymous. Yet that view of the Klan was inaccurate for Louisiana and probably for most of the nation.

It is true that Louisiana was the victim of Klan violence. The Morehouse episode was perhaps the most sensational Klan incident
in the whole nation. The attention attracted by the open hearings, the arrival of national guard troops in the parish, and the tacit approval of the crime by Bastrop citizens seemed convincing proof that the Louisiana Klan was one of the nation's most violent. That image has been reinforced by the brief mention accorded the Klan movement of the twenties in recent accounts of the period. Such accounts frequently list the Morehouse murders and Indiana Grand Dragon David C. Stephenson's brutal assault upon a twenty-eight-year-old secretary, Madge Oberholtzer, as the most flagrant examples of Klan violence of the 1920's. The impression is left that the Louisiana and Indiana Realms constantly resorted to violence.

Klan violence in Louisiana was concentrated in a small number of chapters which were located in the northern tier of parishes bordering the Arkansas state line; in Sabine, Beauregard, and Allen Parishes in southwest Louisiana; and in Rapides Parish in central Louisiana. In DeRidder, for example, Beauregard Parish Klansmen tarred and feathered a Methodist preacher and dumped

---

4 See Chalmers, Hooded Americanism, pp. 59-65; Chalmers devotes almost his entire chapter on the Louisiana Klan to the Mer Rouge incident.

5 Lecuhtenberg, The Perils of Prosperity, p. 212. Miss Oberholtzer died and Stephenson was imprisoned.
him on a city street because he had deserted his wife. And in
Alexandria, Rapides Parish Klansmen strapped pistols on their
hips western style, marched into a downtown hotel, collared the
manager, and ordered him to get out of town or suffer the
consequences. Although the Mer Rouge incident was much more
sensational, the two incidents described above were the typical
Klan violence in Louisiana.

Almost all Louisiana Klans were guilty of issuing proclamations
to what they termed the "lawless element" in their communities,
but usually the matter went no further. Also, many so-called Klan
proclamations and warnings, although doubtlessly Klan inspired,
were the work of emotionally sick people or persons who took
advantage of the existence of the Klan to settle old spites. For
example, Dr. Armand May, a New Orleans surgical dentist, was
convicted for sending threatening letters above the Klan signature.
May was apprehended by a detective hired by the Klan to find out

6New Orleans Times-Picayune, February 26, 1922.

7Hewitt P. Bouanchaud Campaign Committee, The Ku Klux
Klan in Alexandria and Rapides Parish (n. p., n. d.), in
Louisiana Collection, Louisiana Room, Louisiana State University
Library, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.
who was using its name. In Jefferson Parish, across the river from New Orleans, two "scabs," who had taken jobs on the Illinois Central Railroad during a strike, received threatening letters from the "Imperial and illustrious Kleagle Algiers Klan of Ku Klux no. 13." The response of Al-Gre-Har Klan Number Forty-Five was to deny the responsibility for the letters and to offer a one hundred fifty dollar reward for the apprehension of the person responsible for writing the letter. Several other Louisiana Klans offered similar rewards for information leading to the conviction of any person employing their name. In Homer, a small hamlet northwest of Monroe, the local Klan suffered the indignity of having its uniforms stolen from the Masonic lodge, which was used for Klan meetings and as a storage place for Klan regalia. In the state capital, Baton Rouge Klansmen, upon discovering that the Baton Rouge State Times had received a number of letters signed "KKK," penned an indignant letter to that journal claiming that they had mailed only two letters to the capital city newspaper. One, they

8 Lake Charles Weekly American-Press, June 13, 1924.
9 New Orleans Times-Picayune, August 17, 1922.
10 Ibid., August 20, 1922.
said, contained a donation to the "Good Fellows" fund, and the other disclaimed unlawful activities. Any other letters received by the State Times, they vigorously asserted, were obvious fakes.  

In one instance, at least, the sending of a threatening letter resulted in tragedy. An unnamed Louisianian who moved to Pass Christian, Mississippi, mailed a threatening letter to a former associate in Louisiana and signed the name of the Klan. The associate recognized the stationery and the print of the typewriter and killed the author of the threatening letter. Thus the Louisiana Klan was plagued with the problem of non-Klansmen threatening and committing violence in its name. The Klan was, of course, indirectly responsible for such incidents because its very existence created a climate conducive to violence.

In contrast to the highly publicized violent image of the Louisiana Klan was the more characteristic tame side of its personality. The Klan was, in many respects, not unlike many other fraternal organizations active within the state. And as a fraternal society it manifested interest in a number of problems, issues, and activities. One of those interests was charity, a community service

---

12Baton Rouge State Times, March 13, 1922.

13New Orleans Times-Picayune, March 13, 1922.
many chapters of the Louisiana Realm practiced regularly. Cynics might charge that charitable work by the Klan was a source of excellent advertisement for the order, which it clearly was, but acts of benevolence for the needy were also a manifestation of a deep-seated desire to help the less fortunate and improve the community. Thus when a tornado devastated the small central Louisiana town of Pineville, Alexandria Klan Number Twelve established a two thousand dollar relief fund for the victims of the disaster.\textsuperscript{14} In Shreveport, Klan Number Two, upon learning that many families would be unable to provide gifts for their children at Christmas, distributed three hundred food and gift packages to the needy families of that community.\textsuperscript{15} A few miles to the east, Homer Klan Number Sixty-Three appropriated funds from its treasury to purchase school books for any child in the town who was unable to buy his own, and in Baton Rouge, Klan Number Three, raised funds to aid the victims of a storm.\textsuperscript{16} In DeSota Parish, Klansmen donated five hundred dollars to the

\textsuperscript{14}Alexander, \textit{The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest}, p. 92.

\textsuperscript{15}Shreveport \textit{Journal}, December 25, 1922.

\textsuperscript{16}New Orleans \textit{Times-Picayune}, February 21, 1923, and Baton Rouge \textit{State Times}, March 21, 1922.
Mansfield Female College, although this act possibly was motivated by a one hundred dollar donation by the Knights of Columbus.\textsuperscript{17}

Frequently recipients of Klan generosity wrote letters of gratitude which played an important role in community image building for the Invisible Empire. Mrs. B. F. Knox of Homer, after receiving a one hundred dollar gift from Klan Number Sixty-Three wrote: "I believe that men who do this kind of work can not be other than good men prompted by a sense of Christian duty . . . . My prayers shall extend to them for God's blessings in the good work they are doing."\textsuperscript{18} Mrs. Knox doubtlessly spoke for many other persons the Klan had aided in time of need.

The Louisiana Klan also expressed a mild interest in education. Education was an area of Klan concern in many Realms, and in some cases the influence of the secret organization was considerable. In Oregon, for example, the Klan of that state successfully dictated legislation which required every child between the ages of eight and sixteen to attend public schools and which branded parents who refused to abide by the law as guilty of a misdemeanor.\textsuperscript{19} In

\textsuperscript{17}New Orleans \textit{Times-Picayune}, November 24, 1923.

\textsuperscript{18}Mrs. B. F. Knox to editor, Homer \textit{Guardian Journal}, December 13, 1922.

\textsuperscript{19}Pierce et al. vs. The Society of the Sisters of the Holy Name, 268 U.S. 510.
Pennsylvania, Klansmen protested the use of David Muzzey's *American History* as a high school text because the author called George Washington a rebel. On still another occasion, Quaker State Klansmen demanded the removal of a reproduction of Bellini's "Doge" because the flowing robes of the fifteenth century Italian prince bore a striking resemblance to Sunday newspaper rotogravures of Pope Pius XI.  

National Klan headquarters was most concerned about religious training received by students in Catholic schools; however, it carefully avoided reference to the fact that it warmly supported Bible reading in the public schools. Klan concern about Catholic influence in education was no doubt accentuated by insecurity resulting from the inroads of science on traditional truths about the origin of man. The Ponchatoula *Enterprise* no doubt expressed the fear of many Klansmen in Louisiana when it parroted the words of William Jennings Bryan, who asked: "Shall an oligarchy of so-called scientists teach atheism and agnosticism to the children of forty million parents and be paid for so doing by the Christian citizens of the United States? Shall the country's high schools and colleges allow teachers to tell students that the Bible

---

is a collection of myths, and warn them to forget everything they
learned in Sunday school? Insecurity tends to breed insecurity,
and the fears aroused by the Fundamentalist crusade caused
Klansmen to search every corner for malign influences in the
public schools.

In view of the fact that so many Louisiana children were educated
in Catholic schools, it would seem logical that Louisiana Klansmen
would have led a crusade to combat the influence of Romanism on
young minds, and to force the teaching of orthodox Christian
beliefs in the public schools. As a matter of fact it did neither --
at least not in any organized fashion. The reasons are not hard
to find. First, religious fundamentalists, with whom the Klan
could have been expected to ally, did not seek passage of an anti-
evolution bill in Louisiana until 1926, and by that time the Louisiana
Klan was virtually dead. The only hope that the state Realm
ever had in passing any legislation was with the assistance of
another organization, and by the time help arrived the Louisiana
Klan could be of no assistance. The Klan's record on stemming
the influence of Catholicism on young children was equally

21 Ponchatoula Enterprise, March 2, 1923.

22 The Louisiana House of Representatives passed an anti-
evolution bill in 1926, but the state Senate killed the measure.
unspectacular. No Louisiana Klansman publicly suggested the abolition of Catholic schools within the state. Doubtlessly many of the hooded Knights would have preferred the destruction of "crossback" institutions of learning, but they were realistic enough to recognize that legislation accomplishing that goal would unleash violent currents in the state, currents which might sweep their organization to destruction. Furthermore, the abolition of Catholic schools in Louisiana would have placed a tremendous burden on a public school system that was already niggardly supported. Moreover, the destruction of Catholic schools would have required huge new tax levies to support the flood of students previously educated in church schools. And higher taxes, all the Klan's talk about better government and cleaner communities notwithstanding, was a subject the secret society consistently avoided. Thus, officially, the Louisiana Klan dodged the troublesome issues of Catholic influence on school children and the teaching of new scientific doctrines in the public schools.

\[23\] Louisiana, like other Southern states, spent a larger proportion of its wealth on public education than many Northern and Western states. But the state was relatively so poor in the twenties that it still ranked far behind states outside the South in total expenditure per pupil. See Howard W. Odom, Southern Regions of the United States (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1936), pp. 100-103.
Despite the Louisiana Realm's meticulous avoidance of an official policy regarding education, individual chapters occasionally expressed their concern by local action. In New Orleans, for example, Old Hickory Klan Number One, upon receiving complaints that certain Catholic teachers had attempted to persuade their students not to attend revivals then being conducted by Evangelist "Gipsy" Smith, appointed a committee to write letters to the teachers "cautioning them that such acts were not in accord with the freedom guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States . . . ."24 In north Louisiana, in Winn and Jackson Parishes, public school superintendents encountered difficulties with the Klan on two separate occasions. Both men were Catholics. In the Winn Parish case a young principal received a threatening letter from the Klan when it became public knowledge he was a Catholic and a member of the Knights of Columbus. "Seek employment elsewhere, or face the consequences," he was told.25 The Morehouse Klan also forced a young Catholic teacher to resign during 1922. In Iota, a small village east of Lake Charles, Governor Parker issued a proclamation ordering a recall election

24 Minutes of Old Hickory Klan Number One, New Orleans, February 4, 1922, in Robinson Papers.

25 New Orleans Times-Picayune, February 9, 1923.
for Buck McNeil, member of the parish school board who had led a fight to retain the parish superintendent of education, who was a Klansman. The fight had set off a bitter community struggle. And on at least one occasion, Klansmen entered a public school classroom in the small north Louisiana town of Columbia to express their reverence for patriotism.

Senator Joseph E. Ransdell, in a speech delivered at Lafayette, touched off a temporary furor when he criticized Louisiana's public schools and advised parents to send their children to parochial schools. Louisiana Klansmen seethed, but quietly kept their counsel and allowed Imperial Wizard Hiram Wesley Evans to deliver a reply. The Imperial Wizard chose a mass meeting in Shreveport to answer the Senator. He began with a general condemnation of church supported schools. "When a church operates a school," he said, "it has for its purpose the teaching of religion." Underlining the Klan's aim to promote conformity, he then proclaimed: "What is wrong with America today is that it is not homogeneous. Put your children in public schools and you will

\[26\text{Ibid., July 4, 1923.}\]
\[27\text{Mrs. James Walker to author, May 15, 1961, in author's possession.}\]
promote homogeneity in America. 28 Evans then turned on Ransdell. "I have no interest in any political campaign," he said, "but I wish to state it is time for the people of Louisiana to oust this enemy of the public school system . . . . The time has come when Americans must assert themselves and say to the enemies of the public schools and education that they belong to one side and that the friends of Americanism belong to the other." 29 Evans's attack, though full of sound and fury, failed to move Louisiana Klansmen to action. They knew, if the Imperial Wizard did not, that the campaign he proposed would bear bitter fruit in the Bayou State.

The Klan's record on labor in Louisiana is spotted and unclear. Essentially a conservative agency, the national Klan was rarely friendly to organized labor. The rank and file of workers, speaking through the American Federation of Labor, returned the disfavor by unanimously adopting a resolution opposing "invisible government." 30 However, the Klan's espousal of immigration

28 Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, August 2, 1924.
29 Quoted in Shreveport Journal, August 1, 1924.
30 Mecklin, The Ku Klux Klan, p. 97.
restriction would seem to have appealed to workers long anxious
to strangle the flow of competitive cheap labor.

In Baton Rouge many members of Klan Number Three were
employed by the Standard Oil Company; however, there is no
evidence that the local chapter used the mask either to achieve
better wages or as an instrument of propaganda against management.

W. D. Robinson, the New Orleans Times-Picayune reporter
assigned to cover the Klan, claimed that the Invisible Empire
employed labor union leaders as Klan organizers. These organizers
then allegedly recruited union members on the strength of the
Klan's position on immigration restriction and its potential for
keeping Negro competition off the job market. Robinson further
claimed "a considerable number of union men in Monroe, Shreveport,
Alexandria, and other places have been induced to become Klansmen
from that line of talk." If Louisiana union men joined the Klan
for the reasons Robinson claimed, they hid their activities well.

Although bands of white men occasionally appeared in north
Louisiana oil fields and warned Negroes employed by drilling
companies to move out and make way for white workers, the incidents

31 Undated memorandum by W. D. Robinson, in Robinson Papers.
were apparently not connected with the Klan. Moreover, white employers who lost their employees by such methods bitterly complained they could not get white men to replace the departed Negroes unless they gave wage increases.

In still another report Robinson asserted that Klan membership lists indicated that many people associated with the state's pine timber industry were active in the Klan. A former lumberman from central Louisiana told the reporter that mill owners used the Klan to keep bootleggers from the mills and to prevent the International Workers of the World from organizing mill workers. At least one attempt was made by businessmen to use the Klan to their advantage; when Illinois Central trainmen struck the road for higher wages company officials released a fabricated claim that workers were forming a chapter of the Klan for punitive action against the line.

Louisiana had a labor problem in the 1920’s to which the Klan might logically have addressed itself. World War One and

32 Clipping from Washington Times, July 3, 1923, scrapbook number fourteen, in Aswell Papers.
33 Ibid.
34 New Orleans Times-Picayune, April 8, 1923.
Northern demand for unskilled labor had created a steady flow of Louisiana Negroes northward. In 1918 the state passed a law prohibiting out-of-state labor agents from recruiting workers in Louisiana; however, by 1923 F. E. Wood, State Commissioner of Labor (who was, incidentally, a Klansman), was forced to report to Governor Parker that his office was having little success enforcing the law. The railroads, particularly the Illinois Central, said Wood, assisted agents in drawing away the state's Negro labor. The neighboring state of Mississippi, through which the Illinois Central also passed, solved the problem by unofficially countenancing vigilante raids to remove fleeing Negroes from north bound trains. Louisianians, however, allowed the flow to continue unstemmed, and Pelican State Klansmen apparently never noticed the problem. Thus, although the Louisiana Klan was occasionally involved with labor and labor problems, the state's Invisible Empire was never seriously concerned with the working-man's movement.

The Klan was vitally interested in religion. Founded by an itinerant Methodist preacher, the Knights of the Invisible Empire openly proclaimed their devotion to Protestant Christianity. In

---

36 Ibid., June 1, 1923.
outlining the purpose of the order, Simmons had declared that it would stand for the "solidarity of Protestants for Social, Civic, and Moral Defense and Progress." When he chose a symbol for the order he picked the cross. The Klansman's Kreed reverently acknowledged "the majesty and supremacy of the Divine Being, and recognized the goodness and providence of the Same." A close identification with Protestant Christianity was expressed in countless other ways. Each division and subdivision of the Invisible Empire had a chaplain, or Kludd; a religious ritual for opening and closing each Klan meeting; a religious oath to which each entrant into the Invisible Empire had to subscribe; and religious songs ardently voiced by reverent Knights. Hiram Wesley Evans, speaking at the Imperial Klonvocation in 1924, acknowledged the influence of the Supreme Being on the Klan when he declared: "God has done a greater thing for the Klan than that of giving it human leadership. He has given it His Own Leadership. The Lord has guided us and shaped the events in which we rejoice." Time after time the Klan reaffirmed its religious faith. As one Louisiana

37Quoted in Loucks, The Ku Klux Klan in Pennsylvania, p. 118.

38Ibid., p. 119.
Exalted Cyclops put it: "It [the Klan] is of God, it cannot be destroyed by man."^{39}

Close affiliation with Protestant churches had obvious advantages for the Klan, aside from the opportunity that association afforded members to practice their professed faith. Churches were important institutions in America's small towns during the twenties. Both the church and its chief spokesman, the minister, commanded respect from most elements of society, and Klan identification with the cause of religion spoke mightily in the secret organization's behalf. The Klan recognized the value of identification with ministers particularly, and employed clergymen whenever possible as lecturers and as Klan officials. During the years 1922-1928, for example, the National Catholic Bureau of Information reported the names of sixteen Protestant ministers among one hundred two national Klan officials. The same report revealed that twenty-six of thirty-nine national Klan lecturers were Protestant ministers.^{40}

When the Invisible Empire enrolled a minister, members of his flock were certain to follow. Consequently, clergymen were favorite targets for Klan organizers.

^{39}Quoted in Shreveport Journal, August 20, 1924.

American historians have long recognized the close relationship during the twenties between the Ku Klux Klan and Protestant churches. More recently, Robert Moats Miller, of the University of North Carolina, has attempted to ameliorate that charge by strenuously arguing that the Protestant press did not support the Klan and often vigorously opposed it; that various national councils of major denominations frequently adopted resolutions condemning mob action; that important Protestant clergy often bravely spoke out against the hooded society; and that the Ku Klux Klan was certainly not an instrument of twentieth-century Protestantism in the same sense that the Inquisition was of the medieval church. He does, however, willingly admit that there was a close relationship between the Klan and Protestantism in the local community and

---


that the Southern religious press, representing principally
Methodists and Baptists, did not match its Northern counterpart
in hurling defiance at the hooded Knights. 43

In Louisiana the relationship between the Invisible Empire and
members of the Protestant ministry was notorious. The Bayou
State Realm recruited Protestant clergy as rank and file members
and frequently employed them in positions of leadership. William
McDougal, a prominent New Orleans Presbyterian minister, left
his congregation and served the Klan as a lecturer. McDougal,
born in Scotland, was apparently not a member of the Klan. He
was ineligible, he said, because of his foreign birth, but if the
Klan would not adopt him he would adopt the Klan. 44 McDougal
proved to be an excellent foster parent. He was in wide demand
as a Klan speaker throughout the state and delivered many stirring
addresses on "the menace of Romanism." Another prominent
Presbyterian clergyman who warmly supported the Klan was Dr.
John C. Baar, Superintendent of the Presbyterian Hospital in
New Orleans. 45 Dr. E. L. Thompson, Pastor of Shreveport's
Central Christian Church, was also Shreveport Klan Number Two's

43 Ibid.
44 The Winnfield News American, March 31, 1923.
45 Baton Rouge State Times, October 12, 1922.
Exalted Cyclops and one of the leading Klansmen in Louisiana. In 1924, at a time when the Klan's life was threatened, Dr. Thompson was on hand to lead the forces of the Invisible Empire. In Baton Rouge Reverend C. C. "Stuttering" Miller, Pastor of the Kenner Memorial Methodist Church, was an active member of Klan Number Three in addition to serving as Grand Kludd, or Chaplain, for the state organization. Miller was in constant demand as a Klan speaker. For a time he attempted to keep his identity secret by speaking with his mask pulled down; however, his unfortunate speech impediment gave him away. As he made the Klan circuit, cries of "Give it to 'em, Stuttering" erupted from the Klan crowds and the Baton Rouge minister abandoned any hope of keeping his identity secret.

A favorite expression of Klan support of religion in Louisiana was the "visitation." The "visitation" was usually made by a small group of Klansmen who would enter churches during Sunday evening worship services and express their organization's support for the work of the church. Louisiana newspapers related scores of such incidents during the period 1922-1925. Usually the

46 Shreveport Journal, August 20, 1922.

47 Pregeant interview.
ministers did not know the visitors were coming; however, on occasion the dialogue between Klansmen and ministers revealed the unmistakable stamp of prior rehearsal. For example, when Algiers Baptists opened their new church in 1924 an evening song service was interrupted by seven masked Klansmen who marched down the aisle with a plaque to nail on the pulpit. They were interrupted by the minister, Reverend B. E. Massey, who said:

'I must know something about what you stand for before you proceed further. Does your organization believe in the Christian religion?'

'We do,' answered a Klansman.

'Do you believe in the absolute separation of church and state?' asked Reverend Massey.

'We do,' came the reply.

'Do you believe in a free press, free speech, and free schools?' asked the minister.

'We do,' replied a second Klansman.

'Do you believe in the enforcement of the law by duly elected officers of the law and is your organization law-abiding?' queried the preacher.

'We do, and we are pledged to aid and assist them in the performance of their duties,' answered another Klansman.\(^48\)

The Algiers preacher then polled his congregation, five hundred

\(^{48}\)Quoted in New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, July 23, 1924.
strong, who voted unanimously to allow the Klan to present the plaque to their church.

Most "visitations" resulted in cash donations to the minister of the church, a circumstance which could not have been too unwelcome at a time when clergymen were notoriously underpaid. Ponchatoula Klan Number Fifty-Six, for example, visited Evangelist C. P. Roney who was conducting a revival at the Ponchatoula Baptist Church, gave him a one hundred dollar donation, and left a letter of commendation for the regular minister, H. T. Comish. The Ponchatoula Klansmen in their letter to Comish declared: "We will take our stand along with you unqualifiedly, endorse the sermon delivered at this meeting, and the works of the church."\(^{49}\) Comish replied to the Klan's generosity with a prayer for the success of the secret society.

Klan "visitations" and donations were usually followed by letters from the recipients extolling the virtues of the Invisible Empire. Thus B. C. Smith, minister of an undesignated denomination in Dodson, a small community near Winnfield, addressed a letter to Antone W. Radescich Klan Number Nineteen at Winnfield, thanking members for their visit and their cash remembrance. "I very

\(^{49}\)Quoted in Ponchatoula Enterprise, July 28, 1922.
heartily commend you for your noble stand that you have taken in reference to allegiance owed to God, country, and home. The things you stand for, I stand for, and feel that every good American citizen should stand for."\(^5\) Members of the Winnfield Klan were frequent contributors to ministers in their area. Reverend W. H. Jordan, Pastor of the Winnfield Methodist Church, after receiving a one hundred dollar donation from town Knights wrote: "May the blessings of our Heavenly Father be upon you . . . in your efforts to make this a cleaner and better country."\(^5\)

The praise for the Klan from ministers was overflowing. In Caldwell Parish a Protestant minister declared that "if the United States has a destiny it is in the hands of the Ku Klux Klan."\(^5\) Reverend W. O. Bradley wrote: "I am sure the Klan has been misunderstood . . . . I feel the reason for its existence is good . . . . As long as the Klan stands for these things \(\text{[Klan principles]}\), it will do good and be a blessing . . . . No good man need fear it."\(^5\)

\(^{50}\) B. C. Smith to Antone W. Radescich Klan Number Nineteen, quoted in The Winnfield News American, July 14, 1922.

\(^{51}\) W. H. Jordan to Antone W. Radescich Klan Number Nineteen, ibid., July 28, 1922.

\(^{52}\) Quoted in Caldwell Watchman, May 5, 1922.

\(^{53}\) Quoted in The Colfax Chronicle, September 22, 1922.
Dr. W. A. McComb, Baton Rouge Baptist leader, Reverend J. E. Wakefield of Colfax, Reverend E. V. Corley of Bently, and J. M. Boykin and W. W. Holmes, Methodist ministers in Ponchatoula, were only a few of many Protestant clergymen who heaped praise upon the Invisible Empire.  

Obviously many Protestant ministers would have been happier without Klan "visitations" and might well have prayed to be delivered from the tender mercies of their new-found hooded friends. But the situation in which many preachers found themselves was precarious. If their congregations endorsed the hooded society, which many clearly did, anti-Klan comments by the minister might cost him a much-needed job. His was an unfortunate dilemma. He was, as one journalist put it, "damned if he did" and "damned if he didn't."  

On rare occasions "visitations" and donations caused trouble because some church members would not tolerate Klan activity in their house of worship. For example, in Tullos, a small community near Monroe, the visit of a group of masked Klansmen to the local

54bid., July 22, September 2, 9, 1922; Ponchatoula Enterprise, July 20, 1923; and Homer Guardian Journal, August 30, October 11, 25, 1922.  

Baptist church resulted in the outbreak of fist fights among members of the congregation.\(^{56}\) Across the state in DeQuincy an Apostolic congregation demanded and received the resignation of their minister when he refused to return a donation from the Klan.\(^{57}\) And in Winn Parish, where the local Klan had been very active among the Protestant clergy, a reporter noted in 1924 that "efforts ... [were] begin made to bring a more harmonious state ... among the churches. Feeling concerning the Klan," he wrote, "has been so intense for more than a year that many of the churches have been divided in their congregations and very little work has been done along religious lines."\(^{58}\) Yet examples of dissension caused by the Klan within the Protestant churches in Louisiana was the exception, not the rule.

Robert Moats Miller, in his attempt to ease the burden borne by Protestantism for its traffic with the Klan, points out that high church leaders did not support the secret society and often spoke out against it. This was not the case in Louisiana. A careful

\(^{56}\) Alexander, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest*, p. 88.

\(^{57}\) *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, July 3, 1923.

\(^{58}\) Quoted in Alexander, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest*, p. 88.
examination of Louisiana newspapers during the period 1921-1928 will reveal that Bayou State Protestant magnates kept discreetly quiet on the Klan issue. The Bishop of the Bogalusa Conference (Methodist) did go on record against the Klan in 1924, but by that time the Invisible Empire was under attack from many quarters. As a matter of fact, there is evidence that some Protestant leaders in Louisiana were themselves Klansmen. For example, four of the eighteen Louisiana delegates to the Southern Baptist Convention, held at Nashville, Tennessee, in 1922, were members of various Louisiana Klans. None of the remaining fourteen delegates made public utterances against the organization. It therefore seems clear that Louisiana Protestant churchmen largely endorsed the Invisible Empire and gave it warm support. They found the Klan's stand for moral reform appealing, its demand for law and order timely, and its resistance to Roman Catholicism compelling. The Klan found the alliance helpful, and if donations


60 The four delegates were Paul Jones and Dr. W. A. McComb of Baton Rouge, L. L. Sloan of Bastrop, and Dana Terry of Kentwood. See Baton Rouge, Bastrop, and Kentwood Klan membership lists, in Robinson Papers.
were sometimes necessary to win the approval of clergymen they
were a cheap price to pay for the community respect clerical support
brought.

Did the Klan's preoccupation with religion and religious practices
contain depth and substance? If so it would appear that it could be
measured in terms of increased church attendance. However,
an analysis of statistics relating to the major Southern denominations
during the period the Klan was powerful reveals that neither church
nor Sunday school memberships increased abnormally. 61 Obviously,
an external measurement cannot show what happened to men's
hearts, but there is no apparent evidence that any great piety swept
through Protestantism during its courtship with the Invisible
Empire.

A second persistent illusion which grew up around the Klan
implied that the membership of the Invisible Empire was made up of
America's poor lower classes -- that people of affluence were
rarely members of the order. Hiram Wesley Evans, the Imperial
Wizard of the Klan, undoubtedly contributed to the illusion when he

61 U.S., Department of Commerce, Statistical Abstract of the
United States: 1923 (Washington: Government Printing Office,
1924), p. 59, and U.S., Department of Commerce, Statistical
Abstract of the United States: 1928 (Washington: Government
wrote: "We are a movement of the plain people, very weak in the matter of culture, intellectual support, and trained leadership . . .

. . . This is undoubtedly a weakness. It lays us open to the charge of being 'hicks and rubes' and 'drivers of second hand Fords.' We admit it," he said.\(^6\) Another source of the illusion is one of the most widely read histories of the twenties, Fredrick Lewis Allen's Only Yesterday. Describing Klan membership, Allen quoted an Indiana resident: "You think the influential men belong here? Then look at their shoes when they Klansmen march in the parade. The sheet doesn't cover the shoes."\(^6\) Both Allen and Evans wrote their evaluation of the quality of Klan membership after 1925 when the Invisible Empire had passed its peak and was on the decline. Their description of Klan membership was probably correct for the late 1920's because the so-called "better element" was the first to desert the secret order. That evaluation, however, is shot through with contradiction when applied to the Klan movement prior to 1924. When applied to Louisiana particularly it is certainly incorrect.


\(^6\)Quoted in Allen, Only Yesterday, p. 67. See also Leuchtenburg, The Perils of Prosperity, p. 209.
During Governor Parker's crusade against the Klan, the New Orleans Times-Picayune assigned W. D. Robinson to investigate the Invisible Empire in Louisiana. Robinson travelled across the state collecting information on the Klan, and his news stories on the secret fraternity are among the most reliable available. He was particularly successful in collecting charter membership lists which are presently located in his papers in the Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina Library. Robinson probably paid a former Kleagle for some of the lists. They were certainly for sale. Governor Parker, with whom Robinson worked, was offered the New Orleans membership list for twenty-five hundred dollars. Robinson's lists and names of Klansmen which appeared in state newspapers clearly reveal that Louisiana Knights were substantial people within their communities. State representatives, judges, lawyers, ministers, bankers, merchants, planters, teachers, school administrators, state officers, local sheriffs, district attorneys, newspaper editors, and small-town politicians were active members of the organization. In Hammond, Amite, Ponchatoula, and Kentwood.

64 Samuel L. Jones to John M. Parker, July 30, 1923, in Robinson Papers.
the membership rolls reveal that Klansmen in Tangipahoa Parish were almost exclusively substantial men.65

As in other Realms, membership of the so-called "better element" was sometimes transitory. L. G. Porter, Superintendent of Schools for Iberia Parish, serves as a good example. In 1923, when the Klan became a hot issue in New Iberia, Porter was confronted with the accusation that his name was on the list of charter members of the Iberia Parish Klan. Porter replied that he had joined in July, 1921, but "after attending two or three meetings I withdrew my membership and have not been connected with the Klan in any way since."66 The Klan could obviously not expect to hold all of its prominent members, but the evidence is overwhelming that in Louisiana it held a majority of them until 1923, when many resigned because of the Mer Rouge incident or out of fear of impending anti-Klan legislation which would reveal their names to the public.

Still a third illusion clouds a clear picture of the Louisiana Klan. How big was the Bayou State Realm? How many hooded Knights were active in Louisiana Klanism? The Philadelphia Public Ledger

65Klan membership rolls for Hammond, Amite, Kentwood, and Ponchatoula, ibid., and Campbell interview.

66L. G. Porter to editor, New Iberia Enterprise, March 24, 1923.
once announced Louisiana was threatened by 145,000 Klansmen; the former Great Titan of the Province of Southwestern Louisiana claimed 75,000 members; and Robert L. Duffus, a contemporary student of the Klan, claimed Louisiana had 54,000 Knights. A recent student of the Klan in the Southwest agrees with Duffus that 54,000 "dedicated native-born white Protestants" rode with the Klan in the Bayou State. During 1922 a reporter questioned Louisiana Grand Dragon C. P. Duncan, of Shreveport, about the power of the Klan in the state. "The strength of the Klan in this state is surprising," Duncan said.

The reporter would indeed have been surprised had he known the real strength of the Invisible Empire in Louisiana. The Louisiana Realm was never as big as its leaders liked to claim or as contemporary journalists asserted. If it had been, the Klan could have dominated Louisiana politics, and that was a goal never achieved by Bayou State Knights. How big, then, was the Louisiana Klan? Fortunately there is considerable evidence, much of which is admittedly circumstantial, which sheds light on that vital

67 Perkins interview, and Duffus, "The Ku Klux Klan in the Middle West," p. 364.
68 Alexander, The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest, p. 177.
69 Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, December 12, 1922.
question. First, because the Klan numbered its chapters as they
were chartered it is clear that there were approximately seventy-
five separate units of the Invisible Empire in Louisiana. The
writer encountered numerous references to chapters numbered
one through seventy-five; there is no evidence of chapter
enumeration beyond that figure. Six of the chapters were located
in Louisiana's towns and cities -- New Orleans, Baton Rouge,
Shreveport, Monroe, Alexandria, and Lake Charles. Scattered
minutes of Old Hickory Klan Number One in New Orleans reveal
that about 1,000 members were inducted into that chapter. 70
Shreveport, the Klan's strongest chapter, had between 3,000 and
4,500 members, according to a report by W. D. Robinson. 71
Baton Rouge Klansmen, who called themselves "Parker's pets,"
advertised 900 members, which was probably a bloated figure. 72
Monroe was a strong Klan town which probably enrolled 1,000
members. Six hundred members each for Lake Charles and
Alexandria is a generous estimate. Thus, Louisiana's cities and
towns claimed between 7,500 and 8,600 Klansmen.

70 Minutes of Old Hickory Klan Number One, New Orleans,
January 21, 1921, and April 3, 1922, in Robinson Papers.

71 Robinson Report Number One, October 1, 1922, ibid.

72 New Orleans Times-Picayune, June 17, 1923.
Louisiana's smaller towns and villages contained approximately sixty-nine additional chapters. It was from the gross exaggeration of the size of small-town chapters that the ballooned estimates of Klan membership apparently arose. For example, during the Morehouse crisis, when Captain J. K. Skipwith boasted he could produce five hundred Klansmen at a moment's notice, reporters printed his claim as fact. Actually, federal investigators revealed that the Morehouse Klan had only two hundred fifty members, a fact reporters simply overlooked. In Tangipahoa Parish, the home of four chapters, a member claimed only five hundred members. The Robinson membership lists, although clearly incomplete, reveal that other small town chapters were also relatively small. By extending extreme generosity to the Klan and crediting each of the sixty-nine small town chapters with two hundred fifty members, the total Klan membership for Louisiana would be approximately 25,850. The argument might be raised that the membership estimates include only Klansmen who were active in the organization -- that is, those Knights who joined and maintained continued Klan activity throughout the period 1921-1924 -- and thus excludes Klansmen who joined and allowed their

---

73 George B. Campbell to John M. Parker, March 26, 1922, in Parker Papers.
membership to lapse, but who could be depended upon to support the organization. It can be answered that the Old Hickory unit in New Orleans, which was given an estimated 1,000 members, never had more than 550 active members. And there is good reason to suspect this situation existed elsewhere.

The relatively small size of the Louisiana Klan was apparent in other ways. In larger Realms, Klans engaged in extensive business activities or building programs. In nearby Texas, for example, Fort Worth Klan Number One Hundred One built a 4,000 seat auditorium. Louisiana Klans met in rented lodge halls. New Orleans Klan Number One rented Shalimar Grotto for forty dollars per month as its meeting place. The Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Klan manufactured Klan candy. Louisiana Knights, if they wanted candy, ingloriously consumed standard brands. In Missouri, Oklahoma, Kansas, Arkansas, and Texas, William Joseph Simmons's old idea of combining insurance sales with fraternalism was revived in the form of the Empire Mutual Life Insurance Company, which, according to its directors, had over three billion dollars worth of life insurance in force by 1924. Similar business ventures characterized Klan operations in the more powerful

^M Minutes of Old Hickory Klan Number One, New Orleans, February 4, 1922, in Robinson Papers.
Realms. 75 The Louisiana Klan did not engage in business activities or building programs because such ventures required huge memberships, a standard the Bayou State Realm never attained.

These are some of the illusions that surround the Invisible Empire in Louisiana. They give a distorted picture of the history of the organization within the state. Some of the illusions were an outgrowth of Klan secrecy; some were the product of the overactive imaginations of newspaper reporters; and, some resulted from popular assumptions which remained unquestioned too long. Some doubtlessly still exist.

"It [the Ku Klux Klan] dominated the politics of Texas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana."

Thus, in 1947 Francis Butler Simkins, author of one of the most widely read histories of the South, described the political influence of the Invisible Empire during the 1920's in three Southern states. His assessment of the political strength of the Ku Klux Klan was brief, to the point, and unequivocal. Twelve years and six reprintings later, Simkins had not changed his mind. Again he summed up the subject in one sentence and wasted no words on qualifying statements. There was only one problem. His assertion was partially incorrect.

Professor Simkins's judgement that the Invisible Empire dominated Oklahoma politics was apparently valid, because in that Klan-plagued state the secret organization successfully promoted

---

1Simkins, The South Old and New, p. 459.

the impeachment and conviction of Governor John C. "Our Jack" Walton. In Texas, the Invisible Empire won stunning victories in local political contests during 1922 and also succeeded in electing to the United States Senate Earle B. Mayfield, the first Klan member of that distinguished body. Two years later the secret society was the main issue in the governor's race which resulted in the victory of the anti-Klan candidate "Ma" Ferguson.

But what of Louisiana? Did the Invisible Empire really dominate politics in the Bayou State? The answer is clearly and emphatically no! Louisiana Klansmen engaged in political activity, their organization was an issue in a few local elections and one governor's race, and Klansmen held a number of local and state elective offices; but, at no time did the Ku Klux Klan dominate the politics of Louisiana. It would be, perhaps, more correct to assert that in 1923 and 1924 Louisiana politics dominated the Ku Klux Klan and was largely responsible for the destruction of the secret society.

Political ambition was not among the original motives in forming the Invisible Empire, but as the organization grew and altered its

---

3 Alexander, The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest, pp. 129-158.
program in the early 1920's, Klan entrance into the political arena became inevitable. The limitation of immigration, maintenance of national prohibition, restriction of the political influence of the Catholic Church and minority groups, clean government, and maintenance of community morals, were goals which violence and intimidation alone could not achieve. If the Klan hoped to attain its ambitions, the election to public office of men who were Klansmen or who could be depended upon to support the Klan program was required.

Yet Klan entrance into politics was fraught with problems. The Invisible Empire excluded from membership, and thus insulted, Catholics, Jews, Negroes, and the foreign-born, groups which totaled approximately forty per cent of America's population during the twenties. Despite the fact that Klansmen looked upon the groups they excluded from membership as "second class citizens," America's minority groups together constituted a potentially powerful voting bloc which could grind the Klan under if sufficiently aroused. In its early history, the Klan endeavored to avoid arousing its natural opposition. When probing newspapers pointed to the

political potential of the secret society, Klan leaders quickly assured
the public that the Invisible Empire was not a political organization.
Thus, at the time of the congressional investigation of the Klan in
1921, Imperial Wizard William Joseph Simmons proclaimed:
"The Ku-Klux is not a political organization, nor does it seek
political power . . . "6 A year later Edward Young Clarke, who
was at that time serving as Imperial Wizard ad interim, reiterated
Simmons's assurances that the Klan would not engage in politics.
"The modern Klan is not . . . a revival of Know Nothingism," he said. "It is not a political party, it will take no part in political
controversies, and it has nothing to do with partisan issues.
Klansmen will follow the dictates of their individual consciences in
casting their votes. As an organization, we have no candidates --
no favored party."7

Clarke's and Simmons's denials of Klan political activity might
have been reassuring to the enemies of the organization, but to
persons well acquainted with the Klan the statements were pure
nonsense. Hiram Wesley Evans, who replaced Simmons as Imperial

6 Quoted in Rice, The Ku Klux Klan in American Politics, p. 35.
7 Quoted in "Quaint Customs And Methods Of The Ku Klux Klan," p. 52.
Wizard in late 1922, was less timid than his predecessors in ascribing to the Invisible Empire a political role. "Klansmen, like other men," he said, "will use their influence to have parties and candidates further their objects; and, equally to be sure, if a candidate appears in the political arena blatantly proclaiming his hostility to our order . . . Klansmen are likely to vote against him." The new Imperial Wizard still denied, by inference, that the Klan would act as a political organization -- that is, unless it was forced to.

Despite the statements of Klan leaders, the Invisible Empire operated as a political organization as soon as it became strong enough to venture into the turbulent waters of elective contests. The Klan was not always successful in politics because in some sections it was simply too weak to achieve victory. But where it was strong the Invisible Empire elected scores of local officials, state legislators, a few governors, several national representatives, and Earle B. Mayfield of Texas, William J. Harris of Georgia, and Hugo Black of Alabama, to the United States Senate.

And what would the Klan do with political power? Colonel Mayfield's Weekly, the rabid Texas Klan journal spelled out the

---

8Quoted in Rice, The Ku Klux Klan in American Politics, p. 35.
answer point by point. "It is going to drive the bootlegger forever out of this land and place whiskey-making on a parity with counterfeiting. It is going to bring clean moving pictures to this country. It is going to bring clean literature to this country. It is going to drive Catholics back into their church and keep them there. It is going to protect and preserve our public schools at all hazards. It is going to break up roadside parking . . . . It is going to enforce the laws of this land; it is going to protect homes . . . . The Klan means a new era in the life of America."9

As a political organization the Klan worked within the framework of the two major political parties. In the South, Klansmen operated through the Democratic Party while their fraternal brothers in the North and West tended to associate with Republicans. Political success came early in some states and late in others. Thus the Invisible Empire was most politically affluent in Texas in 1922, but did not reach political maturity in Alabama until about 1925 -- at which time the Texas Realm was spent. Certainly the failure of the Realms of the Invisible Empire to win political strength simultaneously was one of the chief factors in reducing Klan influence on the national level. The Klan never held political power in more than a handful of

states at one time. Furthermore, its political victories were not lasting. When the Klan won an election, its opponents than made the organization a political issue; and when the Klan, as an organization, became the issue, as opposed to a Klan-sponsored issue, the outcome was usually disastrous for the hooded society. In some areas the Invisible Empire recognized the danger of the organization becoming a political issue and attempted to avoid that development. 10 But flushed with the sweet taste of early victories, most Realms of the Invisible Empire lowered their guard, exposed their vitals, and suffered a telling blow which led to their early demise.

Pelican State Klansmen were engaged in political activity from the moment recruiting began in Louisiana. W. V. Easton, R. H. Moodie, and other Klan solicitors recognized the value of the Atlanta-inspired policy of recruiting local and state political leaders. They first enrolled the Adjutant General of the State of Louisiana, L. A. Toombs, and then inducted several members of the state legislature, a number of local and district judges, sheriffs, district attorneys, and police officers. The recruited public officials were able to give the Invisible Empire some immediate influence in local

politics, but if the Klan were to become a powerful political organization in Louisiana election of Klansmen to public office was mandatory. Only in that way could a sufficient number of Knights be placed in positions of power to control a parish or city government.

Enrolling a public official behind a veil of secrecy was one thing in Louisiana, but winning an election with a candidate publicly associated with the Klan was a far more difficult task. Yet the Bayou State Realm did exactly that in a few cases. The Klan was a political force in local politics in the same geographical areas of the state that Klan violence centered -- north, central, and west Louisiana. Acts of violence were less dangerous for the Klan, it seems, where the Invisible Empire controlled or influenced the local power structure. Morehouse Klan Number Thirty-Four is a good example of Klan control of parish politics. Its membership included virtually every elective officer in the parish and the town of Bastrop. In Homer, members of Klan Number Sixty-Three were successful in electing T. H. McEachern as mayor of that small north Louisiana hamlet, but it was a close contest. McEachern, a vocal opponent of the Dymond anti-Klan bill, which was killed in
the Louisiana legislature in June, 1922, won by a margin of only four votes. 11

In Shreveport, home of Louisiana's biggest Klan, the Invisible Empire was apparently quite successful in politics. There city Klansmen supported state bank examiner L. E. Thomas, candidate for mayor, and James Dixon, candidate for commissioner of finance. Thomas won an easy first primary victory, piling up a majority of six hundred votes over four candidates. Dixon was swept in on the same deluge of votes. But the Klan was not satisfied. In the second primary Leon I. Kahn, a Jew, who was one of several candidates for commissioner of public utilities, was forced to withdraw because the Jewish merchants of Shreveport feared his continuation in the race would lead to a Klan boycott of Jewish business houses. 12 It was subtle pressure the Klan applied, but it was effective. The secret organization was less subtle in a political race in DeQuincy. In that west Louisiana town, it warned J. S. Brice, a member of the Knights of Columbus, to "stop using his influence" in the behalf of a candidate for city office who was

11 Homer Guardian Journal, June 14, 1922.

12 Robinson Report Number One, in Robinson Papers. See also New Orleans Times-Picayune, September 17, 23, 1922.
opposed by the Klan. Alexandria Klansmen were apparently almost as politically powerful as were members of Klan Number Two in Shreveport. In September, 1922, the city fathers decided to allow the voters to decide the troublesome question of the right of the Invisible Empire to parade in Alexandria streets. In an election in which ninety per cent of the electorate participated, the Klan won a close victory and thus opened city streets for masked parades.

Baton Rouge Klansmen also took a fling at local politics during the summer of 1922. Turner Bynum, a banker, and Ralph McBurney, a railroad conductor, had eliminated L. U. Babin during the first primary in a race for mayor of Baton Rouge. The campaign was calm until the Bynum forces charged that McBurney was a Klansman and published the fact in the Catholic journal Morning State. McBurney denied the charge and proclaimed his friendship for Catholics and Jews. But McBurney was a Klansman. Although his name was not on the charter membership list of Baton Rouge Klan Number Three, it appeared on a later official list filed by the

---


Invisible Empire with the secretary of state. McBurney was not the only Klansman in the race for city office. J. D. "Red" Womack, an important Louisiana Klansman, was seeking the office of city judge. His opponent was the incumbent, W. A. Benton. The Bynum and Benton forces overlooked Womack's affiliation with the Invisible Empire and concentrated their attack on McBurney. On July 4, 1922, Baton Rougians cast their ballots and when the polls closed the vote count revealed that both McBurney and Womack had been defeated by a narrow margin.¹⁶ Baton Rouge Knights attempted to salvage something out of the defeat by charging that Father Leo Gassler, of St. Joseph's Catholic Church, had instructed his parishioners to vote against the Klan candidates. Gassler vigorously denied the accusation.¹⁷ A few weeks later Baton Rouge Klansmen attempted to regain the initiative in their city by announcing they would support officials in "cleaning up the town." But Mayor Bynum would have no traffic with the Klan. He welcomed support of law enforcement, he said, but he regarded the Invisible Empire as a threat to civilized society.¹⁸ One defeat and one rebuff was


¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., July 18, 1922.
enough. Thereafter Baton Rouge Klansmen stayed out of local politics.

Any attempt to assess the political influence of the Invisible Empire on the local level is at best difficult. The records of Klan activity in politics are sketchy. However, it seems that Klansmen were probably quite influential in local affairs in many small communities in the areas of the state previously designated. What did they do with the political influence they wielded? They demanded more vigorous law enforcement, particularly with regard to bootlegging. They used their influence to halt the onrush of a modern civilization. For example, in Winnfield the superintendent of schools was called upon to prevent female teachers from riding in automobiles at night with young men. And, when they could, they tried to remove Catholic teachers and school administrators. In a few cases Klansmen had themselves deputized by officials they controlled so that they, too, might participate in law enforcement. Actually, it was in local affairs that the Louisiana Klan exercised its greatest political power. That influence was, admittedly, not great; but it was more than the Invisible Empire would exert on any other level of government in Louisiana.

Yet during 1922, the year of the "big push" of the Louisiana Klan, Bayou State Knights acted as if they believed ultimate Klan
control of the state's political machinery was at hand. They were certainly preparing for greater things. Much of their enthusiasm no doubt arose from Earle B. Mayfield's election to the United States Senate in neighboring Texas. Moreover, they were clearly encouraged by the failure of the Parker administration to outlaw the mask at the May, 1922, meeting of the state legislature. Also, the Klan was growing in Louisiana during 1922. It seems clear that Klan strength reached its peak toward the end of that year and then remained static throughout most of 1923. Thus, on all fronts, if the Baton Rouge mayor's race could be overlooked, the political future of the Klan in Louisiana looked promising.

Everywhere Klansmen were planning for the impending victory. In Shreveport, Klan friends of Mayor L. E. Thomas were talking openly about parlaying his victory in that city's mayoralty contest into a four-year tenure of the state capitol in Baton Rouge. In New Orleans, political prognosticators for the Times-Picayune reported with apprehension the growing Klan interest in politics in what they termed the "country districts." J. G. Palmer, a former district judge from Shreveport, added his name as a possible candidate for the governor's chair in 1923. The Klan was

19 New Orleans Times-Picayune, September 22, 1922.
willing to support him, according to a report from Shreveport. 20
In the meantime the Louisiana Realm had stamped its disapproval
on Walter J. Burke of Iberia Parish and Lieutenant Governor
Hewitt Bouanchaud as successors to Governor Parker. 21 The
same report that condemned Burke and Bouanchaud named Frank
J. Looney of Shreveport, Chairman of the State Democratic
Central Committee, as another Klan target. Looney had to be
removed, claimed the report, because he blocked Klan control of
the Democratic State Central Committee. 22

Another report, published August 13, described the method
the Klan would employ in its grasp for power in 1923. Klansmen
would be nominated for public office, but the Invisible Empire would
also endorse non-Klansmen, according to "inside information"
from the "country districts." The Louisiana Realm was particularly
interested in electing friendly men to the state legislature and a
major effort would be made to achieve victory there, said the
Picayune's informants. There would be Klan candidates for all
levels of government in all areas of the state that the Klan felt strong

20 Ibid., September 24, 1922.
21 Ponchatoula Enterprise, August 4, 1922, and New Orleans
Times-Picayune, July 30, 1922.
22 Ibid.
enough to win or in which it held the balance of power, concluded the report.  

In the meantime the Klan's cry of the hour became "pay your poll taxes." John C. Suarez of New Orleans made a trip across the state speaking at local chapters urging members to prepare for the forthcoming state elections. "Klansman Suarez has a message to deliver which every Klansman should make an earnest effort . . . to hear. He has traveled all over our state and is in a position to impart interesting information," wrote Exalted Cyclops B. H. Smith, Jr., to members of the Klan in Beauregard Parish.  

A postscript at the bottom of the letter said: "Just 17 more days to pay your and your wife's poll taxes."  

In October, 1922, a meeting of Louisiana political leaders in New Orleans pointed up the rising concern about the political intentions of the Louisiana Realm. Edwin S. Broussard and Joseph E. Ransdell, Louisiana's two United States Senators were the chief

---

23 Ibid., August 13, 1922.


25 Ibid.
The main topic of discussion at the meeting was the forthcoming governor's race and the probability that the Ku Klux Klan would be a major issue of that campaign. Delegates who were suspected Klansmen denied that the Invisible Empire would be an issue, unless the opposition made the Klan an issue. South Louisiana delegates were not convinced. The Klan, they declared, was girding for the forthcoming battle.  

Two months later the Monroe News Star expressed fear of the same development. "We had hoped the KKK would not form the basis of an issue in the next campaign and that the candidates would confine themselves to a discussion of economic and civil issues. But if the KKK is to be the issue, we can see a campaign of bitterness, in which religious prejudice will run high . . . ."  

As 1922 drew to a close, most indications pointed to the Klan playing a major role in the Democratic primaries of 1923 and 1924. The Invisible Empire proposed to run members of the organization as candidates and to endorse certain selected non-members. Furthermore, if reports from the "country districts" could be believed, the Louisiana Realm had already marked several possible

\[26\text{Ibid.}, \text{October 22, 1922.}\]

\[27\text{Ibid.}, \text{December 27, 1922.}\]
candidates for defeat. Yet, as bright as the future appeared for
the Invisible Empire in Louisiana politics, speculation was that
"the Klan" would be the "issue" of the 1923 primaries, not Klan
sponsored programs or issues. That line of talk suggested
difficulties for the secret society.

Then, suddenly and dramatically, the Klan's political dreams
collapsed. In December, 1922, John M. Parker dispatched
Louisiana National Guard troops to Morehouse Parish, and bared
to an unbelieving state the conditions that resulted from Klan
domination of local government. The impact of the open hearings,
revealing as they did the violence of the Morehouse Klan, in which
Morehouse law officials had participated, had a profound effect on
many Louisianans. In Lake Charles, a Protestant minister reported
that the Morehouse incident had aroused bitter feelings in his west
Louisiana town. "Political and business animosities are aroused,"
he said. "Men talk fight. One old timer said yesterday, 'If they
are going to fight let's have it out here and now and not leave it
to our children.' He is a Catholic and an old-time gunman but at
present a fine citizen."28 In Donaldsonville, James Von Lotten,
editor of the Donaldsonville Chief, penned a stinging rebuke of

28Quoted in Mecklin, The Ku Klux Klan, p. 36.
Klanism. The Morehouse incident, he charged, revealed the "mental processes of petty tyrants of the 'red neck' type." It was the first time Von Lotten had spoken out against the Invisible Empire in the editorial columns of his paper. The St. Francisville True Democrat unleashed a barrage of anti-Klan utterances and severely criticized the secret society for the bad publicity it had visited upon the state. The Baton Rouge State Times and the New Orleans Times-Picayune had been vindicated. Both had editorially opposed the Klan since 1921. Said the State Times: "The story as unfolded in the Bastrop hearings is the most sweeping indictment ever returned against any secret order. It makes the hood of the Klansman a symbol of murder and torture in Louisiana, a thing despised by all right thinking men." Even the Klan was affected. Carey P. Duncan, Grand Dragon of Louisiana, addressed a letter to all Exalted Cyclops requesting that they keep closer tabs on the location of Klan uniforms to

29 Donaldsonville Chief, January 13, 1923.
30 St. Francisville True Democrat, February 10, 1923.
31 Baton Rouge State Times, January 10, 1923.
prevent unauthorized raiding. And, Klansman George B. Campbell of Hammond called for the abandonment of the mask. In Lafayette, B. C. Crow Klan Number Twenty-Four was confronted with the publication of the names of its charter members. Trouble seemed imminent in the overwhelmingly Catholic south Louisiana town. At that point Catholic Bishop Jules B. Jeanmard in a public decree abhorred the "total disruption . . . of harmony, tolerance and brotherly love" which had previously characterized Lafayette. The Catholics of Lafayette, he said, were "too big, too generous and brave" to employ their numerical strength to "wreak a cheap revenge upon the Klan." Serious trouble was averted in Lafayette, but a week after the publication of its charter membership list the B. C. Crow chapter officially disbanded and returned its charter to Atlanta. In nearby New Iberia, the editor of the New Iberia Enterprise suggested that the local Klan of that town follow Lafayette out of the Invisible Empire. The same week Opelusas Klansmen

32 New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 16, 1923.

33 The Winnfield News American, January 6, 1923.

34 Quoted in Mecklin, The Ku Klux Klan, p. 160. See also New Orleans Times-Picayune, March 30, 1923.

35 New Iberia Enterprise, April 7, 1923.
met with leading citizens of that Catholic community, and on April 6, 1923, Leon Haas, a former member of the state legislature, announced the dissolution of the Opelousas Klan. 36

John M. Parker's persistent war on the Ku Klux Klan was finally bearing fruit. The opposition he had hoped to call forth against the Invisible Empire was slowly, but perceptibly, emerging into tangible form. In May, the Louisiana Bar Association added its powerful voice to those who had already taken a stand against invisible government. The highest allegiance any individual owed was to the state, declared the attorneys' organization. 37 The Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Lafayette Elks Club also voiced concern about the threat of Klanism, and Mayor Robert Mouton promised Lafayette Elks his administration would adopt an ordinance to prevent masking within the city limits. 38 A few months later the mayor of Haynesville refused Klansmen permission to parade in city streets unless they would unmask. His administration shortly passed a city ordinance preventing Klan parades. 39

---

36 New Orleans Times-Picayune, April 7, 1923.
37 Ibid., May 19, 1923.
38 Ibid., April 8, 1923.
the summer of 1923, a movement was afoot in several north
Louisiana communities to form the Caucasian American League
to combat the influence of the Invisible Empire. In New Orleans
the Louisiana Catholic Layman's Association began a concentrated
campaign to organize Catholics for the 1923 primaries.

By midsummer, 1923, the lines were clearly forming. As
late as December, 1922, it had appeared that the Ku Klux Klan
might well be a mighty force in the 1923 primaries. Six months
later no astute politician would have risked his future with the
taint of Klanism. John M. Parker was showing no signs of letting
up in his attack on the Invisible Empire, and claims of the
Governor's opponents that he was using the Klan issue as a spring­
board to higher political office were not reassuring. His persistent
hammering at the dangers of Klanism was having positive effects
that no discerning politician could fail to see. Moreover, Parker
was effectively applying pressure on office-holding Klansmen
by refusing them promotion unless they resigned from the Invisible

40 Baton Rouge State Times, January 2, 1924, and New Orleans
Times-Picayune, November 1, 1923.

41 Ibid., September 25, 1923.
Empire. If those facts were not enough to discourage aspiring politicians from courting the Klan, they had merely to recall the amazing display of political ineptitude displayed by the secret society in its first political outing beyond the parish level. In November, 1922, Judge R. R. Reid of Amite died, thus creating a vacancy on the Louisiana Supreme Court from the Fifth Judicial District; the office was to be filled by a special primary election to be held in March, 1923. Judge Reid and his son, Columbus Reid, had been among the first members of the Amite Klan. They had joined, claimed the judge's son, to prevent the Amite Klan from engaging in lawless violence. Judge Reid's death prompted both his son and Robert D. Ellis, another Amite Klansman, to file for election to the vacant Supreme Court seat. From Baton Rouge District Judge H. F. Brunot, who had also been asked to join the Klan but who had refused, announced his candidacy. Neither Ellis nor Reid made any effort to keep their membership in the Invisible Empire secret, and both spoke enthusiastically about

42 Parker refused to promote Judges Robert Roberts of Minden and J. E. Reynolds of Arcadia because they were members of the Klan. See New Iberia Enterprise, March 24, 1923. A few months later he did promote Judge R. W. Oglesby, a member of the Jackson Parish Klan, but not before Oglesby resigned his membership in the Invisible Empire. See New Orleans Times-Picayune, November 16, 1923.
the hooded order. Brunot capitalized on the situation. He immediately won the support of Governor Parker and then enlisted the aid of Dean R. L. Tullis of the Louisiana State University Law School, an old and distinguished opponent of the Invisible Empire. During March the Brunot forces concentrated on the Klan affiliation of Reid and Ellis, while the two Klansmen called upon William C. Barnette, the Morehouse Klan lawyer from Shreveport, to speak in their behalf. As the campaign progressed it was apparent to everyone that the election was a clear struggle between the Klan and anti-Klan forces. It was, in short, a test of Klan strength in southeastern Louisiana. The Fifth Judicial District was split by the Mississippi River. The Klan was strong in the Florida Parishes, but admittedly weak in the parishes west of the river. Yet in an election which was recognized across the state as a test of its strength, the Klansmen of southeastern Louisiana failed to unite on a single candidate. It was a political blunder of the first magnitude. When the votes were counted on March 22, 1923, Brunot had won a first primary victory over both Klansmen by a margin of four hundred nine votes. 43 Ellis, Reid, and the

43Ibid., March 16, 23, 27, 29, and April 8, 13, 1923. See also Homer Guardian Journal, March 21, 28, 1923.
Klan attempted to salvage something out of the fiasco by claiming that a ballot box in East Baton Rouge Parish had been tampered with. An appeal charging fraud was filed with the Louisiana Supreme Court in New Orleans, but the state's highest judicial tribunal refused to accept the plea. 44

If the southeastern Louisiana contest was not enough to frighten potential Klan suitors, a Klan meeting which took place in New Orleans during the first week of March should have been. In attendance were high Klan leaders from all over the state. The topic of discussion, according to reporters covering the event, centered on which candidate the Invisible Empire would support in the 1923-1924 governor's race. If the Klan were to exercise any influence in the election it was mandatory that the secret society unite behind one man. The Louisiana Realm simply did not have enough members to afford the luxury of disunity. Yet, when the meeting broke up Louisiana Klan leaders were undecided on which candidate the organization would support. A vital breach had developed in Klan ranks, and it would never be sealed. 45

In contrast to the confident predictions of Klan political power which had poured into New Orleans during the summer of 1922, 45

45New Orleans Times-Picayune, March 2, 1923.
the reports from the "country districts," particularly those in south Louisiana, received during the spring and summer of 1923, revealed that any Klan affiliated candidate would be in trouble. Even the Klan recognized the impossibility of its situation and rapidly backtracked from the public boasting engaged in by its members the previous fall. Hiram Wesley Evans, during a brief visit to New Orleans, announced that the Klan was not involved in politics in the Pelican State. Every Klansman should, he said, vote his own conscience. A month later a Klan leader in the Florida Parishes suggested a statewide meeting between Klansmen and non-Klansmen to prevent the secret order from becoming a political issue. In June Great Titan Thomas F. DePaoli announced that he would be a candidate for reelection to the state House of Representatives, but that he would run as a private citizen and not as a Klansman. And in north Louisiana William C. Barnette, the Klan's counsel, called upon a crowd of 10,000 gathered near Shreveport to hear political speeches, not to allow

46 Ibid., March 16, 23, 27, 31, and April 8, 1923.
47 Ibid., March 8, 1923.
48 Ibid., April 8, 1923.
the Klan to be injected into politics. Barnette had been a possible candidate for governor, but after the Morehouse incident discussion of his candidacy had rapidly subsided. The Klan was, in short, asking out. It now did not want to be an issue in the 1923-1924 primaries.

But the time had passed when the Klan could avoid becoming an issue in the 1923-1924 governor's race. The Invisible Empire had made enemies -- powerful enemies -- that saw in the secret order a campaign issue which conceivably might catapult a candidate to the governor's mansion. In June, the powerful New Orleans Times-Picayune editorially called upon the next governor to support legislation barring masking and requiring the filing of membership lists with the secretary of state. "He must say frankly," said the Picayune, "that the Ku Klux Klan has brought into Louisiana a political consciousness of its religious differences, that it has sown bitterness, bred dissension and distrust, and brought heart-burning and suspicion among neighbors, friends, and kinsmen." The New Orleans Item went further than calling upon candidates to renounce Klanism. It boldly, and correctly, stated that "nobody could be elected to general office in Louisiana"

49 Shreveport Journal, June 14, 1923. See also New Orleans Times-Picayune, June 18, 19, and July 12, 1923.

50 Ibid., June 24, 1923.
without pledging himself against Secrecy-and-the Mask. \(^{51}\) The Klan was in the race whether it liked it or not.

The first gubernatorial candidate to capitalize on the Klan issue was Dudley L. Guilbeau of St. Landry Parish. As early as March he had declared: "Nothing short of disbandment will remove the klan from politics in the state."\(^{52}\) During the summer of 1923, Guilbeau conducted a vigorous campaign across south Louisiana, declaring that he would go further than Governor Parker in dealing the death blow to the Invisible Empire. Guilbeau attracted some support in the "Cajun" parishes, but his candidacy was not well received in north Louisiana.\(^{53}\) Guilbeau's candidacy was short-lived. A stronger candidate was Lieutenant Governor Hewitt Bouanchaud, a former speaker of the state House of Representatives, a devout Catholic, and a bitter enemy of the Invisible Empire.\(^{54}\)

---

\(^{51}\)Quoted in Alexander, The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest, p. 178.

\(^{52}\)Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, March 30, 1923. See also Jared Y. Sanders, "The Senatorial Campaign of 1926," undated typescript in Jared Y. Sanders and Family Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Hereinafter cited as Sanders Papers.

\(^{53}\)Homer Guardian Journal, September 26, 1923.

Bouanchaud was supported by Governor Parker, the *Times-Picayune*, and the "New Regulars," a political faction in New Orleans. And like Guilbeau his political strength was in south Louisiana, home of the state's Catholic population. The Lieutenant Governor took an unequivocal stand on the Klan in a speech delivered at Laplace on August 26. "I am opposed to the Invisible Empire of the Ku Klux Klan," he said. "If elected Governor I shall go as far as the federal and state constitutions permit to have laws enacted which will ensure the people of Louisiana . . . the blessings of personal security . . . . Within sixty days after the election laws will be passed regarding the Ku Klux Klan and . . . they will be strictly enforced." The entry of Bouanchaud into the race prompted Guilbeau's withdrawal. The Opelousas candidate claimed he was withdrawing because his candidacy might impair the fight against the Klan. However, Guilbeau's actions might have been based on the fact that he ranked last among the gubernatorial candidates in a political poll conducted by the *Times-Picayune*. Guilbeau then announced his support of Bouanchaud.

---


The third candidate in 1923 was Henry L. Fuqua of Baton Rouge. Fuqua, who was manager of the state penitentiary at Angola, was the personal selection of former Governor Jared Y. Sanders. Fuqua also had the support of former Governor Ruffin G. Pleasant, the "Old Regulars" in New Orleans, most of the industrial interests of the state, and a large faction of the Ku Klux Klan. 57

When the March, 1923, meeting of Klan leaders broke up, Thomas F. DePaoli, Great Titan of the Southeastern Province; Paul D. Perkins, Great Titan of the Southwestern Province; William C. Barnette, and most other prominent Klan leaders, lined up behind Fuqua. All evidence seems to point to the fact that they carried a majority of Louisiana Klansmen with them. The manager of the state penitentiary did a masterful job of straddling the Klan issue -- indeed, of every issue. In a speech at Baton Rouge he said: "I want -- yes I solicit -- the vote of every man or woman who is... qualified to cast a vote in the Democratic primary... whether the vote be Protestant or Catholic, Jew or Gentile, Klan or anti-Klan..." 58 His platform was a masterpiece of equivocation.


58 Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, September 30, 1923.
He would "regulate the corporations," but not "frighten them."

Labor was entitled "to just compensation" and capital was "entitled to a fair return." Agriculture was a problem, but it could be cured by an adjustment of railroad freight rates. The state would be operated on a "cash basis" and there would be "no increase in tax on real property." Fuqua also talked broadly about a highway program, levee improvement, and charity hospitals.

Like Bouanchaud, Fuqua was pledged, if elected to enact legislation outlawing Klan secrecy and the use of the mask. Yet he played the Klan issue down. Bouanchaud claimed the Klan was the only issue in the campaign, but the penitentiary manager countered with the charge that the Lieutenant Governor was injecting a false issue into the contest. In New Orleans, Charles J. Theard, a prominent Catholic, speaking for Fuqua, claimed Bouanchaud was pressing "a false, non-existent issue; that the Klan is not an issue between the candidates, and that short sighted politicians are attempting to line up Catholics behind one of the candidates because


60 Ibid.
he is a Catholic. There was some justification for Theard's remarks. A poll conducted by the Times-Picayune revealed that the Klan was a significant issue in only seventeen parishes. Yet no candidate could have been elected had he publicly supported the Invisible Empire.

Fuqua seems to have solved the Klan problem by a deal with prominent Klan leaders. Counting Bouanchaud as his most dangerous opponent he had to take a stand on the Klan. He would, he probably told Klan leaders, support anti-masking and secrecy laws because Bouanchaud was forcing the issue. The Times-Picayune survey had been made early in the campaign, and if the Klan was not then an important issue there was no assurance that his silence on the secret society would not create a dangerous issue. Therefore, the Klan would have to live with the fact that, if elected, Fuqua would seek passage of anti-masking and secrecy measures. But they would be mild measures and would have loopholes which would protect any Klansman who did not want his name publicly connected with the Invisible Empire. If Klansmen were recalcitrant and fought the legislation proposed, there was always the chance that

---

61 Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, November 17, 1923.

62 Ibid., September 30, 1923.
a new governor might be able to force through legislation requiring retroactive filing of membership lists -- a circumstance that might prove embarrassing to many prominent Louisiana Klansmen. It was a distasteful prospect for Klansmen, but the election of the Catholic Hewitt Bouanchaud would be more distasteful. Thus, as the campaign progressed the Baton Rouge candidate repressed the Klan as an issue and attempted to win votes by calling for peace and harmony. Fuqua had no intention of "rocking the boat" so far as Louisiana's political or economics structure was concerned. In a speech delivered at Baton Rouge, his hometown, he plainly indicated that he was trying to arouse no controversy. "I was born in this city within a stones throw of the spot whereon I now stand," he said. "I have lived here all the days of my life, through my childhood, my boyhood, my young manhood, and on to man's estate. Here I courted and won the woman of my boyhood love, here were our children born, and here the dust of our sacred dead mingles with its parent soil. Aye, here around me cluster all those tender memories whose chords render back music to the touch of 'Home Sweet Home.'"63 A safe middle course, good organization,

---

63Quoted in Baton Rouge State Times, September 30, 1923. See also Biography and Platform of Henry L. Fuqua, p. 7, in Fuqua Papers.
and the proper alliances, Fuqua hoped, would send him to the governor's mansion in 1924.

The last candidate in the 1923-1924 primary contests was less concerned about arousing controversy than the state's penitentiary manager. He was Huey Pierce Long, the volatile Chairman of Louisiana's Public Service Commission. Long was at once one of Louisiana's most hated and most loved politicians. As a member of the old Railroad Commission and the new Public Service Commission he had carried on almost continuous warfare against the entrenched special interest groups in Louisiana -- the Cumberland Telephone and Telegraph Company, the Standard Oil Company, the Southwestern Gas and Electric Company, and the state's extractive industries. He was a mere thirty years of age, the minimum age for a gubernatorial candidate in Louisiana.64

Huey had some Klan support. Alexandria contractor and Klansman Swords R. Lee led a faction of north Louisiana Klansmen in support of Long. But Lee's support was quite unrelated to Long's feelings about the Invisible Empire. Huey was talking about building an extensive system of paved roads for the state (an expense,

---

incidentally, Louisiana's vested interests believed preposterous because it was too expensive) which gave Lee, a construction contractor, a considerable interest in a Long victory. But to Huey the Ku Klux Klan was obviously a nuisance, a false issue which had been injected into the election and which kept the people's minds off the more important economic issues on which he campaigned. Long clearly attempted to straddle the Klan question. In north Louisiana he kept discreetly quiet about the Invisible Empire and in "Cajun country" he too called for an anti-masking law.

Yet his stand on the Invisible Empire was too weak for some of his supporters in south Louisiana and the unfortunate predicament in which he found himself might have cost him votes in the so-called "sugar parishes." He encountered equal difficulties with the Klan problem in north Louisiana. During the campaign, rumors (which might well have been initiated by Long's supporters) circulated in that part of the state that Huey was a Genii of the Ku Klux Klan. Other rumors claimed the Winnfield candidate was a Klansman.

---


66 New Orleans Times-Picayune, September 19, 1923.
at Large.Shortly before the first primary, an advertisement appeared in an Alexandria newspaper which included a statement by Grand Dragon Carey P. Duncan declaring that the rumors of Long's membership were "a bold and bald attempt to use the Klan for the purpose of advancing the political interests of a candidate and as such should be resented by all loyal Klansmen." At the bottom of the message was a note urging the election of Fuqua.

The Klan issue certainly did Huey's candidacy no service. Apparently it left a bitter taste in the mouth of the up and coming young politician. Years later, when the Klan was of no political consequence in Louisiana, Hiram Wesley Evans called Huey un-American and threatened to campaign against him. Huey retorted: "Quote me as saying that that Imperial bastard will never set foot in Louisiana, and that when I call him a son of a bitch I am not using profanity, but am referring to the condition of his birth."

Yet the Klan was not Huey's real problem in 1924. Although the

67 Undated memorandum in Robinson Papers. The memorandum claimed Joe P. Dixon of Shreveport, W. T. Mayo of Shreveport, and Frank Hunter of Mansfield could testify that Long was a member of the Klan.

68 Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 13, 1924.

69 Quoted in Williams, "The Gentleman from Louisiana," p. 15.
popular young politician had a strong following in the country parishes and in north Louisiana, he lacked organization. In New Orleans, Gus and Francis Williams headed a small and hastily put together organization calling itself the "Independent Regulars." Pitted against Huey in New Orleans were the *Times-Picayune*, the "Old Regulars" or Choctaw Club, and the city's financial and shipping interests. Huey learned the political lesson well. Organization was vital, and in the near future Louisiana's "Kingfish" would demonstrate to seasoned politicians a higher form of their art. 70

On January 15, 1924, the people of Louisiana went to the polls and cast their ballots. Lieutenant Governor Hewitt Bouanchaud ran first, followed closely by Fuqua, with Huey Long running a strong third. Bouanchaud carried south Louisiana outside New Orleans and Long and Fuqua divided north Louisiana and the Florida Parishes. 71 Long clearly won some Klan votes, but the evidence is ample that most went to Fuqua. The Baton Rouge candidate carried


Morehouse Parish by a substantial vote. Long ran third there behind Bouanchaud. Fuqua carried Franklin and Tensas Parishes, both strongholds of the Invisible Empire. In Tensas he had four hundred one votes to Long's twenty-two. DeSoto Parish, another Klan stronghold, was carried by the penitentiary manager by two hundred votes. Most of the Klan vote from Caddo Parish probably also went to Fuqua, although Huey ran well in that parish. O. B. Thompson, a charter member of the Klan, related an incident to Dr. T. Harry Williams which occurred shortly before the election. "There was a special meeting called in Shreveport just before the election -- to support Fuqua, and to pass the word down not to vote for Huey," said Thompson. Thompson rose and declared Long was the victim of "a dirty deal." Cries of "throw him out," followed Thompson's protest. "That was the last Kluxer meeting I went to," said Thompson. "I almost ended up in a fight." Fuqua also had the support of Sgt. Dalton's Weekly and the Caldwell Watchman, both avid Klan papers.

---

72 O. B. Thompson to Dr. T. Harry Williams, February 11, 1961. The incident was related to Dr. Williams in a personal interview. Professor Williams kindly made the transcript of the interview available to the author, a copy of which is in the author's possession.
Most political observers now predicted that with Long eliminated Fuqua would easily defeat Bouanchaud in the second primary. Fuqua, with the support of the "Old Regulars" in New Orleans, had led Bouanchaud by more than 10,000 votes in the Crescent City, and the assumption was that he would pick up most of the Protestant votes in north Louisiana which had been cast for Huey Long in the first primary. The New Orleans Times-Picayune, which had supported Bouanchaud in the first primary, now switched sides and called upon the Lieutenant Governor to step aside in favor of Fuqua. The Angola manager, the Picayune now suggested, could be trusted to bring the war on the Klan to a successful conclusion. But Bouanchaud would not be detracted from his course, if indeed any candidate who had run first in a primary could. Faced with a desperate situation, he now moved to enhance his position. The votes received by Huey Long in the first primary could win for him, he believed, and he actively sought them. He first lined up Huey's "Independent Regular" following in New Orleans, then adopted the free textbook plank from the young Public Service Commissioner's platform, and finally tried to win the personal endorsement of the eliminated candidate. But Long would not give the support requested.

73 New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 19, 1924.
and when the second primary was held on February 19, 1924, Fuqua, now supported by almost all Louisiana Klansmen, walked away with a tidy victory. His margin was over 33,000 votes.  

Henry L. Fuqua was Louisiana's new governor, and he had reached that post with the aid of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. But Louisiana Klansmen could hardly claim the victory. Their influence, little that it was, had been badly split in the first primary. The elimination of Long left them no place to go but the Fuqua camp. They certainly could not support Bouanchaud who had pledged an even worse fate for their organization than Fuqua. Moreover, one of their principal leaders, Representative Thomas F. DePaoli of New Orleans, had been defeated in his bid for re-election. The Klan still had a few members of the legislature, but the legislation pledged against the Klan in the primary now was clearly imminent.

On Monday, May 19, 1924, Henry L. Fuqua was inaugurated Governor of Louisiana. The event was marred only by the refusal of the incumbent, John M. Parker, to participate in the ceremonies. Parker felt that he and his family had been "slighted" by the Fuqua committee for local arrangements. Specifically Parker complained that the formal invitation for his family's

74 Ibid., February 20, 1924, and Homer Guardian Journal, January 23, 1924.
participation came too late. The real reason for the refusal, however, was Parker's intense opposition to Fuqua. The incident was but a slight annoyance to the new Governor. At the time of his inauguration the legislature had already been in session almost a week, and the organization which had produced victory at the polls was functioning smoothly. The New Orleans Times-Picayune summed up the situation in Baton Rouge nicely. "Peace, peace, beautiful religious peace, envelops the new Louisiana legislature tonight," it said. "Governor-Elect Fuqua's religious peace ticket won in both the House and Senate. A Ku Klux Klansman was elected Speaker of the House. A Knight of Columbus was elected clerk of the House on the nomination of two Baptist ministers. A Catholic was elected President Pro tempore of the Senate. A Knight of Columbus was elected secretary of the Senate." Indeed, peace was the keynote of legislative activity in Baton Rouge. Governor Fuqua had prepared three bills to deal with the Klan and the Klan was cooperating with the administration. Lieutenant Governor and former Klansman O. H. Simpson; Speaker of the House and Klansman Stuart Douglas; Great Titan of the Province of Southwestern

---

76. New Orleans Times-Picayune, May 13, 1924.
Louisiana Paul D. Perkins; all predicted easy passage for the Fuqua bills. The legislation proposed by the new Governor specifically required all secret organizations to file their membership lists annually with the secretary of state. But the Klan was given a way out. The law would not go into effect until September 1, 1924, and any Klansman who found his membership embarrassing had until then to resign. A second bill provided that an assault by a disguised person would be a felony and would be punishable by five years of hard labor in the state penitentiary. The last bill prohibited public appearances by masked individuals except on Mardi Gras. The three bills were introduced simultaneously in the House and Senate. Senator N. C. Williamson of West Carroll Parish, an admitted Klansman, introduced them in the upper chamber and Representative C. A. Morvant, a Catholic, of Lafourche Parish, sponsored them in the lower chamber. At the time of introduction reports were that the Klan would support all three bills. Peace, sweet peace, seemed everywhere apparent.

But two obstacles threatened easy passage of the bills. Senator Hugh Wilkinson of New Orleans, feeling that the anti-Klan legislation

proposed by Fuqua was ineffective, introduced seven bills of his own. According to the Orleans Parish legislator any criminal lawyer—could "drive a horse and cart through the governor's bills . . . ." There was considerable substance to Wilkinson's charges, as later developments would demonstrate, but the Fuqua forces ground unhesitatingly forward, and Wilkinson's protests went largely unheeded. The second interruption in the peaceful assassination of the Invisible Empire came from Dr. E. L. Thompson, Pastor of Shreveport's Central Christian Church and Exalted Cyclops of Shreveport Klan Number Two. He appeared in Baton Rouge on the night of May 31 for a Klan naturalization ceremony. He spoke bitterly against the Klan bills then under consideration in the legislature. "In Louisiana the war is on," he said, "with the legislature leading the fight upon some of the finest and cleanest men in the state . . . . Why can they not be left to settle their own religious difference . . . . Since you [the legislature] are going into the business of regulating religious activity in this state there are two bills I want to see introduced into the legislature. One of them is to investigate every hospital, school, sweatshop, and other institution controlled by any religious body in the state. Look behind the high convent walls. The other

78Quoted in New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, May 24, 1924.
is to prohibit the existence of any religious of fraternal body in this state that owes allegiance to any foreign power whatsoever." \textsuperscript{79}

Thompson apparently had not been told of the script. His line of talk could create great difficulties for the Klan in the legislature. The Invisible Empire was simply at the mercy of the Fuqua forces, and it was clearly wiser to cooperate in mild legislation than provoke stronger laws through impassioned religious diatribes.

On the night of June 2, 1923, the Fuqua administration passed the three anti-Klan bills in the House of Representatives. The anti-masking law and the law prohibiting assault by masked persons passed easily. The bills passed ninety-one to three and unanimously. But the membership registration law aroused the ire of the House's few Klansmen. On that measure the vote was eighty to seventeen. \textsuperscript{80} Slightly over a week later the scene was repeated in the Senate. The anti-masking law and the bill prohibiting masked assaults passed without incident, but the membership registration bill prompted a spirited fight. The bill was finally passed twenty-eight to eleven under the careful guidance of its Klansman sponsor, Senator N. C. Williamson. \textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{79}Quoted in Baton Rouge \textit{State Times}, June 1, 1924.

\textsuperscript{80}New Orleans \textit{Times-Picayune}, June 3, 1924.

\textsuperscript{81}Ibid., June 12, 1924.
The laws had been passed with Klan assistance. But the Invisible Empire in Louisiana could really claim little credit. It had been the victim of Louisiana politics since the gubernatorial campaign began in 1923. It had not dominated that campaign. Its small size, its inability to agree on one of the two Protestant candidates, and the unwillingness of either of those candidates to accept Klan support openly placed the organization in a difficult position. Its violent excesses in some parishes combined with its open boasting about Klan political influence during the fall of 1922 made the Klan a political issue in the primaries of 1923-1924. That was a circumstance it could not avoid. During the first primary, its support was divided behind Long and Fuqua. When Long was eliminated in the first primary, Klansmen had no place to go but to the penitentiary manager's camp because his opponent was a Catholic and a bitter enemy of the Invisible Empire. All indications point to the fact that Fuqua had promised his Klan supporters mild anti-Klan legislation. Legislation of some kind, he could not avoid. When the legislature met, Fuqua's original Klan supporters stuck to their bargain and supported the anti-Klan measures he proposed, but several Klan legislators, who had apparently not accepted the prior arrangement, bolted and bitterly fought the membership registration law. Thus, the Louisiana
Klan was never in a position to control any political situation on the state level. The fight over the passage of the membership registration law widened the breach in Klan ranks apparent since the summer of 1923. That breach would never be closed, and the Louisiana Klan would never again be the same.
CHAPTER TEN

THE FOLDING OF THE SHEETS

The passage of the anti-Klan legislation during June, 1924, evoked the wrath of several members of the secret organization. Said one Klan legislator from Natchitoches: "It will bring war, I tell you, rather than peace." Another said: "You will not settle this issue this year, not next year, nor the next. The 'heart and soul' cannot be legislated out of men."¹ In the meantime Dr. E. L. Thompson, who had bitterly attacked the laws when they were being considered by the legislature, offered reassurance to Louisiana Knights. The Klan was not afraid of the laws, said the pastor of Shreveport's Central Christian Church, and the Invisible Empire would be less affected by them than any secret organization within the state. "No Klansman will be uncovered who cannot afford to be," he claimed. "I cannot state publicly how this will be accomplished but I can say the laws will be enforced in all their details."²

¹Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, June 12, 1924.
²Ibid.

348
The north Louisiana preacher was suggesting, on the same day that Governor Fuqua signed the bills, that the Louisiana Klan would comply with the provisions of the laws, but would avoid revealing its membership. That was exactly what the Louisiana Realm ultimately did, and Thompson's statement, coming as it did on the day the bills were signed, suggests the Invisible Empire easily found the loophole in the membership registration law that Senator Hugh Wilkinson of New Orleans had claimed was so apparent.

Reverend Thompson was apparently satisfied with the situation. But Imperial Wizard Hiram Wesley Evans was not. Louisiana's Klan leaders had earned the wrath of the Imperial Wizard for their cooperation with the Fuqua administration. James Murray, a representative of headquarters in Atlanta, was sent to Louisiana, and after an investigation he recommended to Evans that several prominent Klansmen be expelled from the Invisible Empire, including Speaker of the Louisiana House of Representatives Stuart Douglas, Senator Delos Johnson of Franklinton, Senator Norris C. Williamson of Milliken, Representative R. L. Prophit of Monroe, Representative L. M. Spencer of Tallulah, Great Titan Paul D. Perkins of Lake Charles, Great Titan Will Germany of Moaroe, and Great Titan Thomas F. DePaoli of New Orleans. 3

3Shreveport Journal, June 14, 1924.
Murray's recommendations seemed harsh to Perkins, who doubted that the national organization would dare expel the men marked by the Atlanta representative. One politician, who was friendly to the Klan, prophetically observed: "The efforts of one element of the Ku Klux Klan in Louisiana to expel those legislators who are members of the order and other prominent Klansmen because of their efforts in enacting the laws against secrecy and the mask is a foolish one and will mean the death of the Klan in Louisiana . . . . If these men are barred from the order there will be a host of others who will resign."  

Evans withheld action on Murray's recommendations until late July, 1924, when the Louisiana Realm held its second Klorero (or annual meeting of state leaders) in Shreveport. On July 31 Grand Dragon Carey P. Duncan was conducting a meeting at the Youree Hotel to select five delegates to the Imperial Klonvocation scheduled for Kansas City in September. Evans solemnly marched into the room, announced the banishment of Duncan, Perkins, DePaoli, Germany, Grand Kludd C. C. "Stuttering" Miller, and Grand Kligrapp Clayton P. Spring. No mention was made of the members

---

4 Quoted in New Orleans Times-Picayune, June 15, 1924.  
5 New Orleans Item, August 11, 1924.
of the state legislature marked for expulsion by Murray. Evans might have regarded their dismissal too dangerous, because at the time Murray's recommendations were made, the suggestion that Stuart Douglas be ousted created a considerable stir among members of Shreveport Klan Number Two, of which the Speaker of the Louisiana House of Representatives was a member. Evans's abrupt invasion of the Youree Hotel meeting broke up the Klorero and left the Bayou State Klan without Realm officers.

The Imperial Wizard corrected that situation quickly. A few days later he appeared in Alexandria, home of the Klan's strongest chapter in central Louisiana. A meeting was called for ten o'clock a.m., August 16. Klansmen began arriving on the evening of August 15. Among those present were James Murray, the Atlanta representative, Captain J. K. Skipwith, of the Bastrop Klan, Jeff B. Snyder, an important Klan leader from Madison Parish, William C. Barnette, of Shreveport, Robert Ellis, Klan leader from Amite, Swords R. Lee, Alexandria contractor and Klan leader, and the Imperial Wizard, Hiram Wesley Evans. The fifty Klansmen in attendance represented the new leadership of the Invisible Empire in Louisiana. The gathering of Louisiana's Klan moguls

---

6 New Orleans Times-Picayune, June 15, 1924. See also Shreveport Journal, August 11, 1924.
lasted only two hours. It began promptly at ten a.m. and ended at noon. When the meeting adjourned newsmen were told that the Louisiana Realm had been placed under an executive triumvirate consisting of Robert Ellis of Amite, Swords R. Lee of Alexandria, and William C. Barnette of Shreveport. Assisting them would be James Murray, Evans's representative from national headquarters. Barnette was to continue as Klan counsel at a fee of five thousand dollars per year.

Having established a new governmental hierarchy, the Louisiana Klan now moved to avoid the intent of the membership registration law passed by the legislature in June, 1924. Dr. E. L. Thompson, Exalted Cyclops of the Shreveport Klan, had announced on the same day the bill was signed by Fuqua that the Invisible Empire would not be affected by the legislation. The Klan clearly intended to circumvent the law. The question was how. Actually, it was rather simple. The membership registration law did not go into effect until September 1, 1924. The Louisiana Klans held their last "official" meetings on Thursday night, August 26, 1924. At that time chapter records and membership lists were attached to Atlanta headquarters. In short, most Louisiana Klansmen became "Imperial Klansmen" and surrendered their membership.

7 New Orleans Times-Picayune, August 17, 1924.
in the Louisiana Realm. Each chapter retained a small group of officers, usually seven, who filed their names with the secretary of state on December 30, 1924, as required by the law. Section three of the membership registration law required that individual members of an organization not attend meetings of that organization unless the list of members had been filed. But the law also said members of any organization "operating in this state." Louisiana Klansmen contended they were not members of an organization operating in Louisiana. Only the officers were. Other Bayou State Klansmen were members of the Atlanta organization. When business was to be conducted, therefore, "Imperial members" attended local Klan meetings and assisted in the transaction of business. But nothing was done officially. Official business was conducted only by the seven officers who had filed their names according to law. Thus, after a meeting the seven officers of a local Klan would meet separately and "officially" ratify the will of "Imperial members."  

On December 29, 1924, the Louisiana Realm complied with the law. The membership lists were filed by Klan counsel William C. Barnette of Shreveport. They revealed, among other things, 

8Ibid., August 24, 26, 27, 28, December 31, 1924, and January 2, 1925.
that an alteration had occurred in Klan leadership for the state since
the August meeting in Alexandria. The name of Robert Ellis of
Amite had been removed. Swords R. Lee, J. W. Murray, and
Barnette were listed as "Imperial representatives," along with
two newcomers, A. B. Bowie of Crowley and E. D. Deane of
Shreveport. The membership registration lists also revealed
that Louisiana had lost about a dozen Klans since 1923, including
the Old Hickory chapter in New Orleans. Furthermore, the
enumeration of all chapters had been changed, apparently to hide
the fact that local chapters were disbanding. The Ladies of the
Invisible Empire filed the same day, and their list revealed that
only eighteen chapters of that organization remained active. 10

The Invisible Empire in Louisiana had successfully evaded the
membership registration law, and during succeeding months some
Knights talked about testing the legislation before the United States
Supreme Court. Still others entertained dreams of capturing
control of the governor's office in 1928 and repealing the obnoxious
legislation. On Mardi Gras, 1925, jubilant Klansmen donned
their hoods on the one day of the year masking was now legal. On

---

9 Shreveport Journal, December 29, 1924.
10 Ibid., January 1, 1925.
that festive holiday Shreveport, Monroe, Baton Rouge, and Lake Charles were the scenes of Klan parades, initiations, and rallies. 11 John M. Parker observed the scene and penned a letter to J. S. Cullinan. "My long hard fight here and throughout other states where I went does not seem to have produced real substantial results," he wrote. "Our laws in Louisiana in regard to mask and secrecy are practically openly defied by the affidavit that there are only seven members of each Klan . . . ." 12

Both Parker's lament and the Klan's rejoicing were untimely. Neither the former Governor nor Louisiana Klansmen fully recognized that the Invisible Empire in the Bayou State was having its last fling. The Klan's political influence in Louisiana was destroyed. Prior to his banishment from the Invisible Empire, Paul D. Perkins had attempted to win nomination as a delegate to the Democratic National Convention of 1924, but he had been defeated by Griffin T. Hawkins, a vocal anti-Klan leader from Lake Charles. The twenty-man Louisiana delegation to the Democratic National Convention included two Klansmen, Jeff B. Snyder of Tallulah and Swords R. Lee of Alexandria; but, their

11 Ibid., February 25, 1925.

12 John M. Parker to J. S. Cullinan, March 25, 1925, in Parker Papers.
presence on the delegation was not connected with their membership in the Klan. At the Democratic National Convention in New York the Louisiana delegation joined with other Southern states and voted against condemning the Klan by name, but Pelican State Knights could find little reassurance in that gesture. By 1925 no informed person regarded the political influence of the Louisiana Realm seriously. The division which had been apparent during the governor's race was never resolved, and the high-handed action of Evans in depositing the state's Klan hierarchy only served to drive important men out of the movement.

As time passed other signs of decline appeared. In Morehouse Parish, the scene of violence and murder in 1922, life was returning to normal. Mrs. Thomas F. Richards, wife of one of the two brutally murdered men, had remarried. Ironically, she chose as her new husband, R. A. Whetstone, the state's principal witness against Klansman T. "Jeff" Burnett. An what of Captain J. K. Skipwith, the irascible leader of Klan raiding in Morehouse? He was temporarily in demand as a Klan speaker,
but after 1925 his name disappeared from prominence. In Winnfield, Sergeant N. C. Dalton, the editor and publisher of The Winnfield News American and Sgt. Dalton's Weekly sold out. Sgt. Dalton's Weekly was no longer published, and the News American's slogan was changed from "For God, For Country, And For The Home" to a less inspiring "Published In The Interest Of Moral And Material Progress And For Profit." Such base motives must have aroused the retired army veteran mightily. After the transfer of ownership news of Klan activity in Winn Parish was no longer evident.

In March, 1925, the once proud Shreveport Klan engaged a Chicago speaker to extoll the virtues of Americanism at the state fair grounds. The meeting was to be followed by a barbecue for the public. The same month, on the back page of the Shreveport Journal, a report citing the support of Exalted Cyclops Dr. E. L. Thompson for a police campaign against narcotics appeared. A few days later, again on a back page, the Journal reported Louisiana's largest Klan had sent floral wreaths to the funerals of a Baptist minister and a federal alcohol agent who had been killed on a raid. The Klan that had once tarred and feathered wifebeater

16Ibid., February 29, 1924.

17Shreveport Journal, March 4, 9, 24, 1925.
Jack Morgan and had elected a mayor of Shreveport had been reduced to sending floral wreaths.

When Mardi Gras arrived in 1926, the one day the Klan was allowed to don its masks, the Invisible Empire in Louisiana was totally invisible. And when the second membership filing was made in December, 1925, the list revealed the Klan had lost eleven more chapters since the original filing one year earlier. And Louisiana newspapers, which during 1922, 1923, and 1924 had been rich sources of Klan news stories revealed during 1925, 1926, and 1927 almost a total absence of interest in the Invisible Empire. Perhaps the surest sign of the collapse of the Louisiana Realm was its failure to demonstrate against the candidacy of the Catholic A. Smith in the election of 1928. While Imperial Wizard Evans and Klansmen from a half dozen Southern states protested loudly against the Democratic Party's Roman candidate, the few remaining Louisiana Knights silently kept their own counsel. Nor did Smith's Catholic religion make any apparent difference in the outcome of the Presidential election in Louisiana. The only unusual thing about the Presidential election of 1928 in Louisiana was the huge increase in the number of citizens who voted. Almost twice as

18 New Orleans Times-Picayune, January 1, 1926.
many Louisianians cast ballots in the 1928 Presidential election as had voted in 1924. Hoover doubled the Republican vote and Smith almost doubled Democratic balloting. Certainly Smith's religion had much to do with the increase in Republican voting in the Pelican State, but the appeal of "Republican prosperity" was probably an equally compelling issue. 19

Thus, the Louisiana Realm of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan declined almost as rapidly as the organization had emerged into prominence in the state. By 1928 it had probably shrunk to less than 3,000 members. Klan violence had completely disappeared. The organization was, in short, no longer a force of any consequence in Louisiana life. Several developments suggest reasons why the Invisible Empire declined so rapidly after 1925. In 1924 Congress passed an immigration law which severely restricted the number of immigrants allowed to enter the United States. Southern and eastern Europeans, the group most obnoxious to the Invisible Empire, were clearly discriminated against under the laws. 20

---


In addition, fraternal organizations which had played so important a role in American life, began to decline during the latter part of the decade. And finally, the abnormal conditions arising from World War One -- the fear of Negro militance, the fear of radical foreign influences, anti-Catholicism, and the lawlessness which characterized the postwar years -- had been considerably ameliorated with the passage of time.

In Louisiana there were more immediate reasons why the Klan experienced an early demise. The Invisible Empire had promised Louisianians "law and order." On too many occasions the secret order was responsible for lawless acts it was pledged to prevent. The Morehouse episode clearly demonstrated that fact to Bayou State residents. The Klan's emphasis on anti-Catholicism, in a state where a substantial proportion of the population was Catholic, soon created difficulties for the secret organization. But the most important factor in the rapid decline of the Invisible Empire in Louisiana was the secret order's involvement in state politics.

---


Not only did that involvement produce a permanent split in Klan ranks, it also resulted in legislation against the Klan. Despite the fact that Klansmen found a way to avoid the registration of their membership, the law caused them no little inconvenience. More damaging was the law forbidding the wearing of masks. The mask was a vital romantic symbol, and when it was removed the Klansman who found in its use an escape from the reality of his world suddenly discovered that without it he had not escaped at all. The law providing penitentiary penalties for masked assault was decisively effective. There is no evidence of any Klan violence after the passage of this law.

Many men had joined the Invisible Empire because it could be used as a vehicle to advance their professional or political careers. There is, however, no evidence that the Klan significantly contributed to either business or political advancement. In fact, in the political arena, the Klan was usually a greater burden than an aid. That was certainly the case beyond the local level in politics. Thus, having failed to produce the positive results members expected from it, the flame of the Invisible Empire dimmed rapidly after 1924. To be sure, that flame had burned brightly during 1922 and had promised the faithful great rewards for their service. But the Morehouse episode, Governor Parker's persistent attacks,
internal disunity, and the anti-Klan legislation of the Fuqua administration had weakened its glow, and by 1925 the flame of Klanism was flickering, and would shortly be extinguished.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Newspapers

Atlanta Searchlight. 1921.
Caldwell Watchman. 1921-1925.
The Colfax Chronicle. 1921-1925.
Donaldsonville Chief. 1921-1926.
LaFourche Comet. 1922-1928.
Lake Charles Weekly American-Press. 1921-1925.
The Morehouse Enterprise. 1921-1925.
Nashville Tennessean. 1965.
New Iberia Enterprise. 1921-1928.
New Orleans States. 1922-1924.
New Orleans Times-Picayune. 1920-1930.
New York World. 1921.
Ponchatoula Enterprise. 1921-1927.
The Richland Beacon-News. 1921-1925.
The Sabine Index. 1921-1927.


St. Francisville True Democrat, 1921-1925.

The Winnfield News American. 1921-1927.

Manuscript Collections

James B. Aswell and Family Papers. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Henry L. Fuqua Papers. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Edward J. Gay and Family Papers. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Ladislas Lazaro Papers. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Huey P. Long Scrapbooks. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

M. S. Newsom and Family Papers. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

John M. Parker Papers. Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

W. D. Robinson Papers. Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

Jared Y. Sanders and Family Papers. Department of Archives, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Articles and Periodicals


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Cline, Leonard L. "In Darkest Louisiana," in The Nation, CXVI (March 14, 1923).


"Even the Klan Has Rights," in The Nation, CXV (December 13, 1922).

"For And Against The Ku Klux Klan," in The Literary Digest, LXX (September 24, 1921).

Harris, A. I. "Klan on Trial," in The New Republic, XXXV (June 13, 1923).


"Imperial Wizard And His Klan," in The Literary Digest, LXVIII (February 5, 1921).


"The Klan As A National Problem," in The Literary Digest, LXXV (December 2, 1922).

"The Ku Klux Klan And The Church," in The Literary Digest, LXXIII (April 8, 1922).


"Our Own Secret Fascisti," in The Nation, CXV (November 15, 1922).


"Quaint Customs and Methods of the Ku Klux Klan," in The Literary Digest, LXXIV (August 5, 1922).


Public Documents


Books


Dabney, Thomas E. *One Hundred Great Years: The Story of the Times-Picayune From its Founding to 1940*. Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1944.


________. *America's Menace or the Enemy Within*. Atlanta, Georgia: Bureau of Patriotic Books, 1926.


Unpublished Sources


Personal Interviews


Personal interview with George Hair, former member of Winnsboro, Louisiana Klan. Baton Rouge, Louisiana, September 8, 1960.


Personal interview with Dr. Edwin White, former member of New Orleans Klan. Hammond, Louisiana, February 27, 1960.

Klan Documents

A B C of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Atlanta, Georgia: Ku Klux Press, n. d.


Kloran of the Women of the Ku Klux Klan. n. p., no publisher, 1923.

Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Papers Read at the Meeting of Grand Dragons, At their First Annual Meeting, held at Asheville, North Carolina, July, 1923. Atlanta, Georgia: no publisher, 1924.

Simmons, William Joseph. The Constitution and Laws of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Atlanta, Georgia: no publisher, 1921.

**Other Sources**


Transcript of personal interview with O. B. Thompson, conducted by Dr. T. Harry Williams, February 11, 1961. Copy in author's possession.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
VITA

The author was born in Wayne County, North Carolina, April 1, 1932. He was educated in the public schools of Goldsboro, North Carolina, Miami, Florida, and Monroe, Louisiana. He received the Bachelor of Arts degree from Southeastern Louisiana College in 1954. After two years in the United States Army, he entered Louisiana State University and received the Master of Arts degree in 1959. He is presently employed by Murray State University, and is a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the June, 1966 commencement of Louisiana State University.
EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: Kenneth Earl Harrell
Major Field: History
Title of Thesis: The Ku Klux Klan in Louisiana, 1920-1930

Approved:

[Signatures]

Date of Examination:
May 12, 1966

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Jane de Grammont
André Muggle
Charles B. Davis
Fred H. Wilhardt

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.