

*The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan  
Right-Wing Movements and National Politics*

By Rory McVeigh

(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009. Pp. 244. Charts, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Paperbound, \$22.50.)

In his book *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-Wing Movements and National Politics*, sociologist Rory McVeigh offers critical insights into the strategies and constituency of the 1920s Klan. The work offers a sophisticated new explanation of the quick rise of an organization that, at its height, numbered more than three million.

McVeigh's analysis challenges as too simplistic prior research that treated Klansmen as "irrational, ignorant, or gullible" (p. 36) or, alternatively, as "downwardly mobile" folks "clinging to a worldview that was becoming obsolete in a changing world" (p. 133). Instead, McVeigh reveals an organization that carefully crafted its narratives and political positions to appeal to a predominantly middle-class constituency.

Using a sophisticated content analysis of Klan publications—in particular the group's national newsletter *Imperial Knight-Hawk*—McVeigh shows that the group's mobilization correlated with a perceived decline in status for many native-born, white Protestants. Klan members were predominantly small businessmen, shop owners, and craftsmen who felt threatened by cheap factory labor undertaken by immigrants and funded by big financial institutions. The threat was real. Working conditions

were rapidly shifting as large-scale factories took over manufacturing from family-run firms. In response, McVeigh argues, the Klan crafted a series of nativist and racist appeals designed to play upon these fears. In keeping with its populist approach, the Klan also supported such civic institutions as public schools as an important bulwark against downward mobility.

McVeigh's analytical frame is heavily influenced by market theory and the concepts of supply and demand. He examines the market competition—not only economic but also political and social—faced by the Klan's core constituency and argues that "the movement thrived on cultural homogeneity and tended to be most active in states in which native-born white Protestants greatly outnumbered immigrants and Catholics" (p. 180). Contact with immigrants or people of color was not what allowed the Klan to flourish; rather, it did well where there was a lack of diversity and arguments for cultural homogeneity were more widely accepted. That meant that the Klan would grow strongest in the Midwest, particularly in Indiana, even if its chapters could be found nationwide.

Even with the resources of its constituency and the success of its recruiting effort, the Klan fell apart

within a few years of reaching its height. McVeigh finds that infighting, bad press, and political missteps prior to the 1924 presidential election all contributed to the Klan's decline. By 1928, only a few hundred thousand members remained in the group.

In a larger context, McVeigh's work makes a strong case for why conservative and liberal social movements should be treated differently. McVeigh rightly points out that conservative social movements offer remedies for populations that have power, but believe they are being challenged by changes in society. Because of this established power, social movements from the right tend to bring greater resources to bear on their causes. Liberal social movements, on the other hand, look to expand opportunities and rights to

previously excluded sectors of society. Their work is harder, as the populations they represent are usually oppressed and thus have less access to financial and other resources to fund their battles. These clear differences argue strongly for separate analyses of social movements from the right and the left.

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### *The Federal Art Project and the Creation of Middlebrow Culture* By Victoria Grieve

(Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009. Pp. x, 299. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00.)

Victoria Grieve's book is a welcome addition to the literature on New Deal art programs. Surprisingly, it is also the first sustained examination of the early twentieth-century emergence of a middlebrow culture as it pertains to the visual arts. Sparsely illustrated, the book nonetheless complements studies of New Deal artwork by illuminating post-World War I cultural theories that planted the seeds for Federal Art Project (FAP) initiatives

in the 1930s. Historians and art historians alike will want to read with a laptop nearby to see examples of artworks by some of the lesser-known artists under discussion.

Grieve's study arrives as a growing number of scholars of American art history have begun to examine the 1920s. Situated between the criticism of the genteel Gilded Age and that of the populist New Deal era, the period's art criticism resists easy catego-