

Department of Transportation (DDOT) in 1974, still the system's name today.

In closing, a recent development deserves mention. In 2017, the year *The Thirty-Year War* was published, Detroit debuted a brand-new 3.3-mile streetcar line along Judge Woodward's namesake avenue between downtown and Grand Boulevard. The city's transportation history has now come full circle. *The Thirty-Year War* is a highly recommended history of a forgotten chapter in U.S. urban mass transportation.

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### *Ku Klux Kulture: America and the Klan in the 1920s*

By Felix Harcourt

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. Pp. 272. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00.)

Although the Southern Poverty Law Center reports a marked decline in the number of local Klan chapters in the United States over the past year, the remarkable proliferation of other various "hate groups" since the last presidential election has reawakened interest in what during the 1920s became the largest, most widespread nativist, racist movement this nation has ever witnessed. The Ku Klux Klan attracted millions of members from coast to coast, exercising significant political power in a number of states, particularly Indiana. Felix Harcourt makes a worthwhile contribution to our understanding of the movement, providing an analysis thought-provoking in what it explicitly states

and in its possible contemporary implications.

Instead of focusing on the Klan as an organization with specific political and social agendas, Harcourt examines it as a broader cultural phenomenon which, despite its fighting, factionalism and decentralization, created a unifying "imagined community" for its membership and exerted considerable influence on mainstream American culture as well. He questions previous assertions that the Klan was culturally reactionary and anti-modernist, and instead sees it as ambivalent and conflicted in its response to the innovations associated with the Jazz Age, yet willing to use the newest media to its own advantage. He portrays those who joined the Klan not

as marginal outliers, but in many ways within the mainstream. Harcourt writes that though it is tempting to depict the 1920s as a “struggle between the forces of progress and reaction, the reality of American cultural politics is far more ambiguous” (p. 183).

The book depicts how the Klan, with some reservations, embraced and creatively utilized numerous forms of popular culture, including film, the press, literature, crime magazines, theater, jazz bands, phonograph records, radio, and sports, to enhance its membership and influence. While other recent works, such as Tom Rice’s *White Robes, Silver Screens* (2015), have noted this, none have looked at this issue so broadly. Harcourt adds that mainstream culture frequently found it beneficial to exploit interest in the flamboyant Klan movement without necessarily endorsing it. In the process, he argues, the Klan was able to normalize and sanitize itself.

Unsurprisingly, Indiana furnishes many examples of this process. Gennett Records in Richmond featured early jazz and blues artists Louis Armstrong and Jelly Roll Morton yet recorded such numbers as “Onward Christian Klansmen.” Newspapers in Richmond, Kokomo, and Franklin provided enthusiastic accounts of the Klan’s local activities. Pro-Klan films drew crowds in towns like Tipton, and Klan basketball and baseball tournaments took place throughout the state and elsewhere. Klan teams even vied with Catholic and Jewish competitors

without incident. Harcourt observes that just as participation in athletic events contributed to the assimilation and respectability of ethnic groups such as Irish Catholics and Jews, a similar phenomenon could be witnessed with respect to Klansmen. Members of the self-proclaimed “Invisible Empire” in the end were not so invisible.

Importantly, the Klan’s rise coincided with the mushrooming of mass culture, but Harcourt might have said more about earlier connections between nativist movements and American culture. Similarly, there is little mention of how subsequent nativist or extremist organizations continued effective use of mass media, including television and the internet. Some recent studies such as Linda Gordon’s *The Second Coming of the KKK* (2017) have alluded to parallels between the Klan movement and today’s political situation. Harcourt remains silent on this, but what he writes provokes vital questions, particularly regarding mass media’s role in generating, manipulating, and “normalizing” current political events.

The multitude of examples Harcourt provides might overwhelm and deter some readers; nonetheless, this well researched book should be of interest to those wishing to learn more about this fascinating aspect of the Klan.

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