

The Klan's Enemies Step Up, Slowly

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ABSTRACT: Indiana's Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s was an expression of mainstream values. Klan members were not ignorant rubes but mostly middle-class, respectable citizens among the state's white, native-born Protestants. One indication of the organization's strength is the nature of the opposition it engendered, which was slow to form and weak in effectiveness. This article studies those who challenged the Klan, including Jews, African Americans, and particularly Catholics. Some lawyers, ministers, elected officials, and other individuals spoke out. But many Protestant leaders, newspaper editors, politicians, and others who might have stood up instead remained silent or joined the crusade. The feeble nature of Klan opposition is part of a larger understanding that the Klan was not an abnormality or aberration but a powerful expression of intolerance and exclusion that rests deep in Indiana and American history.

KEYWORDS: Ku Klux Klan, Indiana, white supremacy, intolerance, history of journalism, D. C. Stephenson, Republican Party, Democratic Party, *Fiery Cross*, American Catholicism, American Judaism, African Americans, Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church, labor unions, University of Notre Dame, Meredith Nicholson, George Dale, Arthur L. Gilliom

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Indiana's Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s is among the most important stories in the state's history and among the most difficult to understand. Myths stand in the way—myths that, with scant basis in fact, give comfort and enable denial of connections between past and present.

One myth asserts that the Klan declined rapidly in 1925 when Hoosiers learned of Grand Dragon D. C. Stephenson's brutal assault of Madge Oberholtzer, her death, and his sentence to the Michigan City Penitentiary.¹ The prison camera clicked to make Stephenson's mug shot and to mark the death of the Klan, so the story goes. This version of history is told in the plaque placed outside the Hamilton County courtroom where Stephenson's trial was held: "The outcome of the trial resulted in the rapid decline of the theretofore powerful Klan influence in state government."² The troubling word is "rapid." The twelve men who convicted Stephenson deserve praise, but the Klan's decline was not rapid. Nor was its power, either before or after the trial, limited to state government.

Essential to this and other myths is a narrow focus on Stephenson and his sordid crimes. The spotlight on this evil charlatan not only obscures more important parts of the story but also helps build the largest myth, that the Klan's strength was a fluke, an anomaly that depended on Stephenson's charisma in manipulating gullible Hoosiers to sign up. These are the robed rubes that reporter Elmer Davis labeled "hill-billies, the Great Unteachables." If Davis was right, then decent Hoosiers might be absolved of blame. An Indiana native who spoke with a Hoosier twang, Davis was a distinguished American journalist. He was also dead wrong.³

The recent scholarship of Leonard Moore, Allen Safianow, and others makes clear that Indiana Klan members were anything but unteachables. Mostly middle class, these white-collar and skilled workers could afford the initiation fee, monthly dues, and other costs estimated at about \$250 a year in 2011 dollars. Some 300,000 Hoosier men joined, up to one-third of the state's native-born, white, Protestant men, as did unknown numbers of women. Many were true believers, good Protestants, and respected citizens. There were charlatans among them, of course, as well as hangers-on, but

¹ Stephenson assaulted Oberholtzer on March 16, 1925; she died on April 14; he was convicted on November 14. For details of Stephenson's career and trial, see M. William Lutholtz, *Grand Dragon: D. C. Stephenson and the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana* (West Lafayette, Ind., 1991).

² For an excellent account of Noblesville's struggles with the memory of the Klan, see Allen Safianow, "You Can't Burn History: Getting Right with the Klan in Noblesville, Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History* 100 (June 2004), 111-54.

³ Elmer Davis, "Have Faith in Indiana," *Harper's Magazine* 153 (June 1, 1926), 621.



Former Grand Dragon D. C. Stephenson's mug shot, taken at the Indiana State Prison in late 1925. Stephenson's trial and subsequent conviction did not mark the end of the Klan in Indiana.
Indiana State Archives, Indiana Archives and Records Administration

in front of burning crosses at dozens of “naturalization” ceremonies across the state, thousands of Hoosiers recited the Klan oath with conviction as they also pledged faithfulness to their god and nation. They paraded down main streets and around courthouse squares with purpose and pride. They were large in numbers and power in Indiana, and they persisted long after Stephenson went to jail.⁴

⁴Leonard J. Moore, *Citizen Klansmen: The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1921-1928* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1991); Allen Safianow, “The Klan Comes to Tipton,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 95 (September 1999), 203-231; Roland G. Fryer and Steven D. Levitt, “Hatred and Profits: Under the Hood of the Ku Klux Klan,” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 127 no. 4 (November 2012), 1883-925. A good analysis of membership in a Michigan community is Craig Fox, *Everyday Klansfolk: White Protestant Life and the KKK in 1920s Michigan* (East Lansing, Mich., 2011). For an overview of the Klan, see Thomas R. Pegram, *One Hundred Percent American: The Rebirth and Decline of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s* (Chicago, 2011). Also useful is Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and the American Political Tradition* (New York, 2017). For state context, James H. Madison, *Hoosiers: A New History of Indiana* (Bloomington, Ind., 2014). Thus far no membership lists of Klan women have surfaced. It is reasonable to assume that they were similar to men in socioeconomic background.



Dozens of proud Klan women gathered in New Castle, Indiana, 1923. All but one lifted her mask for the photographer.

Ball State University Archives and Special Collections

New research and new perspectives now open up fuller understanding of the depth and breadth of Klan strength.⁵ Among the many ways to illuminate the organization's power is to consider the immense obstacles facing the Klan's critics. Opponents had an uphill fight against widespread zeal for the Klan's credo of 100% Americanism and against the organization's skillful tactics of community building and intimidation. They struggled against the cultural intolerance of the 1920s, built on assumptions of white racial superiority, Protestant righteousness, and American birth. Resistance to the Klan required unusual courage and an appreciation of racial, ethnic, and religious differences that was in short supply a century ago. Understanding the slow and feeble nature of Klan opposition allows fuller appreciation of the Klan as a central story and not a marginal sidebar in Indiana's history.

Stephenson's downfall surely hurt the Klan, but even as damning evidence of his crimes flooded out of the Noblesville courtroom, Hoosiers went to the polls in fall 1925, and elected Klan candidates. In Indianapolis the

⁵ Good examples include Felix Harcourt, *Ku Klux Culture: America and the Klan in the 1920s* (Chicago, 2017); Kelly J. Baker, *Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant America, 1915–1930* (Lawrence, Kan., 2011). Both scholars show the Klan's reach beyond politics to cultural and religious significance.

Klan ticket swept not only the mayor's office, but the city council and the school commission. At the end of 1925 the Greensburg newspaper printed an invitation to a cross burning east of town to celebrate the Christmas season. In Rushville Klan women delivered seventy-four Christmas food baskets.⁶ From Richmond a year later, longtime reformer William Dudley Foulke wrote to women's rights activist Alice Stone Blackwell to lament that "here in Indiana the subordination of our governor to the Ku Klux Klan is something inconceivable and I can see no evidence of any public spirit adequate to resist the abuses which surround us."⁷ As late as October 1927, when a profusion of sordid details had circulated, including criminal charges against Governor Ed Jackson for his Klan dealings, the *New York Times* published an extensive investigation concluding that "the Klan is broken," but adding: "One sees few signs of a great and united popular wave that will sweep all the bad and stupid men out of office."⁸ Heroes were few, novelist Meredith Nicholson regretted. "In the vast company of rogues, cowards, villains and plain crooks," he wrote in 1928, "the spectator almost despairs of finding even one figure representing virtue."⁹

As powerful as the Klan was, Indiana never was a 100% Klan state. There was always opposition, if weak and scattered. In Hartford City, supervisors of the community building, all Protestants, refused in late 1922 to permit Klan speaker Helen Jackson, posing as an "escaped nun," to voice her anti-Catholic lies because she "would create enmity between the citizens of the community." A few months later Clinton County Circuit Judge Earl Stroup, a Republican, spoke critically about the Klan at a Kiwanis Club meeting. In Michigan City the police chief publicly charged that he had been removed from his job because he refused to join the Klan. "I am eligible," he wrote in his affidavit, "but the organization is against my principles." City leaders in Logansport, Portland, Lafayette, Indianapolis, and Jeffersonville proposed anti-mask laws on the assumption that revealing identities would shrink memberships. The *Indianapolis Fiery Cross*, the Klan weekly newspaper, objected but urged marchers to lift their masks, as some

⁶ *Greensburg Daily News*, December 24, 1925; *Rushville Daily Republican*, December 26, 1925. See also Moore, *Citizen Klansmen*, 144-47.

⁷ W. D. Foulke to [Alice Stone] Blackwell, December 28, 1926, roll 8, National American Woman Suffrage Association Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. I am grateful to Nicole Etcheson for this reference. Foulke had earlier received an anonymous, threatening letter from a Klan member. *Richmond Palladium and Sun-Telegram*, December 16, 1922.

⁸ *New York Times*, October 2, 1927.

⁹ Meredith Nicholson, "Hoosier Letters and the Ku Klux Klan," *The Bookman* 67 (March 1928), 9.

proudly did when they paraded or posed for photographs. Indianapolis Mayor Lew Shank was among the most visible of Klan opponents. He sought to prohibit masked parades, ordered the arrest of *Fiery Cross* newspaper boys for inciting riots, and restricted cross burnings as a public safety measure. Voters soundly defeated Shank's gubernatorial bid in 1924. His successor in the mayor's office, elected in 1925, was fellow Republican John L. Duvall, a leading Klansman.¹⁰

ENEMY "ALIENS"

The strongest challenges came from Americans the Klan labelled as enemies. First were Catholics, the primary object of Klan intolerance in Indiana. Catholics had always known bigotry, but the Klan presented a new level at a time when American Catholics were moving toward the middle class, away from their outsider status and toward militancy in protecting their rights as Americans. That transition was anathema to the Klan. Ironically, Klan hostility may have provoked a more aggressive Catholic combativeness in asserting rights enjoyed by Methodists or Baptists. Catholics resisted, for example, when they decided to boycott the Tipton County Fair in 1923 after the announcement of "Klan Day" at which the future Klan-backed governor Ed Jackson would speak, or when the Knights of Columbus organized an Indianapolis protest that drew nearly eight hundred Catholic men.¹¹

There were individual acts of protest, as well. A Catholic farmer in Shelby County was driving his team home after a day in the fields. Noticing Klan members assembling outside a country church, the farmer unhitched his horses, smacked them on the rear, and watched with delight as they ran straight to the barn and right through the Klan gathering. For years that farmer retold his story with a chuckle.¹²

¹⁰ *South Bend News-Tribune*, October 28, 1922; Safianow, "The Klan Comes to Tipton," 220; *Garrett Clipper*, January 8, 1923; *Indianapolis Fiery Cross*, January 19, February 2, April 13, June 1, August 31, 1923; Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (New York, 1967), 151-52. For a good overview of mask laws, see David J. Goldberg, "Unmasking the Ku Klux Klan: The Northern Movement against the KKK, 1920-1925," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 15, no. 4 (Summer 1996), 32-48.

¹¹ Safianow, "The Klan Comes to Tipton," 222; Lynn Dumenil, "The Tribal Twenties: 'Assimilated' Catholics' Response to Anti-Catholicism in the 1920s," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 11, no. 1 (Fall 1991), 21-49, esp. 34.

¹² Eleanor Arnold, ed., *Buggies and Bad Times: Memories of Hoosier Homemakers* (n.p., 1985), 89.



An editorial cartoon from the Klan newspaper, the *Indianapolis Fiery Cross*, May 16, 1924. Uncle Sam paints a sign expressing the Klan's nativist opposition to "trash" immigrants from Europe.
Indiana State Library

The most consistent opposition came from the *Indiana Catholic and Record*, a statewide weekly. The *Record's* Irish-born editor, Joseph Patrick O'Mahony, was a sharp-minded newspaper veteran. O'Mahony jumped into the 1924 political campaigns to denounce Republican/Klan ties. He also charged Democrats with spinelessness for not taking a stronger stand against Klan candidates. By ducking the issue, he asked, were they "looking for the support of the KKK?" O'Mahony partnered with the Catholic Information Bureau, formed in Indianapolis in summer 1924, to buy ads in newspapers across the state to counter Klan propaganda. When Governor Jackson spoke in Noblesville, the Information Bureau placed an ad in the local newspaper denouncing him. The bureau also focused on rebutting the fake stories told by Helen Jackson when she spoke in Indianapolis just before the 1924 elections.¹³

¹³ *Indiana Catholic and Record*, July 28, 1922; Safianow "You Can't Burn History," 120. See also *Indiana Catholic and Record*, November 3, 1922, November 2, 1923; *Brookville Democrat*, October

Another challenge came from the American Unity League, based in Chicago, but with widespread operations in Indiana. The Indianapolis AUL chapter had formed after the Ancient Order of Hibernians sponsored a St. Patrick's Day celebration in 1923. Their keynote speaker was AUL president Patrick O'Donnell, a feisty lawyer who vigorously attacked the Klan and reveled in his moniker "Mad Pat." Under O'Donnell's leadership, the AUL pushed for city ordinances to prohibit marchers from wearing masks, sponsored its own speakers, and kept up steady reporting on Klan activities. Although Catholics predominated, AUL activists included African Americans, Jews, and white Protestants. The organization moved toward positions that would later be labeled multicultural, as it advocated for full rights and respect for all Americans. President O'Donnell told a large Fort Wayne audience that the "fight against the klan was not a Jewish fight or a negro's fight or a Catholic's fight, but an American fight."¹⁴

AUL's newspaper was titled *Tolerance*. Harsh criticism, satire, and humor filled its pages as it mocked those it labelled "Koo Koo's" and attacked dupes, fools, and knaves posing in "the shroud of the terrorist and the mask of the highwayman."¹⁵ The newspaper's most sensational tactic was to obtain and publish lists of Klan members, under headings such as "Who's Who in Nightgowns." On April Fool's Day 1923, thieves broke into Klan offices in Indianapolis and departed with names of 12,208 local Klan members. *Tolerance* began printing the names, adding business affiliations and addresses. Later the organization sold a separate printing of the roster for twenty-five cents.¹⁶ The publication also revealed names of Protestant ministers who had become Klansmen. As names from other towns joined the Indianapolis list, some embarrassed Hoosiers quietly dropped their membership. *Fiery Cross* editors expressed outrage and attacked *Tolerance's* reporting as evidence of Catholic deceit.¹⁷

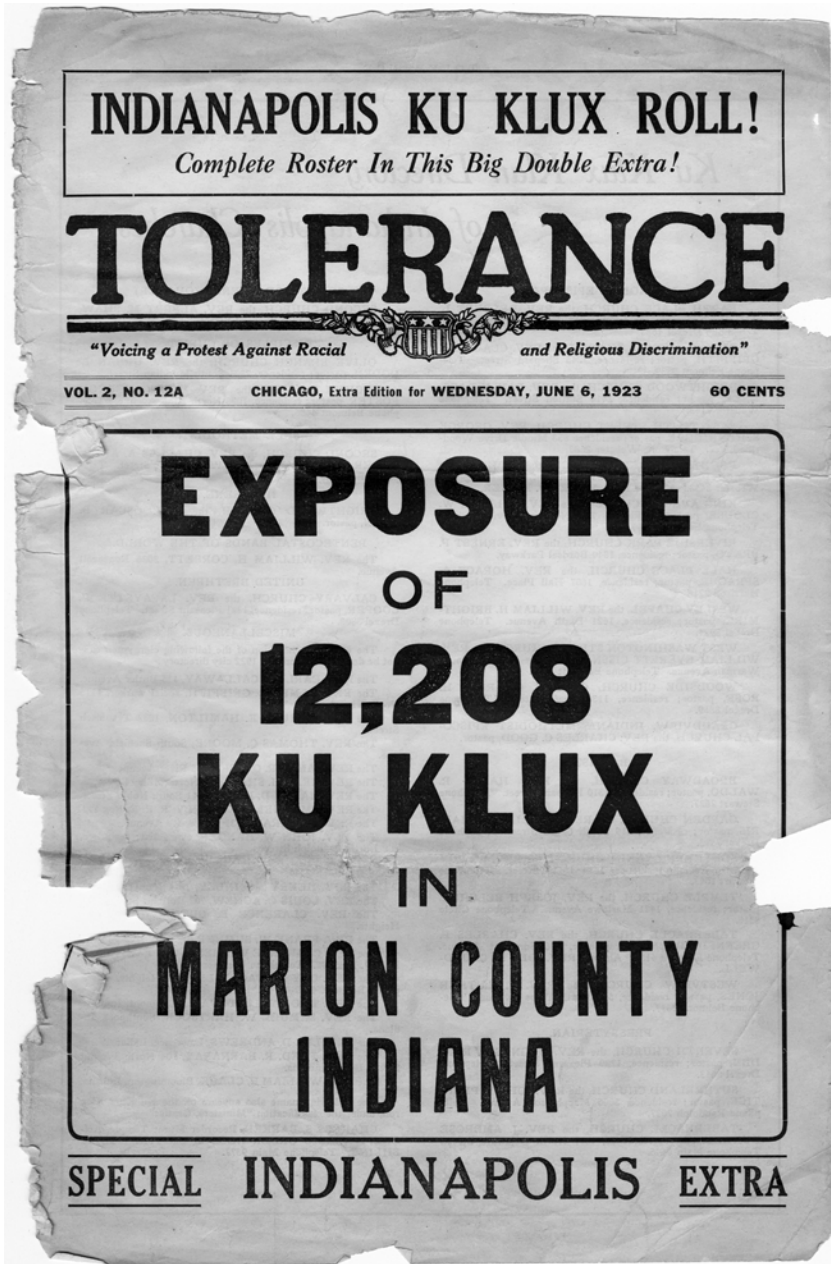
16, 1924. A good account is Joseph M. White, "The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana in the 1920s as Viewed by the Indiana Catholic and Record," (M.A. thesis, 1974), Butler University Graduate Thesis Collection, <https://digitalcommons.butler.edu/grtheses/24>.

¹⁴ *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, October 1, 1923.

¹⁵ Quoted in Lutholtz, *Grand Dragon*, 124.

¹⁶ *Tolerance*, December 23, 1923, April 20, 1924. See also White, "The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana," 35-36.

¹⁷ Lutholtz, *Grand Dragon*, 65-72; Deborah Ballee Markisohn, "Ministers of the Klan: Indianapolis Clergy Involvement with the 1920s Ku Klux Klan," (M.A. thesis, Indiana University, 1992); John A. Davis, "The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1920-1930: An Historical Study" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, Evanston, IL. 1966), 51-54; *Indianapolis Fiery Cross*, April 6, April 27, 1923.



Anti-Klan Catholics published the weekly newspaper *Tolerance*, which, in one of its most sensational tactics, obtained and published the names of Klan members. The list for Marion County appeared in the June 6, 1923, issue.

John Martin Smith Collection, William H. Willennar Genealogy Center, Elkhart Public Library

South Bend's large Catholic and immigrant population made the northern Indiana city one of the most hostile to the Klan. A chapter of the American Unity League was active in distributing *Tolerance* and organizing speakers. The heads of the local American Legion and the Masons publicly denounced the Klan, as did the *South Bend Tribune*.¹⁸

The most remarkable event in South Bend came when the Klan gathered on May 17, 1924, to celebrate victories in the spring primary election. News spread to the University of Notre Dame campus, and students began to stir. University President Rev. Matthew Walsh ordered students to remain on campus, deploying the caution that often marked university administrators in such situations. Students disobeyed. Hundreds sprinted toward downtown, where robed Klansmen were directing traffic toward the rally site at Island Park. Students began to send cars in the wrong directions. They marched to Klan headquarters at the corner of Michigan and Wayne Streets, where the Klan's third-floor office window displayed a large electric cross with red light bulbs. A barrel of potatoes sitting in a street-level grocery provided the ammunition to throw at the cross. An oft-told story, likely apocryphal, is that when only one red bulb remained lit Notre Dame quarterback Harry Stuhldreher, soon to be famous as one of "the four horsemen," grabbed a potato, took aim, and threw a touchdown pass. Raucous cheers erupted. As D. C. Stephenson arrived to complain about violence, students proudly displayed tattered robes and hoods they had pulled off Klan members. Perhaps Father Walsh smiled as he decided not to punish his rowdy students. There was some embarrassment over the stereotypes of young Irish men fighting in the streets with potatoes, but Father Walsh in 1927 approved the university's new official nickname, "the fighting Irish."¹⁹

For weeks afterward the *Fiery Cross* featured the Notre Dame student "riot" as prime example of Catholic violence. It was "rancid hatred in its worst form," performed by a "cursing mob of students who showed no respect for age or sex." One headline shrieked "Trampling of Flags and Tearing Clothes from Protestant Women."²⁰

¹⁸ Jill Suzanne Nevel, "Fiery Crosses and Tempers: The Ku Klux Klan in South Bend, Indiana, 1923-1926" (Senior thesis, Princeton University, 1977), 60-61.

¹⁹ Todd Tucker, *Notre Dame vs. The Klan: How the Fighting Irish Defeated the Ku Klux Klan* (Chicago, 2004), 145-62; Jill Weiss Simins, "Integrity on the Gridiron Part One: Opposition to the Klan at Notre Dame," November 19, 2019, Indiana Historical Bureau, Indiana History Blog, <https://blog.history.in.gov/integrity-on-the-gridiron-part-one-notre-dame-opposition-to-the-klan/>; Brendan O'Shaughnessy, "A Clash over Catholicism," at <https://www.nd.edu/stories/a-clash-over-catholicism/>. The argument for more scholarship on the Klan and Catholic Universities is in William Vance Trollinger, "Hearing the Silence: The University of Dayton, the Ku Klux Klan, and Catholic Universities and Colleges in the 1920s," *American Catholic Studies* 124 (Spring 2013), 1-21.

²⁰ *Indianapolis Fiery Cross*, May 23, June 13, 1924.

Other than the Notre Dame “riot,” there are few known instances of violence directed against the Klan in Indiana. Elsewhere in the North violence did occur. One historian has concluded that in some communities “anti-Klan forces used far more violence—and quite often very effectively—than the Klan had ever employed.” Perhaps Hoosiers really were friendlier, or perhaps Klan opponents concluded that violence was an impractical response when so many fellow citizens owned white robes.²¹

Far smaller in numbers, Hoosier Jews had fewer weapons than Catholics. The *Indiana Jewish Chronicle* was traditionally apolitical, but the Klan’s anti-Semitism pushed it toward sharper reporting that included urging readers to vote Democratic in the 1924 elections. Acts of resistance and protest took place across the state. In Terre Haute, Rabbi Joseph Fink refused the Klan’s demand that he resign from the community welfare league. Fink went so far as to charge cowardice against Klan members who hid their faces while they claimed the high ground of American patriotism. Fort Wayne’s Rabbi Aaron L. Weinstein spoke of America’s founding ideals as he read from hate letters sent to him by Klan members. In Hammond, where the Klan was very active, a Reform Jewish congregation organized a public lecture series that often focused on tolerance. One speaker, a Lutheran minister from Chicago, called out the Klan as he dismissed claims of a pure white race and asserted that “America always has been a great melting pot.”²² Responding to Klan boycotts of their businesses, Jews and Catholics in Muncie agreed to cooperate among themselves.²³

In Indianapolis, when threatened with a Klan boycott of their south-side American Grocery, Louis and Rose Shapiro defiantly changed the name to “Shapiro’s Kosher Foods” and attached a large Star of David to the front of the building.²⁴ Morris Feuerlicht, a widely respected Indianapolis rabbi, became one of the Klan’s most outspoken adversaries, using wit and satire to make eloquent strikes against hatred and exclusion. Two Jewish attorneys were among leaders of the Indianapolis chapter of the American

²¹ Goldberg, “Unmasking the Ku Klux Klan,” 42. Goldberg singles out for violence against the Klan the tristate area of the West Virginia panhandle, western Pennsylvania, and eastern Ohio, where traditions of labor strikes and violence were likely stronger than in Indiana.

²² Arthur S. Meyers, “A Sturdy Core of Thinking, Fact Seeking Citizens’: The Open Forum Movement and Public Learning in Terre Haute and Hammond, Indiana, in the 1920s,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 99 (December 2003), 360, 366; Peggy Seigel, “A ‘Fearless Editor’ in a Changing World: Fort Wayne’s Jesse Greene,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 113 (December 2017), 335.

²³ Dwight W. Hoover, “To Be a Jew in Middletown: A Muncie Oral History Project,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 81 (June 1985), 155.

²⁴ Douglas Wissing, “‘Cook Good, Serve Generously, Price Modestly’: The Shapiro’s Story,” *Traces of Indiana and Midwestern History* 21 (Fall 2009), 11.



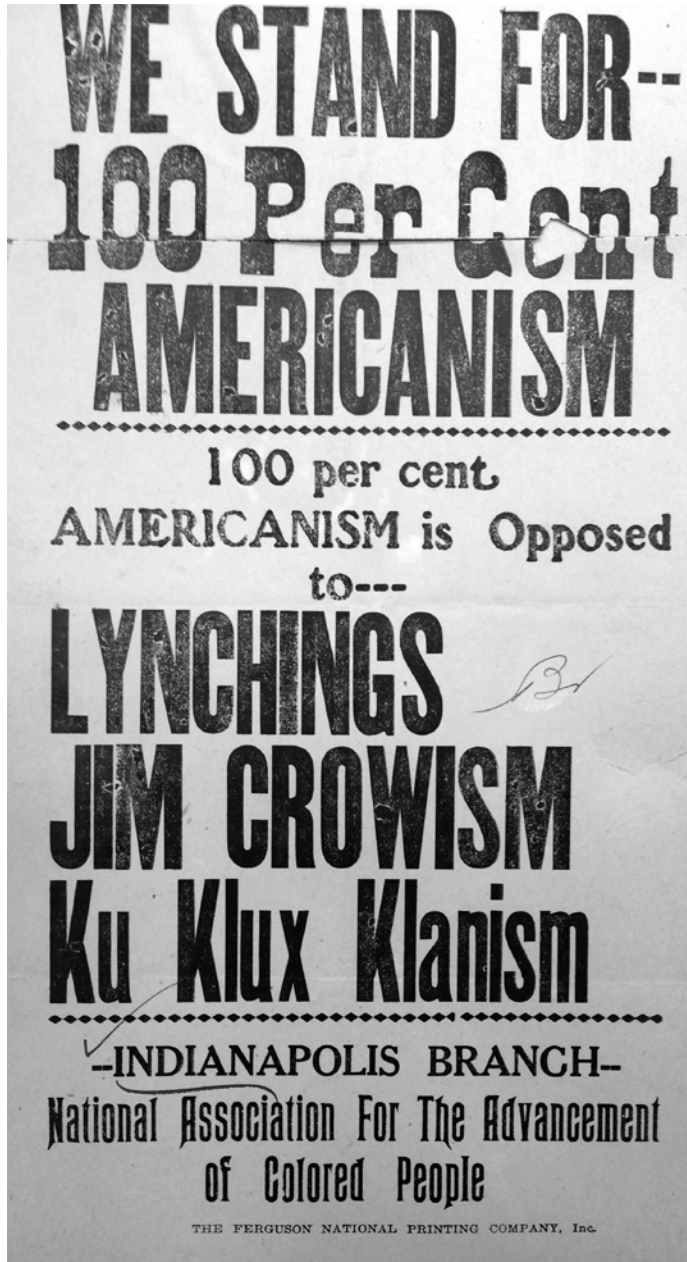
Indianapolis Rabbi Morris M. Feuerlicht was an outspoken challenger of the Klan.

Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis

Unity League, and attorney Bess Robbins started a campaign to ban sales of the *Fiery Cross* on city streets. Other Indianapolis Jews decided against such public protest and instead intensified displays of their commitment to American ideals. They checked to make sure that Jewish donations to the Community Fund were at high levels, that sacramental wine was distributed only to synagogue members (not to outsiders seeking a drink), and that the B'nai B'rith lodge ended meetings with singing of the "Star Spangled Banner." The Jewish Welfare Association of Indianapolis made Americanization a primary goal that included teaching proper behavior to young immigrants tempted to visit dance halls and pool rooms.²⁵

African Americans had their own newspapers to report on Klan activities. In Indianapolis the *Freeman* and the *Recorder* frequently attacked the organization. Of long-term importance were those black lawyers, ministers, club women, and other community leaders who organized branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. New NAACP branches across the state used the Klan threat to spur membership

²⁵Judith E. Endelman, *The Jewish Community of Indianapolis: 1849 to the Present* (Bloomington, Ind., 1984), 118-26; Richard Moss, "Creating a Jewish American Identity in Indianapolis: The Jewish Welfare Federation and the Regulation of Leisure, 1920-1934," *Indiana Magazine of History* 103 (March 2007), 39-65.



Klan strength stimulated branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People to organize and protest across the state. This Indianapolis branch poster challenged the Klan's definition of 100% Americanism.

Papers of the NAACP, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress

recruitment. In Indianapolis and Muncie, branch leaders sought to keep the Klan from meeting or parading. In Indianapolis, Terre Haute, Gary, and South Bend, NAACP branches began legal action to challenge segregation. And they began to question the decades of black voter commitment to the Republican Party, now so closely identified with the Klan. The Indianapolis branch published a special newspaper during the 1924 political campaign, which, for example, advertised an “Anti-Klan Meeting” with several ministers speaking. The national NAACP paid close attention to Indiana and urged black Hoosiers to vote Democratic in 1924, which they did, in a sharp break with the past. Such glimmers of light did not signal a new dawn. Not until the late 1940s did the NAACP make significant progress toward legal equality in Indiana.²⁶

“MAINSTREAM” CHALLENGES

Most of Indiana’s Protestant denominational organizations did not publicly condemn the Klan. In their state conventions Methodists, Baptists, and Disciples of Christ chose silence.²⁷ The Indianapolis Episcopal Diocese did approve a resolution strongly critical of the Klan, as did the city’s Christian Ministers Association. Some congregations were deeply divided; some individual ministers stood up. Robert Little of Fort Wayne’s First Presbyterian Church spoke against the Klan at the local Optimist Club and received hearty applause. In Tipton County, Presbyterian minister J. J. Ashenhurst accused the Klan of un-American and un-Christian behavior. In Kokomo’s First Christian Church lay leaders refused to participate in a Klan funeral unless attendees lifted their masks. At Indianapolis’s Englewood Christian Church Frank E. Davison opposed the decision of lay leaders to allow the

²⁶ Harry D. Evans to Walter White, March 21, 1922, G. W. Langston to William Pickens, September 26, 1924, *Indianapolis Informer*, October 11, 1924, all in Part I: G63, Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. (hereafter NAACP Papers); A. Wayne Brooks to Robert W. Bagnall, July 18, 1922, Part I: G65, NAACP Papers; *Tolerance*, July 20, 1924; Emma Lou Thornbrough and Lana Ruegamer, *Indiana Blacks in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington, Ind., 2000), 49; William W. Giffin, “The Political Realignment of Black Voters in Indianapolis, 1924,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 79 (June 1983), 133-66; James H. Madison, “‘Gone to Another Meeting’: Willard B. Ransom and Early Civil Rights Leadership,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 114 (September 2018), 165-201.

²⁷ Indiana Methodists eventually offered some response to the intolerance of the 1920s. At the Indiana Annual Conference in 1930 the Committee on Memorials passed a resolution that “‘Jim-Crowism’ in our country at the present time seems utterly inconsistent with our ideals and teaching of brotherhood.” It was time for Methodists, the resolution concluded, to “lead the way to practical brotherhood by squaring our practices to our preachments.” *Minutes of the Ninety-Ninth Session, Indiana Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church Held at New Albany, Indiana, September 24-29, 1930* (Cincinnati, Ohio, 1930), 378-79. I am grateful to Philip Amerson for this reference.

Klan to meet in his church. Davison was among several ministers forced to resign. In rural Parke County an anti-Klan group calling themselves “The Protestant Committee of One Hundred” planned a community discussion of the issues that so angered local Klan members.²⁸

Labor unions were split as well. The Indianapolis Central Labor Union voted to condemn the Klan, a decision that caused the carpenters and typographical unions to withdraw from the body.²⁹ The head of Evansville’s Central Labor Union urged his members to “abandon religious prejudices and racial hatred.”³⁰ The United Mine Workers gathered at their 1924 convention in Indianapolis to debate whether to allow members to join the Klan. More than thirty Indiana miners’ locals petitioned to permit membership. Although the majority of delegates voted to continue to bar Klansmen, miners in southwestern Indiana joined in large numbers, especially after Stephenson organized a formal recruiting initiative in the minefields.³¹

Military veterans shared the Klan’s emphasis on intense patriotism but were less committed to other goals, particularly prohibition, considering the alcohol consumed at some Legion posts. Still, up to fifty percent of Legionnaires may have joined the Klan. The Legion’s annual state convention in 1924 turned down a censorship resolution. Some local Legionnaires did repudiate the Klan, but most were like Paul V. McNutt. An Indiana University law professor who was elected state Legion commander in 1926, McNutt remained silent even though he believed the Klan was “pernicious.” Silence was the road to victory. Democrat McNutt was elected Indiana governor in 1932.³²

²⁸ *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, January 3, 1923; Safianow, “The Klan Comes to Tipton,” 220; Frank Elon Davison, *Thru the Rear-View Mirror* (St Louis, Mo., 1955), 75-79; Meyers, “A Sturdy Core of Thinking, Fact Seeking Citizens,” 360; James H. Madison, *Indiana through Tradition and Change: A History of the Hoosier State and Its People, 1920-1945* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1982), 53; *Indianapolis Fiery Cross*, February 22, 29, 1924.

²⁹ *Indiana Catholic and Record*, August 10, 1923; Richard Morris Clutter, “The Indiana American Legion, 1919-1960,” (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, Bloomington, 1974), 85-89.

³⁰ Quoted in Samuel W. White, *Fragile Alliances: Labor and Politics in Evansville, Indiana, 1919-1955* (Westport, Ct., 2005), 60.

³¹ Thomas R. Pegram, “The Ku Klux Klan, Labor, and the White Working Class during the 1920s,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 17 (April 2018), 373-96; White, *Fragile Alliances*, 54-56, 177-79. White acknowledges the challenges of explaining the Klan’s appeal to union members and working-class Hoosiers, including in cities such as Evansville where there was also support for Socialist Party candidates in the immediate postwar years. Relevant to the uncertainty is the paucity of good scholarship on Indiana labor history.

³² Clutter, “The Indiana American Legion,” 54; Dean J. Kotlowski, *Paul V. McNutt and the Age of FDR* (Bloomington, Ind., 2015), 83-84, 90-91.



Kokomo lawyer Conrad Wolf, left, strongly condemned the Klan at the Indiana Bar Association's annual meeting at West Baden in 1923. Wolf is shown here with entrepreneur Elwood Haynes, for whom he worked as a patent attorney.

Howard County Historical Society, Kokomo

Lawyers were potential Klan adversaries, since they had a sense of the rule of law and the eyes to see Klan corruption in local communities. Still, lawyers worked in hometown environments where rocking any boat could be costly. The most important action came from the Indiana Bar Association. At its annual meeting at West Baden on July 6, 1923, delegates debated a resolution to denounce the Klan. A distinguished lawyer from Kokomo, Conrad Wolf, attacked the Klan, even though he was a Republican who favored strict enforcement of Prohibition. Wolf won enthusiastic applause when he argued that “we must get rid of the spirit of hate. What family or what community can exist where every member hates each other?” The lawyers unanimously adopted a resolution of condemnation of the Klan and its “decrees of secret tribunals the members of which conceal their identity behind robes and masks.” Always eager to play the victim card, the *Fiery Cross* charged that the state bar association was “condemning 400,000 Anglo-Saxon Protestant residents of Indiana.”³³

³³ *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, July 6, 1923; *Indianapolis Fiery Cross*, July 13, 1923; *Kokomo Tribune*, January 12, 16, 1929.

Most literary notables remained silent. Indiana had a deserved reputation as a home of writers, a proud Hoosier Athens where in the late nineteenth century a so-called golden age of literature had begun. In 1928 one of the best-known of many called out his fellow authors. Meredith Nicholson was a widely respected, best-selling novelist and essayist (and a Democrat). His attack was gently written, in the Hoosier tradition, but he named names of those “poets, tellers of tales, and philosophers who had fled from the turmoil to the peace of the hills,” including Booth Tarkington, George Ade, Theodore Dreiser, and William Herschell. About the time of Nicholson’s challenge, Tarkington turned away from an opportunity to condemn the Klan when he told a Boston reporter that “the rank and file of the Indiana Klan were good honest citizens.” A recent critic has written that Tarkington “was almost pathologically nonconfrontational,” a trait not uncommon among Hoosiers that doubtless contributed to the silence.³⁴

NEWSPAPERS MOVE TOWARD LIGHT

Like their readers, newspapers were mostly supportive or silent. Many editors, according to distinguished Indiana-born journalist Lowell Mellett, “content themselves with careful avoidance of the issue.”³⁵ Almost a year after Madge Oberholtzer’s death, Nicholson lamented privately that “our newspapers have been markedly timid about denouncing it. There’s a fear upon the state.”³⁶ The state’s press offered few profiles in courage.

Exceptions to press sluggishness included the *South Bend Tribune*, the *Vincennes Commercial*, the *Indianapolis Times*, and the *Muncie Post-Democrat*. Both of Fort Wayne’s two largest newspapers, the *News-Sentinel* and the *Journal-Gazette*, attacked the Klan. *Journal-Gazette* editor Jesse Green was especially vigilant. A Republican, Methodist, and Mason, like many Klan members, Green consistently condemned the Klan as “un-American.” Also writing critical editorials in the *Journal-Gazette* was Claude Bowers, who would become a popular historian and leading Democrat. In fall 1923, Bowers wrote that “when race is arrayed against race, and religion against religion, when neighbors become enemies because they

³⁴ Nicholson, “Hoosier Letters and the Ku Klux Klan,” 7; *Boston Globe*, May 19, 1928; Robert Gottlieb, “The Rise and Fall of Booth Tarkington,” *New Yorker* (November 11, 2019), at <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/11/11/the-rise-and-fall-of-booth-tarkington>.

³⁵ Lowell Mellett, “Klan and Church,” *Atlantic Monthly* 132 (November 1923), 9.

³⁶ Meredith Nicholson to Claude G. Bowers, March 9, 1926, Claude G. Bowers Papers, II, Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington. See also *New York Times*, October 14, 1926.

worship in different churches, and when our people cease to be a people and become a miserable hotch-potch of quarreling factions we cease to be the America that was born of the Revolution.”³⁷

The *Indianapolis News* also censured, at first. An editorial in April 1922 called out the Klan as “adult boys in grotesque masks who seek to exploit a primitive fear of ghosts.”³⁸ But as Klan strength increased the paper backed off, as did most others across the state. Aware of the importance of a good press, the Klan followed up on damaging reporting by organizing phone calls from members to threaten cancellation of subscriptions and removal of advertising. One can imagine the deliberations in smoke-filled newspaper offices as to how to cover the story. Many papers offered only short factual accounts of a Klan rally or parade. Some, such as the *Greencastle Herald*, did not mention the Klan even in reporting Stephenson’s trial. Many reported Klan events as just another aspect of normal daily life.³⁹

The *Fiery Cross* offered readers detailed reports of what it considered to be the outrageous lies of the mainstream press. When the *Indianapolis Times* ran a front-page editorial titled “Stop the Klan” during the 1924 fall election, the *Fiery Cross* reprinted the entire page of “anti-Protestant venom” as a springboard to attacks on the *Times*.⁴⁰ In a critical essay in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Lowell Mellett reported that Hoosier friends told him that when a Catholic baby boy was born a rifle was hidden in the church, ready for the uprising to come. The *Fiery Cross* dismissed Mellett’s article as “a direct assault on Hoosierdom” from the “effete east.”⁴¹

The most cutting attacks came from the *Muncie Post-Democrat*. Editor George Dale was a left-leaning Democratic crusader who attacked bootleggers

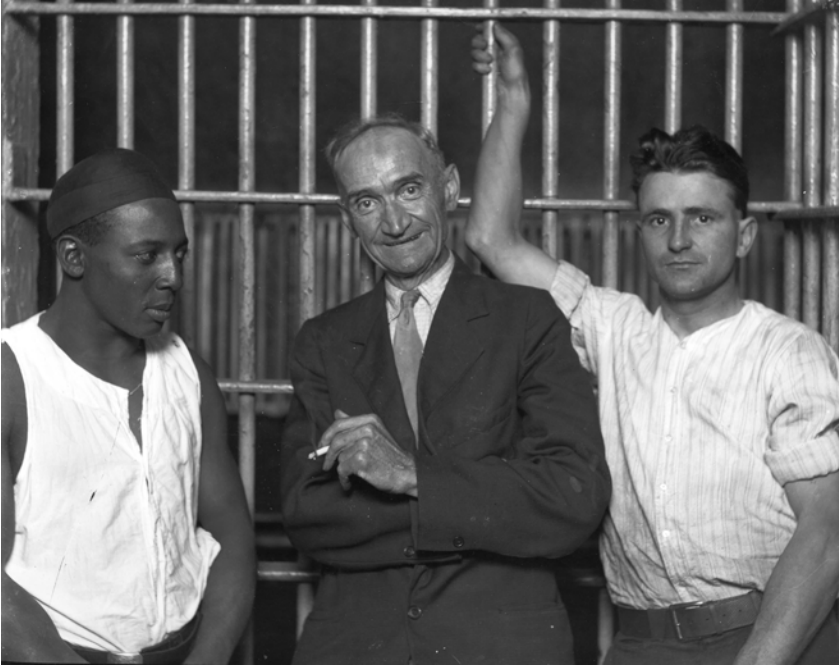
³⁷ Quoted in Seigel, “A ‘Fearless Editor’ in a Changing World,” 333. See also Peter Sehlinger and Holman Hamilton, *Spokesman for Democracy: Claude G. Bowers, 1878-1958* (Indianapolis, Ind., 2000), 92; Claude G. Bowers, *The Tragic Era: The Revolution after Lincoln* (Cambridge, Mass., 1929). There is irony in Bowers’s popular, pro-Southern book on Reconstruction, about which one scholar has written: “More than any other book in the late 1920s, *The Tragic Era* helped the Democratic Party keep the segregationists in power for another generation.” Ibram X. Kendi, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* (New York, 2016), 331.

³⁸ *Indianapolis News*, April 26, 1922.

³⁹ Testimony of Hugh Emmons, February 20, 1928, *State of Indiana v. The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan*, p. 121, Ku Klux Klan Files, Office of the Indiana Attorney General, Indiana State Archives, Indiana Archives and Records Administration, Indianapolis; Bradford W. Scharlott, “The Hoosier Newsman and the Hooded Order: Indiana Press Reaction to the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s” (M.A. thesis, Indiana University, 1978), 54-55.

⁴⁰ *Indianapolis Fiery Cross*, September 5, November 14, 1924.

⁴¹ Mellett, “Klan and Church,” 4; *Indianapolis Fiery Cross*, November 9, 1923.



Muncie Post-Democrat newspaper editor George Dale was perhaps the most dogged of Klan critics. His attacks on Judge Clarence Dearth caused Dearth to sentence him to the Delaware County jail, where he stands in this image between two fellow prisoners.

Ball State University Archives and Special Collections

and corrupt politicians as he advocated for labor unions in a Republican-dominated city. He made enemies, enthusiastically. A showman not always committed to fact, Dale wore a hat with a hole he said had been made by a Klan bullet. Klan members bumped him on the sidewalks, and women spit on him, he claimed. He mocked the Klan with scathing front-page stories. He called out presumed members by name, labeling them “kookoos.” He identified Klan brothels, saloons, and other businesses. He accused members of cowardice and un-American behavior. Among Dale’s targets was a local judge, Clarence W. Dearth, a likely Klan member who taught the adult Bible class in the largest Methodist Church in town. Judge Dearth had Dale arrested and jailed for contempt.⁴²

⁴² *Muncie Post-Democrat*, March 7, April 4, November 14, 1924. See also Ron F. Smith, “The Klan’s Retribution Against an Indiana Editor: A Reconsideration,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 106 (December 2010), 381-400; Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (New York, 1937), 323-24; Carrolyle M. Frank, “Politics in Middletown:

Stephenson's trial and conviction gave newspaper editors vast evidence and some courage. The most prominent voice was that of Thomas H. Adams, editor of the *Vincennes Commercial*. After the Republican Editorial Association met in spring 1926 to deliberate on the Klan question, Adams led an investigation that uncovered and publicized damning evidence of corruption. Nicholson thought Adams "a broad-shouldered Saul of a man, flinging aside the frightened citizens who try to stop him," as he "lifted his voice and began saying things of profoundly disturbing import."⁴³ Old Guard Republicans tended to support Adams in hopes of ending the political chaos caused by the Klan. He won accolades from some press and party colleagues, but not all. His opponents called him a "sorehead," driven by political ambition to upset Republican leadership. His own Knox County Republican Committee expelled him from the party. A leading Republican newspaper in Hamilton County, the *Ledger*, asserted in early 1928 that, contrary to Adams's assertions, the "Hoosier state has nothing for which to apologize."⁴⁴

Adams's investigative journalism did not begin until a year after Madge Oberholtzer's death, yet even at that late date some editors ignored troubling news. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* employed an Indianapolis correspondent who surveyed the city's newspapers in fall 1926. He concluded that the *Indianapolis Times* gave full coverage to Klan corruption, but that the *Star* and *News*, both affiliated with the Republican Party, only slowly reported the details with "a tone of pronounced skepticism toward the accusations" against Stephenson, Jackson, and others. Out-of-state newspapers gave more coverage to the investigation, the *Post-Dispatch* reporter concluded.⁴⁵ As evidence grew, Harold Feightner at the *Indianapolis News* began more detailed reporting. Eventually the *Star* editors had little choice but to praise Adams for his "initiative and relentlessness that turned the light of day into the dark corners."⁴⁶

Simultaneously with the Adams investigation, the *Indianapolis Times* ramped up coverage by printing incriminating documents and blasting the

A Reconsideration of Municipal Government and Community Power in Muncie, Indiana, 1925-1935," (Ph.D. diss., Ball State University, 1974), 54-55; Stephen J. Taylor, "Koo Koo Side Lights: George Dale vs. The Klan," Hoosier State Chronicles blog, November 17, 2015, <https://blog.newspapers.library.in.gov/koo-koo-side-lights-george-dale-vs-the-klan/>. For the Indiana State Supreme Court's partial upholding of Dale's conviction, see Hugh Evander Willis "Punishment for Contempt of Court," *Indiana Law Journal* 2 (1927), Iss. 4, Article 2.

⁴³ Nicholson, "Hoosier Letters and the Ku Klux Klan," 9.

⁴⁴ *New York Times*, October 14, 1926; *Fellowship Forum*, October 23, 1926; Moore, *Citizen Klansmen*, 182, 187.

⁴⁵ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 12, 1926.

⁴⁶ *Indianapolis News*, December 9, 1927; *Indianapolis Star*, May 25, 1928.



Among the Indiana newspapers that attacked the Klan was the *Indianapolis Times*, which won a Pulitzer Prize for its reporting in 1928.

Indiana Historical Bureau, Division of the Indiana State Library

organization and its allies. In 1928 the paper and its progressive editor, Boyd Gurley, received the Pulitzer Prize for meritorious public service.⁴⁷ That national recognition remains a source of Hoosier pride to the present.

There was courage, but so much of it was limited and late. Publishers had to sell advertising and papers to the largest numbers possible. Taking stands on differences rooted deep in the state's religious, political, and social culture was not the road to profit. Among newspaper editors and reporters, as with political candidates, storekeepers, farmers, and club women, were genuine believers who saw the Klan as the way toward a greater America.

SLOW-STEPPING POLITICIANS

Politicians were torn between temptations to embrace the Klan and fears of offending anti-Klan voters. Republicans generally chose Klan support, as attentive voters learned quickly because of the printed voting instructions

⁴⁷ George E. Stevens, "Winning the Pulitzer Prize: The Indianapolis Times Battles Political Corruption, 1926-27," *Journalism History* 2 (Autumn 1975), 82-83; "Indianapolis Times," Indiana Historical Marker, <https://www.in.gov/history/markers/4115.htm>.

Klan organizers circulated to friendly organizations, including Protestant churches (sometimes placing them with Sunday School lessons). The slates identified each candidate's religion, position on prohibition, and degree of "readiness to assist in all Americanization measures." A final item listed the candidate's position on the Klan: "He is favorable," or "he is unfavorable."⁴⁸ Democrats were less enthusiastic and more conflicted. At their 1924 state party convention, delegates rejected a radical anti-Klan plank, pushed especially by Catholic Democrats, and adopted instead a moderate statement that did not mention the organization by name. Seeking Catholic, Jewish, and African American votes, however, the party agreed to "condemn the efforts of our opponents to make religion, race, color or accidental place of birth a political issue."⁴⁹

In the general elections in fall 1924, the Klan used its immense resources to back Republican candidates who best advocated Klan principles, including "white American supremacy," "exclusion of Foreign immigration," and the necessity that "only native born White American citizens be eligible to elective public office."⁵⁰ A Republican/Klan landslide victory in 1924 led to the so-called Klan legislature of 1925. The 1927 session, even after Stephenson's downfall, was paralyzed to inaction. Legislators could neither endorse nor condemn the Klan.⁵¹

Klan political power declined slowly. By fall 1928, a *New York Times* reporter claimed, "public sentiment against the Klan is so strong in Indiana that affiliation with it is now regarded as a liability."⁵² That prediction was wrong, as the November elections showed. Although deeply tainted with evidence of Klan connections and corruption, Republicans won overwhelming victories in congressional and state elections.

One of the few Republican state officials to attack the Klan was Attorney General Arthur L. Gilliom, a lawyer from South Bend. Gilliom had pushed to prevent Klan parades in his hometown but still won state office as attorney general in 1924. In early 1928 he filed suit to revoke the Klan's state charter and

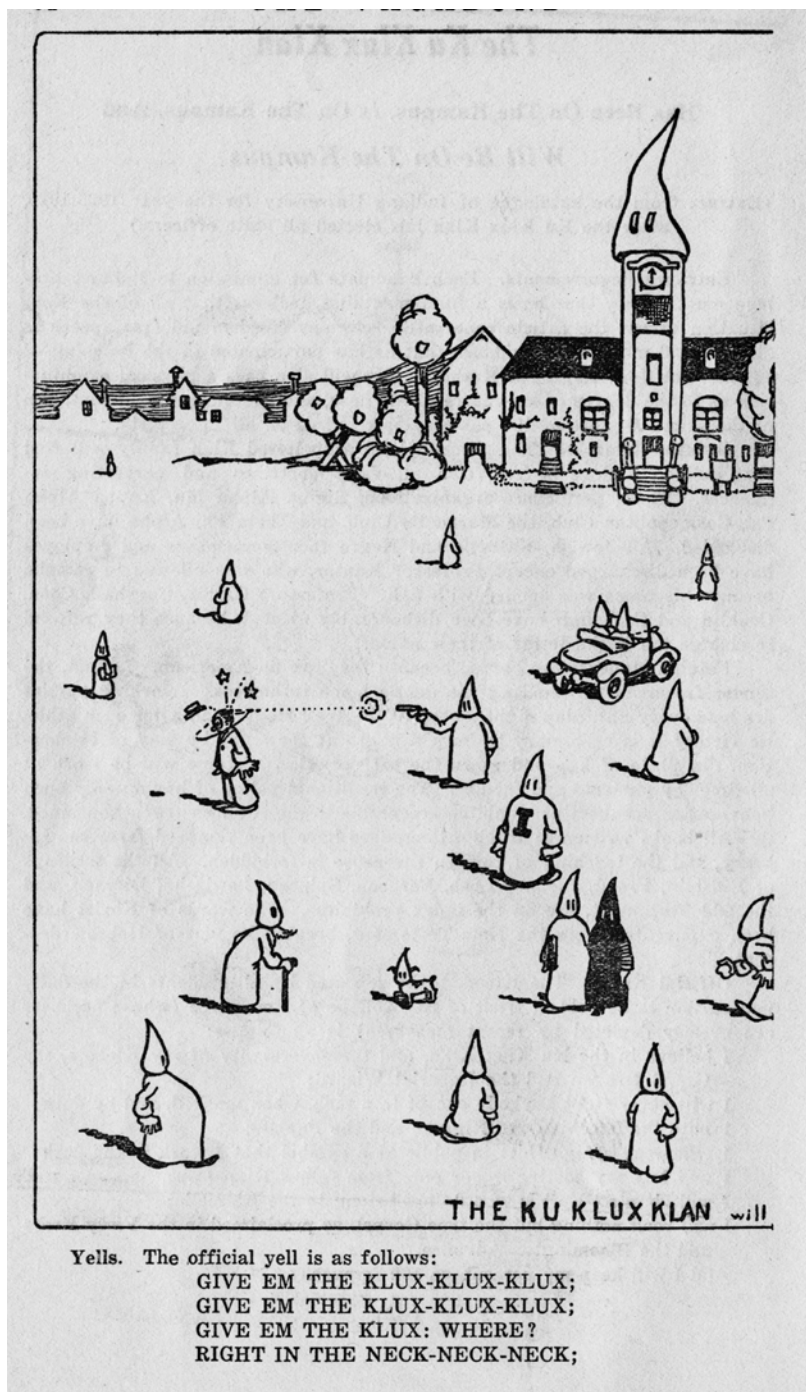
⁴⁸ Local Klan workers screened candidates to identify friends and enemies and then to prepare and distribute voter guides. Democratic candidates sometimes received favorable rankings; Republicans usually did. Madison, *Indiana through Tradition and Change*, 56-57.

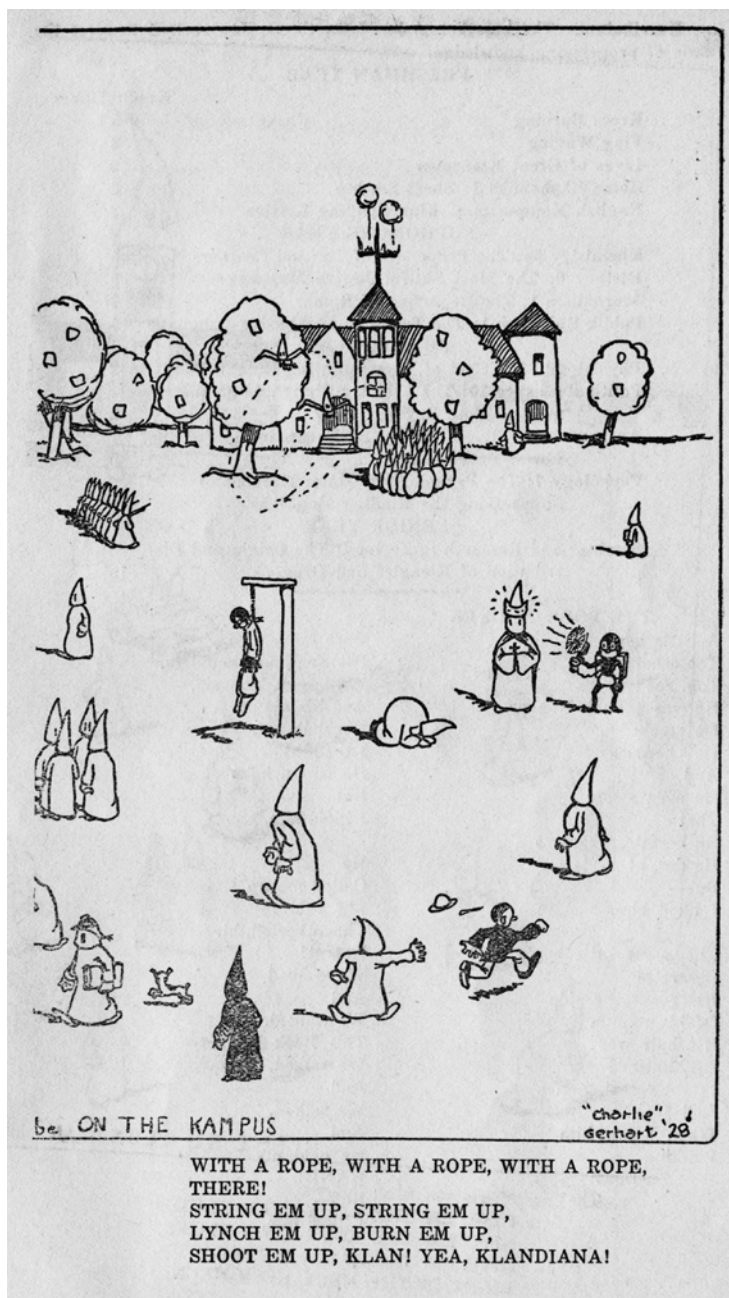
⁴⁹ *Indianapolis News*, June 6, 1924.

⁵⁰ Grand Dragon, Realm of Indiana, to My Faithful Klansmen, November 1924, I: G63, NAACP Papers.

⁵¹ *Indianapolis News*, February 26, 1927. See also Justin E. Walsh, *The Centennial History of the Indiana General Assembly* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1987), 326.

⁵² *New York Times*, October 23, 1928.





A cartoon mocking the Klan appeared in a satirical Indiana University student publication, *The Vagabond*, in October 1924.

Indiana University Office of University Archives and Records Management

then began to gather testimony from Stephenson and his associates. Running for a United States Senate seat in 1928, Gilliom increased his attack on the Klan and also the Indiana Anti-Saloon League, charging both as “secret and super-government dictatorships.” Voters soundly rejected his Senate bid.⁵³

The Democratic state platform of 1928 did point to the “debauchery of those in power” and promised that the party would “purge the state government of the slime and corruption that has caused self-respecting Hoosiers to hang their heads in shame.”⁵⁴ Voters were unconvinced. The 1928 campaign released another round of anti-Catholicism directed at Democratic presidential candidate Alfred E. Smith, a wet Catholic from New York City. Some communities witnessed cross burnings in protest of Smith’s candidacy. When the candidate entered Indiana from Ohio he looked out the train window to glimpse a fiery cross welcoming him. One Democratic leader complained to a Columbia City audience that “the people who are decrying Al Smith’s religion have none of their own, or they would not be intolerant.”⁵⁵

If there was a Klan political death notice, it came with the municipal elections in 1929. National columnist Bruce Catton concluded that the vote “marked the final passing of the Ku Klux Klan as a power in Indiana.”⁵⁶ Voters turned away from candidates with any taint of Klan connection and from Republicans generally. Two-thirds of Indiana towns voted Democrats into office. Eight of the state’s largest cities replaced Republican with Democratic mayors, electing even newspaper crusader George Dale in Muncie. In Evansville, Democrats finally gained office. Republicans had won earlier in the decade with hefty Klan support, but despite Republican/Klan promises, brothels, saloons, and corruption continued to flourish. Experts claimed that the 1929 local elections gave “the first open opportunity of Hoosier voters to register their sentiments concerning the wave of political corruption that followed the Ku Klux Klan regime.”⁵⁷ Perhaps Al Smith’s absence made it easier to vote Democratic, perhaps Hoosiers at long last had had enough.

⁵³ Ann Gilliom Verbeek, “The League and the Law: Arthur L. Gilliom and the Problem of Due Process in Prohibition-Era Indiana,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 107 (December 2011), 289-326.

⁵⁴ Indiana Democratic State Platform, 1928, *Indiana State Platforms*, I.

⁵⁵ *Huntington Press*, November 3, 1928. See also Madison, *Indiana through Tradition and Change*, 71-72; Safianow, “The Klan Comes to Tipton,” 227; Andrew E. Stoner, *Campaign Crossroads: Presidential Politics in Indiana from Lincoln to Obama* (Indianapolis, Ind., 2017), 221.

⁵⁶ *Columbus Republic*, November 29, 1929. Bruce Catton became a noted Civil War historian.

⁵⁷ *Greenfield Daily Reporter*, November 6, 1929. See White, *Fragile Alliances*, 59-68; Madison, *Indiana through Tradition and Change*, 73; *Greencastle Herald*, May 8, 1929; *New York Times*, November 10, 1929.

DEAD AND GONE?

Hoosiers remained anxious that a revived Klan would march again around Indiana courthouse squares. Rallies and meetings continued in Kokomo, for example, where the local Klavern, named in honor of Nathan Hale, purchased Malfalfa Park to hold rallies.⁵⁸ In Noblesville a new organization, the Junior Order of United American Mechanics, formed in 1929 with membership criteria and ideals similar to those of the Klan.⁵⁹ Such sporadic revivals fizzled as the Great Depression deepened.

If by 1930 the Klan seemed dead, the beliefs that built it remained. Returning to Muncie in the mid-1930s for a ten-year follow-up to their classic book, *Middletown*, Robert and Helen Lynd found divisions of race and religion less sharp than in 1925 but still sufficient to constitute “tinder ready for kindling if and when Middletown wants a bonfire to burn a scapegoat.”⁶⁰ According to many white Americans across the state and nation, immigrants remained a threat, even if the 1924 Klan-backed National Origins Act had severely restricted entry into the country. Jews and Catholics were still the “others,” not 100% Americans, perhaps not even pure white. African Americans remained second-class citizens, enduring intense discrimination and segregation everywhere, from restaurants to basketball courts to factories to schools. Hollywood movies, along with alcohol, continued to lure good people toward bad choices (even with the Klan’s 1925 Bone Dry law on the books, until the Great Depression and Franklin D. Roosevelt ended that battle). Public schools still needed more Protestant religious instruction and more American flags. White, native-born Protestants needed to remain vigilant and militant.

As the 1920s ended, men and women dumped their robes into attic trunks to be discovered years later by perplexed children and grandchildren.⁶¹ Indianapolis newspaper reporter Harold Feightner recalled that “as the lights were turned on again, few would admit, even sheepishly, they ever had belonged to the Klan.”⁶² A silence fell in the 1930s as Hoosiers pretended the Klan had passed away and left behind no meaningful consequences.

⁵⁸ *Kokomo Tribune*, November 20, 1929; *Fellowship Forum*, August 11, September 1, 1928, June 29, 1929; Allen Safianow, “‘Konklave in Kokomo’ Revisited,” *The Historian* 50, no. 3 (May 1988), 66. For an example of fear of a Klan return, see Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown in Transition*, 443.

⁵⁹ *Noblesville Ledger*, December 4, 1928, April 4, 1929. I am grateful to David Heighway for this reference.

⁶⁰ Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown in Transition*, 462-65.

⁶¹ For an excellent meditation on discovering Klan photographs in family papers, see Susan Neville, “Into the Fire,” *Ploughshares Solos* 7, No. 6 (2019).

⁶² Harold Feightner, interview with Thomas Krasean, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis, 1968, p. 61.

One of the Klan's leading ministers was Aubrey H. Moore, pastor of First Christian Church in Noblesville. Reporting his death in 1938, the local newspaper had nothing to say about the Klan. Rather, laudatory accounts of Moore's ministry included a resolution by the Noblesville Ministerial Association praising his "lofty moral dignity and character, high ideals, and worthy conceptions of his duty toward God and man as a citizen, a Christian gentleman, and a preacher."⁶³

Across Indiana the story of the Klan was willfully forgotten in gestures toward healing. Forgetting might bring a peace and absolution that made apologies unnecessary.⁶⁴ Even historians ducked the subject into the 1980s.⁶⁵ A pioneering exhibit that opened in 1980 at the Allen County-Fort Wayne Museum dared to include a Klan robe but only after cautious planning. At the dawn of the third decade of the twenty-first century, only a very few references to the Klan are found on the nearly five hundred official state historical markers.⁶⁶

The myths endured. The Klan was a fluke. The decline was rapid and complete when the wickedness of the Grand Dragon was exposed in that majestic Noblesville courtroom. According to the *Indiana Catholic and Record* "when the worst is said it was only a passing nightmare inspired by a circus parade of dupes led by artful dodgers."⁶⁷ Dupes and artful dodgers became the standard memory. In this widely accepted fairytale the Klan had never represented the real Indiana. It was unfair that the state's reputation suffered. Gestures toward polishing that reputation accompanied denials.

⁶³ *Noblesville Ledger*, December 7, 1938. See also Safianow "You Can't Burn History," 136.

⁶⁴ For memories of the 1920s Klan in the late 1980s, see Kathleen M. Blee, "Evidence, Empathy, and Ethics: Lessons from Oral Histories of the Klan," *Journal of American History* 80, no. 2 (September 1993), 596-606.

⁶⁵ See, for example, the high school textbook, *Indiana: The Hoosier State* (Evanston, Ill., 1962), by John D. Barnhart, Donald F. Carmony, Opal M. Nichols, and Jack E. Weicker. The first two authors were members of the History Department at Indiana University Bloomington. The book avoids not only any mention of the Klan but also of African Americans. A section on "Personalities in Indiana History" spotlights fourteen Hoosiers, all white men. This narrow history was the American norm into the 1970s. For more recent interpretations in a school textbook see James H. Madison and Lee Sandweiss, *Hoosiers and the American Story* (Indianapolis, Ind., 2014), 201-207.

⁶⁶ David Crosson, "What's the Risk? Controversial Exhibits Challenge the Romantic Past," *History News* 36, no. 4 (April 1981), 19; "Indiana Historical Markers," <https://www.in.gov/history/markers.htm>. The major exception among state markers is one for the *Indianapolis Times*, which mentions the newspaper's Pulitzer Prize for reporting on the Klan. In recent years the Indiana Historical Bureau has sought to mark stories of race, gender, and ethnicity. The Klan awaits markers, which any Hoosier can propose for consideration.

⁶⁷ *Indiana Catholic and Record*, April 8, 1927, quoted in White, "The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana," 102. See also Safianow "You Can't Burn History," 143-54.

One of the more ironic came from Governor Jackson. He appointed an all-star commission to commemorate Abraham Lincoln's boyhood home in southern Indiana, a deliberate effort to purge the state of Klan odors. Soon there was "A Civic Awakening in Indiana," as the Indianapolis correspondent for the *New York Times* reported in 1930, evidenced in new highway construction, schools, parks, and a memorial to Revolutionary War hero George Rogers Clark. Klan days were gone. "A new era has dawned."⁶⁸

Myths fill the vacuum. Out of ignorance, selfishness, or malevolence some have continued to deny the past. They hold to comforting stories that celebrate only American greatness. They tell bedtime stories suitable for frightened children. Myths and denials persist, but the scent of burning crosses never goes away.

From the 1960s to the present, remnants of the 1920s Klan remain in sporadic gatherings of angry white citizens marching with Klan insignias and Confederate flags. They spray-paint Nazi swastikas on synagogues and post outrageous lies on websites. These Hoosiers include far more rubes and "unteachables" than their predecessors. With scant power they quickly attract massive opposition when they gather to rant about white racial purity, illegal immigration, welfare, abortion, and homosexuality. They can still intimidate, they can be violent, but compared to their forebears of the 1920s they are pathetic fragments.

More confusing and important are those upright citizens who deploy more subtle claims of racial and cultural supremacy, aided by leaders in silk blouses and dark suits preaching modern versions of exclusion and intolerance. Today's sophisticated versions of Klan ideals are hidden with dog whistles but the similarities are striking. One of the Klan's most popular speakers and organizers was the Quaker minister Daisy Douglas Barr. The rising tide of people of color, she warned in 1923, meant that "it will be only a few more generations until whites will be in the same position as the Indians today."⁶⁹ Immigrants flooding into the country required, a Klan leader told a Hamilton County audience in 1924, "a stone wall around the nation so tall, so deep and so strong that the scum and riff-raff of the old world cannot get into our gates."⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Keith A. Erikson, "Losing Lincoln: A Call to Commemorative Action," *Indiana Magazine of History* 105 (December 2009), 312; *New York Times*, July 6, 1930.

⁶⁹ *Rushville Republican*, March 2, 1923.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Safianow "You Can't Burn History," 128.



Since the 1960s, Indiana Klan members have tended to be among the “Unteachables.” Their focus on white supremacy is expressed in this image of a parade in Kokomo in 1980, which includes an unusual grammatical mistake on the sign “it’s nice to be white.”

Howard County Historical Society, Kokomo

The Klan story does not give comfort. It rests at the core of American history, not at the margins. My new book, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Heartland*, seeks to tell that story in honest detail, from the 1920s to the present. The first sentence reads: “The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s was as dark as the night and as American as apple pie.” It’s a hard but necessary truth. It’s also a darkness illuminated by those few who stood up in opposition a century ago.