Three Sheets to the Wind: The Klan in the Hoosier State

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The city of South Bend, Indiana, and surrounding areas have a vast and rich history filled with people from all different walks of life, cultures, religions, and beliefs. These different walks of life have shaped South Bend into the city it is today, but this is not to say that these different groups of people have always gotten along. Like many other places in the United States, hate and intolerance have been able to flourish from underneath a pointed hood. The Ku Klux Klan made themselves known throughout the state of Indiana during their resurgence in the 1920s, especially in South Bend. With South Bend being the home of Notre Dame University, a Catholic institution, the Ku Klux Klan's hatred for Catholics instilled fear and anger in many South Bend residents.

Following the end of the American Civil War in 1865 and the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, the hatred and disdain for Black people, especially in the South, was rising. According to Wyn Craig Wade in his book *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America*, "It [Ku Klux Klan] had begun in the town of Pulaski (seat of Giles County), Tennessee, sometime between Christmas 1865, and June 1866."[25] Wade even says that the original founders of the Ku Klux Klan could not remember exactly when the group was founded. The Ku Klux Klan had been molded by the rising fear of Blacks and whites mixing from the lack of slavery, keeping them divided. Especially in large slave-holding states like Tennessee, life was different with so many freed Black people now living amongst the white population.

Six Confederate veterans: James Crowe, Richard Reed, Calvin Jones, John Lester, Frank McCord, and John Kennedy, all in their twenties and well-educated for the time, returned home to Pulaski after the war ended to find there was nothing to do and no jobs

25 Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 31.

available. Wade claims there was a feeling that "...if Pulaski had had an Elks Club, the Klan would never have been born."[26] With boredom sweeping across their new, war-less lives, the Confederate veterans took it upon themselves to start their own club. When it came to the naming of their newfound group, John Kennedy proposed the idea of using *kuklos*, the Greek word for circle. James Crowe took that proposal and countered with *kuklux*, to which Kennedy added on *klan* as a nod to the men's Scotch-Irish heritage.

The men joked that the name Ku Klux Klan seemed mysterious and even occult-like. To draw on the spooky ring to their newly adopted name, the six men took white sheets and pillowcases to cover themselves as they gallivanted around town. The group decided their club's attire would be "loose-fitting white gowns, belted at the waist and decorated with meaningless occult symbols in red flannel- spangles, stars, half-moons- the less meaningful the better."[27] To finish their ensemble, the group constructed tall, cone-shaped hats out of white cloth and cardboard to completely cover their head with eye holes punched out. The men encouraged and celebrated the member who created the most outrageous getup.

Originally, when the group was formed, the men played harmless pranks on the community to rid themselves and the townsfolk of the boredom that took hold after the war ended. However, as the Ku Klux Klan grew bigger and more factions, or dens, formed, the silly and fun hazing and initiation of new members became less entertaining for the members. So, the men turned to tormenting Black citizens. These jokes were usually harmless and similar to ones pulled by slave patrols before the war. At this time, the Klan's only purpose was purely social and for amusement.

In April 1867, Frank McCord-the Grand Cyclops of the Ku Klux Klan-called all of his leaders to the Maxwell House Hotel in Nashville, Tennessee, to reorganize the Klan on paramilitary lines to "resist the evils of 'Radical Reconstruction' and keep former slaves "in

26 Wade, *The Fiery Cross, 33*.
27 Wade, *The Fiery Cross*, 33.

their place."[28] The Klan decided to take it upon themselves to protect the weak, innocent, and defenseless. Those who met the criteria were white citizens the Klan deemed in danger from the newly freed Black people. This decision quickly changed the Ku Klux Klan from a perhaps annoying but harmless group to a full-fledged hate group capable of torture and murder.

While the Klan made their presence in the South well known, their reign of terror did not last long. During his successful 1868 Presidential campaign, Ulysses S. Grant ran with the campaign slogan "Let us have peace." Both Northern and Southern voters were swayed by his campaign, thus leading to his election in November of that year. During his presidency, Grant would vie for equality amongst men, including his support for the Fifteenth Amendment, which "forbade denying suffrage anywhere in the United States on the basis of race."[29] His support that led to the passing of the amendment would be revered as his "finest hour as president." This, of course, angered the Klan, who directed their violence toward Black and Republican voters. The amendment allowed for legal action to be brought against anyone standing in the way of eligible men from voting; therefore, it allowed for legal action against violent Klansmen. In 1870, Republicans in Congress began working on legislation aimed strictly at impeding the Klan and its terror.

The Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871 came to the House of Representatives on March 29, 1871. In this bill, any U.S. citizen would be permitted to sue in a federal court those persons who had deprived him of his "rights, privileges, or immunities" guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. It also made "conspiracy to deprive one or his civil rights" a crime. Also, it would now be illegal for "two or more persons" to "conspire together or go in disguise upon the public highway or upon the premises of another" with the intent of depriving anyone of the right to vote or testify in court, or to deny anyone twenty other rights secured by

28 Michael Newton, *White Robes and Burning Crosses: A History of the Ku Klux Klan from 1866.* (Jefferson, N.C. McFarland, 2014), 8.
29 Wade, *The Fiery Cross*, 82.

the Constitution. Furthermore, this bill allowed the President to use the military to put down any civil disturbances that deprived citizens of their constitutional rights. Finally, the bill compelled jurors to take an oath that they were not in any way associated with the Klan. The Ku Klux Klan Act was passed by both the House and Senate, with a few alterations in the Senate, and was signed by President Grant on April 20, 1871.[30] The next challenge was enforcing it.

While the Klan's effects were still felt all across the South, membership numbers started to dwindle in the first half of the 1870s. Many men who felt strongly about Black people and Republicans turned to calling themselves minutemen or rifle clubs and acting out political terror, just without ties to the larger organization of the Ku Klux Klan.[31] The actions of the Klan continued, just without the label. At this time, the Klan's actions began to be romanticized, and Confederate sympathizers began believing in the "Lost Cause" myth. This myth "supplied a heroic interpretation of the war so that southerners could maintain their sense of honor."[32] The Klan would be romanticized and thought upon fondly by those, mainly in the South, who agreed with their plight, but membership would continue to dwindle down to near nothing. This led those who feared the Klan to believe it had come and gone for good. Their actions lived on, but the organization was simply swept away.

During the Great War, the United States saw a resurgence of racial hostilities and a resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan. On February 18, 1915, President Woodrow Wilson hosted a showing of the film *Birth of a Nation* in the East Room of the Executive Mansion for himself, his daughters, his cabinet, and their wives. This was the first film ever shown in the

30 Wade, *The Fiery Cross*, 90.

31 Ku Klux Klan in the Reconstruction Era - New Georgia encyclopedia, accessed November 30, 2023, https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/ku-klux-klan-in-the-reconstruction-era/.

32 Lost cause religion - new Georgia encyclopedia, accessed November 30, 2023, https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/arts-culture/lost-cause-religion/.

Executive Mansion.[33] This three-hour, black-and-white film, released in January of that year, follows two white families, one from the Union North and one from the Confederate South, who believed they could reunite and mend their relationships through their shared beliefs that the newly freed Black peoples were inferior to themselves.[34] Wilson's only comment about the film came three years later, in which he stated, "I have always felt that this was a very unfortunate production and I wish sincerely that its production might be avoided, particularly in communities where there are so many colored people."[35] This film is often credited with aiding the resurgence of the Klan and furthered the romanticizing of the South and the Civil War.

Following the end of the Great War, the Ku Klux Klan experienced a major resurgence. The Klan of the 1920s, however, was unlike its predecessor in many ways. Leonard J. Moore explains in his work *Citizen Klansmen: The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1921-1928,* that the Klan of this time "did not conform in many respects to the popular images so strongly associated with the Klans of the Reconstruction and civil rights eras."[36] Moore writes that the Klan of the 1920s was no longer centralized in the South; it spread its roots across the entire United States. At this time, there were between three and six million members. He also states that the Klan spouted a rhetoric of "a more complex creed of racism, nativism, Americanism; the defense of traditional moral and family values; and support for Prohibition."[37] The Klan seemed to revive itself with the onslaught of immigrants coming into the United States searching for a better life. This allowed the Klan to turn its hatred from just African Americans to all those not born in America, Catholics, and Jewish people.

33 Wwplblog, "Birth of a Nation," Woodrow Wilson Presidential Library & Museum, May 17, 2019, https://wwplblog.wordpress.com/2017/09/01/birth-of-a-nation/.
34 U.S. History Scene et al., "'Birth of a Nation,'" US History Scene, August 26, 2017, https://ushistoryscene.com/article/birth-of-a-nation/.
35 Wwplblog, "Birth of a Nation."
36 Leonard Joseph Moore, *Citizen Klansmen: The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1921-1928* (Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1991), 1.
37 Moore, in *Citizen Klansmen, 3.*

Between 1922 and 1925, Indiana became a Mecca for the Ku Klux Klan. Outside of the Klan's headquarters in Atlanta, Indiana was the epicenter of the Klan movement with an estimated 400,000 members.[38] It is believed that between one-quarter and one-third of all native-born white men in Indiana were members of the Klan in the 1920s.[39] There were also many women and children who participated in their own respective Klan activities. These numbers would go on to influence Indiana politics. The Klan backed the Republican party to push their beliefs into government and would support candidates holding their same values from small-town elections all the way up to the governor in 1924.

Starting in Evansville, Indiana, in 1920, the Ku Klux Klan and its message made its way north throughout the entire Hoosier state. With a large population of white, Protestant, native-born men, the Klan flourished, and membership increased. The state of Indiana was so popular for the Klan that its publication, *The Fiery Cross*, was based out of Indianapolis. The Protestant men of the state reportedly connected with the Klan's message because it seemingly gave them more influence over public affairs and politics than average citizens.[40]

Although the Klan was massively popular with a vast majority of Indiana residents, it was not welcomed by all. Many violent attacks were directed at Klansmen. From assaults on the streets in multiple towns, a riot incited by Notre Dame University students against rallying Klan members, to two members even being murdered, the Klan and its members were often met with resistance and violence from Hoosiers who opposed their hatred and their message.[41] These instances were published in *The Fiery Cross*. Many of those who opposed the Klan were not always those the Klan deemed worthy of their hatred. Religious leaders, politicians, and journalists spoke out against the group, even though doing so in Indiana was dangerous.

38 Timothy Egan, essay, in *A Fever in the Heartland: The Ku Klux Klan's Plot to Take Over American, and the Woman Who Stopped Them* (New York: Viking, 2023), 156.
39 Moore, *Citizen Klansmen,* 7.
40 Moore, *Citizen Klansmen,* 23.
41 Moore, *Citizen Klansmen,* 25.

The Ku Klux Klan's publication *The Fiery Cross* originally started in 1921 in Indianapolis, Indiana, under the name *Fact!* In 1922, it was renamed to *The Fiery Cross.* In its infancy, the publication posted information about rallies, meetings, and other Klan activities. It also held space for advertisements from local businesses offering deals and discounts to Klan members. Following a change of editors in 1923, the newsletter began to publish more ideological and political articles. *The Fiery Cross* began naming Protestant clergy and Catholic businesses that did not support the Klan. This was done in hopes that Klansmen would boycott these businesses and diminish their profits. The newsletter also inserted instructions on how to be a "good Klan member" and various affirmations that the Klan's purpose was a worthy one. One such example is seen on the final page of the February 16, 1923, issue outlining various beliefs of the Ku Klux Klan with a banner reading, "there is glory in oppression! There is victory in persecution!"[42] With an annual subscription cost of five dollars in 1923, then editor D.C. Stephenson boasted that the publication had over 100,000 readers. Stephenson would take the newsletter from a small tabloid publication to a twelve-page newspaper by April of 1923.[43] The Klan would continue to publish its newsletters until 1925.

Under the editorial reign of D.C. Stephenson, *The Fiery Cross* made a point to publish the Ku Klux Klan's version of events whenever the Klan was attacked or insulted in any way. One such article titled "Headquarters at Fort Wayne Also Robbed" detailed the events in which the Klan claimed that three men, two of whom were former Fort Wayne police officers, intentionally set fire to their office building and stole robes and a small amount of cash. Often, *The Fiery Cross* published facts about an event that were contrary to what mainstream publications were writing. In the case of this Fort Wayne fire, *The Fiery Cross* stated, "contrary to newspaper reports in which it was stated that Roberts and Arnold are

42 "Victory!," *The Fiery Cross*, February 16, 1923, Vol. II, Number 11.

43 "The Fiery Cross," indyencyclopedia.org, November 14, 2023, https://indyencyclopedia.org/the-fiery-cross-1921-1925/.

members of the Klan, officials of the organization declared emphatically that they are not."[44] The Klan publication also attempted to discredit the arrested men by stating that the attorneys for the accused were members of the Knights of Columbus. According to their website, in the 1920s, the Knights of Columbus "worked to overcome racial prejudice in American society."[45] As expected, the Klan and the Knights did not get along due to their opposite viewpoints and values. For the suspected arsonists to use members of the Knights as attorneys was seen as another slap in the face to the Klan.

One major event that the Ku Klux Klan really wanted to make their side of the story known, was the riot between Notre Dame University students and Klan members in South Bend, Indiana. Notre Dame, a Catholic university, was situated not far from the Klan's headquarters in South Bend. Due to their proximity, students and Klan members had more than one scuffle during the Klan's presence in the city. The hatred of Catholics by the Klan made the students an easy target for their bigotry, which the students did not take kindly to.

After the riot, the Klan was quick to issue their side of the story in *The Fiery Cross,* published on May 23, 1924. The article also offered a booklet for sale for a small fee of 10¢ titled *The Truth About the Notre Dame Riot on Saturday- May 17th 1924,* in which the original article written on the topic was republished with a short introduction and statement from Stanley Frost, a nationally-known writer who wanted to make sure the truth got out to "…those who may have been misled by an unfriendly press."[46] The Klan vehemently expressed their innocence in having any part of the violence seen on May 17th or the 19th, an aftershock of the riot. While other publications did not paint the Notre Dame students in the

44 "Headquarters At Fort Wayne Also Robbed," *The Fiery Cross*, February 8, 1924, Vol. III, Number 15.

45 "Our History 1919-1929-Post World War I: Knights of Columbus," Our History 1919-1929-Post World War I | Knights of Columbus, accessed December 3, 2023, https://www.kofc.org/en/who-we-are/our-history/in-search-of-liberty.html.

46 Wingfoot, "The Story of the Riot," in *The Truth About the Notre Dame Riot on Saturday-May 17th 1924* (Indianapolis: Fiery Cross Publications, 1924).

best light, the Klan's publications fully placed the blame and more on the young Catholic men.

The Ku Klux Klan's headlines shouted accusations such as, "Notre Dame mob beats men and women; police tardy to act in riot," "Autos stopped and Protestant occupants assaulted," and "Brute lacerates baby girl's face with powerful blow." They tried to garner further sympathy for themselves by including subheadings stating, "Desire by Klansmen to avoid bloodshed probably saves many lives" and "Klan gains thousands of supporters among former antagonists."[47] The Klan outlined the events of that day from their vantage point. As always, there are three sides to every story: the aggressor's version, the victim's version, and the truth.

The Klan began their account of May 17, 1924, with a sentence stating, "In a riot started Saturday morning by students of Notre Dame, Roman Catholic university... men, women, and children were beaten and the American flag stoned, torn to ribbons and trampled underfoot by a cursing mob of students who showed no respect for age or sex."[48] The article gives a timeline of the events starting at 8 AM, at which time about five Notre Dame students were reported to be congregating outside of the South Bend Klan chapter's headquarters while piling rocks, eggs, and potatoes. The students also verbally harassed the Klanswomen arriving at the office to prepare for the day. It is said that the insults thrown at the women always ended with "Protestant." For the next few hours, more students congregated and harassed Klan members. At 11:30 AM, the Klan reported that a rock was thrown through the window of their office where they displayed a lamp in the shape of a fiery cross, one of the Klan's many sacred symbols. Once the lamp and window were shattered, students began rushing up the stairways to Klan headquarters on the third floor. A man in an Army uniform

47 "Notre Dame Mob Beats Men and Women; Police Tardy to Act in Riot.," *The Fiery Cross*, May 23, 1924, Vol. III, Number 30.

48 "Notre Dame Mob Beats Men and Women; Police Tardy to Act in Riot.," *The Fiery Cross*, May 23, 1924, Vol. III, Number 30.

at the top of the staircase informed the Notre Dame students that the Klan wanted no bloodshed, to which the students exited the building and took to rioting in the streets.

After leaving the Ku Klux Klan's headquarters, the Klan claims the Notre Dame students rioted throughout the city and targeted "all Protestants or any person with an American flag."[49] According to *The Fiery Cross,* the students targeted anyone suspected of being a Klan member, anyone suspected of being Protestant, or anyone with an American flag. The Klan also made it clear in their article that the South Bend police were sent out into the fray in droves, as an estimated forty percent were deployed to calm the rioting. However, a large number of policemen were Catholic, and the Klan claimed those officers refused to "turn against their fellow Catholic."

Later in the evening, around 6 PM, members of the Klan from Gary and Hammond arrived, expecting to participate in a parade and rally. These newly arriving members were quickly attacked by the riotous students. Consequently, the Klan members took refuge in the LaSalle Hotel behind locked doors. An official Klan statement claimed they had called off the parade to avoid bloodshed, even though the Klan's numbers now outweighed those of the Notre Dame students. The Klan iterated that they did not want to violate the law by having an unpermitted parade. In fact, the permit from the city of South Bend had been revoked. While the rioting continued into the night, the Klan's article claimed, "By nightfall the Klan had gained many thousands of supporters."[50]

When speaking on the South Bend police's response to the violence, *The Fiery Cross* made its disdain for the inactive police very clear. The Klan claimed that "Chief of Police Larry Lane, Roman Catholic, said he could do nothing as 60 per cent of his department were Roman Catholics," while going on to state, "[Chief Lane] did not fear trouble from the Klan,

49 "Notre Dame Mob Beats Men and Women; Police Tardy to Act in Riot.," *The Fiery Cross*, May 23, 1924, Vol. III, Number 30.

50 "Notre Dame Mob Beats Men and Women; Police Tardy to Act in Riot.," *The Fiery Cross*, May 23, 1924, Vol. III, Number 30.

but that he feared what the students would do." The article insinuated that the Chief of Police believed his police force would not be able to quell the violence due to their religious loyalties, but the article also stated that by 3 AM on Sunday, "the jail was filled to overflowing with the alien horde and the patrol wagons were still busy." The article drove home its final attack upon the South Bend police by saying, "The fact that [the riot] lasted almost twenty-four hours with no apparent effort on the part of the faculty to stop the thugs who were beating women and children, dishonoring the American flag and causing riot, it is now merely problematical as to just what will be done."[51]

The Klan pushed their narrative of innocence by reanalyzing a previous attack upon a Klansman by Notre Dame students a year prior when the barber's name had been included in a list of supposed Klan members. The Klan cried that the local press did not write about them fondly in their reports of the incident stating that the "stories carried in local papers were so far from accurate that they were absolutely worthless as far as letting the readers learn from them what actually happened." The article expressed the belief that those opposed to the Klan and those who were critical of it were envious or threatened by their political power. This was illustrated by the Klan's statement, "The fact that candidates, sponsored by the Klansmen of St. Joseph county, swept the primaries here on May 7, has goaded the alien element to desperation."[52] The claimed innocence of the Klan was driven home by including a quote from Stanley Frost in the separate publication from the Klan previously mentioned in which it states, "It (the Indiana Klan) has never been accused of violence," says Mr. Frost, "and in a recent riot which I happened to see at South Bend the aggression was entirely from the other side. That bloodshed was prevented was due to the strenuous efforts of Klan leaders."[53]

51 "Notre Dame Mob Beats Men and Women; Police Tardy to Act in Riot.," *The Fiery Cross*, May 23, 1924, Vol. III, Number 30.
52 "Notre Dame Mob Beats Men and Women; Police Tardy to Act in Riot.," *The Fiery Cross*, May 23, 1924, Vol. III, Number 30.
53 Wingfoot, *The Truth About the Notre Dame Riot on Saturday- May 17th 1924*.

In the wee hours of Sunday morning, the riot had ended with a number of students being arrested, with no mention of any Klan arrests. Sunday, May 18, 1924, was uneventful between the Klan and Notre Dame students, but Monday would reignite the violence between the groups, on a smaller scale. *The Fiery Cross* ended its May 23, 1924, article with the Klan's depiction of events by stating that during the evening of Monday, May 19, 500 Notre Dame students rushed the Klan's headquarters in South Bend. The local Klan had their weekly meeting at 8 PM, and at 8:20 PM, when the men were leaving the hall, the students had congregated outside and began forcing their way up the stairs to the Klan's space. The article stated that "police protection was provided the Klansmen and they were told to defend themselves." This riot was dispersed after several students were arrested and taken to jail. The Klan reported only one Klan member was injured. Then mayor of South Bend, Mayor Eli Seebirt, reportedly called the Klan's headquarters after the riots to suggest the Klan lower their fiery cross emblem to avoid tension between them and the students. The Klan responded by saying, "…the Knights of Columbus display their emblem at lodge halls without molestation and that Roman Catholic Churches display crosses and other emblems without protest from any American citizen." The mayor was unable to argue with this. The emblem remained in the window for all to view from the street. The article written and published by the Klan finished with the quote, "it is believed the students have been taught a lesson and that no more mob demonstrations will be made."[54]

The Fiery Cross was not the only publication printed about what happened between Klan members and the Notre Dame students. A local newspaper, *South Bend Tribune,* also wrote an account of the events of May 17th and 19th, but their recollection of events differed from the one published by the Klan. The *South Bend Tribune*'s May 18th, 1924, article titled, "Tense Excitement Prevails Throughout Day Marked by Clashes Between Klux and Foes,"

54 "Notre Dame Mob Beats Men and Women; Police Tardy to Act in Riot.," *The Fiery Cross*, May 23, 1924, Vol. III, Number 30.

outlines the events of the Saturday riot between the South Bend Ku Klux Klan and Notre Dame University students. The newspaper states, "city and county officials, organized anti-klan forces and a driving persistent rain ruined the klan program, ending a day of tense excitement marked by numerous clashes between kluxers and anti-kluxers." The *Tribune* begins the tale by claiming the Notre Dame students began congregating downtown near the Klan's office after noticing a horde of white, hooded figures appearing in the streets. The students did not take kindly to the robes' presence and took to tearing the robes off the Klan members in retaliation. One quote from the article illustrated this by stating, "Some of the most violent disturbances... where two klansmen, after the robes had been torn from them and divided among their assailants, took refuge in a gasoline filling station."[55]

According to this article, by 11:30 AM, no more Klansmen could be seen in the streets, mostly due to their robes being stripped away and torn, therefore making them blend in with the crowd; however, the violence still persisted. The intended Klan activity for the day was a parade and rally, yet contrary to the Klan's statements, the *Tribune* claims the group was never granted a permit for such activities. The newspaper claims, "Klan officials were again refused permission to parade after a conference between Mayor Eli F. Seebirt, Chief of Police Laurence J. Lane and the board of safety, ending at noon. The same refusal had been made a week before." Due to the ongoing rioting, Chief of Police Lane requested Indiana National Guard troops be sent, but Indiana Governor Emmett T. Branch deemed the allocation of troops impractical. As a result, thirty special, local deputies were held at the ready to assist.[56]

Around the early afternoon, the article states that the student rioters began gathering outside the Klan's office with the fiery cross lamp within view from the street. At this time, a

55 "Klan Display in South Bend Proves Failure," *South Bend Tribune*, May 18, 1924, Vol. LI, Number 353.

56 "Klan Display in South Bend Proves Failure," *South Bend Tribune*, May 18, 1924, Vol. LI, Number 353.

rock was thrown at the lamp and window causing glass to rain down onto the sidewalk. The students then began to rush the staircase leading to the Klan offices. The students were not in the building long before they retreated back to the street. The newspaper commends the police force by stating, "[…] police did splendid work in handling the situation, the officers keeping their tempers and making an obvious impression on the crowd." It was reported that there were no serious injuries or casualties as a result of this riot, and it was further claimed that no hospitals in the area received any accident calls. The South Bend Klan was not particularly small, but the number of visiting Klan members hoping to attend the parade created a larger Klan presence. The newspaper states, "Estimates as to the number of visiting klansmen vary. Leaders of the organization claim 25,000 strangers were in the city but not more than 2,000 assembled at one time," although state highway policeman Gordon Otstot said there were 50,000 Klansmen gathered near South Bend. As evening crept in, the Notre Dame students began to retreat back to their campus, seemingly satisfied with their work.[57]

The following Tuesday, May 20, 1924, the *South Bend Tribune* published an article about the second, smaller riot involving the South Bend Ku Klux Klan and Notre Dame students- who had a further bone to pick with the Klan. According to the newspaper, the city officials strived for peace between the groups, as the article starts by stating, "[Mayor Seebirt] is making a determined effort to bring peace in the city." On Monday evening, around 8 PM, some Notre Dame students had heard about a Klan meeting happening at the headquarters, and an estimated group of 500 began marching down the street to the office. Before the students could reach the building, Klansmen and South Bend police officers were already outside. Quickly, both groups started throwing bottles, rocks, police clubs, and anything not nailed down at each other. As the policemen charged the crowd of students, it was stated, "Many members of both factions and a number of non-participating bystanders

57 "Klan Display in South Bend Proves Failure," *South Bend Tribune*, May 18, 1924, Vol. LI, Number 353.

were injured."[58] Unfortunately, this time several individuals were taken to local hospitals for their wounds. Additional police aid was requested from a nearby city, Mishawaka, and both students from Notre Dame and Klansmen were arrested during the scuffle. Although a number of injured parties were taken to hospitals, no serious injuries were reported.

When it became apparent to the Notre Dame students that they would not be as victorious in this brawl as the one on Saturday, they began to retreat to the South Bend courthouse lawn. Shortly after the students began congregating on the lawn, the President of Notre Dame, Father Matthew Walsh, arrived to speak to his students. The *South Bend Tribune* writes that Father Walsh gave a speech to the injured, charged students. He desperately wanted the students to quell the fighting and return to campus. The newspaper quoted Father Walsh as saying, "A single injury to a Notre Dame student would be too great a price to pay for any deed that concerned itself with antagonisms."[59] It seemed that Father Walsh's words resonated with his students, and they returned to their campus. This was the last of the fighting between the groups.

Tensions between the South Bend Ku Klux Klan and the victims of their hate continued throughout the area. Catholics, Polish immigrants, Irish immigrants, and African Americans alike were seen as less than human, and the Klan even referred to them as "aliens." The diversity of Northern Indiana created a whirlpool of animosity amongst the citizens. The Klan's power in the state would continue for a couple of years until an unlikely figure brought the organization down.

One of the most influential members of the Ku Klux Klan during this time was David Curtis (D.C.) Stephenson, who was the Grand Dragon of the Indiana Klan. Due to the power Stephenson held in the state's politics, he once boasted in 1924 that he was "the law" in

58 "Mayor Seebirt Moves Towards Peace in Klan War," *South Bend Tribune*, May 20, 1924, Vol. LI, Number 355.

59 "Mayor Seebirt Moves Towards Peace in Klan War," *South Bend Tribune*, May 20, 1924, Vol. LI, Number 355.

Indiana. Stephenson's beliefs were the embodiment of the Indiana Klan movement.[60] Unfortunately for the Klan, a scandal involving Stephenson would ultimately lead to its second downfall, at least within Indiana. Historian Leonard J. Moore describes this scandal by illustrating, "In 1925, [Stephenson] sexually assaulted an Indianapolis woman during an overnight train ride to Chicago. Then, after she took poison, he kept her sequestered until it was too late for doctors to save her life."[61]

On the night of March 15, 1925, Stephenson had called an acquaintance, twenty-eight-year-old Matilda "Madge" Oberholtzer, to his Indianapolis home. Once Madge arrived, an intoxicated Stephenson and his henchmen forced Madge to drink strong liquor against her will. When Madge attempted to leave for home, Stephenson grabbed her and said they would be traveling to Chicago by train. Stephenson claimed, "I love you more than any woman I've ever known."[62] Madge, questioning where this love came from, resisted and attempted to flee, but she was kidnapped by Stephenson and his henchmen and forced at gunpoint into a car traveling to the train station. Madge accepted her fate. If she tried to run, she believed Stephenson would kill her and get away with it due to his connections.

Once on the train and swept into a sleeping car Stephenson brutally raped and mutilated Madge to the point she was profusely bleeding from multiple places on her body. In the early morning, the train arrived at a stop in Hammond, Indiana- where Stephenson decided the group would get off instead of Chicago. Stephenson quickly took Madge to a local hotel, where he hid her away. Needing to purchase a hat and cosmetics to cover her injuries, Madge persuaded Stephenson to let his driver take her to a pharmacy. While there, Madge purchased a box of bichloride mercury tablets with the intention of killing herself. Due to Stephenson's connections, Madge feared that suicide would be her only escape.[63]

60 Moore, *Citizen Klansmen,* 8.
61 Moore, *Citizen Klansmen*, 9.
62 Egan, *A Fever in the Heartland,* 197.
63 Egan, *A Fever in the Heartland,* 202.

Once back at the hotel, with a sleeping Stephenson, Madge ingested six of the eighteen tablets and instantly showed symptoms of poisoning. Stephenson planned to take Madge straight to the hospital under the guise of her being his wife, who had mistaken the poison for aspirin, but Madge refused to feign their marriage. Instead of going to the hospital, Stephenson adjusted his plan and took Madge to Indianapolis by car. Once back at his Indianapolis home, Stephenson put Madge in the garage, where she would stay until March 17, when one of Stephenson's henchmen drove Madge back to her home and dumped her upstairs. As the man left, he reportedly gave a fellow boarder of the house the excuse that Madge had been in a car accident. Upon her arrival, Madge stated that she knew she was dying.[64]

After being returned home, Madge quickly received medical care from a doctor, unsure of how long she had left to live. In addition, Madge had called attorney Asa Smith, to make sure her story was recorded. She was not going down without a fight, Stephenson's influence be damned. Madge's friend, Ermina Moore, and attorney Asa Smith took notes from Madge as she told her harrowing tale of her time with Stephenson and "drew up a 3,000-word document outlining how Madge had met [Stephenson], what happened on Sunday night, the train ride, the continued abuse in the hotel in Hammond, the medical neglect on the drive back to Indianapolis, stuffing her in a garage."[65] Satisfied with their work, Madge signed her name to the statement, the signing being witnessed by a notary. This would be her legacy. Matilda "Madge" Oberholtzer died twenty-nine days after her attack by D.C. Stephenson on April 13, 1925, and her 3,000-word statement would be used against her attacker in court.

Stephenson was convicted of second-degree murder and was given life in prison, but he would file multiple motions for wrongful convictions stating, "...the most appalling

64 Egan, *A Fever in the Heartland*, 203-208.
65 Egan, *A Fever in the Heartland,* 219.

persecution to which man has been subjected to since the days that civilization abandoned the bludgeon."[66] Ultimately, the Indiana Supreme Court would uphold Stephenson's conviction. Following his arrest and conviction, Indiana Klansmen quickly ousted Stephenson claiming he was not one of them. The Klan even went as far as stuffing letters, membership lists, telegrams, and directives from Stephenson into sacks and sending them down the White River, which were discovered by children playing on the banks. Stephenson's actions had tainted the Indiana Ku Klux Klan's name. Members were said to have shed their robes and tossed them onto bonfires in anger. Author Timothy Egan described that "the Klan still stood for hatred of the other ... But now it also stood for rape, murder, political corruption."[67]

The Klan would last a few more years in the Hoosier state, but after Stephenson's incarceration, members became upset by his and other Klan leaders' unlawful actions. Most ordinary Klansmen in the state joined to support law enforcement and traditional morals. *The Fiery Cross* ceased publication quickly after Stephenson's arrest since he was the editor. Furthermore, Klan membership decreased by 90%. By 1926, Indiana membership numbers had stooped to 50,000 from 400,000. Even though numbers dwindled after Stephenson's arrest, "the ideas that his followers promoted while marching in masks behind a flaming cross prevailed as the law of the land."[68] Most notably, the Immigration Act of 1924, which Stephenson had helped pass to impede immigration, and the world's first compulsory sterilization law that spanned from 1927 to 1974, were ingrained in Hoosier society for decades after Stephenson's fall from grace. Although the effects of the Klan's legacy were felt for decades, Klan membership never recovered from the end of the 1920s, when nationwide membership fell below 100,000.

Looking at the present-day Klan, a report by the Anti-Defamation League in 2016 states, "The long-term decline of Ku Klux Klan groups is due to several factors, including

66 Egan, *A Fever in the Heartland,* 327.
67 Egan, *A Fever in the Heartland,* 327.
68 Egan, *A Fever in the Heartland,* 346.

increasing societal rejection; a growing perception by white supremacists that Klan groups are outdated; and competition with other white supremacist movements."[69] Over half of the current Klan groups were formed within the past five years, with approximately 3,000 members nationwide. Many current groups hold traditional Klan beliefs mixed with neo-Nazi ideals. As of 2022, The Southern Poverty Law Center reports that Indiana hosts zero Ku Klux Klan groups, but one group, the Honorable Sacred Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, resides in Madison, Indiana.[70] The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan is an offshoot of the original Klan founded in 1975 by David Duke, who "attempted to put a "'kinder, gentler' face on the Klan... portraying itself as a modern 'white civil rights organization.'"[71] However, the Knights hold the same beliefs as the Klan.

While Ku Klux Klan numbers may have dwindled to a mere speck of what it used to be, hate still runs rampant throughout the United States. The disdain and hatred for those different from oneself still prevails in many groups. The uniforms may have changed, but the hate that permeated from underneath a white hood and sheet still leaks into society. The names may change, but bigotry and hate will continue in the shadow of the Ku Klux Klan.

69 Tattered Robes: The State of the Ku Klux Klan in the United States, May 11, 2016, https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/assets/pdf/combating-hate/tattered-robes-state-of-kkk-2016.pdf.

70 "Ku Klux Klan," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed December 7, 2023, https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/ideology/ku-klux-klan.

71 "Knights of the Ku Klux Klan," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed December 7, 2023, https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/knights-ku-klux-klan.

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