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This thesis examines the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s in Kansas City, Kansas. A nationwide phenomena which gathered as many as six million members, the order arrived in Kansas City in early 1921. Responding to perennial local social, civic, and political problems, the KKK quickly enrolled hundreds, possibly thousands, of civic-minded, middle-class supporters. Nearly 900 of those men were identified for this study. Drawn heavily from the ranks of the small-business owner, clerk, and skilled craftsman, Klansmen were generally middle-aged, mainline Protestants who voted Republican and frequented lodge meetings.

Conforming to the contours of Kansas City history, the Ku Klux Klan evolved into a vehicle of popular protest to challenge indifferent local elites. Despite defeating its political opponents, the KKK soon became the victim of its own contradictions and successes. Disagreement over "methods and operations," particularly the use of violence and economic boycott, forced 450 men out of the order in a single day. Still searching for

a viable means of civic progress, ex-Klansmen organized "reform" Klans. These measures failed. By 1930, the order disappeared from public view.

**The Ku Klux Klan in Kansas City, Kansas
1921-1930**

A Thesis

Presented to
the Division of Social Sciences
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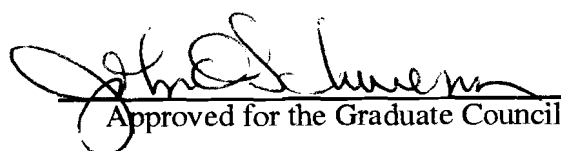
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Glossary *

<i>Exalted Cyclops</i>	President
<i>Klaliff</i>	Vice President
<i>Klokard</i>	Lecturer
<i>Kludd</i>	Chaplain
<i>Kligrapp</i>	Secretary
<i>Klabee</i>	Treasurer
<i>Kladd</i>	Conductor
<i>Kleagle</i>	Organizer
<i>Klarago</i>	Inner Guard
<i>Klavern</i>	Chapter and Meeting Place
<i>Klexter</i>	Outer Guard
<i>Klokan</i> (singular)	Investigator
<i>Klokann</i> (plural)	Board of Investigators
<i>Nighthawk</i>	Charge of Candidates

* William J. Simmons, *Kloran* (Atlanta: W.J. Simmons, 1916): 4-5.

Introduction

In 1915, William Joseph Simmons lay in an Atlanta hospital recovering from an automobile accident. It was there he envisioned plans to revive that legendary specter of Reconstruction, the Ku Klux Klan. Son of a former Alabama Klansman, "Colonel" Simmons was an erstwhile Methodist circuit rider making his living as a district manager for the Woodmen of the World when he brought the Klan back to life. ¹

On Thanksgiving evening, 1915, Simmons led fifteen recruits to Stone Mountain, Georgia, where they burned a cross and dedicated themselves to those "principles of Americanism embodied in the Constitution of the United States, consecrated themselves, as Protestants, to the tenets of the Christian religion, and pledged themselves, as white men, to the eternal maintenance of white supremacy." Simmons' "secret, social, patriotic, fraternal, beneficiary order" received a charter from the state of Georgia on July 1, 1916. Despite such an auspicious beginning, the organization grew slowly. ²

The effect of World War I on the ultimate success of the Klan remains a matter of debate, but the war gave impetus to Simmons' early organization as he succeeded in filling the ranks of the Citizens' Bureau of Investigation (CBI) with his followers. The CBI clandestinely monitored local slackers, foreigners, radicals, and others deemed detrimental to the war effort. But despite its wartime service, the recrudescant Klan claimed only 4,000 to 5,000 largely southern members by 1920. Without aid, Simmons' creation was on a desultory course to extinction. ³

Help arrived in the persons of Edward Y. Clarke and Elizabeth Tyler of the Southern Publicity Association. Clarke and Tyler sensed the Klan's potential and wanted

to market it nationwide. Simmons, admittedly a poor administrator, agreed. From the date of Clarke and Tyler's agreement with Simmons -- June 7, 1920 -- the Ku Klux Klan became an ascendant force in American life. ⁴

The Ku Klux Klan arrived in Kansas City, Kansas, in early 1921 as part of the Clarke-Tyler expansion. Led by King Kleagle George T. McCarron, a provisional chapter known as the Sunflower Club was organized in February 1921. McCarron's Kleagles found members in the city's businesses, churches, factories, lodges, shops, union halls, and rail yards. City hall and the county courthouse also supplied recruits. Following a "thorough combing of the region" for acceptable members, Wyandotte Klan No. 5, Realm of Kansas, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan (Inc.) received its charter from the parent Atlanta organization on February 17, 1922. Although the years 1921 to 1930 shall be referred to as the "Klan era," Kansas City Klansmen would influence and direct the city's affairs for the next 30 years. This study outlines that history. ⁵

Edward Y. Clarke had perfected his marketing skills as a "specialist in booming communities that were not progressing as rapidly as they wished to." Indeed, Clarke was known as the "doctor of sick towns" in the south. Clarke and Tyler broadened the Klan program, offering potential members an array of appealing causes to take up and protect. In short, Klan salesmen proffered One Hundred Percent Americanism, Protestant Christianity, and Law and Order to patriotic, law-abiding, native-born Protestants. The Southern Publicity Association commissioned a sales force of more than 1,000 Kleagles to peddle the Klan's cure-all program across the country. The order's strident anti-Catholicism sold particularly well. ⁶

The Klan's successful recruiting did not go unnoticed. The *New York Herald* began an expose of the Klan in January 1921 and the *New York World* followed in September. The *World's* sensational reports riveted Congress. Hearings ensued. In October 1921, The US House Rules Committee, chaired by Kansan Phillip Campbell (R), heard testimony on the Klan for a little more than a week, but made no recommendations.

Many interpreted the legislative silence as tacit approval of the Klan. "Congress made us," Simmons later boasted. The efforts of the New York newspapers also served the Klan as aspiring citizens of the Invisible Empire mailed in facsimile applications clipped from the papers. If the expose had "increased World sales by a hundred thousand, it increased Klan sales by ten times that number," David Chalmers has written. The aggressive recruiting campaign, media interest, and apparent government apathy resulted in an alleged gain of more than one million new members in little more than a year.⁷

Nationally, the Klan's growth continued throughout 1922, 1923, and 1924, when it peaked somewhere between two and six million members. It is difficult to assess the figures accurately as both the Klan and its opponents had reason to inflate the numbers. Klan secrecy compounds the problem. Scholars have suggested 40,000 to 100,000 Kansas Klansmen with a base of 15,000 activists. In 1924, the Klan claimed to have enrolled 200,000 Kansans into the fold. Kansas City, Kansas, the state's largest city in 1922, had -- by the Klan's count -- 5,000 members in February and 7,000 by that April. Evidence strongly suggests that the actual number of Kansas City Klansmen was closer to 1,050, but with an additional 5,000 to 10,000 sympathizers who may be included as part of a larger, if unaffiliated, "Klan movement."⁸

The size of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s can be put in perspective when compared with other American social movements. The Klan was three times the size of the Non-Partisan League, and at least twice that of the Populists. The Invisible Empire was approximately the same size of the American Federation of Labor. Ten times the number of Americans joined the Klan in the 1920s as joined the Communist party at its peak in the late 1930s. Given this popularity, particularly its resonance among working and middle-class Americans, the organization deserves scholarly consideration.⁹

The historical reputation of the Klan during the 1920s was determined by its earliest observers and perpetuated by subsequent scholars. Sociologist John M. Mecklin wrote an influential 1924 account depicting the Klansmen as small-town losers,

disgruntled yet envious of the material success of the cities, distraught yet titillated by the "revolution in manners and morals," and fearful that because of their declining birthrate, their birthright to govern America was shifting to the horde of Catholic and Jewish immigrants arriving on their shores and crowding their cities. Motivated by fear, small town and rural Protestants embraced Prohibition, Fundamentalist Christianity, and the Klan as the means to preserve their dying way of life. ¹⁰

Drawn almost entirely from ideological statements and the official utterances of Klan leaders, the traditional accounts of the second KKK produced an archetypal Klansman who was irredeemably racist, sectarian, as well as socially and economically marginal. Generalization was the rule. Local variations of the Klan program were explained by the presence of the nearest minority. Only with the introduction of Klan membership records did historians begin to move beyond the stereotyped view of the Klan.

Kenneth T. Jackson, in his *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (1967), was among the first to question the Klan consensus. In Jackson's view, Klansmen were not responding irrationally to symbolic fears, but were using the Klan as a political vehicle to resist objective social pressures such as the influx of African American and Southeastern European migrants into their rapidly changing neighborhoods. Jackson's research signaled a seismic change in the historiography of the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s, but the revisionism was only beginning. ¹¹

Beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a new generation of historians began investigating the Klan using a case-study approach. Concentrating on particular communities and Klan chapters, the new historians utilized membership rosters, census data, church, fraternal, and civic club records to determine a local unit's concerns and agenda. These studies produced remarkably detailed and complex portraits of the order. Studies of klaverns in Denver, Colorado, Eugene, Oregon, and El Paso, Texas, among others, challenged prevailing interpretations about Klan members, beliefs, and programs.

Historians such as Shawn Lay and Robert A. Goldberg concluded:

The order drew its membership from a generally balanced cross section of the white male Protestant population. . . . In the context of early twentieth-century American society, the great bulk of Klansmen were not aberrationally racist, religiously bigoted, or socially alienated. . . .¹²

The revisionist historiography demonstrated the superiority of the case-study method in understanding the rise and the nature of the KKK in the 1920s. Continuing in that vein, this study of Wyandotte Klan No. 5 draws on Klan membership rolls, city directories, church, fraternal, and civic club records, local newspapers, and the records and correspondence of three Kansas governors.

For the purpose of this study, the Ku Klux Klan is defined as one way white, native-born Protestants have expressed concern about race, class, and culture. The Ku Klux Klan has appeared on at least five major occasions in American history, but its motif, a simple white cloak, symbolic of a defiant, if imperiled, white civilization, has proven to be the only real commonality between various embodiments of the order. Because of its amorphous, unprogrammatic nature, the Klan image has endured and maintained a viable cultural resonance capable of speaking to different ages and "concerns" with the same reassuring authority. In the 1920s, the Klan message struck an agreeable chord with hundreds, if not thousands, of middle-class Kansas Citians. Distressed by long-simmering social, civic, and political problems, and the failure of local elites to solve them, these citizens extended a hopeful, if tenuous, welcome to the hooded order. This study examines the limits of their alliance with the KKK.

Chapter one describes the unique historical condition of Kansas City, Kansas, on the eve of the Klan's organization in the city. Chapter two chronicles the order's public debut and tumultuous first year in Kansas City. Chapter three examines the "methods and operations" used by the Klan to advance its agenda. Chapter four investigates the efforts of dissident Klansmen to organize a socially acceptable Klan organization in Kansas City and the persistence of anti-Catholicism. Chapter five is a detailed examination of the

social composition of Wyandotte Klan No. 5. Chapter six describes the order's participation in Kansas City and Wyandotte county politics. Chapter seven presents the conclusions of this study.

A note on style: All quoted material is reproduced as it was written. Clarification of names or meaning is presented in brackets if needed. The interpolation of *sic* will therefore be held to a minimum. Furthermore, unless otherwise noted, "Kansas City" shall refer to Kansas City, Kansas.

Notes

1. William J. Simmons, "How I Put Over the Klan," *Colliers* (July 14, 1928): 32.
2. Robert L. Duffus, "Salesmen of Hate: The Ku Klux Klan," *World's Work* (May 1923): 32-33.
3. William G. Shepherd, "Ku Klux Koin," *Colliers* (July 21, 1928): 8-9. Duffus, "Salesmen," 33.
4. Ibid, 34-35.
5. Kansas, State v. Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, *Plaintiff's Abstract of the Record* (Topeka: n.d.): 41. David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (1965; reprint ed., Durham: Duke University Press, 1987): 34.
6. Duffus, "Salesmen," 35. Stanley Coben, *Rebellion Against Victorianism: The Impetus for Cultural Change in 1920s America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991): 140.
7. Duffus, "Salesmen," 36-38. Shepherd, "Koin," 38. Chalmers, "Hooded," 38.
8. 40,000, Charles W. Sloan, Jr., "Kansas Battles the Invisible Empire: The Legal Ouster of the KKK from Kansas, 1922-1927," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 40 (Autumn 1974): 393. 100,000, Lilah L. Jones, "The Ku Klux Klan in Eastern Kansas During the 1920s," *Emporia State Research Studies* 23 (Winter 1975): 5. 15,000, Robert L. Duffus, "The Ku Klux Klan in the Middle West," *World's Work* 46 (August 1923): 364. 5,000 *Kansas City [Ks.] Weekly Press*, February 24, 1922. 7,000 *Kansas City [Ks.] Kansan*, April 24, 1922. 200,000 *Weekly Press*, March 7, 1924.
9. Stanley Frost, *The Challenge of the Klan* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1923, 1924): 221. Coben, "Rebellion," 121. Robert A. Goldberg, *Grassroots Resistance: Social Movements in Twentieth Century America* (California: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1991): 104.
10. John M. Mecklin, *The Ku Klux Klan: A Study of the American Mind* (New York: Harcourt, Brace Company, 1924). For examples of Mecklin's influence, see William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958): 209. Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955): 293-297.
11. Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).
12. Shawn Lay, ed., *The Invisible Empire in the West: Toward a New Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992): 220.

Chapter One

The Contours of Local History

The predicant Kleagle's mission was to "find out what was worrying a community and to offer the Klan as a solution." What did chief Klan organizer George T. McCarron find when he appraised Kansas City in 1921? What forces would shape the Klan's protean program in the city? ¹

In an attempt to compete with Kansas City, Missouri, Kansas City, Kansas, was created on March 6, 1886, by the consolidation of Armourdale, Armstrong, Kansas City, Riverview, and Wyandotte, Kansas. Despite Wyandotte's predominant size, city leaders persuaded their fellow citizens to adopt "Kansas City" as the new entity's name. "Kansas City," they averred, would sell more municipal bonds than "Wyandotte." ²

Built on high bluffs and flood-prone bottoms, Kansas City faced physical impediments to growth, progress, and civic unity. But the greatest challenge was to overcome the immense political, economic, and psychological shadow cast by Kansas City, Missouri. The proximity was not without its benefit. Cheaper land and lower taxes enticed Missouri capital across the river causing some citizens to celebrate the possibility of becoming a prosperous Second City. "Wyandotte promises to be to Kansas City [Missouri] what Brooklyn is to New York," an optimistic, if resigned, Kansan wrote in 1879. But consolidation was an attempt to meet the Missouri side Great City to Great City, not as a suburb. "The last ten years have been spent in idle railing at Kansas City [Missouri] while that great absorbent has gone on taking in the wealth of Kansas and using it to build up one of the greatest cities of modern times, in achievements already won and in future possibilities," railed the *Wyandotte* [Ks.] *Herald*, shortly before the

union.³

Consolidation failed to unite the city commercially or civically. Serried yet inchoate, an enervating provincialism pervaded the former Kansas towns as Kansas City struggled to form a collective civic identity. Identity and the problematic proximity of Kansas City, Missouri, informed Kansas City, Kansas, political discourse throughout the Klan years. In this acutely self-conscious political culture, local problems were frequently traced to Missouri origins. Organized crime, the "imperialist KC Star," and political boss Thomas A. Bigger were routinely vilified in the press as enemies of local promise.

The consolidation arrived at a time of social and political unrest. Republicans maintained local power, in part, by turning a blind eye to liquor violations. This tactic allowed the city's German population to remain loyal to the GOP. Kansas City's Irish dominated the Democracy. African Americans were largely Republican. One historian observed that at the time of consolidation "there were probably few more socially heterogeneous places in America than this industrial city on the edge of the prairie." Kansas City's burgeoning meatpacking, railroading, and manufacturing industries demanded a large labor supply. As older immigrants moved into commerce or up the ranks of management, new immigrants filled their jobs in the factories and yards. Industrial demand was partially responsible for the city's ethnic variety. Croats, Poles, and Slovaks were drawn by economic and religious opportunities. They often settled on Strawberry Hill, filling the houses and pews built by earlier immigrants. Public policy also contributed to the city's diversity by encouraging newly-freed black "Exodusters" to settle there. An estimated 20,000 African Americans arrived between 1878 and 1882. Many of them lived on the site of Quindaro Township, while others found land near Jersey Creek, an area dubbed "Rattlebone Hollow." Mexicans began to migrate to Kansas City in force during World War I to relieve labor shortages. Their community continued to grow throughout the 1920s.⁴

As Kansas City and the nation adjusted to the industrial order of the late

nineteenth century, new political movements arose to mitigate the changes. The Knights of Labor found members and power in Kansas City. They included Mayor Thomas F. Hannan in their ranks. The organizing success of the Knights in the meatpacking and railroading industries elicited a strong reaction. To rein in the city's restive working class, 350 "middle-class hypocrites" formed "Law and Order Leagues" dedicated to enforcing prohibition more strictly, closing gambling halls, and abolishing radical labor unions.⁵

Other fissures in Kansas City society appeared along religious lines. The American Protective Association (APA), an anti-Catholic "patriotic" movement, flourished in the city from 1892 to at least 1897. Its propaganda was published locally in both English and German versions. The APA's inclusion of foreign-born Protestants and blacks (albeit in separate lodges) illustrates the degree to which anti-Catholicism, rather than race or nationality, shaped Kansas City politics.⁶

As the city rolled into the twentieth century, two issues dominated political affairs: prohibition enforcement and the awarding of municipal contracts and franchises. Prohibition and its concomitant law enforcement problems frustrated Kansas Citians' efforts to build that dream city worthy of surpassing its Missouri neighbor. In 1903, angry citizens held mass meetings demanding stricter enforcement of the dry laws. The "Big Joint War" of 1905 resulted in the ouster of Mayor W.W. Rose for failing to shut the doors of the city's saloons.⁷

The social moralism of Victorian America found political expression in the new age as reformers endeavored to clean out city hall along with the saloon. One measure adopted was the Galveston Plan, a municipal model by which cities were governed by commissioners elected "at large" rather than by ward. The goal was to "take city government out of politics and elect capable men instead of vote getters." Although Kansas City voters approved the change in 1909, critics denounced it as elitist and undemocratic. The old village-neighborhood divisions were still demanding separate and equal voices in city affairs. The new offices were the Mayor-Commissioner, the

Commissioner of Finance and Revenue, the Commissioner of Parks, Health and Public Property, the Commissioner of Streets and Public Improvements, and the Commissioner of Water Works and Public Lighting.⁸

Kansas City was in a period of self-examination when the Klan made its first public appearance in the city. The *Kansas City* [Ks.] *Kansan* surveyed popular impressions of the city's civic and moral condition in a series of articles from June to August 1922. Citizen responses reveal concern with civic progress, law and order, and regional autonomy. They criticized the lack of public accommodations such as water fountains, playgrounds, and schools, and the deterioration of sidewalks, alleys, and streets. Garbage collection, transportation, and weed control were also objects of complaint. "It's the weeds that give the city a 'rube' appearance," one citizen charged. City services had not kept pace with growth. Other residents wanted more civic pride or local "patriotism," a concept of loyalty based on reciprocity, the lack of which vitiated commercial life. "If the merchants of Kansas City offered for sale materials and stocks desired by citizens would these citizens patronize their home stores, or continue to go to Missouri to spend their time and money?" wondered a dubious booster. Kansas Citians wanted "fair play" in politics, their affairs conducted by "good men" with no interest in personal gain, and government operations run in a "business-like" manner. True to form, the Kansans demanded home rule. "Kansas City," ran a common lament, "is governed by Missouri politicians, political bosses. I know positively that a political boss in this town goes to Missouri, meets the political bosses there, and frames the program for our city."⁹

But law enforcement was the most distressing problem. "The trouble with this city," an indignant citizen said, "is that the officials turn loose the criminals and bootleggers instead of making them pay the penalty for their crimes. It is a crime and an outrage against the community." Gangs from Armourdale and other parts of the city waged open warfare throughout Wyandotte county. Arrests climbed to record heights in 1922. Kansas City's large 21-1/2 square mile size, Kansas City, Missouri, an inadequate

police force, official negligence, and a "large number of persons of foreign birth" were blamed for the enduring problem.¹⁰

Kansas City's Protestant leaders analyzed the city's moral condition. The ministers blamed the recent war, rod-sparing parents, and misguided educators for the "decline in morals." The Reverend Carl W. Nau, St. Paul's Episcopal church, believed that "the intoxication and brutality of the war have brought out the heroic virtues on one hand, but the deteriorating vices on the other." The Reverend George W. Durham, Metropolitan Avenue Methodist Episcopal church, blamed parents and schools. "The child in school and in the home is not taught to respect the Bible and its teachings, even as it was three decades ago. There is at present very little respect for the ten commandments, without which, moral degeneracy is sure to occur," Durham warned. Not all hope was lost. A majority of the ministers queried predicted confidently that the moral "pendulum will swing to more sane conduct in time."¹¹

Neighborhood activists formed civic clubs in the early 1920s in an attempt to remedy the sort of ills described in the *Kansan's* investigations. Kansas City had fifty-four civic and classification clubs in 1922. The Armourdale Business Men's Club (ABC) was organized on May 1, 1920. Led by the Reverend E.L. Brown, pastor of the Central Avenue Methodist Episcopal church, the ABC worked to improve its district with the addition of parks, swimming pools, and a community house. The ABC encouraged industrial development and the establishment of a south city market. The Sixth Ward Civic Club also represented Armourdale. The clubs cooperated on campaigns to remove weeds, clean streets, and ban carnivals. Carnivals, according to club leaders, "were a detriment to the community, bringing a class of undesirable 'floater' with the company." Thomas C. Hattley, a garage owner, was president of the Sixth Ward Civic Club. The new civic clubs and improvement associations' goals ranged from economic development to moral and racial restrictions.¹²

The organization and proliferation of the neighborhood club in Kansas City

coincided with the appointment of George F. Kessler as city planner. Kessler's mission was to rationalize the city's growth through precise planning and zoning laws, to design a metropolis rivaling Kansas City and St. Louis, Missouri. But city planning and the civic improvement campaigns at the beginning of the decade illustrate the city's penchant for discord, not cooperation.¹³

Armourdale was riven with internecine jealousy. The ABC and the Sixth Ward Civic Club represented opposite ends of the same relatively small district, but the clubs rejected William A. Callahan's merger proposal. The dissension prompted one south side partisan to muse whether "some political interests in another part of the city were endeavoring to keep a divided sentiment in Armourdale. . . ." The writer, *Kansas City* [Ks.] *Republic* publisher E.W. Wells, declared, "Just as long as there is found in Kansas City, Kansas, the need of numerous civic organizations to protect and foster the interests of the several divisions of the city, just that long will the city stand divided against itself. 'Without union in civic organizations there cannot be union in civic action'." ¹⁴

Clearly, Kansas City leaders were searching for a viable means of civic progress. Through the efforts of King Kleagle George T. McCarron, Wells, Brown, and Hattley were united in the ranks of the Invisible Empire. They were joined by other civic club leaders: John L. Zeller, president, London Heights Improvement Association, and secretary, Officers' Council of Associated Improvement Clubs; Dr. K.C. Haas, president, Argentine Activities Association; Paul Taneyhill, membership director, Sixth Ward Civic Club; E.D. Cole and G.A. Hartweg, directors, Riverview Booster Club; William A. Callahan, co-founder of a subsequent Armourdale Business Club; and the Reverends Nau and Durham.¹⁵

The need for progress was obvious to most Kansas Citians, not just prospective Klansmen. But the direction progress should take and the character of its program was problematic. Two groups vied for the right to determine this path. Local elites -- municipal politicians, industrialists, and bankers -- advocated a vision of inter-city and

state cooperation. A "Greater Kansas City" agenda which, it critics averred, sacrificed Kansas liberty to Missouri interests. These elites, entrenched in the city's central business district on Minnesota avenue, were found in such powerful local institutions such as the Mercantile Club, the Rotary Club, and the First Presbyterian church. Politically, they supported Kansas City, Missouri, initiatives such as the city commission movement and other "progressive" measures backed by the *Kansas City [Mo.] Star*. But the Missouri newspaper and its influence represented all the evils in the world to a substantial number of Kansas City, Kansas, white, native-born, middle-class Protestants. Small-business owners dominated this faction which advocated economic and political autonomy, not cooperation (or in their view, *cooptation*). Its ideological spirit was found in Armourdale, along Kansas avenue, the city's "second" business district.¹⁶

Elite leaders did little to counter their "Missouri first" reputation. During the "crime wave" of 1922, business leaders like O.C. Smith, president of the Kansas City, Kansas, Chamber of Commerce and Kansas City Structural Steel, supported grassroots crimefighting efforts but "not for the purpose of criticizing certain agencies in Missouri. . . . It is my opinion that the good citizens of the two cities and states are one in this matter. . . ." Smith's fellow businessmen formed a Kansas branch of the "Law Enforcement League." Led by President James H. DeCoursey, a prominent Catholic and creamery owner, and Secretary Albert Mebus, a druggist, business leaders flocked to the Missouri-based organization. "The committee will make a great mistake," warned Police Chief Henry T. Zimmer, "unless it extends its influence to bring about observance of the law in addition to the enforcement of it. . . ." The chief "cited the fact that the 'enforcement organization' in Kansas City, Mo., is charged with being merely a political creation of selfish propagandists who are endeavoring, it is said, to extend their influence over this city." But while established elites looked across the river for aid, the response of many white, native-born citizens was to look to themselves and channel their discontent into a large popular social movement: the Ku Klux Klan.¹⁷

Kansas City, Kansas, was a good opportunity for diligent Klan organizers. The perceptive salesmen tailored the order to accommodate the contours of local history. Edward Y. Clarke's genius for "doctoring" sick towns is evident in the Kansas City case. King Kleagle McCarron and his team quickly diagnosed the chronic maladies of local history -- the disunity, the inchoate civic identity, and the regional hegemony of Kansas City, Missouri -- and sold the Klan as the cure to the city's ills. Wyandotte Klan No. 5 would thus speak directly to the social, civic, and political issues raised since the agglomeration of 1886 and offer dissatisfied Kansans a voice of populist protest.

The first knot of Wyandotte Klan No. 5 leaders was typical of the of the hundreds of others who joined the order. Dr. Devirda H. Burcham was appointed as the chapter's first president. A serum company owner, Burcham was an active Republican, Mason, and Baptist. Other Klan leaders had similar middle-class credentials: Klaliff Dr. Cresse P. Rhoads, dentist; Klokard Walter H. Williams, auditor at Armour and Company; Kludd A.L. Neugebauer, railroad engineer; Kligrapp J.C. Hopkins, no occupation; Klabee Jesse H. Baxter, insurance salesman; Kladd Harlan A. Bullock, no occupation; Klarago Harry Lillich, grocer; Klexter Vic Potter, chauffeur; Klokann W.H. Whisman, bookkeeper at Armour and Company; T.R. Taneyhill, druggist; C.E. White, barber; and Nighthawk J.W. Gill, foreman.¹⁸

Before establishing a permanent Klan hall at 747 Minnesota avenue, Number Five met at various locales. The Grund Hotel, 806 North Sixth street, was the site of early meetings and initiations. Other early Klan conventicles included the "Old Armory" at 845 Minnesota avenue and a building at Thirteenth and Troup streets. After a year of clandestine preparation, Wyandotte Klan No. 5 was ready to move out of the lodge and into civic life.¹⁹

Notes

1. David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (1965; reprint ed., Durham: Duke University Press, 1987): 33.
2. Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983): 113. Larry Hancks, ed., "A History of Kansas City, Kansas Municipal Government" (unpublished manuscript, Wyandotte County Historical Museum, Bonner Springs, Kansas): 3-4. There is a paucity of twentieth-century Kansas City, Kansas, history. In addition to Fink and Hancks, see Kate L. Cowick, *The Story of Kansas City* (Kansas City: Central High School Press, 1924). Joseph H. McDowell, *Building a City: A Detailed History of Kansas City, Kansas* (Kansas City: The Kansas City Kansan, 1973). Kansas City, Kansas Ethnic Council, Inc., *Ethnic History of Wyandotte County* vol. 1 (Kansas City: Kansas City, Kansas Ethnic Council, n.d.).
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9. *Kansas City* [Ks.] *Kansan*, June 18, 1922.
10. Ibid, January 25, 1921; June 18, August 14, August 27, December 31, 1922. Nellie Drier to Ben S. Paulen, June 18, 1927; Mary Pappas to Ben S. Paulen, July 21, 1926; Charles B. Griffith to J.N. Chapman, July 27, 1926, Box 2, Folder 2, Governors Papers, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas. Governor Ben S. Paulen's correspondence files are flush with complaints of Kansas City crime.
11. *Kansan*, June 25, 1922.
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15. *Kansan*, February 6, 1921; October 10, 1922; January 8, March 11, 1923. *Kansas City [Ks.] Weekly Press*, September 14, 1923; June 5, 1925.
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Chapter Two

Debut

When Wyandotte Klan No. 5 received its charter from the parent Atlanta organization on February 17, 1922, it relished the new degree of autonomy. The small-business owners, clerks, and skilled craftsmen who predominated Ku Klux Klan ranks were now free to graft their local agenda onto the body of the organization. Civic interest was evident from the beginning. Dividing the city by its then-seven wards, Exalted Cyclops DeVirda H. Burcham appointed "Major Generals" to "look after the moral and financial welfare of the wards." The Major Generals, in truth, little more than Klan ward heelers, reported their observations and the complaints they received from the residents of the wards to Burcham. Potholes and bootleggers were common grievances. The Major Generals were L.K. Wiles, druggist, first ward; Dr. T.W. Hadley, veterinarian, second ward; J.V. Moore, laborer, third ward; R.M. Eagle, serum company owner, fourth ward; J.K. Kiekbush, yardmaster, fifth ward; William A. Kuchera, hardware store owner, sixth ward; and A.L. Neugebauer, railroad engineer, seventh ward. ¹

In early April 1922, the generals' community vigilance materialized in the form of flowers signed "K.K.K." at the home of Samuel Hamilton. A 39 year-old electrical lineman, Hamilton had fallen to his death from a utility pole. A short time later, on April 23, 1922, the Klan made its official debut at the Metropolitan Avenue Methodist Episcopal church. Five masked and robed Klansmen interrupted services to present the Reverend George W. Durham with a donation and a letter of appreciation thanking the pastor for his "patriotic addresses . . . advocating civic justice and political equity." The men boasted that their organization comprised 7,000 "One Hundred Per Cent Americans"

and represented "everything that is good and clean morally, righteously, and politically." ²

Durham's "hearty welcome" was not reciprocal at all Methodist Episcopal churches. The Reverend G. Franklin Ream, Washington Avenue Methodist Episcopal church, would not accept the Klan's donation unless the men removed their masks. They refused. Rebuffed but resolute, the Klan's goodwill tour of Kansas City churches continued throughout 1922. The Klan also visited nearly "every colored church" and donated \$10.00, an act the *Kansas City* [Ks.] *Sun* wryly noted showed "that while they may be opposed to the African race 'running the earth' they are not averse to aiding them in their efforts to reach heaven." The Klan explained the purpose of its visit in a letter to a black congregation:

We are very much aware that some persons with selfish ambitions have addressed your people and have sent letters among them telling of our dislike for the colored race. But right here let us say that our membership is 100 per cent American and we are always friends of good law abiding citizens white or colored. We are watching and aiding every good American institution and our investigations have proved that your church is such and a credit to our city. We wish to express our appreciation to all law abiding citizens. ³

African American ministers D.B. Jackson, T.A. Bowers, and P.A. Morrow handed over the Klan gifts to charity while other church leaders returned the money to the Klan.

Klansmen carefully planned church and hospital visitations. After the Reverend G.C. Schaub of the Trinity English Lutheran church received a Klan donation, "the lights went out and a motion picture machine flashed the Stars and Stripes on a curtain back of the pulpit. The congregation sang 'America' and the five men left," a swift act suggesting a good Klan advance man. On May 1, 1922, Kansas City Klansmen made their largest donation, \$402.00, to Bethany Hospital. "This is a token of our appreciation for what you are doing for the poor of this community," Klansman Paul Taneyhill said. ⁴

The church and hospital visits served several purposes: first, to announce the Klan's "benevolent presence" in the community; second, to link the image of the Klan with the Protestant churches; and third, to attract recruits. Intimidation of the "Catholic, Jew, Negro, thug, gambler, bootlegger, prostitute and other people of that character" -- a

Klan official's depiction of the order's enemies -- was the darker, if unstated, goal of the Klan's specious charity. ⁵

The KKK responded to and exploited the city's growing fear of crime. "This is a law enforcement organization. I wish you to get that clear," Exalted Cyclops Burcham announced. The Ku Klux Klan's vision of the well-ordered society linked -- as did mainstream Protestantism -- civic and moral progress. Public order was predicated on private virtue. Hence, the enforcement of law, particularly the prohibition law, was a moral and social necessity for Kansas City Klansmen. Serving as the eyes and ears of the resulting militant Victorianism, Wyandotte Klan No. 5 encouraged its members to "go around pool halls and gambling places where [criminals] loaf and report what they hear. . . ." ⁶ Klansmen John L. Zeller explained:

The members are admonished to observe the general conduct of the citizenry and report to the cyclops or his appointed representative any violations of the law, or any acts that lead to the violation of the law . . . if it proves of merit it is taken over to the police department, the prosecuting attorney or the sheriff's office. ⁷

Fulfilling a dream of founder Simmons, the Klan also functioned as a nationwide spy network. Following tips from other Klans, Number Five detectives tracked wanted men from Georgia, Oklahoma, and Kansas, but without much success. Burcham described how the process worked:

We had a letter from an organization in Oklahoma that a certain Jew had come to Kansas City, and they wanted us to locate him, and if he was there to notify them, and they would send an officer after him and take him back. We failed to locate the Jew; he was not in Kansas City; at least we did not find him. [The wanted man's offense was the "mistreatment of a woman."] ⁸

Indigenous reprobates proved easier prey. Number Five warned a local minister to return to his sick wife or leave town. The parson returned, resigned his pastorate -- and quit the Klan. ⁹

Politics, too, fell in the bounds of Klan interest. Setting its recusant standard squarely in the Republican camp, the Klan cast its vigilant eye on city hall. When Water and Light Commissioner L.H. Chapman tendered his resignation in June 1922, the Klan

sought to influence the selection of his successor. Finance Commissioner Arthur J. Strickland, Streets Commissioner Henry J. Schaible, and Parks Commissioner Harry J. Kaelin were aligned against Mayor Harry B. Burton and Chapman. Burton and Chapman were allegedly tied to Thomas A. Bigger's "city hall machine." A machine, it was rumored, which worked in the interest of Kansas City, Missouri, and was controlled by the *Kansas City [Mo.] Star*. Chapman remained in office but the incident divided the solons and adumbrated a new order in Kansas City, Kansas, politics. Strickland, Schaible, Kaelin, the Klan, and the city's African American Republican leaders composed one unlikely faction. Black Republicans and white Republican Klansmen remained political allies throughout the Klan era. "Issues," a realistic black leader explained, "are uncertain and unsubstantial things in the hard world of necessities. We have been juggled and befogged on issues too many times. What we want is not issues, but jobs." ¹⁰

But Klansmen were "befogged" with issues of probity, class, and race. Led by the Reverend George W. Durham, 300 concerned Klan citizens demanded the dismissal of the Argentine High School dancing instructor. "Some of this dancing has been called folk dancing, but what do you call it when I saw a group of young folks in our high school playing jazz music and waltzing to it?" Durham queried. The school's spring pageant also angered Klan parents. "It was a tax on poor people," Durham charged, "and many of them could ill afford to spend the money it cost to dress their children properly for the occasion." School superintendent Matthew E. Pearson planned to integrate the pageant racially, but a delegation of Klansmen convinced him to revise his plans. Political alliances are one thing; social equality quite another. ¹¹

Wyandotte Klan No. 5's debut in the spring of 1922 revealed the concerns of subsequent Klan activism: civic improvement, law and order, and political and moral probity. But its furtive pursuit of all that was "good and clean morally, righteously, and politically" quickly alarmed Kansas City's established leadership. Mayor Burton proclaimed:

I believe America and Kansas City are big enough to house all classes, creeds and colors in harmony. I believe in laying cards on the table and in the revealing of identities in any organization and I do not believe any organization ashamed of its identity should be permitted to instill fear into the hearts of other people who might otherwise function as good citizens. Being a real American, to me, means toleration of all.¹²

The next day, April 25, 1922, the *Kansas City* [Ks.] *Kansan* announced in a one-inch headline, "Burton Launches War on Ku Klux." The mayor's war on the Klan would rage for the next year. A Democrat, Burton, born October 12, 1887, at Climax, Kansas, was elected mayor of Kansas City as the Union-Labor candidate in 1921. A Protestant and a Mason, Burton had nevertheless appointed a well-known Catholic, George H. West, as police judge, and hired four Catholic police officers. "His fairness to Catholics since taking office a year ago has been utilized by his political enemies to arouse feeling against him," the *Catholic Register* reported. "It is well known the Klan is being organized by his political enemies and intends to back its own candidates at the next county and city elections." Burton's alleged affiliation with a certain Kansas City, Missouri, newspaper infuriated Kansas City's militant localists. Whatever the veracity of Burton's ties to the *Star*, he did play interstate politics. Only a month before the Klan became an issue, Burton was compelled to quit campaigning for Democratic mayoral candidate Frank Cromwell in Kansas City, Missouri. Not only were Burton's political ties suspect to the Klan, the mayor's church, the Washington Avenue Methodist Episcopal, had declined the order's donation. Moreover, fearing civil disorder, Burton had forbidden the Klan to march in an American Legion parade. The brief history between Burton and the Klan was marked by suspicion and antipathy. It went downhill from there.¹³

Burton attempted to mobilize public opinion against the Klan with an open letter to the citizens of Kansas City decrying the order for setting "neighbor against neighbor" and fanning the "flames of prejudice." But Burton also recognized the impulse that led men into the order and appealed to the Klansmen on civic grounds.

To those of you reluctant to quit under fire, I would answer that your first interest, and your highest responsibility, rests upon you as a citizen of Kansas City and not as a Klansman. Your desire to bring peace and harmony into this community

should overcome your reluctance to disband under criticism. I send this call to your community spirit, your love for Kansas City and not to your personal pride. ¹⁴

The mayor shifted to the administrative front where he requested all city employees who were Klan members to renounce their membership in the Invisible Empire or risk the loss of their jobs. Burton's threat "occasioned considerable levity" among city workers, forty-eight of whom had already joined the order. Although all four city commissioners eventually endorsed Burton's anti-Klan measures, commissioners Kaelin and Strickland questioned the city's right to circumscribe employees' off-duty associations. As is to confirm Klan founder William J. Simmons' earlier boast of federal endorsement, Kaelin argued, "I have seen in the papers where it is recognized by congress." Nevertheless, the commissioners proclaimed a state of emergency to protect the "peace and happiness" of the city. To that end, they passed an ordinance prohibiting the "appearance in public of any person in any costume which conceals his identity." Soft-pedaling the ban, Burton maintained that the mask law protected Klansmen "in that it would prevent crooks from adopting their disguise and preying on the people or in gratifying of personal grudges." ¹⁵

Burton's first three assaults on the Klan -- official condemnation, administrative fiat, and proscription -- forced the order to defend itself. On May 1, 1922, Wyandotte Klan No. 5 challenged the mayor to "debate . . . the merits of the organization." Klansman John L. Zeller, men's Bible class teacher at London Heights Methodist Episcopal church, arranged the meeting between the mayor and "Dr. Harry Graham," an alleged Boston-based Klan lecturer. On Sunday, May 7, 1922, 2,000 spectators crammed the church at Fifteenth and Garfield streets. Graham asserted that the country needed the Klan because of widespread "moral degeneracy and political debauchery." Women and children required special protection, "the sanctity of the home . . . being violated a thousand times a day." Graham said he welcomed the mayor's attack on the order as "the more said against us, the more men flock to our standard. The riffraff of the country

cannot get into our organization. The men whom we take in are the best men of every community, men who are respected, fearless, and courageous. . . ." Burton, like other anti-Klan public officials, based his opposition to the order largely on its secrecy. "Why do they clothe themselves in secrecy and go about their work in the dead of night? Why do they wish to take the law unto their own hands? We have the ballot to change conditions when they are wrong. . . . Let the Klan dispose of its robes and hood. Let members show their faces," Burton said. ¹⁶

The *Catholic Register* noted, "The audience, which besides being anti-Catholic and pro-Klan, was also very much anti-Burton." They hissed the mayor. "Before an audience of intelligent thinking men, he [Graham] would be no match for Mayor Burton's straightforward logic, but before an ignorant anti-Catholic audience such as attended the debate, he had the best of the mayor." ¹⁷

Despite his poor reception at the London Heights debate, Burton's continuing efforts against the order were paying dividends. On May 6, 1922, the day before the debate, Burton introduced the following anti-Klan resolution to the Wyandotte County Democratic Convention: "That the constitution of the United States provides equal rights to all citizens regardless of race, color, or creed, and that we, Democrats of Wyandotte county, stand opposed to any organization which includes hatred or prejudice among our citizens." Party support of his "crusade against the Ku Klux Klan" and an approving *Kansan* editorial appeared along with coverage of the debate to strengthen the mayor's position. ¹⁸

On the night of May 4, 1922, a "semi-official" investigation of the Klan resulted in the arrest of Klansman Melvin T. Puckett. Guarding the entrance to a Klan meeting at the Old Armory, Puckett was arrested on vagrancy charges by Police Judge George H. West, Chief of Police Henry T. Zimmer, and four other officers. Klan attorneys William L. Wood and Louis S. Harvey represented Puckett the next morning in court. A prominent Mason, Republican, and former Texas cowboy, Wood lashed out at West and

began to "cross-examine" the magistrate in disrespectful tones. Wood and West were once friends, but West's Catholicity and his political ties to Burton were anathema to Wood's burgeoning Klan consciousness. West found Wood in contempt and fined him \$50.00.¹⁹

But Puckett's arrest was not the biggest issue to the Klan. The police department's investigation -- an operation Burton denied approving but which the Klan with its network inside municipal affairs expected -- was at the root of Wood's anger. West's arresting party had been accompanied by at least one other observer that night, an investigative reporter from the pugnacious *Catholic Register*. On May 11, 1922, the paper reported on the investigation of the Klan and furnished its readers a list of "some men who may belong to the Klan." The *Register* explained that "we have sufficient evidence to lead us to believe and we are reasonably sure it was a meeting of the Klan, but as we do not believe in too much secrecy, we are printing below a list of the men whom we recognized leaving the hall." The names of more than ninety Klansmen appeared on the *Register's* front page. The paper cleverly ridiculed the Klansmen's civic hypocrisy:

Klan members sign a pledge and take an oath to discriminate against the Negro, the Jew and the Catholic. They are not adverse, however, to taking these ostracized beings' money in a business way. For instance there is Mr. Hartweg, who bought out the old Nelson Shoe Company's store on Central avenue. The present editor of the *Register* used to sell Mr. Hartweg advertising some thirteen years ago and Mr. Hartweg was profuse in his love for the Catholic, so he said. Probably someone else was using Mr. Hartweg's car and left it parked in front of the door of Old Armory hall. That is up to Mr. Hartweg to prove to his Catholic customers.²⁰

The paper promised to "make amends" if it incorrectly identified any of the ninety-plus men as a Kluxer.

"Dear Sir: In a recent issue of your paper there appeared an article, asserting that I was a number of the K.K.K. and did not want the friendship and patronage of the Catholic people, which I have enjoyed during my entire time in this city. Knowing I am one of the Democratic candidates for the office of sheriff, some have used this propaganda to injure me, and elevate someone else for this office. In order to place this matter before the many readers of your honorable paper, I wish to deny that I ever was or am now a member of said K.K.K. This accusation is an absolute falsehood, and I defy anyone to substantiate the same.

"Thanking you in advance, I remain

"Respectfully,

"T.A. Powell, Candidate for Sheriff"²¹

Powell either fibbed or changed his mind. His name appears on page one, column four, of a Wyandotte Klan No. 5 membership roster dated November 13, 1922.²²

Burton had attacked the Klan on a variety of fronts: public opinion, administrative, legal, and clandestine. The 1922 political season opened a new theater of conflict. Nineteen Klansmen entered the July primaries, seventeen as Republicans. Ten Klansmen moved on to the general election where eight won office, including that of county attorney. Four Klansmen sought the office of sheriff: Republicans David Kepler, Jr., and Harry Lillich and Democrats T.A. Powell and George Chess. Daniel "Bob" Maher, a non-Klan candidate, defeated Lillich by seventy-six votes. T.A. Flynn, a Catholic, won the Democratic nomination. Klansmen retreated to Paul Taneyhill's Armourdale drugstore to discuss their options.²³

Judge West's harassment of the Klan had included fining a Lillich supporter, Edward Cooper, \$25.00 for displaying a placard too close to the primary polls. But the Klan blamed Lillich's defeat on vote fraud, not official repression. To circumvent their enemies, they decided to enter the grocer as an independent candidate. Bearing the signatures of 8,000 "working men and their wives," a petition was submitted to the county requesting Lillich's name be placed on the November ballot. The bid met resistance, but County Attorney E.A. Enright, a Klansman, ruled Lillich eligible for the general election despite questions over the legality of some petition signatures.²⁴

Lillich's re-entry into the sheriff's race fashioned a "new alignment" in Kansas City politics as Burton's allies deserted the Democrats for the Republican Maher to ensure the Klansman's defeat. Other anti-Klan forces also planned strategy. Five-hundred members of the Retail Grocers Association, "equally divided in representation of colored, Catholic and Jew," backed Maher. The race energized voters. Papers reported a one-hundred percent increase in Catholic registration. The *Kansas City [Ks.] Weekly Press* observed:

On the other hand the Ku Klux Klan is very active and that organization . . . has

been rolling up voters for the battle. Just what may be considered as the best test, is hard to determine. Flynn, Democrat nominee for sheriff is a member of the Catholic church. Lillich who made the race for the Republican nomination for sheriff and came out second best in the race . . . is said to be affiliated with the Klan. . . . Maher, who was nominated by the Republicans, is a member of the Presbyterian church and not a member of the Klan. Many members of the Catholic church are said to believe that it's the part of wisdom not to make a clean cut campaign against the Ku Klux Klan and if that be true Maher may receive unexpected strength on that account. ²⁵

Maheer won with 11,364 votes, Lillich finished second with 9,000, and Flynn was last with 7,046 votes. The anti-Klan strategy had succeeded for the time being, but 1922 marked only the beginning of Klan political action. ²⁶

Just as the *Catholic Register* had warned when the Klan first appeared in Wyandotte county, the organization was composed of Mayor Burton's political enemies. Barely two months after the 1922 campaign, whispers of the Kluxers' plans for the 1923 municipal elections began to appear in the news. "One such rumor," the *Kansan* reported, "said that an effort to raise \$9,000 to finance the campaign of a Ku Klux Klan candidate would be made because of the fight Mayor Burton waged on the Klan when it first came into public notice here." Five prospective Klan candidates were mentioned for the mayor's race: Dr. R.B. Grimes, a non-Klansman backed by Klansmen N.V. Reichenecker and DeVirda H. Burcham; W.J. Wright, Jr., former Wyandotte county sheriff; Dr. T.W. Hadley; G.B. Little, former city commissioner; and William W. Gordon, a non-Klansman, but brother of Klansman Dr. J. Riley Gordon, city dentist. Burton finished first in the primary with 8,503 votes, Gordon was second with 6,895, and Grimes a close third with 6,874 votes, according to the *Weekly Press*. ²⁷

Anti-Burton partisans protested the mayor's victory. The following letter expresses the frustration which fueled the Klan's growth in the city.

"Dear Sir: I wish to say frankly that I am not a Democrat, but myself and wife voted for you [Governor Jonathon M. Davis]. I want to call your attention to some things that; locally we seem unable to handle. On primary day Tom Pendergrass [Pendergast] of Mo. Sent Antos over her to work for Burton. Some estimate the numbers at near one hundred. This procesion was led by Chester the noted Mo. Criminal and his Pall also prosecuted over there. An Argentine woman rode with Chester all day. I think it will be plain to you that if thugs and thieves with whiskey to distribute it will, are allowed to do this it will be impossible to get a good citizen

to run for any office. If they attempt that on election day again they should be met with officers enough to arrest the whole gang even if the state militia have to be called to help. A Gentleman from Argentine tells me that Chapman has an Argentine man on pay who has been out the City for six months. The City Hall Crowd are supposed to put over a vast coal deal costing our people a big sum. A reporter for the Star is said to have been connected with that but he got frightened and pulled out. My opinion is that five or six fellows at the City Hall should be decapitated officaly just below their official ears, or plainly impeached.

"Yours Truly,

"W W Wallace" ²⁸

Wallace did not appear in the Klan ranks, but was one of the thousands who would look to the Invisible Empire for civic salvation.

Although it did not appear on the ballot, the 1923 municipal election was a referendum on the Ku Klux Klan. Burton vowed to "continue to oppose strife and contention between the different groups in the city and I will, in the future as in the past, exercise a spirit of fairness in dealing with these problems." Challenger Gordon directed his message toward Klansmen and the potential "Klan voters" like Wallace. "The first thing I will do when I enter upon the duties of mayor will be to clean up Kansas City. It is my intention to thoroughly purge the city of bootleggers, gamblers, and other undesirable characters." Gordon defeated Burton by more than 4,000 votes. "There are many causes assigned for the defeat of the mayor," the *Weekly Press* reported, "too numerous to mention." "One of which no doubt," the rival *Sun* rejoined, "was that the *Press* supported him." ²⁹

The Klan did its part by circulating anti-Burton rumors and anti-Catholic propaganda. Klansman Harry Lillich claimed that Burton had applied for Klan membership on December 21, 1921, but was rejected. Witnesses on the affidavit included Klansmen Vic Potter, N.V. Reichenecker, T.W. Hadley, and William Hicks. Lillich's accusations appeared conveniently on the front page of the *Kansan* the day before the election. Burton denied the charge and sued Lillich for libel, but Judge Don C. McCombs, himself a member of Number Five, ruled that libel cases with their \$1,000.00 fines were out of his jurisdiction and dismissed the case. Klansmen also distributed bogus

Knights of Columbus literature. "This alleged oath is so revolting," Knights of Columbus State Deputy James Malone said, "that no self-respecting man will permit it be given to him, say nothing of distributing it to others. . . ." Wyandotte Klan No. 5 successfully exploited anti-Missouri, anti-machine, and anti-Catholic sentiments to defeat Burton and advance its vision of an independent, Protestant Kansas City, Kansas.³⁰

The 1923 school board race also drew Klan candidates. What assurance did Klan parents have of segregated pageants and danceless schools without control of the board? Five Klansmen entered the contest for a two-year board term: George W. Durham, DeVirda H. Burcham, Bert R. Collins, and Rosedale Klan No. 17 Exalted Cyclops Lawrence E. Wilson. Durham won, but was followed closely by Burcham and Collins. Indeed, despite Durham's victory, their vote totals were remarkably similar. Their popularity illustrates the appeal of the order beyond the klavern door: Durham, 10,468; Burcham, 10,128; and Collins, 10,110. The threesome's primary tallies had also been close: Durham, 5,262; Burcham, 5,063; and Collins, 5,404. In the primary race for a four-year school board term, Klansman Dr. K.C. Haas received 5,238 votes but faltered in the municipal election.³¹

Mayor Gordon considered five Klansmen for the chief of police: W.J. Wright, Jr., Clarence Hedrick, Harry Lillich, Stanley Beatty, and U.G. Snyder. "At least four of the men mentioned in connection with the place would have difficulty in obtaining confirmation," the *Kansan* opined, "[and] presentation of their names would only result in embarrassment to them." Perhaps sensing the trouble, Gordon rewarded a non-Klansman, campaign worker N.J. Wollard, with the post. Only one Klansman, Haas, was appointed to a position in the administration. The medical man became the new police surgeon for the city's first district. But whatever disappointment the Klan suffered over Gordon's administrative appointments, they had defeated Burton and also thereby eliminated Judge West from the police court bench and Chief Zimmer from the police force.³²

Wyandotte Klan No. 5's influence was evident from the moment it invaded the

Metropolitan Avenue Methodist Episcopal church. Civic melioration, law enforcement, political and moral probity, and the attendant class and racial issues, both defined the Klan's agenda and forced public debate. Assigning "Major Generals" to supervise the city's wards, the Klan, in effect, reinstated the governing system supplanted by the adoption of commission-style government in 1910. Enough political victories could make the changes official. The ensuing war with Mayor Burton had raged from April 1922 to April 1923. But the Klan's first year in Kansas City was a qualified success. As the city would soon learn, the Klan had suffered mightily at the hands of Burton, West, the Catholic press, Kansas Governor Henry J. Allen, and their own contradictions.

Notes

1. Kansas, State v. Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, *Plaintiff's Abstract of the Record* (Topeka: n.d.): 42, 139. "Majors General List," Unfinished charter application file, Records of the Office of the Secretary of State, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.
2. *Kansas City* [Ks.] *Kansan*, April 11, 24, 1922.
3. Ibid, April 24, June 5, 6, 1922. *Kansas City* [Ks.] *Advocate*, April 28, 1922. *Kansas City* [Ks.] *Sun*, June 19, 1922.
4. *Kansan*, May 2, 8, 1922.
5. "Plaintiff's Abstract," 117.
6. *Kansan*, April 30, 1923.
7. "Plaintiff's Abstract," 101.
8. Ibid, 99.
9. Ibid, 50-51.
10. *Kansan*, June 16-21, 26, 1922.
11. Ibid, June 20, 1922. "Plaintiff's Abstract," 42.
12. *Kansan*, April 24-25, 1922.
13. Ibid, March 20, April 24-25, 1922. Margaret Landis, comp., *KCK's Mayors: A Look Back* (Kansas City: n.p., n.d.): 57-58. *Catholic Register* (Kansas City, Mo.) April 27, 1922.
14. *Kansan*, April 25, 1922.
15. Ibid, April 25-26, 1922.
16. Ibid, May 2, 4, 8, 1922. "Dr. Harry Graham" was actually Dr. Harold A. Bullard, an Independence, Missouri, dentist turned Klan activist. "The Mormon church of Independence seems to have furnished its quota of active Klansmen," the *Catholic Register* (November 2, 1922) noted of Bullard. Bullard also organized the Klan organization in Fort Scott, Kansas. "Plaintiff's Abstract," 57.
17. *Catholic Register*, May 11, 1922.

18. *Kansan*, May 7-8, 1922. *Kansas City [Ks.] Weekly Press*, May 12, 1922.
19. *Catholic Register*, May 11, 1922. *Kansan*, May 5, 1922.
20. *Catholic Register*, May 11, 1922.
21. *Ibid*, July 27, 1922.
22. "Ku Klux Klan Membership Roster," November 13, 1922, Henry J. Allen Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
23. *Weekly Press*, June 23, November 10, 1922. *Kansan*, August 2-4, 1922.
24. *Ibid*, August 3, October 11, 17, 21, 1922. *Weekly Press*, October 6, 1922.
25. *Kansan*, October 22, 1922. *Advocate*, November 3, 1922. *Weekly Press*, November 3, 1922.
26. *Ibid*, November 10, 1922.
27. *Catholic Register*, April 27, 1922. *Kansan*, January 7, 1923. *Weekly Press*, February 16, March 30, 1923.
28. W.W. Wallace to Jonathon M. Davis, March 30, 1923, Box 10, Folder 4, Governors Papers, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.
29. *Kansan*, April 1, 1923. *Weekly Press*, April 6, 1923. *Sun*, April 13, 1923.
30. *Kansan*, April 2, 8, 19-20, 1923.
31. *Weekly Press*, March 23, 30, April 6, 1923.
32. *Kansan*, April 5-8, 17, 1923.

Chapter Three

Methods and Operations

While it offered a united front during the battles of 1922 and 1923, disagreement over "methods and operations" split Wyandotte Klan No. 5 within months -- if not weeks -- of receiving its organizational charter. Conflict over the use of violence quickly tested Klan members' resolve to impose their agenda on Kansas City. The trouble began in the early spring of 1922 when Exalted Cyclops DeVirda H. Burcham and Klabeer Jesse H. Baxter traveled to Atlanta, Georgia, to "investigate conditions and learn something of the Klan and the organization." What Burcham and Baxter did or did not learn in Atlanta would be the cause of the chapter's internal problems. '

Dr. Matthew E. Pearson, superintendent of Kansas City, Kansas, public schools, planned to integrate the city's spring school pageants by allowing black and white children to participate together in a parade. A "mixed parade" was intolerable to the Klan, but the appropriate course of action was yet to be defined. Number Five had two branches subordinate to the exalted cyclops whose identities were unknown to the klavern's general membership. The "Cabinet" provided the exalted cyclops with internal security and reviewed the complaints received by the Klan on local problems. The Cabinet, also referred to as the Klokann, comprised both chapter officers and others selected by Burcham. But the Cabinet was deliberative. A shadowy element dubbed the "Kluxers" executed the order's direct actions. Burcham presented the Pearson matter to the Cabinet where he allegedly proposed that the Kluxers disguise themselves in special unmarked robes and masks and punish the superintendent for his affront to white supremacy.

Burcham's "nightriding," Klansman Louis S. Harvey claimed, was the lesson from Atlanta. It was there Burcham learned

how . . . [to] execute these orders of the cabinet and carry them into effect by taking people out and administering punishment; he [Burcham] said they were instructed how to disguise themselves so they would not be recognized and that was by stuffing cotton in their mouths or jaws. [So] that the punishment they administered was effective . . . they did not attempt to permanently maim a person or kill them, but just so they would know they had been dealt with by the Klan. ²

But Harvey and fellow cabinet members Richard R. Fleck, Cresse P. Rhoads, and J.C. Hopkins balked at Burcham's recommendation. "I remember saying to them if there was anything wrong with the matter we should take it up with Professor Pearson; so we called his house and made arrangements to see him that evening," Harvey said. In the end, Burcham led a delegation of robeless Klansmen to the superintendent's house where they peacefully persuaded him to cancel the "mixed parade." ³

For his part, Burcham maintained that the purpose of his Atlanta visit was to meet Imperial Wizard William J. Simmons. According to Burcham, Simmons' only instruction was to "follow the constitution and by-laws" of the Klan. Burcham also denied the existence of the Kluxers and their unmarked robes. He contended that the consideration of community complaints was not limited to the cabinet but was referred to the regular membership. After the members gathered evidence, Burcham relayed the information to public officials. He further stated that the Pearson problem was discussed during a regular membership meeting. But ten other Klansmen corroborated Harvey's charges, including Harry R. Borchardt, an admitted member of the Kluxers; J.C. Hopkins, the member who ordered the manufacture of the Kluxer robes; and Gerald Keith, the Klan tailor who made the garments. ⁴

The Atlanta visit of Burcham and Baxter sparked a series of events that tested the limits of Klan members' loyalty to the organization. The Klan would not survive if its leaders advocated violence as a means of community control. Klansman Louis S. Harvey, a former US assistant attorney who had helped prosecute the Industrial Workers of the

World in a celebrated Red Scare trial, suspected that Burcham's enthusiastic plans were unlawful. Harvey discovered that an "old statute put on the books after the Civil war had been carried forward into Section 19 of the federal statutes, which explained . . . that if two or more persons conspired to intimidate a person from exercising his rights they was guilty of conspiracy and subject to federal punishment." Harvey concluded that Burcham's plan for Pearson "would amount to a violation of the federal statutes, and I did not feel justified in letting the members go farther without apprising them of what their actions meant in the face of the law." At the next meeting of the Klan, July 13, 1922, Wyandotte Klan No. 5 voted to disband. On Harvey's advice, 450 men left the order that day.⁵

There were other problems. Conflicts over chapter funds, particularly "the amount of money they wanted sent to Atlanta at that time" exacerbated the tension. Klansman V.A. Simons blamed the chapter's "bust up," in part, on the money issue. Simons did not elaborate on the details, but the ubiquitous *Catholic Register* boasted that

so much trouble was caused the Klansmen through this publicity [the *Register's* expose of Klan members] that they got to fighting amongst themselves. Then Kleagle Jones saw that the end was near and ordered the treasurer to turn over the several thousand dollars in the treasury to him. The treasurer waxed so vehement in his refusal that he finally told Jones that 'he would see him in hell first before he would turn over a dime to him.' Jones reported back to DeNise, and the King Kleagle had the Imperial Gizzard revoked the charter of the Kansas City, Kas., Klan. The money is still on deposit in a Kansas bank.⁶

But King Kleagle McCarron did not "revoke" Number Five's charter until November 22, 1922, and only then to circumvent a state investigation. But there is an element of truth to the *Register's* assertions. Burcham charged twenty-two Klansmen with attempting to "wreck" the order by the "appropriating of money and property." Although most them quit on July 13, 1922, they were officially "banished" from the Klan on October 20, 1922. It was charged, among other crimes, that J.C. Hopkins "had received money and issued receipts" but failed to record the transactions in Klan account books. This charge was apparently retaliation against Hopkins for testifying that Burcham

ordered him to buy the Kluxers' unmarked robes. ⁷

Clearly, the Klan was divided over means. The question is raised: did the KKK attract violent men? Perhaps more important, did the Ku Klux Klan encourage violence? Given the order's widespread appeal to white society, its ranks included some men who promoted violent solutions to personal and social problems. For example, Mrs. Thomas C. Hattley sued her Klan husband for divorce and charged that he was "an habitual drunkard, [and] that he has abused her and used vile language. . . ." Hattley was arrested for attacking his wife with a pistol and public drunkenness. The Klan constitution did not proscribe the drinking of alcoholic beverages except during chapter meetings. Beyond that, drinking was an offense only if adjudged to be "excessive" or "habitual." In other words, the law and order organization sworn to uphold the law had a realistic, if insouciant, attitude toward prohibition. Also, Harry Lillich was arrested for striking a Kansas City, Missouri, journalist who attempted to photograph Wyandotte Klan No. 5 members leaving a courtroom. ⁸

Notwithstanding the acts of individual Klansmen, the reputation of the 1920s' Klan is not marked by physical violence. "With few exceptions," a six-city case study concluded, "members of the hooded order avoided violent vigilantism." No acts of physical violence were reported in Kansas City, Kansas, in the 1920s, but the encouragement was there. The Reverend W.C. Hausam of the London Heights Methodist Episcopal church -- the church that had hosted the Burton-Graham debate and was home to more than twenty Klan families -- preached a theology of castigation which advocated that the "hickory stick be revived for youth and the public whipping post for adults. . . ." Kansas City Klansmen, however, did not heed Hausam's call to arms. Despite the sermon from the pulpit and Burcham's Atlanta "lessons," Wyandotte Klan No. 5 refrained from nightriding and the tar and feathers. But there were alternatives. ⁹

Number Five boycotted non or anti-Klan merchants to promote fraternalism with fellow members and punish enemies. Fraternalism or "Klannishness," as defined by

Imperial Kligrapp H.K. Ramsey, meant to "stick to your own kind in every way." Number Five advised its members to "refrain from buying" from one certain dry goods merchant because he refused to advertise in a local newspaper. The paper was not identified, but the *Kansas City* [Ks.] *Kansan* was the likely beneficiary of Klan action. Klansmen alleged that the *Kansas City* [Mo.] *Star* had ignored Kansas political affairs until the advent of a daily rival, the *Kansan*, in 1920. Fearing the loss of advertising revenue, the *Star* began to report and -- critics claimed -- direct Kansas politics. By mid-April 1922, the *Kansan* and *Star* were engaged in an advertising war. Boycotting merchants who refused to advertise in the *Kansan* was consistent with both the Klan's local agenda and its ideological Klannishness. It is an example of the ineluctable bond of Klan and civic interest. Although the *Kansan's* editorial page was nominally anti-Klan, Klansmen held important positions at the paper. Managing editor Carl F. White and George C. Akerstrom and Herbert T. Barclay of the advertising department were members of the Invisible Empire.¹⁰

In addition to the boycott, Number Five sent letters to public officials to advance its cause and express disapproval. Official Klan missives were cast on the order's stationery and stamped with its seal. Official Klan correspondence was sober, if officious.

"Honorable Jon. Davis

"Governor of Kansas

"Sir: It is with regret that we note your appointment of Harry B. Burton to a responsible position in the state prison at Lansing. And in as much that Harry B. Burton has taken advantage of every opportunity to oppose our organization during his administration as Mayor of our City; thus compelling us to defeat him for reelection,- We feel keenly disappointed to learn of him receiving an appointment to a position of responsibility by the Governor of our State who we have felt to be friendly to our cause. Therefore we most earnestly protest to you of this appointment and sincerely hope that you will take steps to amend this situation in the near future.

"Most sincerely yours,

"Wyandotte Klan No. 5

"Knights of the Ku Klux Klan

"John L. Zeller

"Kligrap

"P.O. Box 117, Kansas City, Kansas." ¹¹

Governor Davis received other "Klan" mail, scrawled and lacking the seal of

"official" Number Five correspondence.

"We See By the Papers that James McMahon sent up to Lansing in 1909 was asking for pardon from you. to Wich we Seriously Protest. We No the full facts in his case he murdered his Brotherinlaw and 2 Sisters in Cold Blood. besides his married Sister was Ready To Be A Mother in Short Time So you See he practicable killed 4 Persons these are facts Knowned to all the Old Settlers hear So we dont want you to Ever Let him out to come back in Wyandotte county. if he is turned Loose in hear he Will Be Roped to a Limb of tree. We are your Friends and ask you to Keep him Where he is Let Him Rot there for all We care. Trust you will see to it he dont come Back Hear.

"Fraternally the KUKlux Klan of. Wyandotte. Co. Kan." ¹²

It is difficult to determine whether the McMahon letter is authentic or spurious, but it is an example of the trouble Mayor Burton predicted would arise with the appearance the hooded order.

The internal pressures testing Wyandotte Klan No. 5 were soon compounded by Governor Henry J. Allen's attacks on the order. Allen became aware of the Klan's existence in Kansas in late July 1921. The state was concerned with the prospect of Klan growth but the issue lay dormant until July 1, 1922 when 400,000 railroad shop workers went out on strike, 7,500 of whom were in the two Kansas Cities. Allen was acutely sensitive to labor unrest. Kansas had endured more than 300 coal strikes between 1917 and 1919 alone. In an attempt to curb work stoppages, Allen called a special session of the legislature in January 1920 to establish the Court of Industrial Relations, better known as the "Industrial Court." The court regulated five "public interest" services. The court could forbid the cessation of production without its permission, and set criteria for wages and working hours. But more important, "the [court] stated that [while] collective bargaining was upheld, it was unlawful to use the strike, boycott, picketing and intimidation for the purpose of hindering, delaying or interfering with or suspending the operation of an essential business." ¹³

Organized labor had floundered since the end of World War I. Management had skillfully exploited the uncertainty of the Red Scare to roll back wartime gains. Labor hated Allen's court and sought redress. Opportunistic organizers presented the Klan as a

solution, and some historians speculate that the railroad workers heeded the call of the white cloak as a means to combat Allen. When the Klan threatened to march in support of the strikers in Arkansas City, Kansas, on July 4, 1922, Allen ordered Attorney General Richard J. Hopkins to investigate. The parade was canceled, but on July 8, 1922, Allen announced that masked parades would be prohibited in Kansas. "Masks [were] an unhealthy condition while strikes were in progress," the governor said.¹⁴

Within weeks of the strike, Governor Allen began exploring the possibility of ousting the KKK from the state. The Klan was operating in Kansas without a corporate charter; in other words, "no authority to enter Kansas has been granted to the Klan." The taint of illegitimacy bothered Kansas City Klansmen and added to their doubts of the order's efficacy for their community. The newspapers from the summer of 1922 were flush with reports of Klan organizing success from Chanute to Great Bend. At the end of September 1922, Allen dispatched James A. McDermott of the Industrial Court to investigate conditions in Arkansas City, the site of continuing Klan and labor strife. McDermott's inquiry evolved into a larger examination of the order.¹⁵

As the tension between Allen and the Klan mounted, the governor decided to address the issue in a speech in Coffeyville, Kansas, a "stronghold" of the order. Allen left Topeka amidst threats to himself and his family. The governor reportedly "had no fixed opinions as to whether the messages came from a supporter of the Klan or from a radical labor representative who sought to use the Klan to carry out a cowardly plan of intimidation." But if the governor knew who his enemies were, he did not seem to realize that the Klansman and the labor radical might be the same man. On October 28, 1922, Allen denounced the Klan as the "greatest curse that can come to any civilized people, the curse that arises out of unrestrained passions of men governed by religious intolerance and racial hatred." Allen threatened to oust the Klan from Kansas on the grounds that it was a foreign corporation (Atlanta, Georgia) operating in the state without permission of the state charter board. He accused the order of "seeking to establish in this

state the un-American idea that we can improve the conditions of this state by turning the rights of government over to a masked organization which arrogates unto itself the right to regulate the individual." He resumed the crusade in Great Bend, Kansas, expanding his attack to include those whom the Klan desired most to control -- Roman Catholics. Allen, like many Kansas Klansmen, a Methodist and a Mason, subscribed to all the old anti-Catholic myths. "Bloc voting" and undermining the public school, the "cornerstone of the republic," were common anti-Roman sentiments. Allen complained:

You Catholics who go out and say "I don't vote for a man that is not a Catholic. I am going to put my political activities behind my religion." You ought to be ashamed of yourselves. . . . I know that the Catholic church has been guilty of some unwise duties toward the school system because there should be in this country, as the basis of our citizenship, the English language. ¹⁶

Allen's reflexive anti-Catholicism underscores the notion that his opposition to the Klan was largely political. In his words, "My objection to the Klan is not on account of any particular principle, my objection is to its masked form of government." ¹⁷

Following a summer and fall of preliminary investigation, Attorney General Hopkins filed a suit on November 21, 1922, seeking to oust the Klan from Kansas. By November 13, 1922, the state had secured a list of Kansas City Klansmen; on April 30, 1923, the investigators began hearing their testimony. Local newspaper coverage exposed the Klan's intimidation of school superintendent Matthew E. Pearson and the dancing instructor at Argentine High School, as well as the inner workings of the order. The articles divulged the order's dissension and the July 13, 1922, break up. The stories included the names of more than forty Wyandotte Klan No. 5 members, certainly an embarrassment to the men and their families. ¹⁸

Despite the Klan's victorious appearance in the wake of Mayor Burton's defeat in the city elections, the order was divided and exposed by the end of April 1923. The official pressure applied by Mayor Burton and Governor Allen (and later, Attorney General Charles B. Griffith), and the relentless hounding by the *Catholic Register* forced the Klan to defend and examine itself. Upon examination, scores left. Exalted Cyclops

Burcham's trip to Atlanta quickly tested Klansmen's definition of civic action and their tolerance of zealots. The violence issue and the concomitant problems of the Kluxer committee, and the allocation of unit funds for special robes, pushed many in the order far beyond their expectations of "100 percent Americanism" and community service. But the members who walked out of the Klan between July 1922 and May 1923 were not abandoning their Klan ideals. "The whole thing, methods and operations, have become so distasteful to me I don't want to think about it," one disgusted Klansman complained. So he did what any concerned citizen would do. He organized. ¹⁹

Notes

1. Kansas, State v. Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, *Plaintiff's Abstract of the Record* (Topeka: n.d.): 54. *Kansas City* [Ks.] *Kansan*, April 30, 1923.
2. "Plaintiff's Abstract," 52-54. *Kansan*, May 1, 1923.
3. Ibid.
4. "Plaintiff's Abstract," 45, 49, 55, 98-100, 102-103.
5. *Kansan*, May 1, 1923. "Plaintiff's Abstract," 45, 47.
6. Ibid. *Catholic Register* (Kansas City, Mo.), November 9, 1922.
7. "Plaintiff's Abstract," 99, 138.
8. *Kansan*, March 28, April 7, 1923. Knights of the Ku Klux Klan (Inc.), *Constitution and Laws* (Atlanta: Knights of the Ku Klux Klan Inc., 1921): 75.
9. Shawn Lay, ed., *The Invisible Empire in the West: Toward a New Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991): 220. *Kansan*, November 20, 1922.
10. "Plaintiff's Abstract," 92. *Kansan*, April 17-22, 1922; May 1, 1923.
11. John L. Zeller to Jonathon M. Davis, July 18, 1923, Box 10, Folder 4, Governors Papers, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.
12. "Ku Klux Klan of Wyandotte Co. Kan.," to Jonathon M. Davis, September 20, 1923, Box 9, Folder 1, Governors Papers, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.
13. *Topeka* [Ks.] *State Journal*, July 28, 1921. *Kansan*, July 1, 1922. A. Bower Sageser, "Political Patterns of the 1920s," in John D. Bright, ed., *Kansas: The First Century* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1956): 2:75-76.
14. *Topeka* [Ks.] *Daily Capital*, July 6, 1922. *Kansan*, July 21, 1922. Charles W. Sloan, Jr., "Kansas Battles the Invisible Empire: The Legal Ouster of the KKK from Kansas, 1922-1927," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 40 (Autumn 1974): 394-395.
15. *State Journal*, July 18, 1922. *Daily Capital*, August 17, 24, September 3, 1922.
16. *State Journal*, October 26, 1922. *Daily Capital*, October 29, 31, 1922.
17. Ibid, November 2, 1922.

18. "Plaintiff's Abstract," 5. *Kansan*, April 30-May 1, 1923.

19. *Ibid.*

Chapter Four

Part I

A Tendency To Split

The goal of reform-minded Klansmen was to eliminate the "objectionable features of the old Klan." On July 6, 1922, a challenger appeared in Kansas City, Kansas, to compete with the Klan for the allegiance of Protestant activists. Former Wyandotte Klan No. 5 members Cresse P. Rhoads, V.A. Simons, Richard R. Fleck, Bert R. Collins, L.F. Lutz, F.B. Croll, J.C. Hopkins, W.H. Williams, Paul Taneyhill, and C.E. White organized the Knights of America. "We couldn't longer control the klan organization, so we killed it and organized a new anti-Catholic society to fight Catholics and Jews only. We will let Negroes join this society as most of our members like Negroes anyway and they ought to be a big help to us in the new organization," ran a questionable *Catholic Register* quote attributed to an erstwhile Klansman. ¹

A potential Knight of America was at least 18 years old, male, Protestant, and notwithstanding the reports of the *Register*, white. The ex-Klansmen brought selected ideological beliefs with them to construct the new organization. The club's "principles" -- "Loyal Americanism, Protestant Christianity, white supremacy, the exercise of the right of franchise, limitation of immigration, free public schools, and closer relations between capital and labor" -- were a litany of standard Klanisms. Officially convened at the Welborn Community Church, the Knights of America met at the Knights of Pythias Hall at 626 Minnesota avenue. Three hundred men joined at the inaugural meeting. Klansman E.A. Enright, Wyandotte county attorney, was among those attending the convention. ²

The Knights of America was a product of the schism that occurred in the wake of

the Pearson affair. Although the Knights received a charter from the state, they quickly disappeared from public view. Its founders and leaders reappeared in both the Atlanta-based Klan and subsequent reform efforts.

On May 1, 1923, the "Ku Klux Klan of Kansas" applied for a charter to do business in Kansas. Organized by Number Five members Harlan A. Bullock, J.C. Hopkins, L.F. Lutz, F.B. Croll, and Claude F. Higgins, the Kansas Klan was the result of the ouster suit investigation initiated by Governor Henry J. Allen. Removing the "objectionable features" that had so roiled state leaders, "the new klan will recognize no boycott, no class hatred and will not wear masks or hooded uniforms," explained the group's attorney, Louis S. Harvey.³

This reformed Klan was tailored to fit the specific objections voiced by Allen in October and November 1922. Allen made it unmistakably clear that his opposition to the Klan was not based on any "particular principle."

The essence of our opposition to this order is not in the fact that it fights the Catholic church or expressed its antipathy to the Jews or to the Negro, but in the fact that it does this under the protection of a mask and thru process of terrorism and violence.⁴

The governor had an acute intolerance of challenges to the status quo. His Court of Industrial Relations was an attempt to reorder the strife caused by obstreperous coal miners and recalcitrant corporations. The Klan was a rogue. Its interference in the 1922 railroad strike threatened civil order and its intimidating masks made identifying -- and therefore controlling -- it difficult. Allen admitted he did not fear the Catholic Knights of Columbus because he knew who the state leaders were. He could not say the same of the Klan. Any successful Klan reform had to assuage establishment fears of political competition.⁵

The "Preamble" to the "Constitution and Laws of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan" (Kansas) was a simple rearrangement of Klan rules from pages four through six of the Atlanta Klan's constitution; but there were several important omissions. The Kansans

dropped the residual "southernness" of the Atlanta organization. References to chivalry, protection of womanhood, and the maintenance of white supremacy were excised from the document. All plagiarism stopped, however, in the articles of the new constitution. Section two limned the structural changes devised by the reformers to build an acceptable Klan. Whereas the Imperial Wizard reserved all power in the autocratic Georgia order, the "government of the [Kansas Klan] shall be patterned after the constitution of the United States of America, and shall ever be democratic in form." The local reformers promised executive, legislative, and judicial branches "substantially the same as the federal government." The local units envisioned by the Kansans would manage their own finances, and write and enact their own constitution for the "absolute government of themselves." ⁶

The new Kansas Klan required its members to be "Protestant Gentiles" and American citizens. This expanded, however slightly, the Atlanta Klan's definition of American, which had allowed only native-born white men to join its ranks. Section five of the Kansas constitution was the foundation of the reforms. "The membership and roster of this organization shall not be any more secret than is the membership of any other fraternal, benevolent organization or secret society in the United States of America." Furthermore, the Kansas Klan assured the state that no member would be "required or permitted to wear a mask over his face or to otherwise conceal his identity" in public. Confident that these reforms would prove acceptable the state charter board, the Ku Klux Klan of Kansas hopefully submitted its application. ⁷

Klan fissility is a national characteristic of the KKK in the 1920s. Torn by internal and external pressures, Protestant activists scrambled to maintain viable organizations. Disgruntled Denver, Colorado, Klansmen formed the Minute Men of America. The new order "abandoned the more controversial features (secrecy, overt anti-Catholicism and anti-Semitism) of the Invisible Empire while retaining the Klan's concern with law, order, morality, the separation of church and state, and immigration restriction." Robert S. and

Helen Merrell Lynd's archetypal "Middletown" -- Muncie, Indiana -- suffered the same calamitous fissures as Kansas City. First reorganized in March 1924 as the "Klan of the North," the new order had national ambitions and appeared in Kansas a short time later as the "Independent Klan of America." Although the Muncie-based Klan applied for a charter in early 1925, on May 7, 1925, the Kansas State Charter Board rejected the application unanimously and without explanation. Threatened with a lawsuit for their unauthorized use of the word "klan," the hapless reformers renamed their sect the "Knights of American Protestantism" and disappeared. From the "Anglo-Saxon Clubs of America" (Richmond, Virginia) to the "International Klan of America" (Seattle, Washington); from the "Independent Protestant Knights of America" (Niagara, New York) to the "Improved Order of Klansmen" (Oregon), reformed Klans across the country rejected the autocracy of the Atlanta organization and attempted to organize independent local orders. ⁸

Former Kansas City Klansmen attempted reform once again in August 1924. These men also purged the order of its undemocratic features and secrecy. Indeed, the third Kansas City reform Klan declared itself the *Visible* Empire. The Visible Empire plagiarized pages nine through twelve of the Simmons' constitution. It also drastically censored the original order's Southern overtones. "To create and maintain an institution by which the present and succeeding generation shall commemorate the great sacrifice, chivalric service and imperishable achievement of the Ku Klux Klan," stated the Kansans' truncated infringement of the Atlanta order. The rest of the regionally offensive sentence read :

"of the Reconstruction period of American History," to the end that justice and honor be done the sacred memory of those who wrought through our mystic society during that period, and that their valiant accomplishments be not lost to posterity; to perpetuate their faithful courage, noble spirit, peerless principles and faithless ideals, to hold sacred and make effective their spiritual purpose in this and future generations; that they be rightly vindicated before the world by a revelation of the whole truth. ⁹

The third Kansas City reform Klan was led by President Jesse V. Moore, Vice-

President Robert N. Coffman, Secretary H.L. Gregg, A.D. Roudybush, and I.J. Motz. There are class differences evident between the various reform efforts. The Knights of America was organized by a dentist, two insurance company owners, a foreman, a timekeeper, a veterinarian, a druggist, and a barber. The "Ku Klux Klan of Kansas" included three members of the Knights of America among its founders. The third Kansas City Klan was lead by a laborer, a plumber, two self-employed craftsmen, and one man without a known occupation. But whatever declension of class is suggested among various reform leaders, their goal was the same: to build an acceptably independent and democratic Klan. ¹⁰

Kansas City reform Klansmen eliminated the order's masks, unveiled its membership, revolutionized its internal power structure, localized finances, revised the order's Southern antecedents, and liberalized membership rules. But the Klan's most "objectionable feature" was its claim to a role in the affairs of men, community, and state. This pretension was an affront to elected and established leaders that no amount of reform could ever make politically acceptable.

Part II

"I am not against your organization because you don't like the Catholic church."

Governor Henry J. Allen

October 30, 1922 ¹¹

The Ku Klux Klan's anti-Catholicism persisted despite the reforms. There is a simple explanation for the reformers' retention of the order's odious and vocal contempt of Rome: It was never included among the order's "objectionable features."

American anti-Catholicism was as old as the country itself. John Higham wrote that "the idea that papal minions posed a subversive threat to national freedom was so

deeply entrenched in myth and memory that it needed relatively little objective confirmation." *Anti-Klan* anti-Catholicism is a case in point. James Malone, state deputy of the Knights of Columbus, protested Allen's accusation of Catholic "bloc voting" and "unwise duties toward the public school." ¹²

The quoted statement, "Catholics who go out and say, 'I do not vote for a man who is not a Catholic'," is manifestly unfair to Catholics. Catholics never say, "I do not vote for a man who is not a Catholic," though many do not vote precisely because they are Catholics. ¹³

In reply, Allen merely reiterated that the

Catholic who boycotted in election a man because he was not a Catholic is just as far away from the ideals of the American Republic as the Klansman who boycotted the man because he was a Catholic. This is religious bigotry, and has no place in our American life. And bigotry is just as bad for a Catholic as a Protestant. ¹⁴

Allen viewed the Ku Klux Klan and the Catholic church as moral equivalents. He found both groups narrow-minded, strident, and unreasonable. Other opinion leaders shared Allen's belief that the KKK and Catholic church occupied the same moral plain. "There is considerable satisfaction in the thought that John W. Davis has been unable to drive President Coolidge to denouncing the Klan. . . . What kind of president would he be to denounce the Klan or the Knights of Columbus?" wondered the *Kansas City [Ks.] Weekly Press*. ¹⁵

If a person, idea, or institution was identifiably Catholic, its role in public life was suspect. As late as 1924, the Kansas State Board of Review considered prohibiting the film "White Sister" because it was "purely Catholic." Gertrude A. Sawtelle, a resident of Kansas City, Kansas, and chair of the review board, explained to Governor Jonathon M. Davis that while "there was nothing immoral or objectionable in the picture . . . we thought at the time it would only appeal to Catholics." ¹⁶

Kansas endured three waves of organized anti-Catholicism in 1892, 1914, and 1921. The American Protective Association thrived in Kansas City Protestant fraternal quarters (white and black) from 1892 to 1897. Paranoid and shrill, the order's newspaper, the *American Eagle*, fought imaginary battles against militant papists throughout the

decade. By the early 1910s, an anti-Catholic movement emerged from the left of the political spectrum. This "post-progressive" anti-Catholicism linked Big Business with the Roman hierarchy. The *Iola* [Ks.] *Anti-Catholic Crusader* expressed the fears of many Kansas Protestants in this era. The *Crusader* explained to its readers "how the Jesuit political machine handles the bank. . . . This is not a theory, but a condition. This is not a generalization, but a brass tack fact." The "post-progressive anti-Catholic" movement was superseded by the war effort, but the zealous "100 percent Americanism" of the aftermath once again raised doubts of Catholic loyalty. Kansas City Catholics had anticipated the possibility of a postwar reaction. "During the past few weeks we have heard from several authorities that we may look for a drive against Rome in the near future," the *Catholic Register* wrote in the spring of 1920. "There is need for Catholic action. We must have a crystallized Catholic sentiment," the paper warned. Within a year, their fears were realized as Kleagles arrived in the city to exploit the latent anti-Catholicism.¹⁷

Despite their persistent opposition to Rome, most Kansas City Klansmen would have agreed that they were not opposed to Catholic persons, but to the alleged political machinations of church leaders. "The fact is," the Klan's national leader, Imperial Wizard Hiram W. Evans, said, "that our quarrel with the Catholics is not religious but political." Separating individual Catholics from their hierarchy allowed a Klansman like Walter R. Rhodus to survive the marriage of his daughter, Naydene, to a prominent Catholic, Joseph A. Butler, Jr.¹⁸

Anti-Catholic activism could take the same form as other Klan protests in the post-Pearson era: letter writing.

"January 30, 1925

"Hon. B.S. Paulen

"Topeka Ks

"My Dear Governor,

"I am writing to advise you of some friction that exists among the State Board of Nurses. A Miss M. Helena Hailey R.N. Sec'y-Treas of State Board for Examination and Registrations of nurses is objectionable to some of the Board and I thought it advisable, owing to existing circumstances for you to give it due consideration. I am told by good authority that she is not fair. Also while nursing in a protestant hospital she took a child to care for, "which was a commendable thing to do." but

since joining the Catholic Church is training it in this faith. I am enclosing news paper clipping to verify this statement. Now as Miss Hailey's place on the Board will be vacated with others this year, I would earnestly ask that a protestant be put on in her stead. I will give you two names of Nurses who are such and highly respected among their profession. Miss Bertha Pace of Clay Center and Mrs. C.C. Bailey 741 Tyler at Topeka Ks, or any other protestant who is efficient should be acceptable to the remainder of the Board. I would not have you infer that I am trying to dictate who you shall appoint. am only asking that you do reappoint this party. and that the ones you do appoint will be protestants. The Catholic are not entitled to an appointment from you, as none of them helped to elect you. I do not know if you remember me or not. You were meeting so many but I am the Dentist who got you to go to Bethany Hospital. I would much rather talk this over with you than write. and will not expect an answer from you, as you should be careful what you write. I will deem this as personal.

"I am yours truly.

"C.P. Rhoads" ¹⁹

Rhoads, "banished" Klansman and Knights of America "Supreme Concillor," is just one example of the stalwart anti-Catholic activism of the era.

Propaganda distribution accompanied the letter-writing activities. Klan literature filtered into the mainstream press. "It is said that something like 75 or 80 percent of the public offices in the United States are held or controlled by a secret organization known as the Knights of Columbus, whereas only about one-fifth of the voters of the country belong to this organization. . . . Is this true?" asked *Kansas City* [Ks.] *Sun* editor A.W. Stubbs. After Stubbs received a long rebuttal to the "insidious and dastardly propaganda" explaining that Catholics occupied only five percent of public offices, the editor concluded, "If the K.K.K. organization is based on false promises, as the figures given indicate, then all this triade against the Catholic church and the Knights of Columbus is pure bunc and the loyal people of this country will soon see that such an organization has no legitimate place among American institutions." But Stubbs fell for the Klan's "bunc" in September 1924. By this time the order had been in Kansas City for almost four years. Stubb's naïveté illustrates the efficacy of Klan propaganda on local opinion leaders. ²⁰

To charges of inherent disloyalty and disproportionate political power, Klansmen blamed the Catholic church as a germinating source of alien influence in American life. Set to the tune of "Drifting Back To Dreamland," this song expressed Klan fears of a

"Romanized" Kansas and proffered solution.

It's a shame for dear old Kansas/ and we know where to place the blame/ With the state filled up with Romans/ To drive our young folks insane/ With their rotten politicians/ As corrupt as they can be/ So it is up to the Knights of the KKK/ To set Kansas free/ We are going to Klux Topeka/ We are going to Klux it hard/ We are working for one purpose/ To put Americans on guard/ We are busy but we are happy/ For we are working for our home/ For the public schools of America/ And to keep the dago pope in Rome/ Are we going to turn over America/ To the dago pope in Rome/ Let him undermine our government/ And wreck our Protestant homes/ Or will we protestants stand firm/ And stand man by man/ To support this organization known/ as the Knights of the KKK/ If you wish to cut down taxes/ Of these old United States/ And join the Knights of the KKK/ To close the immigration gates/ From old southeastern Europe/ And fill our asylums as well/ Load them onto a returning boat/ And let them go to ____/ I want to say to you Protestants/ Who do not belong to the Klan/ You just as well join us/ As Rome has got your hand/ So step right out this evening/ And get right in the fight/ I want to see you sign your card/ Before you leave here tonight.²¹

A Kansas Klanswoman regarded Catholicism as not only a foreign influence but as a separate nationality. In 1927, "M.H.S." warned:

A Methodist minister in this city [Salina] made the statement that in the past year in 7 states the Methodists thought they were doing good work in caring for 3,000 orphans. It has been revealed that in the same 7 states 21,000 children had been taken in and cared for by Roman Catholics. 21,000 children deprived of the education of a free public school. It means the loss of 21,000 coming American citizens, 21,000 more Roman Catholics. This is nothing short of a crime on the part of Protestant people.²²

Kansas City Klansmen inherited a cultural tendency -- the Protestant suspicion of Catholic loyalties -- and tailored it to fit their local agenda. Roman Catholics were thus viewed as yet another foreign obstacle to overcome in the path of civic progress.

Kansas City's white native-born Protestants joined the KKK with the hope of addressing the city's longstanding issues of civic unity, identity, and regional autonomy. When the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan lost its ability to aid in that effort, its members left in droves, including 450 in a single day. But the search for a viable means of civic progress was only beginning. Former Klansmen attempted at least three revisions of the order, never differing over ends, only "methods and operations." Effacing the "objectionable features" of the boycott and class hatred, as well as secrecy, residual "Southernness," and autocratic organization, Kansas City Klansmen designed what they

believed was an "unobjectionable" order. But their opponents saw things differently. With the exception of the Knights of America, no Klan organization from Georgia, Kansas, or Indiana was ever chartered to operate legally in the state. Notwithstanding the fears of masked political competition, the protracted ouster suit (July 18, 1922 to February 28, 1927) gave state officials a reasonable excuse to reject the applications of any Klan or Klan-related organization.

The one reform the Klan could not endure was the only reform that would have made it acceptable to elected officials: absolute dissolution. But the Klan's refusal to reform itself ideologically would also contribute to its eventual decline in Kansas City. With a Catholic population of nearly 30,000, any hope of true civic progress was doomed without their participation. But the antipathy to Rome was so ingrained in Protestant identity that its elimination was never considered a "reform."

Notes

1. *Topeka* [Ks.] *State Journal*, May 3, 1923. *Kansas City* [Ks.] *Kansan*, October 18, 24, 1922; May 1, 1923. *Catholic Register* (Kansas City, Mo.), July 27, 1922.
2. *Kansan*, October 18, 24, 1922.
3. *State Journal*, May 3, 1923. *Topeka* [Ks.] *Daily Capital*, May 3, 1923. Knights of the Ku Klux Klan [Kansas], "Application for Charter," May 1, 1923, Records of the Office of the Secretary of State, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.
4. *Daily Capital*, October 31, 1922.
5. *Ibid*, November 2, 1922.
6. Knights of the Ku Klux Klan (Inc.), *Constitution and Laws* (Atlanta: Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, inc., 1921): 4-6. Knights of the Ku Klux Klan [Kansas], "Constitution and Laws of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan," May 1, 1923, Records of the Office of the Secretary of State, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.
7. *Ibid*.
8. Larry R. Gerlach, "A Battle of Empires: The Klan in Salt Lake City," in Shawn Lay, ed., *The Invisible Empire in the West: Toward a New Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992): 143-144. Robert S. and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* (1929; reprint ed., Orlando: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1957): 482. M. William Lutholtz, *Grand Dragon: D.C. Stephenson and the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1991): 121. *Daily Capital*, February 5, May 7, 1925. David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (1965; reprint ed., Durham: Duke University Press, 1987): 193. Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967): 82, 195, 254. Lay et al, "Invisible Empire," 177.
9. "Constitution," (Atlanta): 9-12. Knights of the Ku Klux Klan [Kansas], "Charter," August 5, 1924, Records of the Office of the Secretary of State, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.
10. Knights of the Ku Klux Klan [Kansas], "Application for Charter," August 5, 1924, Records of the Office of the Secretary of State, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.
11. *Daily Capital*, October 31, 1922.
12. John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (1955; reprint ed., New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988): 79.

13. *State Journal*, November 1, 1922.
14. *Daily Capital*, November 2, 1922.
15. *Kansas City [Ks.] Weekly Press*,
16. Gertrude A. Sawtelle to Jonathon M. Davis, August 20, 1924, Box 2, Folder 5, Governors Papers, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.
17. *American Eagle* (Kansas City, Ks.). *Iola [Ks.] Anti-Catholic Crusader*, March 1914. Higham, "Strangers," 178-179. *Catholic Register*, April 29, October 28, 1920.
18. Hiram W. Evans, "The Klan's Fight for Americanism," *North American Review* 223 (May 1926): 47. John D. Bright, ed., *Kansas: The First Century* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1956): 4: 423-424.
19. C.P. Rhoads to Ben S. Paulen, January 30, 1925, Box 38, Folder 3, Governors Papers, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.
20. *Kansas City [Ks.] Sun*, September 12, 26, 1924.
21. Ku Klux Klan File, Manuscript Collection, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.
22. *Klankraft in Kansas* (n.l.), September 1927.

Chapter Five

"Let Members Show Their Faces" ¹

When Mayor Harry B. Burton commanded Kansas City Klansmen to "show their faces," he cast a threat at the heart of the order's strength: its secret membership. Wyandotte Klan No. 5 closely guarded both the size and identity of its membership from "alien" purview. This examination of Klan membership is a look behind the klavern door, an unmasking of the average Klansman.

Not surprisingly, there is disparity between the Klan's estimate of its size and that of its enemies and critics. In February 1922, the local papers reported rumors that Wyandotte Klan No. 5 had 5,000 members in the city. In late April 1922, in a letter to the Reverend George W. Durham, the organization claimed 7,000 "One-Hundred Percent Americans" in its ranks. But there are reasons to doubt these figures. Wyandotte Klan No. 5 had organizational jurisdiction over all seven of the Kansas City's wards; that it, until the addition of Rosedale, Kansas, as the city's eighth ward in June 1922, every Kansas City man who joined the Ku Klux Klan joined Number Five. On July 13, 1922, 450 men left the Klan in protest of Exalted Cyclops DeVirda H. Burcham's alleged plans to do violence to school superintendent Matthew E. Pearson. The following spring, Burcham's successor as chapter president, Walter H. Williams, testified that the "last report showed about 650 members paid up." This amounts to approximately 1,100 Klansmen. The membership roster received by the office of Governor Henry J. Allen in November 1922 listed 1,053 names, including those who had quit in July. ²

Estimates of the state size of the Klan are also difficult to assess. Lilah L. Jones estimated the order at 100,000, but her figures were based a report by the pro-Klan

Mulberry [Ks.] Independent. Charles W. Sloan, Jr., calculated Kansas Klan strength at "possibly 40,000," but admitted that this "may be too high." Contemporary journalist Robert L. Duffus concluded that he did not know the total number of Kansas Klansmen but believed that its core of support was built on a base of 15,000 activists.³

Whatever the true numerical measure of the Ku Klux Klan in Kansas City, the organization was able to gather other citizens in a larger, if unorganized, Klan movement. Klansman Harry Lillich's independent candidacy for sheriff in 1922 was supported, in a petition, by "8,000 working men and their wives," and later, 9,000 voters. Although Lillich reportedly resigned his Klan membership to pursue the office, he was the acknowledged Ku Klux Klan candidate. Similarly, DeVirda H. Burcham, George W. Durham, and Bert R. Collins received close vote totals in both primary and general elections. If true Klan membership stood at only 1,000, Klan appeal numbered five to ten times that. Non-Klansmen supported Klan political candidates and other Klan-led initiatives such as the protest over the Argentine High School dancing instructor and racially-integrated school events.⁴

Summer picnics also reveal the Klan's size in the city. Wyandotte Klan No. 5 did not sponsor the annual regional event until 1928. Usually held in Bonner Springs, Kansas, on the Fourth of July, the holiest of Protestant holidays, the event featured Number Five's thirty-two-piece band, a drill team, and a beauty contest. Number Five invited all Klansmen within a 150-mile radius of the city to the party. "Several thousand" were counted at the 1928 picnic. Other Klan picnics were more precise in their enumeration: 1924, 5,000; 1925, 5,000; and 1926, 12,000. The annual Klan picnic included Klans from Kansas City, Leavenworth, Tonganoxie, Linwood, and DeSoto, Kansas, among others. The events were open to the public and heavily publicized. Hence, the picnics illustrate again, if not actual Klan numbers, Klan appeal. And like its political strength, Klan amusement power numbered 5,000 to 10,000 strong.⁵

The Women's Auxiliary noted in the accounts of the summer events is part of the

unfortunately scant evidence left documenting its existence. The inclusion of women -- and boys in their own Junior Klan -- shows the order's appeal to the family, its social, sexual, and recreational aspects. The Klan's resonance among native-born Protestant women manifested itself as farce, too, suggesting that by late 1922 -- early in the Klan's Kansas City history -- the culture was already saturated with the image of the Ku Klux Klan.

The Ku Klux Klannettes presented the Rev. F.W. May of the University United Brethren church with a purse, \$1, Saturday night. It was at the height of a party which the Rev. and Mrs. May were giving at their home, 2100 North Thirty-Second Street, for the Christian Endeavor Society that a group of weird hooded figures silently stalked into the room. A hush fell on the merrymakers. One of the shrouded figures stepped forward and in a hushed voice made the presentation speech. Then as silently as the number had come, so they moved away. Then, they had a revel all their own. Unmasked, the band proved to be the Women's Bible Class and the Criterion Class of the United Brethren church. The two organizations had not been invited to the young peoples' party. To let others know they to, were having a social event, they planned the visit to the Rev. Mr. May's house. The Criterion Class and the Women's class were entertained after the masked visit, at the home of Mrs. Baker, 3118 Parallel avenue. ⁶

Who were the one-thousand faces behind the mask of Wyandotte Klan No. 5? "They are not always, though sometimes, the best in the community, but they are usually the good, solid, middle-class citizens, the 'backbone of the nation,'" reported Stanley Frost, a contemporary observer of the Klan. An astute and not altogether unfriendly critic of the KKK, Frost's opinion was not that of the mainstream, which generally viewed the Klansmen as "drawn . . . from the less educated and less disciplined elements of the white Protestant community." But the discovery of Klan membership rosters substantiates Frost's claims. A list of more than 1,000 Kansas City Klansmen survives, 894 of whom were identified for this study. An occupational status comparison of Klan and non-Klan workers illustrates the middle-class make-up of the order. ⁷

4.4 percent (N=39) of the Klansmen were employed in high, non-manual, white-collar occupations such as attorney, clergyman, or physician. Only 1.7 percent of Kansas City's male workforce enjoyed high, non-manual status. 24.1 percent (N=216) were mid, non-manual workers. This class included small-business owners, managers, and public

officials, among others. 5.5 percent of the non-Klan workers appeared in mid, non-manual occupations. 26.9 percent (N=240) of Kansas City Klansmen worked in low, non-manual occupations. This category comprised clerks, public servants, and salesmen. 14.8 percent of the general workforce was classified as low, non-manual. 19.3 percent (N=173) of the Kluxers were skilled, blue-collar craftsmen such as railroad engineers, carpenters, or machinists. 17.6 percent of Kansas City's non-Klan workers were also skilled workers. 19 percent (N=169) were apprentices or semi-skilled workers. These Klansmen worked as switchmen, brakemen, and meter readers, among other occupations. 23.2 percent of the city's other workers toiled at this level. And 3.2 percent (N=29) of Kansas City Klansmen were unskilled laborers. This number contrasts sharply with the 24.5 percent of the total male population who appeared in the same category. Additionally, 3.1 percent (N=28) of the Klansmen were either retired or unemployed. The most common Klan occupations were small-business owner, clerk, and railroad engineer; that is, mid, non-manual, low, non-manual, or skilled work occupied most Klansmen. Among the occupations the Klan did not attract were banker, industrialist, and fundamentalist preacher. ⁸

Because Kansas City Klansmen were so similar in occupational status, they were familiar with one another in ordinary yet vitally important ways. 51.7 percent (N=462) worked with at least one other Klansman. There were twenty-five Klan businessmen who employed thirty-two fellow citizens of the Invisible Empire. The top ten employers of Klansmen were: Armour and Company, 32; the city of Kansas City, 48; Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad, 26; Kansas City Railway Company, 24; Kansas City Structural Steel, 15; Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, 95; Swift and Company, 17; United States Government, 17; Union Pacific Railroad, 11; and Wyandotte county, 11. The top ten employers of Kansas City Klansmen comprised one-third of the order's members. ⁹

The Klan dominated some Kansas City quarters. The city's south district court

was thoroughly Kluxed. Judge Don C. McCombs, Chief Deputy Clerk James P. Fox, Junior Clerk Bina S. Quick, Jr., Marshal Charles E. Pointer, and Deputy Marshal Charles Langford were members. Kansas City elected McCombs mayor in 1927. He served until 1947.¹⁰

Klansmen were employees, employers, co-workers, and partners. Life in the Invisible Empire introduced its members to like-minded businessmen. Frank Cole purchased Fabian Drug in 1922; C.W. Forsberg bought Harry Lillich's grocery store for his son; Gerber's Candy Kitchen acquired Barnes' Furniture Company's storerooms; and veterinarians F.B. Croll and T.W. Hadley became partners in 1927. All four deals closed in Klan confidence.¹¹

The "good, solid" middle-class dominance of the Klan ranks becomes even more evident when the high, mid, and low, non-manual workers and the skilled, blue-collar craftsmen are combined. This number, 668 or 74.7 percent, is the Klan's middle-class quotient. It affords further comparison with other segments of the population. The middle-class quotient of the entire working male population of Kansas City in 1920 was 39.6 percent. The middle-class quotient of those ineligible for Klan membership -- Catholics, Jews, non-whites, and the foreign born -- was 19.4 percent. Native-born white males were closest, but trailed the Klansmen at 49.3 percent.¹²

Wyandotte Klan No. 5's 74.7 percent middle-class composition reflects the findings of other case studies and adds to the growing consensus among historians that the Klan attracted mainstream citizens. The Klan's middle-class quotient remained high despite differences of geography and local economy. For example, the middle-class quotient of the Aurora, Illinois, Klan was 79 percent; Denver, Colorado, 70 percent; and Richmond, Indiana, 75 percent.¹³

Klansmen shared other class traits. Although military records were not located for the Kansas City Klansmen, they appeared in their generations' conflicts: six Wyandotte Klan No. 5 members served in World War I; three in the Spanish-American War; and one

in the Philippine Insurrection. Many Klansmen had sons in the American Legion in 1922, suggesting that by 1917 most members were probably past the age of active military service. Some historians speculate that Klan membership was a form of compensation for missing the Great War.¹⁴

Generally middle-aged (average: 43.9), most members were married (N=614 or 68.7 percent), and owned houses (N=515 or 57.6 percent). These numbers reflect their personal maturity and stability in the community. "Kansas City, Kansas, is not the home of rich men. There is not a millionaire in the city. Its people are the middle and small home owner class," the *Kansas City* [Ks.] *Weekly Press* noted. Klansmen were not wealthy men. Attorney William L. Wood is the only Klansman listed in the lone social register extant from the era. More important, Thomas A. Bigger and L.H. Chapman, two Klan foes believed to be agents of the "imperialist" *Kansas City* [Mo.] *Star*, appeared in the *Elite Directory*, illuminating the Klan's middle-class features from another angle.¹⁵

Residence augmented ties of class and workplace. 49.2 percent (N=440) lived on the same block as another Klansman. Some streets had as many as six Klansmen on a single block. More frequently, three, four, and five Klansmen resided on the same Kansas City block. Kansas City's "Klan block" was located on Armourdale's Kansas avenue. The Reverend E.L. Brown resided at 952 Kansas avenue; Neal Smalley at 953; the Reverend A.J. Morton at 955; Klansman Thomas C. Hattley owned the building which contained 953 through 957; Roy E. Siegmund lived at 959; Harry Lillich's grocery store was at 966; Klan tailor Gerald Keith was in 973; and Klan druggist Paul Taneyhill was located at 1001 Kansas avenue.¹⁶

Klansmen did not live in the city's first ward, the area east of the downtown in the flood-prone bottoms. Sixteen Klansmen resided in the second ward. The third ward embraced the largest number of Klan, non-Klan, and African American citizens. The Northwest Improvement Association mobilized its neighborhood to defeat a measure to establish a "Negro park" west of Tenth street. 302 Klansmen lived in the third ward. The

fourth and fifth wards were the city's central wards in the 1920s. 269 Klansmen resided there. Seventy-one Klansmen lived in Armourdale, the sixth ward. 120 Klansmen lived in the seventh ward, Argentine. No residence was determined for 116 members. Rosedale, Kansas, became the city's eighth ward in 1922. Rosedale Klan No. 17 was led by Lawrence E. Wilson and David F. Espenlaub. Espenlaub, an insurance company owner and county commissioner, was a distant cousin of US House Speaker "Uncle" Joe Cannon of Illinois. ¹⁷

Klansmen lived in the same wards, neighborhoods, and occasionally in the same house or apartment. Ninety-five men shared an address with another Klansmen. Of these ninety-five, forty-seven had the same surname; ten were co-workers. Kinship played a role in the organization's success and cohesion. Eighty-eight Klansmen strengthened family ties with Klan membership. Furthermore, 232 Klansmen had the same surname as at least one other member. It is presumed that some number of these men were related. In-law ties are similarly difficult to trace. ¹⁸

Klan commonality suffused other organizations. Sixty-one Wyandotte Klan No. 5 members belonged to Kaw Lodge No. 272, Ancient Free and Accepted Masons (AF&AM). Ten of these men apparently joined the Masons after becoming Klansmen, illustrating the complex interplay between the Klan and other Protestant fraternal organizations. Visiting a city's lodges was a Kleagle's first priority when attempting to "Klux" a community. The high number of Masons, Knights of Pythias, Elks, and Odd Fellows who joined the Klan reflects this recruiting bias as much as it does any putative ideological compatibility. "No thinking person has ever seriously considered the suggestion that Masonry was fostering Ku Kluxism," the *Catholic Register* ventured, "but it has long been evident that a certain assertive element in Masonry was excellent material for membership in the Klan." ¹⁹

Wyandotte Klan No. 5 members were scattered throughout Kansas City's lodge community. The Odd Fellows Chelsea Lodge No. 564, Summounduot Lodge No. 3,

West Lodge No. 484, and Quindaro Lodge No. 559 shared thirteen men with the Klan. AF&AM West Gate Lodge No. 438, Roger E. Sherman Lodge No. 369, Rosedale Lodge No. 333, and Wyandotte Lodge No. 3 supplied at least twelve more Klansmen. Number Three, "the oldest and largest Masonic lodge in Kansas," met at the same location as Kaw Lodge No. 272. Number Three contributed members to the Klan, but more important, Number Three gave the order experienced leadership. Number Three officers DeVirda H. Burcham, Richard R. Fleck, and Walter H. Williams became the first three exalted cyclops of Wyandotte Klan No. 5.²⁰

Burcham, Fleck, and Williams were united in denominational allegiance as well. Their families all attended the First Baptist church at Tenth and Grandview streets. Complete church records were not located for this study, but the available evidence supports some tentative conclusions. The five largest religious bodies in Kansas City, Kansas, in the 1920s were the Roman Catholic, the Methodist Episcopal, the Negro Baptist, the Northern Baptist Convention, and the Disciples of Christ. Fundamentalist churches were a minority in Kansas City during the Klan era. The Assembly of God, the Church of the Nazarene, and the Church of Christ mustered a total of only 359 members and five congregations. Wyandotte Klan No. 5 reflected these denominational realities. Kansas City Klansmen were Baptists (N=7); Disciples of Christ (N=4); Episcopalians (N=3); Lutherans (N=2); Methodists (N=25), and Presbyterians (N=2).²¹

At least six Kansas City ministers joined the KKK. The Reverends E.L. Brown, George W. Durham, and A.J. Morton pastored Methodist Episcopal churches. David A. Cruden and Henry M. Jeffries led Disciples of Christ congregations. The Reverend Carl W. Nau served St. Paul's Episcopal church. "Pro-Klan" churches, those that were either led by a Klan minister or were publicly supportive of the Klan, included First Christian, Central Avenue Methodist Episcopal, London Heights Methodist Episcopal, Quindaro Christian, St. Paul's Episcopal, Trinity English Lutheran, State Avenue Baptist, and the Welborn Community church. These mainline churches were socially directed, committed

to establishing the Kingdom of God on earth through good works. America had a historic role to play in establishing this Kingdom. "The United States will succeed toward this end, first, by sticking to the principals with which it was started," prophesied the Reverend J.M. Mason, Quindaro Methodist Episcopal church, "second, by eliminating those things which tend to be against these principals, third, by accepting the challenge today and being the big brother of the world," Thus was 100 percent Americanism divinely ordained.²²

Mainstream Protestantism further encouraged Klansmen from its pulpits. The Reverend W.C. Hausam, London Heights Methodist Episcopal church, identified the "four causes of crime and four remedies for it." Hausam blamed "lax home training," disrespect for authority, immigration, and movies for the trouble. He advocated corporal and capital punishment, immigration restriction, and "prohibition of all immoral and criminal films" as the solution to the problem. Hausam's sermon sanctified Klan social objectives.

The immigration laws of 1866 are partly responsible for America's crime wave. At that time all barriers were removed and the cities of Europe dumped their morally defective folk. Today the offspring are our criminals. Prohibit all immigration until these present criminals shall have been assimilated, imprisoned or killed.²³

Hausam's sentiments were not limited to Klansmen. London Heights had more than 1,500 members, only twenty-one of whom appeared in the Klan ranks. Hausam was not in that number.

Despite the assertions of an earlier generation of historians, Klansmen were not generally Fundamentalists. They belonged to mainstream evangelical and liturgical congregations. If there was pietistic-liturgical conflict within Kansas City's Protestant community, it did not concern them. Fundamentalism in the 1920s did not put much faith in man's ability to mitigate social ills. Kansas City Klansmen believed in this ability extravagantly. The Reverend Carl W. Nau's field of endeavor was St. Paul's "Home Science Section," precisely the type of mission a Fundamentalist like Billy Sunday

denounced as "godless social science nonsense." Klan ministers had more in common with the "Social Gospel" than the "old-time religion." The *Kansas City [Ks.] Labor Bulletin* beamed:

Reverend Brown can always be depended on to be upon the side of fairness and the working people. His religion is the kind that has to do with problems we have to meet here in this world. He preaches a gospel of better wages, better conditions and better homes while we are here in this world. Some pastors of the wealthy churches would have the poor people wait until they got to heaven to get what is due them.²⁴

Another Klan minister, the Reverend George W. Durham, also received praise from the labor organ.

Rev. Durham analyzed the fault of the Industrial Court in a very logical way by pointing out that the proper solution as he thought, is to strike at the heart of the whole matter, which is coal itself, and the way to do that is for the coal operator and the coal miner to be the same person through the state owning the mines.²⁵

Durham was really saying that the "heart of the whole matter" was capitalism itself. This was further than most Kansas City workers were willing to go in 1921 and certainly was not a goal of the Klan. (H.M. Perkins, a friend of Klansman T.W. Hadley, ran for US senator on the Socialist ticket in 1930. Perkins garnered only 1,804 votes in the Depression-era union town.) The KKK of the 1920s was neither a strain of right-wing Fundamentalism nor a precursor of the Christian Right.²⁶

The KKK advocated *Protestant* Christianity. The Klan's use of the term Protestant -- as opposed to Fundamentalist -- proves paramount to understanding the order's appeal to the mainline denominational churches and its anti-Catholicism. Protestantism by definition is opposed officially to the Roman church. This belief and the historical identity which evolved from it was expressed in the names of prominent Kansas City Klansmen such as John Calvin Hopkins and John Wesley Faust. Fundamentalist Christian membership in the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s was coincidental; Protestant Christian membership verged on the redundant. The Ku Klux Klan and mainline Protestantism shared members and a worldview in the 1920s. If specific Klan beliefs and goals did not originate in Methodist, Presbyterian, or Episcopalian pulpits, they were solemnized and

propagated there.

"I have endeavored to be sometimes more than a Methodist preacher in Armourdale and so have taken opportunity to do what I could for the welfare of the community at large," the Reverend Brown wrote on the eve of his transfer to a Garnett, Kansas, charge. The Ku Klux Klan successfully drew civic-minded Kansas men into its ranks. Brown led the Armourdale Business Men's Club as well as the Central Avenue Methodist Episcopal church. Klansman Brown was not an exception. Kansas City Klansmen organized and led civic clubs, business associations, and labor unions. The Klan's middle-class composition and zeal for reform reminded its more perceptive observers of Bull Moose Progressives. Stanley Frost wrote "there are many ways . . . in which the Ku Klux movement resembles the Progressive Party. It contains about the same basic elements of partly dissatisfied and party idealistic middle-class folk, as well as the same fringes. Its gatherings have the same appearance and feelings." Journalist Robert L. Duffus also admitted "that some of the same portion of our population which followed Mr. Roosevelt's train in his great days, and which have contributed many a progressive measure to the national programme, have also proved susceptible . . . to the Klan's siren song of hate." ²⁷

Mount Rushmore sculptor Gutzon Borglum entered public life with the Connecticut Progressives in 1912. By 1922, he was a national officer in the Ku Klux Klan. Kansas City Klansman W.J. Wright, Jr., one-time sheriff of Wyandotte county, reportedly "served . . . a lifetime as a water carrier and wood chopper for the Republican party. When he went out with Roosevelt in 1912 and was accused of quitting his party he countered that it was the party which had deserted him." ²⁸

Not all future Klansmen "went out" for TR. Klan Republicans split in their support of Roosevelt and Taft in 1912. Of the 118 politically-active Klansmen identified for this study, ninety-six (81.3 percent) were Republicans, sixteen were Democrats (13.6 percent), and six appeared as non-partisan municipal candidates. Besides the Republican

dominance of the Klan ranks, another substantial majority is evident. Eighty-two Klansmen (69.5 percent) did not enter public life until after the date of the Klan's organization in the city. Republican hegemony continued with the newcomers. Sixty-four men (78 percent) represented the GOP.²⁹

Klan commonality again pervaded other Kansas City institutions. Eighty-five precinct committeemen posts were won by Klansmen between 1921 and 1930. Klansmen often jointly occupied these positions, sometimes capturing both the Republican and Democratic nominations. In 1924, the fifteenth precinct of the third ward was held by Klan Republicans R.B. Eagle, H.E. Zimmerman, Grant Gates, and N.V. Reichenecker. Democrats J.W. McDonald and Leon J. Miller shared the thirteenth precinct of the fifth ward. In 1926, Klansman R.E. Johnson held the 113th precinct for the Republicans, and Klansman D.L. Rankin for the Democrats. The Klan's bipartisan dominance continued in the 136th precinct of the seventh ward with the election of Republican J.P. Knippenberg and Democrat G.C. West. Between 1921 and 1930, Klansmen and former Klansmen captured 136 democratically-elected offices in Wyandotte county.³⁰

While there was no organic relation between Bull Moosers and Ku Kluxers, they drank from neighboring well-springs. Even if the populist Klansmen opposed "progressive" measures, particularly those that emanated from the editorial pages of the *Kansas City [Mo.] Star*, they at least shared a similar élan with Roosevelt's Christian Soldiers.

The populist consciousness of the men who joined the KKK and its reformed variations was clearly expressed by the Reverend N.M. Tatum, pastor of the Welborn Community church.

It is high time that the common people are making some effort to organize against crooked political and criminal influence. Labor is organized, capital is organized, the underworld, the politicians; in fact, everyone except common people are organized. We must organize with the intent to act unitedly in the common cause of the common people.³¹

Kansas City Klansmen's impulse for action led them to adopt and discard sundry

civic, moral, and political organizations in the 1920s. These organizations included the Ku Klux Klan of Atlanta, Georgia; two independent Ku Klux Klans of Kansas; the Knights of America; the Welfare League of the State and Chelsea Avenue Baptist churches; the Representative Government League; various tax leagues, civic clubs; and in 1926, the (Wyandotte) Republican County Central Committee. Considered as a whole, these Klans and Klan-dominated groups composed a larger middle-class social movement that flourished in the city between 1920 and 1927. Its goal: civic progress through law and order, moral probity, political reform, and regional autonomy.

Notes

1. *Kansas City* [Ks.] *Kansan*, May 8, 1922.
2. *Kansas City* [Ks.] *Weekly Press*, February 24, 1922. *Kansan*, April 24, 1922; May 1, 1923. *Kansas, State v. Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Plaintiff's Abstract of the Record* (Topeka: n.d.): 43, 47. "Ku Klux Klan Membership Roster," November 13, 1922, Henry J. Allen Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
3. Lilah L. Jones, "The Ku Klux Klan in Eastern Kansas in the 1920s," *Emporia State Research Studies* 23 (Winter 1975): 5. Charles W. Sloan, Jr., "Kansas Battles the Invisible Empire: The Legal Ouster of the KKK from Kansas, 1922-1927," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 40 (Autumn 1974): 393. Robert L. Duffus, "The Ku Klux Klan in the Middle West," *World's Work* 46 (August 1923): 364.
4. *Kansan*, June 20, October 11, 1922. *Weekly Press*, April 6, 1923.
5. *Kansas City* [Ks.] *Sun*, June 30, 1928. *Bonner Springs* [Ks.] *Chieftain*, August 21, 1924; July 9, 1925; July 8, 1926.
6. *Kansan*, October 30, 1922.
7. Stanley Frost, *The Challenge of the Klan* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1923, 1924): 2-3. Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the 1920s* (1931; reprint ed., New York: Harper and Row, 1964): 56.
8. U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920: Population*, 4:1123-1125. *1922-1923 Kansas City, Kansas Directory* (Kansas City, Missouri: Gate City Publishing Company, 1923): passim. *1924-1925 Kansas City, Kansas Directory* (Kansas City, Missouri: Gate City Publishing Company, 1925): passim. "Klan Membership Roster." Occupational status categories are based on the work of Robert A. Goldberg, *Hooded Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Colorado* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981): 183-186. The occupations of 894 Kansas City Klansmen are listed in the Appendix.
9. Ibid.
10. *Kansas City* [Ks.] *Weekly Press*, November 10, 1922. "1922-1923 Directory." "1924-1925 Directory." "Klan Membership Roster."
11. *Weekly Press*, February 2, August 4, November 3, 1922. *Kansas City* [Ks.] *Sun*, November 26, 1927.
12. "Fourteenth Census," 1123-1125.
13. Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (New York: Oxford

University Press, 1967): 119. Goldberg, "Hooded Empire," 38-47. Stanley Coben, *Rebellion Against Victorianism: The Impetus for Cultural Change in 1920s America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991): 142.

14. *Weekly Press*, February 2, 1922. Frank P. Strickland, *The Transactions of Kaw Lodge No. 272, A.F.&A.M. of Kansas City, Kansas* (Kansas City: n.p., 1927): 252. John D. Bright, ed., *Kansas: The First Century* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1956): 3:248-249. *Kansan*, April 24-25, 1922.

15. *Weekly Press*, November 16, 1923. Frances Keller Bristol, comp., *Elite Directory* (Kansas City, Missouri: Tiernan Havens Printing Company, 1901): 219-220, 232.

16. "1922-1923 City Directory," passim. "1924-1925 City Directory," passim. *Kansan*, November 27, 1922. Perl W. Morgan, *History of Wyandotte County Kansas and Its People* (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1911): 2:658.

17. "1922-1923 City Directory," 103. "1924-1925 City Directory," 907.

18. "Klan Membership Roster."

19. Strickland, "Transactions," 254-266. *Catholic Register* (Kansas City, Mo.), July 13, 1922.

20. Kansas I.O.O.F. Lodges, "Death Notices," 1873-1970, vol 1: A-G, 31, 50, 57, 69, 191; vol 2: H-P, 224, 263, 312; vol 3: R-Z, 424, 491-492, 572, Manuscript Collection, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas. Kansas Freemason, "Death Notices," 1860-1935, vol 1-3, n.p., Manuscript Collection, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas. *Sun*, December 24, 1922.

21. First Baptist Church [Kansas City, Ks.], *Directory*, 27-36, Manuscript Collection, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas. U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies: 1926*, 1: 444-445. Morgan, "History," 2: 665, 698, 785, 791, 836, 901, 968. Bright, "First Century," 249. *Kansan*, November 16, 1920; April 4, May 8, June 5, July 3, November 28, December 10 1922; January 1, 1923; November 27, 1925. *Weekly Press*, July 3, 1925. London Heights Methodist Episcopal Church, [Kansas City, Ks.], *Membership Record, 1924-1931* (n.p., n.d.): 184, 194, 200, 226, 240, 252, 262, 262, 308, 316, 332, 336, 346, 370, 372, 374, 378, 380, 386, 418, 430, Baker University Archives, Baldwin City, Kansas.

22. "Klan Membership Roster." *Kansan*, April 4, May 8, June 5, July 3, 1922. *Weekly Press*, July 3, 1925.

23. *Kansan*, November 20, 1922.

24. The idea that midwestern political conflict was predicated on differences between pietists and liturgicals suffers in the light of the Klan's ability to attract both groups. This "ethnocultural" argument is delineated in Richard Jensen, *The Winning of the Midwest: Social and Political Conflict, 1888-1896* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971): 74-88, and Paul Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics, 1850-1900* (New York: The Free Press, 1970): 69-91. George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991): 31, 39. *Kansas City [Ks.] Labor Bulletin*, November 31, 1921.

25. Ibid, November 9, 1921.
26. Ibid. *Weekly Press*, November 7, 1930.
27. Ibid, March 10, 1922. Frost, "Challenge," 224. Robert L. Duffus, "The Ku Klux Klan in the Middle West," *World's Work* 46 (August 1923): 363.
28. John Allen Gable, *The Bull Moose Years: Theodore Roosevelt and the Progressive Party* (Port Washington: National University Publications, Kennikat Press, 1978): 43. *Kansan*, June 18, 1930.
29. *Weekly Press*, April 5, July 12, November 1, 1912; June 23, November 10, 1922; April 6, 1923; August 15, 1924; March 20, 1925; June 25, November 5, 1926; January 14, April 8, 1927; June 22, August 10, 1928; November 7, 1930. *Kansas City [Ks.] Republic*, March 18, 1921.
30. *Weekly Press*, July 11, July 16, 1926.
31. *Kansan*, October 24, 1922.

Chapter Six

Politics

Despite (or perhaps because of) the travails of external and internal pressure, public exposure, and schism, the Klan had a politically-energizing effect on its members. Klansmen pursued and captured dozens of elected offices during the Klan era as the order permeated the city's political realm. Politics proved a natural extension of the community service impulse that sparked Kansas City Klansmen to civic action. Politics was also the accepted way to change public policy, an arena where the Klan could compete legally, even if it threatened the established order of things.

Wyandotte Klan No. 5 succeeded in recruiting longtime Wyandotte county Republican officeholders. William Beggs served as county assessor in 1910, and as county clerk from 1918 to 1930. Beggs was among those observed at the May 4, 1922, Klan meeting detailed in the pages of the *Catholic Register*. Klansman William G. Bird's Republican career stretched from 1909 to 1930 as precinct committeeman, county assessor, and county treasurer. Other old-time Wyandotte county political perennials who joined the Klan were Justus N. Baird, E.A. Enright, J.W. Hayward, William L. Wood, and W.J. Wright, Jr. -- all Republicans. Other men who were to achieve local notoriety with the order also had pre-Klan political experience: Republicans Richard R. Fleck and Thomas C. Hattley, and Democrat Louis S. Harvey.¹

Klan political involvement, particularly at the grassroots level, grew throughout the decade. Klan precinct committeemen increased their numbers substantially. In 1922, there were seven Klan precinct committeemen (four Republicans and three Democrats); 1924: twenty-six Klan precinct committeemen (fifteen Republicans and eleven

Democrats); 1926: twenty-five Klan precinct committeemen (twenty-two Republicans and three Democrats); and 1928: thirty-one Klan precinct committeemen (twenty-eight Republicans and three Democrats). In 1930, there is a marked decline that parallels the national demise of the order. Only thirteen known Klansmen served as precinct committeemen in 1930 (twelve Republicans and one Democrat).²

Between 1921 and 1930, Kansas City Klansmen ran in eighty-six popular campaigns. They won thirty-four races. Combined with their precinct committeemen posts, Kansas City Klansmen captured 136 democratically-elected offices. Most of the eighty-two men who entered politics after the Klan arrived were Republicans, but the newcomers also included twelve Democrats and six non-partisan municipal candidates. Klan-engendered candidates ran for forty-six offices between 1921 and 1930, winning twelve, but they also held eighty-five precinct committeemen slots in those same years. The newcomers included George W. Durham, board of education; David F. Espenlaub, county commissioner; D.M. Boddington, board of education; and Frank Werner, county commissioner.³

The politics of 1922 and 1923 was a part of the Klan's bid for power in Kansas City. Klansman Harry Lillich's strong independent run for sheriff announced the order's political presence. In 1923, the Klan succeeded in clearing Mayor Harry B. Burton and company from their path of civic progress, but other obstacles loomed. By the mid-twenties, politics became the sole instrument of survival for the Klan.

The ouster suit initiated by Governor Henry J. Allen produced a "finding of fact" in late April 1924 that the KKK must have a state charter to operate legally in Kansas. The charter could only be obtained by a two-thirds vote of the state charter board. The board was composed of the attorney general, Charles B. Griffith, the secretary of state, Frank J. Ryan, and the state bank commissioner, Roy L. Bone. Griffith and Ryan were faced with re-election that year, and both men were actively anti-Klan.⁴

Klan strength was at its purported zenith in Kansas and the United States in 1924.

Two Klan-endorsed candidates, Republican Ben S. Paulen and the current governor, Democrat Jonathon M. Davis, were the only major gubernatorial contestants. Some feared that unchallenged by Paulen or Davis, the Klan would have sufficient electoral strength to capture the posts which composed the charter board. The most vocal exponent of this scenario was the Emporia newspaperman, William Allen White. On September 20, 1924, White declared, "I want to offer Kansans afraid of the Klan and ashamed of that disgrace, a candidate who shares their fear and shame." White's anti-Klan independent run for the statehouse was not encouraged by Kansas City's localist Republicans. The editor was tainted by his association with the *Kansas City* [Mo.] *Star*. Critics portrayed White's campaign as mere revenge. Far from the principled anti-Klan image, which White and his supporters would later cultivate, contemporary skeptics interpreted the Emporian's entry as an attempt to inject a "progressive" Republican candidate into the fray and steal the nomination from the party's regular "stand pat" faction. Paulen won the office, but White received nearly 150,000 votes. The incumbent Davis finished only 30,000 votes ahead of the Emporia Sage. But White had not garnered the votes of those whom he might have expected to win. Kansas City's staunch Republican "blackbelt" remained loyal to the GOP in 1924.⁵

"Lacking any genuine ground for his attack on Paulen, he [White] raises the fake Klan issue, while privately admitting that he cares nothing about the Klan one way or the other," charged the *Kansas City* [Ks.] *Advocate*, an African American Republican weekly. "Issues," a prominent black Republican once said, "are uncertain and unsubstantial things in the hard world of necessities. We have been juggled and befogged on issues too many times. What we want is not issues, but jobs." Other black Kansas City leaders rejected both Paulen and White. The Reverend A.S. Mayfield's congregation passed a resolution in support of Governor Davis "because of the Klan issue." African Americans, Republicans or Democrats, had nothing substantial to gain in supporting a third party candidate in the "hard world of necessities."⁶

Kansas City black Republicans like Thomas Kennedy, editor and publisher of the *Advocate*, pursued a realistic policy of accommodation on political matters, but resisted overt Klan initiatives. For example, black Republicans were aligned with Klan Republicans during the shake-up surrounding L.H. Chapman's resignation in 1922, but they rejected or attempted to return Klan church donations made at the same time. Black leaders further opposed the independent sheriff candidacy of Klansman Harry Lillich in 1922 when they worked with Roman Catholics and Jews to ensure his defeat. Black leaders also opposed the Klan-sponsored display of "The Birth of a Nation" in Kansas City.⁷

"Dear Sir. --

"The Civic League, the N.A.A.C. and other bodies of our group, have all appealed to the governor [Paulen], asking that he find some way to stop the show of the Birth of a Nation. . . . We did it, hoping he would refer the matter to your office, but it seems that he has not done so. And this is to ask, -- Is there anything that you [Attorney General Charles B. Griffith] can do to prevent a presentation, which can do no good: but which may do a great deal of harm. It is a great pity, that men can not find that, -- which better becomes their time and talent, -- than this needless appeal to prejudice, This appeal is made of the part of the Civic League.

"Yours Respt.

"I.F. Bradley, Pres, S.H. Thompson, C.W. Comagor, John A. Hodge, Wm. Boone, "Rev. D.B. Jackson, Rev. George McNeal, G.B. Buster, J.J.N. Gray, J.R. "Thompson, Ben Robinson, Thomas Kennedy, S.D. Scruggs Jr., E.B. Walden, A. "Plough, J.H. Clayborne." ⁸

Kansas Republicans had kept the picture out of Kansas for eight years until Governor Davis, perhaps bowing to political realities of his own, let the epic be shown in 1923. "It seems to me," Klan newspaper editor Orrin B. Strong of Fort Scott, Kansas, wrote the governor, "that with all the interest there is under the subject, the heavy membership of an interested organization in this section of the state[,] makes the subject one of particular political significance." Wyandotte Klan No. 5 brought the film to Kansas City and won an injunction against those seeking to block its exhibition. Republican attacks on the exhibition of "The Birth of a Nation" kept blacks in the GOP even in times of Klan infestation. But if black leaders compromised with Klan-tinged organizations in order to retain their diminutive if recognized role in the Republican

dominance of Kansas, they refused to remain silent during other Klan offensives.⁹

Despite William A. White's defeat in the 1924 election, his campaign was not a failure. "I got out and challenged it and rebuked it and stopped it from proving its power by defeating Ryan, Griffith, and Miley [state superintendent of education]," White boasted. "That protest and the triumph of the three men on the Republican ticket, whom the Klan was fighting, broke the back of the Klan. . . ." Notwithstanding White's bombast, the Klan was indeed damaged.¹⁰

The Kansas supreme court confirmed the ouster suit's conclusion on January 1, 1925, and ruled that the "Ku Klux Klan is ousted from organizing or controlling lodges . . . in the state. . . ." The Klan was on the ropes in Kansas, but despite the victories of Griffith and Ryan, the order still had a promising course of redress. The new legislature had many pro-Klan members. On February 25, 1925, S. 269, the "Klan bill," passed the senate, twenty-three to fourteen. The bill would have recognized the Klan by automatically granting it the elusive charter. But anti-Klan forces led by House Speaker Clifford R. Hope outmaneuvered the Klan's legislative minions and defeated the bill. Klan options dwindled. The order appealed to the US supreme court in March 1925, challenging the ouster suit decision. And in May 1925, in a triumph of hope over experience, the Klan filed an application for a state charter. Rejection was certain and arrived on July 1, 1925.¹¹

In less than a year, whatever hopes the Klan held of attaining a legally-recognized role in community affairs were dashed: the ouster suit, the re-election of Griffith and Ryan, the decision of the state supreme court, the defeat of the Klan bill, and the rejection of the order's charter application amounted to a wall of official resistance not likely to fall. While some Klansmen may have held some hope for the US supreme court's future decision on the ouster suit, most Kansas City Klansmen realized that they had one final chance of gaining legal status in Kansas -- victory in the 1926 general elections.

The defeat of Griffith and Ryan became imperative to Klan survival. "The race for

the Republican nomination for secretary of state has been the most spectacular . . . of any of the 1926 primary contests," the *Topeka [Ks.] Daily Capital* reported. Three Klan candidates entered the Republican primary: Ewing Herbert, editor of the *Hiawatha [Ks.] Daily World*; Guy Swallow, former Topeka chief of police; and John A. Ryan, a Kansas City Democrat. "It appears," the *Kansas City [Ks.] Sun* wrote, "that everybody except Frank Ryan has Klan support." Secretary of State Frank J. Ryan was convinced that Governor Paulen had "injected the Kansas City Ryan into the race as a Klan ruse to make the nomination of Ewing Herbert possible." He protested the Democrat's entry in the Republican race. The Kansas City Ryan appeared before the state canvassing board represented by attorney David F. Carson, a barrister with strong Klan ties. John A. was declared eligible for the primary, but Frank J. prevailed in Wyandotte county and elsewhere. William A. Smith, an assistant attorney general who worked on the ouster suit, defeated Klan-backed Max Anderson for the attorney general nomination.¹²

Meanwhile, Wyandotte Klan No. 5 prepared assiduously for the campaign. On the following instructions from their leadership, Klansmen distributed slates of preferred candidates and taxied voters to the polls.

"Faithful and Esteemed Klansmen:

"A few days ago we forwarded to the entire membership letters asking for volunteer workers and automobiles and we have had some response. Now we want to appeal to you for the last time for both volunteer workers and automobiles. If you have an automobile, and can be off from your work on primary day, we need your help. We want every man who has an automobile to lend his assistance to this organization on primary day. This is one of the most important parts of this election and this is one election that we absolutely must win and without your personal help, we have an opportunity to lose. You will find 2 blanks attached to this letter. If you do not have a car, but will work on primary day, fill in the blank which reads, Volunteer Car Service, and mail it to P.O. Box 115, Kansas City, Kansas. Do this immediately, as we must have this information at once. All automobiles will report to the United Oil Co., 12th and Minnesota Ave., and report to Mr. F.C. Morasch. Please keep this letter so that you will know where to take your car on August 8.

"Faithfully yours,

"In the Sacred Unfailing Bond,

"A.J. Gagel"¹³

Their effort was evident in the results. Twenty-one Klan Republican precinct committeemen were elected that summer, seventeen of whom were political neophytes.

(One of three Democrats elected was also a newcomer.) The precinct committeemen who elected the Republican County Central Committee wielded considerable local power. Thus, "in several of the 199 precincts the fights for the job of precinct committeemen were some of the closest battles of the day," the *Kansas City* [Ks.] *Kansan* reported. Klan attacks on Kansas City, Missouri, and Star-Bigger domination were coming to a climax. The Klan faction, headed by insurance man Earl D. Clark, nominated attorney David F. Carson for the post of county chairman. Carson was the Klan's choice to supplant the agents of Bigger's "machine." On August 12, 1926, the two factions battled for four hours before Carson prevailed on a parliamentary technicality. "Carson's election marks the downfall of the Thomas Bigger machine, which for more than sixteen years has been in control of local republican politics," the *Kansan* noted. Bigger's reign had begun with the 1910 debut of commission-style government in Kansas City Kansas; the Klan's anti-Kansas City, Missouri, anti-elite, politics was born in that same era. The progressive innovation which radiated from the editorial pages of the *Star* was championed by the city's Mercantile Club, a powerful civic organization chaired by real estate man Willard Merriam and banker C.L. Brokaw. To many Kansas Citians, commission government meant the relinquishing of local control to the *Star* and its wealthy acolytes.¹⁴

Kansas City Klansmen opposed commission government as undemocratic. In January 1926, groups began forming to reinstate councilmanic government -- the old ward system -- in Kansas City. "The chief objection made against the present form is that all the districts of Kansas City are not represented in the city hall," the *Sun* explained. In late April 1926, Klansmen and prominent former Klansmen organized the Representative Government League. Klansman Lawrence E. Wilson was elected secretary. Former Klansmen Louis S. Harvey and E.N. Enright served the legal committee. Klansmen John Bridges, Richard R. Fleck, W.J. Wright, Jr., David Kepler, Jr., and Dr. K.C. Haas were appointed to serve their respective ward's executive organizing committees. "In view of the fact that Kansas City is composed of a number of separate and distinct districts, each

with their own individual identity, it is charged that the commission form of government is not truly representative. . . ." The measure ultimately failed. It reveals, once again, the city's enduring problem of civic identity. But if a unified Kansas City remained a hopeless illusion, the Klan's takeover of the county Republican machine was a victory for regional autonomy. Not only did Klan candidate David F. Carson -- with blackbelt support -- win the chairmanship, Klansman H.T. Barclay was named secretary. ¹⁵

Notwithstanding Klan voter organization, precinct committeeman victories, and party takeover, anti-Klan forces triumphed in November 1926. Charter hopes vanished. Finally, in late February 1927, the US supreme court declined to consider the Klan's ouster suit appeal because it did not involve a federal law. The Klan had failed at virtually every level of appeal -- political, administrative, legislative, and judicial; local, state, and federal. But before the order completely demobilized, there were great and ironic victories. ¹⁶

Despite the Klan's success in county and precinct offices, Klansmen found municipal offices more difficult to Klux. Dr. DeVirda H. Burcham ran unsuccessfully for mayor in 1921. Anti-Klan Mayor Harry B. Burton was defeated on 1923, but his successor, William W. Gordon, proved unsatisfactory to many Kansas Citians. In 1925, six Klansmen pursued city office. D.M. Boddington and George W. Durham captured board of education seats, but four others failed at city commission positions. Thomas A. Bigger's forces still controlled city hall. ¹⁷

Kansas Citians had grown impatient with Mayor Gordon's efforts to "clean up" the town. "It doesn't do any good to notify the police of Kansas City, Kansas," one citizen complained. Crime flourished. City leaders protested the criticism. The city's hodge-podge layout and stateline propinquity made effective patrolling difficult. Gordon blamed some of the problem on the city's ethnic groups: "Croatians, Poles, Hungarians, Greeks, Mexicans, and Turks," who do "not speak the English language . . . and have been used to liquor in their own country. . . ." But by late 1925 it was apparent that the city's crime

problem was exacerbated by a corrupt police force. The policemen were not only corrupt, they were unfair. Kansas City police were accused of accepting payoffs from bootleggers -- and then arresting them. When it was alleged that Chief of Police N.J. Wollard was involved in the practice, he resigned. Klan police officer Stanley Beatty was offered the post but accepted a police captaincy instead. Frank Wisdom was appointed to replace Wollard.¹⁸

The police department scandal fueled more speculation. By the spring of 1926, citizens were demanding investigation of city conditions. Attorney General Charles B. Griffith appointed Louis S. Harvey as a special assistant attorney general to investigate the city. The Harvey Report was ready in June, but its contents were kept secret. The Harvey Report detailed widespread graft in the awarding of municipal contracts and prohibition violations -- the twin banes of Kansas City municipal government. Curiously, Griffith delayed the release of the report to the public. He pursued instead a series of raids on Kansas City speakeasies. Declaring Kansas City a "cesspool and a stinking place," Griffith outraged the self-conscious Kansas Citians who threatened to ban the attorney general from entering the city in the future. A mass meeting, called to order by Klansman Richard R. Fleck (now president of the Parkwood Tax League) called for the immediate release of the Harvey Report. Griffith finally made the report public on September 3, 1926. He filed an ouster suit against Gordon the next day.¹⁹

The lines were drawn quickly, deeply, and politically. Gordon accused Griffith of ignoring the city's request for law enforcement aid earlier in the year until Gordon sued W.D. Pratt, a political crony of Griffith and Governor Paulen, for the faulty construction of a settling basin. It was only then, Gordon averred, that Griffith began investigating Kansas City and working to remove him from office. Pratt, like his friend the attorney general, was identified with the *Kansas City [Mo.] Star*. Nevertheless, Gordon was suspended from office and replaced by J.O. Emerson. Gordon's attorney, David F. Carson, argued, "The ouster suit against Mayor Gordon was instituted for no other reason

than to protect Bill Pratt, Tom Bigger, and others. . . . Gordon was ousted for no other reason than that he refused to look the other way. . . ." ²⁰

Whatever the truth of the state's charges of law enforcement failure, or financial irregularities against Mayor Gordon, or Carson's charges of *Star*-inspired mischief, the conflict revealed the familiar alignment of forces: Klan and localist politicians versus anti-Klan and *Star* progressives. The episode was dominated by men with current or former Klan ties. In addition to the direct involvement of Louis S. Harvey and David F. Carson, Carl F. White, Wesley Crew, D.H. Vance, A.L. Murphy, Charles Langford, Stanley Beatty, and Charles Costello appeared among those filing affidavits in the case. ²¹

When the dust from the Gordon-Griffith fight settled, Water and Light Commissioner C.D. Darnall was the only city leader ousted from office. Klan eyes turned once again to the political arena. Klansman Don C. McCombs entered the 1927 mayor's race. Klansmen D.M. Boddington and Robert N. Coffman filed for Commissioner of Streets and Public Improvements, and Bert R. Collins attempted to win a seat on the board of education. McCombs easily captured the office. The *Kansas City [Ks.] Weekly Press* reported, "Automobiles were in service, flying banners proclaiming the favorite candidates; there was said to be plenty of money in use in spite of the efforts of County Attorney Mellott, the police were very active for McCombs, lively scenes, good old days as of other times. . . ." ²²

The Klan had reached the pinnacle of local power with the elevation of McCombs to city hall. "McCombs was backed in his campaign by several large organizations, and organizations demand jobs," the *Kansan* warned. But McCombs did not cover his entire administration in a white sheet. While he appointed Louis S. Harvey city attorney, he replaced Klansman James P. Fox as police judge. Before naming F.R. White, a non-Klansman, to the post, McCombs even considered former judge and Klan foe George H. West for the job. In 1928, McCombs named his former clerk, Bina S. Quick, Jr., as secretary to Chief of Police William McMullen. D.M. Boddington was also victorious in

1927. As street commissioner, Boddington appointed Klansman Charles Langford as a clerk. Langford, Quick, and Fox served with McCombs on the south city court. (One wonders how Fox fell from grace.)²³

The Klan did not own city hall, but McCombs' election struck another blow at the *Star-Bigger* forces. Following the victory, Governor Paulen appointed Frank Thompson as judge of the south city court to fill McCombs' vacancy. A Kansas City Republican wrote Paulen: "I believe his appointment will . . . result in amalgamating all of the forces in this county, except those of Tom Bigger. I think it is high time that he be given the go-by and that it clearly be shown to him that we can get along without his service and assistance."²⁴

Shortly before McCombs' election, the *Kansan* wrote, "Ten years ago Kansas City, Kansas, began preliminary steps toward becoming proprietor of its own features. The new buildings all about the city, the beginnings of a civic center and an awakened civic consciousness are proofs that Kansas City not only knows the job but is equal to its requirements." In 1917, the Chamber of Commerce was organized. In 1920, George F. Kessler was hired as city planner, and civic clubs such as the Armourdale Business Men's Club were formed. Kansas City also got its first daily paper, the *Kansan*, in 1920. Kansas City Klansmen were frontline soldiers in the city's battle for progress and autonomy. Their 1927 housecleaning of city hall must have quickened the pulse of local patriots. The Chamber of Commerce launched a large-scale civic improvement drive that coincided with McCombs' victory. The Chamber's goal was to build "independent political and business relationships which will permit it to take its place among the commonwealths of the country, commanding recognition abroad and self-respect and pride on the part of its citizens," illustrating once again the affinity of Klan and civic interest. Kansas City had made progress in the years 1917 to 1927 in forging a more confident self-image and a prickly independence. The moment seemed auspicious for more Progress, and the Klan. But there were rumbles of discontent. McCombs' election

had not been greeted with jubilation by all. The *Weekly Press* admonished its readers.²⁵

As Armourdale was quite unanimous for Don McCombs, all classes supporting him, his overwhelming election must not be wholly taken as a victory of the bootlegger, the punch board operator and the cigarette smoker. Many bitter disappointments will be devoured, after Mr. McCombs has been installed in office, for the lawbreaker will not receive as many favors as he expects. As mayor, Don McCombs will be put to the acid test and here's hoping he will succeed and he will succeed, if he pays some attention, if he pays more attention to the men who become rich; those who hold up their hands in holy horror at the pint flask and hide behind it and reap graft handling the business of the city.²⁶

Don Carlos McCombs ruled Kansas City, Kansas, for twenty years by creating a bipartisan political machine from the withering vestiges of Wyandotte Klan No. 5. Represented by Klansman J. Earl Thomas, Democrats traded their votes for machine patronage while the city was able to garner more aid from the permanently Republican state legislature with a Republican mayor at the helm. The hiatus of new annexation from 1925 to 1956 successfully blocked the creation of new county commission seats, a shrewd maneuver by McCombs that reduced the possibility of Democratic rivals emerging from the suburbs.²⁷

"The McCombs administration," a local historian wrote, "has been referred to as 'unprogressive,' a description that some might say is overly generous. . . ." Civic neglect was the theme of the McCombs era. The city's municipal power plant was badly mismanaged. As late as 1947, forty percent of Kansas City residences still had poor sewer service. Unlike those champions of civic progress who made the transition from the Armourdale Business Men's Club to the KKK, parks and swimming pools were allowed to decay by McCombs. The State Board of Health closed six pools during his tenure. More dramatically, Kansas City's population decreased under the machine for the first time in the city's history. And if the McCombs' machine eschewed the forces of the *Star*, it embraced its own foreign entanglements. Mayor McCombs was rumored to be little more than a local agent of Missouri political boss Tom Pendergast, and a trafficker in liquor and gambling.²⁸

By 1946, McCombs, now in his late sixties, decided not to seek another term as

mayor. Sensing the potential for change, idealistic World War II veterans, many of whom were the sons of earlier anti-Klan elites, begin organizing the city for reform. To remedy the neglect of the McCombs' years, they formed the "Citizens Committee for City Manager Government." The mayor's forces countered with the organization of the "Citizens Committee for the Retention of Representative Government." Former Klansman Justus N. Baird (ousted from the office of county attorney by Attorney General Charles B. Griffith in 1924) campaigned against the veterans' proposal, an echo of the earlier anti-commission arguments that once informed Klan politics. "Progress can only be made where there is a scattering of power, rather than the concentration of power in an individual," Baird warned.²⁹

The measure failed 18,198 to 9,845. The power of the mayor-commissioner intact, McCombs' forces met to pick his successor. "Included in the . . . group are lawyers, city and county officials, both elective and appointive, labor leaders and members of the police and fire departments," a description which echoed the membership composition of Wyandotte Klan No. 5 during its heyday in the 1920s. Former Klansmen J. Earl Thomas, Eli Dahlin, Stanley Beatty, E.W. Wells, and pro-Klan legislator Thomas Finigan were among the group that secretly tapped Judge Clark E. Tucker to replace McCombs. Tucker won the election and appointed Thomas police judge.³⁰

The machine stalled in January 1952 when the attorney general began to investigate Judge Thomas' office. Secret tapes revealed that the judge sold tips of impending raids to bootleggers and gamblers and then shook them down for political contributions. He was also accused of helping civil service applicants cheat on exams. Confronted with the evidence, Thomas resigned. On January 7, 1952, Lieutenant Jack Stewart of the police raid squad resigned. Stewart, too, was a former member of Wyandotte Klan No. 5.³¹

Thomas died in June 1952, never having his day in court. On June 6, 1952, three city commissioners were indicted on a number of counts ranging from civil service

violations to illegal campaign contributions, but because of the death of three important subjects of the probe, the charges were dropped. A non-machine candidate, Republican Paul Mitchum, defeated Tucker on April 5, 1955. With his defeat, the McCombs' storm passed. McCombs did not live to see his machine break down. He was buried on December 7, 1951, the Reverend Carl W. Nau presiding.³²

Notes

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2. *Weekly Press*, July 21, 1922; July 11, 1924; July 16, 1926; July 21, 1928; July 11, 1930.
3. *Kansas City [Ks.] Republic*, March 18, 1921. *Weekly Press*, July 21, November 10, 1922; April 6, 1923; July 11, November 14, 1924; March 20, 1925; July 16, November 5, 1926; April 8, 1927; July 21, November 9, 1928; April 5, 1929; July 11, November 7, 1930.
4. *Topeka [Ks.] Daily Capital*, April 23, 1924. Charles W. Sloan, Jr., "Kansas Battles the Invisible Empire: The Legal Ouster of the KKK from Kansas, 1922-1927," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 40 (Autumn 1974): 399.
5. Jack Wayne Traylor, "William Allen White's 1924 Gubernatorial Campaign," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 42 (Summer 1976): 184, 191. William Allen White, *The Autobiography of William Allen White* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1946): 63. *Weekly Press*, November 14, 1924.
6. *Kansas City [Ks.] Advocate*, October 3, 1924. *Kansas City [Ks.] Kansan*, June 26, 1922. C. Clyde Myers to Jonathon M. Davis, September 8, 1924, Box 9, Folder 4, Governors Papers, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.
7. *Kansan*, June 6, 20, 1922. *Advocate*, November 3, 1922; December 7, 1923; January 4, 1924. *Kansas City [Ks.] Sun*, December 18, 1925.
8. The Civic League of Kansas City, Kansas to Charles B. Griffith, December 7, 1925, Box 2, Folder 1, Governors Papers, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.
9. Orrin B. Strong to Jonathon M. Davis, July 11, 1923, Box 9, Folder 9, Governors Papers, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas. *Sun*, December 18, 1925. Gerald R. Butters, Jr., "The Birth of a Nation and the Kansas Board of Review of Motion Pictures: A Censorship Struggle," *Kansas History* 14 (Spring 1991): 12-13.
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11. Sloan, "Kansas Battles Invisible Empire," 400, 404. Clifford R. Hope, Jr., "Strident Voices Between the Wars," *Kansas History* 2 (Spring 1979): 54. *Daily Capital*, February 26, 1925. *Topeka [Ks.] State Journal*, June 17, July 1, 1925.
12. *Daily Capital*, August 1, 4-5, 1926. *Sun*, July 2, 1926.

13. Ibid, July 23, 1926.
14. *Kansan*, August 11-13, 17, 1926. *Weekly Press*, August 20, 27, 1926. *Sun*, August 20, 1926. Carson's enemies failed to record votes properly or call the roll. Following their departure from the convention, Carson's forces -- the Klan faction -- called the roll and recorded votes.
15. *Sun*, January 29, February 6, April 23, 30, May 28, July 9, November 9, 1926. *Weekly Press*, August 20, 1926.
16. *Kansan*, February 28, 1927.
17. *Weekly Press*, March 20, April 10, 1925.
18. Irene Capell affidavit, August 23, 1926; W.W. Gordon Affidavit, September 13, 1926, State v. Gordon, Case No. 27365, Supreme Court of Kansas Records, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas. *Sun*, October 23, 30, November 6, 1926.
19. Ibid, March 5, July 9, 16, 23, August 27, September 3, 1926. *Daily Capital*, September 2, 4, 11-12, 14, 1926.
20. *Sun*, September 28, 1926. *Daily Capital*, September 16-17, 1926.
21. Ibid. Affidavits, State v. Gordon, Case No. 27365, Supreme Court of Kansas Records, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.
22. *Weekly Press*, April 8, 1927.
23. *Kansan*, April 6, 8, 1927; August 7, 1928.
24. William A. Wood to Ben S. Paulen, April 8, 1927, Box 38, Folder 17, Governors Papers, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas.
25. *Kansan*, December 18, 1920; March 27, 1927. Kate L. Cowick, *The Story of Kansas City* (Kansas City: Central High School Press, 1924): 14.
26. *Weekly Press*, April 8, 1927.
27. Margaret Landis, comp., *KCK's Mayors: A Look Back* (Kansas City: n.p., n.d.): 65-70. Larry Hancks, ed., "A History of Kansas City , Kansas Municipal Government" (unpublished manuscript, Wyandotte County Historical Society, Bonner Springs, Kansas): 19, 23.
28. Ibid, 22-23.
29. Ibid, 25-26. *Kansan*, March 2, 1947.
30. Ibid, March 5, 1927. Hancks et al, "Municipal Government," 28.
31. Ibid, 29-31.
32. Ibid. Landis, "Mayors," 73. *Kansas City* [Mo.] *Star*, December 7, 1951.

Chapter Seven

Demobilization

The political victories of 1926 and 1927 represent the peak of Wyandotte Klan No. 5's power in Kansas City. But at the same time of this qualified success, the order's social base was eroding. This chapter explores Number Five's demise from Kansas City at the time of its most sanguine achievements. The examination of the Klan's declining public activities supports this conclusion.

In April 1926, Charles H. McBrayer, as Grand Dragon, Kansas' highest-ranking Klansman, offered former members clemency from past debts if they agreed to pay one-quarter membership dues (\$1.25) and rejoin the order. 1926 also witnessed the first and only parade of the KKK in Kansas City. Wyandotte Klan No. 5, its Women's Auxiliary, and Junior Klan, were joined by Klansfolk from Wyandotte and Leavenworth counties, Kansas, and Jackson county, Missouri. Grand Dragon McBrayer and Missouri Grand Dragon Dr. William Campbell led the procession along Minnesota avenue with a mounted patrol of twenty horses and forty automobiles. But the parade drew only 1,500 marchers, hardly a display of strength. ¹

All of Wyandotte Klan No. 5's public festivities had disappeared by 1928. No more picnics were mentioned in the local press. The city directory mirrors this demise. The Klan had its own meeting hall by 1925. Located at 747 Minnesota avenue, in the heart of the city's central business district, the order appeared in business directories under the Klan name. By 1929, the Klan had moved its local headquarters to 1720 Central Avenue. South Kansas City, particularly Armourdale and Argentine, had produced many vocal and activist civic club and Klan leaders. Often at odds with the

elites ensconced along Minnesota avenue, south side partisans like *Kansas City* [Ks.] *Republic* editor and publisher E.W. Wells undoubtedly understood the symbolic importance of the Klan's downtown retreat. The KKK disappeared from the pages of the city guide in 1930. The last public notice of the order appeared in the summer of 1930 as Klan chapters from Kansas City, Olathe, Ottawa, Shawnee, Merriam, DeSoto, Edgerton, Overland Park, and Lawrence, Kansas, gathered for a convention at the Bonner Springs Klan Hall. ²

By the mid-twenties, the Ku Klux Klan was in nationwide retreat. Numerous scandals, fulfilled and unfulfilled political and social promises, and a robust economy, among other factors, are frequently cited for contributing to the order's demobilization. Following the election of Don C. McCombs, Wyandotte Klan No. 5 faded gradually from the city's stage. It did not occur overnight. White native-born Protestants simply moved on, their energies subsumed by other concerns. Paul Taneyhill, the Armourdale druggist, is an example of the transient Klansman. In 1920, Taneyhill served as membership director of the Sixth Ward Civic Club. In 1921, he joined the Klan. Eventually becoming a Klan officer, Taneyhill led the delegation that donated \$402.00 to Bethany Hospital. In July 1922, Taneyhill helped organize the Knights of America and coordinated Harry Lillich's run for sheriff. Taneyhill was officially "banished" from the Atlanta-based order in October 1922, probably for his role in the Knights of America. Finally, he appeared as a Republican precinct committeeman in 1928. The fluid nature of Klan membership necessitated the use of "once," one-time," and "former" throughout this study. Other men had the briefest of Klan tenures. Dr. John Wesley Faust attended one meeting and quit. Charles Costello, a police detective, held membership for thirty days. ³

Kansas City Klansmen moved in and out of the Klan and Klan-like organizations, but resistance, elite and popular, played the greatest role in driving the order from Kansas City. Elite resistance to the Klan in Kansas City pushed civic-minded men from the order who feared offending elected officials. There were two types of elite resistance to the

Klan: political and ideological. Governor Henry J. Allen shared common prejudices with Kansas Klansmen, particularly his instinctive anti-Catholicism. Allen, admittedly, did not oppose the Klan on principle. He merely objected to its means -- secrecy -- and its objective -- power. His resistance was predicated on his role as an elected leader; his response was one of defensive authority. Despite his lack of sympathy for Klan victims, Allen's commitment to removing the order from Kansas cannot be understated. Henry J. Allen presented the Klan an insurmountable, if imperfect, obstacle in the path of its drive for power in Kansas. Kansas City Mayor Harry B. Burton opposed the Klan politically, too. It was, after all, composed of his political enemies. But Burton brought a moral fervor to the battle against the Klan that other anti-Klan elites lacked. Unlike Allen, he worked publicly with Catholic leaders to fight the Klan. He opposed the Klan on principle while acknowledging its members' commitment to Kansas City's civic improvement. Burton's sense of empathy, for both the Klan and its victims, graced his role with moral authority. Notwithstanding their different styles, Allen, Burton, and later, Attorney General Charles B. Griffith, led the state's war on the Klan to victory.

Elite resistance to the Klan was crucial to its defeat, but grassroots resistance, particularly that of Roman Catholics, was just as critical to the effort. The *Catholic Register*, the region's diocesan newspaper, reported, exposed, and ridiculed Wyandotte Klan No. 5 with the sort of accuracy that can only come from the inside of an organization. The *Register* either had a Klan informant or infiltrated the order. The *Register*, for example, broke the story of the Knights of America. It was the only newspaper account of the first reform Klan. Indeed, it was the first paper to report Klan dissension. In November 1922, the *Register* "venture[d] the opinion that the Klan is dead." This report appeared the week before Attorney General Richard J. Hopkins filed the ouster suit against the Klan. On November 22, 1922, King Kleagle George T. McCarron ordered all Kansas Klansmen to resign from their chapter offices and forward all local records to him. The *Register's* fine-tuned ears caught news of these

developments and concluded -- with relevant accuracy -- that the order was moribund in Kansas City. ⁴

The good fight had strained the *Register's* resources.

We are grateful to the clergy and laity for the staunch support that has been accorded us not only in Kansas City but in all parts of the country. It cost us a large sum of money to carry on this fight but it was worth it. If you feel that we have done a service for you, the best way to tell us about it is to send us in an ad or an order for job printing. It is your paper - run for your especial benefit, religiously, socially, commercially and civically. It is your one line of offense and defense that can always be depended on to be in the thickest of the fight for right and justice. The stronger you make the Register, the easier it will be for you to live in peace and harmony with those who are ever ready to attack the defenseless. ⁵

Catholics worked with Jews and African Americans to defeat Klan independent candidate Harry Lillich in 1922. Black leaders, largely Republicans, carefully balanced party loyalty with anti-Klan resistance. Their strategy was to maintain their share of power in the GOP even if it meant alliance with the Klan on specific political objectives. But the African American strategy also included opposing the Klan-sponsored exhibition of "The Birth of a Nation," and the 1925 legislature's "Klan Bill," and returning Klan church donations. Outside a narrow realm of political commonality, black leaders publicly condemned the hooded order. ⁶

Elite and grassroots resistance to the Ku Klux Klan in Kansas City forced the order to examine and defend itself. Upon closer examination, many Klansmen did not like what they found and left the order. Finally, Klan demobilization raises the question of what led men into the KKK in the first place. Longstanding local problems -- social, civic, and political -- and the failure of local elites to address or solve them properly opened the door to a mass middle-class social movement, the Ku Klux Klan.

Questions of allegiance undermined the authority of elite leaders such as Harry B. Burton, L.H. Chapman, and Thomas A. Bigger when they were perceived to be working in the interest of an "alien settlement" -- Kansas City, Missouri. The Missouri Giant was believed to control the economic and political reins of Kansas City, Kansas, by means of the *Kansas City [Mo.] Star* -- a "foreign newspaper speaking a foreign tongue" -- and its

elite followers. Non-Klan leaders looked reflexively and habitually outside the state for guidance in politics, business, and law enforcement. On the other hand, the response of many native-born Protestants was to appropriate a foreign and autocratic organization -- the Ku Klux Klan -- and transform it into an ostensibly local and populist vehicle of political action. When even the Klan proved incapable of ameliorating local problems, for example crime, Klansmen organized law and order auxiliaries such as the Welfare League of the State and Chelsea Avenue Baptist churches. When the Klan itself became the problem, its members attempted reform or quit. ⁷

Kansas City Klansmen brought a wealth of civic, fraternal, religious, and political ties with them to form a nexus of which the Klan was only the latest addition. The Klan's mass appeal attracted non-Klan citizens who allied with the hooded order to change school policies, enforce white supremacy, elect law and order candidates, and take over the county Republican bureaucracy.

Despite Wyandotte Klan No. 5's distinctive Republican profile, non-Klan observers recognized the order's widespread political appeal. "The [Overland Park, Ks.] *Herald* representative was present as an invited guest and must say in all fairness that we were surprised at the liberal and conservative views expressed by the [KKK] speaker on religious and political matters." Wyandotte Klan No. 5 was, in its ideological essence, "populist." Recalling the words of the pro-Klan minister N.M. Tatum. ⁸

It is high time that the common people are making some effort to organize against crooked political and criminal influence. Labor is organized, capital is organized, the underworld, the politicians; in fact, everyone except common people are organized. We must organize with the intent to act unitedly in the common cause of the common people. ⁹

Anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic, and anti-black, the Ku Klux Klan was not extravagantly bigoted. But as one study of the order concluded, Klansmen "were more likely to openly express and act upon their views." Contemporary observers of the order also noted the Klan's muscular sense of social action. Stanley Frost found that Klansmen suffered from nothing more "abnormal than a passion for reform. . . . Yet it is abnormal .

. . for with the Klan this very common trait has an intensity, a directness and a concept of duty to do something, such as are seldom found." This "directness" was the difference between the men who joined the Klan and the men who supported it but did not join, between those who were in full communion and those who merely bowed before the monstrance. This "directness" -- that "certain assertive element" noted by the *Catholic Register* -- was the thin white line which separated Klan from non-Klan. ¹⁰

The Klan imperative to "do something" led men further into civic action. Like silver chasing flux, at least eighty-two Klansmen entered political life through the auspices of the order. Additionally, ten Klansmen apparently joined the Masons after enlisting in the ranks of the Invisible Empire. Civic, social, and political interplay are unexplored but important avenues of the Klan experience in the 1920s.

* * *

You are a traffic officer, a fire truck comes from one street, a patrol car from another, the funeral of a prominent citizen from a third, the St. Patrick's Day parade from the fourth and a Klan parade tries to cut across the intersection. What do you do? ¹¹

The question appeared in an amusing civil service examination which ran in a Kansas City newspaper in late 1925. But the question represents well the political factions which frequently clashed in Kansas City. The Klan indeed collided with the city's Catholic population, and with the apt metaphor of the prominent citizen's funeral. The Klan plowed through the intersection, forcing others to follow in its path. But Mayor Don C. McCombs and his coterie of erstwhile Klansmen never completed the road to civic progress. Hopes of mitigating the city's longstanding ills, its lack of unity, identity, and autonomy vanished.

The Ku Klux Klan arrived in Kansas City, Kansas, in early 1921 and remained there until at least 1930. Responding to perennial social, civic, and political problems, the

KKK quickly attracted hundreds, possibly thousands, of civic-minded, ~~m~~iddle-class supporters. Drawn heavily from the ranks of the small-business owner, clerk, and skilled craftsman, Klansmen were generally middle-aged, mainline Protestants who voted Republican and frequented lodge meetings. Reluctant to engage in violence or economic boycotts, many men left the order to organize reformed orders. These efforts failed. Gaining control of the Wyandotte county Republican party and winning the office of mayor ultimately proved to be shallow victories as both efforts degenerated into political and civic failure. The Klan's grip on city hall held until 1955. The order had thus influenced and directed Kansas City affairs for more than 30 years.

Notes

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4. *Catholic Register* (Kansas City, Mo.), November 9, 16, 1922. "Plaintiff's Abstract," 93, 132, 135.
5. *Catholic Register*, November 16, 1922.
6. *Kansas City* [Ks.] *Advocate*, November 3, 1922; December 7, 1923. *Kansan*, June 6, 1922.
7. Ibid, April 18, 1922. *Weekly Press*, July 3, 1925.
8. *Overland Park* [Ks.] *Herald*, August 28, 1924.
9. *Kansan*, October 24, 1922.
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Appendix

Occupational Status

High Non Manual (N=39)

Architect	1
Attorney	5
Chemist	1
City Commissioner	1
Clergyman	6
Dentist	8
Editor	1
Judge	1
Optometrist	1
Osteopath	1
Physician	7
Publisher	1
Superintendent	1
Teacher	1
Veterinarian	3

Mid Non Manual (N=216)

Businessmen

Automobile Dealer	2
Automobile Repair	1
Automobile Supply	2
Baker	2
Barber	8
Bicycle Dealer	1
Candy Store	1
Cleaner	1
Coal Dealer	4
Creamery	3
Diner	3
Druggist	13
Dry Goods	3
Electric	1
Equipment	1
Furniture	3
Garage	5
Grocer	24

Businessmen, continued

Mortician	1
Nursery	1
Painter	1
Photography	1
Plumber	5
Pool Hall	1
Printer	1
Real Estate	4
Roofing	1
Salvage	1
Serum	2
Shoe Repair	1
Shoe Store	4
Tinner	1
Tobacco	1
Transfer	3
Typesetting	2
Unspecified	15
Warehouse	1
Welding	1

Draftsman	3
Embalmer	1
Farmer	2

Inspectors

Animal	11
Engineer	1
Oil	1
Unspecified	4

Managers

Assistant	4
Business	7
Cemetery	1
Department	5
General Foreman	1
Railroad	1

Managers continued

Sales	1
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Public Officials

Asst. Co. Attorney	1
Asst. Supt. B.O.E.	1
Chief Clerk	1
City Abstractor	1
County Assessor	1
County Clerk	1
County Coroner	1
Marshal	1
Sheriff	1

Low Non Manual (N=240)

Agent	5
Bookkeeper	16
Clerk	81
Collector	7
Dispatcher	1
Floorman	1
Foreman	36
Mailman	3
Speculator	1
Teller	1

Public Servant

Fire Captain	2
Police Captain	1
Deputy Co. Clerk	2
Deputy Marshal	1
Detective	2
Junior Clerk	1

Salesmen

Advertising	2
Automobiles	5
Bakery	4
Battery	1
Cream	2
Electric	3
Film	1
Grocery	1
Insurance	8
Investments	1
Meat	5
Mill	1

Salesmen continued

Oil	1
Real Estate	2
Shoes	2
Tires	1
Traveling	4
Unspecified	19

Security Chief	1
Sheepbuyer	1
Soda Jerk	1
Student	3
Telegraph Operator	1
Timekeeper	4
Yardmaster	4
Weighmaster	1

Skilled (N=173)

Baker	3
Boilermaker	5
Bricklayer	1
Butcher	8
Cable Splicer	1
Carpenter	27
Car Repair	1
Electrician	14
Engineer (RR)	33
Fireman (RR)	15
Fitter	2
Harnessmaker	1
Hostler	1
Jeweler	1
Lineman	2
Machinist	23
Mechanic	10
Painter	3
Planer	1
Plasterer	5
Plumber	3
Printer	3
Roofer	1
Shoe Repair	3
Sign Painter	1
Tinner	3
Toolmaker	1
Welder	1

Semi-Skilled (N=169)

Apprentice	1
Barber	5
Bellhop	1
Boxmaker	1
Brakeman	16
Brander	1
Caller	1
Chauffeur	12
Fire Dept. Chauf.	1
Police Dept. Chauf.	4
Conductor	13
Cook	2
"Employee"	53
Fireman	6
Fireman (Private)	1
Gateman	1
Hostler Helper	1
Marker	1
Machinist Helper	1
Meter Reader	2
Millhand	1
Motorman	1
Oiler	1
Operative	1
Operator	3
Parts Chaser	2
Pilot (RR)	1
Policeman	7
Repairman	1
Stiller	1
Switchman	16
Trimmer	2
Under Sheriff	1
Waiter	1
Watchman	6

Unskilled (N=29)

Laborer	29
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Unknown or Retired (N=28)

28*

* Status categories are based on the work of Robert A. Goldberg, *Hooded Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Colorado* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981): 183-186.

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Timothy D. Rives

Signature of Author

December 5, 1995

Date

The Ku Klux Klan in Kansas City,
Kansas 1921-1930

Title of Thesis

Vernon Cooper

Signature of Graduate Office Staff
Member

12-15-95

Date Received