

A Fever in the Heartland

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PART 1: An Empire of Hate

A history of the Klu Klux Klan through 1920

- The KKK originated after the Civil War to keep Negroes 'in their place' and insure whites retained control of the South.
- It was first crushed by Ulysses S. Grant in 1876, after violent excesses and success in subverting Negro rights.
- In 1905 a book was published romanticizing the Klan, and its great success resulted in D.W. Griffith making the movie 'The Birth of a Nation' out of that book in 1915.
- This movie directly resulted in the Klan being resurrected in the South and spreading elsewhere.
- The guiding principles of this new Klan was the superiority of white, Protestant, native-born Americans over everyone else.
- The Klan operatives didn't need to create resentments - their recruitment pitch fit the times.
- Bigotry was rarely punished or condemned, even in polite circles in the North.

The 1920s was the golden age of fraternal organizations, both open and secret, and the Klan was the largest and most powerful.

- The epicenter of the Northern Klan was Indiana, where it controlled...
 - the state police and state politics
 - a deputized vigilante group 'assisting' police
 - openly supported White Supremacy policies and laws as being Americanism

The rise of D.C. Stephenson

- 'Steve' believed the way to win over the Heartland was with a seemingly wholesome Klan, a Klan of family and Midwestern values - standing for the uplift and protection of untainted Americanism.
- He knew you didn't have to lead a man to hate, just show him the way and he would do it on his own.
- The Klan claimed not to be against Negroes, but against social equality; not against Jews, only those trying to gain control of the world; not against Catholics, but opposed to their systems.
- The Klan stood for principles of pure Patriotism, Honor, Klanishness and White Supremacy (race pride).
- The modern Klan rejected modernism - the world was spinning too fast as it was.
- Klansmen were recruited, paid fees, paid for clothing, and initiated into this secret fraternal organization, i.e. you could be moral and never have your name or identity revealed - hence the sheets and hoods.
- Money obtained was spent to sponsor appropriate civic projects, paid to Protestant ministers to help with their works and 'put in a good word' about the Klan, and to support administrative work.
- Dossiers were assembled on all public servants and used to recruit or defeat individuals, as needed. In this way the Klan quickly began to exert political control within state agencies.
- By this time, D.C. Stephenson expanded his influence to neighboring states, but Indiana remained the hub.
- 'Steve' discovered the key to telling a big lie was to tell it with conviction and repeat it frequently.
- Ultimately the KKK - headed by Hiram Evans in the South and D.C. Stephenson in the North - wanted control of America by peaceful methods, i.e. controlling the politicians.

Men with badges

- In 1922 Indiana, the Horse Thief Detective Association was a lawfully deputized organization without much to do, i.e. cars were taking over. D.C. Stephenson managed to redirect their purpose to act as the morality police for the KKK.
- As such, they both assisted police in their fight against immorality (Prohibition and sexual lewd behavior) and carried out operations against 'enemies' of the Klan.

PART 2: A Master race in the Midwest

- With Prohibition on the books and Jim Crow expanding well beyond the South, the top objective of the Klan was stopping the flow of immigrants who could never be idealized Americans.
- D.C. Stephenson commented that he would like to put all Negroes, Catholics, and Jews on a raft in the middle of the ocean and sink it.
- As the Klan philosophy took hold in the North, it was polite at first, often expressed in codes and winks. The morality police took care of more forceful followup.
- The question is often asked why townspeople would take so easily to the Klan? It seems people need to hate something smaller than themselves as much as they need to have faith in something greater than themselves.
- The Klan sponsored political candidates across many statewide races between 1922 and 1925 and mostly won. Many states had Klan politicians in power, but none were so thoroughly controlled as was Indiana.
- Riots broke out in heavily Catholic areas, but around Notre Dame, in Southbend, the students were able to rout the Klansmen.
- The NAACP began advising Negroes to forgo their historic alliance with the Republican Party - most successful Klan politicians were Republicans - and this began a voting shift still in place today.
- Indiana politicians in 1924 ran as either being in support of the Klan or opposed to it, with the Klan candidate generally winning.
- The U.S. Congress passed an immigration measure that slammed the door on those who could never meet the Klan's definition of 100% American - shaping the face of America for much of the twentieth century. During WWII many Jews fleeing the Nazis were denied entry into the U.S. because of this law.

PART 3: Reckoning

- The downfall of D.C. Stephenson - *and of the national ambitions of the KKK* - came because of his propensity to abuse women when he drank. He was successfully protected until he attacked one woman - Madge Oberholtzer.
- His meeting her, abusing her, and ultimately causing her death are detailed in the book.
- Her lingering death brought national headlines and a well covered trial that exposed both his and KKK methods and practices.
- The result was that it was no longer seen as the 'Christian way' to belong to the Klu Klux Klan and political power and influence started to fade away.
- However, the underlying tribal reasons why the KKK gained popularity have remained in our population and can be seen in the reaction to the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, the problem in being unable to deal with immigration, and the popularity of White Supremacy beliefs well beyond fringe groups.
- This story illustrates why we both need to, and try really hard to avoid, discussing our issues with race and religion in the United States today. The politics of division and fear center on these issues that have been with our Republic from the beginning.