

The ku klux klan of the 1920's

[History](#)



The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was notorious for their hatred towards African Americans and their proclamation of white supremacy. They were known as the invisible empire and for their symbols of intimidation, which included white cloaks with hoods, and burning crosses. The KKK was depicted as an organization which was mostly active in the southern Confederate states and targeted African Americans. It originally died out in the late 1860s, but The Klan rose again in the 1920's because of the motion picture Birth of a Nation, new immigrants arriving to America, and hatred towards African-Americans .

Birth of a Nation was a silent film that premiered in 1915 that was directed by D. W. Griffith. Griffith went to Johns Hopkins University where he met Woodrow Wilson and became good friends. Wilson was a supporter of the Klan. One of the slides in Birth of a Nation has a quote by Wilson that said, "The white men were roused by a mere instinct of self-preservation ... until at last there had sprung into existence a great Ku Klux Klan, a veritable empire of the South, to protect the Southern country. Dixon's was a legislator, baptist preacher, lecturer, novelist, playwright, and an actor. The movie is based on the 1905 book The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan by Thomas Dixon (Chalmer 28). This story revolves around two polar opposite families; the northern Stonemans and the southern Camerons. In this story their sons and daughters fell in love but were split by the civil war stricken states and reconstruction had devastated them.

Congressman Stoneman (was based on radical republican Thaddeus Stephens) was represented as a hate-filled villain, urged by his Mulatto mistress to degrade the captured south, and with the recent assassination of "The Great Soul," Abraham Lincoln, there was nothing to stop his rage.

According to the book the south was ruled by Black tyranny and black corruption 'stained' the legislative hall. The opposite of Congressman Stoneman was Ben Cameron, leader of the KKK and a civil war hero of the south.

In the end the Klan comes and saves the innocent, avenges the fallen, and reunites the grand lovers (Binder 9: 166). D. W. Griffith based the movie on Dixon's book, by re-staging the war battles, Sherman's march to the sea. This gave the impression that the Klan was the 'savior' of the states and the patriots leading our country with an invisible fist. This inspired many people to be patriotic like the Klan but others wanted to be the Klan again. William J. Simmon was one who had viewed this movie and took it to heart. He thought that it was time to bring The Klan back. Colonel" Simmons plan for the Klan had been revealed in an advertisement in the Atlanta Journal on December 7 1915. It contained blurbs such as, " The world's greatest secret, social, patriotic, fraternal, and beneficiary order. "

This helped make the Klan more popular, but it wasn't the only reason for the KKK's substantial growth. There are many other things that led to the KKK success that fell into place beautifully. They were allowed to march in parades during World War I in demonstrations of patriotism. After the war the seized the opportunity for power. Binder 9: 167) Many problems were caused by a new influx of immigrants across the United States. Race riots sprang up in Chicago, Omaha, Duluth, Springfield, Tulsa, Texas, Arkansas, Kansas, and Florida. The KKK disdained the new southern and eastern European immigrants that were. usually either Roman Catholic, Jews, Slavs, or Bolshevik. But they still hated people who were not white. This helped the

KKK spread quickly through anti-Catholic socialist Wisconsin. The Catholics seemed to be real "threats" to the public schools and the enforcement of prohibition.

The Klan actually favored something that may be considered correct with their stance against alcohol during prohibition. The Klan went sour from there, when a few white men from Louisiana began criticizing them. These men were tortured and then later hanged by the Klan. This was known as The Mer Rouge Murders (Chalmer 29). The Ku Klux Klan spread to all corners of the United States, and all through the Midwest. William Allen White had experienced this first hand in 1921. He wrote of his experience and the experience of others.

The following is from his letter that he had wrote on September 27, 1921. "An organizer of the Ku Klux Klan was in Emporia the other day, and the men whom he invited to join his band at \$10 per join turned him down. Under the leadership of Dr. J. B. Brickell and following their own judgment after hearing his story, the Emporians told him that they had no time for him. The proposition seems to be: Anti-foreigners Anti-Catholics Anti-Negroes. There are, of course, bad foreigners and good ones, good Catholics and bad ones, and all kinds of Negroes.

To make a case against a birthplace, a religion, or a race is wickedly un-american and cowardly. The whole trouble with the Ku Klux Klan is that it is based upon such deep foolishness that it is bound to be a menace to good government in any community,"(qtd Johnson 56). White went on to say how idiotic and self centered the Klan was by being so greedy and racial. He also said no one in Emporia fell into this recruiters clutches and they ran the

recruiter out of town. (Johnson 285). The KKK had made their mark in many places.

The KKK had control over many different government positions at the time such as in Indiana, Tennessee, Oklahoma, and Oregon to name a few, but in Indiana the Klan was very influential. In 1924, Republican Edward Jackson was elected governor. This made the rest of the state filled with members of the Klan, but this had not lasted long (AP 135-136). 1924 Anaheim, California was taken completely over by the Ku Klux Klan to make it a model of a 'perfect' city, by taking over the city council, but it was short lived because the voters called for a special recall election.

A little bit after this Earle Mayfield of Texas got the U. S Senators seat, this made the Klan very powerful in these regions(Chalmer 34). Klan members in government seats did not stop there. Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed a former Klan member as a Supreme Court Justice. This man was confirmed to be a big supporter of the Klan, this was Hugo Black. Hugo Black was from Alabama where the Ku Klux Klan had been growing rapidly. He joined the invisible empire and became a high ranking officer in the Klan. Later he entered into politics. He was supported by the Klan and prohibitionists alike.

At the age of forty he had not been known all that well publicly in politics, but he had surpassed four other prominent candidates and won the Senate nomination in the democratic primary, which essentially assured him of victory. For the next year he campaigned in every County. As senator he had openly acknowledged Klan support and attended many state wide rallies. When the Klan political power diminished he broke his ties with them in 1930

(Van Deer Ver). In 1937 Franklin Roosevelt was frustrated with the conservative members of the supreme court.

His legislation to appoint one member for every justice over the age of seventy had failed after a bitter 168 day fight in congress. That plan would have allowed him to appoint as many as six new justices. Roosevelt was not finished yet, as the struggle created one vacant seat, which he had filled with Hugo Black (Leuchtenburg 1). The Klan during the time of Black's membership was very hateful to non white people, especially blacks. They had thought that their jobs were being snatched up by Black people. They also didn't like them because the Ku Klux Klan viewed anyone who was not white as inferior to them.

It had been a hard life for a black person during this time period because of the political power and the number of members in the Ku Klux Klan, they also always used the African Americans of scapegoats to their problems (Drowne 10). The downfall of the second wave Klan happened for a number of reasons but one main reason was the conviction of D. C Stephenson. Stephenson was a long time member of the Klan and became the high rank of Grand Dragon. He was Publicly known to be a strong Prohibitionist. In 1925 he went on trial for the murder of Madge Oberholtzer.

He was also responsible for the abduction, forced intoxication, and rape of Ms. Oberholtzer. The court had ruled that He was sentenced to life in prison. This devastated the Klan and sent them on a steep decline of members. (AP 135-137) The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s was very powerful during its prime. It started with Simmons, grew to enormous numbers, but then died out as quickly as it had came. The Ku Klux Klan had rapidly rose because of <https://assignbuster.com/the-ku-klux-klan-of-the-1920s/>

Griffith's major motion picture Birth of a Nation, the amount of new immigrants arriving to the United States, and the racial tensions between the Klan and African Americans.