

Struck by fear: the ku klux klan

[Sociology](#), [Racism](#)



The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920's recruited the most members out of any Klan before or after it. More than over a million white men pledged their loyalty to this organization. Their fear of society's turn in direction is what struck many white men with panic and enabled leaders to recruit so many members almost effortlessly. Women becoming more independent, the changing culture of youth and the shift in their wealth status pushed for the Klan to recruit more men, so that together they could fend off any changes that threatened the values that they so deeply believed America was built on. It was the country's militant defender of " pure Americanism" and stood for patriotism, old-time religion, and conventional morality.

Economic developments opened new options for African Americans but closed off many for white men. White men were falling to the bottom of the wealth ladder and were stuck working jobs as sharecroppers for richer farmers, or in mills. It was becoming harder for a white man to be his own boss, maintain authority over African American and immigrants or even their own wife and children. African Americans almost owned an equal number of farms. The economic change that took place alter the characteristics families' carried. In the nineteenth-century the " white family was labored under the direction of its male head, now sons and daughter, some wives as well-earned wages in their own right". The 1920's for many women was a very rewarding decade. After many years of fighting for their right to vote they finally won; " there was a profound and keenly felt cultural switch which, for many women, meant increased opportunity to work outside the home".

A “New Woman” was formed and many men were against the changes she brought. “As the woman suffrage won its seventy-year-long battle for the right to vote, male prerogative no longer seemed assured”. Men feared that they were losing their power and looked to the Ku Klux Klan to help them reinstate it. With this sense of independence and freedom that was gained, young women began rejecting “old Victorian values of desexualized modesty”. The world was being torn to shreds in the eyes of Christian white men and something needed to be done. Young women were not the only ones causing public unrest, the majority of the youth were too. The way “the younger generation were rapidly becoming unmanageable” and “discontent with farming life and conditions was something that worried many. Adults watched as a “heterosocial” youth culture began to form; “movie mania, dance madness, and joy-riding”, all seemed to express disobedience and “disdain for their gender roles”. Fearing that traditional values we’re would soon banish was one of the reasons many joined the KKK. The Klan was “ingratiated itself with solid middle-class white citizens on the basis of its unrivaled commitment to community moral clean-ups”. This also helped to prove that their actions had value behind them and it is why they were supported in local elections. While “cleaning up” the community, many families felt that not enough was done to enforce the Eighteenth Amendment. Mothers didn’t feel safe leaving their kids in their yard because of the dangers of “intoxicants” to their families. Citizens confessed their distress to the KKK in hope to rid their community of this “evil”. Not much could be enforced by individuals who themselves were alcoholics, so the Klan took matters into their own hands and hired a private investigator who

collected evidence that “ resulted in a host of indictments” (MacLean 106). Soon after, candidates from the Klan “ swept the local elections”; people trusted them, so many were with them and not against them. The Klan had dominated politics in such a way that one could not be elected without the support of the KKK. They had the “ balance of power” in state politics and had the ability to discard anti-Klan governors from office.

It is no doubt that fear played an extremely vital role in recruiting men for the Ku Klux Klan. Many white men feared the changes taking place because a lot these changes didn’t favor them. They were losing the exclusive power they as white men, once held. From having the absolute authority in their home to almost none. Watching young women become carefree and dressing more provocatively. The feeling of disgrace having to work in the mill or for wealthier farmers. These are all examples of things that white people feared and reasons they joined, some with no hesitation, an organization as extreme as the Ku Klux Klan. They aided them with any problems they encountered, especially if it dealt with someone of color.