

Insight into the Hoosier Ku Klux Klan: The *Fiery Cross* and Indiana Newspapers of
the 1920s

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Introducing the Ku Klux Klan

The “Roaring Twenties” was a decade that brought with it a new age of cultural change that was not welcome to all. The second wave of the Ku Klux Klan ignited in the South and quickly spread to many areas of the United States as a reaction to the increasing influx of immigrants and the shifting cultural norms. The Klan’s philosophies and anxieties materialized in one of their weekly newspapers, the *Fiery Cross*. This publication operated out of Indianapolis, within a state that boasted the highest numbers of Klan membership in the country.¹ Articles in the *Fiery Cross* contained accounts of national and statewide political events in addition to articles about Klan demonstrations and activity. When compared with articles on the same topics in mainstream Hoosier papers, significant variations emerged in tone, vocabulary, and interpretation of certain events.

Studies of the Ku Klux Klan conducted by historians cite excerpts from the *Fiery Cross* to aid their analyses. The newspaper provides a unique glimpse into Indiana Klan consciousness that survived the destruction of Klavern lists and other records.² Research done by both Nancy MacLean and Leonard Moore used the *Fiery Cross* as a tool to connect various communities through propaganda.³ MacLean maintained a wider focus on the appeal of the Klan and how it was able to attract members at such a rapid rate in the United States, while Moore presented a

¹ Leonard J. Moore, *Citizen Klansmen: The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1921-1928*, (Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2005), 7.

² “Klavern” is the term used to describe a local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan.

³ Leonard J. Moore was an associate professor at McGill University in Montreal, Quebec, Canada when he published *Citizen Klansmen*. Leonard J. Moore, *Citizen Klansmen: The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1921-1928*, (Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2005), back cover.

revisionist view.⁴ He argued that the organization in Indiana functioned predominantly as a social organization than the first wave Klan and was less focused on nativism than the organization in other states at the time. He studied Klan records and surviving lists to determine if a majority of members were political and religious fundamentalists. His conclusion reasoned that the Indiana Klan was a social community that was concerned with the protection of American laws and moral values.⁵ Articles in the *Fiery Cross* support many of his claims, but use language of discrimination and superiority in referring to minorities or immigrants. In fact, the Klan newspaper announces its opinions through many examples of religious discrimination, racism, and xenophobia.

Roland Fryer and Steven Levitt's article focused on the enormous marketing structure of the Klan and how they advertised hatred to garner more members. The *Fiery Cross* was implemented as part of the network used to promote the Klan's values.⁶ In Felix Harcourt's "Journalism of a Peculiar Sort," he studied the popularity of Klan publications nationally. The analysis exposed the widespread acceptance and interworking of Klan papers, including the *Fiery Cross*. He used subscription numbers to obtain a close estimate of the families that purchased the *Fiery Cross*. Harcourt's evaluation provides a foundation for a deeper assessment of the wide range of Klan consumers and their position in 1920s society.⁷

⁴ Nancy K. MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan.*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), xiv.

⁵ Moore, 9.

⁶ Roland G. Fryer and Steven D. Levitt, "Hatred and Profits: Under the Hood of the Ku Klux Klan," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 27, no. 4, (2012): 8.

⁷ Harcourt, Felix. "Journalism of a Peculiar Sort": Ku Klux Klan Newspapers in the 1920s. Uploaded 2013.

The *Fiery Cross* reported readers from the surrounding states around Indiana and Central America. An article boasted numbers close to 200,000 received the *Fiery Cross* in their homes.⁸ The newspaper was distributed weekly to subscribers from July 1922 through February 1925. The online *Hoosier State Chronicles* provides access to 104 issues of the paper. This research is based on a sample of 38 issues that were selected for review using a system based on the dates of relevant events along with a sample of every fifth issue in the collection.

Outside publications were selected for comparison primarily based on the date of events and the availability of Indiana papers accessible on newspapers.com. Newspapers were selected from cities throughout Indiana: Indianapolis, Fort Wayne, Huntington, Valparaiso, Columbus, Franklin, Alexandria, South Bend, Muncie, Angola, and Kokomo.⁹

In articles in the *Fiery Cross*, Klan writers interpreted many political events of the 1920s as directly focused on or influenced by the Invisible Empire.¹⁰ The Klan viewed the world through a nativist, Protestant, self-righteous lens that was preserved in the pages of the *Fiery Cross*. They claimed to be misunderstood victims of a society controlled by the vice and political corruption of those they did not believe were 100% American. The Klan's reactions to the way they were perceived, their sponsored events, and their alleged influence on many political events

http://www.academia.edu/4738422/_Journalism_of_a_Peculiar_Sort_Ku_Klux_Klan_Newspapers_in_the_1920s

⁸ "The Fiery Cross is First in Klandom," *Fiery Cross*, July 13, 1923.

⁹ Newspapers.com by Ancestry

¹⁰ "The Invisible Empire" is a nickname given to the Ku Klux Klan due to the confidential nature of the organization. Members were sworn into the ranks of the Klan in secrecy, a tradition that harkened back to the preceding period of Reconstruction. Wade, 33.

dominated the headlines of the pro-Klan newspaper. The world outside of the Klan interpreted the same events differently. Mainstream papers offered a wider perspective of each situation. The insecure, egocentric perceptions held by many members the Hoosier Klan were echoed in the vocabulary, subject matter, and interpretive slant of articles published in the *Fiery Cross*.

The Ku Klux Konstruction in Indiana

The second wave of the Ku Klux Klan rapidly gained popularity in Indiana during the 1920s. William J. Simmons revived the Ku Klux Klan in Georgia after the silent film, *The Birth of a Nation*, became a hit in 1915.¹¹ The film romanticized the actions of the Klan during the Reconstruction period in the South. These ideals appealed to many, resulting in the growth of Ku Klux Klan supporters.

Kleagles came to Evansville, Indiana in 1920 with hopes to establish the Invisible Empire, and their ideas spread like wildfire throughout the state.¹² Kleagles penetrated already established social groups to recruit Hoosiers.¹³ Church groups, fraternal orders, and other clubs were prime targets for circulating information about the benefits of the Invisible Empire as Hoosiers invested a lot of time and money in fraternal organizations due to the benefits that they presented for business, employment opportunities, and social status.¹⁴ The Indiana Klan

¹¹ Shawn Lay, "Ku Klux Klan in the Twentieth Century," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, (Coker College, Hartsville, South Carolina, June 7, 2005), <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/ku-klux-klan-twentieth-century>

¹² "Kleagles" recruited members for the Klan. D.C. Stephenson served as a Kleagle in Evansville before his promotion to Grand Dragon of Indiana. Wade, 222-235.

¹³ Moore, 13.

¹⁴ Wyn C. Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc. 1987), 223.

offered Hoosiers the opportunity to be a part of a social group and provided them with scapegoats for the problems in their communities.¹⁵ Furthermore, Kleagles bribed the ministers of Protestant churches with the promise of compensation for each pro-Klan sermon that they gave, giving the Klan access to the majority of their target audience in each town.¹⁶ These sympathetic ministers could publish their sermons in the *Fiery Cross*.

Many of Indiana's communities welcomed the Klan because of their strict adherence to Prohibition laws, the opportunities they presented for volunteer services, and the multitude of activities that they offered to residents.¹⁷ In addition, industrialization and the influx of immigrants into the country increased after the end of the First World War, bringing many migrants from eastern and southern Europe.¹⁸ The onset of social and cultural changes introduced a sense of fear of the unknown in many Hoosiers. The Klan's nativist policies cultivated these anxieties and promised to fight against the changes they feared.

Through his analysis of Klan documents, Moore estimated that during the peak period of membership "between one quarter and one third of all native-born white men in the state" had paid the \$10 dues and been initiated into the Klan.¹⁹ In

¹⁵ Kathleen Blee, "Women and the Ku Klux Klan: Klan Women in Indiana in the 1920s," In *Women, Families, and Communities: Readings in American History*, edited by Nancy Hewitt and Kirsten Delegard, (Duke University: Pearson Education, Inc.. 2008), 112-125.

¹⁶Wade, 223.

¹⁷ Ron Smith, "The Klan's Retribution Against an Indiana Editor: A Reconsideration," *Indiana Magazine of History*, 106, no. 4, (2010): 17.

¹⁸ Peter J. Duignan, "Making and Remaking America: Immigration into the United States," *Hoover Institution*. September 15, 2003. <http://www.hoover.org/research/making-and-remaking-america-immigration-united-states>.

¹⁹ Moore, 47.

1923, the Klan administered an internal audit of the Indiana Klan. This assessment reported 117,245 Klan members in the state, making Indiana the leading state for Klan affiliation in America.²⁰ An additional census revealed that this number rose to 162,267 by 1925. These calculations seem to be the best approximation, though most likely exaggerated, as they were drawn from data provided by Klan records. However, the appeal of the Klan in Indiana had reached its peak between 1921 and 1924, and this can account for the rapid increase.²¹

This high number of Klan enlistment in the state was in large part due to the sales tactics of D.C. Stephenson. He had been a stock salesman when he joined the Evansville Klan in 1921. Stephenson was quickly promoted to King Kleagle and eventually earned the title of Grand Dragon after he registered five thousand people within six months.²² Stephenson's ambition was to give the Indiana Ku Klux Klan an honorable reputation—he claimed to hold no interest in “selling the Klan in Indiana on hatreds.” His pride was that he “sold the Klan on Americanism, on reform.”²³ He was continuously frustrated with the national Klan organization, because of the bad name they brought to the group with their violent acts. Stephenson withdrew Indiana from the national Klan in 1924 because of his growing exasperation with the behavior that Imperial Wizard H.W. Evans allowed the Southern Klan to get away with.²⁴ The two men struggled for control over the popular *Fiery Cross* during

²⁰ Wade, 218.

²¹ The second census was undertaken as part of the D.C. Stephenson trial. Fryer, 8.

²² Wade, 222.

²³ D.C. Stephenson, c1924, quoted by Wade, 223.

²⁴ Wade, 234-236.

this conflict, but Stephenson ultimately emerged victorious.²⁵ His popularity and patriarch status within the Hoosier Klan earned him the nickname of “Old Man.”

The Klandestine Defensive

Despite the fact that Indiana had the highest Klan membership in the nation, the Klan’s reputation for prejudice and hatred was not received kindly by all sectors of Hoosier society. The very reason that the Klan had such an appeal was due to the large populations of immigrants, African Americans, and non-Protestants that resided in the state. Cities and towns with large populations of these minorities, including religious groups such as Catholics were a primary place for anti-Klan sentiment, though it was not merely limited to those areas. Newspapers and groups organized to combat the Klan, with verifiable occurrences in Muncie, South Bend, and Indianapolis.²⁶ Many newspapers took to publishing Klan membership lists in addition to confronting the Klan’s secrecy and hypocrisy.²⁷ The *Fiery Cross* wrote articles that detailed the ensuing violence towards Klansmen following the publication of the lists. Klan journalists expressed their anger by coining ludicrous nicknames for their adversaries in efforts to humiliate them.

The *Fiery Cross* is an exceptional resource that captures the Klan’s opinions in frozen moments during the paper’s circulation in the early to mid-1920s. In every

²⁵ Patricia Fogleman, “The Fiery Cross,” *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, edited by David J. Bodenhamer and Robert G. Barrows (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 556.

²⁶ Joseph Michael White, “The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana in the 1920’s As Viewed by the Indiana Catholic and Record,” Digital Commons @ Butler University, January 1, 1974, 37.

²⁷ See articles such as: George Dale, *Muncie Post-Democrat*, January 4, 1924. and “Injunction Issued Against Tolerance,” *Indianapolis News*, May 12, 1923. And “Notre Dame Students Stage A Riot” *Fiery Cross*, March 16, 1923.

issue, the newspaper's mission statement was written in the section that coincided with the subscription and publication information. It read: "edited, not to make up people's minds, but to shake up people's minds: to help mold active public opinion which will make America a proper place to live in." Underneath was the price for a yearly subscription, as well as the proclamation that they brought "the truth," to Americans.²⁸ The *Fiery Cross* assured the residents of Indiana as well as other consumers of the publication that they developed their own beliefs based on the information they received. The newspaper proclaimed that it did not force opinions on people, but it would publish the biased stories that made members believe they came to the shared conclusion on their own.²⁹

Critics argued that the confidentiality of Klansmen was an admission of their guilt and shame. They reasoned that if the organization's members were unprejudiced, they would not feel the need to hide behind hoods. Klan journalists used history to justify the organization's secrecy. They compared themselves to the Founding Fathers and the American Revolution.

The only reason that the constitution was adopted was because men of those days had the same spirit as the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, and kept their own deliberations within their breast until they could prepare and organize for democracy...³⁰

The Klan was convinced that its purpose was as essential as the composition of the Constitution. The Klan emphasized its determination to preserve America, and that the hostile nature of the Klan was limited to only the "wickedness that saps

²⁸ *Fiery Cross*, July 20, 1923.

²⁹ *Fiery Cross*, July 20, 1923.

³⁰ Editorial, "Secrets," *Fiery Cross*, July 20, 1923.

American ideals of living and government.”³¹ They used this self-righteousness to justify violent actions against those who went against their definition of American ideals.

The Klan’s hatred came from their fear of “aliens.” In countless *Fiery Cross* articles and editorial pieces, panic over change was prominent. A speech by Klan Emperor Col. William Joseph Simmons recounted in the paper is representative of the Klan’s xenophobia. He spoke of impending doom as Anglo-Saxon men were becoming the minority and fumed that African Americans were given equal protections under laws.³² In an editorial column titled “White Supremacy,” the Klan referred to the Jim Crow laws and the Supreme Court’s ruling on a certain case concerning a black man riding in the same train car as a white man. In this column, they emphasized that the Supreme Court paid damages to the white man, therefore upholding the idea that all men were not born equal. The case was used to justify the Klan’s own desire to do best for the United States by supporting the Supreme Court’s ruling on segregation.³³

The Klan continued to believe that it did not actively attempt to destroy particular groups of people, but worked to uphold the fundamental Christian morality of the United States.³⁴ Frustrated *Fiery Cross* journalists fought to improve the reputation of the Hoosier Klan by reassuring readers that the Klan lived by a code of morals, tolerance, and kinship. The Klan defended their abhorrence of

³¹ John E. Point, “Sparks from the Fiery Cross,” *Fiery Cross*, July 6, 1923.

³² “Indiana Takes Convention at Atlanta by Storm,” *Fiery Cross*, December 8, 1922.

³³ “White Supremacy,” *Fiery Cross*, March 16, 1923.

³⁴ *Fiery Cross*, July 6, 1923, Second Ed.

Catholics with another historical rationalization. They claimed that Protestants fled to the New World after Catholics chased them from Europe.³⁵ They argued that they did not attack Catholics solely on their religion, but asserted that Roman Catholics and the Pope caused much of the moral depravity of the period and needed to be stopped.³⁶ According to the *Fiery Cross*, the Catholic Church epitomized every aspect of society that the Klan sought to change.

In 1921, Pat O'Donnell established the American Unity League in Chicago with the specific aim to eradicate the Klan as an organization. They publically condemned Klansmen and forged ties with anti-Klan politicians as well as publishing Klan membership lists in the organization's newspaper, *Tolerance*.³⁷ In April of 1923, another American League chapter was formed in Indianapolis, much to the horror of the Hoosier Klan.³⁸ The group was predominantly made up of Irish Catholics, but also included a number of African Americans, Jews, and white Protestants among its ranks.³⁹ The *Fiery Cross* frequently belittled the organization and its leader by coining the nicknames: "Mad" Pat O'Donnell and the "little leaguers," or the "Un-American" Unity League."⁴⁰ On one occasion, the Klan wrote an article challenging the American Unity League to provide concrete evidence that the Klan was anti-Catholic. They issued the challenge after the League published a

³⁵ "Who Refused Them?" *Fiery Cross*, June 13, 1924.

³⁶ Eyewitness, "Klan Strikes South Bend; Cleanup of City Starts," *Fiery Cross*, February 9, 1923.

³⁷ Examples in White, 37, and *Indianapolis News*, April 27, 1923, and *Indianapolis News*, May 12, 1923.

³⁸ References in Eyewitness, "\$50,000 Challenge to the American Unity League," *Fiery Cross*, April 6, 1923 and *Indiana Catholic Record*, March 23, 1923.

³⁹ "Unity League For County is Formed," *Indianapolis News*, May 8, 1923.

⁴⁰ "Anti-Klan Ruling Reversed by City," *Fiery Cross*, September 28, 1923.

passive aggressive article about the Klan in the *Indianapolis Star*.⁴¹ The *Fiery Cross* promised to donate \$50,000 to a “real” Catholic institution if the League succeeded.⁴² There did not seem to be evidence that the American Unity League responded; however in the next issue of the *Fiery Cross*, one article referenced a passage in the Indianapolis Catholic Record that denounced the practices of the American Unity League.⁴³ This article proved to be entirely false, as the *Indiana Catholic and Record* often reprinted speeches by O’Donnell and encouraged Catholics to join the organization.⁴⁴

Mainstream newspapers weighed in on the conflict between the Invisible Empire and the American Unity League. In 1923, the *Fort Wayne Sentinel* published a commentary on Pat O’Donnell that agreed with his anti-Klan stance but was not impressed by his stance against the Klan as the *Sentinel* had openly opposed the Klan “18 months ago.” They did not consider him to be exceptional for speaking out against the Klan. The editorial column boasted that O’Donnell used excerpts from the *Sentinel* in his speeches.⁴⁵

When Republican state chairman Lawrence Lyons publically admitted in April of 1923 to using his Klan membership to get elected, the Klan asserted that he had aligned himself with the American Unity League. The scandal inspired livid remarks from the *Fiery Cross*; they called Lyons the “Benedict Arnold” of the

⁴¹ Joseph R. Roach and Michael Harrahan, “To the Citizens of the State of Indiana,” *Indianapolis Star*, April 2, 1923.

⁴² Eyewitness, “\$50,000 Challenge to the American Unity League,” *Fiery Cross*, April 6, 1923.

⁴³ “Indianapolis Catholic Organ Sidesteps the Unity League,” *Fiery Cross*, April 13, 1923.

⁴⁴ White, 37-38.

⁴⁵ Editorial, *Fort Wayne Sentinel*, October 2, 1923.

Invisible Empire and O'Donnell the "prophet of hate."⁴⁶ Following Lyons' announcement, the Klan became increasingly hostile towards the American Unity League and Lyons. They published a long rant condemning the two men and finished the article with the following:

If O'Donnell doesn't know Lyons does. Know. That.
Every. Klansman takes an oath guaranteeing the Roman
Catholic the right to worship God unhampered,
unchallenged, and uninfluenced!⁴⁷

Evidence of the Klan's futile attempts at revenge appeared in the *Indianapolis News* in a story that mentioned telegrams sent by Stephenson to various political figures with instructions on how to replace Lyons as state chairman.⁴⁸ The *Huntington Herald* commented on the Republican Party's dilemma caused by the announcement. The Party debated as to whether Lyons should resign from his position. The *Herald* journalist scolded Lyons for his public departure from the Klan.⁴⁹ It was seen as a foolish political move to throw away the support of the Klan. Newspapers in Columbus, Huntington, and Indianapolis latched onto the scandal and admonished Lyons for turning a "personal matter" into a public one.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Eyewitness Plus. "Lyons Betrays Klan Oath." *Fiery Cross*. April 2, 1923.

⁴⁷ In one particular ranting quote, the *Fiery Cross* wrote, "Mad Pat' O'Donnell, the two-by-four, pussy-footer from Delphi, says and Lyons, by his act (sic) agrees, that he does not believe in secrecy." "Lyons Betrays Klan Oath," *Fiery Cross*, April 2, 1923.

⁴⁸ Examples in *Indianapolis News*, April 27, 1923, and "Watson Sees Members of State Committee," *Indianapolis News*, May 4, 1923.

⁴⁹ "Lawrence Lyons," *Huntington Herald*, April 4, 1923.

⁵⁰ "G.O.P. Chairman of Indiana has Abandoned Klan," *Fiery Cross*, March 30, 1923. "Lawrence Lyons," *Huntington Herald*, April 4, 1923.

Another man in the crosshairs of the Klan's printed wrath was Samuel Lewis Shank.⁵¹ Shank was Mayor of Indianapolis from 1922-1925, the peak years of the Hoosier Klan.⁵² He spoke publically against the Klan and issued bans on masked demonstrations and cross burnings. Whereas Lyons had been attacked with open hostility, Shank was mocked and treated as a fool rather than a threat. The Klan ridiculed his management of Indianapolis in the *Fiery Cross* issues over the course of two years.⁵³ They referred to him as "Limber Lunged Lew" and demeaned his competence in office by calling his "regime" inefficient and his career "burlesque." When Shank announced that he was running for governor in the 1924 election year, the *Fiery Cross* mocked his attempt to defeat the Klan supported candidate, Ed Jackson. The Klan asserted that Shank would lose the "alien" vote due to his incompetence.⁵⁴ By November 1925, a known Klansmen named John L. Duvall replaced Shank in office.⁵⁵ Mayor Lew Shank serves as an example of the treatment of political leaders in Indiana that overtly criticized the Invisible Empire.

The Klan was very adamant about countering arguments made against them by politicians, religious communities, and others who opposed Klan influence in Indiana. Klansmen did not hesitate to dispel rumors or justify their membership in

⁵¹ Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930*, (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1992), 151-152.

⁵² Tiffany Benedict Browne, "100 Years Ago today...1/3/1910- Mayor Shank Sworn In," *Historic Miscellania*, January 3, 2010. <http://historicindianapolis.com/100-years-ago-today-131910-mayor-shank-sworn-in/>

⁵³ Mayor Shank appeared in *Fiery Cross* issues dating from April 1923 to July 1924.

⁵⁴ "Limber Lew Runs to Form," *Fiery Cross*, November 2, 1923.

⁵⁵ Patricia Fogleman, "Ku Klux Klan," *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, edited by David J. Bodenhamer and Robert G. Barrows (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 880-881.

the Klan by using references to warped history. Furthermore, *Fiery Cross* journalists used nicknames to degrade their opponents and boost the confidence of Klansmen. Many of the challenges from outside newspapers or events were addressed in the editorial section of the *Fiery Cross*, with exceptions for political figures like Lawrence Lyons or Mayor Lew Shank, whom appeared in the first page headlines. The importance placed on addressing these attacks on the Klan was not to educate Klan adversaries, as the general population would not have subscribed to the *Fiery Cross*. Instead, the rationalization was meant to reassure Klansmen. The *Fiery Cross* affirmed readers' beliefs that Klansmen were American heroes, upholding the 100% American values of the United States.

The Visible Invisible Empire

Parades, barbecues, and other Klan demonstrations were advertised and outlined in the *Fiery Cross*. The Klan remarked proudly on their organizational techniques and the vast numbers that came to celebrate at various fairgrounds and parks around the state. The large 1923 Independence Day celebration in Kokomo, the negotiations to purchase Valparaiso University in 1923, and the riots in South Bend in May of 1924 were three notable Klan directed events. The manner in which mainstream newspapers covered Klan events varied largely by the nature of the demonstrations and the effect they had on groups outside the Klan. Both Klan and non-Klan papers reported on the events, but the articles in the *Fiery Cross* were enthusiastic whereas the city newspapers commented on the scale of the event rather than the importance of it.

A significant event in the history of the Hoosier Klan was the massive gathering in Kokomo for the 1923 Independence Day celebration. The *Kokomo Daily Tribune* outlined the preparations necessary to prepare the town for such a grand event by disclosing that special trains were reserved with the expectation that attendees would come from all areas of Indiana, Ohio, and Kentucky. The article's boastful tone reflected the town's pride for being selected for the important celebration.⁵⁶ The publicity for the Independence Day event was so vast that the *Indianapolis News* further verified the immense numbers of attendees from outside states and reported on the anticipation of the arrival of the Imperial Wizard, but misprinted his name as "Edwards" rather than "Evans."⁵⁷

The *Fiery Cross* commented on the treatment of Klansmen as they traveled, and indicated disdain towards the outside forces that attempted to confuse incoming Klansmen by changing the road signs around Kokomo. Additionally, families ran into conflict when travelling through outside towns, and others were stopped or arrested for minor traffic violations.⁵⁸ The Klan disclosed its frustration about the incidents in the next issue of the *Fiery Cross*. However, in the same article they asserted that the celebration was a huge success and boasted that Dr. H.W. Evans attended the festivities to issue ninety-two charters to new Hoosier Klaverns.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ "Railroads Put To It To Take Care of Crowd." *Kokomo Daily Tribune*, July 2, 1923.

⁵⁷ "Klansmen Celebrate the Fourth at Kokomo," *Indianapolis News*, July 4, 1923.

⁵⁸ Staff Correspondent, "200,000 Klansmen Meet: 'Kokomonians Perform a Big Undertaking,'" *Fiery Cross*, July 13, 1923.

⁵⁹ Staff Correspondent, "All Roads to Kokomo meet July Fourth," *Fiery Cross*, July 6, 1923.

An event that truly represented the audacity of the Indiana Klan was their plan to purchase Valparaiso University in 1923. The popularity of the Klan in Valparaiso was evident given the number of parades and demonstrations hosted at the local fairgrounds.⁶⁰ Despite this widespread acceptance of the Ku Klux Klan in the city, there was substantial discontent over the possibility of the Klan owning the university. The establishment had fallen on hard times after the First World War and was desperately attempting to remain open. During the summer of 1923, the Indiana Klan showed interest in purchasing the school for conversion to a Klan institution. The two Valparaiso newspapers, the *Evening Messenger* and the *Daily Vidette*, wrote articles that documented the process of the negotiations. The publications conveyed the public's gratitude that the university would survive, no matter the organization that oversaw it.⁶¹ However, in an interview with the school's former president, Henry Kinsey Brown, he appeared less enthusiastic about negotiating with the Klan and denied rumors that the Klan would have complete control over the university. He stated, "I am interested only in seeing the institution perpetuated. I want to see it continue in the same manner as it was conducted heretofore."⁶² Brown had hoped to preserve the morals that the university upheld in the past, with no regards to the faith or race of a particular applicant. As a condition

⁶⁰ "20,000 People in Valparaiso on Klan Day." *Valparaiso Evening Messenger*, May 21, 1923.

⁶¹ The *Daily Vidette* and *Evening Messenger* merged later in 1927.

Lance Trusty, "All Talk and No 'Kash': Valparaiso University and the Ku Klux Klan," *Indiana Magazine of History*, Indiana University Department of History, Vol. 82, No. 1, March 1986.

⁶² Henry Kinsey Brown as quoted in "Klan Purchase of University Agreed Upon," *Valparaiso Evening Messenger*, August 23, 1923.

of the purchase, he publically enacted guidelines that advocated the retention of the university's "non-sectarian" status.⁶³

The *Fiery Cross* announced the Klan's intentions for the university to become "a monument to American ideals and principles," and advised the "un-American and alien forces" not to bother sabotaging the deal.⁶⁴ "The futility of such attempts, however, is realized when it is noted that whatever the Ku Klux Klan starts out to do, it always does."⁶⁵ There is irony in this assertion as the Klan failed to complete the negotiations to procure the institution. A letter written by Milton Elrod, editor for the *Fiery Cross*, delivers the news of the Klan's inability to purchase Valparaiso University. His reason was the "legal difficulties" that the Klan would have to face.⁶⁶ The *Valparaiso Evening Messenger* interviewed a university official who explained that the Klan was concerned with the limits that the charter placed on their control over the school. The reality was that the charter prohibited the school to be administrated by any "benevolent, charitable, mercenary, or fraternal institution," meaning that the Klan could only financially support the school rather than influence it directly.⁶⁷ In addition, the funds expected from Dr. H.W. Evans in Atlanta were never received, and the Hoosier Klan was forced to abandon the dream of owning a university.⁶⁸

⁶³ Letter by Milton Elrod, "Ku Klux Klan Drops Valpo U. Purchase," *Valparaiso Evening Messenger*, September 5, 1923.

⁶⁴ Eyewitness, "Klan to Perpetuate Valpo: University to Become National Institution," *Fiery Cross*, August 24, 1923.

⁶⁵ *Fiery Cross*, August 24, 1923.

⁶⁶ *Evening Messenger*, September 5, 1923.

⁶⁷ "Valparaiso University to Open on Schedule Time," *Valparaiso Evening Messenger*, September 6, 1923.

⁶⁸ Trusty, *Indiana Magazine*.

The next large event in Hoosier Klan history occurred in South Bend, Indiana, a region of the state that the Ku Klux Klan could not fully seduce into the organization. The high numbers of immigrants and Catholics in the city's population made it difficult for the Klan to win supporters. Notre Dame University generated the ultimate opposition to the Klan due to its affiliation with the Roman Catholic Church.⁶⁹ Tensions between the two groups came to a head on May 19th, 1924. On the day of a scheduled Klan parade, Notre Dame university students overwhelmed downtown South Bend and began ripping the robes from Klan members who were demonstrating in the streets. The *Fiery Cross* declared that the students' attacks were directed towards anyone displaying an American flag and referred to it as an assault on Protestantism itself.⁷⁰ Failure by the police force to control the situation unsettled the Klan. They announced in an article titled, "Love vs. Hate," that as Klansmen they were "taught to obey the law, to love their fellowmen regardless of what their fellowmen may believe."⁷¹ The Klansmen claimed to be victims of discrimination. Other descriptions of the incident supported the assertion that the attack on Klansmen was unprovoked. A bulletin from the May 18th issue of Notre Dame *Daily* verified that the students had been told to ignore the demonstration in the days before it was to occur: "It is my wish that the Klan be ignored, as they deserved to be ignored, and that the students avoid any occasion of coming into contact with our Klan brethren."⁷²

⁶⁹ Wade, 235.

⁷⁰ Wingfoot, "Notre Dame Mob Beats Men and Women; Police Tardy to Act in Riot," *Fiery Cross*, May 23, 1924.

⁷¹ "Love vs. Hate," *Fiery Cross*, May 23, 1924.

⁷² Matthew Welsh, "Yesterday's Bulletin," *Notre Dame Daily*, May 18, 1924.

The *Fiery Cross* confronted literature from other states that reported what they saw as false accounts of the incident by printing excerpts from them. The Klan sought to demonstrate to the public the degree to which the American press distorted the image of the Indiana Klan. They reproduced a copy of an article written by *Ogdensburg News*, a newspaper out of New York. The reprint described a group of Klansmen appearing on campus without warning to destroy one of the campus's study halls. Students banded together to fight off the Klan members, who were allegedly carrying revolvers.⁷³ There was no evidence in any Hoosier newspaper about the incident. The Klan used these false charges to win the sympathies of the non-members who were present at the South Bend assault. According to the *Fiery Cross*, one resident from South Bend posed the question "how [are] the American citizens to believe anything he reads against the Klan in the daily newspapers?" when they produce "stories so far from the actual truth, and [make] an effort to gloss over the actual actions of the mob."⁷⁴ The *Fiery Cross* boasted that many citizens of South Bend became more sympathetic towards the Klan as a result of the attack.⁷⁵ Whether this was true cannot be verified due to the secrecy of membership lists and the possibility for exaggeration of numbers.⁷⁶

The interpretation of Klan events was the area where the *Fiery Cross* aligned with mainstream newspapers the most. The grandiosity of the Independence Day

⁷³"Vicious Story in New York State Paper on South Bend Riot Shows Stand by Press," *Fiery Cross*, June 13, 1924.

⁷⁴Staff Correspondent, "Arrogance of Notre Dame Students Gone," *Fiery Cross*, June 13, 1924.

⁷⁵ "Love vs. Hate," *Fiery Cross*, May 23, 1924.

⁷⁶ White, 18.

event at Kokomo in 1923 remains impressive even today. Both the Kokomo celebration and the Valparaiso transaction were reported with pride and proclaimed the power of the Hoosier Klan. However, the assembly of Klansmen for a grand parade in South Bend in 1924 was met with rioting and the beating of Klansmen by Notre Dame university students. The Klan exaggerated the plight of the assembling Klansmen by proclaiming it as an attack on all Protestants. Most outside newspapers acknowledged the Klansmen as victims of the assault instigated by the university students. The Valparaiso University transaction was reported with less enthusiasm in mainstream papers, including those based in Valparaiso, which had a considerable reporting on Klan population. The warnings issued by the *Fiery Cross*' editor, Milton Elrod, portrayed the paranoia felt by the Klan. However, the attempt to purchase a university indicated the Klan's confidence in their power. These three large events in Hoosier Ku Klux Klan history represent the immense pride and self-confidence in the Klan's perceived influence that can be read in the pages of the *Fiery Cross*.

Fiery Crossover into Politics

Much of the content published in the *Fiery Cross* largely promoted Klan views, and this mindset persisted even if the activities were not directly Klan-affiliated. When the Klan spread and reached its peak within Indiana and the United States in 1924, both national and statewide politics continued to undergo change.⁷⁷ While these political events happened outside of Klan manipulation, articles in the *Fiery Cross* increasingly reflected the idea that the Klan had a certain sway in politics

⁷⁷ Fryer, 8.

and legislation; the mainstream media rarely agreed with this interpretation. The distinction was found predominantly in the coverage of the Immigration Act of 1924 and stories about Prohibition enforcement. Intermittently the Indiana Klan would exert real influence in certain areas, as they did in the 1924 presidential and gubernatorial elections in the state, but in most cases, mainstream Hoosier newspapers did not allude to the Klan's impact on the outcomes of these events.

It must be noted that the Klan did not jump into the public sphere immediately. In the early 1920s, when the Klan supported a candidate they kept the information to themselves, or at least out of the *Fiery Cross*. In 1922 and early 1923, the *Fiery Cross* printed articles that dealt with the Klan member's observations of the drinking and gambling that occurred within Hoosier towns. The Klan's first official introduction to the political limelight was when Lawrence Lyons resigned from the Klan and admitted influencing votes in April of 1923.⁷⁸ This was a critical moment that determined how the Klan acted during the elections and how Klan members interacted with politicians in the future.

The Klan devoted a great deal of time trying to "clean up" Hoosier cities that they claimed were riddled with vice and corruption produced by drinking and gambling. The Eighteenth Amendment prohibited the distribution and consumption of alcohol in the United States, but was not strictly followed by many citizens. The Klan saw it as their patriotic duty to bring the offenders to justice. This anti-liquor stance attracted many members to the organization through its promise to

⁷⁸"Lyons Betrays Klan Oath," *Fiery Cross*, April 2, 1923.

eliminate vice in Hoosier cities.⁷⁹ The *Fiery Cross* bragged: “Bootleggers, marauders, traffickers in vice and other like gentry do not thrive where the Klan exists.”⁸⁰

Articles detailed the crackdown on the selling and drinking of liquor in the cities of Evansville, Fort Wayne, Michigan City, Peru, Alexandria, Muncie and South Bend.⁸¹ They often published the addresses of the bootlegging joints in the *Fiery Cross* and made direct calls to the cities’ sheriffs to persuade them to make busts. The Klan became frustrated by the actions of local law enforcement and claimed that the “chief of police [was] so busy trying to find evidence to arrest Klan members that he is entirely blind to a bootlegging and gambling joint.”⁸² In Peru, the Klan applied for a search warrant and presented it to the law enforcement, strongly urging them to make a raid.⁸³ It was actions like these that led to the Klan’s inflated idea that they were vigilante heroes that protected the interests of the American people.

When the death of President Harding shook the nation in August of 1923, the Klan joined in the nation’s lament. Newspapers fluctuated between publishing articles of adoration for the late President and describing the disarray of the Republican Party. The Party was in confusion as to whether former Vice President Coolidge would take his place as their candidate in the upcoming re-election

⁷⁹ Pegram, Thomas R. *One Hundred Percent American: The Rebirth and Decline of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s*. (Lanham, Maryland: Ivan R. Dee). 2011. 127-128.

⁸⁰ Eyewitness, “Klan Strikes South Bend; Cleanup of City Starts,” *Fiery Cross*, February 9, 1923.

⁸¹ Various references in *Fiery Cross*, February 9, 1923. And *Fiery Cross*, March 16, 1923.

⁸² “Alexandria Wonders Why,” *Fiery Cross*, March 16, 1923.

⁸³ “Manslaughter and other Crimes Go Unpunished in Peru, Indiana,” *Fiery Cross*, March 16, 1923.

campaign.⁸⁴ Most Hoosier newspapers described the night of Harding's death and portrayed the President as a kind-hearted man who died peacefully and with composure.⁸⁵ This glorified representation of Harding was echoed in the *Fiery Cross* as they depicted him as a model President. They also focused on the anxiety felt by politicians after the tragedy by publishing an interview with Senator Albert B. Cummins. He elaborated on the strain that the presidency put on Harding and discussed the possibility of placing a limit on terms.⁸⁶ The *Fiery Cross* promoted the "ritualistic services" held by Klansmen around the state of Indiana. Despite the focus on Harding's funeral, the article did not come to a close without mentioning the featured speaker at the Lima Klan's service. The man gave a speech about the "aliens" coming to the United States to "overturn...traditions, uproot laws, and make a mockery of the government."⁸⁷

The influx of immigrants was a reoccurring dilemma that Klansmen faced. They firmly believed that Anglo-Saxon Protestants were becoming a minority in the United States.⁸⁸ They were horrified to learn that immigrants sometimes Anglicized their names after immigrating. Klansmen feared that an immigrant would not be given away by an un-American name.⁸⁹ In 1924, a new immigration act was passed

⁸⁴ "Harding's Death Throws Politics into Confusion" *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*, August 4, 1923.

⁸⁵ "Nation Mourns Death of President," *The Evening Republican*, August 3, 1923.

"Harding's Kindliness of Heart Made Presidency Doubly Hard," *Indianapolis News*, August 4, 1923.

⁸⁶ "Four Years Only For U.S. President," *Fiery Cross*, August 10, 1923.

⁸⁷ "Ritualistic Services to be Held for President Harding Friday," *Fiery Cross*, August 10, 1923.

⁸⁸ "Indiana Take Convention at Atlanta by Storm," *Fiery Cross*, December 8, 1922.

⁸⁹ "Aliens Adopt New Names to be Americans," *Fiery Cross*, January 9, 1925.

and put into effect much to the Klan's excitement. This new act further restricted quotas for European immigrants arriving to the United States, and prohibited the entrance of those from Asian countries, including Japan.⁹⁰

Journalists for the *Fiery Cross* rejoiced when receiving the news about the immigration act. Under a subheading titled "Klansmen Had a Part," they congratulated members for their actions against the "immigration peril." The Klan respectfully recognized the non-Protestant senators that approved the bill. Six Roman Catholics and one Jewish member of the House were called "True Patriots" due to their supporting votes.⁹¹ The Klan's worry over immigration outweighed their hatred of non-Protestants.

Hoosier papers around the state focused mainly on how the adjustment to immigration quotas would affect the Asian population. They reported on the increasingly tense relationship with Japan enflamed by the new Immigration Act. Washington D.C. received backlash from the Japanese government for the new regulation, despite Coolidge's attempts to soften the ban on the Japanese. An excerpt from the Japanese Press was printed in the *Indianapolis News* following the enactment. The article expressed the resentment felt by the Japanese: "we must make known that Americans are unworthy of our friendship. We are partly to blame

⁹⁰ The Immigration Act of 1924, also known as the Johnson-Reed Act, reduced immigration quotas to 2% of each nationality already living within the United States as of 1890. This targeted immigrants specifically from Southern and Eastern European countries, but also prohibited any immigration from Asian countries. This included Japan, which had previously been exempt from the Asiatic prohibitions. Shiho Imai, "Immigration Act of 1924," *Densho Encyclopedia*, 2013.

<http://encyclopedia.densho.org/Immigration%20Act%20of%201924/>

⁹¹ "Immigration Bill Passes," *Fiery Cross*, April 25, 1924.

for the present situation; we have trusted America to an unwarranted extent.”⁹²

Another article contained racist Asian slurs when referring to how life for Asian immigrants would change in the United States as a result of the law.⁹³

In terms of European immigrants, the debate concerned the proposed methods by which they should be selected. The Immigration Committee formed out of the United States Chamber of Commerce supported selective immigration “in terms of the physical, mental, and moral qualifications of individuals,” and performed “studies” based on the efficiency of naturalization by the ethnic background of the immigrant.⁹⁴ This article was printed before the new law passed but represents the collective thought of Americans at the time.

Col. Joseph Simmons’ intention was for the Klan to not be a partisan political organization but to uphold peace and morality in the United States.⁹⁵ At the 1922 Atlanta “Klonvokation,” Simmons announced to the national Klan: “This order is not, and will never be, in politics.” The Indiana Klan did not publically meddle in politics until mid-1923.⁹⁶ By 1924, the *Fiery Cross* had begun publishing articles that revealed Klan interference in state politics. A headline that read, “Elections Swept by Klansmen” implied that the winning candidates were members of the Klan. Within the article the author disclosed that the Klan “made certain that only true-blooded Americans were put into office.”⁹⁷ Klan support could garner enough votes for a

⁹² “Tokio (sic) Protests US Exclusion,” *Indianapolis News*, May 28, 1924.

⁹³ “Chinese Brides Now a Problem,” *The Evening Republican*, July 10, 1924.

⁹⁴ “Selected Method is Advocated in Committee Report,” *Indianapolis News*, April 9, 1924.

⁹⁵ “Indiana Take Convention at Atlanta by Storm,” *Fiery Cross*, December 8, 1922.

⁹⁶ Eyewitness Plus. “Lyons Betrays Klan Oath.” *Fiery Cross*. April 2, 1923

⁹⁷ “Elections Swept by Klansmen,” *Fiery Cross*, November 16, 1924.

candidate to win, as long as the person was willing to aid the Klan's ambitions once he was elected.

When Lyons confessed to being a member of the Klan, he "ripped off the mask," and drew attention to the Klan's influence in the Republican Party. This subsequently made "the Klan an issue in the next campaign."⁹⁸ The *Huntington Press* published an article that acknowledged the Klan had become a pillar of the Republican Party in this election. It was widely known that to be Republican was to cast a vote with the Klan. Both political parties were expected to take a blow in voter support; The Democrats would lose Klan votes and the Republicans would lose African American votes.⁹⁹ The divide between parties regarding the Ku Klux Klan was prominent in the campaign platforms of the candidates. Both John Davis and Robert La Follette had condemned the Klan in speeches during the presidential race. Klansmen supported Calvin Coolidge because of his silence on the subject of the Klan. The *Fiery Cross* claimed that Davis and La Follette were part of the Roman Catholic political machine's plot to take over America, despite neither of them being connected to the Catholic Church.¹⁰⁰ These false accusations exhibit the Klan's paranoia towards anyone who opposed them.¹⁰¹

Ed Jackson was the Klan preferred gubernatorial candidate for Indiana.¹⁰² Due to a recent confrontation between Stephenson and Klan Imperial Representative, Walter Bossert, the Republicans were worried that a schism in the

⁹⁸ *Fiery Cross*. April 2, 1923.

⁹⁹ "Strange Combine Confronts G.O.P. On Eve Of Meet" *Huntington Press*, May 18, 1924.

¹⁰⁰ "Maj. Ed Jackson Elected Governor By A Wide Margin," *Fiery Cross*, November 7, 1924.

¹⁰¹ "Rome Demands Delivery of Votes," *Fiery Cross*, October 31, 1924.

¹⁰² "Maj. Ed Jackson Elected Governor By A Wide Margin," *Fiery Cross*, November 7, 1924.

Klan could take a toll on Jackson's voter base.¹⁰³ The *Indianapolis News* described the scene at each polling place by giving a depiction of the crowd that met there. The paper predicted that "straight tickets [would] be few."¹⁰⁴ Assorted newspapers reported that polls expected Coolidge to win and for a heavily GOP weighted Congress.¹⁰⁵ When the results came in, the *Fiery Cross* rejoiced with anti-Catholic headlines reading, "Roman Dictators Overthrown," and the "Protestant Ticket Sweeps State."¹⁰⁶ The motivation for the emphasis on religion in the headlines was reflective of the Klan's belief that the Pope secretly controlled the government and sought to corrupt the United States.

As represented in *Fiery Cross* articles, the Hoosier Klan believed itself to be the epicenter of politics that transpired throughout the state and at the national level. They assumed the position of a vigilante organization sworn to protect against violations of the Prohibition Act and condemned the disregard of town police departments by applying for warrants themselves and forcing the law enforcement to take action. With the spread of Klan popularity in Indiana, they began manipulating politicians to enact change on a wider scale. The 1924 election was the one occurrence that outside papers acknowledged a direct Klan influence.

Communities speculated on the outcome of the election and how the Klan would

¹⁰³ "Indiana Truly Pivotal State; Optimism Holds," *Huntington Press*, August 3, 1924.

¹⁰⁴ Editorial, *Indianapolis News*, November 4, 1924.

¹⁰⁵ "Various references in "Coolidge Victory Grows; G.O.P. Congress Gains," *Indianapolis News*, November 5, 1924, and "Coolidge Tide of Victory Growing With Every Hour," *The Evening Republican*, November 5, 1924, and "Coolidge Sweeps Nation," *Franklin Evening Star*, November 5, 1924.

¹⁰⁶ Various references in *Fiery Cross*, November 14, 1924, and "Maj. Ed Jackson Elected Governor By A Wide Margin," *Fiery Cross*, November 7, 1924.

affect the results. However there was no evidence of Klan involvement in the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924, according to newspapers in the state. The interpretation of political events by the *Fiery Cross* depicted the Klan's self-absorbed views of American society.

Klancluding Remarks

Thousands of Klan families across the Midwest subscribed to the self-righteous, xenophobic content published in the *Fiery Cross*. The Klan newspaper reflected the ideals held by those inducted into the Invisible Empire and allowed them an outlet for their fears of change within the United States. The *Fiery Cross* assured readers that the Klan battled the corruption produced by morally deprived groups of "aliens." Opponents were degraded with comical nicknames and attacks on the organization's practices were rationalized with dubious historical justification. The headlines celebrated the Indiana Klan's popularity, gains in politics, and hooded demonstrations. The Klan's newspaper published sanctimonious content in comparison with the broad stories written by mainstream Hoosier newspapers. The *Fiery Cross* upheld the belief that Klansmen were working to preserve the glory of the United States by fighting against those who sought to degrade it.

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