

# The Oregon Ku Klux Klan

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## A Failed Attempt at Creating a Homogenous State

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The Ku Klux Klan entered Oregon in 1921, but was almost completely eradicated by 1925. Despite helping get a Klan-backed candidate elected to the Oregon Governor's seat and helping pass the Oregon School Bill, the Klan faded into obscurity in the middle of the decade. Faced with a constant struggle with modernization, interior problems with its central leadership and allegations of corruption, and a changing social and political landscape of the state, the Klan ultimately failed to succeed in Oregon, a state that appeared ripe for its desire to create a white Protestant stronghold.

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Many people immediately associate violence with the Ku Klux Klan. They envision men lynched and hanged from trees, homes and churches bombed, and giant crosses burned in the front yards of “unwanted” people. And while there is certainly a legitimate reason for these images’ association with the Klan, the reality of the Ku Klux Klan in Oregon was much different from the violence most often occurring in the South. The Oregon Klan was much more involved in social and political matters. The Ku Klux Klan, gaining ground ever since the 1915 release of *Birth of a Nation*, a film that served as a major inspiration for the second coming of the Ku Klux Klan, found in Oregon a state with a small African American population and a largely homogenous Caucasian populace. With a history of hostility towards Eastern European and Asian immigrants, along with a population made up of nearly eighty-five percent native born people, the KKK identified Oregon as a potential stronghold by the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>1</sup> While the Klan did manage to gain a strong and loyal following in Oregon in the 1920s, its inability to maintain its central leadership, a constant struggle with modernization, problems with corruption, and, most importantly, the changing social and political landscape of the state and the nation caused the Klan to fail in and disappear from Oregon despite making considerable strides in its early years in the state.

By appealing to Protestant Oregonians’ pioneer roots, anti-Catholic sentiments, prohibition enforcement, social morality, and the call to “Americanize,” or remove, immigrants, the Ku Klux Klan became a legitimate social and political order in the state of Oregon in the early 1920s. The Klan saw in Oregon an opportunity to gain a strong foothold by appealing to such a large Caucasian population. Oregon could, in a sense, become the Klan’s near-perfect

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<sup>1</sup> M. Paul Holsinger, “The Oregon School Bill Controversy, 1922-1925,” *Pacific Historical Review* 37 (1968): 328.

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example of a homogenous, “Americanized” state. Historian David A. Horowitz contends that citizens of Oregon were “particularly ripe for [appeals from the Klan] because of a strong identification with a pioneer past that celebrated virtues, American nationalism, and Protestantism.”<sup>2</sup> The Klan certainly appealed to Oregonians, albeit for a number of reasons. However, when faced with the changing social and political landscape, the Ku Klux Klan was unable to maintain cohesion within its ranks. While the Oregon Klan had the potential to set a precedent in both Oregon and the United States in regards to immigration restrictions and public education, the United States District Court for Oregon and the United States Supreme Court made landmark decisions that left the Klan with little to show as evidence of any influence they may have had. By 1929, the Oregon Klan would no longer exist, having backed down and disassembled in the face of a changing nation.

Though the Klan collapsed in the state after only about a decade in Oregon, and was powerful for only a fraction of that time, its membership grew to considerable numbers, estimated to have been between fourteen thousand and twenty thousand by the early 1920s. According to David A. Horowitz, by the end of the decade, an estimated fifty thousand Oregonians may have passed through the organization.<sup>3</sup> The discourse over who made up the Klan’s ranks has been a heated debate among historians for some time. Assertions made by Nancy MacLean, a historian who contends that members of the ruling class at the top and unskilled laborers, such as urban and rural workers, were underrepresented in the Klan, shed some light on the subject. Her research concluded that the Ku Klux Klan’s majority membership was made up of men who in the old “petite bourgeoisie” occupations, such as shopkeepers and

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<sup>2</sup> David A. Horowitz, “Social Morality and Personal Revitalization: Oregon’s Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s,” *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 90 (1989): 379.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 369.

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farmers, along with men in the new “petite bourgeoisie,” such as white collar salaried employees.<sup>4</sup>

Historian Kenneth Jackson makes a similar argument, claiming that the membership was predominately made up of blue collar workers. While MacLean, writing nearly thirty years after Jackson, would certainly agree that a number of blue collar workers were members of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, her research contradicts very slightly with Jackson’s in that she finds a great deal more white-collar workers in the Ku Klux Klan than Jackson was willing to admit. Jackson, claimed that only a “substantial minority” of white-collar workers made up the overall membership of the Klan.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, each historian makes the argument that the Klan was, in essence, made up of the middle-class.

In his book on the Progressive Era in Portland, Oregon, historian Robert D. Johnston attempts to put an end to the debate over whether or not the Klan was truly made up of the “middle class.” According to Johnston, both MacLean and Jackson are focusing too much on the definitions of what defined the “middle-class” that made up the Klan. In his assertions, Jackson pushed too hard on his assertions about blue-collar workers and MacLean too much on her “petite bourgeoisie” theory.<sup>6</sup> Instead, Johnston points to more recent scholarship that “holds that members of the Klan were a remarkable cross-section of white, Protestant society.” Continuous “revisionist accounts,” Johnston argues, explain “very little about Klan motivation, ideals, and politics.” In other words, the economic backgrounds from which its members came mattered little to the Ku Klux Klan and its goals. “If historians stop insisting that class analysis depends on linking the Klan with one particular solidly organized class—an assumption,” Johnston writes,

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<sup>4</sup> Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry, The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 54, 57.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (Chicago: Oxford University Press, 1967) 240-242.

<sup>6</sup> Robert D. Johnston, *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon* (New Jersey: Princeton Press), 236.

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“shared on both sides of the debate—the findings of all the studies become much more commensurate.” Johnston goes on to further articulate his argument over the unimportance of the Klan’s membership, writing that “the second KKK represented yet another zone of contestation where those at the intersection of the middle class and the working class struggled to define their political and social relationships, even to define their very class identities.”<sup>7</sup> The backbone of the Klan, he later asserts, was a “powerful combination” of both skilled blue-collar workers and lower-level white-collar workers.<sup>8</sup>

Johnston’s interpretation of the Ku Klux Klan is consistent with the findings in this paper. Little primary evidence is available on who was in Oregon’s Klan; the Klan did not keep records of its individual members, nor did it keep any discernible evidence of the economic backgrounds in which its members came from. Because of this lack of information and Johnston’s assertions that its membership was so varied, his contention that the importance of the Klan was not in its membership but in its actual dealings rings true. Thus, this paper will focus on what the Ku Klux Klan achieved, and, more specifically, why it failed to achieve so much, in Oregon, rather than focusing on the near-impossible task of proving who made up its membership.

Moving away from the argument over its membership, then, it is important to distinguish how the Klan went about its work. In uncovering these major themes of the second Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, the arguments by Nancy MacLean and Stanley Coben stand out. MacLean, a historian and professor of history at Duke University, uses Athens, Georgia, the birthplace of the second KKK, to examine the Klan. Through her study, MacLean argues that the Klan used militant activities to enforce their movements. In this argument, MacLean provides the

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 237.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

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understanding that historians have accepted in regards to the Klan's middle-class standing: "In the Klan's case, middle-class standing, or at least identification, led members to feel distinctively entitled to intervene in disputes of the so-called selfish classes above and beneath them." However, MacLean goes on to claim that Klansmen would use "paramilitary means if need be" to intervene in such disputes.<sup>9</sup> In her inspection of the Klan in South, MacLean clearly finds patterns that are distinctive to southern culture, including the "prevalence of sharecropping, tenant farming, disfranchisement, and lynching." These regional traditions, according to MacLean, deeply influenced the Klan's development in the South.<sup>10</sup> Despite recognizing these differences between the Southern Klan and the Klan elsewhere in the nation, MacLean later argues that the Klan's national headquarters, in Athens, Georgia, provides an ideal representative of the national Klan.<sup>11</sup>

MacLean makes the miscalculation of extending the profound violence of the Athens Klan to the national scene, writing "the vigilante practices of [Athens] Klansmen found support in the ideology articulated by national Klan leaders and by representatives of the movement in other states and localities."<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the Ku Klux Klan was violent in other localities, but the majority of the violence took place in the southern regions that MacLean spent her time researching. She is correct in her contention that the Klan had a general feeling of being victimized by increased changes in society. Had she expanded her research, though, to localities thousands of miles removed from Athens, Georgia – considered to be the Klan location with the most violence – she would have had a much broader understanding of the differences in localities.

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<sup>9</sup> Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry*, 159.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

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Historian Stanley Coben agrees with MacLean that Klansmen saw themselves as victims, but he draws much different conclusions after he analyzes the broader practices of the national Klan in his book, *Rebellion Against Victorianism, the Impetus for Cultural Change in 1920s America*. Coben studied the weakening structures of Victorianism in the 1920s, ending with a chapter on the Ku Klux Klan, which he described, with its three million members, as the “most visible and powerful guardian of Victorianism during the 1920s.”<sup>13</sup> The Victorian understanding of racial and gender hierarchies influenced Klan ideologies, Coben argues, and this led Klansmen to guard Victorianism against the encroachments of modernization and immoral behavior.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the Klan deployment of a Victorian concept of high character individuals helped them recruit a loyal following. Klan candidates for state and local offices appealed to Klan and non-Klan people “with promises to reduce or eliminate those results of character defects which threatened the home and family: violations of Prohibition especially, but also drug abuse, prostitution, gambling, political corruption, traffic violations, and Sunday blue-law offenses.”<sup>15</sup> Throughout Coben’s analysis, the Klan was not necessarily the militaristic order that MacLean often made it out to be. Instead, he argued, Klansmen acted as the guardians of Victorianism, an important distinction since Victorian ideals began to disappear at the same time the Klan was breaking apart.

While Nancy MacLean indeed recognized the Klan’s embrace of Victorian hierarchies, she concluded that the Klan resorted to violence in order to defend Victorian ideals. Coben, on the other hand, asserts that “Klan members in the mid-1920s were not any more violent than

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<sup>13</sup> Stanley Coben, *Rebellion Against Victorianism, the Impetus for Cultural Change in 1920s America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 136.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 138. Blue laws usually prohibit a certain activity only during certain days and times.

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other native, white, middle-class Protestant males.”<sup>16</sup> His research also led to his contention that “after the Klan organized nationally for maximum profit and political action in 1921, the organization expelled members and whole chapters charged with having taken part in vigilante activities.”<sup>17</sup> While this may not have been true of MacLean’s Athens study, it certainly draws criticism to her claims that the national Klan was thoroughly entrenched in violence. Drawing on studies by three different historians – Christopher Cocoltchos, Leonard Moore, and Robert Goldberg – Coben argued that “Klansmen represented a near cross-section of the white Protestant male population in their communities,” and that these Klansmen “were not a fringe group of vigilantes; they were solid middle-class citizens and individuals of high Victorian character.”<sup>18</sup> He also looked into the “Ideals of the Ku Klux Klan,” a publication distributed to all its members beginning in 1923, which declared that “This order... will not tolerate acts of lawlessness on the part of its members.”<sup>19</sup> Coben’s research directly challenges the findings of Nancy MacLean by arguing that the second Ku Klux Klan was much less violent, and, in fact, opposed to vigilantism, than people have been led to believe by historians like her.

While Nancy MacLean and Stanley Coben both make compelling arguments, their findings are both problematic. MacLean wisely looks into one locality in order to understand how it operated, but then she makes a mistake by attempting to apply Athens’ unique Klan experience to the national Klan experience. Coben, on the other hand, uses multiple localities to form a perspective of the Klan that looks at it as a diplomatic organization aimed at nonviolent endeavors by using social control. Both historians fail, however, to explicitly make the argument that the second Ku Klux Klan was experienced uniquely in each locality it entered, although

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 141-142.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

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Coben does hint at this in some aspects. This paper, then, will provide insight into what the Oregon Klan was able to accomplish, largely through non-violent means. It operates in agreement with Robert D. Johnston's contention that the membership of the Klan was so varied that it is impossible to place all of its members under one, all-encompassing umbrella. Finally, this paper will show how and why the Klan ultimately failed to become a major source of power beyond its early years in the state, despite having in Oregon arguably the near-perfect location to create a homogenous white Protestant state, using insight into an incident in Toledo, Oregon that goes unexamined far too often by Oregon Ku Klux Klan historians.

Although this paper focuses on the unique localities in which the Klan operated, such as Oregon, it is helpful to expand a coherent image of the structure of the national Klan. Founded by Colonel William Joseph Simmons, a circuit preacher and former soldier in the Spanish American War, the Klan was designed to appeal to native born white Protestants. The 1915 film *Birth of a Nation*, released by D.W. Griffith, portrayed Klansmen as saviors of a demolished South being threatened by dangerous freed slaves. In the movie, Klansmen, donning full white robes and hoods, rescue a white woman from being raped by a savage freed slave. Simmons, using the film to promote the new Klan, has a short interview in the beginning of the movie.<sup>20</sup> As the film's popularity among southern white Protestants grew, the environment nurtured the birth of the second Ku Klux Klan.

The First World War also played a pivotal role in the growth of the Klan. The need for soldiers and support for patriotism created an ideal environment for the Klan to rise as protectors of the nation from strike leaders, draft evaders, and foreign-born negative influences. As the war came to an end, immense social changes began to take place in the United States. African

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<sup>20</sup> *The Birth of a Nation*, produced and directed by D.W. Griffith, Part I. Video Yesteryear Recording, 1984. Videocassette.

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Americans were in full swing of developing a cultural foothold in the country through jazz and literature, making blacks seem much more permanent in society. In addition, immigrant workers flooded the industrial movement, causing a perceived influx of more morals, ultimately putting Victorian ideals were in jeopardy.<sup>21</sup> Adding to the social unrest was the founding of the Communist Party. The ensuing red scare in 1919, focused on the elimination of Communists, aroused prejudice against immigrants, labor unions, and political radicals from that moment on.<sup>22</sup> With tensions building in the South, Simmons found it relatively easy to recruit members into the second Ku Klux Klan. With the collection of membership fees and dues, Simmons was able to successfully afford to hire Elizabeth Tyler and Edward Young Clarke to help spread the work of the organization and turn the Klan into a national fraternal society. The two recruiters shaped the Klan's ideals to appeal to white, male Protestants across the country. No longer just a southern order designed to combat forces of southern tensions, such as the legacy of slavery, the new national Klan adapted to the perceived needs of each locality. Throughout its period of influence, the Ku Klux Klan successfully elected three U.S. senators, eleven governors, and a striking number of local officials. However, by about 1930, the Klan was reduced to about thirty-thousand members. And, by the 1940s, the second Ku Klux Klan had been disassembled.<sup>23</sup>

Long before the Ku Klux Klan fell into obscurity by the 1940s, the first Klan organizers, known as Kleagles, arrived in Oregon in early 1921, and throughout the next decade the Klan worked diligently to attract new members to fill out its ranks. In fact, this did not become much of a problem, considering Oregon had a long history of maintaining its white heritage. In 1849, the Oregon Exclusion Law was passed by the Oregon Territorial Legislature. Although any

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<sup>21</sup> Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City 1925-1926*, 20.

<sup>22</sup> The Catholic University of America, "The Oregon School Case: Chronology." Pamphlet. 25 August 2010.

<sup>23</sup> David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 28-30.

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African Americans already living in Oregon were exempted, the law was designed to prevent African Americans from coming to, or residing in, the state. Any person who violated the law was subject to immediate arrest and a minimum fine of five-hundred dollars. It was not repealed until 1926, in a major decision which went hand-in-hand with the changing structure of the state and coincided with the decline of the Klan in Oregon at that time. In addition, the Oregon Legislature passed laws in 1919 that prohibited public and private schools from teaching any subject in any language but English, with the exception of foreign language classes.<sup>24</sup> In all, these laws are concrete examples of the pro-white background that existed in Oregon before the Klan entered the state.

With this history of anti-foreign and anti-black legislation comes the position held by many Oregonians, including the Ku Klux Klan membership, that the separation of church and state is a vital piece of the Constitution that must be upheld. Ben Titus, a Portland resident and journalist, discussed his motivations for joining the Oregon Ku Klux Klan. His reasons for joining the Klan may be a glimpse into how many Oregonians found themselves in the United States' most infamous white supremacy organization:

Was it anti-Catholic? I am not anti-Catholic or anti any religious organization. I was opposed to the Catholic church – or any Protestant church, for that matter – attempting to inject its influence into the political life of the country; I believe that it is the part of wisdom for citizens to use every effort to protect the commonwealth against such injection of religion into politics. But I believed and believe that this position does not call for religious intolerance nor for an attack upon any religious belief as such. I was assured that the Klan, in its principles, was not contrary to my views.<sup>25</sup>

Titus, although claiming not to be anti-Catholic, was very much in support of the separation of church and state. In *The Western American*, an Oregon Klan newspaper, the Klan wrote about how individual Catholics can actually be good people. One of those people, W.C. Bolton, was

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<sup>24</sup> The Catholic University of America, "The Oregon School Case: Chronology." Pamphlet. 25 August 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Ben Titus, "I was a Klansman," *The Portland Telegram*, 2 Nov 1925, Ku Klux Klan documents collection, MSS 22, Oregon Historical Society. [hereafter cited as KOHS]

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even in the Oregon Legislature in 1921. “He is a good American,” one Klan-published article asserted, even though he was Catholic. “Masses of good Catholics think and act like Mr. Bolton, independent and unafraid of the Pope and priests.” Many Catholics, the Klan contended, “yearn for the restoration of goodwill.”<sup>26</sup> Public declarations like this were sufficient evidence to show how the Klan was not necessarily against Catholic individuals, but against the institution of Catholicism itself. The Klan took the public position that it saw individual Catholics as good people attempting to perform the work of God. However, the Klan was wholly opposed to the Catholic Church, an institution they saw as stepping beyond the bounds of religion and into the politics of the nation.<sup>27</sup>

The perceived problem with Catholicism was the leadership of the pope. The Klan, according to its own publications, “is combating with increasing energy and strength... the Roman Catholic heresy that places loyalty to a foreign Pope above everything.”<sup>28</sup> Herein lays the root of the Catholic problem: that pledging loyalty to the pope was to be un-American because it placed the pope above the United States government, and the Klan was “sworn to perform the sacred duty of upholding the Constitution, to oppose all un-American legislation.”<sup>29</sup> A Catholic, the Klan thought, was un-American if he or she held the power of the pope above the power of the United States Constitution, and thus the Klan feared that the papal authority was “planning to make a shambles of America.”<sup>30</sup> As evidence of such a scheme, the Klan held that Catholic publications that were, “cunningly devised [to appeal] to the ‘fair-minded Protestant,’ designed to make him believe that black is white, and to blind him still more to the foul and infernal

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<sup>26</sup> *The Western American*, “One Lone Catholic in Oregon’s House,” 28 September 1923. KOHS.

<sup>27</sup> Jeff LaLande, “Beneath the Hooded Robe: Newspapermen, Local Politics, and the Ku Klux Klan in Jackson County, Oregon, 1921-1923,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 83 (1992): 46..

<sup>28</sup> *The Western American*, “Klan’s Opportunity and Mission,” 7 December 1922. KOHS.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *The Western American*, “Battle Looms for Our Liberties and Independence.” 19 October 1923. KOHS.

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purposes of Political Romanism.”<sup>31</sup> While the Klan publicly took the position that individual Catholics could be good people, its own hostility towards Catholicism was fundamentally anti-Catholic in nature. Essentially, the Klan believed that the Catholic Church was planning to undermine the sovereign government of the United States. This rhetoric, again, is questionable in that it comes from official Ku Klux Klan publications, with the possible agenda being fear-mongering among non-Catholic Oregonians. In any case, the use of anti-Catholicism was a major factor in the Oregon Klan’s agenda, and it came to be the primary issue in the Oregon School Bill saga.

The Klan’s anti-Catholic sentiments were most revealing in their quest for the requirement regarding public schools. Defending the sovereign government of the country was one of the Ku Klux Klan’s major founding principles. In the Oregon Klan’s Oath of Allegiance, prospective Klansmen had to swear that they would “most zealously – and valiantly – shield and preserve- by any and all – justifiable means and methods – the sacred constitutional rights – and privileges of – free public schools – free speech – free press – separation of church and state... against any encroachment,” including a “religious sect or people.”<sup>32</sup> This declaration, which upholds the power of the government to hold church and state separate, became one of hottest issues in Oregon in the 1920s. The Oregon Compulsory Education Act of 1922 was a bill that would have forced all Oregon children between the ages of eight and sixteen to attend public schools. In theory, the School Bill would have sent children of all ethnic backgrounds to public schools, although it is safe to assume that, in the Klan’s ideal state, Eastern European and Asian immigrants would have been removed from Oregon, making the schools primarily enrolled with white, native-born American citizens.

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Oregon Ku Klux Klan, “Oath of Allegiance,” date unknown. KOHS.

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The bill was first introduced and supported in Michigan by the Scottish Rite Masons in 1920, but was struck down by the state.<sup>33</sup> After failing in Michigan, the Scottish Rite Masonic Order then decided to use Oregon, a state they believed would take the initiative under its wing to remain “pure,” as a test case of passing the bill at a state level. They hoped that the rest of the nation would soon follow suit.<sup>34</sup> The argument for the Oregon School Bill, as written by the Supreme Council of Masons, the Grand Lodge of Oregon, and the Imperial Council of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, revolved around assimilation of immigrants, eradication of snobbery, and the promotion of Americanism. We believe “in the free and compulsory education of the children of our nation in public primary schools supported by public taxation,” the groups wrote in a unified opinion piece, “upon which all children shall attend and be instructed in the English language only, without regard to race or creed, as the only sure foundation for the perpetuation and preservation of our free institutions.”<sup>35</sup> By making public schools mandatory, “the assimilation and education of our foreign-born citizens in the principles of our Government... are best secured.”<sup>36</sup> Rather than allowing citizens to attend private schools, and, more specifically, Catholics attending parochial schools, the bill proposed to:

mix the children of the foreign-born with the native-born and the rich with the poor. Mix these with prejudices in the public school melting pot for a few years while their minds are plastic and finally bring out the finished product – a true American. Our children must not under any pretext, be it based upon money, creed or social status, be divided into antagonistic groups, there to absorb the narrow views of life as they are taught. If they are so divided we will find our citizenship composed and made up of cliques, cults and factions – each striving, not for the good of the whole but for the supremacy of themselves. A divided school can no more succeed than a divided nation.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> David A. Horowitz, “Order, Solidarity, and Vigilance: The Ku Klux Klan in La Grande, Oregon,” in *The Invisible Empire in the West: Toward a New Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s*, ed. Shawn Lay. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986), 202.

<sup>34</sup> Holsinger, “The Oregon School Bill Controversy, 1922-1925,” 329.

<sup>35</sup> Harvier, Ernest, “What the Klan Did in Oregon Elections,” *New York Times*, 3 December 1922.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

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If the law had gone into effect, parents or guardians would have been responsible for their children's public school attendance, and would be penalized one hundred dollars per day if in violation of the law. In addition, imprisonment of the parents or guardians could be enacted in extreme cases. "The effect of this law," *New York Times* reporter Ernest Harvier declared to a national audience, "will be, if upheld by the courts, to close every private school in the State. That was its purpose... Perhaps the main purpose... was to destroy schools maintained by or under the auspices of the Catholic Church."<sup>38</sup> The unofficial slogan in support of the bill was: "What is good enough for my children is good enough for anybody's children."<sup>39</sup> Those in support, specifically the Oregon Ku Klux Klan, argued that church schools not only violated the separation of church and state, but were "conducted in violation of democratic ideals; that private schools tend to the fixing of social classes... The public school was acclaimed as the main thing in the American 'melting pot.'"<sup>40</sup> This became a major rallying point for the Klan, which appealed directly to many Oregonians' ideals of a separation of church and state. The bill became the Klan's major victory, and eventually its biggest failure, in Oregon.

Objections to the law were plentiful, and included the arguments that its passage would destroy the money already invested in private schools, that it would deprive teachers and administrators of their jobs, that it would prevent parents from choosing the correct schools for their children, and that public schools were already overcrowded in the first place. Catholics even tried to make an appeal directly to Oregonians on economic grounds: "Oregon requires immigration for its development. California has twenty-two persons to the square mile. Washington has twenty and Oregon has but eight. Immigration is not attracted by freak legislation, and many at whom measures of this kind are aimed will prefer to live in other States,

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<sup>38</sup> *New York Times*, "The Oregon School Law," 5 August 1923.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

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where a more liberal spirit prevails.” In addition, many objections to the law by both Catholics and non-Catholics compared Oregon to the beginnings of a Russian State, where the child is treated as the ward of the state.<sup>41</sup>

The law eventually passed in Oregon in the fall of 1922, 115,506 votes to 103,685.<sup>42</sup> Unfortunately for the Klan, its sympathizers, and those who opposed the Klan but supported the bill, the law was not scheduled to go into effect until 1926 – four years after it had been passed by Oregon voters. In 1924, after passing in Oregon but before it went into effect, Circuit Judge William B. Gilbert and District Judges C.E. Wolverton and R. S. Bean ruled the law unconstitutional. They declared “the law robs parents of their rights, private school teachers of their livelihood and private schools of their property.”<sup>43</sup> Governor Walter M. Pierce immediately confirmed that he was going to appeal the court’s ruling to the Supreme Court and, in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* (1925,) the Supreme Court struck down the law, upholding the previous Circuit judges’ decision that it was unconstitutional.<sup>44</sup> The irony here is that the Ku Klux Klan, claiming to be a primary defender of the Constitution, saw the Oregon School Bill, which it backed, ruled unconstitutional. The Supreme Court’s decision, written by Justice McReynolds, unanimously set a legal precedent, stating:

we think it entirely plain that the act of 1922 unreasonably interferes with the liberty of parents and guardians to direct the upbringing and education of children under their control... The fundamental theory of liberty upon which all governments in this Union repose, excludes any general power of the State to standardize its children by forcing them to accept instruction from public teachers only. The child is not the mere creature of the State; those who nurture him and direct his destiny have the right, coupled with the high duty, to recognize and prepare him for additional obligations.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Horowitz, “Order, Solidarity, and Vigilance,” 202.

<sup>43</sup> *New York Times*, “Court Invalidates Oregon School Law.” 1 April 1924.

<sup>44</sup> *Time Magazine*, “Education: Unconstitutional.” 7 April 1924.

<sup>45</sup> *Time Magazine*, “Supreme Court: The Judicial Week.” 15 June 1925.

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Regardless of the final decision to strike down the law, the process by which the Oregon School Law originally passed in Oregon shows how Oregon, a state with few African Americans, could have sided with the Ku Klux Klan and made evident its desire to defend America against outside encroachments, such as the Catholic Church. Here it is important to understand that, whether they supported the Klan or not, Oregonians voted the same way the Klan did, thus fostering the Ku Klux Klan in Oregon in the first half of the decade. However, by striking down the law, the United States Supreme Court not only set a precedent that allowed private education, but it dealt a major blow to the Ku Klux Klan through its decision to prevent the Klan and Oregon voters from changing the social landscape of the state. In other words, the Supreme Court made a decision that considerably constricted what the Klan and Oregon voters could do in the political sphere, essentially condemning the KKK's attempts to control "unwanted" masses – in this case, the Catholics.

Before the highly publicized battle for and against the Oregon School Bill, the Oregon gubernatorial race of 1922 further demonstrated the Klan's influence in the state and, much like the Oregon School Bill's finale, the Klan's inability to maintain control. Governor Ben Olcott, who moved to Oregon from Illinois in 1891, was serving his first term as the Oregon governor when the Ku Klux Klan entered Oregon early on in the decade. In May of 1922, with the Klan growing in membership, Olcott issued an official proclamation, denouncing the Oregon Ku Klux Klan as an "evil influence" that was unnecessary in the state. He said "Oregon needs no masked night riders, no invisible empire to control her affairs. Our courts of law, our law enforcing officers, our whole machinery of government are founded on the fundamentals of American citizenship and are second to no other state." Governor Olcott argued "true Americanism is to prevail" only if the Ku Klux Klan is put to an end. "The true spirit of Americanism resents

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bigotry, abhors secret machinations and terrorism and demands that those who speak for it and in her cause speak only, with their faces to the sun.”<sup>46</sup> In this proclamation, Olcott not only condemned the “Invisible Empire,” but asked for his fellow Oregonians to avoid harboring the Ku Klux Klan.

In the 1922 gubernatorial race, State Senator Charles Hall, the Ku Klux candidate for governor on the Republican ticket, was leading Governor Olcott early in the race, May 21. On the Democratic side, Walter M. Pierce was the leading candidate.<sup>47</sup> As the race went on, however, many voters began to back Olcott in a strategy that ultimately prevented Klan-backed candidate Charles Hall from winning the Republican primary. Once Olcott had defeated Hall in the primary, pitting Olcott against Pierce for the Oregon governorship, the Oregon Klan had to come up with a new approach. So the Ku Klux Klan played their last card and came out in full support of Democratic candidate Walter M. Pierce.<sup>48</sup> The Klan hoped that, by helping get Pierce elected, they could kick Olcott out of office, who called the Klan “one of the gravest menaces ever [to confront] our national or civic life.”<sup>49</sup> The move to support Mr. Pierce was a strategy that Ben Titus, who originally joined the Klan, was wholly against. Titus contended that Pierce accepted Klan support and ran on a platform that supported the Oregon School Bill only to get more votes from a wider constituency. Pierce openly promised to reduce taxes, yet his support of the Klan-backed school bill was illogical because such a bill required a tax increase, an issue that received negligible press coverage in *The Western American*.<sup>50</sup> This move, at least in Titus’ mind, was just one of a number of problems with corruption within the Klan’s leadership and its ties to political allies. Nevertheless, the Oregon Ku Klux Klan and candidate Walter M. Pierce

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<sup>46</sup> Ben Olcott, “Proclamation,” 13 May 1922. Salem Executive Department. KOHS.

<sup>47</sup> *New York Times*, “Hall, Klan Candidate, Leads Gov. Olcott in Close Race in the Oregon Primary.” 21 May 1922.

<sup>48</sup> Kingston J. Pierce, “Night of the Klan,” *The Magazine of Northwest History* 21 (2007): 10.

<sup>49</sup> *New York Times*, “Governors Assail Work of Klansmen.” 15 December 1922.

<sup>50</sup> Titus, “I was a Klansman,” 22.

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maintained a relationship, which may have aided Pierce in his 1922 election victory. Originally appearing as a positive move forward for the Ku Klux Klan, the relationship with newly-elected Governor Pierce eventually became a failure that, in part, led to the dismantling of the Oregon Klan.

Pierce and the Ku Klux Klan parted ways over the course of the next year. Despite openly supporting the school bill and appealing the decision to strike it down, Pierce appeared largely apathetic towards the Klan throughout his term as governor. Having won the governor seat, Pierce became indifferent to the Ku Klux Klan, ignoring the aspirations of the organization that helped get him elected.<sup>51</sup> At that point, Ben Titus argued that Pierce felt that he could desert the Klan since he had already fulfilled his only promise to the Klan – the promise that he would get elected by backing the Oregon School Bill.<sup>52</sup> Under Pierce as the governor, however, two Klan-supported laws were enacted by the Oregon Legislature. One prevented public school teachers from wearing religious garb in schools; the other was an anti-alien landownership bill aimed at the Japanese. In any case, the feeling amongst Klansmen was that, once elected, Pierce may have believed that he had no further reason to utilize the Klan. And, on March 5, 1923, Pierce made what was likely his last goodwill appearance with the Klan when he attended a Ku Klux banquet in Portland, Oregon, along with Portland Mayor George L. Baker. Peirce reportedly “spoke on the general subject of ‘Americanism.’”<sup>53</sup> By October of 1923, a movement for the recall and removal of Governor Pierce was in full swing. Although the Klan claimed that they were not behind the petition for a recall, it was assumed that they were at least in support of it, most notably because Pierce did not give patronage to the Klan<sup>54</sup> Among these positions were

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<sup>51</sup> Pierce, “Night of the Klan,” 10.

<sup>52</sup> Titus, “I was a Klansman,” 22.

<sup>53</sup> *New York Times*, “Governor and Mayor attend Ku Klux Banquet in Oregon.” 5 March 1923.

<sup>54</sup> *New York Times*, “Move to Recall Oregon Governor.” 15 October, 1923.

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the Oregon State game commission, the penitentiary, the highway commission, the state hospital, and the prohibition director. In each case, Pierce handed seats to men the Klan openly despised.<sup>55</sup> While the recall movement ultimately failed and the governor retained the office, the relationship between Pierce and the Klan remained strained from that point on. The process by which he won the election, backed by Klan support, demonstrates how Oregonians were willing to elect a candidate who openly supported the Ku Klux Klan to the highest office in the state of Oregon, thus making Oregon a prime location for the Ku Klux Klan to gain a strong foothold. However, the falling out between Pierce and the Klan was a considerable breakdown in the Klan's ability to influence Oregonians, ultimately resulting in yet another major blow to its authority.

This failed relationship with Governor Pierce was not, however, the final move that brought the Oregon Klan down. More evidence of the Klan's influence in Oregon, and Oregonians' apparent willingness to foster the Klan, was in its ability to run successful campaigns to get Klan members into public offices even after the falling out with Pierce and the ruling against the Oregon School Bill. This was most evident in Tillamook, where the Ku Klux Klan successfully put into office the county sheriff, a representative in the state legislature, the superintendent of schools, the 1925 school director, the city attorney, and most city council members from 1924 to 1928. In addition, the Klan had members working in Tillamook as the principals of the local high school and elementary school, county clerk, and the chief clerks of Tillamook and Bay City post offices.<sup>56</sup> Here then, it is helpful to understand that, while the failures of the Oregon School Bill and the Klan's relationship with Governor Pierce were harmful to the Oregon Klan, they were not the complete breaking points for Klan success in Oregon.

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<sup>55</sup> Arthur H. Bone, *Oregon Cattleman/Governor, Congressman: Memoirs and Times of Walter M. Pierce* (Portland: Oregon Historical Society, 1981), 196.

<sup>56</sup> William Toll, "Progress and Piety: The Ku Klux Klan and Social Change in Tillamook, Oregon," 79.

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A major factor in the continued support – and membership – of the Ku Klux Klan before, during, and after the wake of the failures with Pierce and the Oregon School Bill was in its appeal to Oregonians through the concept of “one-hundred per cent Americanism.” Not easily defined, Americanism, in the view of the Klan, was highly attached to social morality. Specifically, the Klan called for people to be completely loyal to the American government and the United States Constitution. This meant that Klan members had to promise and swear “that I will always, at all Times and in all places, – Help, aid and assist – The duly Constituted officers of the Law – in The proper performance of Their Legal Duties.” Also, in taking the Oath of Allegiance of the Oregon Ku Klux Klan, prospective members had to agree to “pledge my life – my property – my vote – and my sacred honor – to uphold [the United States’] flag – its constitution – and constitutional laws – and will protect – defend – and enforce same unto death.”<sup>57</sup> Because of this strong rhetoric regarding civic duty and the upholding of national laws, aiding law enforcement became one of the Klan’s most important and successful obligations during its time in Oregon in the 1920s, mostly in the realm of prohibition. Enacted by Oregon in 1914, prohibition meant constant battles between law enforcement and moonshiners, people who illegally produced and distributed alcohol, resulting in raids, drunken brawls, and sometimes shootings.<sup>58</sup> When the Klan grew strong in Oregon, it began helping law enforcement find people who violated prohibition laws. And, in the summer of 1922, the Klan led a movement to recall Jackson County Sheriff Charles Terrill for being lax on the enforcement of prohibition laws, claiming that he “did not pursue local bootleggers with the vigor expected by community

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<sup>57</sup> Oregon Ku Klux Klan, “Oath of Allegiance,” date unknown, KOHS.

<sup>58</sup> LaLande, “Beneath the Hooded Robe,” 45.

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moralists.”<sup>59</sup> Condemnations against public officials who took a less than active stance for prohibition were commonplace for Oregon Klansmen.

While the fight against prohibition was aimed at upholding the spirit of the law itself, the Ku Klux Klan also went after violators of the law to uphold social morality, a major piece of “one-hundred per cent Americanism.” Perfectly in conjunction with Stanley Coben’s argument that the Klan guarded Victorianism was the assumption that alcohol and corruption went hand-in-hand, and this was a main driving force for the Klan’s position on prohibition.<sup>60</sup> This is one of the reasons for *The Western American*’s high praise for Clatsop County sheriff Harley J. Slusher in 1923. “Sheriff Slusher is a terror to evil-doers,” an article read in the Klan paper. He “constitutes an outstanding and brilliant example for all other Sheriffs and peace officers to emulate, reflecting lasting credit upon his County, his State, and the friends of good government who placed him in office,” because he “cleaned up Clatsop County as it never has been cleaned before, and is keeping it so by constant vigilance.”<sup>61</sup> One of the ways in which the Klan aided law enforcement was by having its newspaper, *The Western American*, deploy journalists as watchdogs of vices, releasing a statement in January of 1923:

The Western American is maintaining an efficient secret service in places where such work is needed... Let no one blame anyone for the ‘leakage’ of inside facts. There is no leak, but one of the best newspaper men on the Pacific coast is on the job, that’s all. To persons who are doing wrong and going ‘haywire,’ there’s only one warning: ‘Watch your step!’<sup>62</sup>

Beyond morality and loyalty to the United States, “one-hundred per cent Americanism” meant speaking English and being a citizen of the country, ultimately fostering the assimilation of immigrants.

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>61</sup> *The Western American*, “An Ideal Sheriff.” 7 September 1923. KOHS.

<sup>62</sup> *The Western American*, “Watch Your Step.” 25 January 1923. KOHS.

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However, the “assimilation” of all immigrants was not exactly what the Klan had in mind when it used the term. Instead, the KKK wanted only to bring in certain kinds of immigrants. In this case, Oregon was an ideal location for the Ku Klux Klan to operate. The Oregon economy was growing quickly, and it required immigration to foster such an increase. The growing economy relied heavily on logging, which was of particular interest to the Klan because the logging industry usually brought transient workers with it who could, the Klan believed, morally disrupt the community.<sup>63</sup> Adding to the threat of moral disruption was the automobile, a new component of modernization that brought outside people, outside businesses, and increased danger, such as high speeds and traffic accidents, that the Klan, and its Oregon sympathizers, feared.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, the outside alien influences that began to creep into Oregon were of particular concern for the Ku Klux Klan.

Although the Chinese were a small concern, it was the Japanese who ultimately became a main target for the Klan because of their mobility and perceived unwillingness to assimilate into American culture. “While we harbor, protect and attempt to teach [Japanese] children who are our future citizens” read an article in *The Western American*, “their parents, who cannot and will not become citizens, are tearing down our work and instilling their own teachings, and instilling prejudice against the United States into their brains.” Coupled with this was the fear that the Japanese, and other immigrants, brought immorality in the form of prostitution and alcohol use. To combat such problems, the Klan called for proper anti-alien laws “to govern the alien in our country and because the big interests want the alien labor.”<sup>65</sup> One such law was the anti-alien law, mentioned earlier. Much like its relationship with Governor Pierce and its loss in the battle

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<sup>63</sup> William Toll, “Progress and Piety,” 82.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>65</sup> *The Western American*, “America’s Overshadowing Problem Looms in Ever-Increasing Menace: Imperative Need of Anti-Alien Laws Stirs Federated Societies of Oregon to Action for National Defense.” 25 January 1923. KOHS.

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over the Oregon School Bill, the Ku Klux Klan was dealt a major blow in the mid-1920s in a small community, this time at the hands of the United States District Court for Oregon.

In July of 1925, community members in Toledo, Oregon, would make a decision that resulted in an unforeseen consequence for the Klan. Sawmill workers at the Pacific Lumber Corporation in Toledo grew hostile when the company announced its plans to hire a number of Japanese immigrant workers to help alleviate concerns with an increased demand for lumber. In the midst of considerable communal backlash, the company further clarified its plans, stating that no Toledo workers' jobs were in jeopardy, and that the Japanese employees would work only during graveyard shifts. Despite these assertions, fifty Toledo sawmill workers, with support from the community, forced the Japanese workers onto cars and trucks and drove them out of town. "There was no bloodshed," according to the report, "but there was a threat of violence." There currently exists no proof as to whether or not any participants of the backlash were members of the Ku Klux Klan, but it does not matter because of the resulting court decision. A year later, in August of 1926, a monumental decision affected Oregon's actions towards immigrants: "the right of Japanese residents in the United States to work where and when they will, and under whatever conditions may please them, has just been established definitely by action of the United States District Court for Oregon," which granted a \$2,500 decision in favor of the Japanese workers in a civil lawsuit headed by Tamakichi Ogura, one of the Japanese victims in the Toledo Incident.<sup>66</sup> That decision essentially created a precedent by which people could not use prejudice to nullify alien's rights. Because of this, the Ku Klux Klan, and Oregon, was dealt a crippling blow in its ability to control "unwanted" immigrants. One of the most

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<sup>66</sup> Alfred Holman, "Japanese Winning Right to Work: Oregon Court Establishes That Local Prejudice May Not Nullify Alien Rights," *New York Times*, August 8, 1926.

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overlooked civil lawsuits in histories of the Ku Klux Klan in Oregon, the Toledo Incident was a major factor in the loss of political influence for anti-immigration voices, specifically the KKK.

While Nancy MacLean argued that the second Klan used militancy throughout the nation and Stanley Coben argued that the second Klan used violence sparingly, it is more the case that the character of the Klan changed with locality. In Oregon, only three cases of Klan violence specifically stand out, and without deaths or permanent injuries suffered at the hands of the Oregon Ku Klux Klan, in comparison, it was a relatively peaceful organization. To be sure, violence occurred at the hands of the Invisible Empire, but with so few documented cases in Oregon, violence was not the norm. Not mentioning the violence, however rare, would be a pivotal mistake in a written history of the Oregon Klan because, often times, the simple perception of the Klan as a militant group holds just as much weight as the Klan actually committing violent acts; a perceived threat is equivalent to an actual threat. All three major acts of violence occurred in Jackson County, in southwest Oregon.

The first encounter was aimed at Arthur Burr. Men in hooded robes tied a rope around the neck of the African American and Oregon resident, hoisted him off the ground three times, and then forced him to run away with bullets hitting the ground nearby his swiftly moving feet in an attempt to scare him out of the state.<sup>67</sup> The second was against J.F. Hale, a white piano salesman who had a debt owed to him by a Klansman. Accused of having two inappropriate relationships with young Medford woman, Hale was dragged into the backwoods and threatened with hanging. The Klan ordered him to end his relationships with the two young women, forgive the debt owed to him, and leave the county immediately. Such an encounter indeed represented the power that the Klan had in its use of violence, although rarely utilized.

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<sup>67</sup> LaLande, "Beneath the Hooded Robe," 47.

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In the third major act of violence, the Klan went after a half-Mexican man named Henry Johnson. Accused of being a chicken thief, Johnson was hanged by the Klan in a nonlethal but terrifying manner before being released and allowed to stay in the county as long he walked a straight and narrow path from then on.<sup>68</sup> The cases against each Klan member would eventually be dropped in court after the defendants persuaded the jury that the bad moral choices of the victims made the crimes beneficial to the community. By turning the victims into the perpetrators and the community as a whole into the victim, the Klan members got off on all counts.<sup>69</sup> Whether or not the violence occurred because of racist sentiments, selfish endeavors, or a true belief in social morality makes little difference; the violence that is often associated with the Klan indeed took place in Oregon, but in such few cases that it cannot be considered to be a tool actively employed by the Oregon Klansmen.

Just as the Oregon Klan appeared largely free of violence, it also appeared mostly free of blatant racism against blacks as well, considering that the majority of Klan rhetoric referred to Catholics and immigrants. However, the organization in Oregon was still a white supremacist group, but with few African Americans in Oregon at the time of the order's presence, the racism was fairly buried. But unfolding the robes of the Oregon Klan reveals the sentiments of a deeply racist fraternal order. In the Portland Application for Membership in the Improved Order of Klansmen, prospective members had to answer a multitude of personal questions, including the following: "Are you wholly of the white race?" "Do you believe in upholding the supremacy of the White man's civilization and racial purity?" "Are you opposed to the intermarriage of persons of the White and colored races?"<sup>70</sup> Because Oregon had so few African Americans, the

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<sup>68</sup> LaLande, "Beneath the Hooded Robe," 47.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>70</sup> Oregon Ku Klux Klan, "Application for Membership in the Improved Order of Klansmen." Date unknown, KOHS.

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Ku Klux Klan's racism did not become a decisive issue, but it is important to understand that they were still very much a racist organization by nature. Without the Oregon Klan lynching African Americans, joining the organization may not have been as big of an issue as it may have been in some Southern states – specifically Georgia – where the African American “problem” was a main concern. Instead, the focus in Oregon was much more entrenched in anti-Catholicism and anti-immigration.

Immigrants' alleged poor morals and refusal to assimilate, in addition to the prejudice and stereotypes that Klan members held towards the immigrants themselves, were of a primary concern for the fraternal order and its internal cohesion. While violence was mostly a non-factor in the Oregon Klan, one of the most important issues for the Oregon Klan gaining members was internal, that being the ideal of “Klannishness,” which helped turn the Ku Klux Klan into a brotherhood that attracted numerous individuals. “Klannishness” meant, beyond loyalty to the United States, loyalty to the Klan itself. Rather than divulge secrets about the Klan, its oath declares, its members would rather die.<sup>71</sup> Klan members also swore to “guard and maintain the social cast and dignity of the Klan,” to only recommend people for Klan membership if they had a sound mind, a good reputation, good character, and unquestionable loyalty to the country. “Klannishness” also required devotion to fellow Klansmen, swearing at any time to come to his assistance or rescue “without hesitation,” in addition to defending and protecting the home, reputation, and physical and business interests of fellow Klansmen and their families.<sup>72</sup>

According to *The Western American*, “Klannishness” also meant that no member was allowed in as a “raft member,” defined simply as someone allowed in for the sole purpose of collecting their membership fees. Instead, “no man is recognized as a Klansman for the mere

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<sup>71</sup> Oregon Ku Klux Klan, “Oath of Allegiance.” Date unknown, KOHS.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

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payment of dues after initiation. He must show up at regular meetings, or have a good excuse, and his worth is measured by the service he gives, ‘not for self, but for others.’” Klan members were each individually a part of one large contributing body. “They SERVE, every man of them.”<sup>73</sup> In other words, men could not get into the Klan simply by paying the fees required of them; they had to swear their loyalty to the Klan and continue practicing “Klannishness” throughout their time in the fraternal order. This idea, however, became a major problem in the Klan’s internal structure.

In some instances, “Klannishness” could not protect the fraternal order, as secret lists of Klan members were leaked and published in the local press, causing many members to defect from the group in fear of losing their secrecy, although little is to be found regarding why Klansmen were afraid of being found out.<sup>74</sup> Some light was shed on this secrecy by Lem A. Dever. He served as the editor of *The Western American*, which was a newspaper published by the Klan in Portland, Oregon. It began in 1922, yet published papers for less than two years. As the main public voice of the Oregon Klan, Dever served an important role in perpetuating Klan ideals, such as anti-Catholicism and anti-immigration, and keeping the Oregon Klan under one, unified voice. In 1924, however, Dever resigned not only from *The Western American*, but from the Klan itself. After leaving the Ku Klux Klan, Dever wrote an article for *The Spectator*, a Portland paper. The article, titled “Limelight turned on the Klan,” was detrimental to the secret order. “The Klan of Oregon,” he wrote, “continues to be a public menace of first magnitude... The enlightened, respectable and law-abiding element has quit the membership, never to rejoin, but the dangerous and ignorant fanatics remain, sufficient in number to maintain activities, ready

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<sup>73</sup> *The Western American*, “No Yellow Slackers in the Klan.” 7 September 1923. KOHS.

<sup>74</sup> Eckard V. Toy, “Robe and Gown: The Ku Klux Klan in Eugene, Oregon, during the 1920s,” in *The Invisible Empire of the West: Toward a New Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s*, ed. Shawn Lay. (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1986): 178.

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to obey the orders of wizard and dragon.” The Klan by 1925, Dever wrote, was “undefensible before the enlightened American people.”<sup>75</sup> Ben Titus, also in 1925, condemned the Oregon Exalted Cyclops, the highest Klan position held in the state, Fred L. Gifford for using the order’s funds for his “own financial and political benefit.” Calling the Oregon Klan “The Fiery Cross and the Double Cross,” Titus revealed the progression the Oregon Klan had taken from 1921 to 1925: “I have seen the Ku Klux Klan in Portland, Oregon vociferating patriotism and honorable dealing, develop into a blind fanatic mob, misled and exploited by its Exalted Cyclops and a few of his henchmen.”<sup>76</sup> He called out the Klan for deceiving its members through a “Klannishness” it did not truly adhere to, faking fundraisers to collect money for Gifford, and enlisting men who violated both state laws and Klan rules.<sup>77</sup>

Titus went so far as to make the most damning proclamation a former member of the Oregon Klan had ever made by accusing Gifford’s wife of Catholicism:

An ironical fact that I have since discovered, was that, while the exalted Cyclops was trafficking with the compulsory education bill to carry through his political plan, and was double and triple crossing fellow klansmen and politicians, his daughter Marcella, and his daughter Mary, had both been students in St. Mary’s academy in 1914-1916 and while he was fomenting the klansmen to wrath against Catholics, his own wife is a Catholic, baptized in that church in St. Paul, July 31, 1881.<sup>78</sup>

Accusing the Exalted Cyclops of marrying a Catholic woman and sending his children to a Catholic school hurt the Klan and the faith its members had in its leader, Fred L. Gifford, because the Klan had been so entrenched in an anti-Catholicism campaign. As these and other charges came to light, the order began to lose many of the people in its ranks. Gifford’s resignation and departure in 1924 ultimately led to the Ku Klux Klan losing its grip in Oregon. Without a central leader, the Klan began to fail much more quickly.

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<sup>75</sup> Lem A. Dever, “Limelight Turned on the Klan.” *The Spectator*. 3 January 1925. KOHS.

<sup>76</sup> Titus, “I was a Klansman,” 12.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 18, 19.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

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The sheer influence of modernization, and the inability to escape from it, also played a distinctive role in the disintegration of the Oregon Ku Klux Klan. Radio, automobiles, and comfortable passenger train cars left few to desire the rural, small towns that the Klan had always stood up for.<sup>79</sup> Some Klan divisions remained as lodges through 1929, but by 1930, the Klan was completely dissolved in Oregon. “I have seen men of Portland, Oregon, who are, individually, as fine a type of men as the country affords, duped, bamboozled and made parties to political villainies that would make a ward heeler blush – for the glory and power of a few men,” wrote Ben Titus, “who have gained control of their patriotic emotions and have warped and distorted them to unpatriotic ends.”<sup>80</sup> The Oregon Klan appealed to Oregon citizens with calls for patriotism, Americanism, and Protestantism. The packed halls of Klan meetings and a Klan-backed governor winning the Oregon election serve as indicators of the Klan’s influence, and acceptance, among Oregon citizens. The height of the Klan, however, was likely reached in 1923, having already supported a candidate that won the Oregon governorship, having helped pass the Oregon School Bill, having supported an anti-alien landownership bill, and having a multitude of members serving in public offices throughout the state. However, delving deep into each area reveals a much different picture. The relationship with Governor Pierce was tumultuous, and the inability to keep the governor interested in Klan ideals was a major problem for the Klan. The public school vote certainly appeared to show how the Klan appealed to Oregonians’ anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic sentiments, but the ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court destroyed the Klan-backed bill and removed any grounds for which the Klan to attempt similar legislation. The Toledo Incident, although not experienced directly by the Klan, resulted in a legal precedent that would have made future Klan attempts to control immigrant workers

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<sup>79</sup> William Toll, “Progress and Piety: The Ku Klux Klan and Social Changes in Tillamook, Oregon,” 84.

<sup>80</sup> Titus, “I was a Klansman,” 13.

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nearly impossible. “Klannishness,” meant to perpetuate the bonds between members, actually led to significant rifts between them, with special importance in the rumors surrounding Grand Dragon Gifford and his family’s association with Catholicism, and his 1924 resignation left the Klan with no central leadership. Furthermore, the questionable claims made by *The Western American*, the 1924 resignation of its editor, Lem A. Dever, and his subsequent condemnations of the fraternal order led to considerable strife within the organization. Ben Titus’ very public denouncement of the Klan also hurt the order. By picking up stories about the interior problems of the Klan, national newspapers also played a role in the fraternal order’s descent into obscurity. In other words, by monitoring the situation and publicizing moves made by the Klan, Eastern newspapers contributed to the Klan’s failure in Oregon.

Without Governor Pierce’s decision to part ways with the Klan, without the courts’ decisions on the Oregon School Bill and the Toledo Incident, without the problems surrounding corruption within the Klan, without the resignation of Gifford, and without the condemnations of Dever and Titus, the Ku Klux Klan may have incredibly changed the landscape of the state. However, the internal strife of the Klan in combination with the decisions of the United States legal system prevented the Klan from becoming a powerful and influential authority in Oregon. Furthermore, the Supreme Court’s decision to strike down the Oregon School Bill actually set a legal precedent for the entire country, serving as a crippling blow to the national Klan and its effort to create a homogenous population.

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