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Jayhawker Fraternities: Masons, Klansmen and Kansas in the 1920s

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In the 1920s, like most of the rest of the nation Kansas found itself the target of the attentions of the KKK. One of its main ways of recruiting was via existing fraternities. Using new archival material this article investigates the response of one of the leading fraternities of the times – the Masons. What emerges is a picture of mixed responses – ranging from mutual hostility to active Klan recruitment within Masonic lodges. In many ways Kansas can be seen as a microcosm of the nation, and as such this study can add to our understanding of what drove up to 10 million American men and women to join this mysterious and now hated body.

When Dan Brown published his most recent book, *The Lost Symbol*, in 2009, amid the huge increase of web articles it produced in its wake, there were some which reiterated historical associations between the Masons and another more sinister and secretive organization – the Ku Klux Klan. It appeared that in many people's minds the two were, and still are, closely linked. There were claims of sharing not only nefarious objectives but also prominent members. The most notable claims centred around the peak of the Klan's membership and influence in the early and mid-1920s. During these years they argued that the two organizations shared a variety of goals, most notably the effective eradication from American society of what they saw as insidious Roman Catholic influence. It was also alleged that during these golden years for both organizations, their membership extended to the very highest levels of US society – even as far as Presidents Harding and Coolidge.[1] More thoroughly researched and nuanced accounts of the period argue that while there were certainly shared interests, they were not as sinister as some claim. It also emerges that although there were shared members, the evidence that they were to be found at such exalted levels is less than conclusive.

However, perhaps this overlap should not altogether come as a surprise. The Klan of these years was a true mass movement. Unlike the earlier Reconstruction Klan of the 1860s and 1870s, the Civil Rights Klans of the

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[1] An example of these articles can be found at http://www.kkklan.com/tokens.htm.

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1950s and 1960s, or the splinter groups using the Klan's name today, the Klan of the 1920s counted its membership in millions, not thousands, or even hundreds of thousands. What was more, it had moved out of its Southern homeland and claimed to have "Klaverns" in all the states of the Union, and Canada as well. Many accounts, then and since, would argue that it was less concerned with race than it was with ritual, membership and money, and although it was responsible for brutal acts, it claimed a mainstream support among all red-blooded, true-blue, patriotic American men – and later women.

Among these were Masons, and to many the tie was obvious. In America the 1920s were years of social aspiration, laissez-faire capitalism and increased physical and social mobility – traits for which Masonic values seemed ready-made. Alongside their more esoteric ideals, the Masons represented a means to make valuable social and business contacts. The fraternity was able to further career prospects within a well-known, respected, well-established organization and provide its members with access to a national network of like-minded brothers. On the other hand, the Klan, while lacking the pedigree of the Masons, had a reputation for patriotic virtue and no-nonsense pronouncements in the postwar uncertainty of the early 1920s. What was more, there was little in the Klan's public declarations which would not have appealed to a considerable proportion of aspirant, "patriotic," Protestant, whites across America.

The membership figures seem to bear these observations out, since at its peak in the middle of the decade anything up to 10 million Americans joined it, if we are to believe some of the Klan's own claims. One of the more conservative estimates of membership in 1923 put the total number of Klansmen at some two and a half million, which is probably rather low. However, what is crucial about this estimate is that the author calculated that over 500,000 – or 20 percent – of these Klansmen were also Freemasons.[2] One contemporary Masonic source claimed that "Klan-joining became contagious and ran epidemic" throughout Masonry in the 1920s and that nearly 60 percent of the founding Klansmen in Oregon were also Masons.[3] In Michigan in 1923, research shows that in Newaygo County nearly two-thirds of Klansmen belonged to at least one other fraternity, and nearly a quarter were Masons.[4]

[2] Figures taken from Alan Axelrod, *The International Encyclopedia of Secret Societies and Fraternal Orders* (New York: Checkmark Books, 1997), 159.

[3] Cited in Lynn Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture 1880–1930* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 122.

[4] Figures taken from Craig Fox, *Everyday Klansfolk: White Protestant Life and the KKK in 1920s Michigan* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011), 121, and conversations with the author.

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Many historians see the influence of Freemasonry on the Klan as far exceeding even this relatively high number of shared members. However, although most aspects of the Invisible Empire in the 1920s have been dug over, often repeatedly and in great detail, this link between Masons and the Klan has often been alluded to, but never fully explored.[5] For example, Wyn Craig Wade's classic narrative history of the Klan devotes a single page to William Joseph Simmons's multiple fraternal ties, and another to the high level of Klan-fraternalists in 1920s Indiana.[6] Lynn Dumenil's seminal study of Masonry takes a similar approach and refers to the Klan on five separate pages and in two sets of footnotes. However, while in a later article she acknowledges their importance to the common cause of the Towner–Stirling proposals for a federal education policy, she sees the connection as a temporary marriage of convenience between a variety of disparate allies, rather than exploring the Klan's claims to a common fraternal heritage.[7]

More detailed studies of both organizations tend to mimic these approaches. Typical of this style is Kenneth Jackson's study of the decade's urban Klans. Jackson mentions the connection in Atlanta, Chicago, Detroit, Minneapolis, Los Angeles, Portland, OR and Denver, but never devotes more than a single paragraph to the common aims or the extent of shared membership.[8] This oversight becomes all the more baffling when it is considered how widespread American fraternalism was during the 1920s. Over these years Americans in all regions joined clubs, societies and organizations, particularly fraternities, in hitherto unprecedented numbers. One estimate puts the total national fraternal membership at anywhere between 30 and 60 million, when America's population was slightly over 100 million.[9]

Nevertheless, there are a variety of possible reasons for this apparent neglect. In part it could be the result of methodological difficulties inherent in such a study, especially given that most fraternal organizations have traditions of secrecy – and few of these are more strictly observed than those of the Klan.

[5] The only specific examples of studies of this connection of which I am aware are two rather obscure investigations of Texas Klan–Masonic ties. These are useful, but rather short and very limited in scope: Donovan Duncan Tidwell, "The Ku Klux Klan and Texas Masonry," *Transactions, Texas Lodge of Research*, 14 (June 1978–March 1979), 160–76; and J. Dexter Sammons, "The Ku Klux Klan and Texas Masonry Part II," *Transactions Texas Lodge of Research* (June 1984–March 1985), 116–28.

[6] Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 141, 223–24.

[7] Dumenil; and *idem*, "The Insatiable Maw of Bureaucracy: Anti-statism and Education Reform in the 1920s," *Journal of American History* (Sept. 1990), 499–524.

[8] Kenneth Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan and the City 1915–1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

[9] Charles Merz, "Sweet Land of Secrecy: The Strange Spectacle of American Fraternalism," *Harpers Magazine* (Feb. 1927), 329.

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Another reason for the lack of investigation probably lies with the reputation of the Klan in the contemporary mind. Since its ultraviolent response to the Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s and its subsequent association with race-based fundamentalists, neo-Nazis and paramilitary survivalist groups, it has deservedly been regarded as a terrorist organization – in spite of the best efforts of some of its leading members to shake off that stigma and rehabilitate it.

This has understandably meant that few legitimate groups have wanted to be associated with the KKK – even the relatively "benign" Klan of the 1920s. Nor have many organizations done much to encourage studies of any previous links, least of all the publicity-shy, often maligned and frequently embattled Freemasons. What is more, given the stunning speed of the collapse of the Klan in the 1920s, it is hardly surprising that other fraternities, especially one of the next largest fraternities – the Masons – wished to distance themselves from any connections with the seemingly doomed, and certainly disgraced, organization. Nevertheless, as more and more Masonic archives have been opened to non-Masonic historians and Masonic history has increasingly become viewed as a part of mainstream history, perhaps it is now easier to carry out more detailed research.

This study aims to detail the interaction of the Klan and Freemasons by looking at a case study, right in the centre of America's western, agricultural and extractive, heartland – Kansas. By examining Masonic archives, local newspaper reports and the all too sparse records relating to the Kansas Klan it is possible to start piecing together a picture of the communication between the two organizations. Not only can such a study highlight the overlap in membership, ritual and ideals, but it can also shed light on the evolution and trajectory of both organizations during what historian John Higham has called America's "Tribal Twenties."[10] Examination of the two organizations' dealings with each other can tell the historian a great deal about membership and exclusion as well as about tradition and modernity in this one of the most fractious and fractured of American decades.

Such a study can also illuminate the attitudes of the two largest fraternal organizations towards each other, allowing investigation of such questions as whether the Masons regarded the Klan as a legitimate fraternity, or what attitude was taken to those who belonged to both organizations. What is more, Kansas was one of the few states to have an active, high-profile, executive-led campaign against the Klan in the decade. This makes it one of the ideal states through which to study the attitudes of an established elite group – the Masons – towards another populist, and perhaps inevitably

[10] John Higham, *Strangers in the Land* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955).

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controversial, group – namely the Klan. The widespread distribution of Masonic lodges took in all variations of Kansas's geography and demography, which can also give clues as to the appeal of the Klan on a smaller, more regional basis in this decade.

Central to this study is the disjuncture between the way in which the Klan saw itself and the way in which others, particularly its opponents, saw it. Enemies attacked it as a violent and bigoted organization. In September 1921, the *New York World* famously ran twenty-one articles on the paper's front page, day after day. These damning articles detailed its activities, ambitions and atrocities with large-point headlines like "Ku Klux Made Jews and Negroes Target for Racial Hatreds" and "Bitter Anti-Catholic Propaganda Peddled by Officials of Klan."[11] Though strenuously denied by the growing Klan, the tales of the organization's threatening and immoral methods and rhetoric led to an investigation by the House Committee on Rules in October 1921. Called to answer to the Committee on 12 October, "Colonel" William Joseph Simmons, the dignified founder of the reformed Klan, claimed that it was fundamentally a fraternal organization and as "innocent as the breath of an angel."[12]

There was nothing new in Simmons's claim. In 1915, when he chartered the body in Atlanta, Georgia, the self-proclaimed Imperial Wizard used his typically florid style to claim that the reincarnated Klan had been "called from its slumber of a half a century to take up a new task and fulfill a new mission for humanity's good and to call back to mortal habitation the good angel of practical fraternity among men."[13] This tie with fraternity has been seen as an essential ingredient in the success of the Klan during the 1920s and it was an effective strategy. One recent study of the Klan in Newaygo County, Michigan has shown that, on joining, around 60 percent of Klansmen already belonged to at least one other "ritualistic order," and there is no reason to think this rural region was exceptional.[14] This is hardly remarkable since the 1920s Klan was designed to appeal to just such fraternalists. A serial joiner himself, Simmons had always realized the potential attractions for his Klan of mirroring other fraternities. This is clearly demonstrated in his tactics at the Congressional hearing, where he compared the objectives of the growing organization to those of such orders as the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, the Knights of Pythias and the Free and Accepted Order of Masons.[15]

[11] See *New York World*, 6–26 Sept. 1921. The articles were syndicated and appeared in at least 15 other papers over the next months.

[12] For details of Simmons's statements see *New York Times*, 14 Oct. 1921.

[13] Cited in Anonymous, *Ku Klux Klan Secrets Exposed* (Chicago, 1922), 26.

[14] Fox, *Everyday Klansfolk*, 121.

[15] Details in House Committee on Rules, *Ku Klux Klan Hearings* (Washington, DC, 1921).

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Simmons used this fraternal card to counter the dark rumours circulating about the Klan's bigotry. It allowed for the exclusion of Catholics, Jews and blacks – by arguing that most fraternities employed restrictions on membership. Simmons told the Committee the Klan "was not anti-Jewish. Any Jew who can subscribe to the Christian religion can get in. We are not anti-negro. Scores of other fraternal organizations will not admit negroes." He pointed out that the Knights of Columbus would not allow Protestants to join.[16] He went on to show that the Klan drew on other aspects of fraternity with its lodge structure, oaths and ritual, which he said were based on a variety of contemporary fraternal organizations. An examination of the 1916 handbook of the reformed Klan, the so-called *Kloran*, clearly illustrates this derivation. In it Simmons had created a ritual loosely based on the Masonic pattern with an altar, oaths and the promise of deadly retribution for those who betrayed the organization. As the organization grew, it also outlined distinctly Masonic-looking degrees of Klansmanship, each with its own initiation ceremony, vows and title, ranging from the initiate Order of Citizenship to the elite Knights of the Midnight Mystery.[17]

Nevertheless, while Masonic numbers soared in the 1910s, this ersatz Masonry did not prove enough to attract the core of the nation's two million or so Masons to the Invisible Empire. Far from it: the Klan suffered some shaky years in the 1910s when it barely spread further than its "re-birthplace," Georgia, and neighboring Alabama. But when, in 1920, the Klan joined forces with the rather grandly titled Southern Publicity Association (SPA), its fortunes changed almost immediately. The SPA was in reality nothing more than an experienced pair of boosters, who would become from 1921 the Klan's Propagation Department, using targeted PR and pyramid selling to vastly increase the scope of the Invisible Empire. By January 1921 they had sent out nearly 1,100 recruiters who, driven by the lure of a 40 percent share of each $10 klecktoken (membership due), soon exceeded even the expectations of the SPA. As the summer of 1921 drew to a close, they had drawn in over 850,000 new Klansmen and began to feel that the potential for further growth was almost unlimited.[18] As 1922 dawned, there were successful Klaverns in

[16] See *New York Times*, 14 Oct. 1921.

[17] For details of Klan ritual and oaths see Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, *Klansman's Manual* (Atlanta, 1924), 66–81. For an analysis of the Klan in comparison with other fraternities see Alvin J Schmidt, ed., *Fraternal Organizations* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1980), 196–201; and Axelrod, *The International Encyclopedia of Secret Societies and Fraternal Orders*, 58–60. For a transcription of the Kloran see Michael Newton, *The Ku Klux Klan* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2007), 432–37.

[18] The best firsthand account of the Klan's sales techniques and what purports to be the contract between Simmons and the SPA can be found in Henry P. Fry, *The Modern Ku Klux Klan* (Boston, MA: Small, Maynard and Co., 1922), 37–51. Historical analysis of the business of

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Missouri, Oklahoma, Arkansas and Colorado and the Klan was ready for a concerted drive into Kansas.

Since the 1920s Klan shrewdly targeted local dissatisfactions and divisions with its populist solutions it found itself with ready-made scapegoats. In this respect – if not in others – by 1922 the Sunflower State seemed like ideal territory for "Kluxing." Kansas society had a variety of readily apparent fissures. Postwar inflation had crippled the buying power of farmers, and to add to this misery a postwar glut had caused grain prices to collapse. The state's leading industries, most notably railroads, oil and coal mining, which had boomed during the war years, were now struggling as the military necessity disappeared and guaranteed prices evaporated. Just as in so many other regions, in so many other industries in these discontented times, miners, railmen and other Kansas workers were striking.

As if this disaffection were not enough to draw in Kansans to the Klan, it was given additional potency by the Klan's relentless accusations that these problems had originated with outsiders. The Kleagles were in little doubt that the Klan's tried and tested message of patriotism would appeal to those workers who had seen blacks or eastern European strikebreakers cross their picket lines, prolonging the suffering for the families of the striking miners and railroad workers. After all, these were the years when the toxic mixture of fears of renewed mass immigration, the Great War, the Great Migration, the "failed" peace and the Red Scare had taken the nation's usual background xenophobia to previously unheard-of levels.[19] Initially it appeared that the Kleagles were justified in their optimism, for within two years the Kansas Realm of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan claimed it had 100,000 members.

In many ways the recruitment drive within Kansas was unexceptional. To a large extent it relied on the same techniques which had proved so successful across other regions of the nation. Alongside speeches made at fetes and fairs, the Kleagles used a range of additional techniques which included the bribing, flattering and cajoling of the elites of the local Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist and Disciples of Christ ministries, as well as other religious organizations. In return for what was often a considerable donation, as well as granting the ministers free membership or perhaps a share of the considerable potential profits, the Kleagles frequently got access to the parish rolls. Kleagles could even be granted permission to advertise and solicit members from among the congregations, sometimes during services or other

Klansmanship can be found in Charles C. Alexander, "Kleagles and Cash: The Ku Klux Klan as a Business Organization, 1915–1930," *Business History Review*, 39, 3 (Autumn, 1965), 348–67.

[19] For details of these fears and their impact on American immigration see Kristofer Allerfeldt, *Beyond the Huddled Masses* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007).

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church-sponsored events. More importantly, the Klan's "Propagation Department" in Atlanta specifically instructed Kleagles to target Masons as potential members – although it should be stressed that from the start this met with a mixed response from the Masonic hierarchy.[20]

Nevertheless, the success of this technique was apparent and it is surely not simply coincidental that the state with the highest Klan membership of the 1920s – Indiana – also had the most members of fraternal organizations per capita. It is also claimed that in 1923 all the Grand Dragons – state-level Klan bosses – of the Invisible Empire were also Masons.[21] Nor did the connection stop at that exalted level. The Klan also claimed that in 1922 the US President, and prominent Mason, Warren G. Harding had been inducted into the Invisible Empire in the White House itself.[22] While the veracity of this claim is difficult to establish, Harding was in many ways the ideal Klan/Mason – ambitious, not overly scrupulous and rural small-town in origin in a time when, as one contemporary commentator put it, Middle America's "middle class simply adore[d] ritual, regalia and 'hokum' ... [because these elements] constitute[d] the greatest social diversion" available in a sleepy countryside whose population suspected that modernity was leaving them behind.[23]

Small-town Kansas was no exception. For example, the little town of Drexel, just to the south of Kansas City, straddling the Missouri border, boasted a population of less than five hundred in 1920. Nevertheless, this small community had ten active churches and equally active lodges for the Knights of Pythias, the Woodmen of the World, the Odd Fellows, the Mystic Workers of the World, the Order of Select Friends and the Modern Woodmen, as well as Eastern Star and the Free and Accepted Masons.[24] With their overlapping rituals and interests in fraternal solidarity and philanthropy – as well as ready-made organizational structure – fraternities and, most importantly, the Masons were seen as the perfect potential Klansmen and Kansas Masonic records show how this worked as well as the frictions the policy created.

[20] For some examples of the reaction to the Southern Publicity Association's policy see the *New York Times*, 17 June 1922; and Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915–1930* (Chicago, 1967), 10.

[21] See Tidwell, "The Ku Klux Klan and Texas Masonry," 173.

[22] For Harding's Masonic ties see John W. Barry, *Masonry and the Flag* (Washington, DC: The Masonic Service Association of the United States, 1924), 100–4. For sources on Harding's alleged Klan membership see Wyn Craig Wade, *The Fiery Cross* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 474.

[23] Arthur Corning White, "An American Fascismo," *Forum*, 72, 5 (Nov. 1924), 638.

[24] See Lila Lee Jones, "The Ku Klux Klan in Eastern Kansas during the 1920s," *Emporia State Research Studies*, 23, 3 (Winter 1975), 38.

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This can be verified by examining the unhappy correspondence between the Kansas Grand Lodge of the Accepted Free and Ancient Masons in Topeka and a variety of other lodges in the state. Starting in the late spring of 1922, these detail Kleagle activity within Masonic lodges which continues at least until the end of 1925. In essence the complaints were pretty uniform: the Klan was using Masonic lodges and Masonic contacts in order to promote membership of the Invisible Empire. A Master Mason from Independence, Kansas detailed how it worked: "[T]he state is being combed by organizers [Kleagles] both travelling and local, who in nearly all cases are Masons, they get access to the local Blue [initiate] Lodge membership lists and then work as many of them as possible for the $10 [klecktoken]." He added that "this graft is being worked on young enthusiastic masons . . . by men who are in many cases masons, and in many cases masons of High Degree."[25]

It seemed that such sacred, confidential information was also being made available to unenlightened "grafters." A Masonic brother from Kansas City complained that he had been approached by a non-Mason who knew of his ties to the Craft and "interviewed [him] . . . in regard to joining [the KKK] . . . on the ground that I was a Mason and that it [the Klan] was generally endorsed by the Masonic Fraternity . . . organized for the same purpose and had the same objective[s]."[26] There were also accusations that Kleagle–Masons used commercial pressure to try to induce other Masons to join the Invisible Empire. In June 1922 there were a growing number of reports detailing accusations of veiled threats by the Klan, threatening the boycott of nonmember businesses.

Typical of these were the accounts which came from the Masonic Lodge in Independence, which a senior, anti-Klan Mason reported to the Grand Lodge in Topeka. He claimed that his open hostility to the Klan had already led to his business being damaged, and he hoped to prevent this happening to younger Masons. The Grand Master supported him, condemning such behaviour as morally reprehensible and highly un-Masonic. It was, he said, further evidence of the way in which these Masons had abandoned their vows and failed to see the true "light."[27]

Despite these objections, the correlation between Masons and Klansmen would remain high in the areas where Kleagles were active. One letter, of May 1922, claimed that of the two hundred Klansmen in the prairie city

[25] Letter from J. M. MacDowell to Grand Master John McCullough AF and AM Masons of Kansas, 16 June 1922. Unless otherwise stated the following letters are taken from the Correspondence Files, Records of the AF and AM Grand Lodge, Topeka.

[26] Letter from Earl E. Fawcett, Kansas City, to Grand Master John McCullough AF and AM Masons of Kansas, 24 July 1922.

[27] John McDowell to John McCullough, 24 June 1922.

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of Wellington, on the Kansas–Oklahoma border, "practically all of them [were] of the Masonic Fraternity."[28] In the same month, in the zinc-mining district and rail hub of Cherryvale in the southwest of the state, it was reported by a senior Mason that there was a "KKK outfit, all of whom, or at least the greater part, are Brother Masons, good friends, but who do not 'see the light' in the proper manner."[29] In June 1922, at a Klan meeting at the Masonic Temple in the rail town of Independence in southeastern Kansas, "out of the forty or fifty [Masons] present, all but about four or five" ended up joining the Klan.[30]

Frequently reported by Masons hostile to the Klan, such accounts are not necessarily entirely reliable, they do illustrate the strength of the fear of Klan infiltration felt by many Masons. However, they are backed up by a rare glimpse of the usually closely guarded Klan membership. In November 1923, the celebrated Progressive Kansas Pulitzer-winning editor and outspoken enemy of the Klan, William Allen White – not himself a Mason – achieved a coup against the Invisible Empire. Through a mixture of bluff and subterfuge, White managed to persuade the management of Emporia's newly opened Broadview Hotel to give him a copy of the desk register for the night when the Klan was booked in to hold its state convention. He published the names of the visitors in full, along with their addresses. Since the only other guests that night were visiting members of a barbershop group from Italy attending a convention, distinguishing the delegates of the Invisible Empire, then and now, was relatively easy: if the address was not Italian, they were Klansmen.[31] Cross-checking this list of Klansmen with existing Masonic records shows that at least forty-two out of ninety-five were identifiable as practising Masons. This equates to over twice the national rate of Klansmen who were also Masons.

Closer examination of the list reveals other interesting features. Of the verifiable Masons a considerable proportion had only just been initiated, perhaps indicating what was widely suspected then and now, that activity in one organization inspired membership of the other, i.e. serial joining. More intriguingly, it may be a sign that those who were already Klansmen may have joined the Masons rather than vice versa, simply in order to gain access to records and groom potential initiates – and of course gain a share of the resulting klecktokens. Or they may have been Masons from another district who had travelled to work as Kleagles in Kansas, and were joining new Masonic lodges, as was required of them. Whatever the explanation, it seems that the

[28] Past Master C. J. Wells, Wellington Lodge 150, to J. McCullough, 27 May 1922. On the letter McCullough has written, "Here's another, please retain for my file."

[29] Russell Garrison to John McCullough, 12 May 1922.

[30] Taken from a letter from J. M. MacDowell to John McCullough, 24 June 1922.

[31] For the list of members see *Emporia Gazette*, 17 Nov. 1923.

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overlap applies especially to the Roger E. Sherman Lodge 239 in Kansas City – an area of exceptionally high Kleagle activity at this time. Here, a whole collection of Klansmen took their initial Masonic degrees in the autumn/winter of 1922–23 at the peak of the Klan recruitment drive in Kansas.

Worrying as such developments seemed to many Masons, reports of such activity met with little substantial response from the higher levels of the brotherhood. Grand Master John McCullough roundly condemned the Klan. His choice of language left no doubt about his dislike for the Klan: "There is no question in my mind but what the Ku Klux Klan is [is] un-American, un-Masonic, and that no member of our fraternity should be associated with them in any manner whatever."[32] Moreover, he blasted those who used their Craft to put "some dollars in the pockets of the Masons who are soliciting the members."[33] McCullough advocated patience when dealing with the Klan. He counseled caution over the use of sanctions on those who were both Klansmen and Masons, reminding his fraternity of traditional Masonic policy not to give publicity to any non-Masonic attacks on the Craft.

Instead McCullough advised his brothers that "the precedent for over 60 years in our Grand Lodge has been to ignore the acts of the 'profane,' and under no circumstances whatever [should the Masons] take official notice of any outside organization."[34] He stopped short of telling Masons to "administer the law or punish [Klan] crimes" themselves, ignoring the precedent set by neighboring Missouri's Grand Master.[35] Nor did he follow the examples of California Grand Master Samuel L. Burke, or Texas Grand Master Andrew L. Randaell, with their strongly worded and highly controversial condemnatory proclamations outlawing the Klan from Lodges. He did not use his position to issue an edict demanding that all Masons renounce the Klan or face expulsion, as had been done by the Grand Master in New Mexico.[36]

McCullough argued that any association whatsoever of the Craft with the Klan in the public mind could prove damaging. He maintained that however innocent or unintended, any proclamation he might make could, as he argued,

> possibly hurt Masonry more than it would possibly be hurt in any other way, as if the public is allowed to believe that masonry is behind the KKK, when the time arrives

[32] J. McCullough to J. W. McDowell, Independence, Kansas, 19 June 1922.

[33] J. McCullough to J. S. Henderson, 28 March 1922.

[34] J. McCullough to J. W. McDowell, Independence, Kansas, 19 June 1922.

[35] See Anonymous, *Ku Klux Klan Secrets Exposed*, 57.

[36] Details of Burke's proclamation and its results have been analysed by Adam Kendall, "Klad in White Hoods and Aprons," a paper given at the International Conference on the History of Freemasonry in Edinburgh, July 2009. For text of Randell's condemnation see *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Texas* (Waco, 1921), 41–47.

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that the KKK is in the mire, which it will surely be, in the end, it is plain to see that masonry will have gained no admirers by allowing its fair name to become so closely associated with the KKK.[37]

That was not to say that McCullough ignored the threat posed by the Klan. One concrete way in which the Grand Lodge attempted to show its disapproval and disdain for the Klan was by refusing to allow the Invisible Empire to rent premises from the order. This gave rise to an episode that illustrates the growing animosity between the two organizations in Kansas and shows how different the operating tactics of both organizations were and the way in which they regarded each other.

In 1924, in keeping with its self-appointed role as guardian of the nation's morals, the Klan launched one of its periodic local purges on minor law infringements in the northwestern suburb of Kansas City, Shawnee. This highly advertised "cleanup campaign" targeted speeding motorists, dice players, teenage petting parties and bootlegging in particular. It hoped to achieve an improvement in public morals by publishing in local papers the names of those caught. Unfortunately, among those netted and publically shamed were several leading Masons of Shawnee Lodge 54 and members of their families, including the senior Mason, a certain "Brother Bartleson." The vigilantes refused to disappear the charges in the name of "fraternal goodwill" and instead went ahead and published the names. Shortly after the public exposé of these Masons, the Master of the Shawnee, Brother Miller, introduced a policy of refusing to allow Klan meetings to be held in the Lodge buildings in the town. Ever sensitive to such snubs, the Klan argued that since the Eastern Star and Rebeccas, as well as the Odd Fellows, were still allowed to hold their usual meetings, this was simply retaliation for the vigilance and incorruptibility of the Klan. The ill-feeling festered and Klansmen waited for a chance to get their revenge.

They found this opportunity with another Shawnee Mason's misbehaviour. In March 1927, Brother Paul N. Williams, a former Master of Shawnee Lodge 54, was reported to Kansas's Grand Master for "un-Masonic conduct." He was – the charges maintained – a married man with "a lovely wife and two sweet daughters and an attractive home." He was accused by other members of his Lodge of "running around with women" other than his wife. When confronted, Williams did not deny the charges, but agreed in future "to conduct himself like a Mason." Nevertheless, within weeks he was caught driving around and entering a hotel room with a woman who was not his wife, not just once, but several times. His behaviour divided the Lodge.[38]

[37] J. McCullough to J. S. Henderson, 28 March 1922.

[38] Taken from a letter from Shawnee Lodge 54 Master Fred A. Mitchell, to Kansas Grand Master Charles N. Fowler, 31 March 1927.

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Some Masons of the Lodge, "a quiet majority," supported Williams, claiming that "regardless of what he had done in the past . . . [he was] doing right in the present." Besides, a spokesman felt that it was un-Masonic to hound a man in the way that Williams was being treated. He asked the Grand Master, "Is it Christ-like and Masonic to persecute a man for past wrongs?"[39] Another defender of Williams, a Brother Larson, was more pragmatic, claiming that since Williams's mistress was not the wife of a brother Mason, it meant that the whole affair was of no concern to the order. On the other hand there was a vociferous group who condemned Williams, and demanded that the Grand Lodge hold a trial. They argued that the man was a serial philanderer whose behaviour and morals were totally incompatible with the ideals of Masonry, by which he had sworn to abide. This group sent a petition for a Masonic trial to the Grand Master. The first of the 39 signatures on the petition belonged to Shawnee Lodge 54 Master, Fred A. Mitchell.

Closer examination of Williams's defenders, most notably Bartleson, Larson and another Brother called Cox, reveals that they had frequently made accusations that the Lodge was riddled with Klansmen. They claimed that the charges made against Williams were made simply because the petitioners were "all Kluxers" and were motivated simply by a spirit of "revenge and insult."[40] According to reports made by Mitchell to Kansas Grand Master Charles N. Fowler, they had "risen in Lodge on different occasions and 'damned' the Klan and various individuals" they saw as Klansmen. Mitchell wrote to a sympathetic Fowler concluding that Bartleson, Larson and Cox's aggressive and "unharmonious" behaviour was far more dangerous to Masonry than any Klan activity.[41] The ensuing "disharmony" became increasingly apparent and unbearable to all parties and Mitchell's correspondence with the Grand Lodge became increasingly acrimonious, eventually reaching the point where Fowler was forced to act decisively. He suspended the charter of Shawnee Lodge 54 and in April 1928 the Lodge's property was handed over to a holding company and subsequently sold.

It is rather difficult to ascertain the exact role of the Klan in the demise of Shawnee Lodge 54, especially since much of this correspondence is missing.[42] Nevertheless, incomplete as the account is, the episode serves to show the increasing divisions within Masonry with regard to the so-called Invisible Empire. Fowler's apparent change of heart regarding the Klan is informative.

[39] Taken from a letter from Brother M. W. Bartleson to Grand Master C. N. Fowler, 19 May 1927.

[40] M. W. Bartleson to Grand Master C. N. Fowler, 19 May 1927.

[41] Fred A. Mitchell to Kansas Grand Master Charles N. Fowler, 31 March 1927.

[42] The correspondence is frustratingly incomplete. Most annoying is the absence of a letter in which Mitchell insults Fowler, the event which arguably caused the rupture which led to the suspension of the Shawnee charter.

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This was a time when the prodigious growth of the Klan was dropping off and stories were emerging in newspapers all over the nation, detailing the immoral and illegal practices of the KKK. At the time the Shawnee Lodge was being infiltrated, the nation was reading of the antics of the disgraced Grand Dragon of Indiana, David Stephenson. The nation's newspapers were full of detailed reports of his notorious "Black Notes" – promissory letters, essentially swearing to silence his near ubiquitous placemen at all levels of Indiana politics. They revealed his "rumor mill," a bank of women charged with creating and spreading mischievous stories about his opponents. There were accounts of his drinking, his womanizing and his corruption.

With newspapers full of Stephenson's less savoury practices and editors spending increasing time turning up other Klan outrages, it is not difficult to imagine why Fowler acted to dissociate the Masons from the Klan or why at least some of Williams's claims of smearing may have been true – or at least appeared believable. Added to this it would also have been galling for a well-established organization like the Masons to have the private lives of its members opened to scrutiny by members of another body – especially when that body was so much more effective at maintaining the privacy which seemed to be ebbing away from the Craft. To its detractors the Klan was a commercially driven impostor whose activities, especially in the political world, threatened to damage all fraternities.

In many ways the Klan's relationship with Masonry was, if not parasitical, then certainly symbiotic and equally certainly essential to its survival and expansion in Kansas. The Klan not only utilized the structures of Freemasonry, but it also increasingly required the sanction of Masons – both individually and collectively. To some extent this was simply because Masonry was a powerful organization led by powerful men. Masons held influential positions at all levels of Kansas society and any institution would do well not to aggravate such an organization. The Klan's history in the Sunflower State illustrates this clearly. It had met concerted opposition nearly as soon as it entered Kansas, and at the forefront of this opposition was the Governor of the state. He had been a Mason since 1913. He was a member of Albert Pike (Wichita) Lodge 303, a Thirty-Second Degree Scottish Rite Mason, a Knight Templar and a member of the Midian Temple, Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, Wichita.

Henry Justin Allen had edited the *Wichita Beacon* since 1907, espousing a pragmatic brand of the then fashionable Progressivism. After having served his country in the Great War, he returned to stand for governor of Kansas in 1919. During his governorship he took a proactive but mediatory stance – based, he claimed, on the model of Mussolini in Italy – with regard to the state's seemingly incessant labor difficulties. This swiftly brought him into conflict with the Klan, who utilized the ongoing industrial strife as a seedbed

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for their anti-immigrant, antiblack, blue-collar agitation. Against him stood Charles H. McBrayer, the Ku Klux Klan's Grand Dragon of the Kansas Realm of the Invisible Empire, and a Mason of Cosmos (Kiowa) Lodge 278.

Given Allen's pragmatic and fundamentally conservative Progressivism, the Klan's demagoguery and aggressively simplistic politics must have been galling. Nevertheless Allen's battle with the Klan shows the difficulties facing opponents of the Invisible Empire. What was more, there was evidence that the Klan was involved in violence, especially in neighbouring Oklahoma, where its vigilante activities in 1922 alone had resulted in at least one flogging for every night of the year, as well as several murders and countless other brutalizations. The Klan was also outspoken in its hate-fuelled rhetoric, with diatribes against the Catholics and foreigners they claimed were corrupting the political system, selling booze and encouraging promiscuity. Klansmen openly ranted of Catholic conspiracies to put the Pope in the White House and reported tales of armies of Knights of Columbus stockpiling weapons to murder good Protestants in their beds. They condemned hordes of "the scum" of Europe entering America through Ellis Island and taking good American jobs, marrying Anglo-Saxon women and outbreeding the more restrained Nordics. Yet, in spite of this barrage of hate and constant reports of violence, membership of the organization, well-organized and driven by the huge profits available through its pyramid selling scheme, continued to grow among respectable Americans in the early 1920s. Mutating and adapting to the fears and prejudices of the various regions of the nation, it reached a peak by late 1924.

Opponents seemed powerless to halt its advance, since it wrapped itself in the Stars and Stripes and, when goaded, simply pleaded the First Amendment. Nevertheless, throughout 1922, Allen led a running battle with the Klan. In Kansas, the initial drives for membership took place with Kleagles arriving from Oklahoma and Missouri. They concentrated their efforts on the main cities as well as the rural southeast of the state. Kleagles from the Oklahoma Realm of the Invisible Empire were especially active in the oil regions south of Wichita, around Augusta, El Dorado and Douglass. Here they began to agitate and enlist members from among the increasingly disaffected workers who felt their jobs to be threatened by foreign labour willing to work longer hours for less money and in worse conditions than their native-born equivalents.

The situation came to a head in nearby Arkansas City, on the Oklahoma border. When Klansmen threatened to march in uniform in an attempt to intimidate black strikebreakers, Allen in turn threatened to mobilize troops. Finally, using measures already under debate in Michigan and the Klan's "home state" of Georgia, Allen then issued a proclamation banning masked parades under public-order legislation. When it appeared that the Klan complied with these measures, he announced the Kansas Klan was dead.

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In fact the Invisible Empire had merely become less visible. It had gone underground, seeking to boost its numbers and ride out the increasing tide of negative publicity following reports exposing violence and corruption in the Oklahoma and Texas Klans. In part the Kansas Kleagles aimed to achieve this through infiltration and utilization of existing structures, like the Masons. In part they simply employed subterfuge and used a variety of pseudonyms to conceal their true purpose. Klans went under names such as the "the Bourbon County Industrial Association" and "the Southwest Trade Association," simply biding their time before they felt strong enough to emerge in their true right. In June 1922, less than five months after Allen declared them dead, just over the border in Blackwell, Oklahoma, 2,500 Klansmen in full regalia celebrated the formation of the Arkansas City and Winfield Klaverns.[43] By the end of the year the Kansas Klan was claiming over 60,000 members. Allen was forced to revise his strategy.

At this point, the Klan's tangled connections with Masonry once more emerge. Allen declared the Klan's activities in Kansas illegal, since the Invisible Empire had not been chartered in the state. The Klan was now forced to enter into a drawn-out legal wrangle over what really was its true purpose as an organization. Initially, the Klan attempted to have itself recognized as an affiliated arm of a Georgia corporation – the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, which was rejected. They then tried to register as a charity, and when that, too, failed, they sought recognition as a fraternity. Although the Klan was still able to continue legally recruiting while in the limbo granted by appeal, by 1925 the Kansas Supreme Court reached the same conclusion as many Masons had held years before. They ruled that in spite of its donations to charities, its rituals and gatherings, its costumes and pageantry and loud protestations of fraternity, the Klan was neither a fraternal organization nor even a benevolent organization, but a commercial venture. As such, the Klan required a commercial charter, which the State Charter Board, dominated by anti-Klan figures, were not willing to give.

Nor is this semantic connection the only one which links the position of the Klan to Masons. Masonic ties were central to the whole structure of the case. It is indicative of the power of the Masons in 1920s Kansas that throughout these cases the Klan was represented by John S. Dean, a Mason, of Center Lodge 147 (Marion), and William Luther Wood, attorney for the Klan, a Mason of Wyandotte Lodge 3 (Kansas City). What was more, Klan Masons put forward the initial Charter proposal. Six of the original 1923 charter applicants were Masons, all from Kansas City, although, interestingly, all were only recent initiates. It is also some measure of the link between the

[43] See the *Arkansas City Traveler*, 3 June 1922.

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Invisible Empire and Freemasonry that when the charter applications failed, the Klan overtly turned to its Masonic connections. Pro-Klan Republican governor Ben S. Paulen, Master Mason of Constellation Lodge 95 and previous Kansas Grand Master, marshalled the Masonic State Senators, more specifically, Shriners, in the Kansas legislature. Openly debated as a Klan-sponsored bill, the Shriners were powerful enough in the upper house to get a measure through allowing the Klan to continue its activities in Kansas without a charter. Unfortunately for them, their influence did not extend to the lower house, and the Klan was obliged to return to its legal quest for a charter. The Kansas Realm of the Invisible Empire eventually came to an end as a legal entity with a refusal from the US Supreme Court in 1927 to grant the charter.

Considering the prominence and widespread nature of Masons in the Sunflower State, and given that there were some 120,000 Freemasons in the state in 1920, it may not be surprising that Masons were represented in the Klan. What is more surprising is that Masons openly attempted to push through pro-Klan legislation when the state's Grand Master was on record as being so hostile to the Klan. However, this whole quest for Klan recognition should not be written off purely as the behaviour of rogue Masons, acting outside the Craft for commercial gain, as their enemies claimed. In many ways the policies espoused by the Klan would not have been that far from the thinking of many Americans – whether Masons or "unenlightened." Many in Kansas and elsewhere felt that the Klan was a genuine force for positive reforms in the region. For example, the Klan backed a move to protect and support public schools, the 1923 Towner-Sterling Bill, which advocated a national education system with a national curriculum and a cabinet-level educational secretary – all of which would act against the parochial system.[44] Based on the reforms passed in Oregon ostensibly to protect the leaching of taxpayers' resources and the teaching of un-American doctrines, the Klan argued for a return to a mythical golden age. In a decade of rapid change, the Klan promoted a seductive image of a bygone era when scrubbed, rosy-cheeked, pioneers' children were educated in plain American virtues by the traditional polymath, a caring but strict school ma'am in the "Little Red Schoolhouse."

Some, at the time and since, have argued that this stance was taken simply to steal a march over, and provoke, the Klan's archenemy, the Catholics, by closing their parochial schools. There is much to back this accusation. Many throughout America – and not necessarily only within Masonry – had little love for Rome. They saw it as hierarchical in the extreme, immoral in its refusal to condemn alcohol in these years of Prohibition and fundamentally un-American. However, Masons argued that they had more reason than most to

[44] For details of the proposals see *Elemental School Journal*, 23, 9 (May 1923), 642–43.

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dislike Catholicism. Rome had set itself against the Craft – largely Protestant, freethinking and often condemnatory of the papacy from its origins – only decades after its inception in the early eighteenth century. The animosity had remained potent and as recently as 1913 the papacy had condemned Masonry as being incompatible with membership of the Roman Catholic Church.[45]

In the broader context, the Klan also fought for other traditional "American" virtues. The Klan was highly instrumental in the formulation and passage of Tennessee's Butler Act, which banned the teaching of "any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation" in state-funded schools, and precipitated the decade-defining Scopes Monkey Trial.[46] It sought the protection of American womanhood through its promotion of family values and attacks on immorality and impropriety. The New Jersey Klan even famously, and very controversially, gave an audience to the birth-control campaigner Margaret Sanger.[47] The Invisible Empire stood "four-square" for the preservation of the Anglo-Saxon race through controls on immigration. It was a vocal part of the powerful nativist coalition which steamrolled through the 1924 Immigration Act, slashing European and Asian immigrant numbers. Throughout the decade it continued to press for the exclusion of Mexican and other "less desirable" immigrants.[48] Klansmen were active in the enforcement of the "Noble Experiment" of Prohibition, seeking out bootleggers and smashing stills.

In Kansas, the Klan also made generous donations to striking railroad men, miners, oilmen and their families. It also made a great show of its vigilante activities, punishing lawbreakers and setting and enforcing moral standards for the community. The motivations attributed to such behavior varied. Some saw these actions as small-town American bigotry. They condemned the Klan leadership as rabble-rousers, eager to promote discord and division among the gullible and ill-educated simply to raise their membership figures, increasing their power and filling their wallets. Others felt it represented true, red-blooded, American, people power – the spirit which had created the nation, conquered the West and made the country the leading

[45] For details see Reid McInvale, "Roman Catholic Church Law Regarding Freemasonry," *Transactions of the Illinois Lodge of Research*, 8, 2 (Aug. 1997), 14.

[46] A good account of the context of the trial and Klan involvement in the evolution debate can be found in Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 11–31, 210.

[47] The best brief introduction to women and their activities and position in the Klan in the 1920s can be found in Kathleen Blee, "Women in the 1920's Ku Klux Klan Movement," *Feminist Studies*, 17, 1 (Spring 1991), 57–77.

[48] See Kristofer Allerfeldt, "'And We Got Here First': Albert Johnson, National Origins and Self-Interest in the Immigration Debates of the 1920s," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 45 (Jan. 2010), 7–26.

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economic power of the world. In many ways these animosities were reflected in the fraternal world as well. To its supporters, these elements made the Klan a modern, vibrant, active, American fraternity. To its detractors its direct-action approach went against the principles of fraternal organizations and made it a danger to all fraternities.

While the power of Masonic disapproval should not be seen as the central theme of the Klan's failure to establish itself in Kansas, it does give some valuable lessons. At its most basic level this study shows that the Klan was very much of its time, drawing members as a result of its concern with both national and local issues. By shifting the emphasis to fraternalism, this form of study adds to our understanding of who joined the Klan, how they were recruited and how membership was regarded. It demonstrates several themes inherent in the ideals of fraternity – especially those of ritualized initiation and a sense of belonging which was so important in a mobile and fluid society like that of 1920s Kansas. However, perhaps in keeping with one strand of the times, it also demonstrates that in spite of fraternal vows, aspirations towards higher motives and collective morality, the individual conscience is frequently overtaken by personal interests – even in the "tribalized" 1920s. At a rather more sophisticated level the Klan may be seen as a fraternity which fits well with a continuation of the power of the Victorian American lodge house as "moral policing institution," bastion of masculinity and school for ethical capitalism – taken to extremes.

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