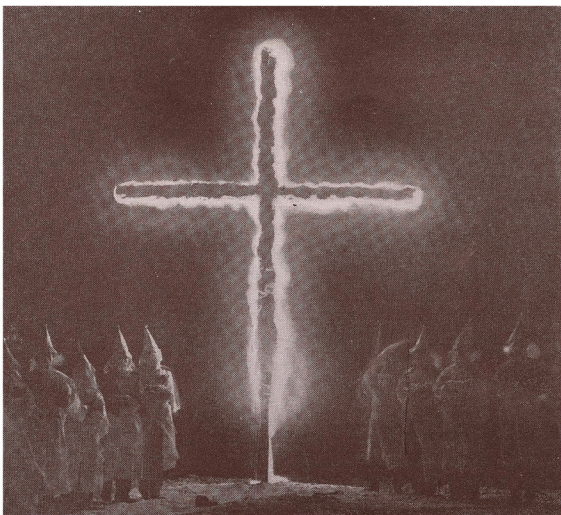


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FIERY CROSS, mark of assembly of Klansmen, once called "Ghouls" in guise of Confederate spirits

THE RECENT REPORT that Hugo Black, newest Justice of the United States Supreme Court, joined the Ku Klux Klan in 1926 and won the Democratic nomination to the United States Senate with Klan support, has revived the memory of one of the ugliest chapters in all American history.

Two of the ugliest chapters, one might perhaps say, for there were two Ku Klux Klans, separated by an interval of fifty years. But for the first of these secret organizations there was at least abundant excuse. It developed out of the desperate need of the white citizens of the South, immediately after the Civil War, to find some agency with which they could combat the oppressive rule of the carpet-baggers from the North and their Southern "scalawag" allies. The South was being treated with the contemptuous brutality with which a conqueror tramples upon a subject province; the government machinery was being cynically used to expropriate the white planters, enrich the new adventurers, and give the Negro population a swaggering freedom for which it was as yet quite unprepared.

When a group of ex-Confederate officers met in Pulaski, Tennessee, in 1866, and organized a secret society the name of which they adapted from the Greek word *kuklos* (meaning *circle*), their idea fell like seed upon a hospitable soil. Even Southern gentlemen of the finest fiber (remember Ashley Wilkes in *Gone with the Wind*?) donned the white hood of the Ku Klux Klan, burned the fiery cross, beat up hoodlums who had been burning cotton gins and assaulting white women, and generally terrorized the rowdies—black and white—who were denying them an opportunity to reestablish themselves as respected members of a lawful community.



HUGO BLACK, alleged Klansman, is opposed for Supreme Court seat.

The original Klan did not last long. It fell largely into the hands of adventurers whose irresponsible lawlessness gave it a bad repute; and after a few years the Southern whites had so far regained their local power that there was no longer any defensible pretext for such an extra-legal force. By 1872 the Klan was on its way out. For more than fifty years it was only a memory.

In 1915, however—after the World War had begun in Europe, but before the United States had entered it—a new Ku Klux Klan arose. On Thanksgiving night of 1915, William Joseph Simmons and thirty or forty of his friends gathered on the top of Stone Mountain, near Atlanta, Georgia, and took an oath of allegiance to the “Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.” Membership in the Klan was to be limited to Protestant, white, native Americans, but otherwise Simmons’ purposes seem to have been somewhat vague, and his organization remained small and unimportant until after the War. In 1920, however, it began to spread rapidly throughout the deep South.

What had happened was that the Klan had fallen into the hands of a publicity expert. Colonel Simmons had taken into the management with him Edward Young Clarke and Mrs. Elizabeth Tyler. Clarke had had a hand in conducting campaigns for such innocent causes as the Roosevelt Memorial Association and Near East Relief. A lot had been learned during the War about the technique of organizing “drives”—Food-Will-Win-the-War drives,

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AMERICAN in oath and ceremony, the Klan waved flags, swore to protect the weak and innocent, but branded its victims with hot pokers

Liberty Loan drives, and what not—and Clarke and Mrs. Tyler put the new technique to use.

They set up a well-disciplined organization to sell memberships in the Klan. They divided the country into Domains, which were subdivided into Realms. Simmons went by the title of Imperial Wizard; Clarke, as his chief organizer, became Imperial Kleagle; the Domains were put in charge of Grand Goblins, and the Realms in charge of King Kleagles. Local organizers were known as Kleagles. (There were other Klan functionaries with equally high-sounding and preposterous titles: Genii, Grand Titans and Furies, Exalted Cyclops, etc.) As for the commercial trimmings, it cost a man \$10 to join the Klan; of this amount the local Kleagle took \$4, his King Kleagle took \$1, the Grand Goblin higher up took 50 cents,

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KLAN UNIFORM of 1870. This one brown, others white, worn by various Klan groups—Knights of the White Camelia, Pale Faces, The Brotherhood



and \$4 was handed on to headquarters in Atlanta (of which the Imperial Kleagle apparently was allotted \$2.50). In short, the pickings were good all along the line. It was well worth one's while to become a Kleagle and sign up new members. And as for the men at the top, their winnings were potentially tremendous, even without taking into account the possible profits of the Gate City Manufacturing Company, which sold uniform robes at \$6.50 apiece.

BUT the Klan could never have grown to immense size and power if the time had not been ripe for it. The demobilization of the army after the War had brought back to the South large numbers of Negro soldiers who, having fought for democracy, were inclined (not unnaturally) to think themselves as good as anybody else. The Klan appealed to Southern whites—and especially to the poorer and more ignorant whites—chiefly as a guarantor of white supremacy, a means of teaching the Negro population its place.

It also offered an outlet for the curious angry unrest which was the peculiar mood of the post-War years. The War had worked

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up the fighting spirit of the country; the armistice, coming before this spirit was spent, had deprived people of an enemy to fight; and they became ready and willing to hear of some new enemy—preferably an enemy that looked foreign—against which they could take up arms. The Klan was anti-Catholic, anti-Jewish, anti-alien, as well as anti-Negro: it appealed to all that was bigoted and ignorant and suspicious in small-town and rural Protestant America. It was easy to convince an uneducated Georgia Baptist that hard times that came in 1821, when post-War inflation broke down, were the result of machinations by Catholics and Jews. Easy to convince a lunch-counter proprietor whose business was being taken away from him by a Greek restaurant that he should join a society of red-blooded Americans who would put the fear of God into such alien enemies and send them back where they belonged. Whatever was foreign-looking made a scapegoat, as Hitler has learned.

THE KLAN also appealed to natural-born joiners. One young man in Chattanooga became a Kleagle of the Klan after having joined the Masons, the Knights of Pythias, the Odd Fellows, the Red Men, the Junior Order of United American Mechanics, the Royal Arcanum, the Woodmen, the Elks, the Eagles, and the Owls. To him at first it was just one more lodge, and potentially the most romantic and exciting of the lot. The ritual and regalia of the Klan, the hocus-pocus of pompous names, the delight of putting on a white robe and uttering a sacred password and meeting with other robed and hooded men on a windy hilltop at night and engaging in deeds of mysterious valor—even if the deeds consisted only of tarring and feathering a black youth whom some hysterical white girl had accused of making advances to her, or of flogging a Jewish merchant—gratified the undying eleven-year-old spirit in thousands of mature men.

Add to these attractions the fact that from our colonial days through our pioneer days down to the present, Americans have had a tendency to take the law into their own hands and short-cut the slow processes of legal justice, and one can well understand how it was that, with good salesmanship behind it, the Ku Klux Klan invaded the West and North.

In 1921 the Klan was exposed by the *New York World* and investigated by Congress, but this did little more than to bring about the retirement of Simmons and Clarke and the installation as Imperial Wizard of a Texas dentist named Hiram Wesley Evans. For six years it remained a national portent.

AN APPALLING number of tarrings and featherings, kidnapings, and floggings were attributed to it. For how many of

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these outrages the Klan was actually responsible, no one could tell; for if one had a private grudge to satisfy, it was all too easy to beat up one's neighbor, leave him half-dead with a KKK label attached to him, and depart in the assurance that the law would be too frightened to investigate. The Klan ruined by boycott hundreds of businesses whose proprietors could not or would not put in their windows the TWK sign (Trade with Klansmen). Spreading west and north, it took on a wide variety of forms. There were lonely communities in which it became virtually the only respected agency for maintaining order. There were others where it became a weapon in the hands of crooks and gangsters. In California it was largely anti-Japanese; in Oregon, anti-Catholic; elsewhere it might be chiefly anti-Jewish or anti-liberal; it suited its hates to the local market. For a time it dominated ominously the state governments of Oregon, Oklahoma, Texas, Arkansas, Indiana, Ohio, and California. Alabamans say today that in the middle 1920's, when Hugo Black is alleged to have joined the Klan, it was almost impossible for an Alabama politician to win election without Klan support. Its total national membership in those days has been estimated at four or five millions, though the actual figures were probably much smaller.

Yet by the end of the 1920's the Klan had almost disappeared. What killed it? The waning of the post-War angers; rising prosperity; sober second thought, probably, on the part of those who had joined the Klan from unselfish if ignorant motives and were dismayed to find it coming under the grip of local thugs and swindlers; the natural inertia which weakens such organizations after the first frenzy of activity; and, presumably, a shamefaced inability to stomach any longer its infantile mumbo-jumbo. When the depression came along, the dues-paying membership shrank to almost nothing.



IMPERIAL WIZARD of the Ku Klux Klan, Hiram W. Evans, is anti-Jew, anti-Catholic, anti-Negro

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In 1934 and 1935, when the worst of the depression had passed and a mood somewhat similar to the post-War disillusionment came over the country, there were reports from Georgia that Dr. Evans and others were trying to bring the Klan back to life, this time as a bulwark against—you've guessed it—communism. Klansmen were charged with having been connected with the murderous tarring of Joseph Shoemaker at Tampa, Florida. But the revival was feeble. There were other organizations of humbler Americans of the middle class: there was the Townsend Plan, there was Huey Long's Share-the-Wealth movement, there was Father Coughlin's party, there were the Silver Shirts and a host of semifascist defenders of this and that, and in Michigan there was the notorious Black Legion.

WILL some other Klan arise, one of these days, and sweep America into a native form of fascism? Perhaps, for we are a lawless and impatient people, tolerance comes hard to many of us, we have millions of people living in dire want, and our economic problems are of such immense size and complexity that the spellbinder who can provide a scapegoat to be punished, or a flag-draped panacea to be adopted, can collect hundreds of thousands of witless followers. Our best protection—and it may be enough—is that we have a rebellious humor. Kleagles and Grand Goblins may make terrifying headway among us for a time—but in due course that laughter which is the beginning of wisdom is likely to begin.—*Frederick Lewis Allen*

THE LITERARY DIGEST