THE FAILED CRUSADE: THE KU KLUX KLAN AND PUBLIC EDUCATION REFORM IN THE 1920s

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Scores of books and academic papers have been written on the history of the Ku Klux Klan. While there are currently a handful of organizations that claim the Klan name and make up a largely diffuse network of white supremacist hate groups, millions of Americans possess vivid memories of the civil rights era Klan that disenfranchised and terrorized southern African Americans and their supporters. Therefore, one might ask why any further analysis of the history of this group is necessary. While volumes have been written on the various phases of this group, first founded in the aftermath of the Civil War, what has largely been ignored is the Klan’s involvement in public education reform during the 1920s.

Exploration of this topic is relevant for the following reasons. As mentioned, while there is a great deal of existing information concerning the Klan as a whole, the subject of the Klan’s involvement in public education has been ignored until quite recently. While the first iteration of the Klan evolved (or rather devolved) from a fraternal order into a terrorist organization, and the post-Second World War Klan followed suit, the so-called second wave Klan of the 1920s was quite different in a few significant respects. In the aftermath of the First World War, the United States entered a “New Era” defined by great change on a number of fronts. Americans of
various political stripes grappled with the consequences of interrelated issues of rapid industrialization and technological development, increased urbanization, immigration, prohibition, women’s suffrage and women’s rights, and a perceived laxity of public morals. In this tumultuous environment, the second iteration of the Ku Klux Klan (founded by William J. Simmons in 1915) appealed to millions of Americans by positioning itself as a group of steadfast moral reformers. During the tenure of Ku Klux Klan Grand Wizard Hiram Wesley Evans, a linchpin of the Klan’s philosophy of moral reform was the promotion and reform of public education.

The study of the Klan’s involvement in public education reveals an organization that skillfully used the media and the political arena to appeal to the hearts and minds of average Americans, thereby achieving nationwide appeal among the mainstream of American society and attracting members and sympathizers from across the socioeconomic strata. The fact that this appeal was so successful, albeit temporary, reveals the prejudices and fears of Americans of that era.

A case study that illustrates the manner in which the Klan sought to influence or control public education is that of Akron, Ohio, in the 1920s. In this era, when the Klan was at the height of its power with over 6 million members nationwide, the largest Klan chapter in the United States was the Summit County Klavern, based in Akron, Ohio. With over 53,000 members, the men of the Summit County Klavern equaled over one quarter of the booming industrial city’s population. The Klan boasted members throughout the corridors of power in Summit County, with members in the mayor’s office, judgeships, the police department, county sheriff, and local National Guard unit.
What was arguably their greatest political achievement was their brief takeover of the Akron Public School Board.\(^1\)

Having said this, the takeover of the school board was not only short-lived, but furthermore, produced no lasting results. Study of other Klan chapters throughout the United States during this period reveals an organization that attempted great reforms in educational policy on both local and national levels that ultimately failed in both respects. In placing the case study of Akron within the larger context of the Klan’s efforts throughout the United States during this time period, it becomes evident that the Klan’s brief success and ultimate failure to achieve lasting change in Akron is in many ways a microcosm that provides a better understanding of national events.

In this thesis, I examine the following questions. In Chapter II, I explore the Klan’s entry into the arena of public education reform in the 1920s. I investigate the reasons that organization involved itself in this matter, and the methods it employed in doing so. Chapter III is a brief overview of the Klan’s involvement in Ohio politics and the state’s policies governing public education.

In Chapter IV, I provide information concerning the case study of the Klan’s involvement in Akron, Ohio, specifically their brief takeover of the Akron Public School Board. I analyze the demographics and culture of the city at that time, and examine why the Klan was able to exploit existing issues and tensions in the city, and how they did so.

In Chapter V, I examine the actual ways that the Klan implemented the promotion of public education by investigating their activities in various locales throughout the United States as well as in Canada. This involved the drive to oust non-Protestant
teachers or administrators, influence or control school curriculums as well as the direct
takeover of public school boards. I will compare the ways in which these various cases
are similar or differ from that of the Klan’s brief takeover of the school board of Akron,
Ohio.

As the following chapters illustrate, the overriding philosophy that served as the
Klan’s raison d’etre as well as informing the Klan’s association in public education
involved was the belief that not only should public morals be defended and preserved, but
specifically that the solution to America’s problems was rooted in maintaining the long
established Protestant hegemony.
CHAPTER II

THE KU KLUX KLAN AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

As the Klan spread across America, it was dedicated to preserving what it considered the rightful heritage of America, specifically the nation’s white, Protestant heritage. This perceived heritage informed their commitment to the public schools, specifically their commitment to preserving the Bible in the public schools. This effort was not only an attempt to preserve a perceived Protestant heritage out of a sense of respect for history, but rather to maintain Protestant hegemony in order to influence society in the present.\(^2\)

While the second wave Klan’s founder William J. Simmons’ administration of the Klan featured a few fumbling attempts concerning education as a tool to gain favor with the public and further disseminate its message, educational reform became a linchpin of the philosophy of Simmons’ successor, Hiram Wesley Evans. In 1922, Evans, a Houston dentist executed a successful coup that ousted Simmons as Imperial Wizard. Ironically, Simmons who had championed the values of temperance and sobriety, was alleged to be a drunkard, and many of the Klan’s rank and file membership had grown weary of Simmons’ perceived inaction and lack of vision concerning the future of the organization, and thus welcomed Evans as the new Grand Dragon. During Evans’ tenure, the Klan
began to exert greater influence over state and local policy. This era was also marked by Evans’ successful efforts to expand the organization to all areas of the United States, as opposed to being limited to the south. Evans explicitly made known his desire for the promotion of public education.³

Evans was quite savvy in formulating his new program for education reform, in that he created a program that was somewhat general in scope, yet simple and specific. His program was comprehensive, in that he posited a large scale, federal governmental solution while he simultaneously detailed implantation of effective programs at the state and local levels, such as local Klaverns distributing Bibles and American flags to public schools.

Evans’ programs based on the idea of educational reform being synonymous with social and moral reform were well within the mainstream of American sociopolitical discourse of the era. Evans’ conception of education reform was part of a long tradition within mainstream American intellectualism dating back to the mid-nineteenth century, in which reformers perceived proper education as a panacea that would cure all of an ailing society’s ills. Education scholar William J. Reese asserted that, “reformers agreed that the public schools stood as the antidote to crime, the defense of republicanism, and a bulwark against atheism, socialism, and alien ideologies that threatened private property and public morals.”⁴ Historian David Tyack notes that “educators were largely optimistic in facing the unprecedented task of assimilating the millions of immigrants.” Tyack insists that, “the great majority of administrators and teachers were probably ethnocentric, proud of American middle class standards, and confident that schooling
could change the many into one people, *e pluribus unum.*” In 1902, John Buchanan asserted, “education will solve every problem of our national life, even that of assimilation of our foreign element.” Buchanan further stressed that, “Ignorance is the mother of anarchy, poverty and crime. The nation has a right to demand intelligence and virtue of every citizen and to obtain these by force if necessary.”

While ample evidence of Evans’ explicit support of educational reform exists, historians from the 1960s through the 1990s barely mention it. In *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*, David Mark Chalmers provides a fairly thorough overview of the Klan through the 1960s, yet he fails to mention their involvement in educational reform. The earliest source that mentions the Klan’s role in public education is Kenneth T. Jackson’s 1967 work, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930*. Jackson devotes several pages to the Klan’s ultimately unsuccessful efforts to ban Catholic Schools in Oregon, which led to the landmark “Pierce Case” in which the United States Supreme Court ruled that discriminatory practices attempting to ban the operation of parochial schools as well as discriminatory hiring practices in public schools based on the religion of current or prospective employees were all unconstitutional. Jackson allots a few paragraphs to Akron, noting that the focus of the Summit County Klavern’s efforts was on promoting and influencing public schools.6 The next significant overview of the history of the Ku Klux Klan is Wyn Craig Wade’s 1987 work, *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America*. Wade, much like Chalmers, thoroughly details the Klan’s efforts toward promoting social reform and makes only passing reference to the Klan’s involvement in public schools, in that he makes a few brief mentions of the Klan’s
negative reaction to the outcome of the so-called Scopes Monkey Trial. During a few short pages, Wade writes that the Klan soon realized that outlawing the teaching of evolution in schools was not an achievable goal, and instead focused on distributing Bibles in public schools.  

In contrast to the aforementioned scholars, Adam Laats stands at the forefront of a new trend in scholarship that reexamines the preponderance of existing evidence illustrating the Klan’s promotion of educational reform. In his 2012 article, “Red Schoolhouse, Burning Cross: The Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s and Educational Reform,” Laats notes that a scholarly focus on this area of study has long been lacking. He posits that Grand Wizard Evans realized that promoting public education would help make the Klan part of the mainstream of political and social discourse, and continues by explaining that Evans was able to achieve limited success concerning this goal. Laats does so by providing evidence that the idea of public education as a curative for a myriad of putative social ills was a long standing notion in mainstream American thought. Laats examines the manner in which the Klan pursued said goals by citing various local studies of Klan chapters, noting that while there was largely a unity of vision among local chapters in that they tacitly agreed with Evan’s philosophy, there was also great autonomy, wherein local chapters could pursue the stated aims of the national leadership in the individual ways in which they deemed fit. Laats, like other scholars, fails to mention Akron, yet the findings contained within studies that concern the inner workings of the Akron Klan, such as Ronald Marec’s “The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in Ohio, 1920-1930”
John Lee Maples “The Akron, Ohio Ku Klux Klan: 1921-1928” seem to concur with the findings of Laats.⁹

Laats asserts that Grand Dragon Evans’ reason for pursuing such reform was that he “hoped to establish the organization as a mainstream, respectable political interest group. There was great public support for restrictive immigration legislation and more effective Prohibition enforcement and Evans hoped to use these issues as well as education reform to establish the mainstream political credentials of the Klan.”⁹ Laats also asserts that Evans not only used the issue of education reform as a means of garnering mainstream acceptance for the Klan, but that Evans also was a sincere believer in public education being a panacea for a myriad of social ills. For years, the Klan had railed against perceived social problems including “the perceived menace from immigration, degradation of Constitutional traditions, loosening grip of white supremacy, and general increase in aggressive public immorality.”¹¹ For this reason, Evans began to take steps to ensure that his organization would no longer merely espouse rhetoric in support of education reform, but rather, he would formulate an explicit program promoting educational reform. Evans believed that this plan would be good for both his organization as well as for society, in that it would help unite his disparate organization in providing it with a unified, national identity while simultaneously providing a remedy to many of society’s problems.

Evans focused on national level reform, when in June 1923, he supported the Smith-Towner Bill, drafted to create a federal department of education.¹² The purpose of this bill was to “reduce illiteracy, increase teacher training and pay, and increase
Americanization efforts in public schools.”\textsuperscript{13} Evans revealed one of the ways in which his philosophy in guiding the Klan, a far right organization, differed from that of conservatives who favored local solutions and fiscal conservatism was his supposed willingness to support not only federal solutions to local problems but an attendant willingness to fund such programs through increased taxation. Evans stressed that, “One of the principal duties of the Klan today is to build up a great free educational system. Fifty percent of our taxes should go towards education instead of only five per cent. Go home and talk education among the Klansmen and soon your representatives in congress will see the light and will be voting to make America the best educated country on earth so that through education our children and our children’s children can care for themselves and be of value to their state.”\textsuperscript{14}

A survey of the history of educational reform reveals that Evans was not an original thinker positing original thoughts, but rather, he merely adopted plans that National Education Association (NEA) president George Strayer had conceived some five years earlier. Thus, many of Strayer’s reasons for establishing such a department jibe with the rhetoric of Evans and the Klan leadership. Strayer hoped to eliminate illiteracy, and claimed that much of the reason for illiteracy as well as other social problems was due to a culture populated by those who spoke in foreign tongues, and therefore espoused “foreign” ideas (read \textit{immigrants}). Strayer asserted, “Schools in which children are taught in a foreign tongues, have been centres for the perpetuation of ideals foreign to our system of government.” Strayer further insisted that in order to maintain America’s “free institutions,” America would, need a national system of education which will provide for
the complete Americanization of millions of foreigners.” Evans agreed, insisting, “There
is but one unfailing defense against every kind of alienism in America; it lies in adequate,
democratic, public school education.”\footnote{15}

In 1918, under the auspices of the NEA, Strayer, in conjunction with W. C.
Bagley of Teacher’s College at Columbia University and Elwood Cubberley of Stanford
University, issued a statement concerning a putative crisis in America, titled the
“National Emergency in Education.” In the essay, Strayer and company asserted that,
“eighty per cent of the rural–school teachers this year are boys and girls fresh from the
eighth grade of the common schools.”\footnote{16}The essay continues by reasserting previous
statements by Strayer, stating, “Vast elements of our immigrant population are
unassimilated to our ideals and institutions.” He insisted that these immigrants were,
“nurtured on alien ideals.”\footnote{17}As a solution to these supposed problems, the panel
recommended that “states accept the principle of compulsory attendance to the age of
eighteen.”\footnote{18}These notions once again jibed with the rhetoric of Evans, who concurred,
“we must have a compulsory educational system to reach and uplift every future
citizen.”\footnote{19}

When Evans communicated to Klan members, he often used language that was
evangelical in tone, establishing that not only was the Klan’s program an earthly one, but
more importantly, was part of a divinely ordained mission. Evans affirmed, “The greatest
duty of America today is to build up its educational system.” He stressed, “You must see
that some sentiment is created for education.” Evans asserted that, “Any lesser program
would be unworthy of a Holy Cause so far blessed with the support of Almighty God.”\footnote{20}
Evans stressed what he perceived to be the extreme gravity of the Klan’s undertaking, “The first and most important duty of a nation is the training of its boys and girls for economic, civic and social life.”21 On another occasion, Evans asserted, “The greatest necessity is that we save, enlarge, and broaden our great free public schools system.” When speaking to an immense gathering of Klan leadership in Ohio, he again stressed that the Klansman was burdened with a great duty to serve America, stating, “No greater duty nor greater responsibility could be accepted by any group than the furtherance of these principles and the development of an educational program of enlightenment to all America.”22 In 1924, Evans insisted, “The Klan stands first, last, and all time for the public school system, functioning at its maximum. There is no organization with a greater educational program.”23 In language lifted almost verbatim from NEA literature, Evans promised that if adopted, the Klan’s enlightened program “will mark the beginning of a rising tide of common intelligence, health, and virtue among both the native and adopted sons and daughters of America.”24 Evans spoke of a utopia reminiscent of the language of Isaiah 11:6, featuring the lion lying down peacefully next to the lamb, promising that the Klan’s reform efforts would create a world wherein ”all our humanity might live in harmony” He added that, “factionalism and strife will disappear.” His stated plan for implementing this miraculous state of affairs was the promulgation of “a nation-wide propaganda for more and better public schools, imbibing the lessons of patriotism from properly taught history of Christianity from the great source-book of our faith, the Bible.”25
The viewpoint that public education not only could but should be an antidote to a myriad of putative social problems was shared not only by Klan leaders and leading academics but also by prominent voices in the media. Some media commentators not only posited that morals should be transmitted through the powerful vehicle of public education, but furthermore agreed with Evans that the word of God as explicitly communicated through the Bible was the necessary means of transmission.

One such voice was Mrs. J. W. Northrup of The New Age, who maintained that the public schools were “dear to all Americans,” due to the fact that it was the place, “Where tiny minds began to soar, where great men and great women of this country first learn the alphabet that leads to fame.” Northrup’s criticism of the modern public school focused on the putative lack of God in the classroom. Northrup asserted, “Any intelligent Protestant knows when you educate a man to believe he can be saved without the living God, that he is not a true American citizen, for it is impossible to be true to this country and at the same time believe that his existence on earth and in eternity depends upon a foreign mortal. Americans arouse yourselves; don’t be cowards, for God hates nothing worse than cowardice.”

Northrup’s vitriolic piece was reprinted in the Klan’s newspaper, the Night-Hawk. The Klan echoed the concerns of scores of Protestant Americans and positioned itself as soldiers on the front line to preserve the supposedly threatened ideals of white, Protestant America. Thus, the way that the Klan communicated this solidarity with scores of everyday Americans as well as voices sympathetic to them in the mainstream media was
to disseminate their message through their print publications, including the *Klan Kourier* magazine, and the *Nighthawk* newspaper.  

According to one *Kourier* author, “The condition that existed in the early history of the Nation forced our forefathers to the conclusion that something must be done to unify the ideals of the people.” The writer claimed that America’s forefathers first established public schools in order to preserve the common language and the values it represents, “so that the children of the rich and poor alike might have the same opportunity by being placed on a common level and so counteract that inequality with which birth or fortune otherwise produce.” The writer establishes that the values ensconced by the establishment of this institution “were clearly the fruits of the Protestant Reformation.” According to historian Kelly Baker, in the minds of many Protestants, including the aforementioned writers, a key factor that made Protestantism superior to Catholicism was that Protestantism emphasized a form of “personal salvation”, wherein each individual believer was to “work out” one’s personal salvation as opposed to merely conforming to the dogma of a central religious authority or fulfilling sacraments and rituals. Thus, the reading of God’s word the Bible was essential, so that, “one might know what the commands of god were and what was demanded of him.”  

Klan members believed that it was not just the duty of the Protestant churches to transmit such values, but also the responsibility of all Protestant believers to convey these values to *all* citizens regardless of ethnicity or religion, via the public schools. The writer posited that these values first clarified by the Protestant reformation were first brought to America by the nation’s Pilgrim forefathers, who “planned our public school system as
one of the foundation stones of our liberties and claimed the right of the state to educate her children,” thus making the public school an “institution so essential to the progress of her [America’s] progress and welfare.” 29

The author argued that the underlying Protestant philosophy that for generations had undergirded the public school was vital as a means to cultivate “effective manhood and womanhood and prepare for good, useful citizenship in the various duties and callings in life.” He went so far as to claim that, “the public schools of America have changed the mental equilibrium of the world,” crediting them with producing “our best men, our strongest patriots, our sweetest daughters and our most devoted mothers.” 30

To another anonymous writer for the Klan’s news organ, the central question was, “Are our children developing Christian character? Are the right principles being brought to bear in their lives?” 31 Another writer for the Kourier concurs as to the importance of such values, not just for Protestant families, but for the welfare of society in general. He stressed, “The life blood of the Nation pulses no less in the veins of the children of the elementary school age, than those of adult life which fill the places of leaders, and of the rank and file in business, industry, commerce and professions.” 32

These sentiments were echoed by Klan Grand Wizard Evans in a Kourier article, wherein he stated that children were, “the greatest asset to the state” and the “hope for a glorious national future.” He continued, “What nation shall be the greatest among the nations of the “New World” That nation shall be the greatest that puts children first in its thought, in its politics, in its economics, in its ethics.” 33
Evans furthermore used the organ of the *Kourier* to promote the Klan’s support of a bill to provide common school education to all children. While support of such a bill may seem to conform with much of the progressive agenda of the day, the Klan’s goal in doing so was to pursue Protestant hegemony. The goal, according to Evans, was, “equipping these future citizens with the proper material for successful co-operation of American children it he affairs of the country.” 34 Therefore, asserted Evans, “It is natural to assume that the Protestant children of the United States will receive proper attention and adequate tutors will be provided with funds supplied by federal authorities.” 35 According to historian, Kelly J. Baker, these little children were to become leaders, not on their own, but rather, they were to be groomed to be obedient, strong, patriotic, citizens. 36

Contributors to the *Kourier* agreed that the central component of inculcating morals in to the next generation of children was teaching the Bible, insisting such an education would “make good citizens and will best promote the interests of the institutions under which they live and for which they are responsible hereafter.” 37 Another *Kourier* article concurred, insisting, “If we would keep this land of the free we must extend Christian principles. Let us keep the Bible in schools.” 38

Another *Kourier* contributor who was a former educator stressed that the Bible was the “holy inspiration of the word of God to man as a guide so regarded by all denominations of Christians.” This anonymous author insisted that teaching concerning individual creeds and doctrines be left to instruction in the home failed to see why “one denomination alone objects to the reading of the Bible in the public schools.” The retired
teacher insisted that the Bible was not a sectarian book, but rather, a book that men had
placed sectarian theories upon. The retired teacher concurred with the Klan that the Bible
was “the foundation upon which civilization itself and National liberty are based; it is
more. It is the only guide that man has to lead him upward to God. Without it the future is
all darkness and the present all gloom. It is the ray of light emanating from the throne of
God that illuminates the destiny of man beyond the grave.” \(^{39}\)

Klan Grand Wizard Evans concurred with such sentiments, and cited none other
than nineteenth-century educational luminary Horace Mann as a prophet who realized the
importance of public education. Evans cited Mann, “the immortal sponsor and patron
saint of education in America, believed that national safety, prosperity and happiness
could all be attained through free public schools, open to all, good enough for all and
attended by all.” Evans believed public ills such as anarchy and crime could be cured by
the antidote of the free public school. Evans claimed the schools, “have not the
institutional standing to which they are entitled; they do not prevent illiteracy, not always
promote patriotism; too often they teach a divided allegiance.” \(^{40}\)

Klan advocate J. S. Fleming asserted, “Our enemies would bar Jesus Christ and
His Bible from our public schools, in order that we may forget them and thus enable
aliens to cunningly substitute the pope and his creed as our God and Guide.” Fleming
feared immigrants subverting “traditional” American culture. Fleming also stated,
“Subjects of the Roman Catholic government cannot avail themselves the benefits of our
American public schools on account of the contaminating influence of religious heresy
over their children.” Fleming not only feared what was taught in the Catholic parochial
schools, but also feared that the Bible was missing from such schools, “because it is
dangerous to the moral and religious welfare of the children of its subjects.” Fleming
perceived the central issue concerning the entire matter to be the government funding of
such schools. Thus, Fleming insisted the government, “cannot yet legally force loyal
Americans to pay for the training of children into a religious hatred of everything
American.” 41

According to a Christian missionary, writing in the Klan’s Kourier magazine,
“Evidently Rome believes that there is a radical difference between Catholic education
and that given by the civil government, else her leaders would not be so bitterly opposed
to the public schools.” This missionary insisted upon an “obvious” plot of Catholics to
take over the educational system. 42 He insisted that such students placed their
allegiances with “ecclesiastical law” as opposed to America’s “civil law.” asserting, “We
have only to wait until they have duly trained five or ten millions of their youth to find
ourselves worm-eaten with a close-knit constituency pleaded to a system of politics
which is entirely subversive of our liberties, usurping the state’s proper role in teaching
children, specifically, inculcating proper values, such as morals and patriotism. No
Protestant Church holds or teaches such anti-democratic and iniquitous doctrines.” 43

An opposing view was voiced in the Catholic magazine Our Sunday Visitor by
Jesuit writer T. L. Bouscaren, who asserted, “Americans have always been, and are still a
religious people. Even in the public schools, many of the most prominent teachers and
directors have been either ministers of religion or at least sincere and earnest Christians.
They would be shocked at the idea of regarding religion of Christ as something un-
American.” Bouscaren maintained that Catholics preferred Catholic schools for their children because they could be explicitly religious, and believed, “The public schools would be better and truly American if they included much needed religious instruction.”

The aforementioned illustrates that Grand Wizard Evans was indeed committed to an agenda of promoting education reform. What is not so clear is the manner in which Evans intended state and local chapters to carry out this mission. While the writings and speeches of Evans provide ample evidence of his vehement support of educational reform as well as federal legislation, what is lacking are any documents that explicitly express the exact manner in which Evans proposed that state and local chapters should promote educational reform. Having said that, a few key documents explicitly detailing the instructions of Ohio’s Grand Dragon Clyde Osborne to local Klavern leadership do exist.

One such document, originating from the state organization, addressed to local Klaverns provides detailed instructions on how to run these local chapters. Klavern leaders were admonished to establish various committees which were to act in cooperation with local bodies, such as churches and American Legion chapters. One such committee was the education committee, who existed to be active in the functioning of the public schools, helping them maintain “American” teachers, and to study public school textbooks to determine whether they contained “un-American” ideas. Klan members are notified that in contrast to the “pro-American” textbooks that were used in their youth, many contemporary textbooks may contain such “un-American” ideas.
Klavern leadership was also challenged to “work out snappy programs and keep your men interested.” Explicit advice is provided, urging the leaders to “Interspace these brief talks with brief, snappy articles from newspapers and periodicals, favorable and unfavorable to the Order.” Two of the key topics that Klan leadership were instructed to cover were the public school system and its benefits, its enemies and how they are fighting it, and the Towner-Sterling Bill.

Another document emanating from the national organization that spelled out the ideals of the organization to both the membership of the order as well as the general public was *The Ideals of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan*. In the tract, the writer explains the “One hundred percent American” ideals of the Klan, including those concerning educational reform. The document states that, “They [the Klan] magnify the Bible as the basis for the Constitution.” Thus, the reasons for the Klan distributing Bibles to public schools in Akron, as well as throughout other areas of the country becomes clearer. The Klan viewed the teaching of scripture as not only vital to moral instruction which would prevent or cure a myriad of social problems, they also viewed such scriptural instruction as a vital component of a student’s civics and history education. The tract makes clear that, “The free public school system is peculiarly American and must be protected against all enemies who would weaken or destroy it.”

In Ohio, as with the rest of the nation, not only did the Klan distribute pamphlets and publish speeches which helped disseminate their pro-educational reform rhetoric, they also sought to utilize the dominant media of their day which was the newspaper. As mentioned previously, while they definitely desired positive coverage in the major
newspapers of the time, the Klan also directly distributed its propaganda through its own newspapers. In Ohio, the Klan published *The Ohio Fiery Cross* which later became *The Klan Kourier*.

The Klan newspapers are full of references to the Klan fight for free public schools, and their struggle against the perceived enemies of this struggle. In “The Klansman’s Kreed,” published in *The Ohio Fiery Cross*, one of the key tenets of the creed reads, “I believe that our Free Public School is the cornerstone of good government and that those who are seeking to destroy it are enemies of our Republic and are unworthy of citizenship.” 47

Another article published in the paper is titled, “Plea for Public Schools Made in Atlantic Monthly.” The article corroborates the fact that the Klan’s support of public education was part of the mainstream of American social thought, as *The Atlantic Monthly* was long established as a moderate voice in American public discourse. The paper features a number of other articles which defend the public school while excoriating the supposedly corrupt Catholic parochial schools. One such article, “Keep the Schools Open,” deals with enforcing the compulsory school attendance law in Ohio.48 A few weeks later, *The Fiery Cross* published an article in which former police officer Margaret Osborne speaks to a group of the K.K.K. Women’s Auxiliary in which she asserts that the vast majority of illiterates and juvenile delinquents are products of parochial schools, and are not native-born whites. In the article, no attribution is provided for Osborne’s assertions.49 Another writing which covers the same ground is an installment of a recurring column “The One American School” written by Aryan Gebee.
Gebee stresses the importance of the public schools as a means of promoting citizenship and democracy for all young Americans, native and foreign born. Another article, “When Did You Visit the Schools?” admonishes parents to involve themselves in the public schools for the same reasons.  

In a July 11th issue of the Ohio edition of The Klan Kourier, the headline read, “President Coolidge Says He is in Favor of Proposed U.S. Department of Education.” The article reveals that not only does Coolidge have common cause with the Klan and other mainstream organizations, including the National Education Association, in supporting the proposed federal agency, but furthermore, Coolidge aligns with Klan ideology in asserting that the public schools must be an instrument for achieving education of all citizens, including foreigners not familiar with the English language and American ideals. Coolidge also continues to explain that America will only “become free economically, socially, politically, and spiritually” by having “limited our amount of immigration in order that the people who live here, whether of native or foreign origin, might continue to enjoy the economic advantages of ours. Any lowering of the standards of our existence that America might remain American.”

The above information illustrates that after Hiram Wesley Evans took over as Grand Wizard of the Klan in November 1922, the Klan began its wide-scale, national promotion of public education reform. Evans inherited a well-established organization with millions of members, including the chapter in Ohio, established during the tenure of second-wave Klan founder William Simmons.
CHAPTER III

THE KU KLUX KLAN IN OHIO

Much like in other parts of the nation, prevalent elements of the culture in Ohio provided a hospitable environment for the Klan to recruit. Not only did anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic sentiments exist in Ohio, the Klan was able to exploit these sentiments in order to vie for political influence in the state. The Klan claimed to have helped to elect a number of their members and philosophical allies to office. The Klan became known for selecting candidates who were already likely to win, and then taking credit for their election. Examples of this occurred in Toledo as well as Akron. 52 On the state level, the Klan decided to back Ohio gubernatorial candidate Vick Donahey, only after it was a foregone conclusion that Donahey was almost assured a victory. 53 These political victories enabled the Klan to enact “Blue Laws” involving Sunday retail, as well as an ordinance banning dancing in commercial dancing halls on Sunday. 54

While the Klan enjoyed a limited amount of success through these political channels, the hierarchy of the organization realized that it could achieve its goals through pursuing control of the realm of public education in Ohio. The same nativist, anti-Catholic sentiment that allowed for the Klan to recruit scores of members allowed the Klan to exert control in the realm of public education within Ohio. In 1919, the Ohio
Legislature passed the Ake Law, requiring that instruction in both public and private schools be conducted in English, with teaching the German language not permitted below high school. This prevailing nationalist, anti-foreign sentiment led to patriotic organizations such as the American Defense Society, Better America Federation, Key Men of America, and the United Flag Association. The Ohio Department of Education announced that patriotic organizations including the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Grand Army of the Republic, the American Legion, and the Ohio League of Women Voters would volunteer the services of their members to examine high school history textbooks in order to determine whether patriotism was being taught, or rather “un-American” values.

Thus, the Klan in Ohio pursued control of local school boards, with their one notable success being the brief takeover of the school board in Akron, Ohio, between 1923 and 1925. The greatest attempt of the state Klan organization to inject Protestant Christianity into Ohio’s public schools was their support of the Buchanan Bible Bill, named for its sponsor, state representative Ross F. Buchanan of Carroll County. The main provision of the bill called for the reading of at least ten Bible verses at the beginning of every school day in all Ohio schools, public and private. Other language of the bill required that all students memorize the Ten Commandments by the fourth grade, and that any teacher not complying with the program outlined in the bill be brought before a disciplinary board in order to make the teacher comply.

While many rural, fundamentalist groups supported the bill, the Klan led the charge by organizing a letter writing campaign to Ohio congressmen, imploring them to
support the bill.\textsuperscript{58} While the bill faced strong opposition from citizens of Ohio’s metropolitan areas, the bill was almost defeated due to a matter of parliamentary procedure. When one Mrs. C. J. Ott of Mahoning County asked for the body to vote to table a particular amendment, the supporters of the Buchanan Bill agreed, not realizing that such a motion would table the entire bill. Once the supporters realized this, they cried foul, claiming themselves as the victims of “political trickery and chicanery.” \textsuperscript{59} Thus, the bill’s supporters vowed that no other legislation be passed until the Buchanan be reconsidered. Ohio Klan Grand Dragon Clyde Osborn explained that tabling the bill stirred up a “lot of bad feeling,” and warned that its opponents would, “have to play ball” in order to pass any new legislation going forward. \textsuperscript{60} While opposition to the bill was expressed by representatives from around the entire state, the majority of the opposition emanated from Cuyahoga (Cleveland) and Hamilton (Cincinnati) counties. One can speculate that this was due to the fact that both of these urban centers and their surrounding areas were populated by large numbers of immigrant stock from Eastern Europe, who were mostly Roman Catholics. Also, these cities and their suburbs possessed minority Jewish populations who were almost non-existent in Ohio’s rural areas.

Republican state house floor leader Robert Taft opposed the mandatory clause in the bill, worrying that it would be, “a great calamity for this bill to pass as it is now written,” due to the fact that mandatory enforcement of the programs described within would violate both the state and federal constitutions. \textsuperscript{61}
In order for the bill to pass, it had to pass an 8-4 vote by the State Senate’s Educational Committee, with the bill’s opponents claiming passage of the bill would be a victory for the Ku Klux Klan. Some representatives suggested that an innocuous moral code, titled “In God We Trust,” could be substituted for mandatory Bible reading.

This substitute bill, termed the Clark-Buchanan Bill, was soon rejected in favor of the original Buchanan Bill. On March 27, 1925, spectators packed the Senate gallery, waiting seven hours until two a.m. for the bill to be considered. Joe R. Gardner of Cincinnati requested a five minute recess. After twenty minutes, the gathered supporters realized the Senate was now adjourned until April 16. Representative Joe Sieber led a conference of the bill’s advocates, wherein they sought to suspend the rules in order to return the measure to the floor of the Senate, but ultimately the group lacked the necessary votes.

During the three week period between sessions, a great deal of political lobbying occurred. A public utilities lobby desired to wrest employee control of the state’s utilities from the Ohio State Department of Commerce, instead delivering such rights to the State Public Utilities Commission. In order for this to occur, the public utilities lobby formed an unusual coalition with the Anti-Saloon League and their allies the Ku Klux Klan. Thus, the public utilities lobby lent its support to passage of the Buchanan Bill in exchange for support for their public utilities bill, leading to passage of the bill by a 21-14 margin upon the Senate’s reconvening.

It was assumed by all that Ohio governor Democrat Vic Donahey would veto the bill, due to the fact that he had done so with ten percent of the first batch of bills sent to
him. Therefore, the Senate’s Republicans would support the bill in order to push back at their adversary, “Veto Vic”, hoping that Donahey’s veto of the Republican supported bill would discredit the governor in the eyes of the Klan as well as rural and fundamentalist voters. Following Donahey’s veto of the bill, the Klan once again lobbied for passage of the bill the following year. When the bill was voted down by a margin of 11-67, the Klan vowed to fight all members of the legislature who opposed the bill. The Klan’s opposition to Donahey seemed to have little effect, as he went on to win a third term as governor.

While some Klansmen attempted to raise support for bills similar to the Buchanan Bill over the next few years, the defeat of the bill effectively marked the end of the Klan’s influence in public education in Ohio. By 1929, when the Klan petitioned Ohio politicians with literature proposing a so-called “Weaver Bible Bill,” the once influential hooded empire was just ignored.

While the Klan in Ohio ultimately failed to achieve any lasting legislative change on the state level, earlier in the decade, the Summit County Klavern, headquartered in Akron, Ohio, engineered a brief yet ultimately unsuccessful takeover of the Akron Public School Board. While the Klan claimed some amount of success in the political arena throughout Ohio, as well as the rest of the United States, and portions of Canada, a number of pre-existing demographic, cultural, and socioeconomic conditions made Akron an ideal site for Klan recruitment.
CHAPTER IV
THE KLAN IN AKRON, OHIO

In order to understand the place of Akron within the larger context of the Klans activities throughout the United States, it is best to begin by understanding the local context in which the Summit County Klavern was able to appeal to vast numbers of local citizens. The study of Akron reveals that while in many ways the activities of the Summit County Klavern and the environment in which it operated were similar to those of other Klan chapters throughout the United States, Akron was unique in some significant ways.

The relatively rapid rise of the Summit County Klan paralleled events in other areas. A persistent myth among the general public is that the Klan was mainly a southern phenomenon. While this was perhaps true during the Klan’s resurgence in the Civil Rights era of the 1950s and 1960s, during the height of the second wave Klan’s power during the 1920s, much of its greatest success was in urban areas in the north. Akron is a textbook example of this phenomenon. Like those cities, Akron proved to be fertile ground for Klan recruiters. Like Buffalo and Chicago, Akron in the last decade of the nineteenth century through the 1920s was a rapidly growing industrial center. For years, Akron was the fastest growing city in America. In parallel with Detroit’s rapidly growing automobile industry, Akron soon became the “Rubber Capital of the World” as home to
the main manufacturing plants and corporate headquarters of the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company, the B.F. Goodrich Tire and Rubber Company, as well as a number of smaller firms associated with rubber manufacturing. During this time, Akron also was home to the Quaker Oats Company. 69

As growing demand for rubber products spurred rapid increases in industrial production, demand for thousands of new workers grew as well. To fill this demand, the rubber industry actively recruited men from neighboring states in the Appalachian region. In 1910, Akron had a population of 69,097 people. By 1920, Akron’s population had increased to 208,435, with 5,580 residents being African American. During this same ten year time period, of the 140,000 new citizens, 70 percent of them were native born white, with another 30,000 being European born. Most of these native born white citizens were recent transplants from the south. 70

With this rapid northward migration came a number of social problems. Many of the recent transplants to Akron were single men, while many more were family men who had ventured north, first seeking stable employment and then seeking a stable residence to house their family members still residing in the south. Due to this vast influx of new residents, Akron suffered a severe housing shortage. Many families and individuals were forced to live in boarding homes. Others were not so lucky, finding shelter in basements, tents, garages, or renovated chicken coops. Many of the single men were relegated to sleeping in so-called hot beds. In this situation, home-owners would rent a “sleeping room” to two or three shift workers; as one worker rose to go to work, another was returning home for sleep. Several local companies constructed barn-like structures to
house hundreds of new labor recruits. This severe housing shortage provided the impetus for a construction boom, which in turn created more construction jobs, which created an even greater demand for housing in Akron. In the period of 1911 to 1920, more houses were built than had existed in the city before that time.  

These conditions helped foster an environment in which many putative social problems existed, thus providing a space for the Klan, alleged moral reformers, to recruit and seize power. In this environment, not only were there thousands upon thousands of single men with ample money to spend, but due to the aforementioned crowded conditions and lack of privacy, these men sought public gathering places to engage in various forms of entertainment and escape from the stresses of the work week. Akron was home to a number of twenty four hour restaurants and burlesque houses. From the early morning until late at night, a growing number of taverns catered to this growing male population. Paralleling the growth of the rubber industry, gambling and vice also became growing industries. In this bustling city, there was a shortage of public transportation. When men were confronted with already full buses and streetcars, some local men turned automobiles into “jitneys” and police often looked the other way when as many as a dozen or more men crowded in and on a vehicle, including the conveyance’s running boards.  

The above information establishes the fact that Akron of the 1920s was an expanding industrial center with a growing population, and as stated previously, the Klan found Akron to be a fruitful location for recruiting new members. The question is how the Klan exploited the social conditions in Akron in order to recruit new members. As
previously mentioned, before the congressional hearings and New York World exposé of 1921, in 1920, the Klan established itself north of the Ohio River in Evansville, Indiana, and then in Ohio. In the south, the Klan was known for being an anti-black organization, yet in the north, it largely focused its prejudices against immigrants and Catholics (who more often than not, were one in the same). While the vast majority of Akron’s pre-rubber boom population were white, as were the job seekers who ventured north, Akron, like many other northern industrial cities, also attracted a northern migration of southern blacks. In fact, white migrants outnumbered their black counterparts by a ratio of twenty to one. While the number of Akron’s black residents increased by 4,923 between 1910 and 1920, the number of native born whites increased by 100,000. Not only was Akron a growing industrial city with a predominately white population, the population was majority Protestant, with a bent toward religious fundamentalism. According to Akron historian John Maples, as Akron transformed from a “boom-town with frontier-like living and social conditions,” to a family oriented community, the moral and social environment of the city became a prime concern. During this time, dedicated Catholic Cornelius (“Con”) Mulcahy controlled the local Democratic Party machine. Thus, the Klan in Akron, much like its other northern counterparts, greatly de-emphasized the issue of race concerning African Americans. Unlike the Reconstruction era in which the original Klan appealed to the fears of southerners concerning recently emancipated blacks, the second-wave Klan focused on appealing to the fears of white, Protestant Americans concerning crime, juvenile
delinquency, and the perceived role of eastern European, Catholic immigrants in these issues.

As previously mentioned, the national Klan organization under the leadership of Hiram Wesley Evans began to use the issue of public education reform as a means to improve public morals, including issues of crime, specifically Prohibition enforcement. In the environment of Akron, the issue of public education played a key role in the founding of the Klan. The South Akron Civic Association provided the Summit County Klan with the organization’s first major membership spurt. The Civic Association was originally founded to persuade the Akron Public School Board to enlarge the overcrowded South High School (later, Thornton Junior High). The board proposed not enlarging South High, but rather, building a new high school (Garfield) in the Firestone Park neighborhood. The nascent Summit County Klan used the Civic Association as a front of sorts, using it to do the work in fighting the Akron School Board, while the Klan used the issue as a recruiting point.78 Similar to the New York World exposé of that same month, a September 21, 1921, Akron Beacon Journal article noted that the Klan was recruiting in Akron, and that no respectable person would be associated with such an organization. Much like the World exposé, the article provided free publicity for the order.79

By the following year, on May 22, 1922, Mayor D. C. Rybolt (who several years later was revealed to be a Klan member, though it is not clear if he was a member at this time) was asked by reporters what he was to do about the Klan’s efforts to recruit new members, as handbills distributed by the order revealed that it had rented the Akron
Armory for an upcoming meeting on May 4 designed to explain the purpose of the organization to the citizens of Akron.\textsuperscript{80} Rybolt replied, “If the meeting is not 100 percent American and strictly for law and order legal steps will be taken to prevent it.”\textsuperscript{81}

When controversy over holding the meeting in the armory grew, the Ohio King Kleagle, Dr. C. L. Harrod of Columbus, moved the meeting to an open air location. When city manager Homer C. Campbell and Safety Director Warren Selby told reporters that the Klan would be denied a permit to gather in any outdoor public space, they moved their meeting to the Calvary Baptist Church.

Four individuals (all African-American men) approached Judge Ahern asking for an injunction to stop the meeting. The men were George W. Thompson, local NAACP representative Samuel T. Kelley, Charles R. Lewis, M.D. and local grocer Leon Gordie. Finally, Akron Police officers arrived during the opening moments of a speech by Billy Parker, former editor of anti-Catholic newspaper \textit{The New Menace}. Armed with an injunction granted to secretary of the so-called “colored” Y.M.C.A. George W. Thompson, the police closed down the meeting.\textsuperscript{82}

By 1923, the Klan in Akron was recruiting high numbers, and periodically holding large initiation ceremonies for several hundred new members. On November 17, a large “Klonklave” was held at the Summit County fairgrounds. Twenty-five thousand attendees were expected, but twelve thousand actually showed up to see thirty four hundred members march through Akron to the Summit County Fairgrounds. Attendees also witnessed performances by the Klan band and the Women of the Ku Klux Klan’s
glee club and enjoyed a pit barbecue. The evening was capped off with the Rev. E. M. Annshansley officiating over a cross burning.  

The Klan became known for doling out charity, including support of local churches and their pastors. The first recorded instance of this was January 20, 1924, as twenty-five hooded Klansmen presented the Rev. Richard R. Yocum of Miller Avenue Reformed Church with a gift of $50.00 for him, plus $260 for enlargement of his church. Further evidence of the relationship between the Klan and the fundamentalist Christian population was Bob Jones University founder, evangelist Bob Jones, journeying from his home in South Carolina to Akron to support the local Klan by building the Akron “Tabernacle,” a space to house over five thousand Klan members. Jones voiced his support for the Klan, stressing that it was a fine organization for Protestants, seeing that Jews and Catholics already had their own organizations. He asserted that in any location where the Klan was active, the Protestant churches were sure to be full on Sundays. Jones further argued that the Klan was a much maligned organization, citing supposed evidence of the Klan actually thwarting lynching of blacks. The Klan prided itself on being a “100 percent American” organization, and as such opposed Catholicism not only on religious grounds but also on the assumption that Catholicism was inherently in opposition to American democracy, based on the fact that it was presumed that Catholics swore allegiance to the Pope of Rome rather than America. Jones declared, “We don’t have popes and kings over here; we’re all common people.” Ultimately, the tabernacle was a temporary home for the Summit County Klan and its supporters, as the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company sold the Klan property on 77 Fir Street in January
1925. The space was designated to become the Summit County Auditorium. The Klan intended to use the new auditorium as an entertainment venue to undercut the “high prices” of local theatres, with the second and third floors of the structure allocated for office space for the Klan. The auditorium was organized by a company headed by local businessman Joseph B. Hanan. During this same time, Hanan served as superintendent of the B.F. Goodrich Tire and Rubber Company and President of the Akron Public School Board while serving as the Exalted Cyclops (local chapter president) of the Akron Klavern (local Klan chapter).

The fact that Hanan was involved with Akron’s rubber industry, as well as the Summit County Klan organization and the Akron Public School Board, speaks to the fact that the Klan was a well-entrenched part of the Akron community, having established itself as allies of the local white, Protestant religious establishment, as well as the business and political establishment. As such, it began to pursue the goals mandated by the Klan’s Grand Wizard Evans, specifically, the pursuit of public education reform. Thus far, examination of both internal state organization documents as well as its official newspaper establish that in accordance with the philosophy of Grand Wizard Evans and the national leadership, the state organization instructed its local Klaverns to promote and protect the public schools. Specifically, the enthusiastic promotion of public education is mentioned in conjunction with moral reform through placing Christ and the Bible first in society. Further study shows that the Akron Klavern and its members conformed to the mandates of Grand Wizard Evans communicated through the state organization.
As mentioned before, during the 1910s and 1920s, Akron experienced an unprecedented population surge that brought with it a housing shortage and attendant putative social problems. During this time of great population growth, another challenge to the city concerned the expansion of the public schools. As many of the men migrated to the city and then brought their families from the south, or single men formed new families upon moving north, the population of school-age children grew rapidly. From 1910 to 1920, Akron grew from a school system wherein 10,000 students were housed in seventeen elementary schools and one high school served by 250 teachers, to one with 32,000 pupils housed in twenty-six elementary schools and four high schools, taught by 800 teachers. Paralleling the housing shortage, the Akron Public School Board faced a school building shortage. As a temporary remedy to this shortage, the board rented storerooms and church buildings in various parts of the city and also held classes in corridors and basements of school buildings. This problem persisted throughout the 1920s, as school enrollment peaked in 1931 at 54,588 pupils. This rapid growth in pupils and the attendant construction of buildings to house the system’s pupils lead to a myriad of problems concerning the financing and staffing of the rapidly growing school system.88

With a growing number of citizens, including parents of school age children, concerned about issues pertaining to public schools, the Klan, which positioned itself as a defender of the “free public school,” found Akron to be an ideal site to recruit and flourish. Concerns pertaining to maintaining American customs and mores in the midst of waves of immigration did not originate with the Klan. In fact, during the Klan’s
ascendancy in Akron during the 1920s, the Akron Public Schools headed an Americanization program for adults that included English language instruction as well as classes designed to assimilate foreign workers. The program was begun in 1911 by a University of Akron professor nicknamed “Daddy Olin” and was held in a room over a saloon on Furnace Street. In 1913, the program was moved to the former Jewish synagogue when Goodyear founder F. A. Seiberling purchased the building and donated it to the Akron Settlement House Association. In 1915, the popular program was absorbed by the Akron Public School System.  

As mentioned before, school overcrowding had long been a pressing issue in Akron. The fact that the influx of migrants to Akron that spurred this overcrowding was largely white, Protestant men from the South provided the Klan with an opportunity to exploit this issue. Furthermore, existing tensions involving a chasm between geography and class among different factions in Akron also proved to be easily exploited when the Klan arrived in the city. While school overcrowding was an issue throughout Akron, it was most severe in south Akron, which was populated by a largely Protestant, working class. In response to the problem of overcrowding, the Akron Public School Board built eight elementary schools and three high schools between 1910 and 1920. Many residents of South Akron began to perceive that they were second class citizens, as an elite faction from West Akron dominated local politics, including the Akron school board. Many in South Akron also held disdain for the largely Catholic population of North Akron who were perceived to be indifferent to the public schools. Historian Daniel Nelson maintains
that the school issue in Akron was, “the key to the political mobilization of Akron’s rubber workers.”90

In Akron, the Klan attracted employees of local companies such as B. F. Goodrich and Goodyear Tire and Rubber, whether they be pro-union or anti-union workers. The Klan crossed party lines, recruiting Republicans and Democrats, Methodists and Baptists. The membership of the Klan in Akron straddled the socioeconomic divide between the city’s poor and well to do.91

During the Klan’s five year period of political dominance, from 1921 to 1926, the leadership of the hooded order and its members never resorted to violence. This is characteristic of the Klan under the tenure of Grand Wizard Evans, wherein he realized that employing rhetoric and the media to reach the hearts and minds of mainstream Americans was more effective. A key facet of this program included the Klan’s promotion of public education reform.

The Klan worked to achieve a greater cultural and social role for South Akron. It did so by working for a larger share of the school-board budget for the seemingly downtrodden portion of the city by acknowledging the citizens’ social ethics, pushing for prayer and Bible reading in schools, the enforcement of vice laws, and the curtailment of business and public entertainment on Sundays.

While the working class of Akron were recruited by the Klan by such tactics, and thus made up a great deal of the order’s membership, the leadership of the Klan was made up of the business elites of West Akron, such as Joseph B. Hanan, superintendent of B. F. Goodrich Tire and Rubber Company, Kyle Ross, the executive of a small
manufacturing firm, and local lawyer Ernest E. Zesiger, also a former officer of the local carpenter’s union and the CLU.

The leaders of the Summit County Klan helped elect or appoint members to the school board, including a butcher, an automobile dealer, a realtor, an attorney, a funeral director, as well as the wives of a dentist and a streetcar conductor. The common link between all of these individuals was their association with Akron’s rubber workers. The merchants’ businesses were headquartered in either South or East Akron. While these men and women may have been well known or influential in their own neighborhoods, they had little or no influence in the city’s chamber of commerce or bar association.\(^92\)

When the Klan-associated majority ran the school board for two years, they provided additional funds for projects in south Akron. While this garnered continued support from many of the city’s working class residents, it also served to increase the divide between South and West Akron. During this time, other Klan-dominated agencies in Akron mirrored the school board’s conservative agenda. The city council, which was reported to consist of several Klansmen, including Klan leader Kyle Ross, banned Sunday dancing as well as Sunday commercial activity. Summit County Sheriff Chris Weaver employed his band of volunteer deputies (mostly Klansmen) to crack down on gambling and traffic law violations.\(^93\)

While members of minority groups such as the NAACP voiced their opposition to the Klan in Akron, it was the upper middle class and wealthy elements who made up West Akron’s elite who provided the strongest and most effective opposition to the Klan. Much like their Klan counterparts, the Klan’s adversaries in West Akron were merchants,
lawyers, ministers and wives of these men, but unlike the South Akron counterparts these were prominent merchants, distinguished lawyers, and pastors of elite churches.

An example of the fact that both the Klan’s leadership as well as their opposition were both dominated by the elites of West Akron is the comparison of Klansman M. C. Heminger with Klan foe Wendell Willkie. While the two men owned houses on Beck Ave. in West Akron, living within one hundred yards of one another, Heminger’s real estate business was headquarterd on South Main St. in a working class district, while Willkie was a partner in a prominent Akron law firm and president of Akron Bar Association.  

The Klan’s intention to control Akron’s schools began to be realized when in the autumn election of 1923, three new School Board members were elected. Along with little-known candidates George Beck and J. A. Cunningham, the third of this group, Joseph B. Hanan, Assistant Office Director at B.F. Goodrich Rubber Company, was known as the Exalted Cyclops (chapter president) of the Summit County Klavern. Hanan, who grew up in nearby Medina County, was a former superintendent of the Auburn public school district. In 1913, three years after the opening of Kent State University, at the behest of President John McGilvrey, Hanan founded the Rural Teachers Training School in the neighboring community of Brady Lake. In the 1937, he was appointed by former Kent resident, Ohio governor Martin L. Davey, to the Kent State University board of trustees, serving until his death in 1952.  

Following this election, the Summit County Klan began to let it be known that it wished to play a larger part in the affairs of the Akron Public Schools. On Tuesday,
November 27, 1923, the Klan targeted Akron South High School Principal and vocal Klan opponent C. J. Bowman. As Bowman was conducting a segment of a chapel assembly for his students that included the play, “The Thanksgiving Dinner”, eleven robed Klansmen entered the school auditorium and stood silently along the sidewall, waiting until the end of the play to form ranks and march to the front of the stage. As every individual in the now tense room remained completely silent, the Klansmen, without speaking a single word, presented an American Flag and a Bible to Principal Bowman and then silently departed. A note within the Bible instructed the recipients that it was to be used for in class instruction, and that the flag was to be displayed either inside or outside of the school building. 96 That afternoon, the Akron Public School Board met, and in a unanimous resolution, ordered that the gifts be returned to the Klan. Board President Charles E. Smoyer, who introduced the resolution, stated that no organization could monopolize the Bible and the American Flag. The board members also resolved that henceforth, any gifts presented to the schools must be presented by individuals not wearing masks or similar regalia. 97

The most significant act performed by the new Klan majority, headed by Hanan, was the motion to adopt compulsory Bible reading as part of the Akron Public Schools curriculum. After several months of hearings, discussions, and debates, the board ratified the new policy on August 1, 1924. In Akron, many local Protestant churches and organizations (both Klan affiliated and nonaffiliated) supported the board’s institution of Bible reading, and according to an Akron Beacon Journal article, some members of the small, local Jewish community were largely isolated in their opposition. 98
In December 1924, board member Harry Huber resigned, claiming pressing business concerns as his reason, although in a Klan Symposium in 1926, W.E.B. DuBois alleged that he was forced off the board for being Jewish.\textsuperscript{99} When members of the board proposed that respected mortuary owner Charles Sweeney fill the vacant seat, other members objected, as Sweeney was a member of “an organization” that they found objectionable. This organization was not explicitly named, yet it was understood by all that it was the Ku Klux Klan. Fortunately for Sweeney, he was friends with School Board President H.T. Waller, and during a special board meeting on January 5, 1925, Waller voted for his friend to become a board member, thus giving the Klan a 4-3 majority on the board. On the following day, Waller was unanimously elected to another term as School Board president.\textsuperscript{100}

In his acceptance speech, he urged the board members to put aside differences in order to work together in an effort to “bring out the potential strength of the underprivileged communities.” This statement would prove to be fraught with irony, as the new Klan led majority began illegally holding secret meetings of their own, where they would decide upon new policies that they would then push through official board approval.\textsuperscript{101} One such scheme concocted by the “secret board” was a plan to redraw the Akron Public School district clusters in order to segregate African American students. Plans to do so were not brought to fruition due to any lack of will, but rather due to prohibitively high costs.\textsuperscript{102}

During the March 23, 1925, board meeting, the issue of financing the new Garfield High School illustrated the sway of the recently elected Klan majority. The Klan
faction wanted to cut the size of the school in order to use the money in other areas where they perceived it was needed, such as South High and West High schools, as well as new school buildings on Storer Avenue. When the Klan plan passed by a margin of 4–2, anti-Klan board member Mrs. Garrett left the meeting abruptly, disgusted by the fact that her vote effectively did not count. The Klan’s next move was to replace the existing superintendent with a man of its own.103

In 1925, popular school Superintendent Carroll R. Reed resigned in order to take the job of superintendent of schools in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Reed had voluntarily agreed to a $1,000 per year pay cut during an economic slump during 1920-21. In 1925, when conditions had greatly improved, he sought to restore that cut. When Akron Law Director Henry Hagelbarger insisted that the pay increase could not occur until after Reed’s term expired, Reed then resigned. While these events may seem to be premeditated, with rumors that the Klan instigated the entire situation, there is no evidence that this was the case.104

Following Reed’s sudden resignation, many assumed that Hanan might become the next superintendent. Hanan denied such rumors at a board meeting held on May 28. He stated that the Assistant Superintendent, Frank D. McElroy, was best suited for the job of superintendent. While there seemed to be a great deal of support for McElroy, Hanan insisted that the board nominate no one until there was unanimous agreement among them. This was merely a stalling tactic, as the Klan held secret meetings where it determined that George E. McCord, the recently deposed superintendent of schools of Springfield, Ohio, was its choice to replace Reed. There were reports that Ohio’s Grand
Dragon Clyde Osborne had met with the Klan members, but Hanan flatly denied these reports, replying, “So far as I am concerned, it makes no difference to me if the Superintendent is a Klansman or not.” When fellow board member Mrs. Garrett asked, “He has the endorsement of Clyde Osborne, doesn’t he?” Hanan answered, “That makes no difference either. I defy Clyde Osborne or anyone else to put pressure on me.”

The appointment of Superintendent George McCord sparked a firestorm of controversy in Akron, as McCord was the former superintendent of the Springfield schools and an avowed Klansman. During his tenure at Springfield, McCord instituted a policy of segregating African American students into different areas in the district, much like his Klan counterparts in Akron proposed during the same time period. He then helped pass a one million dollar levy to fund new school construction and then built four new junior high schools, staffing one of these, Fulton Junior High, with a largely black faculty. He later fired all of the African American teachers in the district. The district’s teaching staff remained all white for another twenty-five years. In his effort to purge the teaching staff of anyone who was not “One hundred per cent American,” McCord also fired several popular white teachers. This move raised the ire of many citizens, and led to his ouster in 1923.

Outspoken Klan critic, former Akron city councilman Gus Kasch opposed the hiring of McCord, and told Hanan, “I have known you a long time and respect you. I tell you now as a friend who has regard for your sincerity, that you are making a big mistake. I tell you that if the people of Akron have a chance to express themselves you will be surprised at what happens.” Hanan replied, “I would take your advice, Gus, except that I
have figures that prove my case. I know what the majority wants.” Kasch queried, “Do you mean that the majority in Akron are Klansmen?” “I certainly do,” answered Hanan.108

During the tenure of McCord in Akron, he not only came under fire for his association with the Klan and his previous record in Springfield Ohio, he also angered many by trimming the roster of school employees in order to save the district money. Recently dismissed Purchasing Agent Charles Trommer alleged that so-called discord McCord was using his power of the purse for political gain, just as he had in Springfield.109 McCord was accused of nepotism after hiring his son, James E. McCord for a summer job as a tracer in the Akron Public School’s architect’s office.110

While McCord had many detractors, he enjoyed the support not only of the Klan but also of portions of the local Protestant religious establishment. When the embattled McCord attended a meeting supporting Hanan, McCord, and their fellow Klan-backed candidates for the school board held at the South Main St. Methodist Church, the church’s pastor, E. M. Lewis assured his parishioners as well as all others in attendance that, “Superintendent McCord is a Christian gentleman who believes in having the Holy Bible, the only book that teaches us how to live, in the public schools. It is here and we want to keep it there.”111

The appointment of McCord was a hubristic move that ultimately led to the end of the Klan’s dominance of the school board. McCord’s appointment caused three school board members, including Garrett and Waller, to resign in protest. This hasty move backfired, as all three positions were soon filled by Klansmen or Klan supporters. The
local Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary Club, Exchange Club, and Kiwanis all censured the board’s action.

A pro-McCord group, the Citizens School League, put forth a platform containing seven planks

1. Economy without stint.

2. Cooperation between the Akron schools and the University of Akron.

3. A comprehensive building program.

4. Peace and harmony among all connected with the Akron schools.

5. Broader vocational training.

6. Give mothers a part in the direction of the schools.

7. Whatever is best for Akron’s 34,000 school children.\(^{112}\)

While religious and moral issues concerning the teaching of the Bible in Akron’s public schools were a key concern of many of Hanan and McCord’s supporters, these issues also overlapped with aforementioned practical issues concerning overcrowding and proper funding of new school buildings. As such, McCord and Hanan supported a plan first put forth by previous superintendent Carroll Reed to transform the Akron schools into a so-called 6-3-3 system, wherein pupils would attend grade school for six years, a middle school for three years, and a high school for three years. McCord stressed that Akron was the only city of its size not to have such a system, as it still maintained a so-called 8-4 system, with pupils attending grade schools for eight years and high school for four years. Board member Robert Guinther opposed the measure, claiming that the measure would be too expensive, while McCord and his supporters insisted building new
facilities would ultimately be cost effective, and would provide for better training for the
district’s students. 113

The body that was ultimately responsible for removing the Klan members and
supporters from the board was the Non-Political School League, headed by local
attorney Wendell Willkie and his fellow American Legion member (and future Kent State
University board member) attorney Robert Guinther. Willkie had established himself in
Akron as a fighter for social justice and democracy. In fact, Willkie came from a family
that had long been involved in social justice issues. His grandparents emigrated from
Germany after being involved in the unsuccessful revolutions of 1848. Upon arriving in
the United States, they became abolitionists. Both of Willkie’s parents were attorneys.
Willkie’s mother, Henrietta (Tritsch) was one of the first women admitted to the Indiana
bar, and during the 1920s, Willkie’s father Herman fought the Klan in Indiana while his
son Wendell did so in Akron. After his service in “The Great War,” law school graduate
Willkie moved from Elwood, Indiana, to Akron after gaining job as an attorney at
Firestone Tire and Rubber Company. The booming city’s population had increased from
69,000 in 1910 to 208,000 in 1920, and when Willkie arrived in Akron, he spent his first
night in the overcrowded city on a hotel cot as convention goers filled local hotels to
capacity.114 Founder and company president Harvey Firestone not only retained a staff of
lawyers to represent the company in its legal affairs, but also employed a group of
lawyers including Willkie to assist company employees with their personal legal affairs,
including wills, or dealing with creditors. Willkie found this work unchallenging, and by
December 31, 1920, he moved to the firm of Mather and Nesbitt. 115
On May 2, 1921, Willkie became Captain of Akron’s American Legion Post # 19. During a downturn in Akron’s rubber industry in 1921, nine Legion posts combined to form post # 19. This consolidation was due to the fact that while Akron’s economy experienced a downturn, and thus, less money was flowing in to the organization, the organization expended large sums aiding veterans of the recently concluded world war, never turning away a veteran, no matter what the expense. To publicize the fact that the struggling Legion needed financial support, Willkie began to give speeches to any group that would listen. These speeches led to his involvement in local Democratic Party politics. Willkie was soon asked to deliver speeches to local civic groups on a number of related topics. On September 24, 1923, Willkie spoke to the Akron Rotary Club (and to the Civitan Club on December 13 of the same year) on “The Meaning of the Constitution.” Willkie lamented that many of the governmental and economic ills of the present day were due to the fact that the representative democracy envisioned by the drafters of the Constitution had been “changed to indirect democracy by the influence of blocs and organizations.” Such language could be perceived as at least partially in reference to Willkie’s opposition to the Klan, which he would express publicly in the next few years. 116

Willkie expressed similarly Jeffersonian principles when addressing the Exchange Club on March 31, 1925. In his talk entitled, “A Great American Evil-Too Much Law,” Willkie criticized what he perceived to be the wasted resources involved in prohibition enforcement. “There has grown up a belief that it is possible to control the country morally by the passage of sumptuary laws.” Willkie questioned the wisdom of “the
passage of a law to control liquor traffic,” wondering if “millions spent in the 
enforcement of the liquor amendment were expended in the education of young men and 
women, if we would not be nearer sobriety than we are now.”

Willkie established that while he opposed prohibition laws (which were supported 
by the Klan), like his political adversaries in the Ku Klux Klan, he was not only a strong 
advocate for education, but also believed that education was a means of improving public 
morals. Willkie again stressed his belief in the power of the public education system to 
 improve the lives of individuals as well as society as a whole when he addressed the 
Rotary Club on July 2, 1925, stating, “I only ask that the children of today be so educated 
to the futility of war that peace will come in the next generation.”

Willkie’s impassioned defense of democracy and social justice led to his 
 involvement in local Democratic Party politics. From June 24 to July 9, 1924, Willkie 
served as a delegate to the Democratic National Convention in New York City’s Madison 
Square Garden. Willkie opposed the nomination of former Secretary of the Treasury 
William G. McAdoo as there were rumors of McAdoo being supported by the Klan. On 
the first ballot, Willkie voted for Senator James Cox of Ohio, while on the second ballot, 
he voted for Newton Baker, former Cleveland mayor, as well as the man who while a 
pacifist, served as Secretary of War under President Wilson, during World War I. On the 
third ballot, Willkie supported Governor Al Smith of New York, and then on fourth 
ballot, finally voted for John W. Davis of California.

At that time, Willkie, one of the party’s most vigorous opponents of the Klan, 
voted in support of a resolution to denounce the Klan in the official Democratic platform.
The Klan sent him a telegram, asking him when he “joined the payroll of the Pope.” Willkie sent the Klan a curt reply (later claiming he lacked the funds for a longer message), simply writing, “The Klan can go to hell.”

By the time Willkie entered the fray of the school conflict in 1925, he was director of the Ohio State Bank and Trust Company, director of the South Akron Savings Association, and director of the Acme Mortgage Company. He was also the youngest man on the board of the Northern Ohio Power and Light Company, as well as the president of the Akron Bar Association at age 33. In the beginning of the summer of 1925, three of the seven member Akron Public School-Board resigned in protest, claiming the Klan controlled the decision making of the four member majority. Willkie would speak on the dangers of the Klan to any group in Akron who would listen. On June 19, 1925, a group of “one hundred or more citizens” held the first meeting of the Non-Political School Board League. After the three resigned school board members spoke, Willkie took the stage, stating, “I think we are all of one mind. Sometimes in a crisis there is a doubt as to the course to be pursued. But I do not believe any honest citizen has any doubt what to do in this case.”

The Non-Political League organized four candidates, fellow attorney and American Legion member Robert Guinther, fellow attorney Wade De Woody, businessman Walter F. Kirn, and realtor Roy Reifsnider. A statement issued by the officers of the league was worded, “This is not an anti-Klan organization; we are not out to get anyone but are fighting for a principle. We are determined only to free the School
Board from the domination of any organization bloc or party. The four candidates have not been asked to commit themselves.’’\textsuperscript{123}

While Willkie’s organization took pains to not relegate itself to merely an anti-Klan organization, Willkie squarely laid the blame for the Klan led dissension on the school board on Klan Exalted Cyclops Joseph Hanan. Said Willkie, “This man Hanan has thrown down the challenge he controls this city. Let me take it up and fight it. I do not think that he does. I think that we properly organize and fight that the people who believe in the American form of government are in sufficient number that we can elect four members to the board of education who will express the true selection of this city.’’\textsuperscript{124}

In the midst of this controversy, McCord hired C. D. Werstler (Treasurer of the South Main St. Methodist Church and City Council candidate) as Assistant Superintendent of Maintenance, a position that did not previously exist. On September 8, 1925, McCord announced the resignation of Ross Lechner, who had served as Superintendent of Maintenance for eighteen years. McCord claimed that Lechner had resigned and was moving to Florida. Lechner and his wife denied these assertions, stating that their trip to Florida was merely a vacation. When asked if the Klan was a factor in his resignation, he replied, “I’ve decided that the best thing I can do is to keep my mouth closed about the whole matter. Later I might have something to say.” Members of the school board denied any involvement in Lechner’s resignation. The “Lechner affair” invited investigation by the City of Akron Civil Service Commission. While McCord was
soon absolved of any wrongdoing, this matter only served as ammunition for the Non-
Political League in opposing McCord and his Klan allies.125

At a Non-Political League meeting held on Friday October 3, 1925, attorney
Walter Wanamaker criticized new school board members Stahl, Hyde, and Mrs. Osborn
for rubber stamping large financial expenditures almost immediately after being sworn in.
At the same meeting former purchasing agent Charles Trommer accused McCord of
firing him merely for political gain.126

The Non-Political League backed its candidates at speaking engagements
throughout the city. On October 20, 1925, in front of an audience made up of mostly
Klansmen, attorney A. D. Zook pointed out that in Springfield, all Klan supported
candidates had won election except for those supported by McCord. Thus, he appealed to
the Klansmen in attendance to think matters over.127 Subsequently, Walter Wanamaker
charged that Klan leader Clyde W. Osborne set up a dictator in Akron. Wanamaker told
the Klansmen in attendance, “In your 100 per cent organization your dictator has
eliminated the American system of government and control of your local organization
and your local funds. Every one of your local officers was made to get out by his boss
and dictator Clyde Osborne” 128

The next speaker, Mrs. A. Ross Reed, asserted that former board member Charles
Sweeny had approached then Superintendent Carroll Reed wondering how to rid schools
of Catholic teachers, with Reed answering that they could not. Reed then accused Hanan
of circulating petitions around South Akron that read, “We Want a Protestant
Superintendent for Our Schools.” Reed also insisted that the Klan majority on the school
board aimed not only to get rid of Catholic teachers, but also to get rid of the schools’ modern platoon system, wherein students rotated between several different classrooms during a school day, with a different teacher to teach each subject. As the election drew nearer, the campaign rhetoric became sharper and more bitter, with the Non-Political League’s literature now reading, “LIBERATE AKRON SCHOOLS FROM CONTROL OF THE KU KLUX KLAN.”

At an anti-Klan event held at Akron’s Ross Hall on Monday October 26, 1925, attorney and former school board president Charles Smoyer accused McCord of dismissing Catholic teachers in Springfield. Smoyer had Non-Political League Secretary H. B. Yarnell read a letter written by Walter B. Evans, leader of the anti-McCord forces in Springfield, to attest to this fact.

Hanan spoke at the Harris School on August 16, 1925. While the Klan majority had long been accused of holding secret meetings to determine policy and the selection of the superintendent, Hanan charged that the school board minority’s choice for superintendent, McElroy, was not “a big enough man for the job,” and that the former board minority was the group that held secret meetings, wherein they demanded approval of candidate McElroy. Hanan insisted the minority “wanted their candidate or nobody. In McCord we found the man we were seeking.” Speaking along with Hanan was George Beck, who demeaned H. T. Waller as merely a “disgruntled boy.” Beck also maintained that former Superintendent Reed had resigned and gone to Connecticut as he, George Beck, refused to meet what he considered to be unreasonable demands on Reed’s part, as Reed had requested a $1,000 salary increase, and according to Beck, “a free hand
in school control.” Hanan’s next public speaking engagement was on October 27, 1925, where he insisted a small group of contractors who were part of the Chamber of Commerce instigated the chamber’s opposition to the Klan. He again defended Mc Cord, as well as the hiring practices employed to bring him to Akron, maintaining, “Superintendent McCord was regularly elected at a regular meeting,” and Grand Dragon Osborne had nothing to do with McCord’s selection. 133

At the final Non-Political League rally on October 29, 1925, well-known Klan critic Rev. Lloyd C. Douglas, Pastor of the First Congregational Church, exclaimed, “The City of Akron is sick. It is full of personal prejudices, hatred and narrowness. Akron is the biggest little town in the country.” As with past meetings of the league, the crowd was populated by several Klansmen and their sympathizers, who assailed Douglas with jeers such as, “Aw you make me sick!” and “Why don’t you get out of town!” as well as, “Go on back to Michigan!” 134 The next speaker, attorney E. L. Brouse, leveled the charge that pro-Klan forces used taxpayer funds, city vehicles and employees in order to distribute 36,000 copies of the School Herald newspaper, that was essentially campaign literature, as members of the crowd shouted in response, “That’s a lie!” and “Prove that statement!” 135

At a meeting of the Citizens School League, Charles Stahl fired back that the Non-Political League spent over $1,200 to print 50,000 copies of a four page newspaper. City Councilman and Klansman Kyle Ross insisted the alleged monies were from an illegal slush fund, adding, “Con Mulcahy is the man who financed this dirty sheet!” Hanan ridiculed the League’s handling of their affairs, asserting, “I could have made a
better job of it.” Hanan especially objected to the fact that the League distributed pamphlets printed in five different languages. “The opposition is appealing to the people who can’t read the English language to win the election for them. I would rather lose the election than win it through influences and votes of that kind.” 136

At the final rally for the Citizens School League, board member Ruby Kahler said that she not only favored Bible reading in the schools, but also wished all the city’s children be in Sunday school. McCord spoke, stressing the need for a flag in each classroom, and regular Bible reading to start each day. At the end of McCord’s speech, a Mrs. Anneshansley rose and shouted, “Do any of you wonder now why the Ku Klux Klan is backing McCord? We don’t hesitate to tell that we are backing him.” 137

In the aftermath of the election, both sides in the school battle had reasons to be satisfied. Citizens School League candidate J. Grant Hyde placed second in the balloting. First, third, and fourth place in the elections were won by Walter Kirn, Robert Guinther, and L. Roy Reifsnider, respectively. Chairman of the Non-Political League, Ray C. Ellsworth, issued a statement stating that his organization did not consider Hyde a Klansman, which in fact was the truth. In the future, Hyde acted as a buffer between the opposing forces on the Akron board, even though Hyde usually voted with the Klan.

With the election behind them, the new board moved on to other pressing school business. Hanan presented the board with a survey Superintendent McCord was conducting, concerning all of Akron’s high schools, although data had thus far been collected from only one school. According to the survey, one third of freshmen could not properly identify the state west of Ohio to be Indiana. 138 At a December 14, 1925,
meeting, McCord proposed to transform the schools from an 8-4 system, to a 6-3-3 system, an idea originally proposed by former Superintendent Reed. Guinther opposed the plan, and Reifsnider and Kirn quickly sided with him.

McCord proposed a junior high plan at a meeting held at Central High School auditorium. The 1000 in attendance agreed with McCord, greeting him with a standing ovation for three minutes. 139 When Guinther spoke, he was met by boos and interruptions of loud throat clearings. Guinther claimed the new junior high system would be more expensive, and students would have to travel farther in order to get to school. Hanan said he could easily rebut Guinther’s assertions, but would not do so, as Guinther had been so rudely interrupted, and thus not able to finish his presentation. Longtime Klan foe councilman Gus Kasch rebutted Guinther’s opposition to the junior high plan, claiming that the added distance the students would travel would be offset by the superior training, and that the expenses inherent in the plan would not only be a worthwhile investment in education, proper administration of such a plan could lower costs. 140

When board president Hanan became ill in the spring of 1926, for several weeks, vice president Guinther sat in the president’s chair. On April 5, 1926, board member J. Grant Hyde proposed that Garfield High School be utilized for a trial run for the junior high school. McCord and Reifensnider agreed, and further added that adding grades seven and eight to South High School would go a long way toward alleviating the district’s overcrowding issue. In the meantime, the Chamber of Commerce could conduct a study as to the program’s efficacy. 141
Overcrowding continued to be an issue in Akron’s schools. Four hundred students crowded rooms on the fourth floor of Goodyear Hall, and were known collectively as the Hotchkiss School. A new school with that same name that was about to be built to house the students might actually be too small to house the students once built. In this school, teachers taught classes of forty-eight to seventy students in two half day sessions, with pupils sitting two to a desk or sitting on the floor. 142

When Hanan returned to the board in late August after recovering from his illness, he recommended a $1,000,000 plan to build new school buildings that incorporated the existing junior high plan. Beck, Cunningham, and Hyde all voted against a motion to place a one-mill levy on the November ballot, prompting Hanan to threaten to quit, as he complained that the people of the city were being deprived of a say in the business of their schools. 143

After Robert Guinther became president of the Akron board, it became clear that McCord had reached the same point he had reached some five years earlier in Springfield. His contract was to expire, and he was aware that the chances of his contract being renewed were negligible. On March 19, 1928, McCord was notified that he would not be rehired. 144 Thus, any vestiges of the Klan’s dominance in Akron’s schools were in the past.

The Summit County Klan’s fairly brief takeover of the Akron Public School board exemplified the philosophy and methods detailed by Klan Grand Wizard Evans. Evans had made it clear that he viewed education as the panacea to cure or prevent all of the social ills facing America. Furthermore, this message appealed to millions of
Americans, as this sort of rhetoric was part of a long established school of American thought. Thus, as Akron was the city in Ohio where the Klan was most successful in pursuing its agenda concerning public education (as well as the city with the largest Klan membership), it serves as a case study of sorts. Thus, it is useful to compare and contrast the Klan’s actions in Akron with similar activities throughout the United States, as well as Canada.
CHAPTER V

THE KU KLUX KLAN'S INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION THROUGHOUT THE USA AND CANADA

While the Summit County Klan quickly recruited thousands of the area’s men and directed them toward a takeover of government offices, including the School Board, they failed to make any significant, lasting impact on the curriculum of the Akron Public Schools. A survey of other Klan chapters in the Midwest, as well as in the south, reveals many similarities, as well as some significant differences.

As stated before, internal documents distributed by the Klan to state and local leadership stress that not only was the public education to be fostered and promoted, but furthermore, it required protection from its alleged enemies, the Catholic Church. Catholics were perceived as a foreign, anti-democratic element that disseminated an anti-American philosophy through its parochial schools. As such, the Klan made a concerted effort in several places throughout the United States to oppose parochial schools as well as deny employment to Catholics. Surprisingly, there is no evidence of this occurring in Akron. In fact, board president Joseph Hanan claimed that religion would not be an issue in determining whether to hire or retain teachers or administrators. Hanan once quipped, “The only ones who have anything to be afraid of are those who are loafing on the job.”145
Such discrimination did occur in other areas throughout the nation. One such example is that of the Klan’s activity in the so-called Steel Valley, the Mahoning Valley in northeastern Ohio, including the city of Youngstown, some sixty miles from Akron. This fellow northeastern Ohio Klan chapter boasted many fewer members than Akron. It claimed an estimated membership between 10,000 and over 12,000, when in reality, their official membership rolls numbered only 2,000. According to census numbers, Youngstown’s population was 132,358 in 1920, and it was labeled as the fiftieth largest city in the nation. Its population reached its peak in 1930 with just over 170,000 residents. While Youngstown’s population was almost as large as its neighbor Akron, and also had a large, active Klan chapter, the local Klavern’s membership was much smaller than in Summit County. 146

As in Akron, a major component of the Mahoning Valley Klan’s program of moral reform was educational reform. Historian William D. Jenkins states that at first, “The Klan attempted a veneer of cooperation with other faiths” when in December 1922 the local Klan leadership sent a letter to the Youngstown School Board that called for religious instruction in the public schools. The letter cited assertions from Harvard University president Dr. Charles Eliot that blamed putative failures in the nation’s schools on the declining moral standards of the present day. This local initiative, which cites mainstream intellectual authorities, is in the same vein as Grand Wizard Evans citing Strayer’s school plan. In order to foster the impression of harmony and interfaith cooperation, the Klan recommended a joint committee of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews join together to draw up a curriculum of religious learning. School superintendent Dr.
O.L. Reid insisted, “If the great faiths could get together on some program, it would be a fine thing.” 147

Following this initial overture, the local Klansmen made known their disdain for Catholicism in other ways. A dramatic instance of this was on May 5, 1923, when the Reverend A. M. Stansel, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Struthers, led a group of eleven hooded Klansmen into a Struthers Local Schools Board of Education meeting and demanded that “only real Americans” be employed in Struthers schools. No action was taken, as the board members cited exemplary employment records of all of the accused members. 148

Similar anti-Catholic measures were proposed in Michigan as well. As mentioned before, the fortunes of Akron, the “Rubber Capital of the World,” were in many ways tied to its Midwestern neighbor to the west, Detroit, Michigan, the center of the nation’s rapidly growing automobile industry. A pressing issue on the statewide ballot was a referendum on a proposed “parochial schools amendment” that would amend the Michigan state constitution to require all Michigan children aged seven to sixteen years to attend public school through the eighth grade. This anti-Catholic measure predated the arrival of the Klan, as it was first introduced by James A. Hamilton of the Wayne County Civil League in 1920 as part of his platform as a Republican party gubernatorial candidate. While Hamilton was defeated, he was able to secure enough signatures to place the measure on the ballot in 1924, during which time the Klan was a strong backer of the measure. The Klan and Hamilton were no doubt encouraged by the fact that a similar anti-Catholic bill had recently passed in the Klan stronghold of Oregon. 149
Many prominent Michigan educators criticized this bill. In a *Times Indicator* newspaper editorial, Frank Cody, the Detroit superintendent of schools, characterized the bill as “un-American in character.” University of Michigan faculty members castigated the bill as a “violation of the fundamental principles of democracy,” a “vicious piece of legislation,” and “a fair specimen of intolerance showing itself in all parts of the country.” They also noted the ways this law resembled activities in Oregon, which proposed similar discrimination against Roman Catholic teachers, stating that prejudice “has manifested itself crassly and brutally in the Oregon school law.” 150 Just as in Akron, as well as in Ohio’s Mahoning Valley, the Klan in Michigan failed to foster enduring change. The compulsory Public School Bill failed miserably, with 760,571 citizens (64 percent) voting against it and only 421,472 (36 percent) voters supporting the bill. 151

Another state that bordered Ohio and experienced many of the same issues of persecution of Catholic teachers and the attempted suppression of Catholic schools is Pennsylvania. In *The Ku Klux Klan in Pennsylvania: A Study in Nativism*, Emerson Hunsberger Loucks demonstrates the way that the Klan in Pennsylvania tailored their appeal to local constituencies using local issues. The Klan in Pennsylvania, as in other parts of the country, claimed that it was the defender of the public schools against the purported “enemies” of these schools, namely the Roman Catholic Church, and more specifically, the system of Catholic parochial schools. In truth, the Roman Catholic Church did not oppose public education, and the Klan did not oppose all parochial schools. Also, both the Klan and the R.C.C. were in favor of religious instruction; the
real dispute was over the nature of the religious instruction taking place. Loucks asserts that the true nature of the dispute can be understood in terms of the Klan’s promotion of its nativist philosophy, which was a continuation of nativist philosophies of the Know Nothing and A.P.A. (American Protective Association) movements dating back to the 1840s. 

Just as in Michigan, the Klan in Pennsylvania was able to utilize existing laws or attempts to pass laws to gain favor with the electorate. In this case, the Klan sought to enforce the Pennsylvania School Code, which required that a minimum of ten scripture verses be read daily without comment. The Klan used public school students as spies and informers to report on teachers who violated this law. A few Catholic teachers lost their jobs due to allegations that they were using “Catholic translations” as opposed to the King James Bible. Such teachers were supplied with stellar references by their superintendents and were able to transfer to other districts where there was much less prejudice toward Catholic teachers.

In Montana, much like in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Michigan, the issue of hiring and firing Catholic public school teachers was raised by the Klan and its sympathizers. In 1924, in Butte, local Klan Kligrup (secretary) Jones argued for hiring only native born teachers in the city’s public schools. The local Klan warned that 85 percent of Butte’s teachers were Catholic. Despite the Klan’s protestations, the majority of Butte’s citizens agreed with the avowed opposition to the Klan, the Citizens Party, which maintained that religion should not be a factor in hiring teachers.
In Minnesota, the local Klan also exploited the public school issue. At a “Klonklave” in Fairbuilt, Minnesota, three thousand Klansmen representing sixty-nine towns gathered to hear local Klan leaders speak on the topics of Americanism and the public schools. Much like in Akron, the Klan in Minnesota made strategic alliances with local Protestant ministers. Such alliances benefitted the Klan as not only did they hope to appeal to the fears and prejudices of Protestant congregants, many of whom were influential and powerful members of the local or state political establishment, they also hoped to use such alliances to purvey influence in the realm of public education. Much like in Akron, the reading of the Bible in public schools was a key issue, yet unlike Akron, a key reason for the ministers’ support of Bible reading was their vocal disdain for the teaching of evolution.\(^{155}\) This is reminiscent of support of the Akron Klan by local Protestant ministers, including E. M. Lewis, who enthusiastically supported Akron school board president Hanan and superintendent McCord for their support of the introduction of Bible reading into the curriculum of Akron’s public school curriculum.

In the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan and its involvement in public education was not limited to the United States. While the Klan in Canada did not face the issue of Prohibition, like in America, the Klan exploited the fears of a long established Protestant ruling class concerning Catholics and immigrants, and as in America, proposed solutions to these putative problems involving public education reform.

In early twentieth-century Saskatchewan, the Protestant, anti-Catholic “Orangemen” fraternity was a long-established, powerful social and cultural force. The order acted as not only a social fraternity but also a benevolent organization that provided
insurance to its members. Such insurance plans were extremely important to laborers, who made up a great deal of the order’s membership. Like the Klan, the Orangemen attracted scores of “common people,” and yet its membership also consisted of scores of middle class men, as well as several wealthy, powerful men, including prominent captains of industry and politicians.\textsuperscript{156} The Ku Klux Klan of Saskatchewan used Orangemen halls as their meeting places, and there is evidence that the Klan drew many of its members from the Orangemen, who shared its anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant biases.\textsuperscript{157}

This mirrors practices of the Klan’s organizers, based in Atlanta, Georgia. The Klan had long drawn their membership from existing fraternities, including the Masons. In fact, second wave Klan founder William Simmons was employed as an organizer for the Woodmen of the World fraternity while simultaneously joining the Masons, Knights of Pythias, the Oddfellows, as well as eight other fraternities, all while maintaining membership in two different churches.\textsuperscript{158} In 1922, Klan publicist Edgar Clarke proposed a Klan to unite several fraternal organizations under one banner: KKK, Free and Accepted Masons, Sons and Daughters of Washington, Knights of Luther and Guardians of Liberty – Legion of Path-Finders.\textsuperscript{159}

Klan organizer Dr. J. H. Hawkins made false claims concerning illiteracy rates in Saskatchewan’s Catholic schools, insisting that illiteracy in predominately Catholic Quebec was 47.2 percent vs. 1.9 percent in Protestant Ontario. Hawkins blamed these putative failures on the influence of Catholic Schools.\textsuperscript{160} Many of the fears concerning Catholicism versus Protestantism concerned immigration. In Saskatchewan, many
Protestants feared the influence of Ukrainian immigrants, who established schools where classes were conducted in Ukrainian.\textsuperscript{161}

These fears lead to a movement to unite the two separate school systems that governed Catholic Schools and Protestant schools. The debate over whether to do so was posed as “The Great School Question.” Conservative Party politician Dr. J. T. M. Anderson summed up the matter, stating the province’s school system “is the great melting pot into which must be placed these divers racial groups, and from which will emerge the pure gold of Canadian citizenship.”\textsuperscript{162} Such language is reminiscent of Klan Grand Wizard Evans, who vowed to use the machinery of the public schools to create conformity among all students, immigrant and native born alike. The Conservative Party lead by Anderson won a majority in the 1929, thereby forming a ruling coalition and displacing the Liberal Party majority. Much like in Ohio, the Conservative majority coalition lead by Anderson pushed for a program of patriotic textbooks in Canada’s schools.\textsuperscript{163}

While historians dating back to the mid twentieth century have made brief note of the Klan’s opposition to Catholic schools and Catholic teachers within public schools, one trend concerning the Klan’s involvement in public education seems to have been neglected until quite recently. While the Klan always portrayed itself as a force for moral reform, they also were allegedly opposed to corruption in all of its forms, and therefore were proponents of “good government.” They positioned themselves as the enemies of corrupt, entrenched political machines, many of which happened to be headed by Roman Catholics of Irish descent, as in the case of Akron’s Democratic Party machine, headed
by the Irish Catholic Con Mulcahey. In a few notable instances, this “good government” Klan crusade involved issues concerning public education, namely financial issues pertaining to rapidly growing cities with rapidly growing public school districts, much like Akron, Ohio, during the same period.¹⁶⁴

This trend occurred in the west and southwest in locales such as Anaheim, California, and El Paso, Texas. In One Hundred Percent American: The Rebirth and Decline of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, Thomas R. Pegram details the Klan’s brief takeover of the local government in Anaheim, California, in the 1920s, which was more overt than the gradual, clandestine efforts of the Summit County Klan in Akron, Ohio. These efforts included a takeover of the city’s school board which ended up being quite lucrative for the Klan and its allies. The Klan in Anaheim positioned itself as enemies of corruption in a fairly novel fashion. Much like in Akron, the growing city built a number of new school buildings in the 1920s. Since its founding in 1857, the city founded by German immigrants was ruled by a small group of wealthy elites. Most of the members of this established elite were German Catholics, who opposed Prohibition, while the local Klan chapter, which only numbered twelve hundred managed to rouse resentment amongst sentiments against the elites. As such, Klan leaders charged that local government officials showed favoritism to local contractors, thus costing the taxpayers too much money. The Klan members of the school board stepped in and offered the services of Klan friendly firms that charged much lower fees. When one firm offered to sell building materials to the board, the Klan found an outside bidder who charged 13
percent less. A local architect offered to design a new school building for $4,000, but the Klan found what was deemed to be an adequate design for $247.\footnote{165}

Just as in Akron, the Klan’s control of Anaheim was brief. An anti-Klan group bribed a Klansman and was able to gain access to a secret members list. With this information, all Klan members running for state office in 1924 were exposed and defeated. And much like the efforts of Willkie and Guinther in Akron, citizens of Anaheim succeeded in voting all Klan members from city government in a special election held the same year.\footnote{166}

Similar circumstances existed in the El Paso, Texas, schools during this time. The lack of adequate school facilities mirrored the situation in Akron, Ohio. The Parent-Teacher Association charged that because of overcrowding due to lack of proper facilities, students were forced to “study on the stairs. Many lower grade pupils are shifted about the building three times a day before finding a roosting place.” The association charged that in the junior high building, there was “only one desk for each three students.” In the midst of these circumstances, the members of the El Paso Frontier Klan No. 100 campaigned on the issue of “good government,” charging that entrenched, wealthy business interests controlled local school politics and did not understand or care about the concerns of the “common people” or their children, and thus won a majority of school board seats. The Klan of El Paso was able to appeal to a large portion of the local electorate utilizing anti-elitist sentiment just as their counterparts in Anaheim did during this same time period.\footnote{167}
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

The evidence contained in this thesis answers the questions regarding how the Klan appealed to scores of Americans during the 1920s. Not only did the Klan exploit existing fears and prejudices, it used the vehicle of public education reform to do so. What remains unanswered is why did the Klan failed to achieve any lasting reforms. In other words, why did the hooded order fail despite the fact that it not only attracted millions of members and supporters in a short period of time, but also employed rhetoric that was part of the mainstream of American thought?

In answering any questions about the Klan, it is important to note that while a great deal of reporting and research has been conducted concerning the order, the organization was a secretive one that did not keep written records. Thus, any explanations concerning successes or failures of the order are largely speculative. One such speculation involves the fact that after the initial failures to maintain Klan majorities of school boards in locales including Springfield, and Akron, Ohio, this led to scores of members becoming disillusioned and thereby resigning or merely becoming inactive. Historian Ronald Marec posits that in Ohio, rural men eagerly joined the Klan when the order first arrived, as it presented social and entertainment opportunities not readily available to those living outside urban areas. Marec maintains that when these men had their fill of rallies, picnics, barbecues, and parades, they realized that while the Klan was
a fraternal order who provided diversion from the sameness of rural life, they did not live up to the promise of an organization bent on reforming society. This disaffection also occurred in the states urban areas as well. 168

Another related explanation is that factionalism within the state organization, as well as the national organization, served to further weaken the organization, and in turn this made it even more difficult for the Klan to reconnoiter and possibly try again to achieve the same types of reforms it had recently attempted.169 This sentiment was expressed by the Reverend Ernest D. Snyder, Pastor of the South Akron Church of Christ. During his Sunday night sermon on August 2, 1925, he stated that he was a good Klansman, but the KKK “Is headed for Hell.” Snyder claimed that the order had been a power for good, comprised of good Christian men, but now was merely made up of politicians, and thus headed for dissolution.170

While on the one hand, these explanations are quite useful in explaining why the Klan saw its numbers rapidly dwindle, these explanations do not answer why the Klan failed to achieve reforms in the realm of public education, especially considering that such reforms seemed to conform to mainstream public rhetoric.

Once again, the answer to this question involves speculation. One can surmise that many Americans, especially those that comprised the majority whom identified as Christian agreed with the Klan’s program of mandatory Bible reading. Both those who supported or opposed the program may have subscribed to the belief that the Bible was
the word of God, and therefore that reading of the Bible was the solution to many if not all of the moral problems facing America. Many of these same Christians may have objected to mandatory Bible reading due to the reason that while they believed in the moral instruction and Bible reading, they may have objected to forced Bible reading. One can also speculate that while others may have not have objected to Bible reading, they strongly objected to the Klan and therefore opposed their efforts.

The aforementioned objections apply not only to the Klan’s program of Bible reading but also to the Smith Towner bill to create a national, cabinet level department of education. Once again, while long established rhetoric concerning the ameliorative power of public education was prevalent among the mainstream of American society, one can speculate that much of the opposition to this plan was due to the fact that the Klan supported such a program.

Perhaps the greatest reason for the Klan’s failure to enact any lasting reform was due to the fact that their “reforms” were not actual reforms. In other words, the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s was an organization that espoused educational reform, thus placing them side by side with progressive reformers of their day. A closer analysis reveals that while educational reform was espoused, in practice the Klan sought to control public education as a means of promoting a strict, narrow Protestant hegemony that was actually quite regressive rather than progressive, and as such was not really a reform movement, but rather, a movement merely concerned with social control.

Viewed through this lens, it becomes easier to understand the reasons for both the Klan’s brief successes as well as their ultimate failures. Historian Thomas Pegram
isolates the key reason for the Klan’s success in the various aforementioned areas of the United States, as well as the reason why these relative successes were short-lived and ultimately produced no legacy of lasting change. He notes that on the one hand, the Klan had common cause with Progressive Era reformers, in that they favored public schools being funded by progressive local and federal taxation. However, the Klan proved to be largely regressive in its philosophy regarding the type of curriculum it favored. While espousing educational reform, and criticizing both poor performing public schools and parochial schools for not doing enough to promote literacy, the Klan seemed much more concerned with curriculums that promoted patriotism, Protestantism, and moral education than practical concerns pertaining to literacy, let alone any forward thinking, new approaches to learning.  

This same narrow approach to the promotion of education is evidenced in the study of Akron in the 1920s. While the Klan promoted Bible reading in schools, there was no enduring legacy of any progressive reform. Thus, the demise of the Summit County Klavern mirrors the demise of other chapters throughout the nation.

Going forward, fruitful avenues of research involving the study of the Klan in Akron may involve the links between the Americanization program in Akron instituted before the time of the reformed Klan and any similar plans in other areas of the United States. Such linkages seem to have much in common with Progressive Era reform programs such as the settlement house movement.
Notes


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