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ABSTRACT

The Ku Klux Klan of the early twentieth century became nationally recognized in large part due to media and political investigations. Though national recognition from newspapers is acknowledged and documented well in historical research, this phenomenon has not been analyzed in many specific locales. This research seeks to analyze the media’s role in the Milwaukee, Wisconsin Klan, and is contextualized by the greater Wisconsin and Indiana movements. The analysis identifies changing media depictions, from rather positive depictions of the fraternal order to predominantly negative portrayals, and notes potential causal factors for this change over time, including overarching national trends.
INTRODUCTION

The Ku Klux Klan of the early Twentieth Century was an organization varying significantly in how it operated in different areas of the United States. Whereas violence by the Klan was certainly common in some southern areas of the country, Klan violence was negligible in a place like Wisconsin – an area without a high African American demographic.\(^1\) Though some Klan attributes varied across city, state, and regional lines, one unarguable truism about the Klan across the nation is that the media paid attention to it. Even when considering the beginning of the second wave Klan in 1915, it is apparent that media attention worked to catalyze this movement. An illustration of this concept can be seen through William J Simmons, the man who led the restoration of the Klan in the early twentieth century. Simmons utilized the media from the beginning, when he chose to put his plans into action just as *The Birth of a Nation*, the silent film romanticizing the Reconstruction era Klan, was released in theatres.\(^2\) But it was not until more media attention was given to the Klan that Simmons newly established fraternal order was noticed in much of the country.

The media was again utilized in 1921, when the Klan made headlines in the *New York World*, a prominent newspaper at the time. The *World* made headlines with exposés into the national Klan that attempted to illuminate corrupt organizational operations, which sparked Congress to investigate into the fraternal order. These congressional investigations themselves were also covered by the *World*, and all these articles were magnetically popular to readers across the country picking up the paper. William J Simmons would note in later years, and quite accurately, that the media attention allowed the Klan enough exposure to make it a national

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\(^1\) Norman Frederic Weaver, “The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1954), 43-44.

force: “‘It wasn’t until the newspapers began to attack the Klan that we really grew,’ he
[Simmons] reminisced years later. ‘Certain newspapers also aided us by inducing Congress to
investigate us. The result was that Congress gave us the best advertising we ever got. Congress
made us.’”3 It is generally acknowledge by scholars of the Klan that Simmons was chiefly
referring to the *World* as the newspaper that pressured Congress to investigate. Researchers in
this area also largely agree with Simmons assessment – that is, that the *World* really helped give
the Klan the advertisement, and even infamy, that would have otherwise been far too expensive,
if not priceless.4 If national newspapers were to have such a massive effect in making the Klan a
household name of the early twentieth century, it seems reasonable to consider how local
newspapers worked to build up support on a smaller scale too.5

In the 1920s, the Milwaukee Klan opportunistically used the *World* headlines on the
Atlanta Klan as a way to catalyze their own efforts to build a solid foothold for the fraternal
order in the city. In tracking media depictions of the Klan in the city through the *Milwaukee
Journal* and *Sentinel*, it appears that there was not much exposure of the Klan early on, and what
was printed was largely negative.6 Even with a predominantly negative depiction of the fraternal
order early on, the exposure was in an area – Wisconsin – that did not realize the Klan was a
local reality. However, as the Klan became established in Wisconsin over time, the depictions by
the *Journal* and *Sentinel* were not only quite positive in many cases, but appeared in much more
frequency. Once the Wisconsin Klan peaked in population and exposés of local Klan
organizations became rampant across the country, these two newspapers shifted toward a

3 Chalmer, 38.
4 Chalmers 35-37; Weaver 90.
5 Sources showing the impact the media had on the Klan nationally are quite plentiful: Weaver, 90.; Chalmers, 36-
38.
6 In acquiring sources for statistical analysis, all of which are located in Appendix A, only two articles about the
Klan were found before the *World* articles. Both of these, one of which was from the *Journal* and the other from the
*Sentinel*, were negative depictions of the Klan.
predominantly negative depiction. Thus, even though negative exposure of the Klan could initially help establish the organization in Wisconsin, these newspapers eventually echoed the larger trends of Klan popularity in the city and state, including organizational decline.
HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE WISCONSIN KLAN

The particular topic with which this piece is focused, the Wisconsin Klan of the 1920s has a few specific themes that scholars have concentrated on. Historians writing on the Wisconsin Klan have taken several approaches: the narrative format, analyses of causal factors for the decline of the Klan, and particular focus on Klan leaders in Wisconsin.

Perhaps the single most important piece of secondary literature related to the Wisconsin Klan during the twenties was Norman Frederic Weaver’s Doctoral thesis, entitled “The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan.” Completed in 1954, Weaver’s analysis largely took a narrative format, also relying heavily on sociological and political analyses, bringing a fairly strong sense of interdisciplinary ideas to his writing. In terms of sociology, Weaver illuminates psychological perceptions, how quickly they develop in the human mind, and synthesizes these ideas in terms of larger social organizations, such as fraternities. Weaver’s main point in bringing in sociology is ostensibly to introduce early in his writing that race and racism are social constructs, and that the institutionalized nature of these constructs creates a strong disposition toward racist tendencies in individuals. In terms of political analysis, Weaver primarily focuses on the way in which the Klan became a strong political machine in some areas, such as Indiana, where the Klan had significant influence in political affairs. Interdisciplinary methods aside, Weaver’s work was primarily of the informative and narrative style, with definite attention paid to the politics of the Wisconsin Klan. That is, Weaver was illuminating the information on the Wisconsin Klan of the 1920s into the historical record through the narrative format. Though there were not many other major writings dealing specifically with the Wisconsin Klan, a few of them also carried out this informative,
narrative theme to their writing. These include Gordon Lee’s and John Turcheneske’s Master’s theses.\(^7\)

Lee’s work, “The Ku Klux Klan in Wisconsin in the 1920s,” though of the narrative spirit, does direct its attention toward poor leadership as a major cause for the decline of the fraternal order. Klan leaders in the state, such as the viciously anti-Catholic Pat Malone, are focused on in Lee’s thesis to explain Klan decline. Turcheneske’s “The Ku Klux Klan in Northwestern Wisconsin” is a narrative that illuminated specific strategies – such as targeting education and religious figures to gain rapport in communities – that the Klan used to add legitimacy to its cause.\(^8\) There were only a few other scholars to write on the Wisconsin Klan in particular, though other authors have certainly written quick overviews of the Wisconsin Klan in the context of the wider movement. Of the few other scholars to write on the Wisconsin Klan, one perspective appears to be something of a media analysis. Written for the field of journalism and mass communications, Darcy Seavers’ Master’s Thesis, “Women in the Hood: Women in the 1920’s Ku Klux Klan Publications,” appears to be directed toward publications and journalism, based on the field and title of the writing. Yet, the thesis is not readily available from Minds@UW, so only the field and title of the writing can give any hints to the direction her research went in.\(^9\) Other than the aforementioned, the Wisconsin Klan of the twenties has not been analyzed with respect to other specific themes or topics. For the purposes of this research, the Klan’s depiction within select Milwaukee newspapers\(^10\) – both the local and national Klan depictions therein – is simply something that has not been analyzed yet. Though media analysis

\(^7\) Weaver, ii-iii, 1-11.
\(^10\) Explanation on why particular papers were chosen for this research will be made in the methodology section.
with respect to the Klan has been done for other localities, such as Indianapolis, and on a national scale, this topic hasn’t been looked at in any depth in Wisconsin.11

HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE NATIONAL KLAN

Broad themes and forms of analysis with respect to the Klan on a national level were much more diversified and shifting over time. Yet, as was the case with the Wisconsin Klan, the informative, narrative theme was initially used with the analysis of the overarching organization, too. Perhaps the best known comprehensive scholarly writing on the Klan was *Hooded Americanism*, by David Chalmers. Using the narrative format, *Hooded Americanism* looks at the Klan in all of its incarnations, from Reconstruction to the Civil Rights era Klan. Chalmers is largely analyzing the organization through a political lens in his research, and notes the political power the Klan had throughout the country. Other researchers on the national Klan address the topic as political historians too, such as *The Ku Klux Klan in American Politics*, written by Arnold Rice. Wyn Craig Wade’s *The Fiery Cross: the Ku Klux Klan in America* is another example of a narrative overview of the Klan in the United States, looking at specific themes of politics, leadership, and violence in his book. *The Fiery Cross* also makes an attempt to do something of a social history of the Klan within the survey, which has been another popular lens for scholars to look at the Klan through.12

Analyzing the Klan from the perspective of a social historian has been a common thread in Klan historiography. Take, for example, Nancy MacLean’s *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan*, which makes social connections across countries to help explain the rise of hate groups globally. That is, MacLean uses the social realities of the time – heightened nationalism after the end of World War One, isolationism…etc. – to explain not just the rise of the Ku Klux Klan as a hate group, but also the rise of fascism in Europe. Similarly, Chester Quarles’s *The Ku Klux Klan and Related American Racialist and Antisemitic*

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Organizations: A History and Analysis, uses the social paradigm to find causal factors for the rise of hate groups – not just the K.K.K. – in America. One more scholar to work with the social history lens for analyzing the Klan is Kenneth T. Jackson, in his book The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930. Specifically, Jackson is also something of a revisionist, reframing common conceptions about the 1920s Klan as largely a rural movement, when in fact cities were a hotbed for the organization too. Taken together as whole, political and social histories seem to be the general focus of much of the writing on the national Klan, with the narrative being the common frame to write from.¹³

There has been little scholarly writing focusing on media portrayals of the Wisconsin Klan in particular. There has been wider analysis of the overall Klan with respect to the media, such as in John M. Shotwell’s Crystallizing Public Hatred: Ku Klux Klan Public Relations in the Early 1920s. Shotwell’s analysis of public relations with respect to the national Klan is certainly interesting and informative research with respect to what this research is doing for Milwaukee specifically. Klan newspaper analysis in specific locales had been done for other areas of the country though, such as in Indiana. Bradford Scharlott’s Hoosier Journalist and the Hooded Order: Indiana Press Reaction to the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s was a great source for identifying potential methods of historical media analysis. So, though similar studies to this have been done before, none have targeted Wisconsin in specific, let alone Milwaukee newspapers. Nevertheless, these other studies certainly helped in the creation of a cohesive methodological structure for this research.¹⁴

METHODOLOGY

Literature on the Wisconsin Klan of the 1920s was somewhat narrow, and so, to get a solid understanding of the Wisconsin movement as a whole, Weaver’s monograph was instrumental. Weaver’s monograph also helped point to the most important set of primary sources on the 1920s Wisconsin Klan, which are unarguably Russell Lynch’s Milwaukee Journal articles. Lynch’s articles focused on the inner workings of the Klan, and were released between April eighth and sixteenth of 1928. Lynch, who was forced into membership through threat when he snuck into a Klan meeting, had a great breadth of knowledge of how the Klan came to be in the badger state.\(^\text{15}\) Weaver’s work utilized these newspaper articles, and he also interviewed Lynch, and was confident in the reliability of these narratives. This research therefore trusts both Weaver and Lynch’s judgment and understanding of the fraternal order. Scholarly sources on the Klan in its entirety, as well as literature on the 1920s generally, were quite vast in comparison. There were few scholarly sources analyzing the media with respect to the Klan, but those available were instrumental in the creation and direction of this writing. Through the use of primary sources of primarily newspapers and government documents, as well as secondary literature on the Klan and the 1920s era, this paper analyzes changing depictions of the Klan through Milwaukee news sources, the Journal and Sentinel, and places these changes in the wider context of the Klan’s rise and decline in Wisconsin. Several reasons were at play in choosing these specific newspapers.

There were a few practical considerations in choosing both The Milwaukee Journal and Sentinel for this research. For one, looking through microfilm of newspapers for articles related to the Klan would have proven to be a particularly monotonous and slow process if any

interesting results were to be attained. The *Journal* and *Sentinel* were both digitized and available online, with the option of searching for key terms. Thus, these two newspapers would be more readily available to the researcher, and the search process to find Klan articles within them would be less tedious. Another element at hand in choosing these two papers were their popularity during the time period in which the research was concerned. Daily circulation for the *Milwaukee Journal* was 107,564 in 1920, and grew to 165,378 by 1928. Information available on the circulation of the *Sentinel* is less comprehensive, but is put at 78,973 in 1923, 66,400 in 1924, and 55,819 in 1925. These statistics place these papers in the top 3 of all Milwaukee papers through this period in terms of circulation – with the *Wisconsin News* being the other paper. Though the *Sentinel* jumped between second and third most circulating paper in the city, it was in the top three throughout regardless of the decreasing circulation mentioned above. Given the importance of the *Milwaukee Journal* and *Sentinel* in this paper, research on these two newspapers was also essential and helpful in contextualizing information.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of this research was simply determining what constituted a positive, negative, or neutral depiction of the Klan by these newspapers. Again, Bradford Scharlott’s article on Indiana journalists followed a similar scholarly approach in tracking media depictions of the Klan, and, thus, using it as a template made these determinations come easier. So, using Scharlott’s work as a model, the following questions were used to determine newspaper depictions:

- Did the article give more time to the Klan and their perspective, or those against the Klan? If more time is given to the Klan, it tended to be a pro-Klan article.

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16 Will C. Conrad, Kathleen F. Wilson, and Dale Wilson, *The Milwaukee Journal: The First Eighty Years* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 215; Also see Appendix B.

Was the commentary by the writer on quotes from Klan or anti-Klan individuals in support of their words or not? Supporting Klan rhetoric within the article would certainly make it a positive depiction of the organization.

Was the Klan mentioned with respect to political corruption or violence? Who was the aggressor in the violence? The aggressor tended to be depicted negatively.

These were generally all of the criteria necessary in determining an article’s perspective. In fact, Klan depictions were usually unambiguous – that is, it tended to be pretty clear-cut as to whether the article was positive, negative, or neutral in depicting the Klan. If the article appeared in any way difficult to categorize based on the abovementioned criteria, it would simply be marked as neutral. Much of the criteria echo Scharlott’s, which was succinctly highlighted as the following:

In assessing coverage of the Klan, articles (including editorials) were judged as favorable to the Klan if on the whole promoted the Klan’s own positions – for example, that the organization was socially beneficial, or overwhelmingly popular, or that its parades and gatherings were awe-inspiring. Newspapers that published such articles in effect acted as arms of a Klan public relations campaign. In categorizing the articles, particular attention was paid to the use of sources; articles that relied heavily or entirely on Klan spokesmen generally were judged favorable to the organization. On the other hand, articles were considered unfavorable if they depicted the Klan as socially undesirable or ineffectual or debilitated. The remaining articles were judged as neutral to the Klan.18

Other stipulations seemed logical as the research was being conducted, such as the exclusion of bulletins. These short messages tended to have too little substance to accurately gauge as positive or negative, and often seemed neutral based on the criteria formulated in this research to assess them. Though the methodological structure is quite similar to Scharlott’s own work, this research synthesizes Scharlott’s evaluation of the Indiana press to Milwaukee’s, a region of the country less engrossed in the Klan movement. Therefore, this research attempts to bring a comparative analysis of how the media intertwined with the Klan during the 1920s such that the variance of this organization across locales can be illuminated.

18 Scharlott, 124.
BACKGROUND

_The Milwaukee Journal_ was established on November sixteenth, 1882, in a small room on Mason Street, in Milwaukee. The paper was originally intended to be a Democratic-oriented newspaper, as the creators, Peter Deuster and Michael Kraus, had intended. Twenty-two days after the establishment of the newspaper, Lucius Nieman took over many of the important roles of the _Journal_, as “its co-owner, editor, reporter and occasional typesetter.”19 Formerly associated with St. Paul’s _Dispatch_ newspaper, and having quit a managing editor job just before, Nieman bought out Deuster’s part in the paper, which is what allowed him the abovementioned roles. Nieman would be the leader and most remembered individual with respect to the establishment of the _Milwaukee Journal_ as a prominent paper in the city.

Nieman’s ideal was for the paper not to have an extreme political leaning, but strive for a balanced perspective.20 Not only did Nieman want an even-hand in approaching political matters, but also to keep a strong focus on local news – that is, any national or global news would come from other national newspapers.21 These were some of the broad strokes of the _Journal_ initially, and even into the 1920s, the time period to which this research is concerned, there were remnants of this ideology.

As new leaders joined the _Milwaukee Journal_, similar ideals to Nieman’s were still represented, though the paper admittedly began to look more cosmopolitan. Such leaders include Harry Grant, who joined in 1915, and Marvin H. Creager, who joined in 1920. Creager was noted as believing that Milwaukee’s own territory was still of primary editorial importance. That is, the _Journal_ overall began to recognize that, even located within the largest population of any

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20 Wells, 56.
21 Wells, 13.
city in the state, it did not want a style that was too cosmopolitan.\(^{22}\) Thus, by the period with which this research is concerned, we are situated with a newspaper in Wisconsin’s most populous city which wants to remain localized in a lot of the news it reports from its own writers. While there is much more information with regards to the *Milwaukee Journal*, the above mentioned is a sufficient baseline for understanding analysis of Klan articles, which will be done later in the paper. While information on the *Journal* was plentiful, the *Sentinel* was somewhat harder to research.

The *Milwaukee Sentinel* was established on June twenty-seventh, 1837, by Solomon Juneau, one of the early pioneers of the region eventually becoming Milwaukee. Juneau’s goal in creating the *Sentinel* was merely to have a paper that could compete with the *Milwaukee Advertiser*. After the death of the newspaper’s first editor, John O’Rourke, Harrison Reed was quickly hired for the position. O’Rourke, the original editor, states in the first issue of the *Sentinel* that the paper would be:

“…a disseminator of the facts; an asserter of the truth; a vindicator of the innocence and virtue; a censor of vice; an advocate of the just ‘claims’ of settlers; a promoter of harmony and social order in the community; a defender of rights of honest occupants; a detector of fraud, imposture and crime; and a vigilant Sentinel on the ramparts of Liberty and Democracy.”\(^{23}\)

A noble and idealistic ethos to start the newspaper with, there is some more concrete information the newspaper espoused early on.

Perhaps the most important piece to consider about the *Sentinel* in terms of its relation with the Klan was its political affiliations. As noted in Robert A. Witas’ Master’s thesis, “On the Ramparts: A History of the Milwaukee Sentinel,” the newspaper initially was politically

\(^{22}\) Wells, 125, 142, 153.
\(^{23}\) Witas, 4.
Democratic, but shifted toward a Whig Party allegiance after Reed took over as editor.24 The paper was Republican leaning during the era to which this research is concerned. Though Republican, the paper was still very much against LaFollette and the Progressive movement, as well as socialist politics. Given the popularity of Socialism in Milwaukee, and, oddly enough, Klan support of some Socialist politicians, this position is particularly worth noting.25

24 Witas, 1-7.
25 Witas, 71-72.
EARLY YEARS OF WISCONSIN KLAN: 1920 – SEPTEMBER, 1921

As mentioned in the introductory anecdote, the media was part of the mechanism utilized in creating initial interest in the national Klan movement, particularly through D.W. Griffith’s *A Birth of a Nation*. Later on, the media provoked congressional investigations into national Klan activity, and later covered the investigations in articles – chiefly through *The New York World*. Just as the national Klan received exposure and benefitted from the media initially, so did a Wisconsin Klan in trying to create a following itself.

Though the second awakening of the Ku Klux Klan officially occurred in 1915, it wasn’t until the early 1920s that it began making headway in the nation.\(^{26}\) In fact, during the early years of the Klan in Wisconsin – 1920-1922 – it was essentially lying dormant, waiting to be stirred into action. The beginning of the Klan in Wisconsin occurred in Milwaukee, where a request was made by a group of professionals to the Atlanta headquarters – that is, the national headquarters – for someone to come and speak about the organization to them. When a national member did indeed come to speak to a group of Milwaukee’s business class, the Klan was essentially born. The meeting was kept small and relatively secret, and was even placed aboard the U.S.S. Hawk – an American naval vessel.\(^{27}\) It was with this meeting that the Milwaukee Provisional Klan number one of Milwaukee was established.

Initially a social club called the “Milwaukee Businessman’s Club,” the meetings were casual and not geared toward creating a high member count. Though some gestures – newspaper ads – were made to gather membership in the early years, they did not garner much attention. It

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\(^{26}\) Though Simmons timed his resurgence of the Klan movement when *Birth of a Nation* was released, this media outlet did not help nearly as well as the *World* articles released in 1921. The likely reason behind this was a lack of collusion between the actual film and the reality of the movement being alive in 1915. The reality of the *World* articles in illuminating the resurgence of the Klan made this particular media exposure much more potent. Nevertheless, timing and collusion with media were important to both scenarios.

\(^{27}\) Weaver, 50, 90; Russell Lynch, “Kluxing Saps Life from Klan in Wisconsin: 38,000 Peak Strength Falls to Only 2,000,” *The Milwaukee Journal*, April 8, 1928. Microfilm (McIntyre Library).
wasn’t until late in 1921 that the *Milwaukee Journal* exploded with articles that gathered exorbitant amounts of attention.

The *Milwaukee Journal* picked up articles by the *New York World* beginning on September 6th, 1921. Just as the national movement made use of the media to establish itself with *A Birth of a Nation*, so did the Wisconsin movement. The *Journal’s* exposure was in an article titled “Unmask Ku Klux Klan as ‘Terror Rule’ Force: Sweeping Quiz Exposes ‘Invisible Empire’ as Huge Profit-making Enterprise and Menace to Security in All States.”28 In Wisconsin, and states all across the nation picking up the *World’s* story, the Klan became an insanely popular topic of discussion. Inflated figures of the popularity of the organization in these articles, and the vehemently negative depiction of the Klan, helped make the fraternal order appear infamous in the eyes of many citizens. So, although the depictions were in fact negative toward the organization, it was this massive exposure of the Klan through the Milwaukee Journal that gave organizers in the state a footstool to launch a larger campaign with. Indeed, once these articles from the *New York World* were released in the *Journal*, there was a quick realization that the Klan grabbed interest in readers. Though the new media exposure of the Klan in Wisconsin certainly aided the rise of the organization there, other factors were at play concurrently.29

While the media exposure from newspapers like the *Journal* and *Sentinel* helped garner Wisconsin interest in the fraternal order, other changes were occurring at the same time. For example, the *Journal* picked up the Klan exposés by the *World*, there were also shifts in leadership within the Wisconsin Klan occurring. Former King Kleagle – a term essentially meaning the Klan officer of the state – of Wisconsin, a man named Mitchell, was being replaced

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29 Weaver, 90-92.
by the end of 1921.\textsuperscript{30} The new leader of the Wisconsin Klan, William Wieseman, took over and rode the Klan to peak popularity in the state.\textsuperscript{31} Wieseman was chosen for the job in large part due to his ability to attract popularity to Masonic festivities, another fraternal order which he was a member and leader. Klan members figured he would be a perfect fit to attract members.\textsuperscript{32} Though Wieseman was picked for his ostensible leadership abilities, in practice he was not a major factor in the rise of Klan popularity in Milwaukee or the state. Other cultural realities and responses to a changing world were much more central to Klan popularity.

The early 1920s lay just after the end of World War I, which, at that point in time, was viewed predominantly as the bloodiest and most shocking event the world had ever seen. There were, of course, many reactions and changes in American culture as a result of such a climactic event. One such idea, and one that is rightfully acknowledged in much of the historical analysis of the Klan, is the concept of one-hundred percent Americanism. Simply put, one-hundred percent Americanism was an ethos in response to World War I, which resulted in a heightened prioritizing of nationalism and conformity in the United States. Political initiative such as the Sedition Act, which gave the government more flexibility in prosecuting socialists and other non-conformists, were ways of forcing a sense of patriotism for government initiatives – whether right or wrong. The Klan merely took this conformity a step further, by projecting a concept of “one-hundred percent Americanism” that essentially said white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants were the only true Americans.\textsuperscript{33} Though these other cultural and organizational factors played a role in ushering in Klan popularity in the state, the \textit{World} articles were nevertheless the centerpiece to

\textsuperscript{32}Weaver, 58 ; Lynch, “Klan Signed Men…”
\textsuperscript{33}Maureen A. Flanagan, \textit{America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivisms} 1890s-1920s (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 234, 266.
recognition in Wisconsin. The vast majority of Wisconsinites did not realize the Klan was in their state, or even re-established again, before the *World* articles. These exposés catalyzed the recognition that the Klan was a functioning Wisconsin organization in September of 1921, not just a secret society from the Reconstruction era.\(^{34}\)

\(^{34}\) Weaver, 56.
SHIFTING DEPICTIONS: THE KLAN FROM September, 1921 – 1924

From late 1921, when the *World* articles were distributed to a national audience, until 1924, the Klan had a notable presence in Milwaukee, and Wisconsin as a whole. Total enrollments throughout the era of the second Klan is estimated to be somewhere around 75,000 members, though it should be mentioned that data was not always gathered and kept by Klan leaders throughout the twenties. While historians estimate the total membership was around 75,000, they put the figure of peak active members *at any one time* to somewhere in the realm of 38,000. It was during the period of 1922 to 1924 where this peak active membership was reached. This range of years also saw the depictions of the Klan by the *Journal* and *Sentinel* shift more positively.35

Whereas there were essentially no positive articles toward the Klan in these newspapers before the *World* articles, positive depictions appeared with some frequency thereafter, as is shown in the data below:

Table 1: The *Milwaukee Journal* and *Sentinel* Depictions of the Klan, September 1921 – 1928

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strong Klan Period in WI (September 1921 – 1924.)</th>
<th>Weak Klan Period in WI (1925 – 1928.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Journal</strong></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sentinel</strong></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>%</strong></td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s personal research. Sources compiled for this data are located in Appendix A.

The data above was evaluated and gathered based on the criteria mentioned in the “METHODOLOGY” section. As is particularly notable in the case of both of these newspapers, September 1921-1924 saw a fairly radical shift in depictions toward the Klan compared to the other era compiled (the Klan after 1924). The Klan was much more likely, on average, to be depicted in a positive or neutral light from September 1921 to 1924. Though the peaking popularity in the state would certainly be one readily identifiable reason that the depictions may have shifted, other factors seem readily responsible for these shifting portrayals too.

Though the peaking Klan popularity between September 1921 and 1924 give some reason for more positive newspaper depictions, the reasoning is a bit more involved. Other possible motives could simply be the news writer’s sympathy toward the Klan. In fact, even if writers were not personally involved with the Klan, there is one thing they did know: That articles on the Klan got attention. Norman Weaver’s dissertation, “The Ku Klux Klan in Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan,” notes a certain mindset of many newspaper writers that could help explain the shifting depictions of the Klan:

“Newsmen were delighted to satisfy this curiosity [of the Klan] by filling their columns with news of the latest Klan Kluxings. Once they had made their discovery that the Klan held the readers’ interest, the newspapermen of the decade never allowed the Klan issue to die. Week after week, month after month, year after year, the Klan remained NEWS. Nearly every edition of every paper featured articles about the Klan…” 36

Considering the intersection between the growing membership of the Klan and the media mindset that the Klan sells, it seems reasonable that writers not only mention the Klan more often, but also to mention it positively. Though Klan popularity and newspaper reactions to this reality help to explain the shifting representations, there are certainly other elements at play too.

36 Weaver, 92.
Another consideration in explaining why the portrayals of the Klan were so positive during the era is simply that many of the editorials were wired from out of state – commonly from Indiana and New York. That is, even though the Journal and Sentinel featured the articles, they had no control over precisely what the content, and therefore depiction of the Klan, was. The only area of influence these two newspapers had for outside editorials were the titles that were given. Thus, many of the shifts in portrayals mark a larger trend nationally of the Klan’s rise in popularity. The overall concept of Klan depictions shifting more positively during peak Klan popularity in the Journal and Sentinel echoes Scharlott’s research on the Indiana Klan in the table below:

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37 Appendix A features the titles and locations of all the newspapers used in this analysis. Appendix A features many articles wired from the two areas mentioned, or, at the least, are focused in on these areas in the writing.
Table 2: The Number of Favorable, Unfavorable, and Neutral Klan-related Articles, Identified in Each Paper for Both Periods of the Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper (1921 Circulation)</th>
<th>Strong Klan Period (1921 – April 1925)</th>
<th>Weak Klan Period (April 1925 – 1927)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bloomington Daily Telephone (1,150)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bluffton Evening News (2,534)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Columbus Evening Republican (3,320)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franklin Evening Star (2,710)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary Evening Post (5,996)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greensburg Daily News (2,945)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greencastle Herald (1,235)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indianapolis News (114,995).</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muncie Star (24,995)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richmond Palladium (11,878).</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Though Scharlott breaks down his periods of time a bit differently than this research, the higher rate of “favorable” illustrations of the Klan during Indiana’s period of peak Klan popularity is mirrored by the Journal and Sentinel. The Indiana research notes that, during the period of Klan strength, anti-Klan Indiana editors had threats of violence waged against them, forcing conformity and “favorable” illustrations. In a sense, Russell Lynch, editor of The Milwaukee Journal, dealt with a similar scenario by being forced into the Klan through threat of violence.
The forced membership was in part a way to insure Lynch would not write anything negative about the Klan at the time. Though the extent of Klan threats of physical violence toward newspaper employees cannot possibly be ascertained accurately in Milwaukee or Wisconsin overall, Lynch’s story does show that it was a reality. Other pressures for positive Klan depictions were presented in other media outlets of the 1920s as well.

Further research into Milwaukee Newspapers would undeniably yield more comprehensive and accurate results into the shifting portrayals of the Klan. Some important newspapers to consider in future research in this area include The Badger American and The Wisconsin Kourier. Both of these newspapers were very much sympathetic to the Klan, and were released at many Klan meetings across the state. With article headings such as “The Sickening Sentinel” from The Badger American, the potential for research into media wars between different papers over the Klan issue could add significant depth to the understanding of the Milwaukee media’s interpretation thereof.

38 Wells, 161.
THE KLAN AFTER 1924

Many of the major *Journal* and *Sentinel* articles focusing on the Klan after March, 1925 illuminated Stephenson’s situation that was occurring in Indiana. D.C. Stephenson, the leader of the Indiana Klan, found himself in a heap of political trouble in late 1924 and early 1925, when he was accused and eventually convicted of rape and murder of Madge Oberholtzer.40 From the *Sentinel* and *Journal* articles examined in this research during and after 1924, Stephenson’s story was the most common Klan topic to be in the headlines.41 These exposés were all negative portrayals of Stephenson and the Klan, for fairly obvious reasons. Klan corruption in states besides Indiana increasingly came up in *Journal* and *Sentinel* headlines after 1924 as well. In the data compiled by the *Journal* and *Sentinel* after 1924, only five percent of the articles depicted the Klan in a positive light, compared to the 42.8 percent during the strong Klan period:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Weak Klan Period in WI (1925 – 1928).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentinel</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s personal research. Sources compiled for this data are located in Appendix A.

40 Weaver, 130.
41 Based on research compiled from the *Journal* and *Sentinel* with respect to Klan depiction, found in Appendix A, Stephenson’s incident with Olberholtzer was the most common single topic.
Corruption in the Wisconsin organization even came up in the *Milwaukee Journal* in 1928. In fact, it was these exposés that are the groundwork for much of the Wisconsin Klan research of this era.\(^{42}\)

Russell Lynch’s articles, which appeared between August eighth and sixteenth, were a comprehensive series of interpretations of the Klan in Wisconsin through the 1920s. More importantly though, Lynch, as well as the plethora of other writers across the nation, were following a general trend of exposing corruption of Klan organizations across the nation. The reality of Lynch and other writers following an exposé trend mirrors not just the *World* articles, but also the custom of positive depictions during Klan popularity. That is, there are distinct media themes related to the Wisconsin Klan during the scope of this research.

Similar to the popularity and mass appeal created by the *World* articles, the multitude of reports illuminating local Klan corruption became the craze in lieu of Stephenson’s headlines. Both circumstances show reporter attempts to illuminate Klan corruption. The primary difference was that the *World* articles worked to help the Klan, while later local exposés essentially marked the decline and fall of the 1920s order. Despite various similarities between the 2 sets of corruption exposures, there are significant differences that help explain why one helped the order so well – the *World* – while the other did not – local exposés.

Part of the reason for the latter series of articles, by writers such as Lynch, marked the decline and fall of the twenties Klan is that there simply were not many individuals communities (like Milwaukee) left to attract.\(^{43}\) That is, the sharp increase in membership between 1921 and 1924 was pervasive enough to attract the vast majority of individuals that would have thought of

\(^{42}\) Chalmers, 171-172; Weaver, 51.
\(^{43}\) Weaver, 129.
joining in a city like Milwaukee.44 Thus, once dirt like Stephenson’s surfaced in newspapers, such as in the Journal and Sentinel, the information could only have a neutral to negative depiction. On the other hand, when a very anti-Klan depiction was sold to the Journal by the New York World, most citizens in Milwaukee did not even know the Klan was an organization in their city. So, though the World articles were viciously negative, they gave the exposure and advertisement that was necessary in 1921. Sense that advertisement was already attained by 1924-1925, the local exposés were not able to attain that same positive impact for the organization. While the time period and status of citizen knowledge about the Klan were significant factors, other macro-level perspectives of many people had shifted too.

Another element to consider that contextualized Klan decline in the 1920s was the proximity of potential corruption. In other words, around the time that Stephenson’s corruption became a central topic in newspaper articles across the nation, citizens began to direct their attention toward potential corruption in their own local organizations. Of course, newspaper writers began to focus on their own locales and expose the corruption there.45

Larger trends that were changing from the early 1920s to the mid and late-1920s in the United States hint toward explanations for Klan decline in Milwaukee. One trend was the concept of “One hundred percent Americanism,” which had substantial merit in the early 1920s, but not nearly as much influence later on. This is to say that the appeal of extreme patriotism that became particularly popular in war time had time to wane, and, by the mid to late-1920s, the Klan could not appeal to this frame as successfully as it formerly had. The fear of war was just one of many reactive dispositions the Klan espoused in creating popularity. Many other fears the Klan capitalized had also reduced by the time of Klan decline – such as fear of Romanism (and

45 Weaver, 130.
particularly a Roman Catholic president) and immigrants. It is also possible that Victor Berger and other Socialist leaders worked against the Klan’s nationalistic appeal of one hundred percent Americanism in Milwaukee, further weakening Klan advertising schemes. Yet, the Klan in Milwaukee was notable for allying with Socialists in many cases, so this argument gets complicated – far too much for the extent of this research.

46 Weaver, 192; Chalmers, 109.
47 Weaver, 77-78.
CONCLUSION

Two of the highest circulating newspapers of Milwaukee between 1920-1928, the *Journal* and *Sentinel*, are fantastic case-studies in acquiring an understanding of Milwaukee newspaper portrayals of the Klan over time. Both papers reflect a strong bias in their coverage, as the newspaper’s depictions changed so drastically between the strong and weak Klan period. Certainly there must have been a sense of giving people what they wanted, which was undeniably the sensationalism of the Klan during this time. Though the number of articles is somewhat limited in this case study, it does appear that the *Journal* had stronger positive depiction of the Klan in their paper, as compared to the *Sentinel*. The figures during the strong period show the *Journal* at a fifty percent positive depiction rate, versus the *Sentinel’s* thirty-six percent during the same period. In fact, compared to Scharlott’s research of ten Indiana newspapers, the *Journal* had the highest percentage of favorable depictions of the Klan during the period of Klan strength. When considering that the *Journal* was a large metropolitan paper that bought many of its national stories from other papers, the *Journal’s* depiction is in many ways a function of the national newspaper depictions, though editors and other members of the *Journal* staff chose these articles specifically. With thirty-one of thirty-seven of the *Journal’s* articles being stories related to Klan organizations outside the state, and written out of the state, the national scope of the Journal is given more statistical credibility.48 Nevertheless, trends on both local and national levels appeared to shift in favor of the Klan much more often between September, 1921, and 1924. It is also worth noting that the *Journal* is illuminated in its historical roots as being a paper dedicated to, in Lucius Nieman’s ideal, “an analysis of the pros and cons without taking a stand.”49 Then, it makes sense that many of the Klan headlines within the state,

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48 See Appendix A, where *Journal* articles are broken down between “National” and “Local.”
49 Wells, 56.
written by Journal staff, were mostly neutral.\textsuperscript{50} Yet, most of the articles that the Journal acquired from other papers were still certainly full of political biases, and simply did not live up to the un-biased ethos Nieman and later leaders of the paper desired.\textsuperscript{51}

Then, the overwhelmingly negative depictions of the period of Klan decline make sense, given this reality. Also, the Wisconsin Klan’s angle of marketing itself as a friendly fraternal order, much the same as Freemasonry or the Knights of Columbus, helped explain why more positive-oriented articles may have been picked up by these two Milwaukee papers. That is, these papers featured articles from across the nation that depicted the Klan in a way that echoed their local depictions. The same case holds true for the weak Klan period, when exposés of Klan organizations outside Wisconsin came to mirror the corruption that Russell Lynch highlighted in his articles of the Milwaukee and greater Wisconsin Klans. That is, the popularity of these other exposés made the Wisconsin area ripe to receive exposure of local corruption. Much more general in the analysis of how depictions of the Klan shifted was seen in the nature of journalism altogether.

The political affiliation of Klan members varied widely across different locales. In the case of Milwaukee in particular, there was support between Socialists and Klan members toward one another. This is precisely the opposite of the case for many Klan organizations across the nation, who were viciously anti-Socialist. Thus, it is difficult to ascertain if political biases from the Journal and Sentinel help explain their depictions of the 1920s Klan when regional associations varied so significantly. When considering such radical shifts in depictions across the two sub-periods with which this research is concerned, regardless of their affiliations, it appears

\textsuperscript{50} Appendix A.
\textsuperscript{51} It is no doubt that many of the Klan articles written during both the strong and weak Klan periods were very much sensationalistic. Even the World articles have strong exaggerations and sensationalist projections. So, the biased, yellow journalism that was particularly popular during this period – but against the ideals of the Journal – was largely fed by Klan articles.
that the portrayals were much more dependent on other causal factors, such as regional and national popularity, and sensationalism.

Thus, there was a strong overall sense that these two major Milwaukee newspapers were in a position of struggling between theoretical idealism and pragmatic realities of their audience. In the case of the Journal particularly, Nieman’s ideal of an even-handed analysis of news was sideswiped for the sensationalism and elevated interest that Klan articles instilled in readers. Predominantly positive depictions of the Klan during the period of Wisconsin Klan growth help illuminate the papers focus on what makes money, and also what caters to changing societal perceptions of the fraternal order. When perceptions shifted toward seeing the Klan as a largely corrupt institution, which was largely catalyzed by D.C. Stephenson in Indiana, the Journal and Sentinel adapted to this paradigm through their shifting depictions – from positive depictions to exposés.
APPENDIX A

List of articles analyzed in compiling depiction of the Klan in both the Journal and Sentinel (found in tables one and three):

Sentinel Local


“Klan Band, No Ham and, Blue; One Nearly Canned.” The Milwaukee Sentinel, August 13, 1925.

“Klan Charge Called a ‘Lie’ by Zimmerman: Governor Candidate Attacks Tactics of ‘Madison Ring.’” The Milwaukee Sentinel, August 28, 1926.


Sentinel National

“80-Foot Cross Glares on City in Hood Ritual: Robed Pastor Flays Evolution Friends.” The Milwaukee Sentinel, August 10, 1925.

“600 Quit Klan as U.S. Menace.” The Milwaukee Sentinel, January 6, 1926.

“Alleged Klan Corruption Doesn’t Reach Them, Judge Told.” Milwaukee Sentinel, October 27, 1926.


“Harding Backs Man Opposing Friend of Klan: Indorses Fusion of Texas Republicans and Independent Democrats in Fight on Mayfield.” The Milwaukee Sentinel, October 24
1922.

“Indiana Center of Klan Dominancy: Indianapolis Boasts it is ‘Star’ in Realm of Knights.” *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 6, 1923.


“Mild Blow at Klan Voted by Legion: Resolution is Passed After pro and Anti Measure Fail.” *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 19, 1923.


“Reed Starts Indiana Klan Slush Probe.” *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 20, 1926.

“Reed to Probe Klan Charges.” *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 14, 1926.

“Slush Inquiry to Reveal Big Contributors: Wets and Klan Also to be Called on Senate Carpet.” *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, June 26, 1926.


“Vermont Center of Vote Interest: Elections Will be Held in Many States on Tuesday.” *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 6, 1923.


**Journal Local**


“Klan Down to 600; Once Boasted 5000.” *The Milwaukee Journal*, July 28, 1925.


“Kluxer Fined; Will Quit Klan: Malone Pleads Guilty to Slander; to Expose Order, He Says.” *The Milwaukee Journal*, June 5, 1927.

“Kluxers, Foes Back Official Blaine Ousted: Governor Twisted on Facts of Recent Troubles,
Grand County Residents Say.” *The Milwaukee Journal*, September 6, 1924.


“State Klansmen to Show Blaine: Governor’s Attack to be Countered by Series of Demonstrations.” *The Milwaukee Journal*, September 6, 1924.

Journal National


“Asks Klan to Bare Names of Floggers.” *The Milwaukee Journal*, July 12, 1927.


“Hammer Slain Buried by Klan; Widow Held.” *The Milwaukee Journal*, November 6, 1925.


“Klan Mexico’s Ally, is Claim: $2,000,000 Spent to Fight Coolidge Policy, Democrat Asserts.” *The Milwaukee Journal*, March 11, 1927.


“Klan Prejudice’ Plea is Failure.” *The Milwaukee Journal*, February 27, 1928.


“Tear off the Klan’s Mask.” *The Milwaukee Journal*, October 25, 1926.
APPENDIX B

Information on Circulation of *Milwaukee Journal* and *Sentinel*

The *Milwaukee Journal* Circulation Information, 1920-1928

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Daily Circulation</th>
<th>Sunday Circulation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>107,564</td>
<td>95,074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>111,862</td>
<td>87,593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>114,755</td>
<td>90,043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>118,555</td>
<td>103,107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>126,988</td>
<td>121,548</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>132,748</td>
<td>125,421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>148,314</td>
<td>148,798</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>158,115</td>
<td>167,611</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>165,378</td>
<td>198,043</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The *Milwaukee Sentinel* Circulation Information, 1923-1925.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Daily Circulation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>78,973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>66,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>55,819</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APPENDIX C

Part of Russell Lynch's Article – April Eighth, 1928:

THE Ku Klux Klan has almost ceased to exist in Wisconsin. Where once it counted its members in thousands, it now numbers them in hundreds.

This secret organization, less than ten years ago, was so powerful in Wisconsin that it dominated a state political convention aided in making a former klanman governor, elected city and county officers, and was credited by national klan leaders with responsibility for the election of a state senator.

Thousands of klanmen gathered in big demonstrations and paraded in hoods and gowns. The klan burned flaming crosses, got its name and its doings on the front pages of newspapers, and made state politicians uneasy.

Got Million From State

From a peak membership of 33,000, in Wisconsin in 1925, the organization has fallen to fewer than 2,000 paid-up members. The klan took more than $1,000,000 out of Wisconsin and left behind insolvent local organizations.

Since the tide of klanism subsided, many men have struggled to live down their connection with the organization—and it has been a struggle. Men of good standing, attracted to the klan by its fine declaration of principles, have found it difficult to repute the rabid tirades of klan lecturers, cross burnings, and the general adverse feeling generated by such things.

More than one former active klan man in Wisconsin has been the target of the klan as he tried to live down his past. Some have found it hard to do so, while others have lost business with the knowledge that past klan associations were responsible.

Klanmen Unpaid For

Some klanmen, both in the state and elsewhere, are still not paid for and some of the largest demonstrations left behind debts which still exist. These debts, furthermore, are spread over various klanmen throughout the state.

Bonds are still unpaid on the klanmen at Dousman, Wisconsin, and others have lost business with the knowledge that past klan associations were responsible.

A tabernacle erected north of (CONTINUED ON PAGE 4)
MILWAUKEE, as the metropolis, was the key to the klan situation in Wisconsin. The klan reached its peak in Milwaukee ahead of other parts of the state, except Racine and Kenosha, where the development was very rapid, and the collapse in this city preceded the disintegration of the klan elsewhere.

The Milwaukee klan signed 4,400 men. Its highest membership was at the time of the revolt in 1924, when it had 3,611 on its rolls. Now there is hardly a paying member in the city.

The Algaburn building office was given up a few months ago, some of the klan stock was sold and a large stock of klan regalia was turned back to the state office.

The klan was organized in Wisconsin in 1920 by a group of men who met aboard the U.S.S. Hawk in the Milwaukee river. When the local klan had its klavern at 2421 Cedar st. in 1924 an American flag from the Hawk was still in use there.

Organizers in Control

Immediately after the organization meetings were held in a hall over the Pabst theater. The national headquarters sent a man named Mitchell to be king kleagle, or chief recruiting officer, for the state.

As a provisional organization the klan was controlled by the propaganda department of the national klan and organizers sent from outside the state had control. They worked on a commission basis and were responsible to headquarters outside the state. Wisconsin kleagmen had no authority over their organization but

authority over their organization but were subject to the despotic rule of strangers.

This choice was a mistake. The membership was growing, and the king kleagle got $1 for each new member in the state. He was not satisfied with this, however, but hired kleagles to recruit members on commissions of $2.50 and $3 a head, which increased his split to $2 and $2.50.

Money rolled in so fast that the new king kleagle found himself suddenly possessed of a large income. An example of the situation was his purchase of a new automobile. He got a new car and one of his first trips with it was to Racine on a hot summer night. He drove too fast and the new motor "froze" before he got to Racine. He abandoned the car on the road and, upon returning to Milwaukee, bought another new and higher-priced machine, trading in the first. The dealer had to tap in the other car.

New members were enrolled faster in Wieseman's regime than at any time before or after, in Wisconsin, but the decline of the klan commenced at that time. The reaction was slow but certain. Good men who had become disgusted with the klan's methods.
Russell Lynch’s Article – April Tenth, 1928:

The klan began to show its strength in Milwaukee in 1922 and met opposition which helped, rather than hindered, its growth.

Resolutions were submitted to the common council attacking it. Socialist leaders denounced it but it recruited heavily among Socialists. John C. Kleist, who openly admitted his membership in the klan, ran for the state supreme court in 1922 and polled the highest vote a Socialist ever got in Wisconsin. He informed the Socialist leaders openly that the klan had more Socialists on its rolls than the party did. The Socialist executive committee finally ousted him in 1924.

Although the party leaders were strongly opposed to the klan, and both Victor L. Berger and Mayor Hoan denounced it vigorously, the klan supported Mayor Hoan against Dave Rose.

Burned Crosses Creep

The first demonstration of any size was the outdoor initiation held Oct. 8, 1922, at Riverview. About 2,000 klanmen witnessed the initiation of 200 candidates by the light of a huge flaming cross.

Many flaming crosses were burned in Milwaukee and its suburbs while the klan was strong. Saxon keepers were warned with the emblem of fire, and when a white man and a negro contemplated marrying, crosses were burned in front of both houses, causing a postponement of the ceremony.

The Milwaukee klan had an understanding that when it had 1,000 members it would be chartered. The organizers, however, were loath to give up the fees, so when that goal was near the quota was raised. It was raised twice subsequently.

The members realized that the initiation fees would aid greatly in establishing the local klan firmly and giving it working capital. The klanhouse wanted to build a clubhouse and the leaders felt that the initiation fees would swell the building fund.

When the Milwaukee organization, aiming at a new quota of 5,000 members, reached a membership of about 4,400, the quota again was raised, this time to 10,000.

A county kloisig named Benjamin Bellsow had been installed. His autocratic tactics enraged the situation and his attempt to seize control of the klan’s finances, coming almost simultaneously with the increase in quota, blew off the lid.

The Bow Tie Club

The klan before this time had moved its headquarters to the Alhambra bldg., and met in Alhambra hall as the Bow Tie club (h. o. w. — brother of what? t. e. — the invisible empire). In April, 1924, the local organization again was seeded. Only a handful of 3,611 members stuck with Wieseman and Bellsow.

The rebels charged that the organizers were “money-grabbers,” and were trying to force undesirable members on the klan for the sake of the $10. The klan’s rules were sponsored in violation of klan principles, and that flaming crosses were burned in violation of the law. The klan demanded of the imperial wizard at Atlanta that Wieseman and Bellsow be removed, that such lectures and cross burnings be abandoned, and that a charter be granted.

The local klan was suspended. F. R. Groedel, a leader among the rebels, obtained an injunction to prevent the ouster of himself from the klan and invoked the discovery statute in a threat to force leaders to reveal klan secrets. This had something to do with bringing a settlement.

“Trouble Shooter” Sent

Charles B. Lewis, a “trouble shooter,” was sent from Michigan to take charge of Wisconsin as imperial representative. Wieseman was “promoted” to a klan job at Washington. Bellsow resigned as county kloisig and was made a special field representative. The terms of the rebels were accepted.

The klan reallied with the national organization. The Perry Day home at 254 Cedar st. was purchased for $35,000 and held by the Milwaukee Klan Home corporation which rented it to the klan. The corporation was formed by klan leaders. The Milwaukee klan was chartered Dec. 1, 1924, with 1,600 paid-up members.

Then organizers resumed the provocative lectures. flaming crosses again were burned. Bellsow returned as county organizer. The members who had revolted to save the klan in Milwaukee realized that they were powerless and the organization went to pieces.

An idea of the rapidity of the disintegration may be gained from the fact that in September, 1923, the Milwaukee klan picnic in Pleasant Valley park, West Allis, drew 15,000 persons, while a repetition of the affair just after the revolt had been settled in 1924 had an attendance of only 1,500.

By the middle of 1925 the Milwaukee klan was a wreck. Mr. Groedel, an early member and attorney for the klan, quit in July with the statement that the organization had only 600 members and that most of those were on the verge of resigning because of Bellsow’s policies.

Rent of $400 due the Kian Home Corporation from the klan for use of the building on Cedar st. was unpaid. The building finally was sold and in May, 1926, the corporation was dissolved.

The klan moved back into its Alhambra bldg. office and maintained a headquarters there until the membership became so small that it could not support an office. The klavern, a klan drill team, survived by recruiting under another name and was no longer affiliated with the klan.
Russell Lynch’s Article – April Eleventh, 1928:

The Fox river valley was a Ku Klux Klan center. The Klan numbered several thousand members in Winnebago county, and it remained a powerful force until 1924 when Benjamin Bellow, who had resigned as Milwaukee county grand dragon after the revolt of the Milwaukee Klan, arrived in Oshkosh as special field representative of King Klagle Charles B. Lewis.

Resign En Mass

Bellows methods proved as obnoxious to the Oshkosh members as they had to the Milwaukee Klan. Persuasion developed and finally precipitated matters by making remarks to one of the officers who were resigned. The executive committee, of which one of the officers of an Oshkosh insurance company was chairman, held an indignation meeting and resigned en masse. The minutes of the meeting were sent to Lewis.

The membership fell off, but the Klan was rebuilt. Bellows came back to Milwaukee.

A big demonstration was held at the county fair park July 4, 1924, which was one of the largest Ku Klux Klan ever had. Admission was charged and receipts reached a large total, but when the affair was over the Klan had a deficit of about $3,000.

Records were in such a tangle that no accounting was ever made. The local officials tried to straighten out matters and arranged to pay some of the bills in installments. Some of the bills are still outstanding for taxes, electric lighting, and printing.

The Tabernacle Flames

The Klan was nearly down and out in membership and finances. About 100 members were lost and only about 100 of the rest attended meetings. Under local leadership, the Klan again grew back to original strength, until the time of Pat Malone’s tabernacle meetings in April and May, 1928.

Klagesen built a large tabernacle but outside of Oshkosh, in six days. The building seated 10,000 persons. The meetings were interrupted when the state industrial commission ordered the building closed for violations of the building code.

Malone’s lectures around the corner of a good many klagesen, a former challeged circles of the Oshkosh Klan, said recently. “He damned the Catholics and exposed the priests until only the fact that the Oshkosh organization was involved pretty deep financially kept the klan from ending the meetings.”

You know, klagesen swear solemnly to hold no prejudice against any man for his honest religious convictions, whether those convictions conflict with his own or not. That is in the klan.

After Malone’s efforts, the Oshkosh Klan agreed to have nothing more to do with such affairs and interrupted the grand dragon of this attitude. The grand dragon sent an order through the state prohibiting lectures.

Malone had gone to Fond du Lac and held tent meetings. The klan there lost members. After the action of the Oshkosh klan, no connection with the Wisconsin klan was severed.

The Oshkosh klan was left with a $3,000 debt on the tabernacle. The collections went to Malone. The organization lost 75 per cent of its membership within a short time as the result of the affair.

Issue in Trial

The Klan issue was raised in the trial of Rudolph Janser, cafe owner, for the shooting Jan. 1, 1928, of Patrolman Palmer Thomsen, in Madison. Attorney for Janser charged that members of the Madison police department were klagesen and had persecuted Janser because he was a Jew. Attly, W. B. Rubin, Milwaukee made this accusation in 1927 and declared that klan influence in the police force was responsible for murder and violence in the Madison “bush” and the failure to arrest guilty persons, after such occurrences.

Janser himself charged that it was a waste of taxpayers’ money and a source of trouble to have klagesen stationed as policemen in a district populated largely by Catholics, negroes and Jews.

The Madison Klan conducted the funeral of Patrolman Herbert Drecel...
Russell Lynch’s Article – April Twelfth, 1928:

A
NOTHER evil of Kluxing ex-
posed in Chippewa county and
the surrounding area, as Senator
Blaine learned when he went there
to speak in the 1928 campaign.

While Mr. Blaine was governor
he denounced the Klam vigorously at
party meetings and klansmen
burned to ‘Roscoeb’ buttons when he
was seeking his third term
as governor.

The klans in the 1923 fall election
had endorsed 11 candidates in Chip-
pewa Falls and Chippewa county
and 10 of them were elected. One
was Paul Rahle, then a klans leader
who became assemblyman.

Gov. Blaine was unable to speak
at the Red Theater, Chippewa Falls
Sept. 25, 1925, and advertisements
announced that he would discuss
the Klan and reveal the record of
Paul Rahle.

Drops His Notes.

Chippewa county had enrolled
about 300 klansmen, not counting
women and children in auxiliary
organizations and many of them went
to the meeting. The governor had
to push through a crowd which
jammed the streets outside the
packed theater. He was informed
that the crowd included many
klansmen.

Gov. Blaine had just launched into
his opening remarks when Assembly-
man Rahle entered the hall. He
was greeted with cheers and cries
of “We want Rahle! Hurrah for
Rahle!”

But the governor dropped his notes
several times and finally shouted for
order in the name of the state. A
klansman was ejected from the
theater and quiet was restored. Mr.
Blaine then demonstrated his ability
as an extemporaneous speaker. He
said not a word about the klan or
Mr. Rahle, but discussed Algerian
and the French war.

About two weeks later, in Chip-
pewa Falls’ twin city of Eau Claire,
the governor informed a group of
politicians that while he and Paul
Rahle had not agreed on many
things, he believed that Mr. Rahle
always tried to do the right thing
and that he was a promising
young man.

TRIED TO Dictate.

After the election of 10 of the
11 candidates endorsed by the klan,
William McMurray, Madison, a field
officer for the klan in Chippewa

Mr. Blaine made a successful run
for the senate in 1926 against Sen-
ator Irvine L. Lenroot, Ralph M.
Hammond, grand dragon of the klan in Wisconsin,
took credit for this victory, according to the affi-
davit of J. E. Lindsay, a former klaxon, as follows:

J. E. Lindsay, first being duly sworn, deposes and says that on or about
Oct. 20, 1926, he, with others, was
present at a meeting in the city of
Menomonie, Wis., and that among
others present was one Ralph M. Ham-
mond, known to him to be the
grand dragon and chief executive of-
cler of the Ku Klux Klan in Wisconsin.

CREDITED FOR VICTORY.

This incident further reveals that
said Ralph Hammond then and there
stated:

That he had recently attended a
national kloonvocation of the Ku Klux
Klan in Washington, D.C., and that
during said meeting a telegram was
read from the platform to the effect
that Irvine L. Lenroot, who was re-
ferred to as the chief exponent of

the world cult, had been defeated for
reelection as United States senator
from Wisconsin by John J. Blaine,
that the present offices of the klon-
voation then said that the meeting
should see the man responsible for
tags and called upon him, the said
Ralph Hammond, to come forward
and that he, the said Ralph Hammond,
complied, and that thereafter there
was a tremendous ovation, the band
struck up “On Wisconsin” and he
said Ralph Hammond acknowledged
the sound and noted.

Affiant further says that the said
Ralph M. Hammond, the said Memon-
omeetings held that the victor
of the said John J. Rahle was
regarded by the national kloon
organization as a klon victory.
Russell Lynch’s Article – April Thirteenth, 1928:

KLUXING — the recruiting of klansmen — was at its height in Wisconsin in 1923 and 1924. Recruitment continued at a slower pace in 1925, and although the disintegration of membership had begun, the power of the Klan continued to be felt strongly through 1926.

Heavy kluxing in 1923 and 1924 led to great demonstrations in 1924 in the form of public gatherings and parades and initiations. In the same year district attorneys, sheriffs, assemblymen and city officials were elected with klan support, sometimes secret and sometimes open.

In some communities the klan was one of the most effective political machines the state has seen, particularly in Chippewa county, Oshkosh, Racine and Kenosha.

Winning Klan Vote

A decade system was used. Each klansman undertook to urge the klan candidates on 10 non-klansmen. In this way 1,000 klansmen theoretically could call on 10,000 voters. Practically, there was duplication, which, however, probably was not without its results.

The organization, under Charles B. Lewis, king kagle and grand dragon in 1924 and 1925, consisted of three provinces. The present grand dragon, Ralph M. Hammond, was great kagan of province No. 1, consisting of the southeastern counties, including Milwaukee. This province no longer exists. The Rev. Daniel Woodward, former chaplain of the state prison, was great kagan of province No. 2, the eastern counties, and “Dr.” W. L. Tilton, Chippewa Falls, was great kagan of province No. 3, the western counties. Province No. 1 now is part of province No. 2.

The membership grew so rapidly in 1923 and 1924 that candidates were initiated in batches of 200 to 1,000. Hundreds of thousands of dollars rolled into klan coffers.

Dollars Rolled In

In the five or six years that the klan thrived in the state, initiation fees of $10 each were collected from about 75,000 persons. The officiating klan — from 25 cents to the king kagle and $5 to the grand dragon — was divided equally between the state and the national klan. The first two initiations, one in Racine and one in Milwaukee, were put on free of charge for selected groups to stimulate interest in the second degree. The disintegration game before many more had advanced to the K-Duo. However, all initiations in the K-Duo paid $1.50 for the “baldric” of which they were supposed to participate.

The result was disappointing to klan leaders. They had hoped to roll in at least $75,000. Mr. Woodward received only $366.66 in the primary but carried Chippewa, Pepin, Dunn and Rusk counties. After his defeat he resigned the klan, later to resign in a public statement denouncing the organization’s leadership.

Many Big Gatherings

The K-Duo, Knights Karnaun, or second degree, cost $5 divided equally between state and national klan. The first two initiations, one in Racine and one in Milwaukee, were put on free of charge for selected groups to stimulate interest in the second degree. The disintegration game before many more had advanced to the K-Duo. However, all initiations in the K-Duo paid $1.50 for the “baldric” of which they were supposed to participate.

In addition, the grand or state offices of the klan were held in some instances to reward men who contributed money to the klan or to platoons of men who had not been paid.

Commissioners of the klan had their offices at Madison, and a parade of 2,000 klansmen in Madison.

30,000 at Racine

The greatest demonstration ever held in the state, was the Racine klan line in 1924, which was attended by fully 30,000 persons.

A greater demonstration of klan strength was planned in 1925. The Rev. Daniel Woodward, then of Oshkosh, great kagan of province No. 2, was asked by Grand Dragon Charles B. Lewis to become a candidate for...
Part of Russell Lynch’s Article – April Fifteenth, 1928:

The final collapse of the Klu Klux Klan in Wisconsin followed the 1926 Republican state convention in the Milwaukee Auditorium and the election of Gov. Zimmerman in 1924. A former klan leader, klan delegates, strong opposition, and the election of Gov. Zimmerman, in fact, klan leaders had intended to secure actual control of the convention, but a battle of wits, which dry klanmen glimpsed under most inauspicious circumstances, upset the plan.

Nevertheless, the scheme to aid the candidacy of Mr. Zimmerman by setting up a convention slate, which klanmen believed Mr. Zimmerman would have no difficulty in defeating in the primary, went through smoothly. This “death” bit of politics by klan leaders resulted in the spectacle of klan votes swinging solidly for Charles B. Perry, Waupaca, an avowed anti-klan candidate for governor, and of W. S. Peavey, Fond du Lac, a klan leader, with drawing in favor of J. N. Tuttemore, Omro, a Catholic, for lieutenant governor.

Led to Resignations

Political intrigue within the klan divided the members and the secret support of Mr. Zimmerman resulted in the resignation of most of the grand klan officers, according to Mr.
Zimmerman for Time
Was Member of Klan

Misuse of Connection
Helped Bring Decline
of Kluxer Order in
Wisconsin

Gov. Zimmerman's connection with the Klan, held for the first time in this article, made the Klan an issue in his campaign. How he held the Klan support in secret and made it big for the Catholic vote is to be told in the final article of this series.

BY R. G. LYNCH

No History of the Ku Klux Klan's activities in Wisconsin would be complete without a review of Gov. Fred R. Zimmerman's connection with the organization. His entire campaign was based on a misrepresentation to the voters which the Klan was part of and that fact contributed to the subsequent decline of Klan power. Mr. Zimmerman had resigned from the Klan before he became a candidate for governor. His resignation, however, was not dictated by that candidacy, but was forced by circumstances at an earlier date. Klan members generally believed him to be still a member when he ran for governor.

Joined in 1922

The governor became a member of the Milwaukee Provisional Klan No. 1 in the summer of 1922, while he was a candidate for secretary of state. He was initiated at the Klan headquarters in the Alhambra Hotel and after the initiation he was introduced at a Klan meeting at Alhambra Hall, where he signed the oath of allegiance and accepted Mr. Zimmerman's resignation. He had the power to do this because the Klan was not yet chartered and he was the all-powerful head of the provisional organization in the state.

Mr. Zimmerman, an ex-member of Madison and on May 1, filed an affidavit with the city service commission, in which he denied that he was a member of the Ku Klux Klan or any other organization opposed to the Catholic Church.

The Klan had been held up in 1926 as a candidate for governor. An attempt was made to prevent any candidate for governor from joining the Klan, but it failed and a convention was held in Milwaukee where the Klan is described in a previous article. No Klan influence was felt in the interest of Mr. Zimmerman.

The rumor concerning Mr. Zimmerman's Klan affiliation spread and he attempted to cover it by asserting at Fond du Lac in August, 1926, "I am not, have never been and never will be a member of the Ku Klux Klan." He repeated this statement at Oshkosh Oct. 14, 1926.

Perry Pulled Lid Off

Charles B. Perry, opponent of Mr. Zimmerman, then made public affidavits by William Wiseman, former king kleagle of the Wisconsin Klan and Herman Kulhman, kleagle, or outer guard of the Milwaukee provisional Klan, in which it was asserted that Mr. Zimmerman had attended numerous meetings of the Klan, Alhambra hall, to which only initiated members of the Klan were admitted, and that Mr. Zimmerman had been initiated at a later meeting.

Then followed a direct attack campaign to convince the Catholic vote of Wisconsin that Mr. Zimmerman was not a Klansman. What was at stake was to be revealed in the next article.
Russell Lynch’s Article – April Seventeenth, 1928:

BY R. G. LYNCH

THE Klu Klux Klan was an issue in the 1926 gubernatorial campaign after the primary, when the rumored connection of Fred R. Zimmerman with the invisible empire was given concrete form by means of affidavits signed by former klan of flfers, who asserted that he had been a member.

Mr. Zimmerman had ignored to some extent the klan issue but when he was confronted with this definite attack he denied the issue and adamantly made it an asset rather than a liability.

Among Mr. Zimmerman’s friends was a Polish Methodist minister, the Rev. Stanislaw Maslowski, who died last January. Mr. Maslowski had the custom, rather unusual among Protestant clergymen, of wearing a reverse collar with a black habit which made him readily distinguishable for a Catholic priest.

Mr. Zimmerman induced Mr. Maslowski to accompany him on campaign trips and sit on the platform at meetings. The minister regarded it as rather a shrewd idea and laughed at the accusations. After the campaign, he boasted that he never came here, that he was the man who made the governor, and that if it had not been for him Mr. Zimmerman would not have been elected.

Such silent propaganda as the presence of Mr. Maslowski in reverse collar on campaign trips was not necessary as the campaign progressed for a deliberate campaign was undertaken. The campaign committee was started early to counteract the Klan issue, including priests that Mr. Zimmerman was not a Klansman.

Bidder Over Deception

The candidate had many strong Catholic friends, among them Frank Starck, Madison, and the late John O’Donohue. These men worked in good faith, to swing the Catholic vote for Mr. Zimmerman. They issued no assurance that he was not and never had been a member of the klan, and the affidavits sworn by the president served only to arouse their indignation, as they regarded as false tales.
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