

**When the Invisible Empire Stormed the Front Range:  
The Reign of the 1920s Ku Klux Klan in Boulder County, Colorado**

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## ABSTRACT

During the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan reemerged in the United States. This second manifestation of the Invisible Empire spread from its traditional homeland in the South to almost every other region in the United States. It gained tremendous support through shrewd campaigning, using modern forms of advertising and by diagnosing local issues in communities and offering idealistic solutions. Racial superiority remained a part of the national platform, but other forms of intolerance came to the forefront. Anti-Catholicism, anti-Semitism, and nativism became segments of a larger “100 percent Americanism” ideology that the Klan hoped to spread throughout the country. Additionally, Klan leaders used a more conservative form of Protestantism to attract more moderately minded white men and women. Other issues that the Klan argued for were improved law and order, education reform, moral authoritarianism and civic engagement.

One area in Colorado, Boulder County, had significant Klan activity during the 1920s. The cities of Boulder, Lafayette and Longmont all had local Klan lodges. In different ways, the Invisible Empire’s ideology resonated with some inhabitants of the Boulder County. Unfortunately, this history has been relegated to a few paragraphs in local histories. This thesis analyzes the development of the Klan in each city and provides some preliminary reasons behind the Klan’s ascension and decline in the county.

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## Introduction:

Our cause *is* true Americanism. This means in all *vital* things a superior Christian civilization for America. Our destiny is the common welfare, materially and mentally, physically and spiritually, upon a plane high above any mankind has ever known. We have the heritage, the resources, the opportunity, for the achievement of the noblest and best in human happiness and power. Our crusade has that glorious goal.

--Hiram Wesley Evans, former Imperial Wizard of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan<sup>1</sup>

On October 24, 1923, Hiram Wesley Evans, the national leader (Imperial Wizard) of the Ku Klux Klan gave this address to commemorate Klan Day at the Texas state fair in Dallas and to outline one of the Ku Klux Klan's basic tenets: immigration restriction. Evans's audience included thousands of Klansmen and women who had gathered to celebrate the Klan's expansion and astounding rise in popularity. The Klan of the 1920s, as noted by several scholars, differed from the first manifestation of the Klan during Reconstruction and the third wave of Klandom in the 1960s. This second wave of Klandom served, as one scholar writes, "different purposes in different communities, but . . . in general, it represented mainstream social and political concerns, not those of a disaffected fringe group."<sup>2</sup> It may be difficult to imagine the Ku Klux Klan, a secretive organization that is primarily characterized as a group of Southern, bigoted white men parading around in sheets and burning crosses, as a mainstream political and social force at any point in United States history. In fact, the Klan in the 1920s gained tangible power in state and local politics and, during its peak,

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. H.W. Evans, *The Menace of Modern Immigration* (Dallas, Texas: October 24, 1923), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Shawn Lay, *Invisible Empire in the West: Toward a New Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 19.

boasted between three and six million members.<sup>3</sup> Three major national conditions gave the Klan an ideal opportunity to spread throughout the United States. First, this second version of the Klan became an outlet for white, Protestant men and women who faced an assortment of social and cultural divisions that had spread throughout the post-World War I United States. These issues included Prohibition, immigration, and a so-called deterioration of social values, labor conflict, and religious conservatism. Additionally, a national economic recession hit the United States after World War I primarily because the European demand for American agricultural and manufactured goods decreased substantially. Finally, and perhaps most opaquely, the Klan mirrored some of the mystical and social elements of such popular fraternal organizations as the Odd Fellows, Masons, and Kiwanis.

The Klan during this time often ostentatiously exploited these feelings of unease to argue vehemently against many fundamental qualities of the United States. Hiram Wesley Evans and the national leaders of the Klan in the 1920s also used these criticisms to energize their campaign and broaden the appeal of the organization to as many white, Protestant men and women as they could. Again, contrary to popular belief, they succeeded in expanding their hooded order across the United States. One analysis found that seven of the ten states that reported the highest number of Klan events lay outside of the South--the Klan's traditional homeland.<sup>4</sup> Several scholars have provided lengthy analyses of the national Klan during the 1920s that highlight the

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<sup>3</sup> Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty!: An American History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2009), 741; and Robert Alan Goldberg, *Hooded Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Colorado* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), vii.

<sup>4</sup> Rory McVeigh, *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-Wing Movements and National Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 15.

adaptability and strength of the movement.<sup>5</sup> These analyses provide valuable overviews, which help frame the Klan as a national movement. Some have also studied individual states to determine the Klan's successes and failures at a more regional level. Colorado, for example, became the stronghold of Klan support in the Rocky Mountain West. With approximately 35,000 members, the Colorado Klan, for a time, effectively wove itself into the social fabric of the state.

Along with statewide investigations, other scholars have examined smaller, more obscure communities to better gauge how the Klan operated and attracted followers. Within Colorado, one community in particular has received scant study: Boulder County. During the 1920s, Boulder County did not escape the spread of Klandom. Instead, the Klan, with relative ease, infiltrated the local governments and/or spread throughout the towns of Boulder, Lafayette and Longmont. These three towns provide excellent case studies into the reasons behind the Klan's ascendance and swift demise. A local study like this offers an opportunity to compare the Klan's development in three geographically-close yet diverse, unique areas that were all influenced by the Invisible Empire. The main questions that arise from a community study like this include: How did the Klan operate in each city? Why did it proceed? What are the notable similarities and differences between the klaverns (local Klan chapters) in each city? Why did each Klan experience a rapid demise? Through the use of secondary works and primary sources from the era, one can begin to answer these questions. Klan members typically concealed their identities, so analyzing this movement required a methodology based on newspaper records, oral histories, Klan

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<sup>5</sup> For a more full discussion of scholarly works relating to this topic, please see the "Historiography" section below.

literature and secondary sources. Moreover, the sources examined spoke of klaverns in other smaller towns and cities such as Erie, Louisville and Nederland. I chose to focus on Boulder, Lafayette and Longmont because they were the three most populated cities and the resources available only briefly mentioned Klan activity in other communities in Boulder County.

Today, an observer would be hard-pressed to imagine the Ku Klux Klan operating in Boulder County. The city of Boulder is often described as a far left-leaning community where cultural pluralism is encouraged. Lafayette boasts similar political and social tendencies, while Longmont could be characterized as more politically moderate, but still generally as a socially liberal city. Boulder County during the 1920s, however, proved to be an appropriate community for various forms of Klan activity because the social, political and economic landscapes of the county varied dramatically from those of the present day. Indeed, hundreds of Boulder County inhabitants joined the KKK during the 1920s.

The violence and bigotry perpetrated by the Klan throughout its history should not be understated. There is no doubt that the Klan used brutal methods to propagate its hateful agenda, and one should not disregard this element of the organization. A similar perspective, to an extent, should be used when analyzing the KKK in Boulder County. One former resident of Lafayette described an instance when the editor of the *Lafayette Leader*, the primary newspaper in Lafayette during the 1920s, was taken to the edge of town and threatened because of an anti-Klan editorial he had written.<sup>6</sup> The Klan in Boulder County still utilized these fear tactics to target people who did not fit the “100

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<sup>6</sup> Blanche Moon, interview by Anne Dyni, 1990, Maria Rogers Oral History Program, Carnegie Library for Local History, Boulder, CO.



percent American” profile the Klan so vehemently argued for; that is, Klansmen and women aimed their acrimonious rhetoric and actions against people of color, Catholics, Jews and immigrants.

At the same time, one should not simply dismiss the movement as a case of “backward,” people propagating fanatical ideologies. Although their mission would be abhorred by people professing mainstream modern standards, nativism and racial intolerance were not exclusively extremist viewpoints during the 1920s. In 1921, for example, a Republican congressman from Washington, Albert Johnson, remarked that “abnormally twisted, unassailable Jews...filthy, un-American and often dangerous in their habits” threatened to overwhelm the country.<sup>7</sup> One author notes that the restrictionist, anti-immigration policies of the 1920s not only severely hindered the opportunities of immigrants, but that they “did so in a blatantly racist way that perpetuated old injustices and created new ones, which endured for decades.”<sup>8</sup>

The increase in nativist sentiment throughout the United States coincided with other severe cultural and societal clashes. Supposed sexual deviance, Prohibition, urban sprawl, conservative Protestantism, the decline of Progressivism, and the rise of conservatism all became tinder for passionate debates throughout the United States. Boulder County was not immune to these fiery disputes and many residents wrestled with these issues. By 1882, for example, the city of Boulder had eighteen saloons operating within city limits. Twenty-five years later, a city ordinance outlawed the

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<sup>7</sup> Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1882* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2004), 48.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

consumption and sale of alcohol.<sup>9</sup> It would take another sixty years for Boulder to reverse the ordinance and officially become a wet city again. These types of debates spread throughout the county and made it an ideal recruiting ground for the 1920s version of the Klan. Additionally, as will be discussed later, each klavern operated with autonomy and attempted to carry out both idealistic and concrete policies. The policies that the Boulder klavern envisioned, for example, may have differed from or aligned with those of the Longmont or Lafayette klaverns. At different points in time, the various Boulder County Klan members sought change through the traditional political system and through extralegal methods. Moreover, evidence underscores an equally important element of the 1920s Klan: that it attracted people who wanted the thrill of joining a mystical, secretive organization. As a result of the genuinely entertaining value of the Klan, members most likely considered it to be a leisure-filled activity, rather than an obligatory responsibility. Through its dexterous political and social advertising, the Klan drew support from a large constituency throughout the United States, Colorado and Boulder County. A closer examination of Klan operations in Boulder County emphasizes the Klan's appeal for law and order, conservative Protestantism<sup>10</sup>, nativism, solidarity among Protestant businesses, and civic-minded reform.

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<sup>9</sup> Phyllis Smith, *A Look at Boulder: From Settlement to City* (Boulder, CO: Pruett Publishing Company, 1981), 155.

<sup>10</sup> I selected this term because it more precisely describes the ways in which Klansmen during this era attempted to combine theologically strict Protestant Christianity with civic and moral reform.

### Historiography:

Since the Klan's rise and demise in the 1920s, there have been substantial, high-quality analyses of its motivations, successes and failures. Due to the unique nature of the Klan in the 1920s, scholars have dedicated a significant amount of time to community studies. In fact, this has become the primary method for scholars to examine the Klan of the 1920s. Many writers and scholars have used community studies to better explicate the intricacies of the Invisible Empire. This was not, however, the general approach that scholars used. For nearly a century, scholars have debated and critiqued various interpretations of the 1920s Klan to build a more objective, cogent and accessible understanding of a seemingly complex organization.

The 1920s manifestation of the Klan has garnered particular attention for its ferocious rise to power and precipitous downfall. As the foremost grassroots terrorist organization in the United States, it has been the central focus of scholars in a wide range of disciplines. Religious studies scholars have analyzed the Klan's role in society through the lens of its hardcore, militant Protestant base; political historians have examined the methods and tactics used by the 1920s Klan to determine how and why the Klan gained political power. This Klan's political ascension in the 1920s has been particularly fascinating for scholars because of the fact that the organization spread from its rural, mostly Southern homeland, into the burgeoning cities and towns scattered across the United States in a relatively short period of time. The 1920s Klan, in general, has intrigued social scientists and prompted them to scrupulously analyze how and why it ever existed.

Two well-regarded, authoritative texts provide overarching examinations of the Klan throughout the United States: David M. Chalmers' *Hooded Americanism* and Kenneth T. Jackson's *The Ku Klux Klan in the City: 1915-1930*.<sup>11</sup> These two books give precise insight into the Klan as a national phenomenon. Mainly, the two books investigate the Klan's inner-workings in various cities and states throughout the United States. These books, however, were both written during the 1960s and do not reflect the most recent scholarship on the subject. In particular, both authors argue that the Klan's success could be attributed to irrational fears and social anxieties. This may be an easy argument to construct, as there were significant, divisive issues throughout the United States during the 1920s. Relying on a strictly psychological diagnosis of the Klan's success, however, fails to take into account various factors such as economic motivations and the popularity of fraternal organizations during the time. This had been the most prominent form of arguing about how and why the 1920s Klan existed. It has been used both by writers who observed the Klan during its time, as in John Moffatt Mecklin's *The Ku Klux Klan: A Study of the American Mind* and Frank Tannenbaum's *Darker Phases of the South*,<sup>12</sup> and by those who analyzed it during the 1950s and '60s such as Chalmers, Richard Hofstadter and John Higham. When presenting the historiography of the 1920s Klan, one recent scholar, Leonard Moore, pointed out a

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<sup>11</sup> David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (New York: Franklin Watts, 1981) and Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City: 1915-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

<sup>12</sup> John Moffatt Mecklin, *The Ku Klux Klan: A Study of the American Mind* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1924) and Frank Tannenbaum, *Darker Phases of the South* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1924).

major flaw in these authors' interpretation: the lack of evidence.<sup>13</sup> Most of these scholars failed to take into account Klan literature and membership lists to dissect the rhetoric and socioeconomic backgrounds of Klansmen and women. Instead, they mostly based their reasoning on secondary sources, which disregarded an assortment of valuable resources.

A more contemporary anthology, *Invisible Empire in the West: Toward a New Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s*, collects the stories of the Klan in communities scattered throughout Colorado, Texas, Utah, California and Oregon. This compilation attempts to turn the orthodox interpretation of the 1920s Klan as a psychologically motivated, pathological organization on its head. Instead, the various scholars use the previously untouched membership lists, local newspaper articles, and correspondence between known Klan members to explain the Klan's swift expansion past its traditional Southern homeland into the developing west. Most importantly, these studies illustrate the speed with which the Klan expanded during the 1920s. Its widespread appeal and broad messages enticed many regular Americans throughout the United States. These focused examinations allow for a scrupulous interpretation of a complex social organization during a tumultuous period of time.

Rory McVeigh presents an even more up-to-date interpretation in his book *The Rise of the Ku Klux Klan: Right-Wing Movements and National Politics*. As a sociologist, McVeigh attempts to argue the reasons behind the Klan's ascendance using a theoretical framework called "Power Devaluation Theory." This theory attempts to address how and why a right-wing organization predominately comprised of relatively

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<sup>13</sup> Moore, *Invisible Empire in the West*, 23.

privileged men and women would mobilize in the first place, and then gain significant social and political power. It essentially contends that when a privileged group of people feels that another social group threatens their rights and power, a well-structured organization may emerge to maintain or restore these endangered privileges.

McVeigh's interpretation attempts to weave together all of the Klan's national agenda to better understand how it achieved its power. McVeigh highlights how the Klan merged immigration restriction, economic stress, Protestant conservatism, public education and fraternalism in their "100 percent Americanism" platform to enlarge their pool of recruits and attract support from non-Klansmen and women. As McVeigh identifies, non-Klansmen and women would act as a key demographic throughout the Klan's rise and during its downfall.

The most recent synthesis of the 1920s Klan can be found in Thomas E. Pegram's *One Hundred Percent American: The Rebirth and Decline of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s*. In this contemporary interpretation of the 1920s Klan, Pegram synthesizes the work done by scholars in the 1980s and '90s to present a more updated view of the second Invisible Empire. Drawing on the books and articles writing by Charles Alexander, Leonard Moore, Robert Alan Goldberg, David Horowitz, Kathleen Blee and a host of other scholars, Pegram masterfully weaves together these secondary sources with a reexamination of primary sources to better explicate how the Klan operated as both a social and a political movement. Relying on the substantial rise in community studies, Pegram crystallizes the historiographical movement towards representing the 1920s Klan as a more mainstream, rather than extremist, reaction to conflicts in the United States.

In this thesis I hope to shed further light on the 1920s Klan in the same manner as this most recent historiographical perspective. By examining this second version of the Invisible Empire through the lens of a community study, I hope to continue this tradition of analyzing national and regional themes through smaller-scale experiences. Additionally, this thesis is also intended to fill a considerable gap in the local history of Boulder County. This area of Colorado has a rich, significant history, and it would be unfortunate for this chapter, no matter how strange, to continue to receive an insufficient level of scrutiny.

## I. The Second Wave of the KKK:

The resurrection of the Ku Klux Klan is often attributed to the release of the epic historical film *Birth of a Nation* (1915). Directed by D.W. Griffith, this film received both spirited praise and fierce criticism for its technical mastery and prejudiced storytelling. Griffith based the film on a novel written by Thomas Dixon, which highlighted the rich, supposedly exemplary history of the South. In particular, it portrayed the Reconstruction-era Klan as gallant heroes and defenders of white womanhood and white supremacy. They were also stalwart guardians of the South's political and cultural institutions. Although the story was laced with historical inaccuracies, the film exhilarated audiences across the United States. Allegedly, on one occasion, an excited audience member at a Southern movie theater shot at the screen when an action-packed chase scene played.<sup>14</sup>

During the same year that *Birth of a Nation* was released, the eventual founder of the second Ku Klux Klan, Colonel William J. Simmons, had also taken an interest in Klan history. Simmons had fought in the Spanish-American War, but "Colonel" was a title granted to him by the Woodmen of the World. The son of a doctor from Alabama, Simmons had entered the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church, lectured on Southern history at Lanier University and been an active member of various fraternal organizations including the Freemasons, the Knights of Pythias, and the Odd Fellows. During the spring of 1915, Simmons acquired a copy of the original Reconstruction-era Klan's Prescript. It outlined the hierarchical structure and ceremonial rituals of the first Klan, and served as the primary model for Simmons' interpretation of the Klan.

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<sup>14</sup> Jackson, *Ku Klux Klan in the City*, 4.



Described as an “unbelievably egotistical individual,” Simmons endowed himself with the title of Imperial Wizard and made himself leader of the infant second Klan.<sup>15</sup>

In 1915, following an extravagant cross-burning on Stone Mountain in Atlanta, Georgia during a late November night, Simmons successfully reincarnated the Ku Klux Klan. Simmons’s leadership abilities did not, however, translate into early widespread success. By 1920, the Klan could only boast about 2,000 members from Georgia and Alabama. The organization also faced considerable financial issues that were magnified by internal greed. Simmons turned to the aid of two young professional organizers, Edward Young Clarke and Elizabeth Tyler. Both had successfully helped to promote organizations including the Red Cross, the Salvation Army and the Anti-Saloon League. After meeting with Simmons, Clarke and Tyler drastically altered the KKK’s business model and eventually created a system in which kleagles (national recruiters) earned 80 percent of the total fees collected from new recruits. The remaining twenty percent of the two-dollar initiation fee ended up at the National Headquarters in Atlanta. This reform contributed to the Klan’s swift ascendance throughout the United States.<sup>16</sup>

From Atlanta, the national recruiters were instructed to identify local issues in the communities they visited and construct a platform that offered the Ku Klux Klan as a solution. This modification led to immediate success, as the number of paid initiates skyrocketed to nearly 100,000 by the summer of 1921.<sup>17</sup> The expanding Klan laid out a hierarchical structure in which states and regions were dissected into realms. A district

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<sup>15</sup> McVeigh, *Rise of the Ku Klux Klan*, 19 and Jackson, *Ku Klux Klan in the City*, 6-7.

<sup>16</sup> McVeigh, 20-21 and Jackson, 8.

<sup>17</sup> Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 33.

sales manager, the Grand Goblin, would oversee a King Kleagle who managed the regular Kleagles. Kleagles were often selected from the popular fraternal organizations of the 1920s for their in-depth knowledge of the fraternities' mystical elements.<sup>18</sup>

By 1922, several contingent events tremendously impacted the organization. In September 1921, the *New York World* ran a three-week exposé of the hooded order. Eighteen major newspapers including the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* and *Boston Globe* printed the story. As a result, the United States House of Representatives opened an investigation into the Invisible Empire's affairs. Simmons, an eloquent speaker, was able to turn the potentially catastrophic investigation into an opportunity to share the virtues of the Klan. An upsurge in support followed the investigation and the Klan's growth seemed to be unstoppable. Internal dissent, however, would lead to the overthrow of Simmons.<sup>19</sup>

During the first national convention (Klonvocation) in Atlanta, a number of disenchanted state Klan leaders gathered to oust Simmons. The leaders included Indiana Grand Dragon (state leader) D.C. Stephenson and Texas Province No. 2 Grand Titan (district commander) and Dallas klavern Exalted Cyclops (local chapter leader) Hiram Wesley Evans. After Evans and a group of National Klan leaders had tricked Simmons into accepting a meaningless role, Evans was selected as the new Imperial Wizard. Under the leadership of Evans, the Klan made even greater headway in expanding both politically and socially across the United States. Financially, the Klan's total assets, according to the national Klan's publication the *Imperial Night-Hawk*,

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.

<sup>19</sup> Jackson, *Ku Klux Klan in the City*, 12.

increased from \$403,171 in July 1922 to \$1,088,473 in July 1923.<sup>20</sup> With the increased financial supply, Evans and other Klan leaders set their sights on acquiring political power.

A string of political victories in 1922 further galvanized support and made the Klan's ascendance seem likely to last. The Klan attained political success in Oregon, Oklahoma, Georgia and Texas as Klan-backed candidates were elected to local offices.<sup>21</sup> Issues that pervaded the United States became central to the Klan's early political success. Candidates saw themselves as championing "100-percent Americanism" and fighting against the scourge of "aliens." Moreover, local issues involving labor unions and organizers, public education and Prohibition became integral to the Klan's platform. Essentially, the Klan did not simply manufacture the disputes that entangled local politics. Rather, the Klan entered areas that were predisposed to its national agenda.

By using highly skilled organizers and implementing a well-designed political machine, the second Klan achieved its peak during the election season of 1924. As noted by scholar Rory McVeigh, the Klan "drew inspiration from the Progressive movement, the populist movement and a republican tradition."<sup>22</sup> The Klan's own rhetorical explanation of its political goals is encapsulated in a passage from the *Imperial Night-Hawk*. One contributor wrote that "The vote is the instrument by which each man exercises his equality. When the vote is given to those who are not entitled to it, its value to the real American citizen is depreciated and his equality is encroached

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<sup>20</sup> McVeigh, *Rise of the Ku Klux Klan*, 24-25.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-26.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

upon.”<sup>23</sup> Using ultranationalist rhetoric, the Klan intended to raise awareness on the social and moral issues that were, supposedly, poisoning the once unassailable American identity.

As its Kleagles and promoters took part in a nationwide grassroots campaign, the Klan gained an unprecedented level of political control. The Klan won major victories at the local and state levels in almost every state. Governors and/or state legislators in Oregon, Texas, California, Indiana and Illinois had either formally endorsed the Klan or had, at one point, donned the ghostly hoods and sheets themselves. Even at the federal level, a handful of U.S. senators were known Klansmen. This sweeping victory, however, would not last long. Almost as soon as the Klan had gained this abundance of political authority, it began to collapse. Dissent and deficient knowledge of actual governance led to the second Klan’s swift demise by 1928. Even a small resurgence during the 1928 presidential campaign, when the Klan attacked Catholic presidential candidate Al Smith, could not sustain the second Klan, and by 1930, it had effectively lost nearly all of its political power.

Before its disintegration, however, the Klan had also achieved an unparalleled level of political and social success in Colorado. National Klan leaders had set their eyes on the flourishing Centennial State almost as soon as the Klan’s reemergence had commenced. Before his ouster as Imperial Wizard, Colonel Simmons had made an exploratory visit to Colorado during the spring of 1921. Arriving at Union Station in a dapper-looking suit, Simmons exchanged greetings with an old associate, Leo Kennedy. Kennedy whisked Simmons to the famed Brown Palace, where members of

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 86.

the political and social elite of Colorado gathered.<sup>24</sup> This meeting marked the genesis of Klan activity in Colorado and the preliminary step in spreading Klandom throughout Boulder County.

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<sup>24</sup> Goldberg, *Hooded Empire*, 3-5.

## II. The Klan in Colorado:

As the preeminent economic and social center in the Rocky Mountain West, Colorado would become an integral part of the national Klan during the 1920s. Its topographical layout would initially, however, make it seem like a difficult place for the Klan to spread. Characterized by treeless plains to the east and the majestic Rocky Mountains to the west, Colorado lured cattle ranchers and crop-growing farmers who dispersed throughout the state. But Colorado underwent an urban surge during the early 1900s that caused an influx of industries and businesses to pop up throughout the state. Along with this economic and demographic expansion that increased the viability of the Klan in Colorado, the state's nativist history laid a foundation for the Klan's growth.

By the 1840s, nativism and anti-Catholicism had materialized through ballot boxes throughout the United States. A tradition of Protestant domination and a rush of immigrants from countries like Germany and Ireland caused a wave of fear and targeted discrimination towards newcomers. Aggressive nativist sentiment morphed into a political entity with the creation of the Know-Nothing Party during the 1850s. It shared many qualities with the second Klan, including a meteoric rise and precipitous fall. Moreover, it was a "highly secretive, ritualistic, fraternal order."<sup>25</sup> Members of the Know-Nothing party emphatically denounced the Catholic Church and any Papal control over traditionally American institutions like schools and government. As a third party, the Know-Nothings were unable to sustain political victories achieved during the

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<sup>25</sup> Carla Joan Atchison, "Nativism in Colorado Politics: The American Protective Association and the Ku Klux Klan" (MA thesis, University of Colorado at Boulder, 1972), 17.

1854 and 1855 elections. Additionally, the Know-Nothings were affected by the same political ineptness that plagued the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s. As the progenitor of an anti-Catholic, nativist tradition, it would heavily influence the political landscape in the United States for decades.

This historical infusion of politics and anti-Catholicism continued with the American Protective Association (A.P.A.) during the 1890s. Founded by Henry F. Bowers, a lawyer from Clinton, Iowa, the A.P.A. seized political control primarily throughout the upper Northeast, Midwest and far West. As opposed to the Know-Nothings, who had formulated their own political party, the A.P.A. members embedded themselves into the already established Democratic and Republican parties. This practice proved a critical factor in the Klan's success in Colorado during the 1920s. The states with 100,000 A.P.A. members or more included Ohio, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, New York, Michigan, Illinois, Missouri, Wisconsin, Washington, California and Colorado. Of all those states, only Colorado and Washington had total populations fewer than 500,000.<sup>26</sup> Although total membership of the secret wing of the A.P.A. actually numbered around 100,000, the fact that Colorado had such a high-percentage of dues-paying members illustrates the ferocity of nativism throughout the state.

Economically, conditions in Colorado experienced a downturn during the late nineteenth century, as the price of silver dropped to a ratio of 20:1 with gold by 1890. Additionally, the growth of the Populist Party, who swayed Western voters with their free silver platform, impacted the rise of the A.P.A. in Colorado. Republicans had

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

experienced tremendous success in Colorado up to this point. The ascendance of the Populist Party in Colorado, however, seriously threatened the Republicans' power. After the Republicans lost control for the first time in Colorado's history during the 1890 elections, members of the A.P.A. allied themselves with the Republicans to regain power.<sup>27</sup> When the Republicans won the 1894 state elections, the *Rocky Mountain News* declared that the A.P.A. was the main reason.<sup>28</sup> The A.P.A's success in the state was short-lived, however, as they failed to carry out any substantial anti-Catholic measures and were smothered by traditional Republicans in office. Even though the A.P.A's time in Colorado was brief, it laid out a strong tradition of anti-Catholicism and nativism for the Klan to exploit.

After Simmons' visit, Klan leaders in Colorado naturally identified Denver as the premier location for a state headquarters. Boasting over 25,000 inhabitants, Denver was far more populous than the surrounding communities in the Front Range. Like the center of a black hole, the Denver Klan's gravitational pull exerted the most influence on the counties that were the closest geographically. The diffusion of urbanized areas in Colorado made it an ideal situation for Klandom to spread quickly. Situated only 30 miles from Boulder, Denver was relatively close to the other urban areas in Colorado including Greeley (54 miles), Colorado Springs (70 miles) and Pueblo (112 miles).<sup>29</sup> This close proximity allowed for Boulder County to be tremendously influenced by Denver. This intrinsic connection, however, did not cause all of the Boulder County klaverns to become homogenized clones of Denver's klaverns.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 49-51.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>29</sup> Goldberg, *Hooded Empire*, 5.



In the hierarchical structure that epitomized the national Klan's governing system, Denver received directives and mandates from the national headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia. As long as the Denver Klan did not deviate too far from the national Klan's overarching "100-percent Americanism" platform, it could maintain a strong level of autonomy. A trickle-down effect occurred in which the national norms percolated down to the state and local levels. One of the critical factors for the Klan's success in the 1920s, and for its demise, was that this percolation did not follow a rigid, hyper-conformist pattern. That is, many of the state and local Klan units developed their own unique manifestations of Klandom. This balance proved too ambitious as the strains between the national, state and local levels ultimately shattered the chains that connected the organization. Colorado Klansmen proved susceptible to this pattern as scandals and internal dissension caused a quick deterioration. Nevertheless, before this disintegration occurred, the Klan gained tangible social and political power throughout the state.

Imperial Wizard Simmons's trip to Colorado in 1921 not only exemplified the overt intolerance that the Klan supported, but also the fact that the 1920s Klan had a strong business-oriented aspect. Simmons saw Colorado as a fertile recruiting ground, not only to spread the message of the Klan, but also to attract a new supply of financial support. Financial support arrived, as the Klan's flexibility in the 1920s allowed it to flourish in Colorado. As identified by Robert Alan Goldberg in his account of the Klan in Colorado, the Klan's success or failure in a particular community rested on the "interplay of four variables: local tensions, governmental responsiveness, the quality of

the klavern's leadership, and community perceptions."<sup>30</sup> These four factors represent quantifiable forms of measuring a klavern's level of success when analyzing a particular community.

Before the Klan could grow throughout the state, it had to first establish a stronghold in Denver. In order to build this stronghold, Simmons and other Klan leaders had to identify the person who would lead the Colorado Klan. A few months after Simmons' arrival, the Denver Klan went public and experienced a slight defeat via a series of exposés published by the *Denver Express*, a newspaper that generally focused on labor issues. The Denver klavern then went dark to reassess its strategy and look for a more charismatic leader. The unexpected identification and ascent of such a man, a local dentist named John Galen Locke, acted as a major catalyst for the Klan's success in Colorado. According to a former patient, Locke resembled a "Buddha with a goatee," due to his rotund physique and Van Dyke beard.<sup>31</sup> Although his appearance may have been ostentatious, it belied a serious, astute personality that propelled him to the top of the Colorado Klan's hierarchy as Grand Dragon. Additionally, he cemented his role as the Colorado Klan's leader, but he was not an extreme bigot. In fact, the main driving force behind his ascent was his desire for power. A friend of Locke's said, "He felt a sense of history and mission all of a sudden. Here, he, Dr. Locke, who had never done anything but work on this poor human carcass, was shaping the course of life of thousands of people. And he loved the power, he just loved it. No doubt about it."<sup>32</sup> Locke's reach would later extend to Boulder County, as evidenced by the fact that

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 16.

his demise as Klan leader coincided with the rise of another local fraternal organization that he founded, the Minute Men of America.

After weathering a wave of backlash and opposition, the Colorado Klan leaders reinserted themselves into the political landscape in 1924, the year of the national Klan sweep. Led by Locke, the Colorado Klan ramped up its campaigning and calls for financial support by systematically enlarging its voting bloc, county-by-county. The Klan nominated Clarence Morley for the gubernatorial race, Rice Means for the short-term Senate vacancy following the death of Samuel D. Nicholson in 1923, and Carl S. Milliken for Secretary of State. Senator Lawrence Phipps, who was running for re-election, decided to formally endorse the Klan even though he was not officially a member. Similar to the A.P.A before it, the Klan selectively infiltrated the established Democratic and Republican parties rather than run as a third party. Generally, however, its nominees for state leadership were Republicans. During the 1924 state conventions, it appeared as though the Klan would not be able to sustain its success as none of its candidates received the top designations. Despite that, shrewd campaigning and a strong showing at the polls led to a sweep during the primary election in September. Throughout the state, voters nominated a Klan candidate for every state office except the superintendent of public instruction.<sup>33</sup>

When the general election campaign ramped up, Klan candidates publically steered away from overtly condemning any social group or spreading the traditional Klan rhetoric. Instead, they focused their message on promoting law and order, the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 77.

Constitution, and aligning themselves with the national Republican platform.<sup>34</sup> In addition to embracing a more moderate political platform, the Klan faced disorganized and inept Democratic candidates. Morrison Shafroth, the Democratic opponent pitted against Rice Means, was particularly unskilled in gathering financial support. He reminisced that “we spent no money, we paid no workers. We had no paid advertisements. It was really a very foolish kind of a campaign.”<sup>35</sup> This combination characterized the Klan’s successes throughout the state: a dedicated, unified minority competing against a scattered majority. It also led to an overwhelming victory when Coloradoans went to the polls on November 4. Riding a wave of late door-to-door campaigning, Klan candidates were elected to the offices of lieutenant governor, secretary of state, attorney general, superintendent of public instruction, and state supreme court justice. Klan candidates also won a variety of seats in the legislative and judicial wings, giving the Klan a strong minority in Colorado’s House of Representatives. Moreover, Morley won the gubernatorial race while Means and Phipps each won their respective seats in the U.S. Senate. Overall, the Klan endorsed the only two Democratic candidates who won.<sup>36</sup>

National Klan leaders including Imperial Wizard Evans and the Grand Dragons of surrounding states travelled to Denver to celebrate the Klan’s decisive victory at the polls. This celebration would be short-lived, however, as the Klan’s victory also presaged its ultimate demise. The Klan faced adversarial political tactics by both non-Klansmen and women in the state House and Senate. Non-Klansmen and women

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 81.

legislators, for example, gained control of influential committees and united to block a substantial number of bills through seemingly benign procedural motions and tactics. As the Colorado Klan faced off against their opponents, a series of both national and local scandals severely hurt the Klan's public image and internal fractures further damaged the organization. Before members left and the organization died, however, the Invisible Empire had planted itself into the heart of Boulder County.

### III. The “Athens of the West”: The Klan in the City of Boulder:

The fact that the three cities examined in this thesis--Boulder, Lafayette and Longmont--each had a functioning klavern in the 1920s speaks to the Klan's considerable flexibility. Before the Klan arrived in Boulder County, each city had distinct characteristics, which clearly distinguished them from one another. As with any community, various factors converged to shape the identities of each of the three cities. The University of Colorado, for example, heavily influenced Boulder. Coal mining became the staple economic force in Lafayette, and agricultural crops like sugar beets brought people from various racial and ethnic backgrounds to Longmont. More than anything, state Klan leaders saw Boulder County as a community in which it could appeal to conservative Protestantism, civic activism and moral authoritarianism.

If Denver was the Queen City of Colorado, then the city of Boulder was its slightly younger counterpart along the Front Range. As the oldest and most populous city in Boulder County, it had a tremendous impact on the county as a whole. The fact that the city of Boulder housed the third klavern established in Colorado (Colorado klavern No.3) signifies how quickly the Klan's principles resonated with Boulder inhabitants. Before the Klan arrived, however, there were specific issues that spurred significant conflict and divisions. Although the inhabitants of Boulder who were either active Klansmen or supporters may not necessarily have agreed with every element of the Klan's "100 percent Americanism" platform, there is ample evidence that certain components of the Klan's agenda corresponded with local issues.

Established in 1859 by a group of prospectors from Nebraska, the city of Boulder became a central location for gold and silver mining. Although the initial

mining rush injected Boulder with frontier-style characteristics, one author writes that Boulder “was never the so-called typical rip-roaring mining camp of the wild west.”<sup>37</sup> In general, Boulder was, in fact, a mining town that experienced considerable difficulties during its early years. Between 1858 and 1870, social and economic factors such as conflict with Native Americans, unemployment and the Civil War made Boulder a harsh community to live in. Boulder finally experienced a surge of life when two railroad lines--the Colorado Central and the Denver and Boulder Valley--connected Boulder and Longmont to Denver in 1873.<sup>38</sup> Transportation would later become a critical factor in the social, political and economic growth that characterized all of Boulder County.

Along with the railroads that transported industrial materials, timber and other valuable resources, another form of transportation further tightened the relationship between Boulder and Denver: the interurban railcar system. From June 1908 to December 1926, these electrically powered cars allowed for quick and easy transportation from the Front Range to Denver. They decreased the travel time to approximately three hours: an extraordinary feat for the day.<sup>39</sup> The improved accessibility gave people the opportunity to travel from the bustling urban center of Denver to the growing cities scattered throughout Boulder County. Additionally, the city of Boulder had had telephone lines since 1881. This crucial form of technology improved communication dramatically throughout the county. Overall, a vibrant communication and transportation system between Denver and Boulder made it an

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<sup>37</sup> John B. Schoolland, *Boulder in Perspective: From Search for Gold to The Gold of Research*, (Boulder, CO: Johnson Publishing Company, 1980), 176.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 298-299.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 339-340.

accessible community in which men like John Galen Locke and the national kleagles (recruiters) could spread the Klan's message.

Religion also played a significant role in the spread of the Klan throughout Boulder County. In particular, the city of Boulder had a long heritage of traditional Christianity. From its inception as a recognized city, Protestant Christian denominations popped up throughout the area. Six inhabitants of Boulder organized the first religious group--a Methodist congregation--on November 27, 1859. Four years later, the Boulder Valley Presbyterian Church formed. A Congregational church, a Baptist church, a Presbyterian church, and a Reformed Episcopal church all had organized by the end of 1873. Catholics, a group that endured an exceptional amount of vilification from the Klan during the 1920s, formed their own church in Boulder in 1875.<sup>40</sup> This rich Protestant Christian tradition became a central form of identity not only for the Boulder Klan, but also for the klaverns in Longmont and Lafayette. Conservative Protestantism attracted an enormous number of supporters for the 1920s Klan, and Boulder County was no exception.

On October 26, 1861, the new Colorado Territorial Legislature formally passed a bill that gave the city of Boulder "an institution of learning."<sup>41</sup> This institution would become the University of Colorado and would also play a significant role throughout the Klan's time in Boulder. This academic center infused Boulder with a strong intellectual character and lured great thinkers from across the United States. During the 1920s, CU would serve as both a potential recruiting ground and a staunch opponent of the Klan. Nevertheless, CU gave Boulder an intrinsic academic quality that led to its

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 176.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 355.



residents generally appreciating the benefits of education and debating how education should be governed.

Socially, the demographic breakdown of Boulder County may seem to contradict conventional wisdom about the Klan's traditional victims. The 1920 census revealed that out of 11,006 residents, 128 were African-American and a mere 4 were identified as Indian, Chinese or Japanese. Furthermore, an overwhelming 91.7 percent (10,087) of Boulderites were Native-white.<sup>42</sup> The African Americans who lived in Boulder at the time mainly resided in the "Little Rectangle," a subdivision between Goss Street and Water Street, or in "The Jungle," a crude shantytown located between 10<sup>th</sup> and Water Street.<sup>43</sup> Although blacks may have not been overtly targeted as frequently in the West as in other parts of the country, one author notes that during the early twentieth century, "blacks encountered a racial climate in which they enjoyed a relatively high degree of physical and psychological freedom, but which was hardly egalitarian."<sup>44</sup> Even though blacks still endured the prominent racism of the time, their isolation and relatively small presence in Boulder County did not warrant a reign of terror from the traditionally violent KKK.

In general, the Colorado Klan of the 1920s did not fervently target black inhabitants. Instead, in most areas where the Klan operated, they practiced a form of racial paternalism, a prominent pattern across the United States. In the *Imperial Night-Hawk*, the national Klan publication, one writer describes the Klan's attitude towards

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<sup>42</sup> "926 More Women in Boulder Than Men, 1920 Census Showed," *Daily Camera*, July 21, 1925.

<sup>43</sup> Dan W. Corson, "The Black Community in Boulder, Colorado" (seminar paper for History 6992), inst. Thomas J. Noel, University of Colorado-Denver, 1996; 6.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

African Americans by stating that “The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan has no fight to make upon the negro. He is recognized as an inferior race and Klansmen are sworn to protect him, his rights and property and assist him in the elevation of his moral and spiritual being and in the preservation of the purity of his race.”<sup>45</sup> An editorial from the *Rocky Mountain American*, a Colorado Klan newsletter published in Boulder, echoes the main points of racial paternalism and condescension:

The Klansman does not oppose the Negro. He is a friend of the Negro and wishes to see him advance and prosper, but he recognizes the Negro for what he is, notes the line of demarcation between the white and black races, and unhesitatingly advocates and insists upon the supremacy of the white race. This attitude is merely a practical recognition of the law of nature and the law of the land itself, which prohibits and brands as a felony in Colorado, any marriage between those of white or negro blood.<sup>46</sup>

Boulder Klansmen did not stray from the national Klan’s dominant ideology regarding race. In fact, they used the same justifications and generalizations to rationalize their white supremacist ideology. Also, in this particular instance, the writer from the *Rocky Mountain American* cites a public law prohibiting interracial marriage as the “practical recognition” that white folks belong to the supreme race. He highlights a law that, sadly, represented the mainstream form of legal thinking throughout the country until the Supreme Court case *Loving v. Virginia* (1967) overturned state laws against intermarriage. Thus, the Klan in the United States and Boulder did not simply devise racial paternalism and separation on their own, but rather reproduced the prevailing divisions between white and black Americans. Still, the Boulder Klan’s

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<sup>45</sup> McVeigh, *Rise of the Ku Klux Klan*, 71.

<sup>46</sup> Unsigned editorial, *Rocky Mountain American*, January 31, 1925.

dehumanizing rhetoric towards African Americans represented a minor segment of its larger platform.

All of these historical factors coalesced to make Boulder an ideal community for the Klan to slip into. A little over one year after former Imperial Wizard William Simmons's auspicious arrival in Denver marked the beginning of the Kluxing of Colorado, leaders targeted Boulder for a swift takeover. The Klan's conspicuous arrival in Boulder was reported on July 15, 1922 by one of the city's local newspapers, the *Daily Camera*. The *Camera* described the event as a "Ku Klux Klan Ceremonial Administered to 200 Boulderites at a Place in the Country Five Miles North of the City."<sup>47</sup> To maintain their veil of secrecy, both newly inducted members and the presiding Klansmen from Denver either kept their hoods up or "turned their backs" while a photographer captured the event. The article continued by describing how a few nights later, a "prominent citizen of Boulder received a warning from the Klan." This citizen, however, had believed it to be a practical joke by a friend. The rumors leading up to the Klan's arrival in Boulder may have confirmed this man's suspicions, but Boulder Klansmen would waste little time in asserting themselves in the city's public affairs.

To establish itself as an organization determined to raise awareness on social issues and develop a positive image in the community, the Boulder Klan's first reported act was donating money to a local Salvation Army office. Along with an outline of what happened, the *Camera* also claimed that "rumor connects several Pearl Street

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<sup>47</sup> "The Ku Klux Klan Ceremonial Administered to 200 Boulderites at a Place in the Country Five Miles North the City," *Daily Camera*, July 15, 1922.

business men with the organization.”<sup>48</sup> This contention aligns with the larger pattern of Klan membership in Colorado during the early phase of its activity. The earliest members of the Klan in Denver were, unsurprisingly, socially and economically well-connected men who could recruit other members through fraternal lodges and acquaintances.<sup>49</sup> A similar pattern would have made sense in Boulder, where there was a very small manufacturing sector employing few blue-collar workers at the time. The Western Cutlery and Manufacturing Company, or simply “the plant,” was perhaps the only well-known industrial center in Boulder during the 1920s.<sup>50</sup>

Along with a twenty-five dollar donation to the Salvation Army, the Klansmen also presented a letter that professed many of the fundamental elements of the 1920s Klan. In the letter, Boulder Klansmen described themselves as “backed by a desire to express 100 percent Americanism, in assisting those agencies engaged in uplifting work of a truly Christian character.” Along with a plea for “100 percent Americanism,” and praise for an organization exemplifying Protestant ideals, the Klan was also “standing for the strict observance of the laws of the United States, complete respect for our flag and our country, national state and local law enforcement, and the upholding and upbuilding of truly American institutions.” Following this act, Captain John Z. Davis of the Salvation Army wanted the *Camera* to “give public expression to his appreciation

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<sup>48</sup> “Boulder Ku Klux Klan Rode Thru Streets Saturday Night and Dropped Dollars En Route,” *Daily Camera*, November 27, 1922.

<sup>49</sup> Goldberg, *Hooded Empire*, 46.

<sup>50</sup> Smith, *Look at Boulder: From Settlement to City*, 152.

for their generosity. He declared that any time the Ku Klux wishes to repeat their performance of Saturday night they will be welcomed.”<sup>51</sup>

This brief encounter highlights the foundational duties that the Boulder Klan attempted to perform during its time in the city. Klansmen fused nationalist appeals with conservative Protestantism by carrying out public displays of charity. Additionally, the Klansmen expressed their desire to see a city that stressed law and order. These exhortations mirrored those of many other klaverns throughout the United States. Klansmen and women in El Paso urged moral reform because “increasing numbers of female El Pasoans began to ‘bob’ their hair, smoke and drink in public, wear skirts and ‘vampire’ dresses...Men likewise abandoned Victorian social restraints.”<sup>52</sup> In Eugene, Oregon, a city with striking similarities to Boulder at the time, Klansmen and others questioned the so-called social and moral progress that epitomized the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A student from the University of Oregon asked in an editorial in the student newspaper, “Have we not departed too far from the ‘mid-Victorian?’”<sup>53</sup> These types of national concerns could well have been replicated in Boulder, as residents saw the Klan as an institution for civic activism.

These expressions of concern, along with the supposed magnanimity of the Klan, apparently stimulated a surge in Klan membership and support, as the next reported Klan event, a parade down the central area of Boulder, received both local and state coverage. Additionally, the number of Klansmen present jumped from six at the

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<sup>51</sup> “Boulder Ku Klux Klan Rode Thru Streets Saturday Night and Dropped Dollars En Route,” *Daily Camera*, November 27, 1922.

<sup>52</sup> Moore, *Invisible Empire in the West*, 71.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

Salvation Army donation to 300 at the parade. In December 1922, both the *Camera* and the *Denver Catholic Register* reported the Klan parade down Pearl Street. Mainly, the articles described the display as a recruiting mechanism to further entice Boulder residents to join or support the Klan. The Klan again invoked its primary rallying cries of civic order, conservative Protestantism, and moral reform as members threw out handbills that read:

The Ku Klux Klan stands for free speech, free press, free public schools, the purity of womanhood and are pledged to protect and defend the sanctity of the home. We are anti-nothing save those principles, which are un-Christian and un-American. Watch us grow in Boulder.<sup>54</sup>

Even though the Klan quickly made inroads into Boulder during its first year of existence, its rapid expansion across Boulder was not met with unquestioning support. The editor of the *Daily Camera* during the Klan's time in Boulder, A. A. Paddock, also acted as one of its primary opponents. In 1921, a year before the Klan had its large initiation ceremony, Paddock wrote an editorial pleading that the citizens of Boulder not join the Klan. He wrote that Boulder "needs no secret organizations to regulate the morals of citizens." Paddock also referred to Colorado's recognized history of nativism and decried how a klavern in Boulder would attain the "same purpose as actuated those who years ago organized the Know-Nothing party and still later the A.P.A. in its war against Catholics."<sup>55</sup> Paddock's tactics when denouncing the Klan ranged from strong criticism to playful jests. A few days after the Klan donated money to the Salvation Army, Paddock expressed contempt for the Klan when he wrote:

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<sup>54</sup> "Ku Klux Klan Visit Boulder Sweeping Through Streets a Mysterious, Shrouded Mass," *Daily Camera*, December 11, 1922.

<sup>55</sup> Arthur Gayle Waldrop, *American Town Hastening to be History: Editorials from the Boulder Daily Camera 1891-1929* (Boulder, CO: 1938), 567-568.

A Ku Klux Klanner pasted on a postal card and sent to the *Camera* a clipping of yesterday's editorial on the KKK. His comment was 'Keep it up. We are still growing.' He's a liar and also, a coward. Brave men sign their names. Anonymous writers are cowards... We don't hate him. He is an object of pity as all slaves have always been with right thinking men. Why did he spell out his letters? Because cowards don't even dare to sign their names – and slaves can't.<sup>56</sup>

Paddock would also famously allude to the Klan as the “Komic Kapers Klub” and the “Klucking Klucked Klams” to further degrade their movement.<sup>57</sup>

The University of Colorado's student newspaper, *The Silver and Gold*,<sup>58</sup> also challenged the Klan's stay in Boulder. Soon after the first sightings of the Klan in Boulder, an editor sarcastically wrote:

The Ku Klux Klan has a nice humanitarian way of looking at their fellow man... We read in it (presumably, in a local KKK publication) that the Klan wants the elimination of the 'bootlegger, prostitute, gambler, niggers, Mexicans, Irish, Jews, Germans, Huns, and in fact all foreigners.' A person unacquainted with the facts would judge that the Klan is an organization of American Indians, whose puritanism has blinded them to facts.<sup>59</sup>

The newspaper acted as a medium to express student opinion on local and national affairs. It also represented one aspect of the relationship between the Klan and the University and helps to frame how the academic community in Boulder viewed the Klan.

After the Boulder Klansmen and women had made their spectacular arrival on Pearl Street, they soon began to foster relationships with the local clergy. Nationwide,

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 572.

<sup>57</sup> “Cross Burned on Flagstaff Mountain and Lit Up the Plains Far Out While the Local Ku Klux Klan Wondered,” *Daily Camera*, May 21, 1924.

<sup>58</sup> From 1892 to 1970, the *Silver and Gold* was the student newspaper at CU. After that, another similarly-named newspaper, the *Silver and Gold Record*, was a staff publication.

<sup>59</sup> Unsigned editorial, *Silver and Gold*, November 14, 1922.

klaverns visited local churches and donated money to attract the support of clergymen. By 1924, in fact, the Klan declared that 30,000 Protestant ministers were Klansmen.<sup>60</sup> As the bridges between the Klan's conservative Protestant ideals and potential Protestant supporters, clergymen became integral in the recruitment of new members and in gaining favor from non-Klansmen and women. A few days after the Pearl Street parade, eight members of the Boulder Klan entered the men's Bible class of the Christian church and rhetorically asked the crowd, "Who took the Bible out of the public school?" When no one responded, the Klansmen remarked that they would, in fact, bring Bibles back to schools.<sup>61</sup> After a description of the episode, the *Daily Camera* article frostily mentioned that identities of some Klansmen were known, and that they were active members of the Christian Church and Masonic lodge. Once again, Boulder Klansmen demonstrated a tendency to play up their secretive, mysterious ways to pique the public's interest. What better way to present themselves as defenders of Christianity than by firmly declaring intent to put the Bible into the public schools? These forms of civic-minded engagement helped the Boulder Klan to extend its lifespan.

When the Denver Klan went dark in the spring of 1923 to reformulate its goals and action plans, the Boulder Klan followed suit. Very little information exists about overt donations and spectacles throughout 1923. The Boulder Klan did reawaken, however, and attempted to gain a foothold at the University of Colorado during the fall of 1923. As described in an editorial in the *Silver and Gold*, the Boulder Klan ran an

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<sup>60</sup> Thomas R. Pegram, *One Hundred Percent American: The Rebirth and Decline of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s*, (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee Publishing Company, 2011), 8.

<sup>61</sup> "Ku Klux Klan Declared On Visit to Boulder Church They'd Put Bible in Schools," *Daily Camera*, December 15, 1922.



advertisement that hoped to secure support within the academic community. Whatever support Boulder Klansmen hoped to secure, however, was met with fierce condemnation from the student editor. He wrote that “The University is too inclusive to support anti-Catholicism too democratic [*sic*] to permit race hatred; too conservative to allow the reigns [*sic*] of government to pass to a group of hooded anarchists. University officials will be warranted in adopting any reasonable measure in order to curb this threatening nuisance.”<sup>62</sup> As a supposed champion of social liberalism and tolerance, the student editor showed deep bitterness towards the Klan. For the most part, the entire University community echoed this sentiment and no record exists of faculty members or administrators actively joining the Klan. A year after attempting to breach the University, however, the KKK achieved a flicker of success.

On April 18, 1924, the *Silver and Gold* ran an article highlighting an advertisement that asked for a Klansman and an anti-Klansman to debate at the University. The Klansman “must be able, conscientious, with no particular love for Catholics, Jews, and Negroes (and) should explain why he took the obligation ‘to the last drop of blood in my body.’”<sup>63</sup> The host of the debate, the Liberal Club, invited the speakers in order to provide a public forum for discussing the virtues and flaws of the Ku Klux Klan. To celebrate this dialogue a month later, Klansmen hiked up Flagstaff Mountain and set a giant cross aflame. This spectacular demonstration marked the second cross-burning along the Front Range that week. Interestingly, the *Daily Camera* alleged that two students belonging to the Liberal Club were actually members of the

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<sup>62</sup> “The Klan Expands,” *Silver and Gold*, November 3, 1923.

<sup>63</sup> “Liberal Club Plans Ku Klux Klan Debate: Advertisement for Klansman to Take Side in Argument Before Society,” *Silver and Gold*, April 18, 1924.

Boulder Klan.<sup>64</sup> If true, this was the only evidence that connected members of the University to the Invisible Empire. Even though the Klan may not have been successful at recruiting students and faculty members at CU, this at least highlights that the Klan made attempts to attract members of the community.

Of the three klaverns in Boulder County, the city of Boulder klavern No. 3 carried out the most stolid campaign. Klansmen and women rarely placed burning crosses onto the front lawns of Boulder inhabitants and the only overt act of violence reportedly perpetrated by Boulder Klansmen occurred in March, 1923. The *Lafayette Leader* ran a news brief describing how former Boulder deputy sheriff Robert E. Rankin was found guilty of four counts of assault after he led a “group of five men, dressed in the robes and hoods of the Ku Klux Klan, in an assault upon the occupants of a lonely cabin in Boulder canon.”<sup>65</sup> Without any more information, one can only speculate whether this was an attack orchestrated by Boulder Klan leaders or the rogue actions of a zealous former law enforcement agent. At the minimum, it further underscores the fact that Boulderites who supported the Klan may have viewed it as a network to advance law and order, but in a more docile manner.

With its majestic mountainous backdrop, Boulder logically appeared to Klansmen as a setting in which to display dazzling spectacles like giant flaming crosses. These exhibitions did, in fact, leave an indelible impression on inhabitants of Boulder. One former resident described accidentally coming across a Klan ceremony in a canyon near Mt. Sanitas. As a child he was both “enchanted and scared” at the sight of

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<sup>64</sup> “Cross Burned on Flagstaff Mountain and Lit Up the Plains Far Out While the Local Ku Klux Klan Wondered,” *Daily Camera*, May 21, 1924.

<sup>65</sup> Untitled news brief, *Lafayette Leader*, March 16, 1923.

the flaming crosses that the Klansmen had erected.<sup>66</sup> Two other former residents recalled seeing the cross burning on Flagstaff during that drizzly night in May 1924. Having seen this as children, one described it as a “frightful sight.”<sup>67</sup> Although no membership list was uncovered, to one resident the Klan felt like a union that attracted the support of the working-class people of Boulder. Members of the community may have felt that they could “better themselves” through Klan membership, as they might through the Odd Fellows and Masons.<sup>68</sup> These public displays may have frightened some folks and bedazzled others, but it was not the only way that the Boulder Klan expressed itself. From January to July 1925, William Francis edited and published the regional Klan publication, the *Rocky Mountain American*. Even though it was in publication during the twilight of the Klan in Colorado, it offers a glimpse into the rhetorical sensibilities of the Boulder Klan and underscores the more prejudiced concepts presented by the Klan.

In recalling the origins of the Boulder Klan, one contributor describes the fundamental characteristics of the founding members of the klavern. It grew “from a mere handful of sturdy Christian, patriotic men. It is here for a purpose and is conscientiously trying to do the will of God as revealed in the tenets of the Christian religion.”<sup>69</sup> The writer continues by asserting that the Boulder Klan had grown to over a thousand members since its inception. The local historians who have written about the

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<sup>66</sup> Wallace G. Clemens, interview by June Holmes, 1996, Maria Rogers Oral History Program, Carnegie Library for Local History, Boulder, CO.

<sup>67</sup> Ernie Lacer, interview by Rose Marie Khubchandani, 1994, Maria Rogers Oral History Program, Carnegie Library for Local History, Boulder, CO and Hugh B. Smith, interview by Robin Branstator, 1989, Maria Rogers Oral History Program, Carnegie Library for Local History, Boulder, CO.

<sup>68</sup> Wallace G. Clemens, Maria Rogers Oral History Program.

<sup>69</sup> Unsigned editorial, *Rocky Mountain American*, January 31, 1925.

Klan in Boulder County vary when presenting total membership figures. Regardless, the *Rocky Mountain American* became the written instrument for Boulder County Klansmen to report events and spread their ideas. It also acted as a directory for Klan-friendly businesses, which was a critical aspect of klaverns throughout the country. Klansmen justified the existence of the organization by arguing that it linked together Protestant-friendly businesses in communities. This was particularly important, because Klansmen contended that various ethnic and racial groups had already created economically integrated communities. To respond against this alleged “clannishness,” Klansmen across the country incorporated their own form of solidarity--aptly titled, “Klannishness.” It achieved two goals: boycotting Catholic or Jewish-owned stores and stimulating trade between Protestant businesses. Regardless of the profession or trade, this tactic resonated with a large number of Klan supporters. In Boulder, one can identify evidence of a similar practice. Some of the advertisements that ran in the publication contain the customary slogan of Klan-friendly business, K.I.G.Y.—“Klansmen I Greet You.” Others offer clever reinterpretations of the KKK alliterative pattern. These include, “Klassy Kit Klothes” (an advertisement for a dry cleaning store) and “Klean Klassy Kars” (an advertisement for an automotive dealership).<sup>70</sup>

On a national scale, scholars have hesitated to reduce support of the Klan to purely economic factors. Macro-level analyses discuss the agricultural recession driven by the end of World War I. Within a community the size of Boulder, however, one can see that attempts were made to create a well-incorporated economic network among Protestants. In addition, writers for the *Rocky Mountain American* professed support for

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<sup>70</sup> Untitled advertisement, *Rocky Mountain American*, February 27, 1925.

the active enforcement of Prohibition and the implementation of Protestantism within public schooling. All of these themes coalesced into an underlying message of “100 percent Americanism.” In one editorial, Francis devotes a significant amount of space to denouncing opponents of the Klan, “an organization which stands for 100% Americanism and speaks for the great majority of Christian Americans.”<sup>71</sup> Combining ultra-patriotic idealism with mainstream Protestant beliefs became a recurring theme in the publication. These sentiments were presented with strong anti-Catholic attitudes. According to one alarmed writer, fifteen million American Catholics were “organizing and working as a unit through many societies that are military and are drilled and equipped with arms and ammunition.”<sup>72</sup>

As the organ for the Boulder County Klan, the *Rocky Mountain American* contains a litany of essays and articles defending the values of the Invisible Empire. Its official status as a publication, however, ended quickly. The reign of the Boulder Klan neared its end in accordance with the organization’s state and national decline. As will be discussed later, the factors behind the Boulder County Klan’s demise were numerous. A series of fortuitous events led to dissatisfaction and to an overall decline of interest in the Klan. Nonetheless, a brief account of the political victories in Boulder County exposes ways in which the Klan appealed to voters in the area.

According to Robert Alan Goldberg, Boulder County contributed to the bloc voting that aided in the Invisible Empire’s sweep during the 1924 elections. At the

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<sup>71</sup> Unsigned editorial, *Rocky Mountain American*, February 27, 1925.

<sup>72</sup> Goldberg, *Hooded Empire*, 9.

county level, voters elected seven out of the twelve Klan-backed candidates.<sup>73</sup> Once again, there is not a substantial amount of evidence that explains why the separate klaverns supported those candidates. One Klan-supported candidate who ran for coroner, Leo Kelso, lost in the election, but was named as an active member by a former resident of Boulder.<sup>74</sup> Otherwise, one can only speculate why the Klan gave their support to certain candidates. Some of these possible reasons include: their opponents were not Protestant; they may have backed “dry” policies to promote Prohibition; they may have advocated for school reform that was associated with Protestantism; or, like the purported Klansman Kelso, they may have been Klansmen or women themselves who intrinsically supported one or more of these platforms. More importantly, Boulder County voters who may not have been Klansmen or women also resonated with these principles and were most likely persuaded by the grassroots, door-to-door campaigning that overwhelmed Klan opponents. In fact, the *Daily Camera* published the list of Klan-backed candidates that was disseminated throughout the county by Klansmen a few days before the general election.<sup>75</sup> Even though the *Camera* staunchly opposed the presence of the Klan in Boulder, this action may have inadvertently provided voters with an accessible “how-to” voting guide.

In its three-year lifespan, the Boulder Klan’s members embarked on a campaign that, in their minds, would raise the social, political and moral consciousness of the city’s inhabitants. Boulder Klansmen utilized the same tactics and methods that led to

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<sup>73</sup> “G.O.P. Gets 8 Democrats 5 in County, Republican State Ticket Victorious,” *Lafayette Leader*, November 7, 1924.

<sup>74</sup> Russell “Bud” Chesebro, interview by James G. Carey, 1995, Maria Rogers Oral History Program, Carnegie Library for Local History, Boulder, CO.

<sup>75</sup> “Ku Klux Klan Sends Ballots to Voters of Boulder County with Directions of How to Vote,” *Daily Camera*, November 1, 1924.

the Klan's meteoric rise. They used a combination of traditional civic engagement with the more modern style of advertisement to entice supporters and present themselves in a positive light. For an organization that historically had committed acts of brutal violence against other social groups, this was a tall order. They were, for a short time, successful. In a city of approximately 11,000, Boulder Klansmen had thrust them into the social and political limelight by using spectacular physical displays and making broad appeals to white, Protestant men and women. Boulder was not, however, the only community in the county that had a briefly thriving klavern. Eleven miles to the east, in the mining community of Lafayette, Klansmen had gathered to form Colorado klavern no. 4.

#### IV. Coal and the Klan in Lafayette:

Now let every citizen resolve that in the year to come, he will redouble his efforts and make the year 1923 the largest, brightest, happiest and most prosperous 365 days ever seen in Lafayette. It can and will be done.

--B.J. Radford, Editor of the *Lafayette Leader*<sup>76</sup>

Radford, who also acted as the publisher of the *Leader* throughout most of the Klan's tenure in Lafayette, wrote this proclamation in the December 29 edition of the *Leader*. Radford wanted to galvanize the people of Lafayette and steer them towards prosperity as the city entered the unknown leap into the New Year. This passage, however, could not take into account the surreptitious arrival of the Invisible Empire in Lafayette. The *Leader*, a weekly publication, was the primary source of information on local events and news in Lafayette. Before 1923, it had made no mention of the Klan in Lafayette. From June 1923 to May 1926, however, stories of the Lafayette Ku Klux Klan were scattered throughout the newspaper.

Lafayette's very existence rested on the extraction and export of coal. In 1887, John Simpson opened the first coal seam in Lafayette, and in the following year, Lafayette was officially incorporated as a town into Boulder County. Between 1876 and 1900, the supply and export of coal underwent tremendous growth. In 1876, approximately 100,000 tons of coal was mined in the Colorado; by 1900, that number had surged to more than 5,000,000 tons.<sup>77</sup>

From the onset, men who had emigrated from Scotland, England and Wales mined the coal in the nearby Simpson, Mitchell, Gladstone and Excelsior mines.<sup>78</sup> In

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<sup>76</sup> "Let's Go Forward to Bigger Things," *Lafayette Leader*, December 29, 1922.

<sup>77</sup> Smith, *Look at Boulder*, 93.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.



the early 1900s, though, immigrants from Poland, Greece and Italy joined the ranks of these generally well-integrated workers. These newly arrived immigrants became the primary targets of the Klan, due to their being relatively unassimilated and mostly Catholic immigrants. Klansmen focused their verbal rebukes against supposed Papal conspiracies and American takeovers, and these newly arrived inhabitants bore the brunt of much of the acrimonious rhetoric vocalized by Klansmen.

During its tenure in Lafayette, the Ku Klux Klan operated in a manner that closely mimicked the dedicated conservative Protestantism practiced by the Boulder klavern. The Lafayette klavern, however, more openly made charitable donations to churches and invited national lecturers. The *Lafayette Leader* ran a number of briefs and articles that described the Lafayette Klan visiting local churches and participating in county-wide Klan events. Compared to the klaverns in the Southwest, the Lafayette Klan, similar to the Boulder Klan, practiced a more subdued, less violent version of Klandom. As opposed to Klan movements in states like Oklahoma and Texas, the *Leader* made no mention of violent showdowns and militant, reactionary events. Instead, the Lafayette Klan members presented themselves as peaceful and pious members of a law-abiding social organization. They made monthly visits to the local Baptist and Methodist Episcopal churches and hosted various national and local speakers who espoused the “100 percent Americanism” platform that was entrenched in Klan ideology.

In one description of the genesis of the Lafayette Klan, members of the Denver Klan supposedly approached a dentist and a manager of the Public Service Company in

1924 to create the Lafayette klavern.<sup>79</sup> The first description of a local Klan event, however, appeared on July 13, 1923, when the *Leader* ran a local news brief that described a KKK initiation ceremony near the Standard coal mine. It mentions that thirty-one Boulder county men, “a majority of these being from Lafayette,” entered the ranks of the KKK.<sup>80</sup> After this induction ceremony, the Lafayette Klan wasted little time in conducting their public outreach campaigns.

One month after the initiation ceremony, local Klansmen presented a United States flag to the mayor of Lafayette, Ben Cundall, to commemorate the recent passing of President Harding. In a letter accompanying the flag, the Klansmen asked the city officials to properly raise the Flag to half mast and accept it “with the trueness of spirit that it was given.”<sup>81</sup> Unfortunately, the Klan members, perhaps in their fervor to show goodwill, did not bring the proper supplies and they “were unable to get the top of the flag pole to attach the rope necessary.” This mistake perhaps best encapsulates the tone and intentions of the Lafayette Klan: a small-scale fraternal organization bent on a positive public image campaign.

The Lafayette Klan members, even with their relatively restrained attitude, were not impervious to critics. One month after donating the flag, the *Leader* ran an article describing a tense verbal showdown between the Lafayette Klan and the Boulder County District Attorney’s Office. First, in a denunciatory letter to the District Attorney, the Klansmen acknowledged that the latter’s office had received a list of

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<sup>79</sup> Boulder County Latino History Project, “Ku Klux Klan in Lafayette, 1926,” Latino Task Force of Boulder County, <http://bocolatinohistory.colorado.edu/document/ku-klux-klan-in-lafayette-1926-0> (accessed September 30, 2015).

<sup>80</sup> “Ku Klux Initiate Near Standard Mine,” *Lafayette Leader*, July 13, 1923.

<sup>81</sup> “Ku Klux Klan Give Flag to Lafayette,” *Lafayette Leader*, August 10, 1923.

supposed members of the Lafayette klavern. The Klansmen continued by accusing the City Clerk, S.R. Neal, and the Treasurer of Lafayette of mishandling city finances. In what was perhaps the Lafayette Klan's most aggressive act, the Klansmen then threatened to reveal the supposed information on corruption to the rest of Lafayette if the District Attorney ever considered sharing the identities of the members. The Assistant District Attorney, T.A. McHarg, sent an eloquent, sarcastic retort that essentially goaded the Klansmen to meet with the District Attorney's office and promised "hearty co-operation." He continued by assuring the Klansmen "that this office is not impressed by communications from those who for reasons known probably by themselves see fit to speak anonymously and withhold both their names and their faces."<sup>82</sup> Although this list has proven irretrievable, the very action of logging potential Klan members in Lafayette speaks to the fact that local law enforcement envisaged the Klan as a rogue, lawless group. One can not be sure how effective this scare tactic was in terms of reducing Klan recruitment, but it may have led the Klan to rethink their tactics and perhaps refrain from overt, aggressive methods that may have drawn the attention of local law enforcement.

After the verbal confrontation, the Lafayette Klan experienced its peak in terms of popularity and recognition. From June 1923 to May 1926, the Lafayette Klan extended its outreach by participating in multiple county-wide Klan events, sponsoring local speakers and films, and making frequent appearances at local churches. Again, this manifestation of the Klan took on its own individual identity that absorbed parts of the national doctrine while also cultivating its own local image. Between 1922 and

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<sup>82</sup> "Ku Klux Klan Ask for Information," *Lafayette Leader*, September 28, 1923.

1926, the Klan visited a church, provided some form of community service or hosted a lecturer at least 16 times in Lafayette. In general, the Lafayette Klan members practiced a softened version of the extreme vigilante methods that, for example, the klaverns in Birmingham, Alabama and Oklahoma City, Oklahoma practiced.<sup>83</sup> Compared to the vigilante floggings, assaults and lynchings that occurred most frequently in Midwestern and Southern states, the Lafayette Klan, along with its city of Boulder counterpart, developed social and political ties that non-violently strengthened its grip along the Front Range.

To project its activities and intentions out to the rest of the county, the *Rocky Mountain American* paid special tribute to the Lafayette Klan in a weekly segment titled “Interesting News from Progressive Lafayette.” The segments were usually simple updates on the klavern’s recent activities. Francis, the publisher and editor of the *American*, would also comment on the various ways that the Lafayette Klan was accomplishing Klan-centered goals. For instance, in an article published by the *American*, a number of Longmont Klansmen visited the Lafayette klavern to discuss the ways in which the Klan acted as the antithesis to the Catholic fraternal organization, the Knights of Columbus.<sup>84</sup> Nationally, Klansmen frequently attempted to draw these comparisons to defend the Klan’s unusual attire and ceremonies and to present themselves as the superior, Protestant version of the Knights of Columbus. In Cañon City, Colorado, the formation of a Knights of Columbus chapter and the construction of a Catholic abbey spurred the local Klan into making anti-Catholic demonstrations.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 51 and 79.

<sup>84</sup> Untitled news brief, *Rocky Mountain American*, May 22, 1925.

<sup>85</sup> Pegram, *One Hundred Percent American*, 78.

When a Longmont Klansman spoke to the Lafayette Klan, however, he noted that the Knights of Columbus rarely drew criticism from the larger Catholic community, while the Klan faced ambivalence and even condemnation from Protestant ministers. Reasons behind these outcries, according to the speakers, included “desire of popularity, misinformation, ignorance and sloppy opinions on tolerance.”<sup>86</sup>

Along with a strong motivation to promote conservative Protestantism throughout the town, members of the Lafayette Klan also engaged in seemingly atypical behavior with the town’s strong labor organizations. Throughout the 1920s, the national Klan organization publically denounced “labor agitators” and generally opposed organized strikes. Nevertheless, local factors continued to determine whether a community adhered to these national principles. In places like La Grande, Oregon (which had a highly-organized Ku Klux Klan following), Klansmen supported striking railroad workers. Similarly, Klansmen endorsed striking laborers in Kansas, most likely to attract the estranged white workers who were replaced by black strikebreakers.<sup>87</sup>

Thus, the local factors in Lafayette allowed for a more mutually beneficial relationship between established labor organizations and the Klan. Allegedly, local miners, presumably white and Protestant, joined the Klan mainly for the fellowship and social elements.<sup>88</sup> Although this alliance would seem strange at first, the white, Protestant miners in Lafayette may have envisioned the Ku Klux Klan as another way to create an exclusionary group to enhance solidarity against southern European Immigrants and Catholics. This pattern existed in some areas of Colorado, as members

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<sup>86</sup> Unsigned editorial, *Rocky Mountain American*, May 22, 1925.

<sup>87</sup> Pegram, *One Hundred Percent American*, 34.

<sup>88</sup> Blanche Moon, Maria Rogers Oral History Program.

of the Klan who were also laborers actually created their own quasi-caucus within the Klan. It was a “circle within the circle.”<sup>89</sup>

Another local issue for which Lafayette Klansmen hoped to provide a solution was the supposed decay of public education. Once again, school reform was a national issue that many klaverns across the country attempted to champion primarily through Klan-endorsed school officials. Although there was little incontrovertible evidence that named Lafayette school officials as Klan members, a smattering of primary and secondary sources do describe some members of the Lafayette school community as close allies of the Klan. In one editorial, Radford quotes the principal of Lafayette’s public high school, W.A. Morrison, as denying rumors that conflict existed between Catholics and Protestants and that all teachers had to be members of the KKK.<sup>90</sup>

Another editorial written by Radford put him at odds with Forrest M. Carhartt, a former principal of Lafayette High School. This was perhaps the clearest indication of a Klansman involved with Lafayette’s public education system, as Carhartt had acted as the Lafayette correspondent for the *Rocky Mountain American*. In his editorial, Radford accuses Carhartt of getting into “paroxysms [sic] of rage,” and of “publishing a mass of untruthful statements” about Radford in another Klan publication based out of Cañon City, Colorado, the *Kolorado Klan Courier*.<sup>91</sup>

In addition, an oral history provided by a former inhabitant of Lafayette named the husband of a music teacher at Lafayette High School, Mrs. McCready, as a Klansman. Mrs. McCready’s husband also acted as the superintendent of public schools

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<sup>89</sup> Pegram, *One Hundred Percent American*, 34-35.

<sup>90</sup> “W.A. Morrison Says Harmony is Good,” *Lafayette Leader*, May 14, 1926.

<sup>91</sup> “Chickens Coming Home to Roost,” *Lafayette Leader*, March 19, 1926.

in Lafayette during the mid 1920s. Moreover, the former resident named a number of school board members and teachers as Klansmen or women.<sup>92</sup> The policies they attempted to implement did not gain much attention in the newspapers, but as noted by the rumored conflict between Catholics and Protestants at Lafayette's High School, it would make sense that these alleged Klan supporters reflected the national Klan's outright suspicion of a purported evil Catholic influence on schools. A writer for the *Rocky Mountain American* commented on the Lafayette Klan's influence on the local schools by writing that the "Lafayette Klan is the friend of public education. In the fight for improved conditions in school facilities and the voting of bonds for the new junior and senior high school building, the Klan not only proved itself the friend but the champion of the movement."<sup>93</sup> In a strange way, the stance the national Klan took on public education led to an ideological overlap with some of the more progressive education reformers in the country. In addition to immigration and Prohibition, the Klan argued that the federal government should have more direct authority over the public school system. National Klan leaders even explicitly endorsed the creation of a federal Department of Education and for the dispersal of more federal funds to state and local education authorities.<sup>94</sup> This progressive attitude, however, could not conceal the highly intolerant views that characterized so many of the Klan's actions. Lafayette Klansmen latched onto this national Klan platform and used it as a way to promote growth.

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<sup>92</sup> Leigh Campbell-Hale, "Remembering Ludlow but Forgetting the Columbine: The 1927-1928 Colorado Coal Strike." (PhD diss., University of Colorado at Boulder, 2013). 98.

<sup>93</sup> Unsigned editorial, *Rocky Mountain American*, April 3, 1925.

<sup>94</sup> Pegram, *One Hundred Percent American*, 90.

Along with the political gains made in electing school board officials, Lafayette residents also voted in Klan-backed officials in the statewide general election in 1924 and in the local municipal election in 1925. In the 1924 general election, Lafayette was broken up into two precincts: seven and thirty-eight.<sup>95</sup> Overall, Lafayette residents voted for twenty-three out of the twenty-nine national, state and county Klan-backed candidates. As with Boulder and Longmont, there were candidates who may have gained the support of the Klan even if they themselves were not officially connected with the Klan. Still, that voters supported approximately 88% of the Klan-backed candidates at least illustrates how the interests of both non-Klan members and Klan members overlapped. During the 1925 local municipal election, Lafayette voters elected the Klan-supported officials running for mayor and alderman. Leo Baker, the newly elected mayor, ran as a part of the Citizens' party and received more than twice the number of votes that his opponent, Dan Simpson of the Taxpayers' party, received. The Citizen's party candidates who ran for alderman, David T. Henderson, George W. Nelson and W.J. Cox, won by a three to one margin.

Even though indisputable evidence revealing the names of Lafayette Klan members may never be recovered, there is still considerable evidence that the Klan's influence ran from central Boulder up Baseline Road and into the heart of Lafayette. Moreover, the Lafayette klavern may not necessarily have represented the most violent offshoot of the 1920s Klan, but they still used intimidating tactics to unnerve and frighten those who didn't fit the Klan's "100 percent American" profile. As with many

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<sup>95</sup> A more precise analysis of how different social groups voted in the election could be made with U.S. census data. One could cross-reference the inhabitants of each precinct with the voting totals to see how recent immigrants and Catholics voted compared to the non-immigrant, Protestant community.



other parts of Colorado, the foundations for nativism and anti-Catholicism had already been set because of the expansion in the late 1890s of the American Protective Association. During this time, Catholic inhabitants of Lafayette had been ostracized and forced to commute four miles to Louisville for Sunday mass. Additionally, in the late 1880s, about four-fifths of the coal miners in Colorado spoke English as their first language. Thirty years after that, approximately seventy percent of coal miners were foreign-born and had less experience speaking English.<sup>96</sup> The belief in inherent racial superiority at the time led to the passing of an ordinance that prevented blacks from staying overnight in Lafayette.<sup>97</sup>

As these patterns of nativist and racist practices had increased in Lafayette over time, so too did the propensity increase for Lafayette Klansmen to use typical strategies like cross-burnings to create a frightening atmosphere for immigrants and Catholics. A number of oral histories and secondary sources describe Klansmen setting blazing crosses in the front yards of Catholics. One former resident recalled the eeriness that surrounded the Klan when he witnessed the Lafayette Klansmen donating money at a local church. "I can remember one time being in the church. And at night, all of a sudden there was a terrible quiet, and I remember 5 or 6 Ku Klux Klan (members) threw a roll of money on the (altar), turned around and walked out. It was the little Methodist Church...and Lord knows they needed it."<sup>98</sup> Another resident remembered that Lafayette Klansmen often targeted Italian Catholics who lived in Louisville. These

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<sup>96</sup> Phyllis Smith, *Once a Coal Miner...The Story of Colorado's Northern Coal Field* (Pruett Publishing Company: Boulder, Colorado, 1981) 66.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>98</sup> Joseph Wallace Malcolm, interview by June Holmes, 1990, Maria Rogers Oral History Program, Carnegie Library for Local History, Boulder, CO.

immigrants were integral in bootlegging during the 1920s and due to the nativism, anti-Catholicism and Prohibitionism preached by the Klan, they most likely endured many forms of discrimination.

For the most part, the klavern in Lafayette encountered the same problems that plagued the Klan throughout the country. Even though it lasted longer than the Boulder klavern, the Lafayette Klan was unable to sustain the momentum gained from the 1924 election. Klansmen in Lafayette encountered doubters and opposition and could not successfully argue against the reasons why the Klan was undergoing a structural disintegration. By the end of 1926, the Lafayette Klan had ceased to exist and no longer received the support of white, Protestant men and women. Before its last days, though, the Klan had established a unified klavern in Longmont, the northern agricultural center of Boulder County.

## V. The Klan's Takeover of the "Minneapolis of the West":

Before Klansmen had officially created klaverns in Boulder and Lafayette, members of the Invisible Empire had staked a claim to the north, in the city of Longmont. Contrary to the coal mining legacy in Lafayette and the influence of the University of Colorado in Boulder, the factor that impacted Longmont the most was the fertile soil that laid the foundation for the city. Founded in 1871 by a committee representing the Chicago-Colorado Colony, Longmont drew interest from outsiders for its agricultural appeal. It was named after Longs Peak, the towering mountain that overshadowed the area, and it attracted such idealists as Rev. Robert Collyer, a Unitarian minister, Sidney H. Gay of the *Chicago Tribune*, and William Bross, a former lieutenant governor of Illinois.<sup>99</sup>

These founders of Longmont envisioned the city to be a place where law-abiding farmers could make a decent if hard-earned living. The 1871 *Chicago-Colony Constitution* asserted that "agriculture is the basis of wealth, of power, of morality. It is the conservative element of all national and political and social growth. It steadies, preserves, purifies and elevates."<sup>100</sup> From 1880 to 1890, Longmont's population doubled from 773 residents to 1543 and continued to grow in the early twentieth century, reaching 5,858 inhabitants by 1920. Longmont's history as an agriculturally-based city became a critical factor for the spread of the Klan. Its founders and future residents imagined Longmont as a sober community where hard-working Americans could achieve a morally-sound way of life. Before the Klan arrived, however,

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<sup>99</sup> Dan W. Corson and Thomas J. Noel, *Boulder County: An Illustrated History* (Heritage Media: Carlsbad, CA, 1999) 81.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

Longmont experienced economic ebbs and flows similar to those that occurred in Boulder and Lafayette. By World War I, wheat functioned as the main agricultural staple and some inhabitants called Longmont the “Minneapolis of the West.”<sup>101</sup> As the demand for U.S. agricultural products increased during World War I, so too did Longmont’s wheat industry. The recession following the end of the war, however, led to an almost complete dissolution of the Longmont Milling and Elevator Company, the city’s primary wheat mill. Before the near collapse of Longmont’s wheat industry, the Great Western Sugar Beet Company (GW), acquired the Longmont Sugar Company and posted advertisements for 500 sugar beet farmers. This caused a flock of migrant workers from various ethnic and religious backgrounds to relocate to Longmont. These immigrants included Swedes, Danes, Norwegians, Mexicans, Germans, Russians, and Japanese.

Some of these newcomers to Longmont, particularly those hailing from Scandinavian countries, assimilated relatively easily. Immigrants who had arrived from Japan and Mexico, however, were almost immediately targeted and faced discrimination due to the heightened level of nativism in the post-World War I United States. In particular, Mexicans and Hispanos<sup>102</sup> were immigrating to Colorado in the thousands. Although white inhabitants did not generally meet this mass migration with an exceptional amount of congeniality, a few notable white residents saw the

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>102</sup> Using *Mexicans and Hispanos in Colorado Schools and Communities* as my primary resource, I relied on Professor Donato’s terms “Mexicans” to describe those who came from Mexico, Texas, and Arizona and “Hispanos” for those coming from southern Colorado and northern New Mexico. See Rubén Donato, *Mexicans and Hispanos in Colorado Schools and Communities, 1920-1960* (State University of New York Press: Albany, 2007) 15.

harassment and discrimination that Mexicans and Hispanos faced and took steps to raise awareness and fight against the mistreatment. One man in particular, Thomas Mahoney of Longmont, questioned the treatment of Mexicans and Hispanos and once noted how Mexican “men, women and children worked long hours in the fields blocking, hoeing and topping beets. School laws were disregarded in order to keep the children in the fields, especially during the late fall topping season. Disease, malnutrition, and death were rampant.”<sup>103</sup> The oppression endured by Mexicans and Hispanos was a significant and clear manifestation of the anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant and racist practices of the 1920s. Nevertheless, the Klansmen and women in Longmont conducted public outreach campaigns very similar to the ones performed by members of the Boulder and Lafayette Klans. The lures of conservative Protestantism and civic reform enticed numerous Longmont residents, and guided the Klansmen and women of Longmont.

A day after the *Daily Camera* reported the first initiation ceremony in Boulder, the *Longmont Ledger* published a story describing another massive group of Boulder County residents who were inducted into the Invisible Empire. According to reports, a group of 2,000 KKK members descended upon the nearby foothills where more than 300 initiates from Denver, Boulder, Longmont and other northern Colorado communities were sworn into the organization.<sup>104</sup> The precise number of Longmont initiates remains unknown, but their activities continued to be closely monitored by writers for both the *Ledger* and the competing newspaper, the *Longmont Daily*

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<sup>103</sup> Donato, *Mexicans and Hispanos*, 15.

<sup>104</sup> “Outdoor Meeting of Ku Klux Klan,” *Longmont Ledger*, June 16, 1922.

*Times*.<sup>105</sup> Similar to the brief pause in the Boulder Klan's activities in 1923, the Longmont Klan did not organize significant events during that year. Rather, they hosted a national Klan lecturer, Dr. G. C. Minor, who visited Boulder County frequently. He reportedly gave "a strong patriotic address, claiming that loyalty to the Constitution was the first principle of the Klan," on Longmont's Fourth avenue.<sup>106</sup> Otherwise, Longmont Klansmen publically disavowed any connections to anonymously written letters threatening Catholic residents William Frank and his son Carl.<sup>107</sup> Even though the letters contained the Klan's insignia, an official telegram from Grand Dragon Locke offered a \$100 reward for information that would lead to the arrest of the author. This reward coincided with a similar offer presented by Longmont's City Council.<sup>108</sup>

The Longmont Klavern continued to operate almost completely in secret until July 18, 1924, when a fiery cross was erected on nearby Haystack Mountain at around 8:30 PM. According to the Ledger, "Niwt and Longmont residents claim to have seen the fire burning and passing motorists say there were hundreds of men at the meeting."<sup>109</sup> As with members of the Boulder klavern, Longmont Klansmen exploited the natural geography surrounding Boulder County to remind residents that the Klan was indeed operating within the community. Perhaps, as Longmont housed a number of immigrants and Catholics, members of the Longmont klavern constructed the display to

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<sup>105</sup> The Longmont Public Library has an extensive collection of both newspapers. However, a fire tore through the old *Longmont Times-Call* building, the heir to the *Longmont Daily Times*, and consumed many issues from the 1920s. Fortunately, issues dating from 1925-1927 did survive the blaze and were able to be examined.

<sup>106</sup> "Ku Klux Oratory," *Longmont Ledger*, June 29, 1923.

<sup>107</sup> Untitled editorial, *Lafayette Leader*, September 14, 1923.

<sup>108</sup> "\$200 Reward for Anonymous Letter Writer," *Longmont Ledger*, September 14, 1923.

<sup>109</sup> "Klan Cross Burns on Haystack Mountain," *Longmont Ledger*, July 18, 1924.

directly warn members of those marginalized groups. Longmont Klansmen followed the cross-burning by hosting a large gathering in downtown Longmont and by donating money to the local Christian Church.<sup>110</sup>

The next Klan event gave readers of the *Ledger* a clearer idea of what Longmont Klansmen hoped to accomplish in the city. On October 3, 1924, the Longmont Klan hosted a speaker, Reverend G.M. Baumgardner, who addressed the central principles behind the Klan's success. Baumgardner mentioned law and order, free public schools, restrictive immigration quotas, and the utmost obedience to the Constitution. Perhaps most importantly, the writer of the news brief agreed that "the order stands for everything that you and I—Americans—stand for."<sup>111</sup> Contrary to the strong disapproval that the Klansmen and women in Boulder and Longmont received from newspaper editors, at least some members of the media in Longmont supported the hooded organization.

After the Klan's sweeping victory at the polls during the 1924 general election, the Longmont klavern celebrated by making a donation at an Evangelical Christian church—which was met with appreciation from the pastor.<sup>112</sup> A month later, Longmont Klansmen enjoyed a special New Year's Eve when they erected an eight foot tall flaming cross in front of the Pillar of Fire Church that was located at the corner of Main Street and Sixth Avenue. Supposedly, Klan members received permission to burn the cross and argued that because it was private property, they were authorized to set the

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<sup>110</sup> "Big Klan Meeting Said to be Held," and "Five Klansmen Present Gift to Rev. Findley," *Longmont Ledger*, September 19, 1924.

<sup>111</sup> "Ku Klux Meeting Draws Packed House," *Longmont Ledger*, October 3, 1924.

<sup>112</sup> "Klansmen Visit Christian Church Wednesday Night," *Longmont Ledger*, December 12, 1924.

cross ablaze.<sup>113</sup> To complete its three-month-long public relations campaign, the Longmont Klan donated money to the United Brethren church, the third church to which the Klan gave money.<sup>114</sup>

Riding a wave of popularity and support, members of the Longmont klavern began to plan a massive parade that would gather hundreds of Klansmen from around the state and solidify Longmont's position as a Klan-dominated community. The parade itself would not match the enormous gatherings reported in places like Kokomo, Indiana where the total number of people who participated in boxing matches and pie-eating contests numbered close to fifty thousand.<sup>115</sup> Nevertheless, reports from the *Rocky Mountain American* and the *Ledger* estimated that on June 5, 1925, between two to three thousand people had gathered along Main Street to witness a procession that included at least five hundred fully-outfitted Klansmen--five of whom were on horseback waving an American flag. The articles reported that people from as far away as Wyoming and Kansas had come to observe the parade.<sup>116</sup> These Klan-sponsored parades became standard ways for Klansmen to attract those seeking amusement and spectacle. It also portrayed the Klan in a positive light as they generally enthralled onlookers while masking the outright intolerance that the Klan preached.

Female members of the Longmont Klan also gained the spotlight temporarily during a Klan-sponsored demonstration. Apparently, Longmont Klanswomen "put on a fine drill" when they paraded around the Boulder County Fairgrounds during a hot July

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<sup>113</sup> "Klan Cross Displayed Again," *Longmont Ledger*, January 2, 1925.

<sup>114</sup> "Klansmen Make Gift to U.B. Church," *Longmont Ledger*, February 6, 1925.

<sup>115</sup> Pegram, *One Hundred Percent American*, 30.

<sup>116</sup> "Big Klan Parade in Longmont Tuesday Night," *Longmont Ledger*, June 5, 1925.



day.<sup>117</sup> One woman in particular, Bishop Alma White, acted as a distinguished speaker and supporter of the Klan throughout its time in Colorado.<sup>118</sup> The *Rocky Mountain American* described her as “one of God’s noblewomen raised up by Divine Providence to fight the battle of truth and righteousness against sin and iniquity. The Klan has never known a more staunch friend and co-worker than Bishop Alma White.”<sup>119</sup> She also supposedly founded a Christian school called Alma College in Zerephath, New Jersey and was editor of a monthly magazine called *Good Citizen*. During one visit to Longmont, she stressed that the Klan’s recent political victories had helped obstruct, “Rome’s path to world supremacy.”<sup>120</sup> This brand of anti-Catholicism percolated throughout Longmont and led to a number of cross-burnings in areas inhabited by Mexicans and Hispanos. According to the 1924 election results, however, these tactics did little to dissuade voters from supporting the Klan.

Similar to Boulder and Lafayette, a strong turnout during the 1924 election helped stimulate the Klan’s sweep. Twenty-three out of the twenty-nine Klan-backed candidates on the state received the most votes in Longmont: the same number of candidates who won in Lafayette. Again, through careful planning and an energized public outreach campaign, Longmont voters believed that their political values aligned

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<sup>117</sup> “Klan Held Demonstration Last Night,” *Longmont Ledger*, July 16, 1925.

<sup>118</sup> In a notable moment in history, White became the first female bishop in the United States and founded the Pillar of Fire Church in Denver. She inhabited many roles as a bishop, including championing women’s rights. Sadly, she also propagated racist, anti-Catholic, anti-Semitic and nativist beliefs when she aligned with the Klan. As one author writes, she was an “oppressed oppressor.” See Nichole Kathryn Kathol, “The Power of Christ Compelled Her: The Intersectional Identities and Cultural Logic of Bishop Alma B. White,” (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2010).

<sup>119</sup> “Bishop White Pays Visit to ‘the American’ office,” *Rocky Mountain American*, May 22, 1925.

<sup>120</sup> “Alma White, Pillar of Fire Bishop, Gives Address on K.K.K. Support,” *Longmont Daily Times*, January 20, 1925.

with many of the Klan candidates. In addition to the general election, Klansmen gained a majority of the city council during the local election of 1925. They used a misleading name, the Progressive Economic Party, to mask their hooded identities. Even with a sterling political display, the Klan council members would later become shortsighted and arrogant in their duties. One bizarre event in particular led the inhabitants of Longmont to turn against them. This became a recurring pattern throughout the country as the Klan faced a debilitating level of external opposition and internal dissent.

## VI. Crisis and Collapse:

The Ku Klux Klan reached the height of its power during the summer of 1925, when tens of thousands of Klansmen gathered at the nation's capitol in Washington, D.C. This enormous public display, however, could not mask the struggles that were contributing to the Klan's imminent demise. Ultimately, what caused this precipitous fall? Following the 1924 election, the Klan achieved political success in strongholds such as Oregon, Indiana and Colorado. From local municipal elections to U.S. Senate races, hooded agents won a variety of political battles. After the 1924 sweep, it seemed as if the Klan was poised to become a long-term, prominent element of American politics. A string of national scandals, factionalism, political ineptitude and a disappointed constituency, however, all caused a sharp decline for the Invisible Empire. At a micro-level, many of these same factors contributed to the end of the KKK in Boulder County as well.

In 1925, two major Klan figures--Indiana Grand Dragon D.C. Stephenson and Colorado Grand Dragon John Galen Locke--each got caught up in significantly damaging scandals that hurt the Klan's national image. The Indiana realm led by Stephenson incorporated a well-structured political machine and Klan-backed candidates won seats in the state House and Senate. What would seem to be an overwhelming victory for the Klan actually occurred as internal fractures between Stephenson and Imperial Wizard Evans were causing considerable strife within the organization. As Stephenson continued to expand his own personal authority, local and state leaders in Klan-dominated Indiana had to choose between the two leaders. Almost immediately, this strife percolated down the chain as newly-elected state legislators

failed to unify. Squabbles and disorder ultimately led to a failure to enact any substantial Klan-endorsed legislation in the state.<sup>121</sup>

Similarly, Grand Dragon Locke implemented an efficient, highly-functioning political structure in Colorado. On the surface, the gains that the Colorado Klan made in the 1924 elections seemed momentous. They had secured a considerable amount of influence in the state House and governor Clarence Morley was a Klansmen who fanatically followed Locke's backdoor instructions. The Klan's control of the state Senate, however, was much more unstable. Klan-backed politicians let arrogance and over-confidence undermine their ability to legislate effectively. Klan opponents organized to block a majority of bills presented by Klansmen and women and non-Klan legislators were named to critically-important committee positions such as the Calendar Committee, which governed the release of bills for consideration. By the end of the first legislative session, only three of Morley's proposed bills had become law. These trivial bills included the abolition of the obsolete Board of Horseshoe Examiners.<sup>122</sup> The legislative failings of Colorado and Indiana politicians presaged the scandals that left an indelible mark on the Klan.

In addition to his hypocritical drinking habits, Stephenson was accused and convicted of a heinous sexual assault against a former office worker, Madge Oberholtzer. According to her statement, Stephenson bit and clawed at her skin during the assault. The prosecution in Stephenson's trial contended that Oberholtzer died from the vicious wounds he inflicted upon her, rather than the mercury tablets she had taken after suffering from severe depression. Eventually, Stephenson was sentenced to prison

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<sup>121</sup> Pegram, *One Hundred Percent American*, 202.

<sup>122</sup> Goldberg, *Hooded Empire*, 90-91.

after being found guilty of second-degree murder.<sup>123</sup> This dramatic scandal on its own caused serious turmoil for the Klan. Those who had allied with Stephenson continued to fight for him and accused Imperial Wizard Hiram Wesley Evans of blackmailing Stephenson in an attempt to consolidate power. Although this scandal certainly contributed to the downfall of the Klan, the two blatant acts of misconduct committed by Grand Dragon Locke may have led directly to the end of the Klan in parts of Boulder County.

As Klan politicians ineffectually legislated in Colorado, the staunch anti-Klan Denver district attorney, Phillip Van Cise, jailed Locke on charges of kidnapping and conspiracy. Allegedly, Locke had threatened to personally castrate a teenaged man who had impregnated a high school girlfriend. Locke avoided a long-term jail sentence, but almost immediately faced dissent from other Colorado Klan leaders. Recently appointed to the short-term U.S. Senate vacancy, Rice Means, a former ally of Locke's, ordered an investigation into Locke's tax history and discovered that he had not filed state income taxes from 1913 to 1924. Evans became involved, and after Locke endured another stay in jail and a heavy fine, Evans ordered him to resign. The *Daily Camera* followed these stories closely as they unraveled, and printed front-page articles constantly during the summer of 1925.<sup>124</sup>

As Locke's popularity began to fade, he decided to create his own quasi-Klan fraternal organization called the Minute Men of America. This revolt led to at least

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<sup>123</sup> Pegram, *One Hundred Percent American*, 206.

<sup>124</sup> See for example, "Colorado Klansmen Voted to Desert National Organization and Ask Locke to Lead Independent Organization," "Klan Leaders Coming by Airplane from Washington; Arrive Sunday," "Locke Says He Will Decline to Head the Rump Order Until He Finishes with Klan," *Daily Camera*, July 18, 1925.

5,000 Klansmen in Colorado resigning their membership and joining Locke's organization. Donning tri-tipped hats and knee breeches, these Minute Men declared they would continue to fight for "100 percent Americanism," conservative Protestantism, and many of the other central tenets that the Klan fought for. Unlike their former Klan brothers, however, Minute Men were unafraid to reveal their identities.<sup>125</sup> This large group of dissidents most likely left because of general disillusionment with the Klan following the other national scandals. Even though Locke himself had been at the center of some local scandals, many loyalists accused Imperial Wizard Evans of purposefully driving Locke away, as with Stephenson, to consolidate his own power.

The city of Boulder klavern found itself right in the middle of this controversial split. On July 23, 1925, Boulder Klansmen met on a hillside near Twelfth Street, just north of the city, to determine whether or not they would join Locke's new organization.<sup>126</sup> The next day, a Boulder Klan official stated that "It is not likely there will be any more Ku Klux Klan meetings in Boulder."<sup>127</sup> The Boulder klavern did, in fact, officially declare its support for the Minute Men and the editor of the *Rocky Mountain American*, in its last official publication, announced the change by writing this pseudo-obituary: "Died at the stroke of midnight, Thursday, July 23, 1925,

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<sup>125</sup> Goldberg, *Hooded Empire*, 109.

<sup>126</sup> "The Klan to Meet North of Boulder to Decide Its Fate," *Daily Camera*, July 23, 1925.

<sup>127</sup> "Boulder Klan Fails to Take Action to Give Up Charter but Favor Locke Minute Men," *Daily Camera*, July 23, 1925.

Boulder Klan No. 3, Realm of Colorado. Born at the stroke of midnight, Thursday, July 23, 1925, Order of the Minute Men of America.”<sup>128</sup>

Additionally, the actions of a former Exalted Cyclops of the Boulder klavern, Clarence E. Lewis, highlight the fact that scandalous, criminal behavior was not confined to state leaders like Stephenson and Locke. Four years after the pronounced death of the Boulder klavern, Lewis pled guilty to forging an \$800 note on the estate of a recently deceased man named J. E. Kirbride.<sup>129</sup> Lewis was a former insurance salesman and Sunday school superintendent, so his role as Exalted Cyclops highlights the ways that the Boulder klavern grew from middle-class support and attempted to somehow combine educational reform with conservative Protestantism. The conviction of Lewis also reinforces the fact that the three klaverns in Boulder County were susceptible to the same morally questionable leadership that hampered other klaverns. The *Camera* articles don't explicitly tie Lewis's wrongdoings back to his Klan days, but they do contain undertones that remind readers of his hooded past.

In addition to the internal troubles that brewed within the Klan, the Boulder County klaverns also consistently faced verbal attacks from newspaper editors who generally hampered the Klan's ability to expand without interference. As voices for their local community, newspaper editors provided commentary on the state of a city's social and political character. In doing so, these men also wielded power that could potentially sway members of the community away from the Klan. As noted, the editors of the *Boulder Daily Camera*, A.A. Paddock, and of the *Lafayette Leader*, B.J. Radford,

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<sup>128</sup> “Local Klan is Dead, Asserts Publication,” *Daily Camera*, July 30, 1925.

<sup>129</sup> “Court Hints at Possible Perjury Charge; Warns Defendant That Sentence May Be Imposed,” *Daily Camera*, October 22, 1929.

wrote dismissive and sneering editorials against the Invisible Empire. Arthur A. Parkhurst, the editor of Boulder's evening newspaper, the *Boulder New-Herald*, wrote even more derisive columns, often jabbing at the Klan with declarations that "white robes and masks in the darkness and secrecy of night are not symbols of Americanism,"<sup>130</sup> and that "The only governments to which Americans owe allegiance are the visible, established national, state, county and municipal governments of the United States."<sup>131</sup> Parkhurst also wrote more extensive editorials that suggested legal methods for outlawing Klan activities, compared the rogue, secretive elements of the Klan to Bolshevism, and blasted the Klan for using extralegal methods to achieve their goals.

Most importantly, the actions of the Klan proved too extreme for too many people, which caused the Republican Parkhurst and the Democrat Paddock, who normally feuded on most topics, to collectively criticize the organization. By mounting so much pressure against establishment figures, the Klan's actions actually led to the formation of non-partisan, anti-Klan coalitions like the Visible Government in Longmont. When that started to happen, more moderate, rank-and-file Klansmen, who may have joined because of a recommendation from a fellow Mason or Elks member, probably would not have been willing to keep the robes and sheets. Even editorials from the *Rocky Mountain American's* William Francis could not halt the growing level of resistance. In one column, Francis--carefully choosing his words--dismissed

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<sup>130</sup> Untitled editorial, *Boulder News-Herald*, December 1, 1922.

<sup>131</sup> Untitled editorial, *Boulder News-Herald*, March 2, 1923.



Parkhurst's attacks by stating, "the Klan can think of no particular reason why it should care a single, oriental beaver's dam if he [Parkhurst] likes it or not."<sup>132</sup>

These written quarrels were not the only way that opponents of the Klan mounted resistance. Some of the first community leaders to condemn the Klan were, ironically, white, Protestant men. Soon after the Klan's arrival in Boulder, outspoken members of Boulder's Protestant community openly denounced the hooded organization. Reverend John Skeen of Boulder's Baptist Church "branded the Ku Klux Klan as being basically wrong."<sup>133</sup> He further criticized the Klan for using Christianity as a way to perpetrate slanderous and abusive actions. Other community leaders openly rebuffed seemingly trivial requests from known Klansmen. Before he was elected U.S. Senator, Rice Means sought permission to personally kick-off at the opening of a University of Colorado (CU) football game. The pointed response from the athletic department was, "Mr. Means can kick-off anywhere he wants to, except in Boulder."<sup>134</sup> Once the Klan seized control of the state government, more CU leaders attempted to reject mandates passed down to them. During the first legislative session after the 1924 election, Governor Morley ordered that George Norlin, the president of CU at the time, fire all Catholic and Jewish faculty members. When Norlin refused, CU faced drastic budget cuts and survived only because of the standard annual mill-levy appropriations.

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<sup>132</sup> Untitled editorial, *Rocky Mountain American*, January 31, 1925.

<sup>133</sup> "Ku Klux Klan Denounced by Skeen in Sermon Thursday," *Boulder News-Herald*, December 1, 1922.

<sup>134</sup> "'You May Kick, But Not in Boulder,' Advice to K.K.K. Rice Means, a Grandstand Performer," *Daily Camera*, November 3, 1924.

Despite the cuts, Norlin remarked that the University was in a “healthy condition and that the general morale of the institution was remarkably good.”<sup>135</sup>

Finally, the Boulder County Klan was not immune to the same wide-scale political incompetence that tormented hooded legislators in the state assemblies of Klan strongholds like Colorado, Oregon and Indiana. Klansmen in Longmont had secured the city council following the 1925 local municipal elections. In a show of force, the council ousted veteran city employees like street superintendent George W. Dean and fire chief Vern Campbell and replaced them with Klan supporters. This caused opposition leaders, belatedly, to call upon the citizens of Longmont to defy the hooded government. Calling themselves the Visible League, they wanted to “include all citizens who will agree that our schools should be free from the contaminating influence of secret political propagandists.”<sup>136</sup> This coalition wouldn’t need to rally too many supporters, as the Klan council members committed an act of political self-destruction with an ill-fated engineering project. The council members hired an engineer to assess the area starting above the St. Vrain River for the possible construction of a dam, which would have boosted the water supply in Longmont. Over the next year, the price of the project shot up from \$85,000 to \$350,000. A state engineer advised the city council to reach out for bids to complete the construction, rather than use local tax money to foot the entire bill. The council rejected the engineer and once news spread of the hastiness of the city council, many people in Longmont expressed severe displeasure with the project. This single mistake left a lasting

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<sup>135</sup> William E. Davis, *Glory Colorado!: A History of the University of Colorado 1858-1963* (Pruett Press: Boulder, CO 1965), 270.

<sup>136</sup> Jim Gregory, “Ku Klux Klan Wielded Much Power in the 1920s,” *Sunday Times-Call Magazine*, November 1, 1987.

impression on Longmont citizens and, during the next local election, all of the Klan-backed council members failed to win re-election. It would seem, then, that even though Klansmen in Longmont did not have to face the clever political maneuvers employed by veteran, anti-Klan legislators in the state capitol, they were still unable to govern effectively.

These acts of defiance, combined with the skepticism that overtook the initial wave of optimism shared by many Klansmen and women following the 1924 election, ultimately overpowered the Invisible Empire in Boulder County. From the first Klan national headquarters in Atlanta, up to the capitol building in Denver, and finally throughout Boulder County, the Klan had vigorously swept across the country. The Klan showed some momentary flickers of persistent life when, for example, six men burned crosses in 1940 near Longmont.<sup>137</sup> But these acts more closely resembled disorganized cases of vandalism than a serious attempt at reviving the Klan. In 1995, Klan members from other parts of the country gathered on Pearl Street to protest Martin Luther King, Jr. Day more than seventy years after the Invisible Empire's parade down the same street. Community members responded with bullhorns, a drum circle and demonstrations.<sup>138</sup>

Altogether, the Boulder County Klan faced the same divisive issues that klaverns all over the country faced in the 1920s. Without a comprehensive plan to stifle the internal struggles and the external opposition, ordinary members of the Klan abandoned the organization. Klaverns became almost too autonomous and were unable

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<sup>137</sup> "Three Men Taken Into Custody After Three Fiery Crosses are Burned Here," *Longmont Ledger*, April 9, 1940.

<sup>138</sup> Rebecca Rodriguez, "County Turns its Back on KKK Rally," *Daily Camera*, January 15, 1995.

to solicit the help of a frantic and uninspired national headquarters. Once it became clear that Klansmen were susceptible to the same vices and mistakes as established politicians and state leaders, disillusionment spread exponentially.

## Conclusion

Even with meticulous reporting from local newspapers, there are still many questions about the Klan in Boulder County that remain unanswered. When comparing the three cities, one lingering question remains: who were these people who felt compelled to wear white sheets and hoods? There are a number of clues that, when put together, may shed light on the answer. For the most part, during the 1920s the city of Boulder's economy did not have a strong industrial or mining sector. As mentioned, the *Rocky Mountain American* provides a glimpse into some of the businesses that were Klan-friendly. Grocery stores, mechanic shops and dry cleaning stores all ran advertisements in the *American*. This would indicate that men with middle-class backgrounds joined the Klan. In Lafayette, evidence points to Klan members being involved in school reform and working as miners. The fraternal, mystical elements of the Klan probably attracted Lafayette and Boulder inhabitants. Longmont Klansmen were also most likely members of the middle or the working-class. The Pillar of Fire Church, which was founded in Denver in 1901 by Alma White and her husband, acted as a physical manifestation of the pivot towards a more conservative interpretation of Protestantism. Although her legacy as the first female bishop in the United States is a significant one, she also envisioned the church to inhabit the right-wing, intolerant branch of conservative Protestantism.<sup>139</sup> Longmont was the only city in Boulder County that housed a Pillar of Fire Church, and thus, could be imagined as perhaps the most religiously conservative city in Boulder County at the time.

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<sup>139</sup> Kathol, "The Power of Christ Compelled Her," 2. To this day, there are still active Pillar of Fire churches in Colorado. See <https://www.pillar.org/> for more information.

National and state Klan leaders probably saw Boulder County as a diverse area where they could recruit a population consisting mostly of white, Protestant men and women. This was a common theme, as states like Oregon and Indiana which had populations of mostly white, Protestant men and women, had some of the strongest Klan support. In Boulder County, there were still examples of Klansmen using traditional tactics like cross burnings to intimidate folks seen as “un-American.” Perhaps more importantly, however, the Klan of the 1920s was anchored in a specific set of ideals: white supremacy, conservative Protestantism, nativism, anti-Catholicism, civic reform, law and order, Prohibitionism and education reform. Yet these ideals could be molded to fit the specific context of a local area. As I hope to have shown, the reasons why the Klan existed in Lafayette may have differed slightly from the reasons why the Klan operated in Longmont. Although Klansmen in both areas used conservative Protestantism and donating money to churches as fundamental tools to attract support, there were different social and economic reasons behind those actions.

Additionally, I hope to have contextualized the Klan on a local level. It’s easy to make generalizations about an organization that gained popularity in so many different areas across the country. When looking at it from the top down, one would naturally make claims that would appear to apply to the entire organization. Nonetheless, some of the more subtle details are lost with this macro-level perspective. For example, scholars generally conclude that the summer of 1925 marked the beginning of the precipitous decline of the Klan. In Boulder, that was fairly accurate, as the klavern transitioned into a Minute Man lodge. In Longmont and Lafayette, though, Klan

activity remained strong until the late fall, 1926. These details allow for a more precise evaluation of a complex organization.

This thesis should not be characterized as alarmist. It should, however, be a reminder that few communities have impeccable pasts. Boulder County is not immune to scrutiny and its past should be carefully analyzed. Even though the 1920s Ku Klux Klan is no longer depicted as an unconditionally extremist organization, its principles were still steeped in intolerance, prejudice and exclusion. These events should not be confined to a few lines in a folksy history of Boulder County; it should be visible for all to see, even if there are seemingly invisible forces at work.

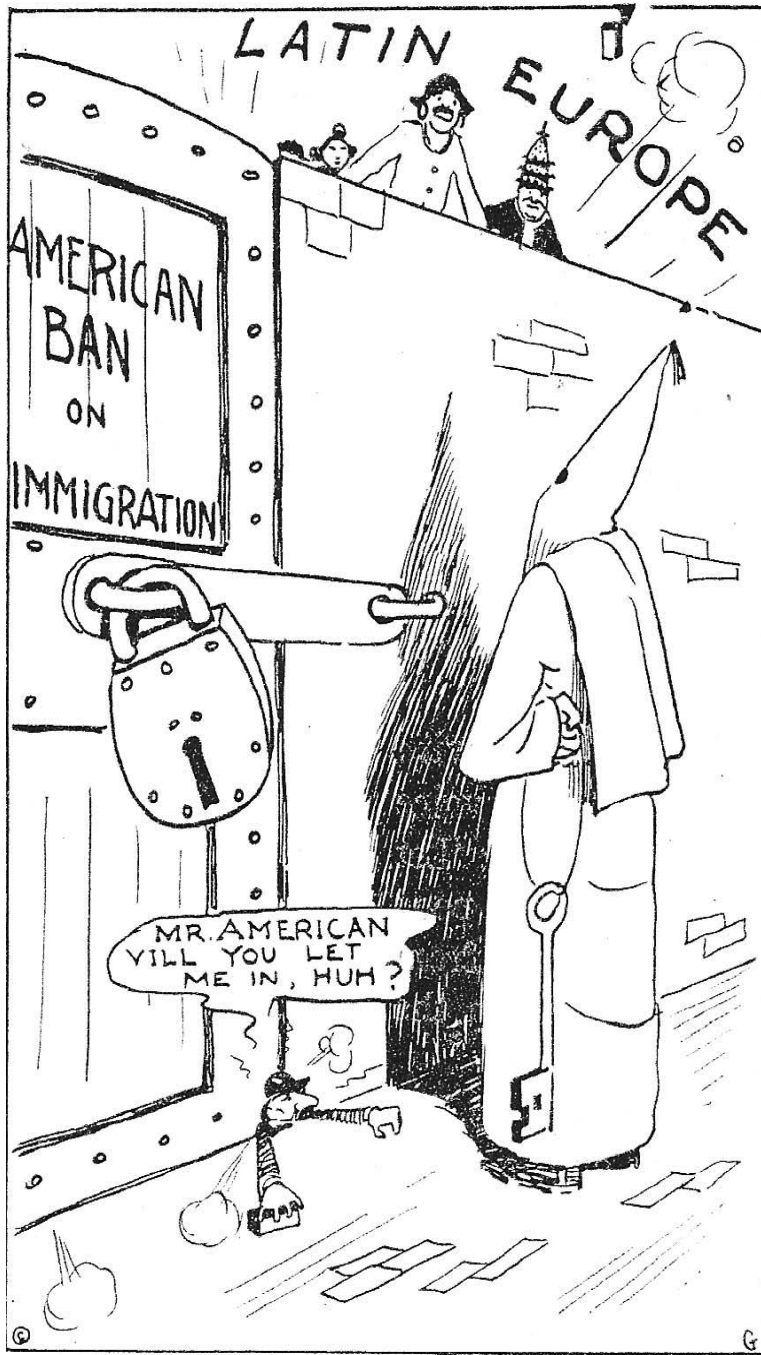
Appendix A



A visual representation of how the Klan used nationalistic American symbols to cultivate their image as guardians of the United States. *Klan Unmasked*, *Rocky Mountain American*. February, 1925. Boulder County Latino History Project, Boulder, Colorado. Accessed September, 2015. <http://bocolatinohistory.colorado.edu/newspaper/the-klan-unmasked-cartoon-from-klan-newspaper>

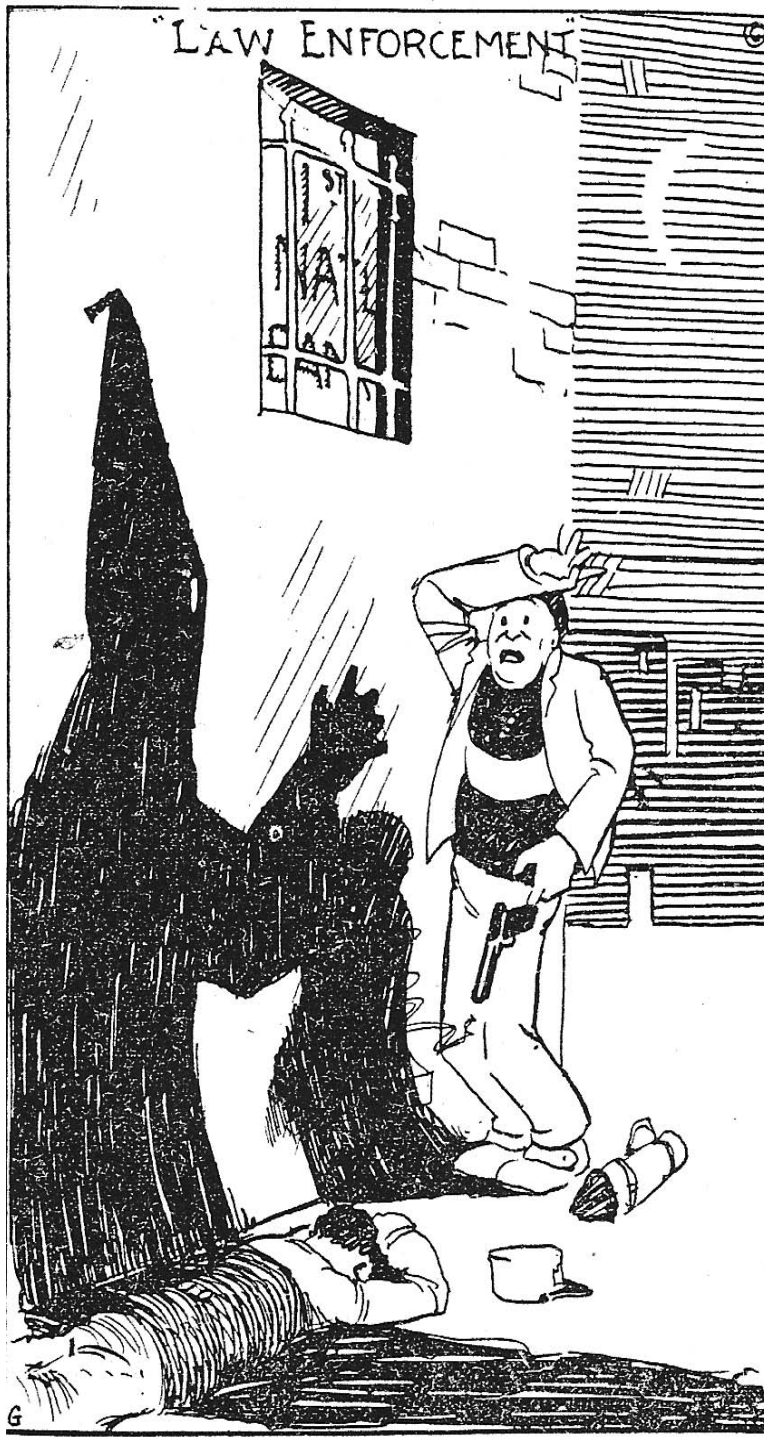


Appendix B



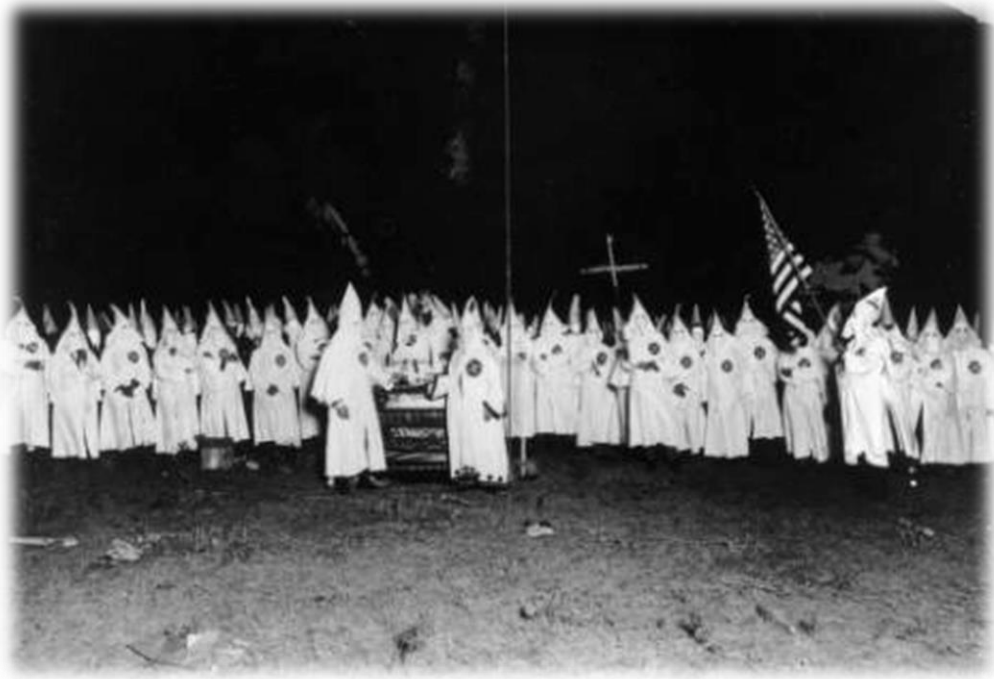
Klansmen also liked to present themselves as vigilante heroes using extralegal methods to protect the United States. In this case, they are also enforcing strict immigration restriction. *Ban on Immigration, Rocky Mountain American*. June, 1925. Boulder County Latino History Project, Boulder, Colorado. Accessed September, 2015. <http://bocolatinohistory.colorado.edu/newspaper/ban-on-immigration-cartoon-from-klan-newspaper>

Appendix C



This image highlights the Klan's use of vigilantism to promote law and order. Klansmen and women used vigilantism to not only target Jews, Catholics, immigrants and people of color, but also to invoke fear into misbehaving white, Protestant men and women as well. *The KKK and Law Enforcement, Rocky Mountain American*. January, 1925. Boulder County Latino History Project, Boulder, Colorado. Accessed September, 2015. <http://bocolatinohistory.colorado.edu/newspaper/cartoon-the-kkk-and-law-enforcement>.

## Appendix D



The only recorded photo of the Klan in Boulder County during the 1920s. According to a description on the back, it was an initiation ceremony that included national, state and local Klan leaders. *Ku Klux Klan Rally in Boulder County, Colorado*. Date Unknown. Denver Public Library Digital Collections, Denver, Colorado. Accessed February, 2015. <http://digital.denverlibrary.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p15330coll22/id/13253/rec/5>

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