

Ku Klux Klan

Civil Rights in the United States, 2000

The Ku Klux Klan was conceived during the Reconstruction Era (1865-1877), to address the fears of Southern whites resulting from rapid social and economic changes. The name Ku Klux Klan was derived from the Greek word *kuklos*, which means "circle of friends." From the beginning the goals of the Ku Klux Klan have always been controversial. Klansmen have claimed that the organization is a Christian, chivalrous, and patriotic society that has benefitted society in general by enforcing the law and through humanitarian efforts. While those committed to old Southern traditions maintained this favorable view, the Klan became most generally associated with the terror of hooded night riders who were responsible for Lynching campaigns directed against people of color.

Over the past one hundred and thirty years, the Ku Klux Klan has experienced periods of resurgence and decline. The first Klan was formed by six young Confederate soldiers in the winter of 1865-1866 in Pulaski, Tennessee. By 1867, the organization had grown large enough to hold its first unity convention in Nashville, Tennessee, and Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest (1821-1877) was chosen as the first Imperial Wizard. Some suggest that he disbanded the organization two years later, in 1869, in response to public pressures, while others argue that Forrest wanted to distance himself so that he would not be held responsible for Klan violence. Congress passed four anti-Klan laws in 1870 and conducted congressional investigations in 1871. Forrest and others called to testify disavowed their involvement in Klan-related violence.

William Joseph Simmons founded the second Klan in 1915, which eventually became the largest in history. Its numbers swelled nationally to between four and five million members by 1925. In post-World War I America, the Klan was able to take advantage of a national political climate shaped by public fears and intolerance, which led to restricted immigration and other conservative measures. While the Reconstruction era Klan focused its wrath on blacks, the Klan of the 1920s broadened its ideology to oppose other ethnics such as Catholics, Jews, and immigrants, as well as the political left and proponents of unionization. During this period, the Ku Klux Klan was a powerful political force in state governments, with Grand Dragon D.C. Stephenson's influence in Indiana being perhaps the most noteworthy. The second Klan experienced a rapid decline in 1926, amidst internal disputes and in the wake of public outcry against Klan lynchings. Perhaps the coup de grace of this period was Klan participation in a highly publicized and unpopular pro-Nazi joint celebration with the German-American Bund in New Jersey in 1940.

Klan activity continued to ebb and flow in the period after World War II. A third Klan emerged immediately following the war, which remained a small and fragmented Southern phenomenon and whose activity led to the passage of "antimask" laws and a roundup of Klansmen in North Carolina in 1952. However, the Klan experienced another resurgence in response to the civil rights movement. During the late 1950s and 1960s, the Klan supported the political work of the White Citizens Councils, which originated in Mississippi and sought to maintain segregation. From the civil rights period to the present, the Ku Klux Klan has become increasingly fractionalized. Many Klan organizations have joined with splinter groups that are continually evolving. One of the most controversial and widely known Klansmen is David Duke (1950-), who has been credited with the "Nazification of the Klan." He led the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan (1973-1982), and went on to win a Louisiana congressional seat in 1989 after forming the National Association for the Advancement of White People (NAAWP). Since the 1980s, Klan organizations have divided into traditional groups, which adhere to the original Klan rituals dating back to Forrest, while other Klan organizations, considered more militant, have incorporated neo-Nazi symbols and ideology along with a more open acceptance of skinheads. At the present, the Ku Klux Klan is one faction of what has been termed the "White Power Movement," which draws together divergent white supremacist ideologies and strategies for social change ranging from political mainstreaming to violence.

- [Klu Klux Klan](#)
-

Further Readings

Bibliography

- Bridges, Tyler. *The Rise of David Duke*. 1994.
- Chalmers, David M. *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan*. 1965.
- Dobratz, Betty A., and Stephanie L. Shanks-Meile. *"White Power, White Pride!" The White Separatist Movement in the United States*. 1997.
- Forster, Arnold, and Benjamin R. Epstein. *Report on the Ku Klux Klan*. 1965.
- Katz, William Loren. *The Invisible Empire: The Ku Klux Klan Impact on History*. 1986.
- MacLean, Nancy. *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan*. 1994.
- Smith, John David. *Anti-Black Thought: 1863-1925*. Volume 9: *The Negro Problem*. 1993.
- Tourgee, Albion Winegar. *The Invisible Empire*. 1989.
- Trelease, Allen W. *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction*. 1971.
- Turner, John. *The Ku Klux Klan: A History of Racism and Violence*. 1981.
- Wade, Wyn Craig. *The Fiery Cross: The Ku Klux Klan in America*. 1987.

Full Text: COPYRIGHT 2000 Macmillan Reference USA.

Source Citation:

Shanks-Miele, Stephanie. "Ku Klux Klan." *Civil Rights in the United States*. Ed. Waldo E. Martin, Jr. and Patricia Sullivan. New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2000. *Gale U.S. History In Context*. Web. 27 Jan. 2011.

Document URL

<http://ic.galegroup.com/ic/uhic/ReferenceDetailsPage/ReferenceDetailsWindow?displayGroupName=Reference&prodId=UHIC&action=e&windowstate=normal&catId=&documentId=GALE%7CEJ2338230902&mode=view&userGroupName=beth15353&jsid=f87a478378ae614642229fa914d7c8c0>

Gale Document Number: GALE|EJ2338230902