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# WOMEN IN THE 1920s' KU KLUX KLAN MOVEMENT

KATHLEEN M. BLEE

In 1920, women won the right to vote, culminating a seventy-two-year struggle for greater access to the political sphere. Yet, women's politics changed in another way in the 1920s. When women gained the franchise, the issue that had united women with different backgrounds and politics disappeared. Women's political goals and ideologies had grown more diverse even before the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment as the separate gender spheres of the nineteenth century dissolved. The extent of this diversity became even more clear without the unifying cause of suffrage. Cleavages of class, race, ethnicity, and region, constant features of women's politics in the United States, now increasingly eroded gender unity in political goals.<sup>1</sup>

The ways in which women became involved in postsuffrage politics were etched in the struggle for the franchise. Ideas born in the battle for the Nineteenth Amendment affected not only the activists but also their descendants and women who had refrained from politics. One outcome – the one most familiar in the popular imagery of the postsuffrage period – was the participation of women in progressive reform movements. Women whose belief in equality was nourished in the drive for the franchise found a logical extension of their suffrage politics in movements for social and urban reform. Women's votes supported candidates who favored maternity and infancy protection and opposed lynching and child labor. Female reformers of the 1920s led the fight for better schools, cleaner cities, more equitable labor relations, and honest politics.<sup>2</sup> Another outcome of the franchise, however, was the involvement of postsuffrage women in reactionary and right-wing political movements. If most women worked for, or were influenced by, the fight for women's suffrage because of its em-

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phasis on political equity, a significant minority found in the quest for votes for women an opportunity to solidify the political power of whites and native-born citizens. These women envisioned political equity between women and men as an issue relevant only within dominant racial and ethnic groups, as seen, for example, in campaigns to extend the franchise to white women.<sup>3</sup> Such racist and anti-immigrant tendencies within the movement for women's suffrage shared aspects of the political vision of nationalistic, militaristic, and racial supremacist movements in the 1910s and 1920s. Women who interpreted the struggle for women's votes through the prism of racial, ethnic, and class privilege thus experienced an apparently easy transition from women's suffrage to the plethora of white supremacist, nativist, and racist political movements of the early twentieth century.<sup>4</sup>

One of the largest and most influential right-wing women's organizations of the immediate postsuffrage period was the Women of the Ku Klux Klan (WKKK). From 1923 to 1930, women poured into the Klan movement to oppose immigration, racial equality, Jewish-owned businesses, parochial schools, and "moral decay." The mobilization of women into the 1920s' Klan was the product of a racist, nationalistic zeal, which also motivated men to join the Ku Klux Klan, combined with a specific, gendered notion of the preservation of family life and women's rights. The women's Klan copied the regalia, militarism, hierarchy, and political stances of the male Ku Klux Klan but insisted that they were no mere appendage of the KKK, claiming autonomy and a special mission for Klanswomen. They used the KKK's call for supremacy of white, native-born Protestants and interpreted it in a gender-specific way, as a vehicle to protect women and children, to preserve home and family life, and to demonstrate newly won women rights. A 1923 advertisement recruited women for the WKKK, using "American" rights and "pure womanhood" as code words for racial and national privilege:

To the American Women of Washington: Are you interested in the welfare of our Nation? As an enfranchised woman are you interested in Better Government? Do you not wish for the protection of Pure Womanhood? Shall we uphold the sanctity of the American Home? Should we not interest ourselves in Better Education for our children? Do we not want American teachers in our American schools? IT IS POSSIBLE FOR ORGANIZED PATRIOTIC WOMEN TO AID IN STAMPING OUT THE CRIME AND VICE THAT ARE UNDERMINING THE MORALS OF OUR YOUTH. The duty of the American Mother is greater than ever before.<sup>5</sup>

The appeal of the Klan to large numbers of women in the 1920s raises more general questions about how and why women become involved in movements of political protest. A particularly intriguing aspect of the 1920s' WKKK was its complex political ideology. Klanswomen carried into their struggle against Blacks, Jews, Catholics, labor radicals, socialists, Mormons, and immigrants a belief in gender equality among white Protestants in politics, work, and wages. Such an ideology cannot be understood within theoretical frameworks that assume a bifurcation between progressive and proequality movements, on the one hand, and conservative, antifeminist and "profamily" movements, on the other. The study of 1920s' Klanswomen is intended to contribute to an understanding of the varying, often contradictory, ideologies that underlie women's commitment to political movements, especially those of the political Right.<sup>6</sup>

Feminist scholarship on women in contemporary and historical right-wing movements suggests two additional issues that can be explored through an analysis of the 1920s' women's Klan movement. One issue is that of motivation. Did women enter the Klan for the same economic, ideological, and political reasons that brought men into the Klan? Or did women and men differ in the motivations, or the political agendas, that led to Klan membership? Research on other movements suggests different possibilities for women's mobilization into the Klan. Scholars of U.S. antifeminist movements, for example, argue that women's participation in politics, ranging from Victorian-era social purity to modern anti-abortion and anti-ERA movements, has been motivated by a complex mixture of defending and resenting male privilege and female vulnerability in the economic and social spheres. Men's participation in these movements, however, reflects a simpler assessment of collective male self-interest. However, the little research that exists on women in right-wing movements other than those with antifeminist agendas suggests that these women may not differ significantly in ideology or political motivation from their male counterparts on the Right.<sup>7</sup> The 1920s' WKKK, which supported both traditional right-wing politics and a certain degree of gender equality, provides an opportunity to examine gender differences in political motivation in a large and significant movement of the Right.

A second issue concerns political activity. What was the nature

of women's involvement in the 1920s' Klan movement? Did women participate, as did men, in terroristic and violent activities, or were women's activities more peaceful, reformist, or "legitimate" than men's Klan activities? There is virtually no research on violent right-wing women's political activity in the United States with which to compare the WKKK. Is this, as traditional accounts imply, because women associated with the major reactionary and terroristic movements of the Right in U.S. history have played insignificant roles in these movements? Historians of the various Klan movements, for example, typically dismiss women's Klan activities as incidental, auxiliary, or merely cultural screens behind which men carried out the real politics of the Klan. Or, as feminist theory suggests, are women's political activities on the far Right undocumented precisely because, as women's activities, they have been invisible or seen as trivial by most historians?<sup>28</sup> Traditional accounts of the Klan movement draw vivid images of episodic, deadly violence perpetrated by gangs of masked and hooded men. By defining the Klan movement through this image of male marauders, women disappear, becoming little more than peripheral onlookers to the crimes and violence of Klansmen. Such a picture distorts both women's role in the Klan and the reality of the Klan itself. If we take women's politics seriously, we find that in the 1920s, the activities of Klanswomen, commonly dismissed as inconsequential and apolitical, were responsible for some of the Klan's most destructive, vicious effects.

I explore these issues through analysis of the 1920s' Klan movement, using primary archival documents from the WKKK, the KKK, and from participants, observers, and critics of the Klan movement. I use documents from the national organizations of the WKKK and KKK to analyze the appeal of the Klan to women and the motivations that drew women into the Klan movement. The extensive propaganda machine of the 1920s' Klan left a considerable body of public documentation in the form of newspapers, pamphlets, and books, while surviving internal Klan letters, speeches, and memorandums preserve a sense of the ideology and goals of the organization.

To understand the specific processes of recruitment and activities of the WKKK, I also examine the large and powerful WKKK chapter in Indiana. With a membership estimated at 250,000 (half of Indiana's Klan membership of half a million), the Indiana

WKKK was probably the largest state organization of Klanswomen. The Indiana WKKK was large but not unique; WKKK chapters existed in every state, with particularly strong chapters in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Arkansas, in addition to Indiana. To assess why women joined the Klan in Indiana it is important to understand what kinds of women became Klanswomen. Unfortunately, as a secret organization, the Klan closely guarded, and later destroyed, its membership roster. No comprehensive or even partial listing of Indiana Klanswomen survives. My analysis of the composition of the women's Klan, therefore, is based on more indirect methods. Women are considered Klan members if they used their names publicly as leaders or spokeswomen for the Indiana WKKK, if their Klan membership was reported in the influential anti-Klan papers, *Tolerance* (Chicago) or the *Post-Democrat* (Muncie, Indiana), or if their membership was publicized at their deaths by public funeral ceremonies performed by fellow Klanswomen. I then traced the personal histories of these Klanswomen through local newspapers, genealogies, obituaries, county histories, and other biographical sources. In addition, I examined propaganda materials written and distributed by the Indiana WKKK; archival data from the women's and men's Klan in Indiana; non-Klan and anti-Klan accounts of Klan activity; and personal recollections of participants, observers, and opponents of the Klan in Indiana.

## **BACKGROUND TO THE 1920s' KLAN**

The Klan movement of the 1920s was the second historical occurrence of the Ku Klux Klan. The first Klan was organized in the rural South after the Civil War to assert claims of white, Southern supremacy during Reconstruction; it collapsed in the 1870s. The Klan lay dormant until the early twentieth century when it was reborn as a movement of white "100 percent American" Protestants, drawing strength from small towns and rural areas in the North, Midwest and West as well as in the South.<sup>9</sup> This second wave of the Klan grew dramatically in the early 1920s, only to collapse precipitously in the late 1920s. In over a little more than a decade, the Klan managed to enroll an estimated three to six million persons in a crusade for a white, native-born Protestant America. A number of factors influenced the dramatic reemer-

gence of the Klan movement in the 1920s. These included a public explosion of anti-Black racism and white supremacist sentiments that followed upon the postwar migration of Blacks from the South to the North, the nationalist hatred of immigrants and political "radicals" fueled in World War I propaganda, and the increase in bigotry and intolerance that accompanied the rise of religious and political fundamentalism.

Unlike its predecessor, the 1920s' Klan kept its organization in full public view, even as individual identities were safeguarded. The Klan movement built upon the network of lodges, Protestant churches, and clubs that structured daily life for many small-town and urban Protestant families. It recruited members in schools, clubs, and churches and used ministers and prominent local leaders as recruitment agents. In turn, the Klan built its own network of social ties. Numerous Klan newspapers and magazines were distributed across the United States. Klan lectures, rallies, and gatherings provided a focus for Protestant social life, and the Klan held out the promise of a Klan college to teach the children of loyal Klan parents. In a period of rapid change and great geographical mobility, the Klan positioned itself as the guarantor of the old virtues and the entrée into a cohesive social and cultural network.<sup>10</sup>

Some of the Klan's rapid growth can be attributed to the local specificity of its campaigns. Klan chapters had substantial autonomy to address community issues and fashion appropriate scapegoats – from Mormons in Utah to Catholics in the Midwest, Jews in the Northeast and Blacks in the South. While a national ideology of anti-Catholicism, anti-Semitism, and anti-Black racism and conservative moralism always underlay Klan actions, recruits varied widely in their commitments to these. Local chapters, too, varied in their activities, which ranged from electoral politics, lobbying, and cultural activities, to terrorism, vigilantism, and violence.<sup>11</sup>

## **WOMEN IN THE KLAN MOVEMENT**

Women's participation in the Klan movement began in the early 1920s, when male membership in the KKK was increasing rapidly. Various male Klan leaders throughout the country organized female auxiliaries, competing for membership and official charter-

ing. The most successful of these affiliates was the WKKK, under the sponsorship of the powerful Klan leader, Hiram Evans.<sup>12</sup> The WKKK was open to white, native-born, Protestant women over sixteen years old. Although there were personal and organizational ties between the women's and men's Klan, the WKKK worked to maintain some degree of autonomy from the male KKK.

Women entered the Klan in various ways and for different reasons. Initially, the women's Klan built upon, then absorbed, many of the women's patriotic societies and Protestant women clubs that began after World War I. Other women joined the Klan as the sisters, daughters, and wives of Klansmen, to assist the Klan cause and promote family togetherness. The WKKK also recruited women directly into a women's crusade for a white, Protestant America. The WKKK hired lecturers, organizers, and recruiters to establish new local chapters, usually in states where recruiters for the KKK had been successful. In this endeavor, the WKKK played upon notions of women's new status, as shaped in movements of female suffrage and gender equality. A recruitment ad for the Women's Klan in Indiana proclaimed: "Men no longer aspire to exclusive domination in any field of endeavor that is his authorship, and whether she wears the cool, sequestered veil of life in the home, or whether she is in the busy walks of business or fashion, woman is now called to put her splendid efforts and abilities behind a movement for 100 per cent American women."<sup>13</sup>

The devotion of the WKKK to an elaborate hierarchy and ritual proved attractive to women, as it had to men in the KKK. An Imperial Commander governed the WKKK on a national level. Under her, a complex series of state, regional, and local officers, with titles of Klaliff (vice-president), Klokard (lecturer), Kligruff (secretary), Klabee (treasurer), and Klarogo/Klexter (inner/outer guard), enforced the code of Klan conduct, collected membership dues, initiated new members, and organized events. Like their male counterpart, the WKKK had an array of social, cultural, and economic units, including drill teams, bands, choirs, a social service agency, kindergartens, and a robe-making factory.<sup>14</sup>

## RECRUITMENT OF WOMEN

What sort of women joined the women's Klan? The common dismissal of the WKKK as a dependent auxiliary of the male KKK

does not accurately capture the process through which women became involved in the Klan. Many – but certainly not all – women in the WKKK were related to male Klan members. Of the sixty-two nonleadership Indiana Klanswomen who are named in the *Tolerance* and *Post-Democrat* or in the Indianapolis Klan paper, *Fiery Cross*, twelve were widows or unmarried women and, we can assume, made their own decisions to participate in the Klan. Furthermore, married women in the Klan were not necessarily led into the movement by Klan husbands; in fact, it was their wives who sometimes convinced men to join the Klan.<sup>15</sup>

Further, most Indiana Klanswomen brought with them a history of extrafamilial involvement. Typically, they belonged to at least one voluntary organization, in addition to a Protestant church and the Klan, and a significant minority worked for wages, in occupations that ranged from positions such as physician, postmistress, real estate agent, and owner of a boarding house to skilled and semiskilled occupations that included dressmaker, office worker, courthouse employee, and nursing student.

Indiana Klanswomen in leadership positions, for whom more biographical information is available, clarify a pattern of Klan membership as an aspect of broad civic and social involvement. Daisy Douglas Barr, the fiery leader of the WKKK for Indiana and seven other states, was married to a bank examiner and raised a son but pursued an independent course. An ordained Quaker preacher, renowned for her oratory skills, Barr began preaching at sixteen; was ordained at eighteen; and served as pastor of churches in Muncie, Fairmount, and New Castle, Indiana. She was an active, powerful member of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and a famous crusader for the cause of the "drys" in Muncie.<sup>16</sup> Barr also was a leader in the Indiana Republican party, serving as the first woman vice-chair of the Republican state committee and as a member of the Indiana Women's Republican Club.<sup>17</sup> She was an active member of the American War Mothers (from which she was forced to resign when her Klan activities became known) and a member of the Women's Department Club. Daisy Douglas Barr, like many leaders of the women's Klan, was also an advocate of women's rights and public participation. In 1916, she wrote:

One can hardly imagine, under our present day progress, that most of the religious denominations in our own country still refuse the rite of ordination

to women applicants. Women have entered the professions of law, medicine, teaching, art, music and even are wrestling with the sciences. . . . And yet the relic of our barbarism and heathenism dogmas, when the belief was still current that women had no souls, is still evident in the fact that other doors are open while the holy ministry still bars her free entrance.<sup>18</sup>

Mary Benadum, prominent leader of the WKKK in Muncie, Indiana, and a rival of Daisy Barr, had a similar background prior to joining the Klan. Married to a prosecuting attorney, she worked for twelve years as a schoolteacher in Muncie and was involved in a variety of state and local civic associations. She was president of the Delaware County (Muncie) Republican Woman's Club and was active in the Business and Professional Women of Indiana and the Methodist church. She also was a vocal and open leader of the women's Klan in Indiana. Benadum embroiled the WKKK in several lawsuits, charging Daisy Barr first with stealing WKKK funds and later with slander, when Barr claimed that Benadum was the true culprit.<sup>19</sup> Her social prominence notwithstanding, Benadum did not fit the traditional conception of high-society womanhood. In 1924, she was arrested in Alliance, Ohio, in a battle with a rival faction of the WKKK in which one woman was injured seriously, and she and Daisy Barr competed intensively and viciously for leadership of the Muncie WKKK.<sup>20</sup>

Lillian Sedwick, named as president of the Marion County, Indiana (Indianapolis), WKKK, was a highly influential and active leader in Indianapolis. Married and the mother of three children, she served on the Indianapolis school board, through which she attempted to bring a Klan philosophy to questions of school policy and racial integration of the schools.<sup>21</sup> She also was active in Eastern Star, the Rebekah Lodge, the WCTU (in which she served as state superintendent), the Methodist Episcopal church, and the International Order of Odd Fellows.

Klanswomen in Indiana not only were likely to be women with a personal history of social and political involvement, but many also violated accepted notions of gender and wifely duty to participate in the Klan. Stories of women who joined the WKKK against the wishes of their husbands and families are common. The 16 May 1924 Muncie *Post-Democrat* noted that "in many Protestant homes the klan has done it's [sic] work breaking the ties that would never have been severed. . . . Some husbands have parted from their wives who joined the Kamelias [Women's Klan] and wives have

deserted husbands who enlisted in the army of Satan"<sup>22</sup>

The Lynds' famous study of Muncie, Indiana, too, quotes a husband who attributed his divorce to his wife's participation in the Klan: "She and I split up over the G-d D-- Klan. I couldn't stand them around any longer." Divorce proceedings, given prominent play in the anti-Klan press, claimed that women neglected children and household in favor of Klan activities. The press emphasized the Klan's negative effect on marriage and family life in order to convince women to return to their "rightful" role as wife and mother. "Edna Walling . . . led to believe that her sphere was politics and Klan activities, instead of the home life she deserved . . . was arrested."<sup>23</sup>

Anti-Klan papers insisted that the Klan did not respect marriage and family life. Claims that the divorce rate was higher in the Klan stronghold of Muncie than in Nevada, that the Klan sponsored frivolous public weddings of fifty couples at a time, and that the Klan "placed Klangraft [Klan corruption] above the holy ordinance of marriage" were frequent. The existence of the WKKK was singled out as proof that the Klan was ignoring traditional morals and the rightful place of women and men. George Dale, the crusading anti-Klan editor of the Muncie *Post-Democrat* who was convicted of contempt of court by a local Klan judge, described Klanswomen spectators at his trial as "sister Amazons of Hate . . . bob-haired Amazons [who] demanded my death." The WKKK itself was accused of being nothing more than a front for women's adulterous trysts and of fomenting the murderous tendencies of women unleashed from male direction.<sup>24</sup>

On the whole, this evidence offers a profile of Klanswomen that is remarkably congruent with decades of female activism in voluntary religious and reform associations. But why did they join the Klan? Recruitment literature from the WKKK played on the same racist and nativist themes as the male KKK, promising to safeguard the American family from "corrupting" influences; to guard against isolation and loneliness; to provide excitement; to preserve nationalistic pride; and to maintain racial, religious, and ethnic superiority. Other sources, however, indicate that women also joined the Klan to assert and increase their newfound political legitimacy. In a rare surviving document, an early women's Klan, the "Ladies of the Invisible Empire," of Shreveport, Louisiana, sought to simultaneously redirect American society and to assimilate

late women into the public, political life of the country. The group presented its objectives as

the bringing together of the Protestant women of America . . . to cleanse and purify the civil, political and ecclesiastical atmosphere of our country; to provide a common meeting ground for American Protestant women who are willing to co-operate in bringing about better conditions in the home, church and social circles; to assist all Protestant women in the study of practical politics; to encourage a study by Protestant wives, mothers and daughters of questions concerning the happiness of the home and the welfare of the state.<sup>25</sup>

Klanswomen bemoaned immorality, racial integration, and religious pluralism, as did Klansmen, but it was in terms of the effect of these on women, children, and the family. Men needed protection from the economic competition of foreigners, the WKKK insisted, for the sake of those who were dependent upon men's livelihoods: "Foreigners can live and make money where a white man would starve because they treat their women like cattle and their swarms of children like vermin, living without fear of God or regard for man. . . . You should by voice and vote encourage for your husband's sake the restriction of immigration. Let us have fewer citizens and better ones. Women of America, wake up."<sup>26</sup>

The mobilization of women into the 1920s' Klan linked the racist, nationalistic zeal, which also motivated men to join the KKK, to a specific gendered notion of the preservation of family life and women's rights. Both Klansmen and Klanswomen promoted the idea of a white, Protestant America, but women, more so than men, were likely to fuse this political agenda with a vision of a perfected private family life. Advocates of a women's Klan organization, for example, linked antforeign sentiments to a defense of the home and female morality. They charged that foreign influences were undermining morality by "public presentation of sex where the wife is always shown as inferior and the mistress as a heroine."

Similarly, the sermons of Quaker preacher and WKKK leader Daisy Douglas Barr adapted the rhetoric of the nineteenth-century temperance movement. Barr stressed the need for a "revival in our home [as] many of our family altars have been broken down," arguing that men's indulgence in the "serpent of alcohol . . . stings his family, degrades his wife, marks his children." She did not, however, consign women to the private sphere. Rather, she defended women's place in professional and civic life as necessary to the purification of the home.<sup>27</sup>

Indeed, through active involvement in the Klan, white, Protestant women claimed to find a new weapon against male immorality. The Klan promoted its ability to protect women from sexual harassment on the job and from abuse by husbands. Both the KKK and the WKKK issued warnings to men who cheated on their wives, owed child support, or neglected their families.<sup>28</sup>

As the WKKK recruited women on the basis of a conservative, racist ideology that stressed the interconnection between the public sphere of politics and the private sphere of the home, it expressed a political ideology that had been shaped in earlier women's political movements for temperance and moral reform. Like the WCTU, an organization to which many Klanswomen belonged and most Klanswomen probably were sympathetic, the WKKK expressed elements of a women's rights politics in which the interests of women were primary. The ideology of the women's Klan, however, was not identical to that of the temperance movement of the nineteenth century. Changes in women's roles in the early twentieth century were reflected in the politics of the 1920s' women's Klan. The restrictions of domesticity that gave rise to anger, antagonism, and resentment toward men's privileges and that motivated the women's rights politics of the WCTU<sup>29</sup> no longer completely defined and circumscribed the lives of many white, Protestant, native-born women by the 1920s. Rather, the entrance of women into the world of politics and business made divisions of race, social class, and religion more salient for, and among, women. Klanswomen still used a rhetoric of women's subordinate status and collective interests similar to that which brought women into the temperance movement; but it was now mixed with appeals for racial, ethnic, and national unity, appeals which depended upon the unity and commonality of purpose of white, native-born, Protestant women *and* men. With this political ideology, the WKKK was able to mobilize women from a great variety of employment and family backgrounds.

### ACTIVITIES OF KLANSWOMEN

For the most part, the activities of Indiana Klanswomen did not differ significantly from those of Klansmen, except that Klanswomen were rarely involved in violence or vigilantism. Klansmen

tended to be involved in either fraternal/social or terroristic activities. Klanswomen worked to solidify the Klan movement itself, led political assaults on non-Klan businesses, and organized to strengthen the Klan's political base, actions essential to the Klan's political and social impact.

On a national and state level, a central aspect of Klanswomen's work was organization building, antivice activities, and anti-Catholic propaganda and actions. The WKKK orchestrated rallies, festivals, and recreational events, some closed to all nonmembers, some for Klanswomen only, and others involving entire Klan families. The WKKK, like the KKK, specialized in ritual and spectacle, with day-long carnivals of sport and song followed by a twilight parade through town, a crossburning, and an evening series of lectures and speeches in a field outside town. Klanswomen organized entertainment meant to build internal solidarity and heighten recruitment, including orchestras, quartets, and parades. A typical event, held in Sullivan, Indiana, involved 3,000 Klanswomen who paraded through downtown, then marched to a park. There,

by the light of a burning cross, the speaking and demonstration were held. Floats, decorated autos, lady horseback riders, marching hosts, all the persons wearing the white robe and marks of the Ku Klux Klan with the exception of one young lady riding upon a specially decorated float. Mothers with sleeping babies in their arms marched with the others and the American flag was given a prominent place. At the park a speaker explained the aim and purpose of the women's organization and a male quartet sang.<sup>30</sup>

Klanswomen were also prominent in the creation of a political culture of "klannishness"—the use of family, leisure, social ties, and ritual to solidify the Klan movement internally and to mark the boundaries between insiders (Klan members) and outsiders ("aliens"). Although often regarded as politically insignificant, the political culture shaped by Klanswomen in the 1920s was critical to the Klan's success in convincing white, native-born, Protestants to enlist in the Klan's crusade and in shaping the solidarity of Klansmembers. Especially important in this culture were Klan rites of passage, including Klan wedding services, christening ceremonies, and funeral services to herald departed Klan sisters. These served both to create a sense of the totality of the Klan world and to present a politically palatable alternative to the culture, practices, and rituals of Catholicism, Judaism, Mormonism, and socialism that Klansmembers swore to oppose. Fur-

ther, the WKKK had a public relations-oriented charity dimension. With great fanfare, they distributed food baskets to needy families and milk to public school children and raised money to build Protestant hospitals. They were also active in the effort to recruit churches into the Klan movement by descending on a church service in full regalia, striding to the front of the church and presenting an envelope of cash to the minister – sometimes a surprised potential recruit, but often a covert Klan propagandist. They crusaded against “immorality,” drove liquor agents out of town, and worked to establish a “clean” motion picture company (the Cavalier Motion Picture Company).<sup>31</sup>

A second activity of Klanswomen was the attempt to “reform” the public schools. Klanswomen frequently visited public schools to distribute Bibles or copies of the Ten Commandments, attempted to have Catholic teachers fired from public school positions, pushed for racial segregation of schools, worked against school closings and the teaching of German in public schools, sought to remove Catholic encyclopedias from the public schools, and raised money in their communities to support public schools to undermine parochial education. Klanswomen also ran for school board seats in order to implement the Klan’s program to “Americanize” and make Protestant the public school system.<sup>32</sup>

Third, Klanswomen worked to influence electoral politics, especially in Indiana. They were active in the drive to bring out the Klan vote by lobbying voters, distributing scandal sheets on non-Klan candidates, and caring for the children of women who pledged to vote the Klan ticket. More insidiously, Klanswomen were involved as “poison squads,” organizing whispering campaigns to destroy the reputation of anti-Klan candidates by insinuating that they were Catholic or Jewish. Vivian Wheatcraft, a reputed Klanswoman and highly controversial vice-chair of the Indiana Republican State Committee, was accused of running an “organization of which she is pleased to call a ‘poison squad of whispering women’” – five Klanswomen in each county in Indiana who could be counted upon to spread gossip and rumors for the Klan.<sup>33</sup>

Similar tactics were used by Klanswomen who organized boycotts of Jewish-owned and Catholic-owned businesses and newspapers opposed to the Klan. These boycotts often were very effective, especially in smaller cities. They were a part of the overall

Klan boycott program, in which women's role as household consumer was essential. Boycotts were implemented via a series of codes that encouraged trade only with fellow Klan members. Ads proclaimed "100 percent" dry cleaners, grocers, or photo studios or contained the code "TWK" (Trade with a Klansman).<sup>34</sup>

Klanswomen took the message and vision of the Klan and acted upon it in a variety of ways, some of which were quite different from the actions of Klansmen. Although Klansmen tended toward more open displays of physical violence and intimidation, Klanswomen were the legitimators of the Klan, the covert manipulators of electoral plots, the cultural organizers of a Klan world, and the force behind the attempt to "Protestantize" the public schools of the 1920s. Certainly, Klanswomen demonstrated no more inclination toward progressive or peaceable politics than did men. On the contrary, the behind-the-scenes actions of Klanswomen had the same goals, and perhaps a greater effect, than the openly violent actions of Klansmen. To a great extent, the destructive fury of the 1920s' Klan lay in its use of rumors, boycotts, and electoral strength—tactics that ruined countless lives across the nation. In these tactics, Klanswomen were key actors.

## CONCLUSION

In many respects, the involvement of women in the 1920s' WKKK was motivated by factors similar to those that brought millions of men into the Klan. Both women and men, reacting to a fear of social, cultural, racial, and religious difference, joined a movement to preserve and elevate traditional white Protestant dominance. Women, no less than men, perceived heterogeneity as threatening; it was Indiana, one of the most homogeneous of states, that produced the nation's largest chapters of female and male Klans in the 1920s. From the limited data available, it also appears that female and male Klan members had similar backgrounds. Both women and men spanned a wide range of ages and occupational/class positions, with those in leadership positions more likely to be older and wealthier.

Women and men in the Klan movement, however, differed in one significant way. The political agenda of the women's Klan wove together appeals to racism, nationalism, traditional morality, and religious intolerance with other appeals to white women's vul-

nerability and to the possibility for increased equity between white women and men. Klanswomen described their reasons for participating in the Klan as related to the precarious or subordinate positions that they—as women—held in the family and in society. Women argued that the Klan was the best vehicle for protecting women and children, asserting the rights of women relative to men, and incorporating women's political savvy into the political arena.

It is clear that women's participation in the 1920s' Klan movement was not trivial or insignificant in its consequences. Although Klanswomen were not involved in the violent terroristic and vigilante actions of Klansmen, women did participate in a full range of racist, antipacifist, and right-wing activities. Klanswomen organized racially targeted boycotts, electoral strategies, and character assassinations, in addition to the cultural and social forums that bound the Klan movement together. Their actions contributed significantly to the persecution of racial and religious minorities and to the poisoning of American public life that was the legacy of the 1920s' Klan.

The history of women's participation in the 1920s' Klan movement should caution against a simplistic equation of progressive and proequality politics. Klanswomen, as fully as Klansmen, promoted a right-wing agenda of racism and bigotry. But they linked the preservation of their families to the rights of women (white, native-born, Protestant women) in the public sphere. They promoted white women's entrance into professions, white women's right to vote, and the need of white women to shape the nation's political agenda. Just as progressive political movements have not always promoted gender equality, so, too, reactionary political movements have at times included women's rights agendas.

The second Klan of the 1920s collapsed rapidly at the end of the decade, a victim of economic depression, internal battles, and financial scandals. In the Klan's next significant appearance in the 1950s, women and men no longer belonged to separate organizations. In the violent, extremist right-wing politics of today's Klan, women have become background figures, integrated with men in Klan organizations that no longer advocate gender equality. The fusion of women's rights with a reactionary and racist politics, at least in the Klan movement, did not stand the test of time.

What was it that permitted the inclusion of women's rights sen-

timents into the racist, reactionary political agenda of Klanswomen in the 1920s, but not thereafter? The answer rests on the specific historical conditions under which women joined the second Klan movement. The male Klan movement, desperate for female members to bolster the claims of competing Klan factions, recruited women who supported nativist and racist viewpoints but also supported women's rights politics. Further, anti-immigrant and racist sentiments within the women's suffrage, moral reform, and temperance movements created the historical possibility for a postsuffrage women's Klan that espoused women's rights while denying the rights of nonwhites, non-Protestants, and the foreign-born.

Feminist scholarship has uncovered a rich legacy of women's involvement in progressive and proequality political movements. It is now possible to turn more attention to the disturbing, but important, question of women's involvement in racist, reactionary, and fascist movements. The study of women in extremist right-wing movements may provide us with a richer understanding of the complexities of women's activities in political movements, as well as better strategies by which to challenge racist, reactionary movements in contemporary society.

## NOTES

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1. See Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920," *American Historical Review* 84 (June 1984): 620-47; and Anne Firor Scott, "After Suffrage: Southern Women in the Twenties," *Journal of Southern History* 30 (August 1964): 298-318.
2. Dorothy M. Brown, *Setting a Course: American Women in the 1920s* (Boston: Twayne, 1987).
3. The complicated relationship between white supremacist and anti-immigrant ideologies and the women's equality movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries is well documented in a number of historical accounts. In particular, see Bettina Aptheker, *Woman's Legacy: Essays on Race, Sex, and Class* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), 9-52; Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (New York: William Morrow, 1984), 159-70; and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, "Discrimination against Afro-American Women in the Women's Movement, 1830-1920," in *The Afro-American Woman: Struggles and Images*, ed. Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn (Port Washington, N.Y.: National University Publications, 1978), 17-27.

4. Joan Jensen, "All Pink Sisters: The War Department and the Feminist Movement in the 1920s," in *Decades of Discontent: The Women's Movement, 1920-1940*, ed. Lois Scharf and Joan Jensen (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), 199-222; Rayna Rapp and Ellen Ross, "The Twenties Backlash: Compulsory Heterosexuality, the Consumer Family, and the Waning of Feminism," in *Class, Race, and Sex: The Dynamics of Control*, ed. Amy Swerdlow and Hanna Lessinger (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1983), 93-107.

5. See *Watcher on the Tower*, 15 Sept. 1923, 12. This was published by the Seattle Klan.

6. An exception to this is the new historical scholarship on women in Nazi Germany which explores the contradictory nature of Nazi feminism in the early years of Nazism in Germany. See Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossman, and Marion Kaplan, *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984).

7. Pamela Conover and Virginia Gray, *Feminism and the New Right: Conflict over the American Family* (New York: Praeger, 1983); Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dream and the Flight from Commitment* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor/Doubleday, 1983), 144-68; Kristin Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Jane Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the ERA* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Susan E. Marshall, "In Defense of Separate Spheres: Class and Status Politics in the Antisuffrage Movement," *Social Forces* 65 (December 1986): 327-51; Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 109-28; Janet Saltzman Chafetz and Anthony Gary Dworkin, "In the Face of Threat: Organized Antifeminism in Comparative Perspective," *Gender and Society* 1 (March 1987): 33-60; Jensen; Rebecca Klatch, "Coalition and Conflict among Women of the New Right," *Signs* 13 (Summer 1988): 671-94; and *Women of the New Right* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

8. Traditional histories of the Klan include David Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1987); and Arnold S. Rice, *The Ku Klux Klan in American Politics* (New York: Haskell, 1972). See Anne Firor Scott, "On Seeing and Not Seeing: A Case of Historical Invisibility," *Journal of American History* 71 (June 1984): 7-21.

9. Max Bentley, "The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana," *McClure's Magazine* 57 (May 1924): 23-33; John A. Davis, "The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1920-1930: An Historical Study" (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1966); John Bartlow Martin, *Indiana: An Interpretation* (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries, 1972); Larry R. Gerlach, *Blazing Crosses in Zion: The Ku Klux Klan in Utah* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1982); Roger K. Hux, "The Ku Klux Klan in Macon, 1919-1925," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 62 (Summer 1978): 155-68; Kenneth Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (New York: Oxford, 1967). But see John Moffatt Mecklin, *The Ku Klux Klan. A Study of the American Mind* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1924). On the first Klan, see Walker L. Fleming, "The Prescript of the Ku Klux Klan," *Southern Historical Association* 7 (September 1903): 327-48; J.C. Lester, *The Ku Klux Klan* (New York: AMS Press, 1905); Mrs. S.E.F. Rose, *The Ku Klux Klan or Invisible Empire* (New Orleans: L. Graham, 1914); U.S. Congress, "Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States," Report 22, pts. 1-3, 42d Cong., 2d sess., 1872.

10. David Chalmers, "The Ku Klux Klan in Politics of the 1920s," *Mississippi Quarterly* 18 (Fall 1965): 234-47; George S. Clason, *Catholic, Jew, Ku Klux Klan: What They Believe, Where They Conflict* (Chicago: Nutshell Publishing, 1924); Emerson Hunsberger Loucks, *The Ku Klux Klan in Pennsylvania* (New York: Telegraph, 1936); Rice. Extensive records of the 1920s' Klan can be found in the Ku Klux Klan Collection, Archives Division, Indiana State Library; Ku Klux Klan Collection-Wayne County, Indiana, Indiana Historical Society; Depositions of Klan leaders in "Indiana-Attorney General," Ku Klux Klan Manuscripts, Archives Division, Indiana State Library; and at the New York Public Library, Library of Congress, and Ball State University Library.
11. The best sources for this are newspapers, such as *Dawn*, 1922-24, published in Chicago by the Ku Klux Klan; *Fellowship Forum*, 1921-27, published in Washington, D.C., by the Ku Klux Klan; and *Kourier*, 1924-36, published in Atlanta by the Ku Klux Klan. Also see "State of Indiana in the Circuit Court of Marion County, Case No. 41769, State of Indiana, Plaintiff v. The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, a Foreign Corporation," in Papers of the Ku Klux Klan, Archives Division, Indiana State Library and "D.C. Stephenson Collection," Archives Division, Indiana State Library. Morality crusades were popular in most Klan chapters. The Klan saw itself as the defender of traditional values and the rights of women and the family. It terrorized wifebeaters, wifeabusers, men who deserted their families, and adulterers. See "Field Letters," Ku Klux Klan Collection, Indiana State Archives, box L-208; Kathleen M. Blee, "Gender Ideology and the Role of Women in the 1920s Klan Movement," *Sociological Spectrum* 1 (1987): 73-97; "Protecting Womanhood," *Tolerance*, 15 Apr. 1923, 11. For a history of Klan terrorism in South Bend, Indiana, see Jill Suzanne Nevel, "Fiery Crosses and Tempers: The Ku Klux Klan in South Bend, Indiana, 1923-1926" (Senior thesis, Princeton University, 1977).
12. Other major women's Klan organizations were Kamelia, sponsored by the competing Klan leader, William Simmons, and the Queens of the Golden Mask (QGM), sponsored by the Midwestern Klan leader, D.C. Stephenson. Kamelia and the QGM, along with local and regional branches of Klanswomen, such as the Ladies of the Invisible Empire, merged into the more successful Women of the Ku Klux Klan in the mid-1920s. See Norman F. Weaver, "The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1954). See also "Women of the Ku Klux Klan: Certificates of Incorporation," in Office of the Indiana Secretary of State, Corporation Division.
13. "Something for the Ladies," *Fiery Cross*, 9 Mar. 1923, 8. This newspaper was published in Indianapolis by the Ku Klux Klan.
14. *Fiery Cross*, 1922-24; *Fellowship Forum*, 1924-31; WKKK Publications, including *Constitution and Laws* (Little Rock, Ark.: WKKK, 1927); *Women of America!* (Little Rock, Ark.: WKKK, 1923); *Kloran* (Little Rock, Ark.: WKKK, 1923); *Ideals of the Women of the Ku Klux Klan* (Little Rock, Ark.: WKKK, 1923); *Installation Ceremonies* (n.p.: WKKK, n.d.).
15. *Fiery Cross*, 30 Mar. 1923, 5.
16. Minutes of the Yearly Meetings of Friends, Held at Richmond, Indiana, 1938; *Indiana Authors and Their Books*, 1967-1980 (Crawfordsville, Ind.: Wabash College, 1981); Indiana Biography, "Mrs. Daisy Douglas Barr" (n.d.), vol. 17; "Klan Women Sue Daisy Barr," *Muncie Star*, 3 June 1924, 1.
17. The female and male Ku Klux Klans of Indiana were involved heavily with the state Republican party. The Indiana Klan engineered the election of numerous mayors, police chiefs, county commissioners, and school boards across the state and was significant in the election of a pro-Klan governor and state assembly in 1924. See Frank Mark Cates, "The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana Politics, 1920-1925" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1970); Carrolyle M. Frank, "Politics in Middletown: A Reconsideration of Municipal Government and Community Power in Muncie, Indiana, 1925-1935" (Ph.D. diss., Ball State University, 1974); and Martin.

18. "Activities in Ku Klux Klan Resented: Indiana War Mothers Accept Resignation of Reverend Daisy Barr," *Muncie Press*, 27 Mar. 1923, 1; Daisy Barr, "Women in the Ministry," *Indianapolis News*, 1 Nov. 1916, supp. 2. See also Alice French Moore Manuscript Collection, box 1: Indiana Chapter, American War Mothers, Indiana Historical Society Library.

19. *Who's Who and What's What in Indiana Politics* (Indianapolis: James Perry Publisher, 1944), 755; "Former Teacher Charges Slander," *Muncie Star*, 3 Jan. 1924, 1; "Klan Women Sue Daisy Barr," *ibid.*, 3 June 1924, 1; Delaware County (Ind.) Civil Order Book, 1924; "Sues Daisy Barr and Others for \$50,000," *Indianapolis News*, 3 Jan. 1924, 17; "Mrs. Barr Defendant in Klan Women's Suit," *ibid.*, 3 June 1924, 12; "Klan Women Sue Agent for \$45,000," *Indianapolis Star*, 3 June 1924, 10; and "Klan Women Shift Slander onto Wizard," *Muncie Evening Post*, 14 Nov. 1924, 1.

20. "Ku Klux Women Battle," *New York Times*, 8 Jan. 1924, 10. For example, when Daisy Barr spoke to a gathering of 2,000 women in Muncie, she had Mary Benadum physically barred from the audience.

21. "Mrs. Sedwick Is New Klan Head," *Indianapolis Times*, 4 June 1926, 1; "Blame Klan for Segregation," *ibid.*, 14 Jan. 1957, 11. See also Weaver.

22. "Klan Loses Its Terbacker in Primary Election," *Muncie Post-Democrat*, 16 May 1924, 3.

23. Robert Lynd and Helen Lynd, *Middletown* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1929), 122; "Lays Separation to Klan," *New York Times*, 27 Mar. 1927, 19; "Klucky Politicians Desert Edna Walling," *Muncie Post-Democrat*, 23 May 1924, 1.

24. See *Muncie Post-Democrat*: "Marriage a Joke to the Klan," 10 Aug. 1923, 1; "The Klan and Divorce," 1 Aug. 1924, 1; "Bloodthirsty Women," 2 Jan. 1925, 1; "Elwood Klan Couple Divorced," 29 Aug. 1923, 1; Robert A. Warrner, "George Dale versus Delaware Klan No. 4" (M.A. thesis, Ball State University, 1972). See also George R. Dale Papers, Special Collections, Ball State University Library.

25. "Join 'Invisible Empire,'" *New York Times*, 7 Jan. 1923, 20.

26. "Women of Indiana Should Wake Up," *Fiery Cross*, 9 Mar. 1923, 6.

27. *Ibid.*, Letter to the Editor, 9 Feb. 1923, 7; Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1981); Daisy Douglas Barr, *Springs That Run Dry and Other Addresses* (Noblesville, Ind.: Butler Printing, n.d.), 46, 105, 128.

28. "Our Business Girls," *Fiery Cross*, 29 Dec. 1922, 4; Ku Klux Klan Papers, box L-208, Ku Klux Klan Collection, Indiana State Library; also, Martin, 192.

29. Epstein, 115-46. 1-6.

30. "Women Parade in Klux Meet," *Carlisle News*, 31 Aug. 1923, 1; also, Robert Coughlan, "Konklave in Kokomo," in *The Aspirin Age, 1919-1941*, ed. Isabel Leighton (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1949), 105-29.

31. "Women's Auxiliary of Klan Announces \$1,000 Gift to Howard County Institution," *Kokomo Daily Dispatch*, 15 July 1923, 1. Also, Blee. The WKKK and KKK were adept at transforming the lyrics of popular songs into Klan messages. Consider the popular "We Belong to the Ku Klux Klan":

We like the Holy Bible, and we like the U.S.A./ We'll go out and fight for the Stars & Stripes any night or day;/ We like good old America, and we'll help her all we can;/ For we, oh we belong, to the Ku Klux Klan;/

#### CHORUS

Yes, we belong to the Ku Klux Klan, we belong to the Ku Klux Klan;/ We'll stop and help a sister [brother] anywhere in this great land;/ [We'll protect your wives and mothers anywhere in this great land;]/ For we belong to the Ku Klux Klan;

We don't like the old bootlegger; we don't like the gambling man./ We don't like the crook in politics; we'll knock him all we can./ We're out to make America a fit place for Americans./ For we, oh we belong to the Ku Klux Klan.

We like the little old schoolhouse where we used to go to school;/ Where the teacher read the Bible, and she taught the golden rule;/ We're going to place a Bible in every schoolhouse in the land;/ For we, oh we belong to the Ku Klux Klan.

(George R. Dale Papers, Special Collections, Ball State University).

32. See *Fiery Cross*, 1922-24.

33. "Women in G.O.P. Ask Removal of Mrs. Wheatcraft," *Indianapolis Star*, 2 Sept. 1926, 1. The most bizarre result of the whispering campaigns in Indiana was the assault on a train in North Manchester, Indiana, when poison squads spread the rumor that the pope was on the train en route from Cincinnati to Chicago where he was to proclaim the United States as part of the papal empire. A large crowd of Klan members halted the train, pulled off a traveling salesman and held him until they were satisfied that he was not the pope traveling in disguise. See Morton Harrison, "Gentlemen from Indiana," *Atlantic Monthly* 141 (May 1928): 676-86.

34. "Why the Lid Came Off Ku Kluxed Indianapolis," *Tolerance*, 8 Apr. 1923, 6. See Bradford W. Scharlott on the WKKK boycott of the *South Bend Tribune*, "The Hoosier Newsmen and the Hooded Order: Indiana Press Reaction to the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s" (Paper presented at the Association for Education in Journalism annual convention, Houston, 1979). See also *Fiery Cross*, 1922-24, and Depositions of Klan Leaders, in "Indiana-Attorney General," Ku Klux Klan Collection, Archives Division, Indiana State Library.