

THE KU KLUX KLAN

A Critical Review; by W. Bruce Pruitt, IX

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INTRODUCTION

Before entering into a discussion of the organization known as the Ku Klux Klan, it is probably necessary to comment briefly on the reasons for such a review. The Ku Klux Klan is not an attractive, meaningful organization at this time. Among the majority of the population its reputation is, to say the least, quite low. Its history is one of violence and oppression, and causes one to wonder about the kinds of individuals who will espouse its philosophy. Since that is true, why would members of the Societas Rosicruciana in Civitatibus Foederatis, or Freemasons in general, be at all interested in it?

The answer to the above question is, I think, at least three-fold. First: when one studies the history of the Ku Klux Klan, and understands the basis for its establishment, one can see that there may have been some legitimacy to the need when it was formed. That could be true if you do not consider the impropriety of its methods. On that basis, we can also understand that, even if there was a rationale for the KKK in the early days, the need for such an establishment has long since disappeared. Some individuals who are critical of the Masonic Lodge have proposed the same argument; that is – “Freemasonry may have been just fine a hundred or more years ago, but why does it still exist?” So, should we Freemasons study the Ku Klux Klan to see if there is any similarity between its history and that of our fraternity?

The second reason I think the KKK is worthy of attention is to study its philosophy and teachings. It is interesting to note that many of the concepts that it advocates are quite acceptable on their face. In fact, some of it may even be considered laudable. So, then, one can ask: “With those lofty ideals, why is the KKK viewed as such a deplorable organization?” It reminds us that any group, Freemasonry included, is judged not by what it says but by what it does.

Thirdly, we should recognize that, in the minds of many, the KKK and the fraternity of Freemasonry are closely linked. The reader may be surprised at that fact, but

it exists, nevertheless. The actual link is not strong at this time, even if it exists at all. However, certain similarities and connections did exist during the first period of the KKK's existence, especially with respect to the most famous Mason of that time – Albert Pike. Anti-Masons are anxious to take that connection and build on it to support their criticism of the craft in general.

The Ku Klux Klan has existed in three distinct periods of time since its inception in 1865. The first lasted from 1865 to about 1871. The second was from 1915 to about 1944, and the third covers from 1950 to the present. We will first take a look at the sociological phenomena that instigated the KKK (namely the Reconstruction Period in the South after the Civil War) and why at that time it was considered necessary. Then we will review the three historical periods of its life. After that we will touch on some of its ideals and teachings, and finally take a brief look at the early connection with Freemasonry and how that link is being used against the fraternity today.

THE PERIOD OF RECONSTRUCTION

There is only one period in history in which any part of the United States has been occupied by a foreign power. That was when the military forces of the Union occupied the Confederate states at the end of the War Between the States. (Many have said that it was not a “Civil War” because there was nothing “civil” about it!) After the surrender of General Robert E. Lee, many radical Republican politicians took steps to destroy the white power within the rebel states. Congress established the Freeman's Bureau on March 3, 1865, designed to aid former slaves. Approximately \$17,000,000 was spent to establish schools and hospitals, and provide homes, food, and jobs for the black people. Congress continued to expand the power of the Bureau, even over vetoes by President Andrew Johnson.

The election of 1866 increased the number of radical congressmen, and the following year they passed the first “Reconstruction Act.” The South was divided into five military districts, each under a Major General. State elections were held with freed male slaves allowed to vote. “Carpetbaggers” from the North migrated down to organize black political machines, which were able to place many poorly-qualified former slaves

in office. Of course the carpetbaggers controlled those in office and benefited from the special taxes and regulations that were imposed on all landowners, both former slave owners and non-slave owners. Between the Union Army and the despotic new state and county legislatures, whites in the South were extremely oppressed. Homes were lost, resistance was severely punished, and civil unrest prevailed. The environment was ripe for an organized movement to counter the extreme change in social structure.

FIRST PERIOD; 1865 TO 1871

The first branch of the Ku Klux Klan was formed in May, 1865 in Pulaski, Tennessee. It was initially a social club of young white men, but within a year became a police force for the purpose of opposing Negro influence in government and society, and preventing intermingling of the races. In 1867 a general organization of Klans was established in Nashville, TN. It was extremely secret, and had an elaborate structure and constitution. Most of the leaders were former members of the Confederate Army, and the first Grand Wizard was Nathan Bedford Forrest, an outstanding Confederate General.

The KKK referred to themselves as the “Invisible Empire.” Each state was known as a “realm,” and was presided over by a Grand Dragon. Counties, or “provinces” had a Grand Giant; multiple counties, or “dominions” were under a Grand Titan. Local units were “dens,” controlled by a Cyclops, and individual members were Gouls.

The Klans played on supposed superstition of the Negroes by dressing in white sheets, carrying skulls with hot coals as eyes, riding at night, and burning crosses. They also targeted immigrant Yankees and other undesirables. Resistance from blacks was often met with beatings and even hanging. The radical Republican Benjamin Butler instigated an investigation into the KKK in 1870. The following year a Grand Jury reported that:

“There has existed since 1868, in many counties of the state, an organization known as the Ku Klux Klan, or Invisible Empire of the South, which embraces in its membership a large proportion of the white population of every profession and class. The Klan has a constitution and bylaws, which provides, among other things, that each member shall furnish himself with a pistol, Ku Klux gown, and a signal instrument. The

operations of the Klan are executed in the night and are invariably directed against members of the Republican Party. The Klan is inflicting summary vengeance in the colored citizens of these counties by breaking into their houses at the dead of night, dragging them from their beds, torturing them in the most inhumane manner, and in many instances murdering.”

The Ku Klux Klan Act was passed by Congress and became law on April 20, 1871, giving the President the power to intervene and suspend the writ of habeas corpus where the Klan was active. This law was effective, but, in addition, white supremacy slowly returned. Both of these elements caused the KKK to practically disappear at that time.

SECOND PERIOD; 1915 TO 1944

The Ku Klux Klan was re-formed in 1915 by an Atlanta, GA minister, William J. Simmons. He was influenced by two books written by Thomas Dixon: “the Leopard’s Spots,” and “the Clansman.” There was also a movie produced called “Birth of a Nation” directed by D. W. Giffith that glamorized the Klan. In the introduction to “the Clansman” Thomas Dixon writes: “The chaos of blind passion that followed Lincoln’s assassination is inconceivable today. The revolution it produced in our Government, and the bold attempt of Thaddeus Stevens to Africanize ten great States of the American Union, read now like tales from “the Arabian Nights.” The main focus of the KKK this time was to counter the National Association of Colored People (NAACP). In the aftermath of the First World War, blacks again were having difficult times economically which created conflicts of jobs and living conditions. The KKK also became hostile to Jews, Roman Catholics, socialists, communists, and “foreigners” in general.

In the 1920s membership of the KKK was reported as high as 5 million. Under the leadership of Imperial Wizard Hiram Evars, who was elevated in November, 1922, the Klan was influential in the national elections of 1924 and 1928. But, things changed. A Klan leader, David C. Stephenson, was convicted of second-degree murder, and evidence of corruption by other members such as the governor of Indiana and the mayor of Indianapolis began to surface. Membership soon dropped to around 30,000. The

depression and the needs of the Second World War caused membership to essentially dwindle to nothing.

THIRD PERIOD; 1950 TO PRESENT

The emergence of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s resulted in a revival of the Ku Klux Klan organizations. The principal pressure is placed against voting by Negroes. For example, in the state of Mississippi, while 42% of the population was black, only 2% were registered to vote. Terrorism was still an active tactic, and lynching was not unheard-of. On Sunday, 15th September, 1963, a white man was seen getting out of a car and placing a box under the steps of the 16th St. Baptist Church. Soon after a bomb exploded, killing four young black girls who had been attending Sunday School. Robert Chambliss, a member of the KKK, was identified and tried. He was found not guilty of murder, but was fined \$100 and given a 6-month jail sentence for possession of dynamite. Years later, the newly elected attorney general of Alabama, Bill Baxley, requested a FBI investigation of this bombing. In November 1977 Chambliss was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment.

The murder of three Civil Rights volunteers in 1964, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, created nation-wide publicity for the voter registration drive in Mississippi. Forty years later, in June, 2005, Edgar Ray Killen was convicted of manslaughter in those deaths and sentenced to 60 years in prison. (He was 80 years old at the time.) Two months later he was granted bail pending appeal of the sentence. Judge Gordon stated that: "...defendants in Mississippi are entitled to post bond unless they are guilty of child abuse or murder, or unless the state has proven they pose a danger."

The above are only a few of the examples of activities of the KKK in modern times. They continue to resist allowing African-Americans full voting and civil rights. They persist in the philosophy that whites are the superior race, and that any intermingling, especially inter-marriage, is against the will of God. Although the Civil Rights movement has resulted in improvements in the life and prospects of black people, and the majority of white people strongly oppose radical activities of the KKK, it remains

a minor factor in American life. The theories of suppression of Negroes, Jews, Catholics, etc. are still advocated by a number of American citizens.

PHILOSOPHIES AND TEACHINGS OF THE KLAN

In 1869 the Ku Klux Klan drew up a series of questions for people who wanted to join the organization. They were simple and to the point:

- 1. Are you now, or have you ever, been a member of the Radical Republican Party?**
- 2. Did you belong to the Federal Army during the late war, and fight against the South during the existence of the same?**
- 3. Are you opposed to Negro equality, both social and political?**
- 4. Are you in favor of a white man's government in this country?**

These questions clearly demonstrate the early thinking of the founders and supporters of the original KKK. As explained above, the terrible living conditions in Reconstruction could possibly be considered justification for such attitudes. However, the methods used to promote such theories laid the groundwork for generations of lawlessness and intolerance.

The following are excerpts of what Hiram W. Evans wrote in *North American Review*, May, 1926:

“The greatest achievement so far has been to formulate, focus, and gain recognition for an idea – the idea of preserving and developing America first and chiefly for the benefit of the children of the pioneers who made America, and only and definitely along the lines of the purpose and spirit of those pioneers...”

“...Other achievements of these ten years have been the education of the millions of our own membership in citizenship, the suppression of much lawlessness and increase of good government wherever we have become strong, the restriction of immigration, and the defeat of the Catholic attempt to seize the Democratic Party. All these we have helped, and all are important...”

“...The Klan, therefore, has now come to speak for the great mass of Americans of the old pioneer stock. We believe that it does fairly and faithfully represent them, and our proof lies in their support...”

Evens’ words in one respect are extremely “patriotic” and designed to demonstrate a love for country, good government, and freedom of political parties. However, they also emphasize the KKK theory that the white race is superior, and is responsible for all that is good in society. The web page of the KKK has the following comments: **Love the Diversity of God’s Creation; Practice Racial Integrity; Don’t Race Mix;** and so forth. Its ideas with respect to race are summarized as follows:

“God’s way: Kind after Kind--different cultures—a Beautiful Rainbow And the Lord Said His Creation was GOOD!”

And

“Satan’s Way: He hates God’s Creation—He Hates Diversity—He only wants One Race—One Culture. Race Mixing is Satanic—It is WRONG! Don’t Destroy the Rainbow!”

The best summary of the positions of the KKK was contained in a leaflet circulated in Mississippi in 1984. It states the following:

Here are Twenty Reasons WHY you should, if qualified, join, aid and support the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan of Mississippi.

- 1. Because it is a Christian, fraternal and benevolent organization.**
- 2. Because it is a democratic organization, governed by its members.**
- 3. Because it is a democratic and just organization.**
- 4. Because it is a working organization which not only talks but ACTS.**
- 5. Because it is a very secret organization and no one will know that you are a member.**
- 6. Because it is a legal organization and no one can be prosecuted for being a member.**
- 7. Because it is a politically independent organization, and is not pledged to any political party.**
- 8. Because it is a Pro-American organization that opposes any thing, person or organization that is Un-American.**

9. **Because it an organization that is sworn to uphold the lawful Constitution of the United States of America.**
10. **Because it is composed of native-born, white, gentile and protestant American citizens who are sound of mind and of good moral character.**
11. **Because the goals of the KKK are the total segregation of the races and the total destruction of communism in all its forms.**
12. **Because the KKK has twice saved this nation from destruction as history clearly records.**
13. **Because there comes a time in the life of every man when he has to choose between the right or wrong side of life.**
14. **Because there are today many alien forces entering the United States of America bent upon its destruction.**
15. **Because it informs it members, and an informed citizen is a good citizen.**
16. **Because a Christian-like brotherhood among men must be revived in America.**
17. **Because one of the goals of the KKK is States' Rights and complete State Sovereignty.**
18. **Because neither the Conservatives nor the Liberals will save our nation, for patriots always save a nation.**
19. **Because it is clear now that if communism is to be defeated in America, it will be done in the South and primarily in Mississippi.**
20. **Because the KKK needs you today to help fight America's battles.**

Clearly many of the above concepts can be adopted by all well thinking and sincere American citizens. That certainly does not mean, however, that the Ku Klux Klan is a truly desirable and beneficial organization. What they do speaks so loudly that you can hardly hear what they say!

THE KKK AND FREEMASONRY

The connection between the Ku Klux Klan and the Fraternity of Freemasonry, either real or imagined, is complex and intriguing. It should not be surprising that many

individuals and groups, especially those opposed to Masonry, make a strong emphasis of such affiliation. They use it as a major objection to membership in the Craft. First of all, both organizations are looked upon as extremely secret. The KKK admits to that characteristic with pride. The Lodge admits to it with strong reservations. At any rate, to be critical of secrecy is to be critical of anything that smacks of a “members only” policy.

Furthermore, one need only look at the history of segregation within the Masonic Fraternity. Colored men were only allowed in the Prince Hall Lodges (not “regular lodges”) for many years, a situation that still exists in certain Grand Lodges, especially in the South. That situation implies a “white supremacy” attitude on the part of the Masonic Lodge. If that is true, then it closely parallels the principal tenant of the Klan. It allows critics to contend that the KKK is probably composed of many Masons, and that Lodges probably give support to the activities of the Klan.

This author has no evidence to support a contention that active Masons at this time are also active “Gouls” of the Ku Klux Klan. In fact, it is my personal belief that such a common activity does not exist, or may exist very rarely. However, there may indeed have been a reasonably close commonality during the first period of the KKK’s existence, from 1865 to 1871. The reason I say that is to recognize that (a) the army of occupation in the South was extortionate in many situations, (b) much of the government was corrupt, and (c) many freed slaves were out of control. The KKK was fighting oppression, so it should not be surprising that some men who were Masons in that day were sympathetic to the cause. In fact, one of the key Masonic figures of that day, Albert Pike, was probably heavily involved in the Klan.

An anti-Masonic group known as “Freemasonry Watch” characterizes Pike in this way:

“In regard to Confederate general, slaver, British spy, convicted Confederate war criminal, Sovereign Grand Commander of the Supreme Council 33rd Degree, Ku Klux Klan ritual designer, Ku Klux Klan Grand Dragon...”

This group follows the normal pattern of using Albert Pike, his obscure writings in “Morals and Dogma,” and his supposed position as the “man in control” of the entire Masonic Lodge as the most vulnerable avenue for criticism. They also give the following description: “Pike has been termed by a number of well known Masonic authors as the

Plato of Freemasonry, and even the Masonic Pope!” Also, “Albert Pike is to Freemasonry what Shakespeare is to Drama. One is inseparable from the other.”

The activities of Albert Pike within the Ku Klux Klan seem to be fairly well established. Of course Freemasonry Watch makes a great thing of those activities to blast Masonry today. At any rate, it is interesting to see a few things about Brother Pike in this context. The book by Walter L Fleming, “Ku Klux Klan; Its Origin, Growth and Disbandment,” published in 1905, states that, “General Albert Pike, who stood high in the Masonic order, was the chief judicial officer of the Klan.” Pike’s picture is included as one of the founders of the Klan. It is known that Pike was the president of the Tennessee Bar Association. It should be said that the book in question was not a “hatchet job,” but actually held the KKK in a favorable light. It was even apologetic by stating, “The very need for such an organization in the disordered conditions of the time caused the Dins (KKK local units) to begin to exercise the duties of a police patrol for regulating the conduct of thieving and impudent Negroes and similar “loyal” whites...” There is evidence that, when the general organization of the Klan was established in 1867, Albert Pike was designated Grand Dragon of Arkansas.

Freemasonry Watch has available a considerable amount of information about Albert Pike’s position in the Ku Klux Klan. The above is only a sprinkling of that material. It is sufficient for this paper, however, to demonstrate that there was probably at least some commonality of membership between the KKK and the Masonic Fraternity in the 1865-71 time frame. If Albert Pike was involved it is reasonable to assume that other Masons would be as well. One would hope, however, that at the writing of this report in the year 2005, very few if any brothers of the Craft will be willing to associate themselves with an institution such as the Ku Klux Klan.

IN CONCLUSION

The organization known as the Ku Klux Klan arose at a time in history when it probably served a beneficial purpose. Its methods were, and are, extreme. There is evidence that members of the Masonic Fraternity were heavily involved in the establishment of the Klan, and in its activities during the first five or so years of its

existence. Some of the pronouncements that come out of the Ku Klux Klan seem to be patriotic, Christian, and socially acceptable. Others, in contrast, go against the norms of a tolerant and open society. There may be lessons to be learned in studying the Ku Klux Klan. Lofty objectives must be supported by matching actions. If the need for a function disappears, that function should also cease to exist. Specifically, Freemasonry should not dwell too heavily on its founding, and historic achievements. It must be relevant for the times. Unlike the KKK, Freemasonry must maintain its beneficial nature for both its members and the society as a whole.

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