

The Campus Klan of the University of Wisconsin: Tacit and Active Support for the Ku Klux Klan in a Culture of Intolerance

By *Timothy Messer-Kruse*

IT was the spring of 1919 when a group calling itself the Ku Klux Klan Honorary Junior Society made its first appearance at the University of Wisconsin, a growing land-grant university whose sprawling, wooded campus dominated Wisconsin's capital. (Madison, the state's fifth-largest city, had a population of less than forty thousand residents; the university enrollment exceeded seven thousand.)¹

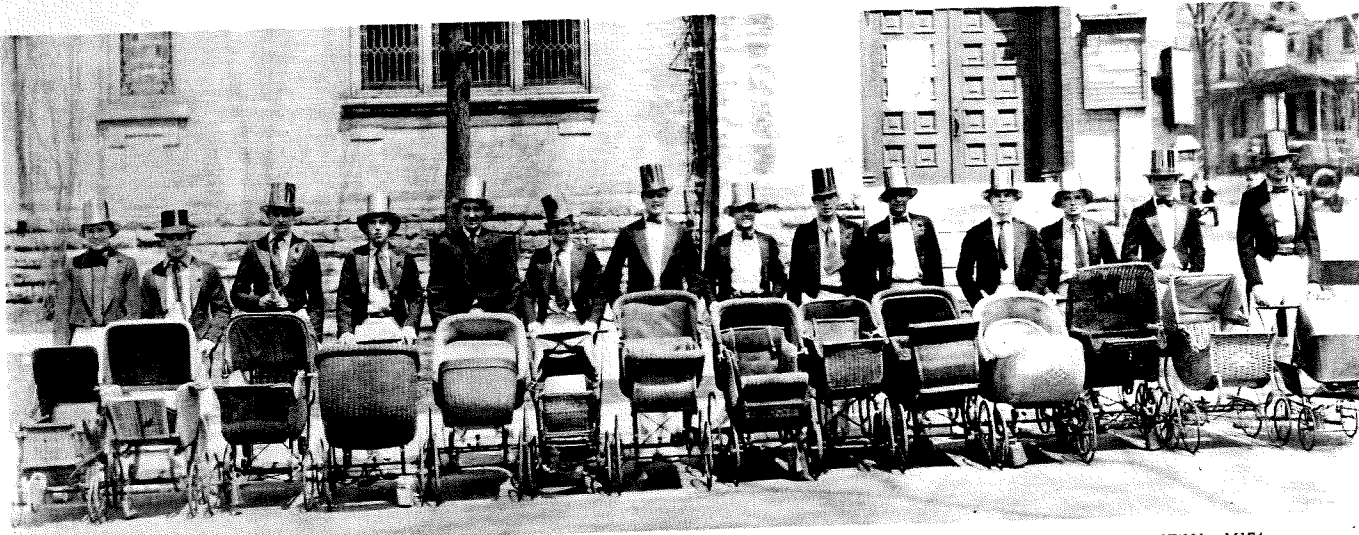
There is no evidence that the new organization was in any way tied to the better-known Invisible Empire of the Ku Klux Klan. But for four years the group prospered under the name Ku Klux Klan, and it made no attempt to distinguish itself from the Invisible Empire. Nor did the question of its affiliation ever become an issue for the university administration or the campus press. The campus Ku Klux

Klan was never the object of debate or controversy; to the contrary, it blossomed into one of the most prominent and powerful interfraternity societies on campus, and its members, all male, included some of the university's best and brightest. Still, even though the Klan was instrumental in organizing the fund drive that helped to build the Memorial Union on Langdon Street, its heyday was brief and it did not have much lasting impact on either Madison or the university community. Seventy years later, like many another campus organization, it is all but forgotten. But the rise and fall of the campus Klan is historically instructive because it serves well as a barometer of the cultural and ideological climate of Madison and the university campus in the 1920's.

IN May of 1919, members of the Phi Gamma Delta fraternity took the initiative by inviting a number of juniors from other fraternities to a secret meeting in Madison where a branch chapter of an honorary fraternity called the Ku Klux Klan was to be organized. Franklin

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¹ *Wisconsin Blue Book*, 1921, pp. 419, 494.



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The baby carriage parade, May, 1920, a part of the KKK initiation.

Bump, one of the Phi Gamma Deltas, made a pitch for the new organization that was too strong for some of those present; the *Daily Cardinal* reported that “many of the darlings slunk under the table before the Grand Hish Moyul from Illinois could reveal the secrets.”² Nevertheless, the nervousness of a few recruits did not spoil the meeting. Within a few weeks the new club was being hailed in the *Cardinal* for having “the most impressive initiation” of all the campus honorary societies.³

The honorary societies of the University of Wisconsin were formed by fraternities to honor their most accomplished junior-class members. They bore portentous names: Skull and Crescent, Iron Cross, Inner Gate, and so on. Like the other honor societies on campus, the Ku Klux Klan elected its members from each of eighteen different fraternities. The process of election itself, its celebration with formal dinners and dances, and the initiation of new members—which, in the case of the honorary Ku Klux Klan, required all pledges to parade

with baby carriages up State Street and around the Capitol Square—was one of the major activities of the group.

With the organization of the Ku Klux Klan Honorary Junior Society, Wisconsin became the second university to have such a group on its campus. The Klan honorary society was originally founded at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign sometime before World War I, though its exact origins remain clouded. Even the student Klansmen displayed confusion about their origins. In some *Illio* yearbooks, for example, they claimed to have been founded in 1906; in others, 1908.⁴ (Either year is suspect, as the group first appeared in the yearbook in 1916, nor did it appear in the student directories or the regents’ minutes before then.) If the honorary Klan existed before 1916, it maintained a sub rosa existence until that year.⁵

However, there were good reasons why a group calling itself the Ku Klux Klan

² *Daily Cardinal*, May 20, 1919.

³ *Ibid.*, June 6, 1919. The *Cardinal* reported that no other society had “thought of using navy beans” in their initiation. Unfortunately, the role of these legumes in the Klan ceremony was not detailed.

⁴ On Ku Klux Klan Honorary Society at the University of Illinois, see the *Illio* yearbook from 1916 to 1924 at the University of Illinois, Champaign. In the 1920 and 1922 editions, the Klan claims to have been founded in 1908.

⁵ Throughout this essay, the term “honorary Klan” denotes the fraternity group that was independent of the Invisible Empire of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.

might either be formed, or go public, in 1915 or 1916. Nineteen fifteen was the year of the premier of D. W. Griffith's film, *The Birth of a Nation*. It was also the year that Col. William Joseph Simmons took sixteen men to the top of Stone Mountain just outside Atlanta, Georgia, where they burned a cross, read a passage from the Bible, and swore allegiance to their new order, the Invisible Empire of the Ku Klux Klan. These two events were not unrelated.

The Birth of a Nation was a milestone in cinematic history. It was the longest and most popular American film yet made; it was one of the first films to be accompanied by a special orchestral arrangement; it was the first to employ symbolism. More importantly, Griffith's film captured the imagination of the American public as no film ever had before. It was the first movie to command a two-dollar admission fee, the first to be honored with a private showing at the White House. Griffith's cinematic artistry made an impression upon a public used to slapstick films that took vaudeville as their model.

But artistry alone was not what propelled *The Birth of a Nation* to success; the film succeeded by synthesizing a number of separate racist and historical stereotypes into a single powerful symbolic experience that President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed was "writing history with lightning."⁶ The film vindicated the myth of the Confederacy as "the lost cause," a brave but vain struggle against odds which succeeded only in un-

leashing hordes of savage blacks and greedy carpetbaggers upon the South. In Griffith's film the South, white womanhood, and the nation are saved by the heroic riders of the Ku Klux Klan.

The Birth of a Nation was adapted from Thomas Dixon's novel *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan*, published in 1905. This date corresponds with the University of Illinois Klan's claim as to the year of its own founding. Whatever the exact circumstances of its formation, the Illini Klan's coincidence with these two monumental events in American popular culture points to the source of its inspiration. The founders of the Illini Klan found the same romantic, chivalrous, and patriotic values exemplified by the historical Klan as did Col. Simmons, who was so inspired by *The Birth of a Nation* that he set about to revive the Ku Klux Klan in the South. Indeed, these were values shared by the great majority of the white population of America.

Dixon's novel and Griffith's film were instrumental in associating the Ku Klux Klan with patriotism and morality in the eyes of the white public. These were values that many Americans—including many students on the University of Wisconsin campus—felt were under assault after World War I. In 1920, the *Daily Cardinal* bemoaned the loss of the spread-eagle patriotism that had reached a fever pitch on campus during the war:

[M]en and women have apparently shut their eyes to the dignity and glory of American citizenship. In the wake of the noble and passionate patriotism of war days has come a spirit of indifference, almost cynicism, toward those things which have made our nation revered in the past. This virus seems to have affected even the student body at Wisconsin.⁷

⁶ Lewis Jacobs, *The Rise of the American Film: A Critical History* (Teachers College Press, Columbia University, New York, 1971; originally published in 1939), 174–187. Thomas Dixon, who wrote *The Clansman* and with D. W. Griffith co-produced *The Birth of a Nation*, was a former classmate of Woodrow Wilson at the Johns Hopkins University (1883) who supposedly "duped" the president into screening the film at the White House. See *Southern Horizons: The Autobiography of Thomas Dixon* (Alexandria, Virginia, 1984), xv–xix, 167–168, 295–304; Arthur S. Link, *Wilson: The New Freedom* (Princeton, 1956), 252–254; and volume 4 of Ray Stannard Baker, *Woodrow Wilson: Life and Letters* (Garden City, New York, 1931), 220–224.

⁷ *Daily Cardinal*, May 9, 1920. See also Norman A. Zimmerman, "A Triumph for Orthodoxy: The University of



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The Ku Klux Klan formal, December, 1919.

By adopting the name Ku Klux Klan in such a climate, students draped themselves in the flag. They saw themselves as aligned with “real Americans,” not bigots and hoodlums. In postwar America, the name connoted not only patriotic ideals but also fraternal ideals, mystery, and racial “whiteness.”

BY the winter of 1919, the honorary Ku Klux Klan was ready to apply for official status and university recognition. Early in December it petitioned the student senate for a charter, which was immediately granted without discussion. At the time, at least three members of the Ku Klux Klan honorary society were themselves student senators, and two

of them were present at the meeting at which the Klan’s petition was approved.⁸ However, it is suggestive of the general climate of opinion on campus that no one else on the senate took issue with the group’s name.

Demanding that student clubs change their names in order to conform to mainstream attitudes—and sometimes for what appear to have been trivial reasons—was a standard practice of the student senate. At its very next meeting, for example, the senate rejected the application of the Anglo-American Club because “the name of the

⁸ Minutes of the Student Senate, Series 20/2/2/4-1, December 3, 1919, in the University of Wisconsin Archives, Madison. The honorary Klan senators were: Wesley Travers, Reuben Chadbourne, and William Collins. Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent citations to archival series are to be found in the University of Wisconsin Archives, whose documentary resources proved invaluable in the writing of this essay.

Wisconsin During World War I” (doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1971).

organization was undesirable." No one questioned the motives of the Anglo-American Club; indeed the senate stated that the "purpose of the organization was worthy." Instead, the senate was concerned about what the world beyond the university would think. "[T]he name, to an outsider, would imply an attempt toward leaguering between the United States and the British Empire," and this, for some reason, was seen as inappropriate at the time.⁹

The same student senate worked strenuously to bar two leftist student organizations from campus: the Social Science Club, formerly known as the University Socialist Club, and a pacifist organization, the New Forum. Despite the fact that the Social Science Club was an established group that predated the senate itself, and that the senate's own constitution exempted previously existing clubs from review, the senate, in an unprecedented action, voted to deny it recognition in January of 1920.¹⁰ A few months later the senate went after the New Forum. Here again a group's name was an issue. The president of the senate, Lawrence W. Hall, "stated his objections to the name Forum because of the war record of the Old Forum. He advocated another name."¹¹ When the senate voted not to approve the club, it also cited the fact that one of the New Forum's speakers had defended the Milwaukee Socialist Victor Berger, and that the group did not conform to the "attitude of the Senate on radicalism."¹²

⁹ Minutes of the Student Senate, Series 20/2/2/4-1, January 7, 1920.

¹⁰ Scott Goodnight to Vincent O'Shea, January 14, 1920, filed with the Minutes of the Student Senate, Series 20/2/2/4-1. See also the minutes for January 7, 1920, and the *Daily Cardinal*, February 27, 1920. The Social Science Club was organized under the name University Socialist Club in 1907. The Student Senate was formed in 1916. See Reuben G. Beilke, "Student Political Action at the University of Wisconsin, 1930-1940" (master's thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1951), 20, and Merle Curti and Vernon Carstensen, *The University of Wisconsin: A History, 1848-1925* (2 vols., Madison, 1949), 2:508.

¹¹ Minutes of the Student Senate, April 7, 1920.

While the Ku Klux Klan honorary society easily passed whatever litmus tests the senate had regarding the name and political viewpoints of campus clubs, it received a rougher reception at the next level of bureaucratic consideration, the faculty committee on student life and interests. When the petition of the Ku Klux Klan came up before this body of five professors and two deans, the committee voted to postpone its approval, stating that "the Committee felt that it did not know enough of the aims of the organization."¹³

Though the committee clearly had questions about the goals of the honorary Klan, it is not clear that their concerns were connected to the group's name. It is more likely that the committee's apprehensions stemmed from its experience with this general class of undergraduate organizations. At the time, the half a dozen or so junior honorary societies were frowned upon and closely watched by the administration. The university's dean of men, Scott Goodnight, a stern and eccentric overseer of student morals, derided them as "organizations always in debt, their initiations, sometimes public, often end in fatalities, and their parties are very unsatisfactory."¹⁴ After many episodes of violent hazings and rowdy initiation parties, the administration had begun to crack down. That same year, two of the most prominent societies were placed on probation and ordered by the faculty subcommittee on societies, fraternities, and politics to keep their initiation parties private, not to "paddle" their pledges, and to cut out any "rough stuff" whatsoever.¹⁵

Whatever the faculty oversight committee's particular reservations, they were

¹² *Ibid.*, March 3, 1920.

¹³ Minutes of the Committee on Student Life and Interests, Series 19/5/3-1, December 11, 1919.

¹⁴ Student Life and Interests Committee, May 6, 1925. For anecdotes on Goodnight's character, see Robert E. Gard, *University Madison U.S.A.* (Madison, 1970), 58-61.

¹⁵ Subcommittee on Societies, Fraternities, and Politics, June 1, 1920.

not serious enough for the committee to reject the honorary Klan's application for a charter. The committee did demand that the honorary Klan submit a more detailed description of its aims, but upon receiving it they placed the university's stamp of approval upon the group.¹⁶

APPROVAL of a group calling itself the Ku Klux Klan as an official campus organization raised not a ripple of concern among the student body. There were no editorials or letters denouncing it in the campus newspaper. Not even the more radically inclined students made the issue a matter of public debate.

To be sure, the Ku Klux Klan was not yet a matter of national concern. In the fall of 1919, the official Ku Klux Klan was still a regional organization whose members numbered less than two thousand, mostly concentrated in Alabama and Georgia. No "Klavern" (chapter) existed in Wisconsin. The brainchild of William J. Simmons—the revived and modernized Ku Klux Klan—was still a relatively small regional organization. It would be another year before the Klan connected with the advertising genius of Atlantans Edward Young Clarke and Elizabeth Tyler, who together popularized the secret society and built it into a nationwide organization that eventually boasted millions of members.¹⁷

Yet, even though the Atlanta-based Invisible Empire of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan was still a regional phenomenon, because of the popularity of Griffith's film and Dixon's novel, Klan imagery was well known in both the North and the South by 1919. There is evidence of an awareness on the University of Wisconsin

campus of the symbolic connection between the campus honor society and the symbols of the Invisible Empire. Newspaper descriptions of the early activities of the honorary Klan alluded to the society's use of Ku Klux Klan ritual. Early in the fall semester of 1919, about thirty young men, representing various campus fraternities, gathered at the Madison Club, an exclusive private establishment at Monona Avenue (now Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard) and East Wilson Street. The *Daily Cardinal* reported that as their initiation ceremony progressed there came from the dining hall "great clucking and other mysterious noises known only to the Klan," which finally reached such a crescendo that the club's management threatened to throw the lot of them out.¹⁸ Commenting on one of the first campus Ku Klux Klan meetings, one *Daily Cardinal* wag wondered what the fraternity Klansmen wore:

D'ya spose that they attend in sheets with eyes cut out, piercing through like gleam of intelligence, only it can't be that with the K.K. Stewards hang on to the linen closet. Masquerades ought to be easy for that crowd.¹⁹

THE honorary Klan made rapid inroads into the so-called "Latin Quarter," as fraternity row on Langdon Street was known at the time. Fraternities had increasingly dominated campus social life since the turn of the century when the center of the campus universe shifted away from the old literary and debating societies. By the 1920's, fraternities were at their height of prestige and influence, setting the pace for all campus activities. Undergraduate men who did not belong to fraternities were referred to as "barbarians," or "barbs" for short.²⁰

¹⁶ Minutes of the Committee on Student Life and Interests, Series 19/5/3-1, January 15, 1920. Unfortunately the letter containing the detailed aims of the honorary Klan cannot be found in the University of Wisconsin Archives.

¹⁷ Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (New York, 1967), 8-9.

¹⁸ *Daily Cardinal*, October 19 and 22, 1919.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, October 22 and 23, 1919.

²⁰ Gard, *University Madison U.S.A.*, 103.



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The YMCA (left) and the Armory on the University of Wisconsin campus, about 1914.

Fraternities attracted a disproportionate share of the more wealthy, elite students who came to the university. University President Edward A. Birge observed that fraternity members “come from well-to-do families and have much better opportunities for preparation than the average students.”²¹ Indeed, two-thirds of fraternity members did not have to work to support themselves while in school.²² The class disparity between fraternity men and the other students was especially evident on the night of the annual prom. It was estimated at the time that the average “barb” would need to

spend only \$13.50 for the night’s entertainments, but the fraternity man needed at least \$37.50 to enjoy the evening in the style to which he was accustomed.²³ The existence of this elite student population fostered class consciousness and elitist attitudes. One “disillusioned alumnus” of a Madison fraternity complained of the snobbery and narrow-mindedness that the Latin Quarter fostered:

The fraternity man firmly believes he is better than the man who has not been fortunate enough to attend college, if not better than the barb. Sinclair Lewis, in his *Arrowsmith*, defined a fraternity as a place where neckties, pants, and ideas were owned in com-

²¹ Edward A. Birge, General Correspondence Files, Series 4/12/1, March 16, 1920.

²² Curti and Carstensen, *The University of Wisconsin: A History*, 2:501.

²³ Beilke, “Student Political Action,” 15–16.

mon. Unfortunately, I have found this to be very close to the truth. The fraternity stifles any attempt to change the status quo through the immense prestige of its upper classmen.²⁴

Besides dominating campus culture, fraternities monopolized campus politics as well. The most prestigious and sought-after honor was to be elected senior class president, and an unbroken chain of fraternity men was elected to that office between 1913 and 1933. Between 1920 and 1924, four of five senior class presidents were members of the honorary Ku Klux Klan.²⁵

Dominance of campus politics was accomplished only because the Latin Quarter voted as a bloc. One of the functions of the junior honorary societies was to forge ties between fraternities, especially when it came to selecting candidates for office. Few organizations could boast of their members' holding as many prestigious offices as could the honorary Klan. For example, one not atypical year's crop of honorary Klansmen (1921-1922) were members of the student senate, student court, the *Badger* yearbook board, the alumni committee, the prom and homecoming committees, the university traditions committee, the Campus Religious Council, and nearly all varsity sports squads and theatrical companies. Members of that year's Ku Klux Klan also served as directors on the YMCA cabinet, the Student Union board, the Memorial Union fund-drive committee, the athletic board, and the *Daily Cardinal* board of control; indeed, Klan members chaired many of these. During that same year, honorary Ku Kluxers edited both the *Daily Cardinal* (the campus news-paper) and the *Badger* year-

book, and held both the senior and sophomore class presidencies. Thus, within two years of its appearance at the University of Wisconsin, the honorary Klan had fulfilled one of the goals it had set out for itself in its constitution, namely, to "take the lead in affairs of the campus."²⁶

MOST of these campus offices were elective positions, and some came with salaries. Such plums were hotly contested in elections where accusations of fraud and corruption were not infrequent. Election organizers went to extraordinary lengths to combat ballot stuffing. Four workers and one supervisor were on duty at all times at each polling place. The supervisors were to be "men above reproach, and not susceptible to any political influence." Polls were closed during the noon hour because it was considered "a bad hour for the perpetration of fraud." But despite these precautions, election officials expected that "efforts will be made to stuff ballot boxes."²⁷ One alumnus from this era remarked in the 1930's that "campus politics are a lot cleaner than they used to be."²⁸ Upton Sinclair, the socialist author of *The Jungle*, came to Madison in the early 1920's on a speaking tour and later published his impressions of student life at Wisconsin:

There are the usual fraternities and sororities, organized into little snobbish groups, and busy with student politics, "log-rolling" and "back-scratching." If the purpose of the university is to prepare students for what they are to meet in the outside life, these things, of course, have their place.²⁹

²⁴ Sampled was the honorary KKK class of 1921-1922. An excerpt from the KKK's constitution was found in the minutes of the Committee on Student Life and Interests, December 11, 1919.

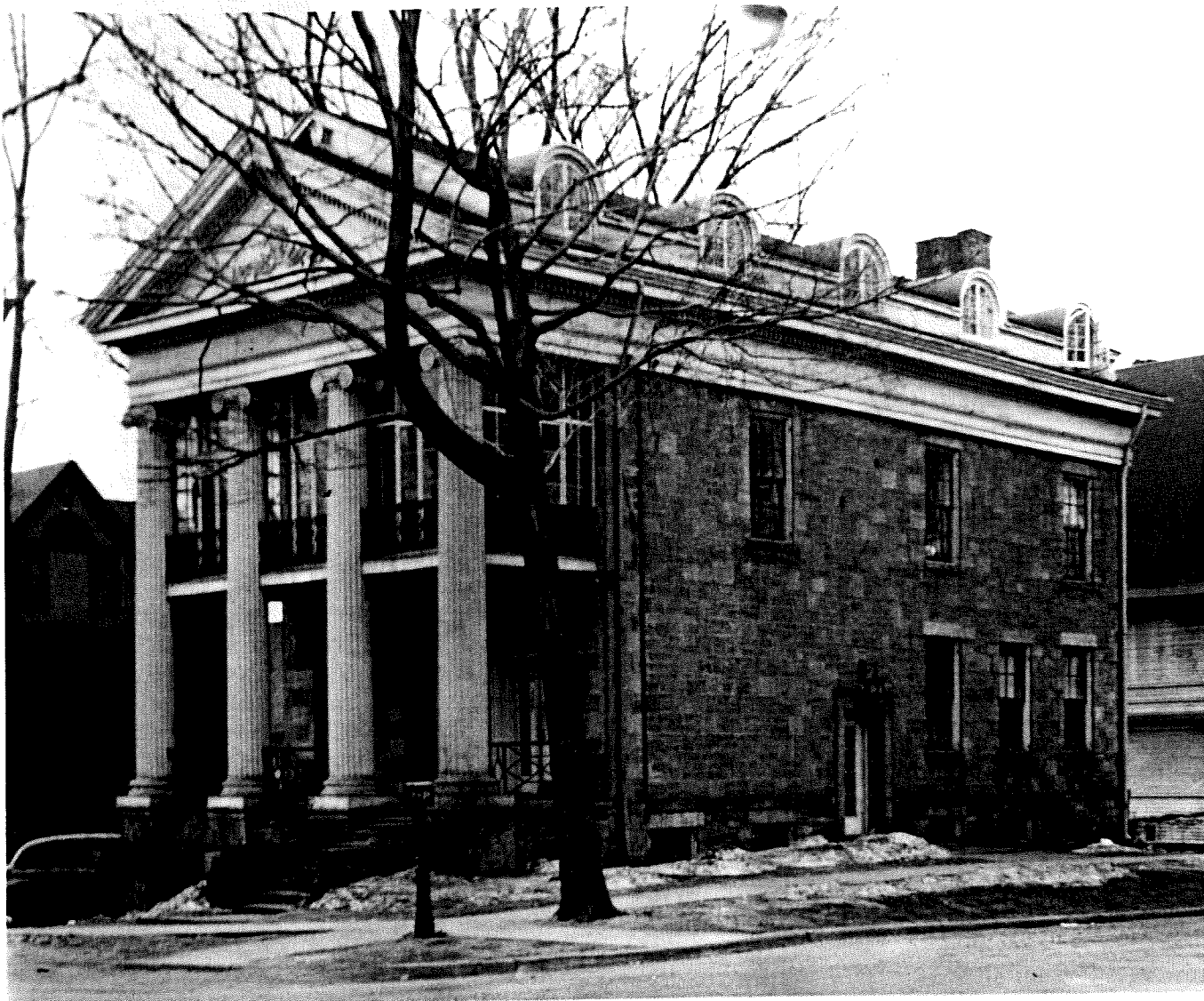
²⁵ Circular entitled "University Elections Data," Series 19/8, box 5, in the "Student Senate" folder.

²⁶ Beilke, "Student Political Action," 14.

²⁷ Upton Sinclair, *The Goose-Step: A Study of American Education* (Pasadena, California, 1922), 237.

²⁴ Banta's *Greek Exchange*, October, 1925, p. 384.

²⁵ Beilke, "Student Political Action," 15. On the centrality of fraternities to University of Wisconsin life in the 1920's, see Curti and Carstensen, *The University of Wisconsin*, 2:438, 500, 503, 659. Honorary KKK senior class presidents were: Frederick M. Bickel (1920), Frank L. Weston (1921), Guiserd M. Sundt (1922), and Walter A. Frautschi (1924).



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The Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity house from 1909–1923 at 524 North Henry Street was built in 1851 by J. T. Marston as his residence. Photo taken by Dr. George E. Orsech, 1951. The house was demolished about 1962.

One of the few independent, uncensored student publications of the period, *The Scorpion*, complained about the election system with its “opportunities for graft” and those “incumbents of student offices [who] have in the past somehow been able to buy a car to assist them in their duties.”³⁰ Honorary societies were one way that

fraternities kept their lock on these campus positions. *The Scorpion* denounced the fraternities’ grip on campus politics:

The organizations most responsible for the present mismanagement of campus life are Ku Klux Klan, Skull & Crescent, and Inner Gate. What the justifi-

³⁰ *The Scorpion*, April 17, 1923, p. 2, available in the University of Wisconsin Archives, Series 20/1/2/00–6. See also Mollie C. Davis, “Quest for a New America: Ferment in

Collegiate Culture, 1921–1929” (doctoral dissertation, University Georgia, 1972). A nephew of Upton Sinclair’s, David Sinclair, was one of the editors of *The Scorpion*.

cation is for the existence of these honorary fraternities, we haven't been able to find out. They are not supposed to be political, yet it is remarkable how the fitness of student candidates for office simmers down to a question of their membership in the Ku Klux Klan.³¹

The Scorpion claimed that the honorary Klan used what the paper scornfully called "efficient business methods in the election." For example, every junior student's name was card-indexed and each was contacted individually by "sleek fraternity brothers, who with the calm, confident air that membership in the Ku Klux Klan imparts" asked for their support.³² According to *The Scorpion*, the honorary Ku Klux Klan's name was an asset in these elections.

WHILE the honorary Ku Klux Klan oiled its campus political machine, the official Knights of the Ku Klux Klan targeted Madison as a promising town in which to establish another of its Klaverns, or chapters. Recruiting agents of the Invisible Empire arrived in the city in August of 1921.³³ While these initial recruiting efforts did not enlist many new members, they did make the KKK an issue of interest or concern for all Madisonians. In response to the arrival of official Klan organizers in Madison, both daily newspapers reacted negatively, filling their columns with excerpts from KKK pamphlets and speeches as a means of demonstrating the Klan's intolerance. For example, Madison's *Capital Times* (founded in 1917 as a progressive forum for Old Bob La Follette) reprinted the following passage on its editorial pages as a damning specimen of Klan nativism:

Provocateurs of revenge and anarchy, opportunists and demagogues are al-

ready forging their strength into a weapon that bodes democracy ill.

Reckless state laws admit them to local elections without the process of naturalization, and inadequate naturalization tests put votes into their hands before we firmly get English into their heads. ON TO THE MELTING-POT AND CLEAN IT O' THIS SCUM!³⁴

Presumably such militant anti-immigrant rhetoric would have been read negatively by some, but most Klan literature emphasized the values of "pure" womanhood and the Christian home, temperance and chastity, clean government and patriotism, white supremacy and protestantism, all summed up in the phrase "100 percent Americanism." Such values struck a sympathetic chord in some quarters of Madison. Some of the city's most respected citizens publicly expressed their support for the Klan, including the Reverend Norman B. Henderson, pastor of the First Baptist Church and president of both the Lion's Club and Madison's Ministerial Union. Similarly, a Klan lecturer gave a talk before the Madison Women's Club. By the end of its first year of recruitment, the Klan claimed a thousand members in Madison. Indeed, even in its denunciations, the *Capital Times* could not overlook the appeal of the Klan's ideology to many of its readers:

The ugly face of the Ku Klux Klan has appeared in Madison. An organization which has behind it a history of arson, murder and violence: a secret order that traffics in terror, racial and political bigotry.

The above may seem strong to many who have, in the past, surrounded the Ku Klux Klan with an atmosphere of romance and chivalry. It may sound well to say that the Ku Klux Klan defended the honors of the South and that it brought protection to the women of

³¹ *The Scorpion*, April 17, 1923, p.3.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³³ *Wisconsin State Journal*, August 31, 1921.

³⁴ *Madison Capital Times*, August 30, 1921.



Union Vodvil

An illustration from *The Wisconsin Octopus*, November, 1921, calling attention to a fund-raising show for the Memorial Union building.

the South. The *Capital Times*, however, believes that no organization which seeks to attain its ends through the use of violence should find root on American soil.³⁵

Overall, the negative publicity accorded the Klan by Madison's newspapers may simply have publicized the hooded order's program and ideas to a larger audience and, in effect, succeeded only in saving some door-to-door Klan canvassers a good deal of shoe leather.³⁶

IN any event, within a few weeks, Governor John J. Blaine had joined in the attack, calling the Klan a "cancer on the nation," while elsewhere the *New York World* began a three-week exposé of the Invisible Empire that was carried in most of the major papers in the

country.³⁷ By October of 1921, Congress had opened hearings on the Klan. This, together with the expanding press coverage, made the Klan a national issue of the first rank, and also proved helpful in extending its recruiting drive beyond the South.³⁸

Despite this growing frenzy of publicity, controversy, and the appearance of actual Klan organizers in Madison, the honorary campus organization at the University of Wisconsin continued under the name Ku Klux Klan. Only once, apparently, did it waver. During its first year, the honorary Klan went by the name "Ku Klux Klan." But when the honorary Klan first appeared in the *Badger* yearbook, it did so under the name "Klu Klux Klan."³⁹ This variant spell-

³⁵ *Ibid.*, August 31, 1921.

³⁶ See the *Capital Times*, August 30 and 31 and September 6, 7, 10, 12, 1921; *Wisconsin State Journal*, August 31, 1921; and Robert A. Goldberg, "The Ku Klux Klan in Madison, 1922-1927," in the *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 58:31-44 (Autumn, 1974).

³⁷ *Capital Times*, September 12, 1921. See also Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (New York, 1967), 11.

³⁸ See Norman F. Weaver, "The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan" (doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1954), 56.

³⁹ The deadline for submissions to the 1921 *Badger* yearbook fell in the winter of 1919-1920. Each yearbook was dated for the year following its release.

ing of the name was assuredly not a typographical error. Two of the editors of the 1921 *Badger* (dated a year prior to publication) were themselves members of the honorary Klan, including Charles Wesley Travers, the editor-in-chief.⁴⁰ Madison's counterpart campus Klan at the University of Illinois also added the "l" to the spelling of their name in that year's *Illio* yearbook, suggesting a degree of concert between the two campus Klans.⁴¹

Then, some time in 1920, the Madison group changed the name back to Ku Klux Klan. This occurred at the very same time that Col. Simmons' moribund organization, invigorated by the promotional zeal of Edward Clarke and Elizabeth Tyler, began its takeoff to national notoriety. The year 1920 was a spectacular year for the national Klan; over 100,000 members were enrolled within eighteen months.⁴² That the leadership of the honorary Klan stuck by its name, even after experimenting with changing it, indicates that they had no concern that they might be confused with the official Invisible Empire. At the very least, it also implies their tacit support for the values espoused by the Klan.

GIVEN that the purpose of the honorary Klan was to confer on its members status, power, and the respect of their student peers, the group's stubborn embrace of the name Ku Klux Klan would have made little sense had not the bulk of the university community shared the values connoted by the name. In fact, a culture of intolerance permeated the University of Wisconsin campus, the Madison community, and white America generally.

⁴⁰ DeWitt Van Pinkerton edited the "Social Functions" section of the yearbook. He and Travers both appear with the honorary KKK in the 1921 and 1922 yearbooks. Their affiliation with the yearbook staff is noted in their senior profiles in the 1922 *Badger*.

⁴¹ *Illio* yearbook, 1921, p. 521.

⁴² See Jackson, *Ku Klux Klan in the City*, 9-11.

Prejudice was so accepted a part of white American culture in this age that bigotry was routinely put on public display. Official events and celebrations of the university often included derogatory parodies of racial minorities.

For example, the Engineers' Minstrels, hailed as the "brightest event" of Wisconsin's 1920 homecoming celebration, was a revival of an annual event that began in 1903 but had lapsed during World War I.⁴³ This university-sponsored event was billed as a "regular old-fashioned nigger Jubilee" featuring "seventy sons of St. Patrick." White performers, smeared in burnt cork and bearing nicknames such as "Bones," "Snow Ball," "Dew-Drop," "Dum Bell," "Tambo," "Sassafras," and "Rastus," paraded about the campus, to the delight of visiting alumni, campus officials, and students alike. The songs that the minstrels sang exuded racism; the numbers had titles such as "Everyone's Happy," "I Love the Land of Old Black Joe," and "When I See All the Loving They Waste on the Babies."

Such minstrel shows were of course a common form of entertainment among white Americans in this era, and Madisonians flocked to commercially produced minstrel shows throughout the 1920's. For example, one minstrel show featuring "Darkies swaying to and fro, shuffling of feet, strumming of banjos," produced by the Men's Brotherhood of the Luther Memorial Church, proved so popular its first night before a capacity crowd of 500 that it was subsequently aired over the *Capital Times* radio station, WIBA.⁴⁴ At the request of the Men's Club of the Methodist

⁴³ *Homecoming 1920*, souvenir program, p. 37 (copy in the author's private collection). There were earlier University minstrel shows; for example, something called the U.W. Minstrels was organized in 1897. See Gard, *University Madison U.S.A.*, 320.

⁴⁴ *Capital Times*, February 16 and 17, 1926; *Wisconsin State Journal*, February 14, 1926; copies of both in the Ernest H. Pett Papers, Wisconsin State Archives, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.



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From the cast of the Engineers' Minstrels at Homecoming, 1920.

Episcopal Church of Madison, the show was twice more repeated.⁴⁵ Several years later the Madison Masonic Band performed a minstrel show that included a "rastus dance," a "Pickaninny song," and concluded with a "quaint southern cotton picking scene." The enduring popularity of minstrelsy was once more reaffirmed as the show at the Masonic Temple sold out and a second performance had to be scheduled to accommodate the demand.⁴⁶

In all such minstrel performances, African-Americans were not just a medium for the comedy, but were themselves the object of ridicule. But even by the racist standards of minstrelsy, the university's homecoming production of 1920 was unusually vicious. The souvenir program—an official university publication subject to administration censorship—invited the audience to "Laugh at the songs, laugh at the dancing, laugh at the niggers." Four of the leading characters of the minstrel show were individually profiled in the program. One sample will suffice to set the tone:

Do you remember way back when a red-headed nigger with cross eyes caught a black rabbit in a graveyard at midnight Friday the thirteenth under a full moon? We couldn't get the nigger—he's dead—but we found the nigger that's got the left hind leg of the rabbit. Here he is. He won't show you the rabbit-leg; not much; maybe he won't even tell you he's got it; but he has. That's what makes him so wild. Look out for him.⁴⁷

It is worth noting, perhaps, that none of the advertisements or programs of the other Madison minstrel productions contained such language.

THE honorary Klan played a central role in producing that year's homecoming program and was also responsible for the promotion of the Engineers' minstrel show. Two members of the honorary Klan, William Sale and George Geiger, contributed toward writing and producing the souvenir program. The

⁴⁵ *Capital Times*, March 4, 1928, copy in the Pett Papers.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, March 10, 1928, copy in the Pett Papers.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Some of the Ends



You see that nigger with sort of a half-worried look? Maybe you think he's a waiter worrying about his next tip. Oh, no; you're way wrong. That nigger's a genuine king, brought over from the banks of the Limpopo River especially for this show; and he's not used to all this noise and commotion. Right now he's worrying about that man up there in white; he looks sober enough, but you can't ever tell what he's going to do next. Tambo wants to laugh at him, but he doesn't quite dare. Watch him, Tambo!

Here's a man from the Sunny South—from Kaintucky; and he's lonesome; he wants to go home. He doesn't like us very well. He's grinning now, though; because somebody cracked a joke he just couldn't resist. You can see he's trying to feel blue; but he can't help laughing, the show is so funny.



This nigger's name is Bones—can't you just see him watch those rolling ivories? "Read 'em and weep!"—wait till you hear him sing it. It's a knock-out—and so is he!

Do your remember way back when a red-headed nigger with cross eyes caught a black rabbit in a graveyard at midnight Friday the thirteenth under a full moon? We couldn't get the nigger—he's dead—but we found the nigger that's got the left hind leg of the rabbit. Here he is. He won't show you the rabbit-leg; not much; maybe he won't even tell you he's got it; but he has. That's what makes him so wild. Look out for him.





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chairmen of both that year's homecoming committee and of the homecoming alumni committee, Lothrop Follett and Kenneth Ede, were also prominent honorary Klan members. Even the minstrel show's orchestra director, Nelson Fairbanks, was later to be elected to the honorary Klan.⁴⁸

Other major university events in these years also reflected the racial exclusivity of campus society and of American culture generally. In the spring of 1921, for example, the major event of the social season was the University Circus, a gala review to which each organization and fraternity contributed an act. Phi Gamma Delta, the parent fraternity of the honorary Ku Klux Klan, put on blackface and marched as a "colored band," while some members of the honorary Klan, in keeping with their more elite status, put on a display of their equestrian skills. Unfortunately, a rain-storm caused the event to be moved indoors into the stock pavilion, hampering the planned sale of what the *Daily Cardinal* called "nigger-baby dolls."⁴⁹

Sometimes degrading racial parodies were aimed at specific individuals. The Smith Orchestra, a black dance band that often performed for Madison's campus fraternities, was lampooned during the University Circus Parade of 1920. Among the floats that year was one featuring young men dressed in blackface and musicians' costumes clowning atop a float whose banner read, "Smith Bros. Cough Drop Band of Tennessee."

Racial caricature was a popular source of humor in most campus publications, especially the campus humor magazine, *The Octopus*. Nor was such racist ridicule restricted to African-Americans; Italians, Asians, and Jews were mocked as well. The

⁴⁸ See *Homecoming 1920*, p. 9, for full listings. One honorary Klan member, "versatile Jim" Brader, played four different blackface roles in a similar minstrel show held two years later. For Brader's activities, see the *Daily Cardinal*, February 2, 1922.

⁴⁹ *Daily Cardinal*, May 21, 23, and 26, 1920.

Left, a page from the 1920 Homecoming souvenir program and, above, two of the performers from that show.



THE LEADING MAN'S LAST ACT

A cartoon from *The Wisconsin Octopus*, March, 1922.

campus cartoonists distorted the figures of each targeted group according to prevailing racist stereotypes and placed them in situations that expressed whites' beliefs in their moral or physical inferiority. Thus, blacks were associated with gambling and violence; southern Europeans were knock-kneed oafs; Jews were obsessed with money.⁵⁰

While such racial and ethnic stereotypes permeated American popular culture during the 1920's, not everyone, even within the fraternity world, approved of them or took them for granted. Practically every fraternity subscribed to *Banta's Greek Exchange*, the premier journal of the fraternity world, a monthly published in Menasha,

Wisconsin. Every issue of *Banta's*, like most other American newspapers and magazines, included a humor section that frequently included racist jokes. But in July of 1921, George Banta, the publisher, wrote a contrite and unusually enlightened editorial in response to a reader's complaint about the racist content of his journal's joke page:

We have a letter written by a subscriber to the Greek Exchange in which exception is taken to certain skits which appear in the March Greek Exchange in the more or less humorous section appearing under the caption, "All Sorts." He does take exception to certain little theoretically humorous paragraphs, and we are perfectly frank to say his criticism is well founded.

We have on the stage what have come to be known as the "stage Irishman," "stage darkey," "stage Jew," and so on.

⁵⁰ See *The Octopus*, March, 1922 (Vol. 3, no. 6), p. 13; April, 1920 (Vol. 1, no. 4), p. 14; and May, 1922 (Vol. 3, no. 8). See also the *Liberty Badger*, 1920, p. 584.

There is only one redeeming feature that we know in connection with these conventional beings and that is the entire absence of any malice in the hearts of their creators and users when they dust them off and bring them out and begin pulling the strings which set them to dancing.

The editor believes that he has, through life, pretty faithfully observed an early made rule to promptly admit a mistake or error whenever he discovers that he has made a mistake or fallen into error. And we are prompt to say that these little fool skits such as those to which he refers, have no place in the pages of this magazine. They are harmless, it is true, and they are without malice, but they are foolish and they are not funny. We therefore apologize and admit the error.⁵¹

As George Banta seemed to be saying, the victims of campus displays of bigotry were not abstractions, but actual people. Though Wisconsin was an overwhelmingly white university, it was not exclusively so. A handful of black students attended the university throughout the 1920's. Three African-Americans joined the freshman class in 1923; the following year one African-American was graduated. As late as 1927, only six blacks were enrolled.⁵² Of those few who attended the university in the World War I era, the best known was Jean Toomer, a descendant of the African-American governor of Louisiana during Reconstruction, P.B.S. Pinchback. Toomer later achieved fame as a member of the Harlem Renaissance and author of the acclaimed novel *Cane*.

Toomer attended the university for a little over a semester in the fall of 1914, and it was in Madison that he was forced for the

first time to confront seriously his own racial identity. He had come to Wisconsin from a black high school in Washington, D.C., and he knew that the issue of his race would be paramount. He determined to keep quiet on the question of his own identity unless specifically asked about it. As he later wrote of his experience:

In my body were many bloods, some dark blood, all blended in the fire of six or more generations. In my own mind I could not see the dark blood as something quite different and apart. But if people wanted to say this dark blood was Negro blood and if they then wanted to call me a Negro—this was up to them.⁵³

The issue of his racial identity proved Toomer's undoing at the University of Wisconsin. Because he was black, he could not belong to a fraternity. As a consequence, he was handicapped when he tried to run for class president, and he withdrew from the contest. He soon grew deeply disillusioned about his fellow students: "I was convinced that the majority of people were uncritical and fickle, attracted to glitter, never examining the worth of their idols, merely following the shifting winds of popularity."⁵⁴

ALTHOUGH the number of African-Americans at the University of Wisconsin was minuscule, there was a sizable foreign contingent. In 1921, for example, over twenty countries were represented among the university's seven

⁵³ See the W. W. Norton & Co. Critical Edition of Jean Toomer's *Cane*, edited by Darwin Turner (New York, 1988), 125. I would like to thank John Brennan for directing me to Toomer's work.

⁵⁴ Quoted from Nellie McKay, "Jean Toomer in Wisconsin," in *Jean Toomer: A Critical Evaluation*, ed. by Therman B. O'Daniel (Howard University Press, Washington, D.C., 1988), 51. Toomer later married Margery Latimer of Portage, Wisconsin. They had one child, a daughter.

⁵¹ *Banta's Greek Exchange* (published in Menasha, Wisconsin), July, 1921 (Vol. 9, no. 3), p. 161.

⁵² *Crisis*, July, 1923 (Vol. 6, no. 3), p. 116; July, 1924 (Vol. 28, no. 3), p. 110; August, 1928 (Vol. 35, no. 8), p. 260.



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The Smith Bros. Cough Drop Band in the University of Wisconsin circus parade, May, 1920.

thousand students. Of these, more than sixty were from China, the Philippines, and Japan.⁵⁵ For these students, the doors to full participation in campus life were closed. Then as now, the effects of isolation and loneliness sometimes produced tragedy, as in 1921, when the body of a young Chinese student, Y. F. Chon, was found floating in Lake Mendota. Chon had apparently committed suicide after being depressed for "lack of friends and ill health."⁵⁶ Sometimes racial animosity assumed more open forms, as it had earlier in the same year when Leo Schen, a Japanese student, was beaten by another student, Thomas Allen. (Schen had accused Allen of ripping notices off the YMCA

bulletin board.) Allen was arrested for assault and battery and pled guilty to the charge, though he justified his actions by pointing out Schen's "misconduct" for questioning him about the bulletin board. The judge went easy on Allen and let him off with a fine of \$5.⁵⁷

University administrators did not make racial issues a priority. Indeed, Dean Scott Goodnight denied that there were any racial problems on campus at all. When an official of another university wrote to Goodnight and asked him how foreign students were received at the U.W., Goodnight answered:

⁵⁵ *The Exposition News*, Vol. 3 (1921), p. 4.

⁵⁶ *Daily Cardinal*, August 2, 1922.

⁵⁷ *Capital Times*, August 31, 1921, the headline for which reads, "Student Fined for Assault Upon Jap."



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The Smith Orchestra playing at a Sigma Chi party, March, 1920.

. . . [A]s far as I know there is no ill feeling or friction whatsoever. Orientals do not, of course, shine in the social world and rarely appear in social activities. They are not members of fraternities, but I know of few class discriminations against them.⁵⁸

Inadvertently, perhaps, Goodnight overlooked the fact that the fraternity system was strictly segregated. This was just as true for fraternities north of the Mason-Dixon line as for those in the South. According to the fraternities' own National Interfraternity Conference, while all fra-

ternities were racially segregated, 40 per cent of all fraternity members nationwide belonged to fraternities that *specifically* limited membership to "Aryans" or "Caucasians." Of course, race was not the only bar to fraternity membership; religion and national origin were also prescribed by many fraternities. Both African-American and Jewish students therefore founded their own separate fraternities—fraternities which subsequently confronted the same Jim Crow attitudes when they were refused admission to the national organization of fraternities, the National Interfraternity Conference.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Dean Goodnight to Prof. A. E. Martin, January 24, 1921, General Correspondence Files, 1920–1945, Series 19/2/1–1, box 1, folder M.

⁵⁹ *Interfraternity Conference Minutes*, Interfraternity Conference, 16th session, 1924, pp. 134–135. For details of the IC's own segregation policy, see the minutes of the Special



Advertising the 1916 Engineers' Minstrels.

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University of Wisconsin fraternities were no exceptions to this rule. Racially exclusive membership provisions were the norm in this period. For example, the constitution of Alpha Theta (the local chapter of Beta Phi Theta), approved by the university administration and the student senate in 1924, required that "persons to be eligible for membership shall be male and white, and of the Aryan race." The 1923 charter of Chi Upsilon (the local chapter of Sigma Pi Sigma) went one step further and specified that "persons to be eligible for membership shall be male and white, of the Aryan race and not a member of the Semitic race." Indeed, some fraternities engaged in even finer racial hairsplitting. Phi Beta,

a drama and musical sorority, required in 1927 that all members "be of the Caucasian branch of the Aryan race," and Rho Epsilon Delta, a coeducational society, confined its members to "Redheaded, Christians of the white race of acceptable social status."⁶⁰

Each of these fraternal charters was scrutinized and approved by both the Student Life and Interests Committee (led by Dean of Men Goodnight) and by the Student Senate (which was dominated by the honorary Ku Klux Klan). There is no evidence that any charter was ever rejected on the basis of a discriminatory membership clause. Rather, the University treated the charters

Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Interfraternity Conference, November, 1923, in the Thomas A. Clark Papers, Series 41/2/1, box 36, University of Illinois.

⁶⁰ Alpha Theta charter filed with Beta Phi Theta records; Chi Upsilon charter in Sigma Pi Sigma folder; both in Dean of Student Affairs, Office of Fraternities and Student Organizations, Inactive Fraternities and Student Organizations files, University of Wisconsin Archives.



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The University's circus parade passing the State Street side of the Historical Society, about 1921.

with bureaucratic indifference. After the fledgling Beta Sigma Pi fraternity submitted its charter for approval, Dean Goodnight commented that "their constitution is on file with us and is a nicely drawn document adequate for the purpose." The Beta Sigma Pi charter specified that its membership was to be limited to American citizens, "Christian Protestants, and shall not include persons of the Jewish Race or of the Catholic faith."⁶¹

While there were but a handful of African-American and foreign students on campus throughout the 1920's, there was a relatively large number of Jewish students. By 1926 there were at least 550 Jewish stu-

dents on campus and their numbers grew throughout the decade. Jewish students were shut out from many campus activities, and by the later part of the decade Jewish students confronted the open anti-Semitism of landlords and other proprietors who placed signs in their windows stating that Jews would not be admitted. The editor of the *Hillel Review*, the newsletter of the University of Wisconsin's Jewish student organization of the same name, described what campus life was like in the 1920's:

The Jew on the campus then was lost, literally lost, in a mad whirl of collegiate activity, which swirled at a dizzy pace over his head. Others were organized, others were provided for. He, because he was a Jew, was left out. He was alone in a society of indifferent organizations—functioning, but not for him. The Jew, alone, became dis-

⁶¹ Goodnight's note is in Beta Sigma Pi folder, Dean of Student Affairs, Office of Fraternities and Student Organizations, Inactive Fraternities and Student Organizations files.



Menorah Society

Officers

BEN WISHNEFSKY	President
CLARA MONFRIED	Vice-President
BERTHA YABROFF	Secretary
SAMUEL GOLDMAN	Treasurer

Cartoon illustration for the Menorah Society from the Liberty Badger, 1920.

couraged, cynical in his outlook, and was without the encouragement and the impetus to get the most out of his university life.⁶²

Anti-Semitism was as much a part of the university culture as were the racist caricatures paraded about in the campus minstrel shows. Just as the stereotyping of African-Americans was officially tolerated by the administration, anti-Semitic caricatures were passed by university censors. In the 1920 edition of the *Badger* yearbook an anti-Semitic illustration was printed on the page devoted to the Menorah Society, the only Jewish club on campus at the time. It portrayed a pair of Jews, both bald, with

long, hooked noses and drooping mustaches, their arms crooked in a sinister shrug, a bulging money bag at their feet. (Kenneth Harley, art editor for the *Badger* that year, was one of the founding members of the honorary Ku Klux Klan.)⁶³

OF all the social institutions in and around the university, the one most accessible to minority students was the Young Men's Christian Association. The YMCA was the very hub of student activities on campus. Its handsome building, located on Langdon Street next

⁶² *Hillel Review*, November 6, 1926 (Vol. 3, no. 3), p. 2.

⁶³ *Liberty Badger*, 1920, p. 584. Kenneth Harley's student resume and honorary KKK affiliation are noted in the 1921 edition of the *Badger*.

to where the Memorial Union would later be built, sat at the crossroads where campus ended and the "Latin Quarter" began. Since it was one of the few places in Madison where foreign students could find rooms, the YMCA became the closest thing the university had to an international residential hall.

The YMCA's management and student directors proclaimed a liberal membership policy. "The association is proud of the fact that in addition to young men from all the Protestant denominations, the Roman Catholics and Jews are among its most active committee workers," read one statement:

Membership in the Y.M.C.A. is open to every man who signs the application saying he believes in the object of the association and desires to assist in its work. [T]here is no line drawn here whatsoever.⁶⁴

To better organize and supervise its various programs for international students, the YMCA established a Foreign Student Committee. Housing discrimination was one of the first issues that the committee tackled, though it did so without challenging discrimination itself. The committee helped foreign students to accommodate themselves to the prejudice they faced. The committee compiled a list of all the landlords who did not discriminate, in order to help the foreign student avoid the "embarrassment and chagrin in answering ads for rooms only to be told that foreigners are not wanted."⁶⁵

From one of the extant planning reports of the Foreign Student Committee, it seems clear that the Y's organized social activities were motivated by an agenda that went far beyond its publicly stated aim of providing recreation and social contacts for interna-

tional students. Three goals directed their activities: "to provide social contacts for foreign students outside of their national groups," "to afford opportunities to foreign students to learn to know the American people as they really are and what they stand for," and "to help foreign students to know Christ." Unambiguously, the report went on to state that "the more important of our objectives, [is] namely the American and Christian contacts." Moreover, there was a sense of urgency to this work:

The foreign students who are attending the University of Wisconsin will presently return to their native countries either more inclined to Christianity and its civilization or else antagonistic to Christianity.⁶⁶

The committee mapped out a strategy for properly inculcating Christian values and American ideals into the breasts of the foreigner by exposing them to Christian homes. First, a party was to be thrown for the foreign students in the comfortable surroundings of the YMCA. As hosts and hostesses, "four or more 'key couples'" were to be "picked with great care by the committee." They in turn were to arrange for other parties in "the finest representative homes of Madison." This second round of parties was to be more formal, and explicit instructions were given on how to word the invitations to be sent to the foreign students. The proselytizing purpose of the evening was not to be mentioned: "[W]e are putting them in Christian homes but this fact need not be included in the invitation." Finally the "key couples" were to recruit more willing married American couples to attend these parties, in the ratio of one married couple with a home for each pair of international students. Care was taken so as to conform to the prevailing racial norms of exclusion:

⁶⁴ *Daily Cardinal*, October 22, 1919.

⁶⁵ University YMCA Manual, 1921-1922, Series 51/5, box 1, pp. 105-106, University of Wisconsin Archives.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

The couples and their assignees are to sit together at the banquet. The students should be assigned to the couples beforehand respecting the race preferences of the couples. It is understood beforehand that the couples will tender an invitation to dinner to the foreign students with whom they eat at the banquet . . . this plan, carried to its desired completeness, acts as one of the finest agents for missionary education.⁶⁷

Finally, and with the utmost delicacy, the greatest pitfall of socializing was touched on. In matters of sexuality, the barriers of race were to be firmly maintained:

Beware of homes where there are daughters of the courting age for University men, for these boys with whom you are working miss greatly the social life and as soon as they meet a girl who shows them very much attention, they will carry the thing either to an undesirable end or put the girl in an embarrassing position.⁶⁸

GIVEN the importance of the YMCA in university life, it is not surprising that members of the honorary Klan were prominent in the Y's decision-making bodies. As members of the YMCA cabinet, Honorary Klan members Alfred Taylor, Lothrop Follett, and Charles Wesley Travers set policy for the local Y. Honorary Klan football star Frank "Red" Weston was described as being "entirely active in the 'Y.'"⁶⁹ "Bud" Follett, one of the founders and president of the campus Klan, was also active in the YMCA fellowship group, where he was the featured speaker on November 20, 1919. (His topic that night was "The Ku Klux Klan." According to the secretary's report of

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁶⁹ *Daily Cardinal*, October 22, 1919.



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Lothrop "Bud" F. Follett, 1919.

the gathering, Follett "told of the ideals and purposes of the organization and of its plans for the future" before an appreciative group that numbered forty.)⁷⁰

The activities of the YMCA and that of the campus Ku Klux Klan were closely intertwined. Like many other student clubs, the honorary Klan sometimes held its meetings in the Y's conference rooms.⁷¹ When the YMCA embarked on its annual campus fund drive in the fall of 1919, it relied upon the honorary Ku Klux Klan to organize its canvass among the campus fraternities. The solicitations by the honorary Klan were highly successful in raising funds. The Y's finance director boasted that with this strat-

⁷⁰ "Report of Fellowship Committee for the Scholastic Year 1919-1920," YMCA Historical Documents, Series 51/1, box 18, folder 10 (entitled "Program Materials"). See also *Daily Cardinal*, November 18 and 19, 1919.

⁷¹ *Daily Cardinal*, October 25, 1921.

egy he had "perfected an effective system for carrying on the campaign."⁷²

THE campus Klan's early association with the YMCA was quite consistent with the later national Invisible Empire's political agenda. Both organizations were avowedly, even militantly, Christian; both supported "Americanism" and the "Americanization" of foreign immigrants. For example, some of the funds raised by the honorary Ku Klux Klan were to go toward the YMCA's Americanization programs, which were aimed at extending the Y's activities beyond the campus by performing "helpful work for true citizenship among foreign-born elements of the population in Madison." The Y had recently established an Americanization Department, whose first project was to conduct a survey of foreigners in Madison with the help of prominent University of Wisconsin faculty members. Eventually the Y expanded its Americanization work by holding English classes and cooperating with the university women who were carrying on settlement and charity work in Madison's main immigrant neighborhood, that principally Italian area near the juncture of Park and Regent streets known locally as "Greenbush" or simply "The Bush."⁷³

The honorary Ku Klux Klan took an active interest in the "problem" of Madison's immigrant population. It cooperated with the YMCA in its Americanization work by organizing a series of charity dinners for children from the Italian district at Christmas time. Each fraternity and sorority house adopted several Italian youngsters for an evening, giving them dinner and entertainments complete with "games, Christmas trees and stunts of all kinds." But to the YMCA and honorary Klan organizers, "Americanization" was a process



F. Laurence "Red" Weston, about 1919. UW Neg M180

that involved much more than simply attaining the legal status of citizenship.

Americanization was a movement of two minds. It expressed ideals of social benevolence and uplift while simultaneously demanding a loyalty conceived in both political and cultural terms. It was a hybrid idea that originated in the 1890's, braided (some might say twisted) from strands of progressive social settlement experience and the patriotic xenophobia of nationalistic societies such as the Daughters of the American Revolution. On the eve of World War I the progressive tendencies had the upper hand. A national campaign begun in 1915 to encourage naturalization carried forth the tolerant slogan, "Many Peoples, But One Nation." But with the spread of the war in Europe, the movement was swept up by a wave of nationalis-

⁷² *Ibid.*, October 22, 1919.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, October 22, 1919; see also March 23, 1920.

tic fervor. A greater emphasis was placed on severing the ties between immigrants and their native cultures, the better to instill loyalty to the United States. Reflecting its lessened tolerance for cultural diversity, the campaign before long changed its slogan to "America First."⁷⁴

In 1916 the Americanization crusade caught on among Madison's religious and philanthropic community. That year, an influential study was made of the housing conditions in the Italian community by a university undergraduate, Henry Barnbrock, Jr. Barnbrock deflated a few of the deeply held myths about the Greenbush neighborhood. He showed that the squalid conditions were attributable not to the dirtiness of the immigrants but rather to the indifference of the city administration, which refused to collect trash and even used vacant lots in the area to dump the city's refuse. Barnbrock accused the city courts of discriminating against Italians who petitioned for naturalization, and he exposed the profiteering of landlords who offered only the most dilapidated buildings to their immigrant tenants.⁷⁵ In the national climate of agitation for "Americanization," the young student's study had a galvanizing effect upon Madison's social activists. Soon after Barnbrock completed his thesis, the Rev. Edward Blakeman of University Methodist Church led a group of over a dozen different charitable organizations to force the city to clean up its dumps in the Bush.

But like their national counterparts, Madison's advocates of Americanization were often motivated by a narrow patri-

tism rather than by the progressive ideals of toleration that reigned before the war. Madison charities targeted their efforts on what they perceived as the lawless and alien presence in their midst, thereby doing their part to ensure the preservation of the republic or a secure homefront during the war. The Madison Methodist Union, which in 1915 established a small Methodist church to minister to the largely Catholic Italian community, viewed conversion to Protestantism as a prerequisite of "Americanization." Italians, the Union's report for 1920 concluded, "need the Gospel of Christ, or they may become sceptics, anarchists, Black Hands, infidels, or what not."⁷⁶

Neighborhood House, a social settlement established in the Italian community on the heels of Rev. Blakeman's trash campaign, emphasized inculcating American culture, including holding classes in American-style cooking. The Americanization advocate's emphasis on American culture defined the immigrant's folkways as inferior. This assumption of cultural superiority in turn created a paternalistic relationship between charity workers and their immigrant clients. In the words of Gay Braxton, head resident of Neighborhood House: "We find the foreigner is much like a child in many respects."⁷⁷

Likewise, the YMCA's "Americanization" programs were aimed at inculcating white, Protestant culture, along with civic ideals. The Y's strategy papers describe well the cultural thrust of their efforts:

There is great need for students to work amongst the boys of the settlement district. This type of work is one of the best mediums in reaching the parents the more nearly the work can be brought

⁷⁴ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (Atheneum, New York, 1973; originally published 1963), 235-243.

⁷⁵ John A. Valentine, "A Study in Institutional Americanization: The Assimilative History of the Italian-American Community of Madison, Wisconsin" (master's thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1967), 111-112; Henry Barnbrock, Jr., "Housing Conditions of the Italian Community in Madison, Wisconsin" (senior thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1916), 11, 27, 33, 71-72.

⁷⁶ *Madison Press Connection*, August 19, 1978; Valentine, "Study in Institutional Americanization," especially chapter 4.

⁷⁷ "Head Resident [Gay Braxton] Reports and Talks," October, 1922, in Neighborhood House Records, Wisconsin State Archives, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

to the every day life of the immigrant, the more effective it will be in changing his mode of living and his customs.⁷⁸

THAT Madison's Italians were the only foreign-born population targeted by this program reveals the cultural intolerance of its underlying logic. For in fact Italians were not the most numerous immigrant group; nearly three times as many immigrants from Germany, and twice as many from Norway, came to Madison during the 1920's. But in Madison, "immigrant" and "Italian" tended to be synonymous. As the authors of the most complete sociological study of Madison in this era complained:

"Little Italy" is so frequently mentioned by the "natives" that one would suppose it contained the major proportion of all the foreign-born. As a matter of fact, [the Italians] constitute but 11 per cent of all the foreign-born in the city.⁷⁹

"Little Italy," or the Bush, was perceived by Madisonians as being the most lawless neighborhood in town.⁸⁰ This perception was just as erroneous as the commonly held belief that all immigrants were Italian. The district that included the Greenbush did not account for the greatest number of per capita arrests; that distinction went to districts of the city overwhelmingly populated by native-born whites. As is true generally, crime in Madison during the 1920's correlated to a higher degree with income than it did with ethnicity.⁸¹

The perception of the Greenbush being a den of thieves was shaped within a cul-

ture that branded all racial and ethnic minorities with some token of criminality. The Greenbush was not the most lawless area of Madison, but it was the most culturally diverse. Along with Italians of Sicilian origin, the Bush was the home of most of Madison's Jews and a high proportion of its small African-American population.

Although the Bush was less than a mile from the boundaries of the campus, the cultural distance separating it from the university community was daunting. Many students from the university who participated in YMCA Americanization programs also volunteered at the Neighborhood House. Women from the Chi Omega sorority sponsored sewing classes; fraternity men, with help from the YMCA, organized athletic events in the neighborhood. By the 1920's, Neighborhood House had become so reliant on the volunteer labor of undergraduates that it had to curtail its programs during the summer recess. However, the effectiveness of these volunteers was compromised by their lack of exposure to immigrant folkways and culture. Head resident Gay Braxton knew how difficult it was for campus volunteers to work with the immigrants. The university girls, she complained, needed "constant supervision" because "they have few ideas of their own for work, they have had no contacts with foreigners or children as they are getting at Neighborhood House

⁸¹ Of the top five districts in terms of arrest statistics, four were also in the bottom five for median income. See Young, *The Madison Community*, 221, 228. One of the university's most famous professors, the historian Frederick Jackson Turner (then retired), referred in 1925 to "the Italian 'hooch' which is bringing discredit upon one of the Madison districts. There is a corner there called 'death's corner,' because of the number of people who have been shot on suspicion that they were [police] spies. But the elective judges give them short sentences or mere fines when these lawbreakers are caught, so that Sicily in Madison flourishes." See Ray Allen Billington, ed., *"Dear Lady": The Letters of Frederick Jackson Turner and Alice Forbes Perkins Hooper, 1910-1932* (San Marino, California, 1970), 365.

⁷⁸ University YMCA Manual, 1921-1922, Series 51/5, box 1, p. 151.

⁷⁹ Kimball Young, *The Madison Community* (University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1934), 31-32.

⁸⁰ David V. Mollenhoff, *Madison: A History of the Formative Years* (Dubuque, Iowa, 1982), 425.

and are therefore unable to meet the problems in a wise, healthful sort of way."⁸²

WHILE the sorority women tended to express the progressive, charitable side of Americanization, some of its fraternity men upheld the more coercive tradition of "Americanization." On occasion, this involved outright intervention in matters of public policy and law enforcement. (This was of course the era of America's "noble experiment," and in Madison, as elsewhere in Wisconsin, the illicit traffic in liquor went on more or less openly in defiance of the law.) In the spring of 1921, the university's "most prominent student leaders" decided to take the law into their own hands and conduct a liquor raid on the Greenbush, where "blind pigs" were common and the bootleg liquor flowed freely. Student leaders staked out the area, collected the affidavits necessary to obtain warrants, and, bypassing the Madison police, called in federal liquor control officers. Federal officers were preferred, because the students did not trust the local police, many of whom were ethnic minorities themselves, to enforce the prohibition against liquor. A large force of federal officers responded to the call and, with the student leaders, descended upon the Greenbush neighborhood. In a single night, eight Italian merchants were arrested and 300 gallons of liquor confiscated.⁸³

As most of those who could be described as "student leaders" of the university were also members of the Ku Klux Klan honorary society, it seems likely that at least some of their members were involved in the raid. Indeed, the *Daily Cardinal* hinted obliquely that the raid was the work of the honorary Klan when it noted a short time later: "The following are having spring practice: 1. The football team 2. Ku Klux Klan."⁸⁴

⁸² "Head Resident [Gay Braxton] Reports and Talks," September to February, 1922, Neighborhood House Records.

The News Sheet, house organ of the YMCA, praised "the splendid action" of the "leaders in student activity in the University who planned this student raid" who had demonstrated their "initiative, courage, [and] moral fiber." So important was the work of cleaning up the immigrant neighborhoods that not only did the future of the university depend upon it, but the very future of the republic did. *The News Sheet* editorialized: "If we are going to surround our young men and women with places of vice, and dens where the breeder of vice is sold, these young men and women who are training themselves to take places of leadership in their respective communities will develop a type of leadership in whose hands the future would be quite unsafe."⁸⁵

The students' raid on "Little Italy" in 1921 was a preview of the raids conducted by the real Madison Knights of the Ku Klux Klan three years later. Then, following the murder of a Madison policeman in the heart of the Greenbush and the arrest of two Italians for the crime, the Ku Klux Klan began to canvass the Bush for evidence of liquor dealing. Bottles of liquor were brought back to the Klan headquarters on the Capitol Square as evidence. Under political pressure to do something to "clean up" "Little Italy"—and, like the earlier student raiders, distrusting the loyalty of his own police force in matters of vice enforcement—Madison Mayor I. Milo Kittleson deputized thirty Klansmen and sent them under the leadership of seven trusted policemen on a raid into the Greenbush neighborhood. This time fifteen arrests were made.⁸⁶

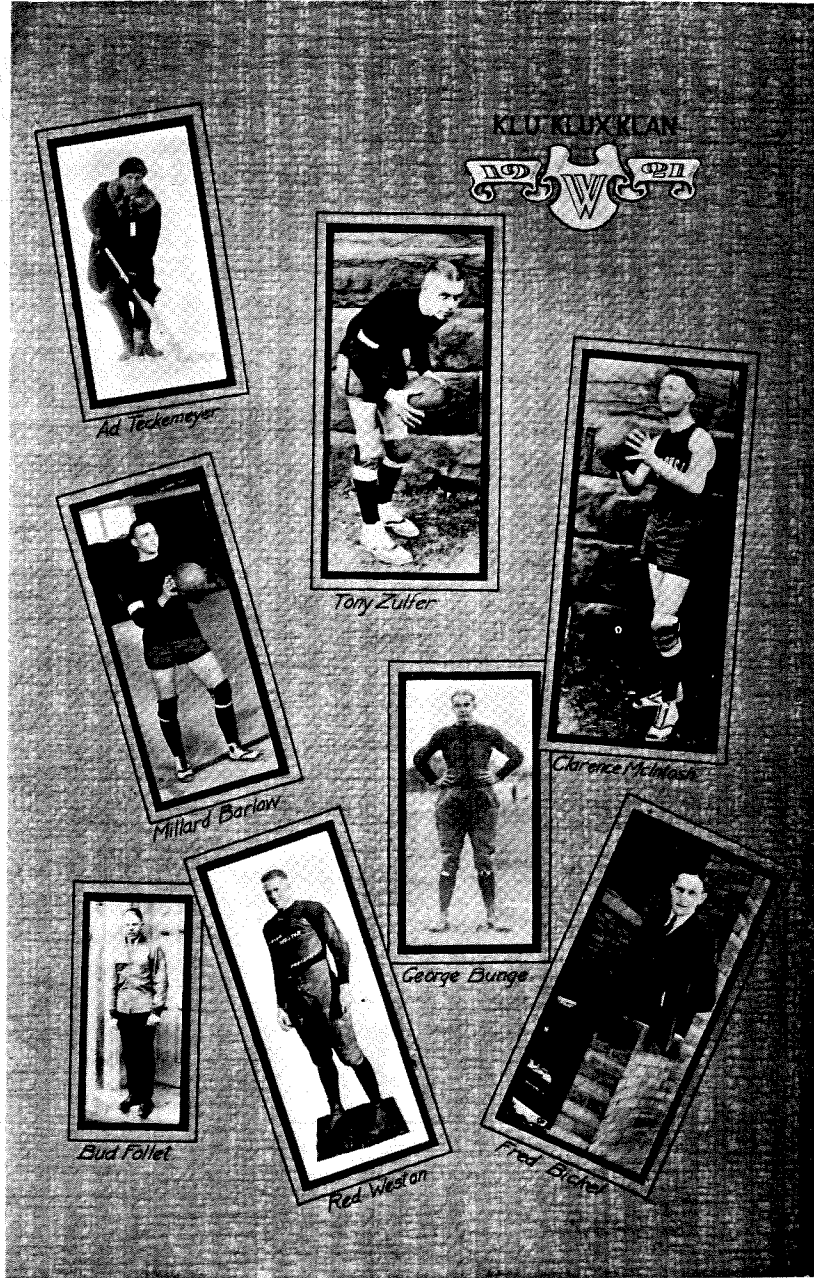
⁸³ *The News Sheet* ["Published. . . by the students connected with the Y.M.C.A. "], April, 1921 (Vol. 1, no. 6), p. 2.

⁸⁴ *Daily Cardinal*, April 8, 1921.

⁸⁵ *The News Sheet*, April, 1921 (Vol. 1, no. 6), p. 2.

⁸⁶ Goldberg, "The Ku Klux Klan in Madison," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, 40–41; Weaver, "Knights of the Ku Klux Klan," 78–80, 140–142.

Klu Klux Klan



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Stars of the 1921 Ku Klux Klan, including Fred Bickel (Frederic March), from the Badger yearbook.

WHILE the honorary KKK was consolidating its power and influence on the campus of the University of Wisconsin, its namesake, the official Invisible Empire of the Ku Klux Klan, was growing and expanding from the South into Indiana, Illinois, and other states of the Upper Midwest. By the fall of 1922, the honorary Klan, for the first time, had to contend with the presence of the official Knights of the Ku Klux Klan on the University of Wisconsin campus. That month the Invisible Empire of the Ku Klux Klan began actively recruiting students—exclusively through personal contacts, it would appear, since there is no evidence of advertising or promotion. By January of 1923, Dean Goodnight revealed that Klan recruiters had also approached some members of the Wisconsin faculty.⁸⁷ Several faculty members did indeed become hooded Knights: one was an instructor of civil engineering who attained the 32nd degree of Masonry before he died; the other was a sergeant-major of the campus military cadets.⁸⁸ That one of the faculty members of the KKK was an accomplished Mason is no surprise. From the beginning, Klan recruiters targeted Masons because of their experience with secretive fraternal rites and the nativist hostility toward Catholicism of many of their members. Many leaders of Masonry fought the Klan, but the Klan held much appeal among the rank-and-file. In Wisconsin, Klan advertisements sometimes bore the caption, "Masons Preferred."⁸⁹

The type of student attracted to the official Klan movement was strikingly different from the character of a member of

the honorary Ku Klux Klan. A typical honorary Klan member was a young man from a city outside the state, probably a liberal-arts major, who had been elected to a campus-wide office, played one or more varsity sports, and belonged to several other social clubs. By contrast, a typical official Klansman was an engineering major from either rural Wisconsin or Madison, who was probably a member of the campus military, and who did not hold any elective office on campus or take part in varsity sports.

Not surprisingly, the honorary Klansmen looked down upon these engineers and rural bumpkins. One little ditty in the 1922 yearbook, edited that year by honorary Klan member Thomas T. Coxon, exemplified their snobbish attitude:

Another bore at eating times, is Agriculture Jake.

With uncombed hair and raucous rimes, he's surely quite a rake.

He lives on fertilizing schemes, hay chokes his rowdy cheers;

Dairy-maids content his dreams and horse-hairs fill his ears.

The Engineer's a hard old nut, a clumsy grimy dolt,

Whose hair is left to grow uncut — his comb a greasy bolt

The only dates that he can get are lady engineers.

When out with them you're safe to bet, he only buys three beers.⁹⁰

In the face of the appearance of the official Ku Klux Klan on campus, it took only a few months before the honorary Klan decided to disassociate itself from its rival group. Gordon Wanzer, president of the honorary Klan, told the press that his group had decided to change its name because "so many people confused it with the name of the non-collegiate secret or-

⁸⁷ *Capital Times*, January 17, 1923.

⁸⁸ See the *Badger*, 1928, p. 474. W. S. Cottingham is profiled in Faculty Document 242 in the University of Wisconsin Archives biographical file. The author could find nothing about the third faculty member of the KBL (KKK), E. Anderson, or more detailed information about Sgt. Atkins.

⁸⁹ On the Klan and Masonry, see David M. Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (Durham, 1987), 34, 191.

⁹⁰ *Badger* yearbook, 1922, p. 736.

Table 1*
Hometowns: KKK vs. Honorary KKK
(in percentages)

	Rural	Urban	Out-of-State	Madison
KKK	48	52	0	33
Honorary KKK	19	81	56	13

Table 2
Majors: KKK vs. Honorary KKK
(in percentages)

	L&S	Commerce	Ag.	Eng.	Law	Medicine
KKK	14	14	10	52	10	0
Honorary KKK	63	19	0	1	0	1

Table 3
Other Affiliations: KKK vs. Honorary KKK
(in percentages)

	None	Cadet Corps	Elected Offices	Varsity Sports
KKK	48	38	0	1
Honorary KKK	1	1	43	44

ganization of the same name." For a new name, the group settled on the mysterious and innocuous "Tumas," which probably derived from the Latin second-person pronoun *tu* and the Latin word *mas* meaning "manly" or "vigorous." Whatever their name, the manly men of the honorary Klan could now go about their business of accumulating accolades and campus sinecures, and they could toast each other at their annual formal dinners without fear of being mistaken for the déclassé.⁹¹

The honorary Klan existed to reap honors, office, power, and the respect of its peers on campus. For several years, at least, the members of the honorary Klan did not feel that the utility of their chosen name was compromised by the growth and attendant negative publicity surround-

ing the appearance of card-carrying Klansmen in Madison. The long campaign of the *Capital Times* to expose the Invisible Empire's violent prejudices had done little to shake the comfort with which the campus honorary society wore its label. Yet when the national Klan made its appearance on campus, it did hasten the end of the honorary Klan. There must therefore have been something about these particular student Klansmen that made association with them unacceptable.

As seems clear, a considerable social

* The data for these tables were gathered from the senior profiles found in *Badger* yearbooks from 1924 to 1928. The last group of sixteen Ku Klux Klan Honorary Society members (the ones who made the decision to change the name of the group), and the twenty-one founders and first two years' worth of members of the Kappa Beta Lambda fraternity (who comprised the core membership of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan on campus), were used for the comparison, because these were the members of both groups whose years at Wisconsin overlapped.

⁹¹ *Capital Times*, October 16, 1922, and January 17, 1923. On the name change to Tumas, see the *Daily Cardinal*, April 18, 1923.

distance separated the world of the typical honorary Klan fraternity man and that of the typical campus Klansman. It was disdain and disenchantment among the fraternal leaders, as much as anything, that brought to a close to the episode of the honorary Ku Klux Klan. Actual Klansmen were not welcome in either the fraternities or, especially, the honor societies of the fraternal elite. (That is why they were to found a fraternity chapter of their own.) The elite had no wish to share the name Ku Klux Klan with the hoi poloi. When engineering majors and the sons of farmers brought the national Klan to the University of Wisconsin, that name suddenly lost its luster for those who had previously embraced it.

THOUGH the honorary society calling itself the Ku Klux Klan was by the end of 1923 known only to history, recruitment of real cross-burning Klansmen continued apace. In December of 1923, the *Badger American*, a Klan paper published in Milwaukee, praised "our American students at the Wisconsin University" who were finding the Klan's principles attractive, including "White Supremacy, Restricted Foreign Immigration, Law and Order."⁹²

Klan organizers saw great potential for recruitment among University of Wisconsin students. A secret memorandum drawn up in 1924 by the Wisconsin Klan described its organizational goal as to "have enough Klansmen in the various organizations to control the school." The center of campus Klan organizing was to be a new Klan-controlled housing fraternity, Kappa Beta Lambda, whose initials stood for "Klans-men Be Loyal."⁹³ KBL was to be a school within a school, a "meeting and living place for all Klansmen in the University of Wisconsin, where the principle of Klans-manship will be taught and en-

forced which will tend to make leaders in our national organization."⁹⁴ In May, 1924, the Ku Klux Klan submitted a charter to the appropriate university officials, and without delay or controversy Kappa Beta Lambda, the secret Klan fraternity, received the customary official recognition of the University of Wisconsin.⁹⁵

The Klan's efforts were most successful among those students who opted for military training in the university's cadet corps. Relatively few students took reserve officer training courses after they were made voluntary in 1923; yet over a third of all the members of Ku Klux Klan fraternity were cadets. One of the faculty members of the fraternity, a retired Army noncom named William G. Atkins, was a sergeant-major of the corps. All but one of the Ku Klux Klan cadets was also a member of Scabbard and Blade, the national military honor society founded at the University of Wisconsin in 1904. (Sgt. Atkins was likewise a member.)⁹⁶

⁹² Weaver, "Knights of the Ku Klux Klan," 88. See the *Badger* yearbook, 1928, p. 474, for a profile of Kappa Beta Lambda. The University of Wisconsin Archives file on the KBL is in Series 19/2/6-5, box 7. KBL is listed in the eleventh (1927) and thirteenth (1935) editions of *Baird's Manual of College Fraternities*.

⁹³ *Klan Field Bulletin No. 32*, reprinted in Weaver, "Knights of the Ku Klux Klan," 87.

⁹⁴ See KBL file, document entitled "Committee on Student Life and Interests: Telephone Vote, May 19, 1924," in the University of Wisconsin Archives. In the early 1950's Norman F. Weaver, a graduate student researching the spread of the Ku Klux Klan in Wisconsin for his doctoral dissertation, inquired with the Office of Student Affairs about the KBL fraternity. He was told that "no organization by the name of Kappa Beta Lambda was ever established on the campus of the University of Wisconsin, nor was any application ever filed requesting permission for such an organization to form." (See Weaver, "The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan," 88.) At the time Weaver inquired about the Ku Klux Klan and the KBL fraternity, the University's own indexes contained references to both organizations. In one document entitled "Student Organizations and Activities," a file entitled "Ku Klux Klan" is listed. (University of Wisconsin Archives, Student Life—Directories, Series 20/00/1, box 1.) An exhaustive search failed to locate this file.

⁹⁵ Sgt. Atkins appears with Scabbard and Blade in the 1925 *Badger* yearbook, p. 396.

⁹² *Badger American*, December, 1923.

The idea for a military fraternity began with Colonel Charles A. Curtis, who was then commandant of the university's cadet corps. Curtis had distinguished himself in the U.S. Army as an Indian fighter in the Southwest and later published some of his reminiscences of those campaigns in a story entitled "Captured by the Navajos."⁹⁷ By the mid-1920's, the fraternity founded by this old veteran of the wars of manifest destiny expressed much of the same nativist and spread-eagle patriotic spirit that was the Klan's bread and butter:

We decry the necessity for the maintenance of large and costly police forces in our various communities, in spite of the fact that these are within our borders and might be expected to be fully in accord with our ideas and ideals. Nevertheless we find it necessary to protect our civilization against enemies from amongst our own number. How much consideration are we to expect from those who by virtue of different standards of living, and with a different moral and ethical code are to say the least only mildly in sympathy with our point of view. What would be the fate of Germany, Austria, France, England, if these nations were now to accept [pacifist] principles? Can there be any question, with famished Russia at their very doors? Such a step would mean the overthrow of Christian civilization as surely as the sun shines.⁹⁸

FROM the start, Kappa Beta Lambda was an uncharacteristic fraternity. Its small two-flat house, located at

⁹⁷ *The Scabbard and Blade*, official organ of the National Society of the Scabbard and Blade (LaFayette Printing Co., LaFayette, Indiana), Vol. 8, no. 2, January, 1924, p. 19. Curtis was also a founding member of the Free and Accepted Masons of Arizona. See Charles A. Curtis Biography and Certificates in the Wisconsin State Archives, State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

⁹⁸ *The Scabbard and Blade*, Vol. 7, no. 3, March, 1924, pp. 14-15.

302 Huntington Court a block south of the campus, was quite humble compared with the ostentatious mansions of the Latin Quarter.⁹⁹ But more than architecture set the Klan fraternity apart from its peers. Its house rules, for example, suggest not only a desire for fraternal discipline but also a preoccupation with the fraternity's uncertain social status. Compared with the dozen or so other fraternities of this period whose house rules have been preserved, Kappa Beta Lambda's were easily the most restrictive. Like all other fraternities, KBL's rules prohibited alcohol in the house. (This rule was of course routinely broken in this decade of Prohibition, but it was a condition of University accreditation that every fraternity include such a clause in its rules.) Like many other fraternities, KBL had rules against smoking, gambling, noise, and "profane, vulgar, or indecent language." But KBL took its rules more seriously than other fraternities, and established the post of "marshal," a member who was charged with checking any violations of the rules and was given the "power to regulate, impose, and collect all fines" for infractions.

A concern for cultivating genteel manners was also evident in the Kappa Beta Lambda house rules. The fraternity required its members to dress for dinner—even specifying both "coat and white collar," which was stiffer than any of the other fraternities which had dinner dress codes. The KBL marshal was specifically ordered to "keep a check on all table manners." By contrast, the elite Phi Kappa Psi fraternity (one of the fraternities that was privileged to nominate a junior member to the honorary Ku Klux Klan) had no rules about dining, dress, or manners. Beyond the standard rules, Phi Kappa Psi had only one

⁹⁹ KBL's address is listed in the 1925-1926 YMCA campus directory, p.66. Huntington Court ran north from Johnson Street, in the block then bordered by Murray, Lake, and Conklin Place. Today the University Square Four Theaters occupies the site. See map 37 of the Sanborn-Perris map of Madison (New York, 1942).



The Kappa Beta Lambda fraternity house at 302 Huntington Court, from the 1928 Badger yearbook.

extra provision; namely, that “no salesman shall be allowed to exhibit or sell his wares in the house.” In short, it would appear from the limited number of extant house records that the only fraternities that concerned themselves with rules about dinner dress and table manners were those that were new to campus, small in size, lacking in influence, and socially marginal.

Academically, the new Ku Klux Klan fraternity could not hold a candle to its honorary predecessor. In fact, it was a disaster. Kappa Beta Lambda began its life ranked twelfth among the fifty or so fraternities in terms of its collective grade-point. Then it quickly sank to the bottom. By its second year of existence, KBL ranked forty-sixth and was placed on probation by the university. Though the warning was enough to motivate the Klansmen to rescue their fraternity over the course of the next semester, once the probation was lifted the fraternity fell back into mediocrity and was soon on probation again. Not once in its existence did Kappa Beta Lambda ever manage to match the all-fraternity academic average.¹⁰⁰

Little is known of the activities that so distracted the student Klansmen from their

studies. Secrecy was of paramount concern to them. Any KBL member was subject to suspension for “making any disclosures of private fraternity matters,” and to expulsion for making “serious disclosures.”¹⁰¹ Newspaper reports of the era did not distinguish between run-of-the-mill Klansmen and student Klansmen. Some activities, though, by their nature, point to the participation of the student Klansmen, such as their attempt in 1926 to reserve the U.W. Fieldhouse for a campus Klan rally, which the Board of Regents denied.¹⁰²

Kappa Beta Lambda shared the fortunes of the organization from which it grew. Like the Wisconsin Klan, which experienced a steady decline in membership after 1924 due to scandal and internal squabbling, the KBL also declined from its first year on. By the time of the campus rush in the fall of 1926, it attracted only four pledges. The following semester it

¹⁰⁰ See the various letters of warning from the Dean's office in the KBL file, University of Wisconsin Archives.

¹⁰¹ See Kappa Beta Lambda charter, p. 2, in the KBL file, *ibid.*

¹⁰² *Capital Times*, August 6, 1924.



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The lakefront fraternity houses of Alpha Tau Omega (left) and Psi Upsilon, about 1920.

changed its name to Delta Sigma Tau, a move that likely signified its disaffiliation with the Wisconsin Ku Klux Klan, which, by 1928, had fallen to less than a thousand members across the entire state.¹⁰³

THE demise of Kappa Beta Lambda in 1926 signified the end of an era in campus life at the University of Wisconsin. The same conditions of rapid social, cultural, and economic change in America that had bred an atmosphere of fear, distrust, and xenophobia—conditions that had briefly turned Madison into “one of the liveliest Klan towns in the state”—had also affected the student population. The honorary Ku Klux Klan did not wear hoods or burn crosses. But it was founded in the national context of the Red Scares, the campaigns for the “Ameri-

canization” of immigrants, the postwar recession, fears about the northward migration of African-Americans, fears about bolsheviks and anarchists. On the university campus, increasing numbers of Jews and non-white students, mistrust of the Italian community, militant Christianity, and a misguided hyperpatriotism coalesced with the snobbery and arrogance of some fraternity men, producing a short-lived organization which shared many of the racist and nativist attitudes of the other, more dangerous Ku Klux Klan.

Looking back on the Klan episode from the vantage of seventy years, it is difficult to believe that neither the faculty and administration of the university nor the overwhelming majority of students raised any significant protest against the honorary Klan’s rise to power and influence. But in truth, the young men of the honorary Klan who borrowed their sobriquet and some of their ideas from D. W. Griffith’s movie or Thomas Dixon’s novel were probably representative of white, protestant Madisonians and of midwesterners generally. What they did, they did openly and unashamedly; and apparently few thought the worse of them for it. It was this prevail-

¹⁰³ Just like the honorary Ku Klux Klan, the Kappa Beta Lambda fraternity had one affiliate at the University of Illinois, though its name is unknown. Delta Sigma Tau was formed when both the Wisconsin KBL and the Illinois local merged. See Minutes of the Student Life and Interests Committee, April 9, 1927.

ing atmosphere of casual bigotry, this culture of intolerance, that fostered the rise of two university social organizations tied to the Ku Klux Klan. The first called itself the Ku Klux Klan out of sympathy for the values of patriotism, protestantism, and white racial superiority evoked by the name; but it was not in fact tied to the national "Invisible Empire."

The second campus organization, Kappa Beta Lambda, was in fact an affiliate of the Invisible Empire. Throughout its short, squalid existence, its members remained true to the Klan's code of secretiveness, disguising their aims and ideals behind a fraternal front. Precisely because they concealed their true identity, the Klansmen of KBL reveal less about the campus culture of intolerance than did those more elite fraternity men who openly took the name but not the membership card of the Ku Klux Klan.

Though relatively few Wisconsin students actually joined the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920's, the intolerant ideals that

the Klan espoused were part and parcel of student life. Ignorance, intolerance, and above all insensitivity existed in Madison, just as they did in small towns and large cities elsewhere in the state. By taking the name they did, the organizers of the honorary Ku Klux Klan did nothing that was considered radical for their day, and they neither provoked controversy nor risked ostracism for doing so. By taking that name, members of the honorary Klan reaffirmed their nationalism and their whiteness, and they gained the respect of their peers—hence the perception of that "calm, confident air that membership in the Ku Klux Klan imparts."¹⁰⁴ For a few years, then, the name Ku Klux Klan was a token of status on the University of Wisconsin campus. And status was, after all, the honorary campus Klan's reason for existence.

¹⁰⁴ *The Scorpion*, April 17, 1923 (Vol. 5), p. 3, in Series 20/1/2/00-6, University of Wisconsin Archives.



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The Hobo Parade, University of Wisconsin Homecoming, November, 1920.