



## KNIGHTS OF THE KU KLUX KLAN

### FROM *Klansman's Manual* (1924)

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The 1920s were a decade of intense cultural conflict. Many Americans, particularly young city dwellers, welcomed mass culture and pursued pleasure through leisure and consumption. Embracing science and secularism, they adopted new gender roles and sexual mores, and increasingly they accepted ethnic and racial mixing. This culture of modernity, however, triggered an intense backlash from millions of other Americans who were appalled by what they saw as the abandonment of "traditional" values. Many of these Americans campaigned for immigration restrictions, turned to fundamentalist Christianity, and sought to enforce a strict Protestant moral code that included the prohibition of alcohol.

No organization more fully embodied these deeply conservative cultural impulses than the reborn Ku Klux Klan. The original Klan had emerged in the South immediately after the Civil War to terrorize African Americans and shore up white supremacy. The new Klan, founded in 1915, had a broader mandate and a larger membership. It targeted not only African Americans but also Jews, Catholics, immigrants, "uppity" women, and radicals. Using modern marketing techniques, the Klan attracted an estimated three to five million members in the early 1920s and boasted strongholds not only in the former Confederacy but also in northern states ranging from Indiana to Oregon. It elected governors, senators, and thousands of local officials even as it enforced its agenda with arson, floggings, acid mutilations, and murder. The Klan was finally undone by a series of scandals in the late 1920s and was defunct by 1944. (A third incarnation of the Ku Klux Klan arose in the postwar years to oppose the civil rights movement; it still exists today, though its membership is miniscule.) As you read this excerpt from the *Klansman's Manual*, think about how the organization portrays itself and who might have been attracted to its message.

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Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, *Klansman's Manual* (n.p., 1924), pp. 9–19.

Six outstanding features are particularized in describing the nature of this Order. Klansmen will do well to fix them in mind so that they will know the kind of an order they have joined.

1. **Patriotic.** One of the paramount purposes of this Order is to "Exemplify a pure patriotism toward our country. . . ." And when [the Klansman] knelt at the

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- "sacred Altar of the Klan," he was solemnly and symbolically dedicated "to the holy service of our country. . . ."
2. *Military*. This characteristic feature applies to its form of organization and its method of operations. It is so organized on a military plant that the whole power of the whole Order, or of any part of it, may be used in quick, united action for the execution of the purposes of the Order. . . .
  3. *Benevolent*. This means that the movement is also committed to a program of sacrificial service for the benefit of others. The Klan motto (Not for self but for others) must be translated into real, active unselfish helpfulness. . . .
  4. *Ritualistic*. In common with other Orders, the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan confers ritualistic degrees and obligations, and commits its grips, signs, words, and other secret work to those persons who so meet its requirements as to find membership in the Order. The ritualistic devices become the ceremonial ties that bind Klansmen to one another.
  5. *Social*. The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan endeavors to unite in companionable relationship and congenial association those men who possess the essential qualifications for membership. It is so designed that kinship of race, belief, spirit, character, and purpose, will engender a real, vital, and enduring fellowship among Klansmen.
  6. *Fraternal*. The Klansmen have committed themselves to the practice of "Klan-nishness toward fellow-klansmen." . . .

## II. OBJECTS AND PURPOSES . . .

### I. Mobilization:

1. *This is its primary purpose*: "To unite white male persons, native born, Gentile citizens of the United States of America, who owe no allegiance of any nature or degree to any foreign government, nation, institution, sect, ruler, person, or people; whose morals are good; whose reputations and vocations are respectable; whose habits are exemplary; who are of sound minds and eighteen years or more of age, under a common oath into a brotherhood of strict regulations." . . .

### IV. Beneficent:

This purpose is expressed in the words "To exemplify a practical benevolence;" and "To relieve the injured and oppressed; to succor the suffering and unfortunate, especially widows and orphans."

The supreme Pattern for all true Klansmen is their Criterion of Character, Jesus Christ, "who went about doing good." The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in making effective its beneficent purpose, will emphasize the need of helpful service to the needy, the weak, the afflicted and the oppressed. The movement accepts the full Christian program of unselfish helpfulness, and will seek to carry it on in the manner commanded by the one Master of Men, Christ Jesus.

V. Protective:

1. *The Home.* "To shield the sanctity of the home." The American home is fundamental to all that is best in life, in society, in church, and in the nation. . . .
2. *Womanhood.* The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan declares that it is committed to "the sacred duty of protecting womanhood;" and announces that one of its purposes is "to shield. . . . the chastity of womanhood."

The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan demands reverence for American womanhood; and insists that her person shall be respected as sacred, that her chastity be kept inviolate, and that she not be deprived of her right to the glory of an unstained body. . . .

The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan is solemnly committed to the defense and perpetuation of every American interest and institution, to the support of the American Government, to the preservation of all the rights, liberties, and privileges of the American people. . . .

VI. Racial: "To maintain forever white supremacy." Or as the Declaration proclaims it, "To maintain forever the God-given supremacy of the white race. . . ."

IX. Co-operative: . . .

The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan is committed to the program of law-observance and law enforcement, and is pledged to "help, aid and assist the duly constituted officers of the Law in the proper performance of their legal duties."

The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan is sworn to the chivalric task of suppressing all menaces to the integrity of America and the rights, liberties, and privileges of the American people.

## Study Questions

1. The post-Civil War Ku Klux Klan allowed any white man to join. Who was allowed to join the Klan of the 1920s?
2. How does the *Klansman's Manual* describe the goals and activities of the organization? How does it tie these goals and activities to religious belief and practice?
3. What does the manual say about women? How does it describe the Klan's duty to "womanhood"? What might this mean in practice?
4. Who do you think might have been attracted to the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s? Why do you think it had such a broad membership outside of the South?