



IN HISTORY: IMMIGRATION AND ETHNIC HERITAGE

Time Line

Impact of the Ku Klux Klan on Indiana

Two themes continued to dominate early to mid-twentieth century patterns of immigration in Indiana: the active recruitment of new workers from Europe and increasingly from Central and South America and Asia, and the ambivalence or hostility expressed toward these same groups by Anglo Americans and others who feared the loss of jobs and their own cultural identities. In the 1920s, despite the growing ethnic diversity of Indiana, or perhaps because of this diversity, the Ku Klux Klan gained a stronghold in Indiana's political and social climate. During the spring of 1923 about 150 hooded horsemen rode down Kirkwood Avenue and around the Bloomington courthouse. In the summer of 1923 the Indiana Klan made an unsuccessful attempt to buy the financially troubled Valparaiso University, where it hoped to spread its concept of traditional values. In 1924 "Klan Day" was celebrated at the Indiana State Fair. Members marched onto the fair's mid-field to lead the "Pledge of Allegiance" and sing a Christian hymn.

Some white Protestants of Indiana, believing in the Klan's vision of 100 percent Americanism, embraced the group. It was a forceful, fearful response to immigration from other countries and other regions of the United States. Much of the popularity of the Klan among Anglo Americans

grew from its stated goals of recapturing a sense of Christian community morals and ethics and a promise to ensure jobs for "Americans first." For many Hoosiers and new immigrants who were neither Caucasian nor Protestant, the Klan became a tangible symbol of racial hatred and terror.

By 1924 the Klan was a powerful force in Indiana. That year, Ed Jackson, the Klan-backed candidate, won the race for governor. The state legislature also had a Klan majority. But there was soon a shift in power. D. C. Stephenson, the powerful Grand Dragon of the Indiana Klan, helped bring about the downfall of his organization in 1925 when he kidnapped, beat, and raped Madge Oberholtzer, an Indianapolis woman who later committed suicide. Stephenson was imprisoned for thirty years and as a direct result, the Klan's influence waned.

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