

The repatriation program is regarded locally as a piece of consummate statecraft. The average per family cost of executing it is \$71.14, including food and transportation. It cost Los Angeles County \$77,249.29 to repatriate one shipment of 6,024. It would have cost \$424,933.70 to provide this number with such charitable assistance as they would have been entitled to had they remained—a saving of \$347,684.41.

One wonders what has happened to all the Americanization programs of yesterday. The Chamber of Commerce has been forced to issue a statement assuring the Mexican authorities that the community is in no sense unfriendly to Mexican labor and that repatriation is a policy designed solely for the relief of the destitute—even, presumably, in cases where invalids are removed from the County Hospital in Los Angeles and carted across the line. But those who once agitated for Mexican exclusion are no longer regarded as the puppets of union labor. . . .

The Los Angeles industrialists confidently predict that the Mexican can be lured back, "whenever we need him." But I am not so sure of this. He may be placed on a quota basis in the meantime, or possibly he will no longer look north to Los Angeles as the goal of his dreams. At present he is probably delighted to abandon an empty paradise.

Collin Gordon, ed. Major Problems in American History, 1920-1945. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. © 1999)

 ESSAYS

In the first essay, Nancy MacLean argues that the Second Ku Klux Klan was born of economic insecurities; that racist and anti-Semitic words and actions, in other words, often reflected the displacement of class and regional anxieties. In the second essay, David Montejano documents the ways in which Southwestern politicians and agricultural interests exploited immigration law and labor controls to ensure a dependable, and politically weak, supply of migrant labor.



The Class Anxieties of the Ku Klux Klan

NANCY MACLEAN

"For the first time in the history of our country," E. D. Rivers, a Great Titan of the Klan, state senator, and now candidate for governor, warned in 1930, "we are faced with being ruled by an oligarchy [of] centralized wealth." Rivers joined other Klansmen as spokespeople in a campaign being waged in Clarke County against "the invasion of these minions of monopoly—the alien chain stores." Employing a traditional idiom of popular protest, Rivers identified chain stores with "the taking away of the freedom of government from the masses." "The Little Group of Kings in Wall Street," one campaign advertisement admonished, is "very deliberately wiping out your independence." Another prominent Klan speaker expressed concern for the "young men of the country who will become 'automatons'" with no

From *Behind the Mask of Chivalry* by Nancy MacLean. Copyright © 1994 by Nancy MacLean. Used by permission of Oxford University Press, Inc.

choice but to work for such monopolies. "Are your Sons and Daughters for sale?" the Citizens' Protective League demanded of local parents. "Do you realize you are gradually selling them into slavery?" The League implored residents not to let "Wall Street [continue] . . . destroying the community life of America." It was vital, an Athens Klan lecturer had earlier warned, to "break up [the] MONOPOLY that is now RUIN[ING] and CRUSHING DOWN ON THE ENTIRE POPULATION OF the world."

In the fight against chain stores, radical rhetoric roused popular support for restorationist ends. The critique of economic concentration aimed, not to promote radical democratic change, but to avert it. The Speaker of the Georgia House, Richard B. Russell, Jr., warned that "if the monopolistic tendency is allowed to continue unchecked, it will result in socialism or communism." The Citizens' Protective League agreed. If the mergers weren't stopped, "we are going to face exactly the situation that has been gone through with Russia." River's claim that this was the "first time" that concentrated capital endangered the welfare of the people made a mockery of the very populism it evoked. When he said the trusts aimed to take away popular sovereignty, he clearly had in mind the middling groups the Klan represented, since blacks and many poor whites had lost long ago what little sovereignty they had. Most telling, perhaps, of the Klan's reactionary motives in the anti-chain store campaign were its associations. Rivers attacked "atheism, communism, chain stores and companionate marriage" as though they were of a piece.

Local Klan lecturers on "Americanism," for their part, blamed Jews and Catholics for the chain-store peril. One speaker dared his listeners to "find out who owns stock" in companies like the "A & P Grocery stores." Jews and Catholics, it seems, hid behind the initials. He further complained that "department stores, all of which are principally owned by Jews or foreigners," were pushing out "American" businesses. He raved against the inroads made into Georgia by Sears & Roebuck, which he insisted was owned by "JEWS, JEWS, JEWS." Its entrenchment would "spell ruination" for the state's independent merchants. He told listeners to find out whether their druggists, undertakers, grocers, butchers, and clothing and shoe merchants were "JEWS OR CATHOLICS," and if so, to boycott them and organize others to do the same. National Klan leaders concurred. If present trends continued, Imperial Wizard Simmons warned, immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe and their children would soon crowd native-born whites out of "the business class." Such charges struck a chord with local members, several of whom operated in competition with Jews and immigrants from Italy and Greece. The Bernstein Brothers, for example, prospered in undertaking and furniture sales, where Klansmen *Chester Morton* and *Bela Dunaway* and his sons struggled to acquire a footing; the *Michael Brothers* owned the local department store, and *Joseph Costa* and family ran a flourishing ice cream and soda business.

The campaign against chain stores illustrates how impossible it is to understand the Klan if one conceives of it as a simple conservative force. The Klan was indeed conservative, fiercely so, as the anti-Semitism and nativism of the chain-store struggle make clear. Yet the order's politics were different from those of the usual standard-bearers of conservatism, "the better people" in Clarke County as elsewhere. The Klan put forward a populist critique of American society suited to the middling men who made up the core of its following. They resented, sometimes

vociferously, "the silk hat crowd" and the social transformation their reign had wrought. Yet the Klan's was no ordinary populism. While it gave voice to middle-class fears of economic concentration and political disempowerment, it also put up ferocious opposition to social reconstruction from the left.

In this dualism lay the appeal of the Klan's class politics to the lower-middle-class men who flocked to the order in such numbers. It articulated the animosity petit-bourgeois whites felt toward *both* capital and labor—and it spoke in idioms at the core of American culture. From classical liberalism, the Klan drew its anti-statist economics. From republicanism, the Klan drew many of its assumptions about the good society and the prerequisites of citizenship. From evangelical Protestantism, it drew a structure of feeling that expressed its members' feelings of being embattled from above and below and that sanctified aggressive self-defense. The composite is best described as reactionary populism.

Klan leaders prided themselves on their fidelity to the vision of the founding fathers. On one hand, they exalted the old liberal tradition of possessive individualism. That property was the basis of freedom was the grounding assumption of the Klan's political theory. In this line of reasoning, as C. B. MacPherson observed, the individual could only be "free inasmuch as he was proprietor of his person and capacities." Politics thus became "a calculated device for the protection of this property and for the maintenance of an orderly relation of exchange." Klan propaganda often manifested such assumptions. "The function of the government," wrote a Klan-recommended writer, "is to protect individuals in their right of person and right of property." The great merit of the United States Constitution was that it had "established individual property rights more securely" than any other form of government, guarding against the twin dangers of "feudalism" and "all forms of socialism or communism." . . .

Klansmen committed themselves to what they understood as the social vision of Thomas Jefferson: a republic of small proprietors. According to Simmons, the "real America has always been a country America." "The farmer is the wealth producer of the nation," concurred the *Imperial Night Hawk*, "the backbone of all industry." Simmons saw urgent danger in contemporary population trends. In 1920, for the first time, most Americans lived in urban areas, and city residents cast the majority of votes. "Ignore the problem of the white small farming class yet a little longer," Simmons warned, "and we shall be driven into farming on a great scale, with armies of stolid peasants doing the work." Simmons found the prospect of the day "when 'he countryside, like the city, shall have lost its free independent population" horribly to contemplate.

Although Klansmen shared Jefferson's adulation of independent farmers, they modified his vision to suit a modern class structure. They extended their loyalties to "the middle class" as a whole, among whom Klansmen also included small businessmen, white-collar workers, independent professionals, and skilled craftsmen. Common to both the yeoman ideal and its broad petit-bourgeois variant was the belief that the future of the republic depended on those with a stake in society. Simmons asserted that the success of early American democracy was attributable to the homogenous interests of "the small property-holders and skilled workers" who made up the citizenry. "The importance of the middle class in history," declared

Charles Gould, “cannot be overestimated.” As a mediating force between ruling and exploited classes, the middle class had provided stability to hierarchical social orders, from the ancient slave states forward. When the middle class was “depressed” or “destroyed,” the ruin of whole societies ensued. Another Klan author cited “the failure of the middle class” as the preeminent reason for the problems of all nations—most immediately, his own.

Now, it seemed, sinister forces imperiled the fragile balance a republic depended on. Far more than their contemporaries, Klan representatives gloomily foresaw the end of the republic. The rhetoric of republican alarm and despair—“luxury,” “corruption,” and “decay”—and morbid analogies between the contemporary United States and the declines of ancient Greece, Rome, and Old World Europe regularly peppered Klan propaganda. Simmons predicted “a steady drift toward monarchy,” a “natural outgrowth” for “a decadent republic” that had spawned “a great class of the rich on the one hand and a great class of the poor on the other.” Both of these classes tended “toward corruption”; neither could be trusted to serve the commonweal. “As a people and as a nation,” he warned, “we are face to face with dissolution.” “Democracy [was] threatened from every side” in the contemporary United States, “by greedy and designing powers above, as by a great mass of incompetent, unprincipled and undemocratic voters from below.” “Both plutocracy and Bolshevism,” announced Simmons, “are new forms of tyranny” the Klan would combat. The Klan, said Simmons’ successor, Hiram Evans, was a tool for “the common people . . . to resume control of their country,” implying they had already lost it.

The foremost threat to the republic, in the Klan’s view, came from below. The order’s press and many of its leaders, North and South, saw the “labor question” as *the* critical one in their society in the early 1920s. They were terrified about how it would be answered. According to an Arkansas Klan leader, the “grave industrial unrest” of the era had driven men into the Klan. “Look at the list of our strikes,” explained Klan propagandist and preacher Charles Jefferson. “In no other country is the conflict between labor and capital so implacable and so bitter.” “Everybody who reads the newspapers or talks with his neighbors,” agreed Imperial Wizard Simmons, “knows that the conflict between labor and capital is drifting us into another civil war. . . . And how much more deadly is disunity between classes than between sections.” Creating “a closer relationship between capital and labor” was one of the Klan’s oft-stated goals.

So, too, was fighting the left. Indeed, nothing else elicited from Klan members quite the same distemper. Socialism was “without a possible exception . . . the most destructive philosophy preached by thinking men.” “The ‘Red’ is the most dastardly creature infesting the earth,” intoned the *Searchlight* in 1923, “the worst menace to civilization.” The activities of the Industrial Workers of the World and the Communist Party proved that “America Needs the Klan.” In later years, Klan leaders would boast that it was their organization that had first “discovered Communism in the United States and which first assailed it.” . . .

Such vehement anti-communism seems odd in light of the weakness of the American left relative to its European counterparts, particularly after the Red Scare, and its virtual absence in the Southeast. But the paradox is more apparent than real. Communism condensed into a single entity all the leveling influences Klansmen perceived in the contemporary world—from economic concentration to the organi-

zation of African Americans, immigrants, women, and youth. Hence the depiction of it as "the extreme of Democracy." Anti-communism became a sign expressing Klansmen's belief that all these hierarchies were linked: tampering with one would unloose all the others. In order to rouse mass popular opposition to changes in any one area, Klan leaders situated them in a worldwide conspiracy. The threat of "anarchy" from Bolshevism was thus discovered "even in villages and hamlets where it would be least expected."

Not surprisingly, then, combatting communism—in all its faces—appeared an urgent task to Klansmen, particularly in the early 1920s, but even thereafter. "Klan Declares War on Radical Forces in U. S.," one headline thus proclaimed, while the Klan press published a whole series on the theme "Bolshevism—Menace to America." After the first World War, socialism ceased to be only "a remote threat" in the United States; "Never was the Red Peril so real." "Labor strikes take on the nature of social revolutions," complained Simmons. "The advocacy of Bolshevism arouses mighty crowds to wild enthusiasm." If such subversion continued, he predicted, native-born Americans would "probably divide and civil war will result." . . .

In interpreting the threat from below, Klansmen reminded their compatriots of Jefferson's fear of the unskilled wage-earners. "Jefferson was right," affirmed Simmons. "Unless" the cities were "reformed they will destroy both democracy and civilization." Simmons believed that "real Americans" simply could not survive factory discipline or urban life; farm life was an essential component of American manhood. "Factory work," he said, calling on Social Darwinism to brand the unskilled as biologically inferior, "progressively selects those who are more and more unfit to be Americans." Like the "idle rich," they were "physical weaklings," "fit only to be the subject of a more or less absolute monarch." Indeed, in the view of the Imperial Commander of the Women's Klan, workers were "those least fitted by blood and training to rule."

Such open hostility toward workers was rare, however; more commonly it was packaged in racism. Klansmen blamed virtually all labor trouble on immigrants and "foreign agitators"—those its publications depicted as "the riff-raff and outcasts of Europe." Simmons maintained that already, in the cities of the North and East, ethnic lines had become class lines. The urban working class was split between skilled tradesmen from Britain, Germany and Scandinavia, whom he respected as the modern heirs of artisans, and unskilled workers from Southern and Eastern Europe, whom he detested. The new immigrants lacked the capacity to appreciate republican institutions. "Rebellion against tyrants to them," said Simmons, "means acceptance of Anarchism or Bolshevism, or at least German state Socialism." "Just as long as there is a tendency of foreign domination in any industrial section of this country," concluded Leroy Curry, "there will be war—eternal warfare." . . .

Yet, as their fears of changes in the federal government suggested, the threats Klansmen discerned came from above as well as below. "Increasing economic inequalities," Evans warned, "*threaten the very stability of society.*" The Klan's involvement in the Athens anti-chain store campaign drew on a critique of economic concentration the national organization had developed over the decade. Just as Rivers charged chain stores with failure to contribute to the churches like local businesses did, so another Klan lecturer told his audience that "THE WALL ST[.] CRACKER TRUST . . . [was] encroach[ing] on your city without paying TAXES."

The allegation that trusts lacked civic commitment flowed from a more general condemnation of "materialism" or "Mammon" worship in American culture, which the Klan adapted from nineteenth-century popular protest movements. Klansmen complained that contemporary society, as Imperial Wizard Simmons put it, valued "money above manhood." This "love of money," asserted E. F. Stanton, was "the root of all evil." "Who loves Mammon, hates God." "In the strenuous rush of big business," Klan leader Edward Young Clarke mourned, "we have forgotten the spirit from which came . . . this great nation."

The order held the unbridled quest for wealth responsible for the decay of communal ethos. Klan propagandist Leroy Curry thus accused "materialism" of "poisoning the minds and shriveling the hearts" of America's young men, who looked out only for themselves now with no thought for "the advancement of the common weal." Such criticisms suggest Klansmen's nostalgia for the nineteenth-century petty-producer ideal, in which communal obligations and a sense of fair practice tempered the voracious self-seeking that private enterprise might otherwise promote. Looking back to the turn of the century from the 1930s, the wife of a local Klansmen gave voice to that yearning. "Everybody used to be neighborly," she reminisced, "helping them that couldn't help themselves. Now unless you are organized or belong to some club, nobody pays any attention to whether you're starving, half-clothed, or sick." "Times sure have changed something terrible," she concluded. In short, in the scramble for progress, society had lost its humane features.

Klansmen sought to compensate for that loss by practicing what they called "vocational Klannishness." It entailed "trading, dealing with and patronizing Klansmen in preference to all others," even if that meant sacrifice of time, money, or former friendships. At least ninety-one local Klansmen had co-workers in the order, a number in businesses owned or supervised by Klansmen. Some perhaps hoped that membership would secure their employment or promotion. Combining commitment to the order with a bid for the trade of members, many Klan employers instituted—and advertised—"100% American" employment policies: they would only hire Klan members. Others made their sympathies clear with firm names such as Kwik Kar Wash, Kountry Kitchen, or Kars, Kars, Kars. Athens Klansmen, for their part, contracted work out to chapter members, backed fellow Klansmen for appointive jobs, employed Klan members, and urged residents to boycott "alien" capital.

The Klan also gave voice to apprehension that middling folks would lose power in the emerging political order. On the local level, Klansmen often pitted themselves against the elite sponsors of municipal "reform." Klansmen saw in so-called Progressive proposals for appointed city managers and commission governments attempts to constrict popular control over the state so that it could better serve business interests. In Georgia, Klansmen in several cities butted heads with wealthy elites over such "reform" proposals. The Atlanta-based *Searchlight* denounced those in its city as "imperialistic" maneuvers for the benefit of "the big interests through their well-organized commercial clubs and autocratic Chamber of Commerce." To thwart the Columbus plan, Klansmen beat up the new city manager and bombed the mayor's home. . . .

A similar spirit of reactionary populist dissent infused the Klan's hostility to the League of Nations and the World Court. In Athens, as elsewhere in the United States, Klan chapters fought against these initiatives. Such efforts, in the view of

the *Kourier*, aimed at establishing a "Super State," a "gigantic trust" that would "rule the world . . . in the interest of a few." As the self-appointed representatives of small, local business, Klansmen perceived that they would lose out if large capital in the United States cooperated with its counterparts in Europe and Japan for a less contested division of the world's spoils. Klansmen felt keenly their "inability to compete . . . with great corporations . . . who do not hold their allegiance to one flag and government." They believed the World Court and like efforts at international cooperation were plots by "the international bankers."

As had the Populists, Klansmen thus charged finance capital and its political allies with responsibility for public policies inimical to the interests of petit-bourgeois Americans. Hence a Grand Klokard (lecturer) wrote to Tom Watson in 1922 to hone his own arguments about how "the Wall St. Bankers" and Federal Reserve policy had "brought hard times upon us." Watson's protégé, Klansman and state secretary of agriculture J. J. Brown, blamed the agricultural disaster in 1920 on the Federal Reserve's refusal to ease credit for farmers. Other Klan politicians earned accolades from their fellows for continuing Watson's attacks on President Harding and his alleged Wall Street paymasters for having produced the "wrecked farmers, banks, [and] small merchants of the South and West." More generally, the Klan accused "big financiers" of "robbing the people." The damage caused by the boll weevil was said to pale compared to that inflicted by "gamblers and speculators in manipulating the market."

Klansmen inherited hatred of Wall Street from nineteenth-century petit-bourgeois radicals who located the sources of inequality not in the economic system itself, but in relations of exchange and unjust laws. The analysis they held in common maintained, as Watson put it in 1921, that "the money question . . . is the greatest of all economic questions." "In all ages," *The Searchlight's* editor explained, "the financiers have been able to completely rule and ruin the nations." The source of the current troubles in the economy was that the United States had been "turned . . . over to the great financiers and the transportation companies." "And when the government loses control of those two things," the editor explained, "the citizens have but little to hope for."

Like the resentments against Democratic Party élites, the critique of finance capital had deep roots in the South. Farmers ensnared by crop liens, mortgages, and monopoly control of the marketing and transportation of their crops had good cause to hate financiers and trusts. The economic crisis of the 1920s helped revive this antipathy as the banks' tight-fisted credit policies exacerbated the plight of hard-pressed residents. Local Klan leaders gave voice to the resulting popular hostility. Klansman George D. Bennett, for example, campaigned in 1926 on a platform that included "better banking laws." "I feel sure," Bennett intoned, that "the people of Georgia have suffered enough from high finance and rascality in high places."

Klan leaders employed these complaints to their own ends. They made finance capital the scapegoat for a corporate order in which it was inseparable from industrial capital. Klansman E. D. Rivers thus implicitly exonerated industry when he told an Athens audience that unemployment and hard times resulted from mergers of big banking institutions. Over and over again, the Klan counterposed "the genuine Americanism of Henry Ford"—not coincidentally a virulent anti-Semite—to the alleged cupidity of John D. Rockefeller and his fellow "international money sharks."

On the rare occasions when the Klan criticized not just monopolists or financiers but capitalists as a group, the charge was usually that they were insufficiently patriotic and racist. Capital's "love of money," the Klan alleged, had led it to import people of "inferior races" to the United States. A meeting of Grand Dragons denounced opposition to immigration restriction by "the big employers of pauper labor" reliant on this "European 'riff-raff' . . . the very scum of the earth." Employers used this imported "cheap labor," according to the Klan, to lower the living standards of white, Protestant Americans. Klansmen's criticisms of large employers thus centered, not on their exploitation of workers, but their infidelity to their "race" and nation.

The communalist spirit of "vocational Klannishness" was similarly double-edged. While its advocates condemned the dominance of market values, they did so in a calculated effort to drive out Catholic, Jewish, and African-American entrepreneurs whom Klansmen otherwise had to weigh in against in an impersonal marketplace. Klansmen's criticisms of Mammon had the same quality: insubstantial at best, reactionary at worst. Like "selfishness," "materialism" was a moral failing. Combatting it required, not systemic change in the economy, but rather a spiritual awakening.

The "Mexican Problem"

DAVID MONTEJANO

In the midst of the confident and ambitious mood that accompanied the sweeping agricultural transformation of Texas and the greater Southwest lingered a somber realization—a hesitant, reluctant acknowledgment of a significant Mexican presence. The recognition was necessarily ambivalent: the rapid development of the region was dependent on Mexican labor, yet this type of labor brought with it unknown and potentially troublesome social costs. Politicians, educators, and concerned citizens warned that Mexicans were the cause of political corruption and fraud, the destruction of homogeneous rural communities, labor problems, crime, and disease, among other social problems. What was to be done with the Mexican?

There were opposing views on the question. Growers argued that the feared social costs of Mexican immigration could be regulated; small farmers and workers, on the other hand, predicted the "undoing" of America. The end result, after a decade of frequently bitter discussion, was a compromise—Mexicans were to be kept in the fields and out of industry. The proper place for Mexicans in modern Texas was that of farm laborers. . . .

The discussion of the Mexican question was not exactly new. A similar discussion, carried publicly in national magazines and major newspapers, had occurred immediately in the aftermath of annexation. The solution of the period lay in the optimistic faith that the backward Mexican race would disappear before the energetic