

Racist violence

White racism was not just a matter of enforcing separation on black people. It was not even a matter of routinely treating them as inferior. There were racist groups who were quite happy to beat up, terrorise, or even murder black people for any reason or, sometimes, for no reason at all.

Lynch law

A **lynching** is when a mob kills somebody, because the people in the mob believe the person they lynch has committed a crime. In the USA in the early twentieth century it was usually (but not always), a white mob killing a black man. Sometimes the mob hauled their target from jail, sometimes the person had not even been arrested. Lynch mobs almost always beat or tortured their targets, then hanged their bodies from a tree. Many people at the time thought lynching only went on in the South. This was not true. But it was easier to get away with there.

About 75 people battered down the door in the jail to reach the yard. They stripped Thomas Shipp, dragged him out to the jail yard and hung him from a window until he was dead – the 10th person lynched in Indiana this year. They beat Abe Smith unconscious with a sledgehammer, let women trample & scratch him, carried him a block away and hung him to a maple tree in the yard of the courthouse – the 11th person lynched in the state this year. Then they hung Shipp's body by Smith's.

Source D: A Time magazine article, 18 August 1930, about lynchings in Indiana.

Along the way most of his clothes were torn off. When the men dragging Smith stopped briefly, several women rushed forward to stomp on his head and chest and to scream insults.

Source E: From an eyewitness account of the lynching of Shipp and Smith.

Source F: In 1930, Tom Shipp and Abe Smith were arrested on suspicion of murder in Indiana (not a southern state). Before they could be tried, they were taken from jail, beaten, then hanged by a mob of about 1,000 people.



SOURCE 46

Little did I dream that one night I would fall into the hands of such a merciless mob of fanatics, that they would attempt to execute me because of the color of my skin. This whole way of life was — and is — a heritage of black slavery in America.

A huge and angry mob were demanding from the sheriff 'those three niggers'. They had gathered from all over the state of Indiana. Ten to fifteen thousand of them at least, against three. Many in the crowd wore the headdress of the Ku Klux Klan.

[The mob broke down the door of the jail, and beat and then hanged his two friends. Source 47 shows you the scene that greeted Cameron as he was dragged out of the jail for his turn.]

The cruel hands that held me were vicelike. Fists, clubs, bricks and rocks found their marks on my body. The weaker ones had to be content with spitting. Little boys and little girls not yet in their teens, but being taught how to treat black people, somehow managed to work their way in close enough to bite and scratch me on the legs.

And over the thunderous din rose the shout of 'Nigger! Nigger! Nigger!'

[Cameron did not know what saved him. The crowd had the rope round his neck before they suddenly stopped and let him limp back to the door of the jail. He called it 'a miraculous intervention'.]

James Cameron, *A Time of Terror*, 1982.

This is a description of what happened in source 4 on the previous page.

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The Ku Klux Klan

The first Ku Klux Klan was set up by a group of soldiers from the South in 1865, after they lost the Civil War. Its aim was to stop blacks gaining any real freedom. It was suppressed in the 1870s. In 1915, William Simmons re-formed the Ku Klux Klan. It was still a terrorist organisation, but it expanded its targets a little. The Klan wanted America to be a WASP nation (white Anglo-Saxon Protestants). They saw black people, Jewish people, immigrants from non-Anglo Saxon countries, Catholics and people who belonged to left-wing political groups (for example Communists) as 'un-American'. They believed these people should be driven out of the country. The Klan became very powerful, especially in the South. They wore white robes and hoods, to keep their identity secret. In fact, almost everyone knew who was a local Klan member. In some states the police, the law courts and local government were all full of Klan members. It was hard for anyone they persecuted to bring charges against them.

Activities

- 1 Write one or two sentences each to explain what Source D tells you about:
 - a the feelings of the lynch mob
 - b how the reporter felt about the lynching.
- 2 What three inferences can you make about the Ku Klux Klan from their song-book (Source G)?
- 3 List the problems faced by a governor of a Southern state in 1925 who was not a member of the Ku Klux Klan and wanted to stamp it out.



Watch out!

Many people make the mistake of calling the 'Ku Klux Klan' the 'Klu Klux Klan'. This is because the last two words both start with 'KI-'. But the first word does not have an 'I' in it.

Build Better Answers

How far does Source E support the evidence of Source D about what happened to Shipp and Smith? (7 marks)

- **A basic answer (level 1)** will compare the two sources for evidence of support OR the lack of it, giving a generalised answer. For example, *No, because Source E does not mention Shipp at all.*
- ▲ **A good answer (level 2)** will quote examples of support, OR lack of support. For example, *Source D says women trampled him, and Source E says women stomped on his head.*
- ▲ **An excellent answer (level 3)** will explain the ways in which the E both does and does not support Source D, and make a conclusion about how far this is support using phrases such as *very little support* or *strong support*.

Source G: One of many songbooks produced for the Ku Klux Klan. 'Uncle Sam', the symbol of America, is carrying a US flag and leading a group of Klansmen.



What was the Ku Klux Klan?

Origins

The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) was set up in the 1860s by soldiers who had fought in the American Civil War. Its aim was to terrorise black people newly freed from slavery. However, it died out in the years after 1870 when a federal grand jury determined that the Klan was a 'terrorist organization'. It was revived after the release in 1915 of a film, *The Birth of a Nation*, which was set in the South after the Civil War and showed the Klan saving white families from gangs of blacks intent on raping and looting. The film attracted huge audiences and seemed to reinforce the idea of white supremacy. After the First World War, labour tensions rose as veterans tried to re-enter the work force. In reaction to these new groups of immigrants and migrants, the membership of the Klan increased.

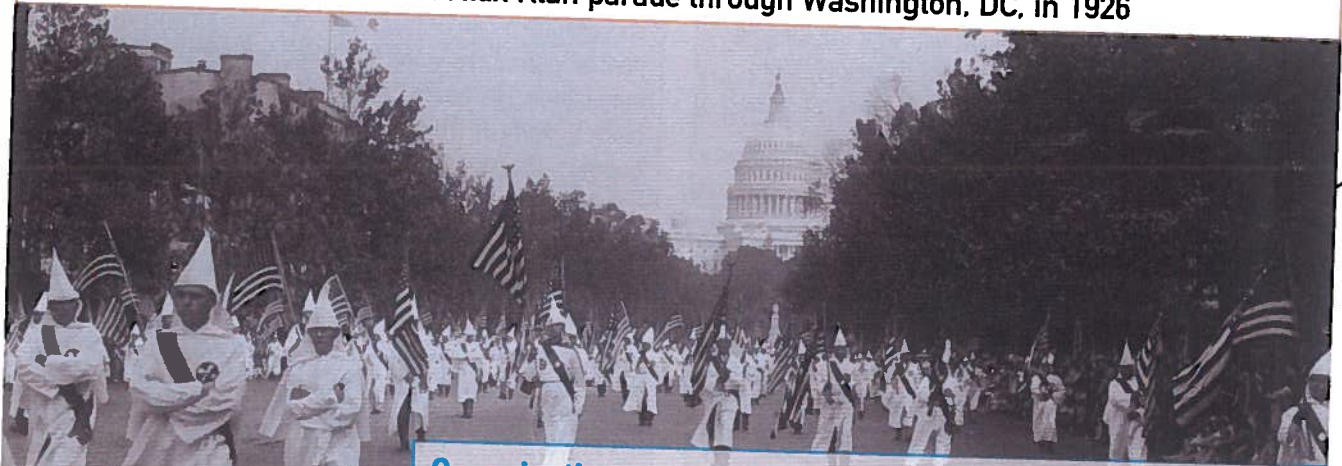
Beliefs

Klansmen were WASPS. They were fighting for 'native, white, Protestant supremacy'. They were anti-communist, anti-black, anti-Jew, anti-Catholic and against all foreigners.

Source A: Hiram Wesley Evans, the leader of the KKK, speaking in 1924

It is the way of the world that each race must fight for its life, must conquer or accept slavery or die. The Klan wants every state to make sex between a white and black person a crime. Protestants must be supreme. Rome shall not rule America. The Roman Catholic Church is un-American and usually anti-American.

Source B: Members of the Ku Klux Klan parade through Washington, DC, in 1926



Organisation

Klansmen dressed in white sheets and wore white hoods. This outfit was designed to conceal the identity of Klan members, who often attacked their victims at night. The white colour symbolised white supremacy. Members carried American flags and lit burning crosses at their night-time meetings. Their leader, a dentist called Hiram Wesley Evans, was known as the Imperial Wizard. Officers of the Klan were known as Klaliffs, Kluds or Klabees.

Membership

In 1920 the Klan had 100,000 members. By 1925 it claimed to have over five million. It attracted members all over the USA, but especially in the South. Most members were white, Protestant and racist. The state governors of Oregon and Oklahoma were members of the Klan. The second Klan arose in response to:

- Industrialisation, which brought more and more workers to cities. The Klan grew rapidly in cities such as Memphis and Atlanta, which expanded quickly after 1910.
- Many of these workers were immigrants from eastern and southern Europe, or black Americans migrating from the southern states to the urban centres of the North.
- Southern whites resented the arming of black soldiers during the First World War.

Activities

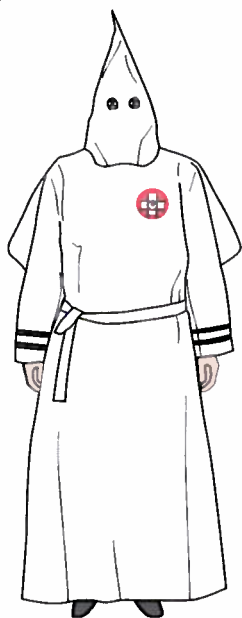
Members of the Klan carried out lynchings of black people and beat up and mutilated anyone they considered to be their enemy. They stripped some of their victims and put tar and feathers on their bodies. For example, in 1921 Chris Lochan, a restaurant owner in Louisiana, was run out of town because he was accused of being a foreigner. His parents were Greek.

Source C: A description of Klan activities in Alabama in 1929

A lad whipped with branches until his back was ribboned flesh . . . a white girl, divorcee, beaten into unconsciousness in her home; a naturalised foreigner flogged until his back was a pulp because he married an American woman; a negro lashed until he sold his land to a white man for a fraction of its value.

Source D: A report of KKK activities by the New York magazine *World* in 1921

5 kidnappings	41 floggings
43 orders to negroes to leave town	1 branding with acid
27 tar-and-featherings	1 mutilation
	4 murders



Decline

The Klan declined after 1925 when one of its leaders, Grand Wizard David Stephenson, was convicted of a sexually motivated murder. When the Governor of Indiana refused to pardon him, Stevenson produced evidence of illegal Klan activities. This event discredited the Klan and led to a decline in membership.

Source B ▾ KKK secret codes. Why did they need, or want, a secret language?

Klonversations Kode-book

WORD

Ayak

Akia

Kigy

Sanbog

MEANING

Are you a Klansman?

A Klansman I am.

Klansmen I greet you.

Strangers are near, be on guard.

4 SOURCE INVESTIGATION

What were the aims and beliefs of the Ku Klux Klan?

SOURCE 3 From the ten questions that were put to all would-be Klansmen before they were allowed to join

- “ 2 *Are you a native-born, Gentile, American citizen?*
3 *Are you absolutely opposed to . . . any cause, government, people, sect or ruler that is foreign to the USA?*
4 *Do you believe in the tenets of the Christian religion?*
5 *Do you esteem the USA and its institutions above any other government . . . in the whole world?*
8 *Do you believe in and will faithfully strive for the eternal maintenance of white supremacy? ”*

SOURCE 4 In 1926, in a Kansas newspaper, the Klan described who they were fighting against

“ . . . every criminal, every gambler, every thug, every libertine, every girl-ruiner, every home-wrecker, every wife-beater, every dope-peddler, every moonshiner, every crooked politician, every pagan papist priest . . . every Roman controlled newspaper, every hyphenated American, every lawless alien . . . ”

SOURCE 5 R. Coughlan, 'Konclave in Kokomo', in *The Aspirin Age 1919-49*

“ *It may be asked why, then, did the town take so enthusiastically to the Klan? . . . Many old stock Americans believed they were in danger of being overrun. The 'foreigners were ruining the country'; and so anything 'foreign' was 'un-American' and a menace. Another important idea in American history was anti-Catholicism because many of the founding fathers had come to America to escape Catholic persecutions in Europe . . .*

[Later, Coughlan described a Klan parade]

The road was a creeping mass of cars. They were draped with flags and some carried home-made signs with Klan Slogans as 'America for the Americans' or 'the Pope will sit in the White House when Hell freezes over' . . . That night there was a parade down Main Street in Kokomo. There were thirty bands. They rolled the slow, heavy tempo of the march to a low meadow where the Klan had put up a twenty-five-foot 'fiery cross'. Many of the marchers carried flaming torches. Flag bearers usually carried two Klan flags flanking an American flag, and the word would ripple down the rows of spectators lining the kerbs, 'Here comes the flag!' and 'Hats off for the flag!' ”

SOURCE 6 Klan poem of the 1920s

“ *I would rather be a Klansman in a robe of snowy white,
Than to be a Catholic Priest in a robe as black as night,
For a Klansman is an American and America is his home,
But the Priest owes his allegiance to a Dago Pope in Rome. ”*

SOURCE 7 William J. Simmons, who helped to make the Klan popular again in 1915

“ *America is a garbage can! . . . When the hordes of aliens walk to the ballot box and their votes outnumber yours, then that alien horde has got you by the throat. ”*

Using Sources 3-7, work out:

what the Klan believed in (and who they were against)

why so many people supported them in the early 1920s.

Why do you think the Klan is so closely associated with patriotism and the American flag (Sources 3 and 5)?

What sort of people might have joined the Klan?