

Freemasonry and the Second Ku Klux Klan in California, 1921–1925

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ABSTRACT

There is a profound misunderstanding regarding the relationship between freemasonry and the second Ku Klux Klan that rose to prominence in 1915 and carried on until the late 1920s. Within the long, dark shadow of American ethnic and cultural conflicts, fraternal and patriotic organizations, with their own idealized mythological identities combined with the entrenched and accepted nativist sentiment of that era, became embroiled in an American struggle for identity. America is a nation of joiners and has been proud of this distinction, for a large part of its social infrastructure has been built through the efforts of communal organizations and associations. Furthermore, these volunteer associations have been influenced by freemasonry through a natural cross-pollination of members, which, in turn, has influenced the American character of that auspicious fraternity. This is especially true during the golden age of American fraternalism into the early twentieth century. Consequently, confusion has arisen over the determination of what point certain fraternities' true purposes begin, end, and overlap. Analyzing primary documents and correspondence found in the archives of the Grand Lodge of F & AM of California, this paper will give a first person overview of the problems that arose when the Ku Klux Klan attempted to gain prominence in California freemasonry in the 1920s. Pandering to the societal fears of white Protestants while mimicking the benevolent fraternal societies, the Klan gained sympathy amongst enough California freemasons to cause their Grand Lodge to take controversial action by forbidding its members from being associated with it. The paper will address the ideologies of the Klan and American freemasonry, and how its dual members attempted to reconcile and justify their need for both organizations to compliment one another. Because of their incongruous core philosophies and purpose, the research demonstrates the success

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California masons had in ousting the Klan from freemasonry in California. This success came from the Klan's own insistence that it was a 'fraternal society' while it did little to eschew its subversive activities, or its hateful and notorious past. Therefore, the Klan's subterfuge stood in contrast to every mason's promise to submit to the rule of the law of his country.

Keywords: Patriotic Associations, Secret Societies, freemasonry, Fraternalism, Ku Klux Klan, Romanism

In the United States during the early twentieth century, the fraternal lodge and chapter became a haven from the rapid changes causing dislocation and isolation. To many post-World War I Americans the root of these changes lay in the vast increase and surges in immigration patterns, and as a mirror of the society that populated them, fraternal organizations both reflected and fought against these shifts. Some fraternities provided a haven and support group for recent immigrants, as with the Sons and Daughters of Italy of America. Others were unified by their hatred of the New Immigrant, like the masonic spin-off that became the Templars of Liberty, or those that used quasi-masonic nomenclature and structures such as the Free & Accepted Americans. Against this backdrop, when in 1915, the freemason, preacher, insurance salesman and itinerant fraternal organizer for the Woodmen of the World, William J. Simmons, sought to find a model for his re-vivified Ku Klux Klan in Georgia, he looked specifically to freemasonry, as well as other fraternal organizations, for his Klan's ritual and organization. To his mind, and many others of that era, Simmons was assuring a tradition linking the two bodies. Supporters and detractors claimed a masonic heritage for such Klan notables as the first Imperial Wizard of the Klan, Nathan Bedford Forrest and that it was the arch-mason, Albert Pike, who drew up the original Klan ritual, or *Prescript*.²

Simmons' Klan also pointed to the uneasy co-existence of freemasonry and Catholicism. The issuance of papal bulls and warnings of excommunication against masonry had been well-documented for over two hundred years. Protestant sects, along with free thinkers, exhibited a tendency to dominate organizations which supported ideas that were directly opposed to those espoused by the Catholic Church. American masonry, with its fundamental Protestant structure, was associated with the upsurge in anti-Catholic sentiment which flowered in the post World War I xenophobia that gripped the nation. This fraternity was seen to

2. Jim Tresner, *Albert Pike: The Man Behind the Monument* (New York, NY: M. Evans and Company, Inc: 1995). See also *Syracuse Herald*, vol. 45, No. 13,84620 [September 1921]), 5.

be particularly susceptible to notions that each brother should be a true American knight of Freedom for 'One Hundred Percent Americanism' charging against the 'Romanist' and his militant agents within the Knights of Columbus.³

To many Americans, masons and non-masons alike, the Ku Klux Klan met this goal. Riding the wave of militant super-patriotism in the early 1920s, the Klan deliberately abandoned the self-declared inclusiveness of freemasonry and Odd Fellowship, and openly advocated a cultural war on the foreigner and the Catholic. In this the Klan was not unique; it had allies within the fraternal movement. Issue after issue of radical fraternal-based newspapers, such as *The Searchlight* – published by the Junior United Order of American Mechanics (JUOAM) – and the more general *The Fellowship Forum* warned of a Catholic Romanist/foreigner/mongrel invasion and a resultant victimization of the white race. This, they declared, was most apparent in the attacks launched through the school system, governments and by the Catholic, with their 'militias' the Knights of Columbus and the Jesuits. The only defense, they reasoned, was to be found in the Klan's forthright resistance. One supporting report claimed the Klan was,

not anti-Catholic, but [that] the Catholics are anti-Klan, for they see in the Klan a real Protestant movement sworn to champion and to proclaim those Protestant principals that are the sources and bases of our real American Protestant civilization [...] We are not anti-negro or anti-colored of any kind, but the colored and the mongrel races are anti-Klan because they see the forming of a powerful white man's organization, sworn to preserve the white man's race in all of its prestige and to maintain the purity of white blood without taint or stain of any kind [...] The Ku Klux Klan stands for undivided, unqualified, supreme and exclusive allegiance to the government of the United States [...]⁴

This article seeks to examine the interaction between freemasonry and the Ku Klux Klan in California during the 1920s. It is specifically informed by correspondence from the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of California from 1921–1924, along with further references of Klan activity within the 1925 Annual Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of F & AM of California. These papers detail an ongoing attempt by the Klan to establish itself as not only the premier fraternal organization for 'one hundred percent Americans.' It also seeks to detail how the identity of a morally purified and vigilant Anglo-Saxon Protestant espoused by the Klan was ultimately rejected by the leadership of several American

3. Jesse Whited, *Report on Correspondence*, 1919. Grand Lodge of F & AM of California, 13.

4. William J. Mahoney, Imperial Klokard of the Ku Klux Klan and freemason, *The Fellowship Forum*, 13 October 1922.

masonic grand lodges, particularly in California. Nevertheless, its appeal to common masons during a period coming to grips with the insecurities of nationalism, induced by the hyper-patriotic fallout of America's first European conflict, still resonated strongly amongst California masons.

During the second Klan's rise from 1915 until its demise in the late 1920s, the United States was embroiled in intense social reconstruction. It appeared that war had brought Victorianism to a close: an age of staid manhood cloaked in class distinction. The nation had completed the process of 'taming' the continent. The Progressive urge had re-invigorated America's belief in its mission at home, giving women the vote, empowering and protecting the working man and bringing gas and water socialism to America's burgeoning metropolitan areas. It had propelled an ambitious—and ultimately unsuccessful—crusade to spread the American liberal message abroad. In the process, the nation had risen to become the world's foremost economic power. But just what specific qualities really constituted an authentic American identity remained a matter of concern for those who were now sharing the stage with a new wave of immigration; coping with the new ideas and ideals of modernity, as well as newly coming to terms with politically and sexually empowered women. These uncertainties gave rise to new enemies. There was a retreat into Puritanism with the Volstead Act and a surge in evangelical Christianity.⁵ There was also a huge upswing in masculine past-times—this was the era when sport emerged as mass entertainment. It was also an age that again enjoyed the periodic increases in fraternal membership.

In terms of isolating and alienating the immigrant, religion and race replaced nationality: desirable immigrants were Protestant and 'Nordic'; the undesirables were often Catholic or Jewish: they might also be Asian or Slavic. During these years, anti-Catholicism in particular re-emerged as a highly potent force as the Klan took on the mantle of previous

5. Editorial comment for non-US-readers: The Volstead Act was the National Prohibition Act and the enabling legislation for the 18th Amendment to the US Constitution, which effectively banned alcohol in the United States. The Act established a legal definition for intoxicating liquor, and the penalties for its manufacture. It was named for Andrew Volstead, Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, which managed the legislation. The Volstead act was passed through Congress, despite President Woodrow Wilson's previous veto and officially enacted on 28 October 1919. Prohibition was officially enacted on 17 January 1920 and was repealed in 1933, thus repealing the 18th Amendment and allowing for liquor sales. The Act was highly flawed and did not curb the appetites of those who sought intoxicating beverages. During Prohibition bootlegging and smuggling rose in popularity, along with advent of mobs and gangs that sought to exploit large financial and power bases associated with illegal manufacture and distribution.

incarnations of agitation against the Catholic. They became the Know Nothing Party and the American Protective Association.⁶ Religious scapegoating has always proved an effective tool for group identity and the fast changing, commercially driven years of the early 1920s were no exception. Nearly every social ill in this era of unfamiliar modernity could be ascribed to a *Romanist* plot. Minority populations could inevitably be found guilty of crimes such as bootlegging or bombing. Furthermore, it was asserted by Klan sympathizers that Catholics could not be true Americans since they held allegiance to a foreign ruler (the Pope) and who planned, through immigration and crime, to invade and subjugate the greatest nation on the earth.⁷ The new Ku Klux Klan appointed itself the guardian of public behavior and defender of moral cleanliness because these were traits found largely in the superiority of decent, restrained and civilized American-born, Protestant, white, folk. By definition it also set itself up in opposition to any person who did not fit their rigid definition of American, labeling them as traitors even though the accused may themselves be white and, in many cases Protestant, as well. This tactic was a rather creative form of identifying an enemy in order for the Klan to courageously deliver a community from its problems.

The so-called secret societies, labor, and patriotic fraternities enjoyed great successes because they brought together people of diverse social statuses, and also because their members, for greater good and ill, espoused mystery and the sense of belonging to something larger than their members; to evoke the cultures of the past and to impart its wisdom, as though they were spiritual heirs. The new Ku Klux Klan, according to its founder Simmons, was to be greater than the rest because it would unite the 100 Percent Americans in a ritualistic fraternal army in order to fight against those who would invade and destroy it from within. While the revived Ku Klux Klan originated in the South and is today still considered an aberrant Southern phenomenon, it did not arrive in California as an invading foreign army. Nor was it antithetical to the prevailing mores of California. The state was historically conservative in regard to class and ethnicity, and prone to a vigilantism born from its reputation as a wild land. The result was that the second Klan grew organically; drawing upon the fears of citizens genuinely concerned for their safety and prepared to defend their 'American' identity against

6. For an overview of the Klan's anti-Catholic heritage see Kristofer Allerfeldt, *Race, Radicalism, Religion and Restriction: Immigration in the Pacific Northwest 1890–1924* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002), 54–61.

7. For one example out of many published, see 'Romanists Stage Boldest Political Battles in History of the United States,' *The Fellowship Forum*, Washington, DC, 8 September 1922.

perceived invaders and interlopers. Like the rest of the Union, these Californians were men who readily accepted segregation along with religious and ethnic inequality as being perfectly natural, indeed desirable.⁸ These were men who were genuine believers in the benefits of Prohibition and the evils of evolution. These were men who were frustrated by the government's seeming tolerance of 'reds', labor organizers and radicals. These were the men who joined the Klan.

In her thesis, 'The Ku Klux Klan in Downey During the 1920s,' Jan Beemer Shults documents the appeal of the vigilantism that was to inspire the revived Klan's appearance in the rough-neck California oil towns of Kern County. These worthy citizens were inspired by the accounts of gambling, graft, prostitution, and other misdemeanors, which filled the local papers. She also illustrates that the Klan had an appeal to a less obvious constituency—reformers. Anaheim, in Orange County, experienced the arrival of new citizens from other regions who became incensed at the traditional German residents' laxity in enforcing the laws against alcohol. This 'law abiding' section used the Klan as a part of a vanguard of the populist movement who sought to wrest the city from the ruling elites and establish law and order through clean and alcohol-free living.

An example of the Klan's clandestine and fierce moral commitment to bringing Volstead violators to justice is the notorious April, 1922 Inglewood (Los Angeles County) raid on the household of the Elduayen Brothers. Both Fidel and his brother, Mattius, were suspected of providing bootleg drink to local youth, and were abducted from their home in full view of their families by masked assailants who had the intention of having the brothers arrested at a nearby police station. When this plan failed, the brothers were treated to a night-time joy ride by masked men which ended with the vigilantes threatening to kill them and a shoot-out with the Deputy Marshal, leaving two wounded and one killed. Evidence gathered later revealed that this raid had been organized by the local Klan and the dead man was the city constable, Medford Mosher, who, ironically, had been telephoned by the Elduayens' terrified neighbor to investigate the raid, but had been out of the office. The two wounded included Mosher's son, Walter, and Special Deputy Leonard Ruegg.⁹

8. Jane Beemer Shults, 'The Ku Klux Klan in Downey During the 1920s,' MA dissertation, Cal State Long Beach, CA, May 1991.

9. Gary Roldan, 'Activities of the Ku Klux Klan in Kern and Los Angeles Counties, California, During the 1920s,' MA dissertation, School of Social Sciences, California State University, Fresno, CA, May 1996, 48–49. For examples of daily newspaper accounts and inquiries of the raid see also Associated Press, 'Probe into Fatal Fray

In summary, while suspicion of foreigners and Catholics was indeed widespread throughout the US, in California it seems that to the KKK bootlegging and other immoral acts associated with alcohol consumption were a matter of course for the immoral, the foreigner and the 'Romanist'. In other words, these acts were part and parcel of the perceived dangerous cultural values that were corrupting the young and other impressionable or wayward citizens. The reports of hooded night riders taking hostages or involving themselves with firearms naturally concerned law-abiding citizens. That some of the instigators and/or their supporters were involved in other popular fraternal societies was also a matter of intense concern—especially to the masons of California in general, and to the leadership of their Grand Lodge in particular.

The Klan issue, however, had a curious prologue in 1914–1917 involving an investigation by high-ranking masons—several of whom, including the 1921–1922 Grand Master of Masons in California, Samuel E. Burke, would pit themselves against anti-Catholic agitators. While the Klan is never mentioned, presumably because that phenomenon hadn't yet reached Californian soil, the anti-Catholic resentment that would allow Simmons' Klan to flourish was played out in the reportage following a self-appointed committee of Los Angeles masons who were charged by the leadership of the Knights of Columbus (K of C) to investigate the legitimacy of a notorious K of C ceremonial oath that had been entered into the Congressional Record. This committee, which was dubbed by detractors as the 'Whitewash Committee,' was composed of Burke (then an Inspector for the California Grand Lodge), Past Grand Masters Motley Flint and Dana Reed Weller, and William Rhoads Hervey (Grand Master in 1917).¹⁰

In their contention that the K of C oath was a forgery, the 'Whitewash Committee' was the subject of a series of articles in a masonic periodical entitled, *The Light*, from 1917 to 1918. The chief argument of this publication was that the committee, being composed of high-powered bankers and lawyers—and Burke, who was a dentist—had been bought by clandestine Romanists intent on influencing their Catholic agenda and alleging that the opponents of their findings had been unduly persecuted for criticizing the committee's actions.¹¹ Also drawn into the fray was the California Masonic Grand Lodge, who, in response to complaints

in Southern City Starts,' *The Bakersfield Californian*, 24 April 1922, 1,7 and 'Woolwine Has List of Raiders at L.A.,' *The Oakland Tribune*, 7 May, 1922, 3.

10. Knights of Columbus File, 1914–1917. Henry W. Coil Library Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

11. *The Light*, vols. 1–3, 1917–1918. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

amongst their own membership, charged that the committee had no right to link their investigation to freemasonry by signing the independent report with their masonic titles, thereby giving the false impression that it was officially sanctioned by that governing body. The Grand Lodge's position was fostered by the fact that the report was also admitted into the Congressional Record by Congressman William Kettner, who also served as the Grand Marshal for the Masons of California.¹²

While the events may seem trivial today, they did lead to substantial reforms in the masonic culture of California. The main change was a discouragement in the usage of masonic titles in the public sphere, unless otherwise authorized by the Grand Lodge. Also, it was argued, that the body of freemasonry in California—as was customary—should be careful not to interfere with the affairs of other organizations. The latter concern was be used later by the Klan when Burke, this time as Grand Master from October 1921 to October 1922, would call into question their courting of masons in his jurisdiction.¹³

Burke's reaction to reports of Klan membership among California masons was to issue a circular to the constituent lodges whereby he openly questioned the true motives of the Klan. His position was essentially that however much it wrapped itself in American patriotism, the Klan was essentially un-American because of the vigilantism and violence associated with it. His views would have struck a chord since for eight editions in the fall of 1921 the *New York World* published detailed exposés of the Klan's misdeeds which were then syndicated across the nation. These prompted a full Congressional investigation, which turned to the Klan's advantage by a virtuoso performance by Simmons, and left lingering doubts about their true purpose and methods.

What prompted Burke's action was correspondence addressed to his office giving detailed accounts of lodge members becoming Klansmen or being approached by Klan recruiters, known as *Kleagles*. Freemasonry has traditionally taken a non-sectarian and non-partisan stand on matters within and without the organization, and forbids members from subjectively associating their personal beliefs with the *whole* of the Order. Each man is to subscribe to the philosophies of the Order and to integrate

12. 29 October 1915, anonymous resolution to Grand Lodge of F & AM of California; 1915 Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of F & AM of California. Knights of Columbus File, 1914–1917, Henry W. Coil Library Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

13. 11 October 1915, resolution by Morning Star Lodge No. 68, Stockton, CA; 29 October 1915, anonymous resolution to Grand Lodge of F & AM of California; 1915 Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of F & AM of California. Knights of Columbus File, 1914–1917, Henry W. Coil Library Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

them with his own conscience in the hope of self-improvement. Having said this it is paramount that the individual, while following his own conscience, should remain entirely within the laws of his country.¹⁴ With a few exceptions, freemasonry has rarely interfered with the practices of other fraternities, unless those practices strayed too close to the defined boundaries of what is considered 'Masonic'. Armed with the reports of Klan chicanery, which he saw as violating those traditions, Burke found reason to believe that any masonic association with the Klan was detrimental—not only to the Order itself, but also to the philosophical concept of American identity and system of due process:

This "Invisible Empire" pretends that its chief purpose is to aid in the enforcement of the law of the land; but its practical workings appear to be to interfere with the orderly and lawful administration of the processes of our courts and the duly constituted officers of the law...an organization which is so un-American and un-Masonic in its methods as to merit the disapproval of thoughtful, law abiding, order-loving men.

He continued,

It matters not how patriotic may be the purpose of individual members. The practical operations of the organization do not coincide with the principals and ideals upon which our government was founded, nor upon the principles and ideals of Freemasonry. Our forefathers founded this government upon the basis of law and of order and obedience to constituted authority, and Masons are bound by all the teachings and all the traditions of our Institution to openly and avowedly sustain the duly constituted administrators of the law of the land, and to discountenance mob activities.

It has been charged that members of our Fraternity have in some instances become allied with this Ku Klux Klan, and it is even charged that...the Klan is fostered and encouraged by Masons; that the night-riders who usurp the lawful processes of the courts...are Masons. The Grand Master does not believe such stories to be true. And he does not presume to proscribe the membership or activities of Masons in any lawful society or organization; but he is opposed to combinations of men who usurp law; he is opposed to societies which condemn without due trial...¹⁵

The Grand Secretary, John Whicher, also released his statement. It was aimed at clarifying and mollifying those still questioning Burke's opinion:

It is not his [Grand Master Samuel Burke's] purpose to interfere with the affairs of another organization, nor to indicate to Masons what societies they should join or not join. Men may lawfully organize a society which

14. James Anderson, *Constitutions of Freemasons*, 1723. The Charges of a Freemason, Part II Of the Civil Magistrates, Supreme and Subordinate.

15. Circular sent by Grand Master Samuel Burke to constituent lodges under the Grand Lodge of F & AM of California, 2 May 1922. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

makes it a prerequisite that each member shall have his head adorned with red hair, or that each member shall have been born in the America, or any restriction that may be mutually agreed upon. But when men organize for the avowed purpose of usurping the processes of the courts of the land, and while professing intense loyalty to government do commit overt acts with hooded sheets over their heads, and in addition invade our Lodge rooms for the purpose of proselytizing for membership, thus giving the general public to believe that Masons and Masonry is responsible for such organization—then the Grand Master deems it his duty to call a halt and to commit our Lodges to the doctrine that law and the orderly conduct of society must be maintained by our members, and that the good name of our ancient fraternity be upheld.¹⁶

Other American masonic jurisdictions, such as New York, had gone on record either to condemn the Klan or, like the District of Columbia, to proclaim their ambivalence: that this particular jurisdiction and freemasonry in general had no power to prohibit membership in any organization unrelated to it.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Burke, along with his administration and advisors, had reason to believe (via correspondence from California masons and sympathizers of the Klan) that the revived KKK sought to gain legitimacy by linking itself with freemasonry, as if the latter would be a natural fit for the former, which was proclaimed to be populated by God-fearing patriots.

There was much evidence proposed by Klan apologists to suggest a shared heritage and mutual objectives. Several letters sent to Burke in the wake of the furor his statement unleashed attest to this. For example, as one non-California mason opined:

I belong to Winfield Lodge 110 A. F & AM and also the Chapter and Commandery of Winfield...I have had the workings of the Klan explained to me but owing to the fact that my sister married a Catholic, I am not eligible to join the Klan but I am for the Klan and I don't care who knows [sic]...the Klan are absolutely American and for the protection of the American flag [...] ¹⁸

While most of the California lodges enthusiastically praised Burke's circular, some took issue with what they believed as a statement against their American-made freedom of association, and, therefore, a violation of the

16. Letter from John Whicher to Thomas Boswell, Master of Roseville Lodge, 12 June 1922. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

17. Jesse Whited, 1922 Committee on Correspondence, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

18. Letter from Roy N. Smith of Winfield Kansas to Samuel E. Burke, 15 May 1922. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

principle of masonic harmony by not interfering with an individual's conscience. What followed, almost immediately, was a barrage of protest letters by avowed Klansmen from across the United States maliciously leveling charges that Burke was a pawn of a Papal plot to infiltrate the masonic fraternity. By way of proof, they cited his previous involvement in the 1914 masonic 'Whitewash Committee' and the ensuing two year-plus controversy surrounding their investigation into the Knights of Columbus oath. Chief amongst these threats and rants was a 27 May 1922 letter signed only by anonymous 'Members of the Fraternity.'

This letter was sent to California lodges declaring that Burke's pronouncement against the Klan was patently un-masonic. As a result of the anonymous letter, several members felt compelled to examine what was considered to be Burke's hard-line attitude toward the Klan. Many of these men felt a growing animosity with what they believed to be an infringement on their freedom of association and battle lines were drawn on the floors of the lodges between pro and anti-Klan sympathies. To add to the confusion, the anonymous letter was interpreted as an authoritative response to Burke's anti-Klan pronouncements. Some believed the anonymous letter to have been written by the members of a rebellious hierarchy of masons. Others saw it simply as the response of outraged Masonic-Klansmen. To yet another segment it was merely an 'outing' which revealed Burke as a traitor to masonry and showed his true, Catholic, sympathies.

This sinister speculation and suspicion was not limited to constituent lodges or Klan sympathizers: a private letter from Grand Secretary Whicher—who would have fallen into neither category—informed Burke that he believed a Past Grand Master, who had corresponded with another mason, claiming that Burke's letter violated masonic law may be at the root of the anonymous circular. Whicher stated ominously that the District Attorney could have this person's offices raided for proof, although the issue is never again mentioned.¹⁹

While the majority of lodges reported to the Grand Lodge little opinion on the Klan, or having few problems with an open relationship between the two organizations, many lodges took the anonymous letter at face value. They argued that it offered a simple protest and logical protest—that the Grand Lodge intended to limit a mason's involvement in another organization devoted to fighting the wrongs of society and preserving their heritage. As a result, one lodge in particular, Union Lodge in Sacramento, saw fit to inform the Grand Master that his circular was un-masonic in that

19. Letter from John Whicher to Samuel E. Burke, 2 June 1922. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

it seemed to limit a citizen's right of association and as a result, for a short time, had its charter suspended and its Master removed.²⁰ A controversial apology signed by the members of the lodge was received by Burke and it was found that the Master and the Secretary's names were conspicuously absent—possible indication that they had no remorse for disagreeing with Burke's edict and their recalcitrant accusations of un-masonic behavior.²¹ With the Master removed from office for his insolence, the Secretary was allowed to keep his position since it was kindly determined by Burke that he was only doing what he was charged to do—to report the bidding of the lodge master and the governed members. Essentially, the California Grand Lodge had been forced into a very real position of exacting more force from the growing issue than previously planned, and had to use extreme delicacy to position itself in order to preserve the legendary precept of masonic harmony amidst conflicting feelings of those in sympathy and antipathy within masonry toward the Klan.

While most of the lodges complied with the circular, reports filtered in of Klan groups attempting to rent masonic halls under assumed names identifying themselves as men's organizations. Wherever the Klan appeared, patriotic intimations on the rights of free assembly and Americanism were used to defend its right to exist. Furthermore, these subjects became an open topic in masonic lodges, meaning that the precious masonic commodity of harmony was to be put to the test. Pro-Klan sympathizers, even if they themselves had not joined, openly vouched for the character of those joining the Klan. They argued that the nature of US society's flaws and problems necessitated an activist fraternity like the Klan. Typical of these was the letter sympathetic toward the Oakland Klan which claimed that:

the men who compose the Klan are among our best citizens [...] if we all obeyed our country's laws and brought our influence to bear on our courts [...] there would be no need of a Ku Klux Klan.²²

On 20 July 1922, Samuel Burke received an open letter—later published in the editorial of the *Fraternal Forum*—from no lesser a figure than the *Imperial Klokard* (Chief Lecturer) of the Ku Klux Klan William J. Mahoney. In it, Mahoney accused what he called 'dissident' masons and Grand Masters of being grossly misinformed as to the true nature

20. Letter from Union Lodge to Samuel Burke, 7 June 1922. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

21. Letter from Samuel E. Burke to J.W.S. Butler et al., 12 July 1922. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

22. Petition letter by several Oakland Masons to Samuel E. Burke, 5 June 1922. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

of the Klan.²³ The tone of the letter is patronizing. It sternly admonishes freemasonry as a whole for all too readily accepting as fact what Mahoney considered to be unsubstantiated allegations against the Klan. He points out that masons, of all people, ought to be aware of the harm such misrepresentation could wreak:

Your attack upon the secrecy of this Order will have little weight with those who know the history and the operations of Masonry. It has not been so many years ago since Masons in this Country found it necessary to conceal their identity and keep unknown their meeting places [...]

I note that you have accepted the judgment of the common enemies of Masonry and the Klan that ours is "a sheeted and hooded" fraternity assuming all kinds of judicial powers and every kind of governmental authority. Is all of this usurpation to be charged up to us simply because we have an unusual kind of regalia that we use only in our meeting places and on authorized parades? Why not attack the order of Red Men because they disguise themselves as Indians, and so conceal their identity that even their friends cannot recognize them?

Mahoney goes on to dismiss the constant accusations of lawlessness and violence attributed to the Klan:

We do not accept responsibility for present day violations of law any more than we are willing to accept responsibility for the lawless acts of the Night-riders who terrorized the tobacco sections of Kentucky more than a decade ago, or of the murderous activities of the Molly Maguires, or of the Irish Mob who tore down the flag of a friendly ally at a meeting of the Loyal Coalition, or of the Springfield, Washington and Chicago race riots, or of the death of the Pope, or of the Armenian outrages.

I can add this concluding word, that every Mason who can qualify for membership in the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan will find himself the better equipped to fulfill his obligation and to perform his duties as a Mason [sic]:²⁴

Other letters accused Burke of being a tool of 'Popery' and 'Romanism' with an unhealthy sympathy toward Catholicism. Some argued that he was an outright spy for the Vatican and claimed that this was obvious from his prior investigation into the Knights of Columbus.²⁵ In summary, they maintained that his attitude was somehow a part of a papal plot to discredit the Klan-attested Protestant nature of not only freemasonry, but also of the United States. These pro-Klan letters also boasted that

23. *The Fellowship Forum*, 13 October 1922. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

24. William J. Mahoney to Samuel E. Burke, 20 July 1922. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

25. See 1914–1928 Whitewash Committee/Knights of Columbus Correspondence, Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

80 percent of masons were on their side. By their logic, the parades of Templars or Shriners were comprised of men who were also Klansmen. To hear them tell it, these were moral crusaders dedicated to cleansing the nation of its ills.²⁶ Despite the vainglorious pronouncements of Klan superiority, Burke remained resolved that the Ku Klux Klan was not a lawful organization. Further to this he argued that Klansmen did not uphold traditional masonic or American ideals. He claimed that no right-thinking freemason should, or could, associate with it. However, as Burke's successors would later discover, holding a certain moral conviction was not the same as enforcing it, and the conflict over the Klan continued to fester within California's lodges for quite some time to come.

During the 1923–1924 terms of Grand Master Arthur S. Crites, the Klan/masonic connection became more prominent. Throughout California, as well as the rest of the United States, those masons offended by Samuel Burke's outspoken stance became more willing to assert the relationship as natural. They reasoned that the principles of freemasonry overlapped and complemented those of the Ku Klux Klan. Crites was moved to speak out about this alleged connection, and although holding strong opinions against the Klan, he was more circumspect in his language than Burke. As he wrote to the Grand Secretary in the fall of 1923:

I am hoping that every member of the Fraternity realizes that our Order either profits or suffers by the acts of its individual members; that the reputation of the Fraternity is really within the hands of everyone that belongs to the Order, and that the opinion the world has of the Klan, at least, is not such as to reflect added good opinion upon its members. It is devoutly to be hoped that every member of the Order, but particularly that every officer, keep its affairs out of the Fraternity. There is one sure way of doing this and that is not to become a member.²⁷

Within the masonic fraternity, the next few months brought no clarification. Reports of mass Klan initiations both in the northern and southern parts of the state confused the members as to what direction to take. Certainly, many of those members who were against the Klan wrote to Crites to inform him that their lodge Masters were inclined to support the Grand Master and advise against any mason from attending a Klan meeting. Klan supporters, on the other hand, were growing increasingly agitated at what they believed was an unfair and unprecedented attack on the part of Grand Lodge that prevented them from exercising their

26. Anonymous letter to Samuel E. Burke, received 17 May 1922. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

27. Arthur S. Crites to Will H. Fischer, 22 November 1923. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

right to join any organization they saw fit. They were proud of being both Klansmen *and* masons and saw no conflict of interests or clash of ideals.

Over the years it had become common practice, when they wished to raise their profile in an area, for the Klan to appear *en-masse* in full regalia at churches or town halls during ceremonies and meetings. There would be no prior warning, and they would frequently win over the congregation by leaving a sum of money in their wake while extolling the virtue and might of the Invisible Empire. Soon they expanded this practice to include masonic lodges. For example, they carried out one of these surprise gatherings shortly before the monthly meeting was to convene in Sacramento on August, 1924 at Warren G. Harding Lodge. Several hooded Klansmen appeared at the door of the lodge room asking for admittance. Out of courtesy, the Master allowed them to enter and accepted their gift of an organ in token of the good work of freemasonry.²⁸

The result of these encounters was that divisions widened. Over the months that followed news clippings and bills advertising pro-Klan talks given at masonic halls also became commonplace, as well as requests for Klan-supported men's groups to rent masonic buildings.²⁹ Where such measures met with hostility, pro-Klan forces began to slander the opposition. Sources began to issue reports of lodge members committing ballot fraud directed against Klan supporters.³⁰ The threats of violence, along with other forms of discordant and un-masonic behavior, were increasingly commonplace. The deep concern and vitriol expressed from both sides during this period is near ubiquitous. Crites, himself, felt that he investigated each matter to the best of his ability, but his only recourse was to remind his masonic constituency that, while Grand Lodges and freemasonry in general do not normally comment upon the affairs of other organizations, the best possible recourse from mixing Klan and masonic philosophies was for a mason to emphatically reject any compulsion to join that organization. Crites commented on 29 April 1924:

The Ku Klux Klan situation has given me considerable concern [...] I am very seriously considering including reference to this organization in my

28. Henry R. Brown, Master of Warren G. Harding Lodge UD to Arthur S. Crites, 16 August 1924. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

29. Temescal Lodge Secretary to Arthur S. Crites, 20 October 1923; Coachella Lodge No. 476 to Arthur S. Crites, 24 February 1924; Yosemite Masonic Building Association to Mere B. Haver (forwarded to Crites), 29 January 1924. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

30. Correspondence of Arthur S. Crites to W.W. Abbott, 17 June 1924. Henry W. Coil Library Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

report to the Grand Lodge, but have about concluded that I am unwilling to do so unless I can receive assurances that an effort will be made to put the attitude of the Grand Lodge on record on the problem (sic).

[...] I said so at the time, and still feel that the Grand Lodge made a mistake in not doing this when the problem was confronted in 1922 [...] the best way to combat this influence was by personal letters to the lodges where this organization was receiving attention. My idea being [...] that we should not seem to persecute or even over-emphasize the activities of the concern [...] I find, however, that it is still gaining headway and is giving some lodges serious trouble [...].³¹

So contentious was the general mood that Crites' good friend, Will H. Fischer, advised him to take a moderate stance and to refrain from taking anymore action, lest it be the very kind that would open up the floodgates of controversy:

[...] I am submitting the suggestion that it might be well to use moderation, or possibly to refrain. I can see the matter from several angles, just as you undoubtedly do, but my general conclusion is that nothing effective could be done unless it were drastic and went the full limit. That, of course, would tear things wide open. To do anything less than that which is drastic would accomplish nothing constructive and at the same time would provoke a great deal of quarreling and bitterness. You may have encountered conditions which cannot be overlooked; but I know of no conditions here, despite the large and growing membership of the organization to which I have referred, which in my opinion would justify Grand Lodge in departing from its customary policy, which is not to recognize other organizations in the way of approval or disapproval.³²

Throughout the rest of the year, letters were received boasting of both masonic and Klan membership, as if the combination of the two should be a mythical moral force with which to be reckoned. One vitriolic tirade from 7 September 1924 complained of a Knight Templar Commander in San Francisco, who, during a monthly convocation, derided a pamphlet exposé entitled, '*When Knight Meets Knight*'. The pamphlet claims to reveal an alleged Knights of Columbus ritual catechism, wherein the candidate to that fraternity is ordered by inebriated priests with Irish names to drink from a barrel of whiskey, in addition to a host of other demands to prove his fidelity. The angry letter's anonymous author expresses shock that *any* Knight Templar would be against such information aimed to inform concerned 100 Percent Americans and masons:

there is not a word of UNTRUTH in the article [...] nothing offensive whatsoever on this *When Knight Meets Knight* to a MAN who is a

31. Correspondence of Arthur S. Crites to Will H. Fischer, 29 April 1924. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

32. Correspondence of Will H. Fischer to Arthur S. Crites, 12 September 1924. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

REAL American and believe in this Dear old US its Flag [...] he stands so far above such Weak Kneed Protestants and Roman-Masons as You, as Heaven is above the Earth [...] (W)e also Thank GOD for the large number of FEARLESS MEN IN MASONRY who belong to the 100% Americans and are not afraid that they will offend the POPE and his Agents when they wish to speak or ACT [...] I am very yours truly, A Sir Knight and a KLUXER [sic].³³

In a post-script, the unknown correspondent threatens the Knight Templar Commander. He argues that since the Commander works for a certain company and that its clients are most certainly are 100 Percent Americans, he will lose business for California. The anonymous correspondent adds as a final gesture that he believes Oregon and Washington will become 70 percent Klan by 1925.

Although the national Klan suffered the consequences of scandals and exposés, at the close of Crites' year as Grand Master, the effects of the Klan issue in California showed little sign of diminishing.³⁴ This is demonstrated by a letter Crites sent in the waning months of his term, to his successor, David John Reese. Newspaper clippings detailing Klan activities were also included with the correspondence. In it he confided that all that could be done was done; he was resolved that the masons of California should not belong to the Klan, nor identify freemasonry with it. This, to paraphrase, was all that Crites hoped could be accomplished, and that Reese, his administrative committees, and the voting members of Grand Lodge would sustain his position.³⁵

From 1924 to 1925, Grand Master David John Reese would monitor the situation, as Crites did, by continuing to send out questionnaires to lodges inquiring if there were any suspected Klan members amongst the membership.³⁶ While no personal correspondence from Reese's term is presently available, mention is made in the Grand Lodge proceedings that Reese revoked the charter of Yosemite Lodge No. 99 in Merced because of the long-standing feud between Klan sympathizers and their opponents. The lodge's Master-elect was forced to renounce the Klan before he could be considered for election.³⁷ In 1928, the legacy of

33. Anonymous letter to Arthur S. Crites, 7 September 1924. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

34. Letter from Arthur S. Crites to Irving Magnes, 14 August 1924. Crites states that he has word from Oakland that the Klan was very strong in that city, and that they claimed to be able to 'throw the Masonic fraternity.' Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

35. Letter from Arthur S. Crites to David J. Reese, 28 August 1924. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

36. 1925 Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of F & AM of California, 422; 439.

37. 1924 Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of F & AM of California, 399–402. See also correspondence from C.H. Wright to Arthur Crites, 29 January 1924 and 2 February

the 'Whitewash Committee' of 1914 would briefly reappear as various Southern newspapers, led by the intrigue of the campaign of Catholic New York Governor Al Smith for the presidency, inquired of the Grand Lodge of California if they had vetted and exonerated the Knights of Columbus oath admitted into the Congressional Record.³⁸

From outside the fraternal model, some idea of the impact of California's battle with the Klan fraternity can be gathered by a quick scan of the fraternal press of the day, as well as several national papers like *The New York Times*, *New York World* and *The Washington Post*. The *New York World* and the *Syracuse Herald's* 1921 condemnation of the Invisible Empire was scathing, accusing it of subversion under the guise of patriotism:

The original Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Inc., modestly begun five years ago, has become a vast enterprise, doing a thriving business in the systematic sale of race, hatred, religious bigotry and "100 per cent" anti-Americanism [...]

[...] A large majority of those attacks on individuals have involved matters of behaving along the lines of personal morality, have flagrantly violated the Bill of Rights implanted in the Federal constitution and the charter law in every state in the Union, and have involved an assumption of the Klan's authority to impose moral censorship on communities and citizens, summarily punish any "offenses", and set up its own standards covering every incidences of private life. It would be impossible to imagine an attitude more essentially lawless.

[...] The Klan is a negation of democracy, an autocratic group of self-appointed reformers who try to take the kingdom of heaven by violence, a futile effort that was exploded some 2,000 years ago. Admit that they believe themselves the upholders of superior morality and superior politics. Others, who disagree with them, may have an equally exalted idea of their own convictions. But if society is to be broken up into groups, trying to enforce their group opinions by masked methods, we will have anarchy and the structure of self-government civilization has been laboring all those centuries to build up will be undermined [...] [sic].³⁹

While the aforementioned newspapers did much to bring the abuses of the Klan into the public mind, they, as with many in prior years, unwittingly gave it free publicity — of which the KKK exploited in print, for the Invisible Empire also had its own national papers like the *Fiery Cross* and the *Kourier*, and many others that served local Klaverns. During the early rise of the Second Klan, nativist newspapers such as the *Menace* and *The Torch* openly supported and bolstered the Klan's own publishing

1924 response by Crites concerning Yosemite Lodge No. 99 and the Klan. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

38. See 1914–1928 Whitewash Committee/Knights of Columbus Correspondence, Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

39. *Syracuse Herald*, vol. 45, no. 13 (6 September 1921), 834.

efforts and espoused their views without any direct influence from any other fraternal organization, concentrating more on the anti-immigrant, anti-clerical stance of their readers. On the other hand, periodicals like *The Searchlight* reflected a more fraternal approach in their decidedly pro-Klan stance. In the *Searchlight's* case this was rather unsurprising since it was published by the distinctly 'patriotic' and notoriously nativist fraternity of the Junior Order of United American Mechanics (JOUAM). Perhaps more interesting is the example of *The Fellowship Forum*, which also took a less than objective stance over the issue of the Klan.

The Fellowship Forum was published in Washington DC by George Fleming Moore, who was a past Sovereign Grand Commander of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, Southern Jurisdiction, as well as former editor for that masonic organization's official organ, *The New Age*. Despite Moore's illustrious career in freemasonry, *The Fellowship Forum* was independent and not officially endorsed by any masonic or other fraternal organization. As a weekly publication it reported on a variety of international events from a fraternal point of view—a claim that its large readership probably accepted, placing a belief in the objectivity of its reportage since its verbal demeanor and graphic layout was reminiscent of American newspapers. Within its pages, it is possible to read of a new chapter of DeMolay for Boys being organized. There might be an article on the history of freemasonry in England, alongside a piece about a Klan meeting in Boston. It was staunchly anti-clerical and ran many pieces about such topics as the Romanist attempt to force Columbus Day upon the American populace as being one of the boldest political battles in the history of the United States. 'Militant Freemasonry' was its self-stated objective and extolled masons to purchase nativist literature by running advertisements for booklets such as *Rome in Congress* with the tagline, 'Which Will You Choose, Freemasonry—or The Pope?'⁴⁰

The Fellowship Forum's nativist politics also openly supported certain politicians in their efforts to galvanize a fraternal front in order to protect America. It maintained that all societies should become patriotic associations and, thereby, sympathetic to the nativist cause. Indeed, the paper ran an advertisement in almost every issue for a fledgling fraternal lobby group (and pro-Klan given that William J. Mahoney, Imperial Klokard, was their Vice President), called *The National Council of Patriotic and Fraternal Societies of the USA*. Their urgent tagline reads, 'America Needs Minute Men Like Those of 1776!...You can be a Paul Revere in MOTIVE! You must be! For the spirit of the great Patriot has stepped out

40. *The Fellowship Forum*, 13 October 1922. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

of the pages of history at the hour when a shadow of danger looms upon the Sacred Constitution.’ [sic]⁴¹

Both *The Searchlight* and, more particularly, *The Fellowship Forum* gleefully reported on the controversy in California as a raging fraternal battle between the forces of a mystical white, Protestant America and the invading armies of the Pope with the screaming headlines:

Grand Master Burke Charged With Taking Throne of Authority – Wages War on “Invisible Empire” by Taking Away Charters of Masonic Lodges⁴²

and,

Romanism Is Cause of Friction In California Freemasonry⁴³

Denouncement of the *The Fellowship Forum* was dramatically illustrated on 17 July 1922, by California freemason Burton L. Smith of *The Los Angeles Times*:

[...] When a publication posing as a mouthpiece of Masonry defends the institution it gives reason for some to believe the statements of Klan organizers that the Ku Klux was a working part of Masonry [...] The words on your printed pages can work no harm to thinking Masons, but to the uninitiated it gives reason for the belief that the Craft upholds an organization whose rule of action is mob violence [...] spreading terror with tar pots and flaming torches [...] You would have the world believe that all others in the Golden State favored these outbreaks of lawlessness. In this regard permit me to call attention to the fact that the strongest fight against the Klan waged in the state was carried on by the Los Angeles Times, of whose editorial staff I have the honor of being a member. This was not Catholic propaganda [...]⁴⁴

By examining the letters, Klan literature, official Grand Lodge correspondence, and fraternal periodicals, the reader is given a personal and timely insight into what has, perhaps, already been documented about the Klan, but from a point of view few have entertained. From these resources it can be shown that the Klan portrayed itself as a fraternal brotherhood of mystical knights sworn to protect white Protestantism for America through the social avenues of fraternalism and politics. It is similar to a grass-roots populist organization in that it was able to appeal

41. *The Fellowship Forum*, 27 October 1922. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

42. *The Fellowship Forum*, 27 October 1922. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

43. *The Fellowship Forum*, 11 August 1922. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

44. Burton L. Smith, Los Angeles Times to George F. Moore, Managing Editor of the *The Fellowship Forum*, copied to Samuel Burke, 17 July 1922. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum Archives, Grand Lodge of F & AM of California.

to specific localities and social demographics, who then challenged the political superstructure. Neither the confrontational approach of Burke, nor the arguably more subtle methods of Crites seemed to have achieved anything against the Klan's insurgency during the early 1920s. Nevertheless within two years after these men, the Klan as a national institution would be measured in the thousands, rather than the millions. The Klan would fall victim to scandals exposing a combination of its own greed, lack of accountability and over-expansion.

Unlike freemasonry, the Klan also collapsed because the ritual, mystery and fraternity by which it set so much stock were proved to be shallow, meaningless and inconsistent. By contrast, freemasonry continued to expand its numbers throughout the decade. Perhaps that was because masons have historically portrayed themselves as offering a philosophy and code of conduct based on ancient and accepted principles to those who sought answers to their existence. To many Americans, masonry had represented a refuge and had given access to a wide circle of like-minded individuals. Both of these elements of its mission were particularly appealing in the 1920s, and, unlike the Klan, freemasonry's traditions were not dependent on scapegoats and the rhetoric of hate or exclusion.

The Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of California, along with other American masonic jurisdictions (though not all), opposed the Ku Klux Klan primarily because of the readily apparent disparity between the Klan's stated patriotic idealism and its propensity toward vigilantism, along with the obsessive promotion of its own rigid version of American identity. Freemasonry has traditionally remained neutral on matters regarding sectarian religion and partisan politics, and has rarely commented on the activities of other organizations—preferring to leave matters to individual choice. Nevertheless, the Klan's mob rule, corruption and hubris posed serious problems that conflicted with traditional masonic tenets—values that were supposed to be the foundation of all societies, and which transcended provincial prejudices.