

Prohibition in their own towns as well as in the rest of the state and nationwide. In this sense, the rural Klansmen of Wayne County shared a powerful bond with their compatriots in Richmond.

If the rural klans differed in any important way from the Richmond chapter, it was in their ability to attract leading citizens into the local klavern's ranks. In both Hagerstown and Centerville, prominent businessmen joined the order and probably took part in directing its operation. The reasons for this were twofold. First, these communities had remained smaller and more closely knit than Richmond or other larger towns. Community organizations of all kinds had not become as stratified as they had in Richmond. Town merchants, whose economic existence depended on the business of a relatively small number of townspeople and farmers, had every reason to be closely involved with community organizations such as the Klan. Second, these small-town elites had not become part of the group of boosters and businessmen who played such a dominant role in Richmond's public affairs. The Rotary club did not open its membership to leading businessmen from surrounding towns until sometime after the 1920s. Thus, the line that separated Richmond's boosters from the rest of the community also apparently separated them from business leaders in other parts of the county.⁶¹

Indianapolis

In some respects, the Indianapolis Klan had little in common with the chapters that operated in Richmond and rural Wayne County. The idea of community, which played such a significant part in the Klan movement in towns with 300, 3,000, or even 30,000 residents, could not convey the same meaning in an industrial city of 300,000. Klansmen in Indianapolis could not assemble in one place for weekly meetings and could not hope to know personally more than a small number of their fellow members. Klansmen in comfortable tree-lined suburban neighborhoods in the northern and eastern sections of the city probably had little contact with Klansmen in distant working-class neighborhoods in central, western, and southern sections. Ministers from one or two leading churches could not play the same influential role in Indianapolis that they could in Richmond

or Centerville. Massive social events and demonstrations could have a powerful impact, even in a large city, but they could not overwhelm and energize an entire population in the same manner as those that inundated town squares and Main Street shopping districts.

Unlike Klan movements in Richmond, rural Wayne County, or most other communities in the state, the Indianapolis movement took place in an environment where ethnic minorities were present in significant numbers and were the focus of considerable concern. Of course, the overall size of the foreign-born population did not compare with that of cities like Chicago, St. Louis, or Detroit, and the largest immigrant group was German rather than of southern or eastern European origin. Still, at more than 5 percent of the total population, Indianapolis's foreign-born groups were large enough to form their own ethnic neighborhoods and leave a noticeable imprint on the city's social, economic, and political affairs. After Germans, who comprised 30 percent of the immigrant population, the next largest group of foreign-born residents came from eastern and southern European countries—primarily Greece, Italy, Poland, Romania, Russia, and Yugoslavia. Together, these groups made up more than 27 percent of the city's foreign-born population. The Irish were another important immigrant group, representing more than 14 percent of all foreign-born residents. The great majority of the city's immigrants lived in working-class neighborhoods south of the downtown district. These neighborhoods did not expand during the 1920s, but there is evidence that more prosperous families, particularly from the Jewish community, were beginning to move to suburban districts in the northern part of the city.⁶²

During the twenties, blacks were by far the largest and, to many whites, the most disturbing ethnic minority group in Indianapolis. The black population had grown from 21,816 in 1910 to 34,678 in 1920 and had come to comprise 11 percent of the total population. Historically confined to a section along Indiana Avenue northwest of the downtown area, the black community had been gradually expanding, generally in a northern direction toward more affluent suburban neighborhoods. Blacks had also begun to move into previously all-white neighborhoods northeast of downtown. The expansion of the black community ignited a great deal of controversy and resulted in the appearance of white neighborhood "protective" associations,

a new system of racially segregated public schools, and an attempt to segregate residential neighborhoods by city ordinance. Indianapolis Klansmen naturally supported these measures and used their political influence to help bring them into effect. Thus, conflict between white Protestants and blacks—as well as Catholics and Jews—played a more direct role in the Indianapolis Klan movement than it did in Wayne County.⁶³

While recognizing the differences between the Indianapolis Klan and chapters in smaller, less diverse communities, it is important not to exaggerate the significance of these differences or to conclude that Indianapolis Klansmen joined the order for fundamentally different reasons than other Klansmen in the state. While the Klan movement took a distinct form in a large urban setting, the main forces driving it were essentially the same as those in other communities. The order still attracted a wide cross section of the white Protestant population rather than being confined to any narrow social group or set of groups. Ethnic conflict, though an issue in Indianapolis, still was not the main focus of the Klan's activities and not the primary reason for its popularity. And even if the Klan could not bring the same sort of cohesiveness to community life in Indianapolis that it did in Wayne County towns, it still had its greatest impact as a force for popular control at the local level. In fact, in a large city like Indianapolis, the Klan could not rely simply on sensational public demonstrations or social activities to make its presence felt. Instead, it was forced to turn directly to politics. As a result, the Indianapolis Klan achieved more influence in local government and a greater voice in civic affairs than any of the Wayne County chapters.

As noted earlier, in the early stages of its growth the Indianapolis Klan attracted white Protestant men from all walks of life. These individuals joined the order in representative numbers from each of the city's major occupational and religious groups. The important exceptions were that leading businessmen and other economic elites did not join, lower middle-class individuals were somewhat more likely to be members, and those who belonged to the city's relatively new, overtly fundamentalist Protestant churches rejected the Klan. It is likely that as the Klan movement reached its zenith, the membership in Indianapolis was even more widespread. This cannot be proven, of course, since the surviving list of the city's Klansmen does

not extend past early 1923. But if the pattern of membership growth in Indianapolis paralleled those in both Richmond and Denver, Colorado, in any meaningful way, as time went on new members were more likely to come from the working class, making the city's Klansmen even more representative of the general population.⁶⁴

Residential patterns in Klan membership—even in the early period—further demonstrate the order's broad appeal. An analysis of the residential distribution of five hundred Klansmen and five hundred men from the general population in 1923 shows that while Klan membership was more concentrated in some areas, it had a significant following throughout the city (see Table 5.5). In four of the six areas investigated (north central, south central, east, and north), the percentage of Klansmen was higher or nearly equal to the percentage of all men sampled. The two areas where Klansmen were less concentrated (west and south) were overwhelmingly working-class neighborhoods. But at the same time, the percentage of Klansmen in these areas was far from inconsequential and, by the summer of 1924, probably became more representative of the total male population.⁶⁵

Given the heightened significance of ethnic minorities in the population, it is important to note that the Klan does appear to have been particularly popular in the north-central section of Indianapolis, where racial tensions ran especially high. While the figures in Table 5.5 make it appear that the percentage of Klansmen was roughly equal to the percentage of males in the general population, in reality, at least one-third, and perhaps one-half, of the men residing in the north-central area can be assumed to have been black. Compared with the percentage of *white* men, then, the percentage of Klansmen in this area was quite high and can be attributed, at least in part, to white concerns over the consequences of continued growth in the black population. Even in neighborhoods not adjacent to the black community, racist fears about the growing number of blacks in the city probably helped stimulate support for the Klan. Heightened ethnic tensions also may have played a role in the Klan's popularity in the south-central region, which contained most of the city's Jewish population. Klan membership was relatively high in other neighborhoods of southern and eastern European immigrants as well.⁶⁶

Table 5.5

*Residential Distribution of Klan Members and All Males,
Indianapolis, 1923*

Area	Klan		All Males	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
North Central *	88	17.6	94	18.8
South Central	109	21.8	92	18.4
West	43	8.6	71	14.2
East	142	28.4	103	20.6
North	69	13.8	73	14.6
South	41	8.2	67	13.4
Other	8	1.6	—	—
Total	500		500	
Chi-square (6 dof) = 29.01 $P \leq .01$				

Source: See Appendix.

* Contained a large black community.

If ethnic conflict in several neighborhoods contributed to the Klan's appeal, however, it was only part of a wider pattern of social and political concerns that enticed men into the secret order. As shown in Table 5.5, the Klan was popular in suburban areas in the north and especially in the east, where ethnic minorities represented no threat to generally homogeneous white Protestant neighborhoods. Even in south-central Indianapolis, the Klan's attraction appears to have involved more than a turf battle between native-born whites and ethnic minorities. In her recent history of Indianapolis's Jewish community, for example, Judith E. Endelman observes that while Jewish citizens were naturally outraged by the Klan's ideology and disturbed by its popularity, Jewish neighborhoods were not torn by conflict with surrounding white Protestant populations during the 1920s. By that time, Endelman argues, the Jewish community generally had "earned the respect of the larger

community" and sporadic episodes of anti-Semitism were of relatively little consequence. Ultimately, the Klan had "little direct effect on the Jewish community."⁶⁷

The Klan's appeal to south-side Protestant German immigrants and assimilated Germans further complicates the picture. Anti-Catholic and anti-Jewish sentiment in the German community may have contributed to the Klan's popularity. On the other hand, working-class German immigrants had always lived in close proximity to other immigrant groups in that part of the city and there is no evidence that tensions increased significantly during the Klan years. Given the powerful trend toward assimilation by German-Americans in the twentieth century and then particularly after World War I, it is likely that many ethnic Germans perceived the Klan as a patriotic citizens' organization and joined primarily for that reason.⁶⁸

The Klan can be tied more directly to the racial conflict in north-central neighborhoods. In 1925, the Indianapolis Klan gained control of the Republican political machine and made a clean sweep in the municipal election. Under the at-large scheme for electing city councilmen, six new members of the council were chosen in November, all Klansmen and all garnering approximately the same number of votes. Although only two of the new councilmen lived in the north-central section, all appeared sympathetic to the white neighborhood protective associations that were pressing the city to restrict the movement of blacks into white neighborhoods. Shortly after taking office early in 1926, the new Klan councilmen passed a residential segregation ordinance that gave white citizens the right to exclude black families from their neighborhoods. The ordinance was overturned by the courts and never put into effect, but its passage represented a clear example of the racist sympathies of the Klan councilmen.⁶⁹

One of the more significant, and perhaps ironic, aspects of the residential segregation ordinance episode was the relatively small role it played in the larger context of the Klan's involvement in Indianapolis politics. The segregation campaign predated the Klan's emergence as a force in the city. First directed at the public schools, it resulted in a decision by school officials in 1922 to reorganize elementary schools along racial lines and build a new high school that all black students would be required to attend. The attempt to ex-

tend a legally sanctioned system of segregation of residences in 1926 was the next step in the ongoing campaign, rather than something new, and actually generated relatively little controversy among the white citizens of Indianapolis. While Klan politicians supported the measure, it had not been an important campaign issue or the subject of weighty debate between Klan and (white) anti-Klan forces.⁷⁰ Two other issues, in fact, engendered a good deal more political strife. One involved the Klan's assault on the city's Republican machine and the battle over patronage that ensued once the Klan slate had been swept into office. The other issue—by far the biggest of the election—involved the public schools but had nothing to do with racial segregation. Instead, it centered on the Klan's support for a widely supported school building and modernization program and the refusal of school officials to get it under way.

Although the state Klan movement had begun to lose momentum by November 1925, the hooded order was still strong enough in Indianapolis to propel two of its members into top leadership positions in the local Republican organization. One of these men was John L. Duvall, an attorney who since 1909 had made a living operating a series of small suburban banks and whose previous experience in politics was limited to one term as Marion County treasurer. Duvall joined the Klan sometime in 1922 or early 1923 and became its candidate to replace the anti-Klan Republican mayor, Lew Shank, in 1925. Klansman George V. Coffin became even more powerful than Duvall. The former Indianapolis chief of police and Marion County sheriff became a high official in the city's Republican machine beginning in 1924 and surpassed all other leaders of the organization once Duvall and the other Klan candidates were elected in 1925.⁷¹

The issue of patronage surfaced immediately after Duvall won the mayoral contest and revealed the Klan's powerful new role within Indianapolis's Republican organization. Duvall quickly established that the Klan would be repaid for its support. The day after the election, he left Indianapolis for a secret location in Illinois where he could meet with Klan leaders away from the glare of the press and the pressures that were sure to emanate from the Republican establishment. During the next several weeks he issued a series of announcements about expected appointments in the upcoming administration, almost all of which met with the Klan's approval. A number

of Klan insiders were put on the city payroll. One job in the park administration went to the leader of the Indianapolis Klan, George Elliot. An editorial appearing in the anti-Klan *Indianapolis Times* within a week of the election concluded with obvious dejection that the Klan's takeover of city politics had been nearly complete: "The city hall will be turned over to the Ku Klux Klan on January 1. Mayor-elect John L. Duvall has rewarded his friends."⁷²

The Klan had indeed won control of both city politics and the local Republican organization, but the Old Guard did not give up power without a fight and Klan politicians themselves were far from unified as they took command. As the new chairman of the Marion County Republican party, George Coffin attempted to mediate between the Klan faction that had brought him to power and the Republican establishment, represented by attorney William H. Armitage, the Republican boss during the Shank administration. As the election drew near, Coffin apparently came to believe that the new administration should contain a mixture of Klan and Old Guard loyalists. Coffin's willingness to work with Armitage infuriated Elliot, Duvall, and the rest of the Klan's political leadership. On the eve of the election, at a massive rally for the Klan slate, Elliot denounced Coffin as a traitor and a "politician" and declared that the Klan would not be connected in any way with the Republican political machine. Over the next few weeks and into the first few months of the Duvall administration, factional struggles between Duvall and the regular Klan leadership on the one hand, and Coffin, other Klansmen, and a few remaining Old Guard Republicans on the other, were at the center of city politics.⁷³

Coffin's show of independence was not surprising. Unlike Duvall, whose political support was derived almost entirely from the Klan, Coffin had deep roots in Indianapolis politics and maintained a network of allies and supporters that extended well beyond Duvall and Elliot. Coffin had been a popular figure in the city ever since 1913 when, as a police captain, he personally rescued several hundred people and led relief efforts in flood-ravaged West Indianapolis. Later, when he became chief of police and county sheriff, Coffin made inroads into the Republican establishment and became particularly useful to the party in maintaining relations with leaders in the city's black community. Even though Coffin used the Klan to fur-

ther his career, he refused to be controlled by its leaders once he became county chairman, because doing so would have cut him off from traditional Republican supporters. Coffin's attempt to hold the middle ground eventually paid off. In the short run, however, he was able to wrestle away only a few patronage positions as the new administration took office.⁷⁴

While the election thrust Klan factions into a struggle for power at city hall, it had also achieved something more substantive. Along with Duvall and the new city council, the Klan had elected a slate of candidates for the Indianapolis Board of School Commissioners. Their election had been the central issue of the campaign and the focus of a bitter struggle between a powerful group of business leaders and the Klan—much like the battles that took place in Richmond and other communities—over who would control public affairs.

Since the end of World War I, the city of Indianapolis had been engaged in a protracted debate over conditions in its public schools. Newspapers and civic groups had criticized the overcrowded classrooms as well as poor heating, ventilation, and plumbing, outdoor toilets, broken windows, and other indications of disrepair. In 1921 and again in 1923, the voters passed bond measures intended to finance a building program. The program was to include the repair and modernization of existing buildings and the construction of two or perhaps three new high schools, six new elementary schools, and a number of other new classroom buildings. In 1921, in the midst of enthusiasm for the building program, a number of business leaders organized the Citizen's School Committee and offered a slate of candidates for the Board of School Commissioners who would "establish sound management and efficiency" in a school administration that was perceived by the public as poorly run. While the citizen's board won election by giving the impression that it supported the building program, over the next four years it demonstrated instead a determined commitment to hold down expenditures for the schools and generally block the building program.⁷⁵

The campaign against the building program was carried out by the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, the Indiana Taxpayers Association, their allies on the school board and other supporters in state and local government, and the *Indianapolis News*. The first blow

came when the state tax board refused to approve the 1921 school bond after the voters had passed it. Then in 1922 and 1923, the board members of the Citizen's School Committee worked to block other attempts to raise revenues and to postpone decisions about plans for the new school buildings. Further delays grew out of a rupture within the citizen's committee's ranks early in 1923. Two of the school commissioners who had been elected with the committee's support defected and upset the balance of power on the board.⁷⁶ In response, the Chamber of Commerce Education Committee issued a report attacking several of the new building designs for their "extravagance" and pointing to various other examples of waste and inefficiency in the schools. One of its recommendations called for the resignation or impeachment of the two "traitorous" commissioners and another who had joined with them in opposing the Citizen's School Committee. The besieged commissioners refused to resign and vigorously defended the building plans in the press. One commissioner, Dr. Marie Halsep, revealed that from the beginning of her term she had been under pressure to oppose the building program and support the position of the citizen's committee and the *Indianapolis News*. "I was warned that I must obey the *News*," she told a reporter. "One person told me 'if you do as the *Indianapolis News* says, your time on the board will be pleasant. If you do not, then watch out.'"⁷⁷

The city's two other major newspapers rushed to defend the school board from the criticisms leveled by the chamber of commerce. The *Times* and the *Star* both concluded that the problems in the city schools could not be blamed on school board mismanagement. They criticized the report as unfairly biased against the building program, since two of the committee members had also sat on the state tax board, which had undercut the 1921 school bond, and two other members were employees of the *Indianapolis News*. Faced with growing opposition—and with another school bond election just one month away—the chamber of commerce softened its position, stating that it would no longer oppose the building program so long as board members agreed to consult "civic bodies" before making major decisions.⁷⁸

The Klan's involvement in the school controversy began with the 1923 school bond referendum. As the March election date ap-

proached, the *Fiery Cross* printed a series of stories on conditions in the city schools and the opposition to the building program. The Klan newspaper pointed to the "outside toilets, old stoves, stench and filth and revolting conditions" and reminded its readers that previous attempts to finance the building program had been undermined. The main culprit, in the view of the *Fiery Cross*, was the president of the Board of School Commissioners, Charles W. Barry. Much of the criticism of Barry, a Roman Catholic, came in the form of traditional Klan anti-Catholicism. The *Fiery Cross* concocted a number of schemes whereby Catholic bishops were directing Barry to undermine Indianapolis's public schools. At the same time, however, it made more valid criticisms of the opposition to the building program that came from the Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce, the Indiana Tax Board, and the *Indianapolis News*. When voters passed the school bond, the Klan newspaper declared in a front-page headline: "Sure They Want More Schools."⁷⁹

When the Board of School Commissioners came up for reelection in 1925, the Klan led the fight against the Citizen's School Committee. Five candidates, all backed by the Klan and all pledged to endorse the building program, organized as the Protestant School Ticket. By the time of the election, the citizen's committee and its supporters realized that public support for the building program was too strong to be completely thwarted. Some of the new elementary school buildings had been constructed in 1924, and as the election drew near in 1925, the school board broke ground for two of the new high schools and announced that it had agreed on the plans for constructing the Shortridge High School (the land for which had been purchased more than five years earlier). But the citizen committee's change in policy came too late to satisfy the voters. All of the Klan's school board candidates were elected, and despite continued resistance from business interests, they presided over the completion of three new high schools and several new elementary schools.⁸⁰

One of the high schools finished by the Klan school board was racially segregated Crispus Attucks, located in northwestern Indianapolis. The completion of the school during the Klan's reign, along with the attempt by the Klan city council to enact the residential segregation ordinance, led to a pervasive belief in later years that

the segregation campaign of the 1920s grew out of the Klan movement and was implemented primarily by Klan politicians. While the Klan made an excellent scapegoat for later generations of politicians attempting to justify decades of legally sanctioned discrimination, this simply was not the case—despite the fact that the hooded order was a natural home for activists in the segregation campaign and Klan leaders did their part to promote it. The key to understanding segregation and the Klan in Indianapolis is to recognize, first, that Klan politicians were far more interested in patronage and power than they were in ideology and, second, that the Klan and segregation movements were, for the most part, independent of each other. The decision to segregate the public schools was made in 1922 by the board of the Citizen's School Committee at the urging of not only the white neighborhood protection associations but also the chamber of commerce and other business groups that backed the citizen's board.⁸¹ The segregation program did not depend on the Klan's support and would have been carried out had the Klan never existed. The real source of controversy was the building program, not segregation. During the twenties, there were many vehicles for racial prejudice in Indianapolis; the Klan, however, represented one of the few vehicles to challenge the power of commercial business elites in city politics.