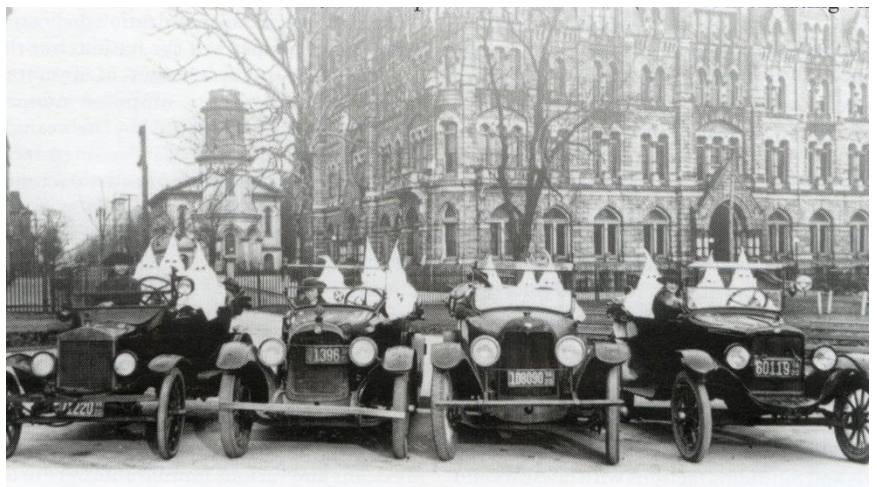


Anti-Black Organizations and Brutality in Texas: A Historical Analysis

The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and other anti-Black organizations severely distressed Black people in the Southern United States, especially in Texas. Black people lived in constant fear of their livelihoods, walking on eggshells avoiding discrimination, arrest, and death by lynching. The presence of these organizations, along with the failure of Reconstruction, led to many white people viewing Black people as hypersexual, lazy, and dangerous to white men and their families.

Beginning in the late 1860s after the American Civil War, the lineage of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) began with Confederate general Nathan Bedford Forrest, the Imperial Wizard of the first Klan and continued with his grandson, Nathan Bedford Forrest II, the Imperial Wizard of the second Klan.¹ Founded on racism, nativism, and Christian evangelicalism, the organization became especially active after slavery was deemed illegal under the Fourteenth Amendment.² Klan members believed that freed slaves were assaulting southern white women and threatening white power and supremacy. They argued the only method to solve these problems was to defend white families through economic and social discrimination, violent beatings and police brutality, and lynchings.³



A group of Ku Klux Klan members in cars.

¹ Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK* (New York, Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 25.

² Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK* (New York, Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 25.

³ Linda Gordon, *The Second Coming of the KKK* (New York, Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 25-26.

Ku Klux Klan members, whether they were slaveholders or not, feared that Black people would overrun society, especially due to the deep roots of racism in the United States.⁴ Many white individuals had held the belief that God had created black people for the particular objective of providing labor for white people, leading to the conviction that racial equality had conflicted with God's plan.⁵ Many former slaveholders had expected the federal government to pay them for the loss of their slave, as many slaves were worth about \$1000, but many white southern families did not own slaves of any kind.⁶ Regardless, many white southerners despised competing with freed people over land, jobs, and cash crops, as many of them were small yeoman farmers aspiring to own larger portions of land.⁷

Klan members, dressed in white robes, frightened people as they carried out their violence. Klan members took advantage of Black families' beliefs in voodoo and the supernatural, especially when they made statements like the following in an eerie voice: "I am a spirit from the other world. I was killed at Chickamauga."⁸ Many Black families noticed the dangers of sleeping near windows and doors, so many slept on the floor to avoid raids and shootings from Klansmen. At weekly meetings, each Klan group was designated to carry out orders of warning, whipping, or killing based on the race of an individual; a white person would get off with a warning at first, but a Black person was usually whipped or killed without warning, and this occurred about twenty times in one night.⁹

⁴ Susan Campbell Bartoletti, *They Called Themselves the KKK*, (New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2010), 3-7.

⁵ Susan Campbell Bartoletti, *They Called Themselves the KKK*, (New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2010), 7.

⁶ Accounting for inflation, this would be \$23,543 in 2024's dollars.

⁷ Susan Campbell Bartoletti, *They Called Themselves the KKK*, (New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2010), 8-9.

⁸ Susan Campbell Bartoletti, *They Called Themselves the KKK*, (New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2010), 29-30.

⁹ Susan Campbell Bartoletti, *They Called Themselves the KKK*, (New York, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2010), 53-54

The Ku Klux Klan and other anti-Black organizations infiltrated Texas city governments and police forces, under the statewide leadership of Roger Q. Mills.¹⁰ During this time, police forces arrested a disproportionate number of Black people, especially in Erath County, leasing them out to the convict leasing system. Most Black people arrested committed minor, divisive crimes like vagrancy and violating local option¹¹ with few committing crimes like burglary and murder. The convict leasing system defined first-class crimes as murder and burglary, but the system defined vagrancy and prostitution as second-class crimes.¹² First-class criminals worked within the confines of the prison walls, unable to work outside. The prison board assigned second-class criminals public utility jobs, like railroads and farms, outside of the prison.¹³

On Sunday, August 1, 1909, Henry Goss, classified as a negro in jail logs and census records, was arrested for liquor production and sale in Erath County.¹⁴ In 1876, the Texas Constitution required the creation of a local option law, and Erath County was one of fifty-three counties that were completely dry, leading to the prohibition of the sale, manufacturing, consumption, and transportation of liquor across the county.¹⁵ He was released on Wednesday, August 4th, 1909 and Thursday, August 5, 1909 on bond.¹⁶

In summary, white supremacist organizations led to intensified resentment in race relations between white and Black people, especially in the South and in Texas. Many white individuals viewed freed Black people as aggressive, sensual, indolent, and disobedient animals

¹⁰ Anabel Burke, "The Ku Klux Klan in Waco," *Waco History*, <https://wacohistory.org/items/show/200>.

¹¹ Violating local option usually referred to local alcohol production and consumption laws.

¹² Donald Roy Walker, *Penology for Profit* (Texas, Texas A&M University Press, 1988), 20.

¹³ Donald Roy Walker, *Penology for Profit* (Texas, Texas A&M University Press, 1988), 20.

¹⁴ Deborah Liles, Abigail Horsley, Anabelle Sherrill, et al, *Final Jail Logs in Erath County (1880s-1910s)* (September 20th, 2020)

¹⁵ K. Austin Kerr, "Prohibition," *Handbook of Texas Online*, Texas State Historical Association, accessed October 22nd, 2020. <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/prohibition>

¹⁶ Dr. Deborah Liles, Abigail Horsley, Elliot Archer, et al, *Final Jail Logs in Erath County (1880s-1910s)* (September 20th, 2020).

and wanted their rights and families protected by white supremacist organizations such as the White League and the Ku Klux Klan.

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