

Beneath the Hood and Robe: A Socioeconomic Analysis of Ku Klux Klan Membership in Denver, Colorado, 1921-1925

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The Invisible Empire of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan was in numbers and political influence the most powerful social movement of the 1920s and probably the most significant crusade of the American right-wing. Unlike its predecessor of the Reconstruction period or its descendant of today, this Klan movement was not primarily southern, white supremacist, or terrorist. Preaching a multifaceted program based upon "100 Percent Americanism" and militant Protestantism, the secret society enlisted recruits in every section of the nation. Among the strongest Klan organizations were the invisible realms of the West—Colorado, Texas, California, and Oregon. Perhaps as many as six million Americans heeded its call to resist Catholics, Jews, law violators, blacks, and immigrants. The Klan's means of resistance were usually political—the election of trusted men who would assail criminals and regulate minority groups. Boycotts, cross burnings, and night riding tactics were also employed to remind minorities of their place.

One of the many questions about the Klan which remains unresolved concerns the socioeconomic character of the membership. Who joined the Ku Klux Klan? Was the Klan a movement of a particular social and economic class? Do popular stereotypes of Klan members approximate reality? Such questions are critical because determining which men joined will not only place the movement in sharper focus but enhance our understanding of why they joined. Almost every scholar concurs with sociologist John Mecklin's observation that the vast majority of Klansmen were "conventional Americans, thoroughly human, kind fathers and husbands, hospitable to the stranger . . ."¹ Consensus, however, ends at this point.

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¹ John Moffatt Mecklin, *The Ku Klux Klan: A Case Study of the American Mind* (New York, 1924), 96.

Mecklin, an early and perceptive student of the organization, considered the Klan a movement of the "well-meaning but more or less ignorant and unthinking middle class . . ."² It included, he added, "in many instances the best citizens of the community."³ Journalist Stanley Frost, also writing in the 1920s, agreed: "They are usually the good, solid, middle-class citizens, the 'backbone of the nation'."⁴ In Oklahoma, town merchants and professionals, rather than poor farmers and tenants joined the secret society. Seventy-three Pennsylvania Exalted Cyclopes swore under oath in 1927 that the rank and file were "gleaned from the average walk of life and such as composes our Protestant churches, our lodges, commercial clubs, and other civic organizations."⁵

The Klan's economic and social respectability has been challenged with qualitative and quantitative data which portray the organization's membership as overwhelmingly lower middle and working class. While it is conceded that prominent men did appear in the klavern hall initially, they were among the first to defect when the Klan swelled with members of lesser rank. Allegedly, Klan violence and blatant appeals to prejudice repelled the better-educated professionals and businessmen. Seymour Lipset inferred, "As a simplistic moralistic bigoted movement, the Klan increasingly became a movement of the less educated and less privileged strata . . ."⁶ Frederick Lewis Allen dismissed the Klan as a product of "the less educated and less disciplined elements of the white Protestant community."⁷ Norman Weaver's investigation of the Detroit Klan revealed that southern whites, threatened by black competition for jobs and homes, were especially receptive to the secret society's appeals.⁸ The Middletown Klan, remarked Helen and Robert Lynd, was "largely a working class movement."⁹ Kenneth T. Jackson's *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* strongly bolsters the marginal man-low status argu-

² *Ibid.*, 103.

³ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁴ Stanley Frost, *The Challenge of the Klan* (Indianapolis, 1924), 2.

⁵ Garin Burbank, "Agrarian Radicals and Their Opponents: Political Conflict in Southern Oklahoma," *Journal of American History*, LVIII (June 1971), 18-19; Emerson Hunsberger Loucks, *The Ku Klux Klan in Pennsylvania: A Study in Nativism* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, 1936), 60.

⁶ Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, *The Politics of Unreason: Right-Wing Extremism in America, 1790-1970* (New York, 1970), 125.

⁷ Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday* (New York, 1931), 56.

⁸ Norman F. Weaver, "The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan" (doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1954), 285.

⁹ Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown* (New York, 1929), 482.

ment. His analysis of Klan membership lists and chapter records from six cities and towns demonstrated:

White-collar workers in general provided a substantial minority of Klan membership and included primarily struggling independent businessmen, advertising dentists, lawyers, and chiropractors, ambitious and unprincipled politicians and salesmen, and poorly paid clerks. The greatest source of Klan support came from rank and file nonunion, blue-collar employees of large businesses and factories. Miserably paid, they rarely boasted of as much as a high school education and more commonly possessed only a grammar or "free school" background.¹⁰

Proponents of the low-status view augment their position by quoting the Klan's second Imperial Wizard, Hiram Wesley Evans: "We are a movement of the plain people, very weak in the matter of culture, intellectual support and trained leadership. . . . This is undoubtedly a weakness. It lays us open to the charge of being 'hicks' and 'rubes' and 'drivers of second-hand Fords.' We admit it."¹¹ Contemporary opponents of the Klan agreed, although their motives may be more suspect. Also offered in evidence is the frequently quoted observer of an Indiana Klan demonstration: "You think the influential men belong here? Then look at their shoes when they march in parade. The sheet doesn't cover the shoes."¹²

A third hypothesis, rarely made explicit, has also been suggested. A few students of the Klan have interpreted the organization's heterogeneous program as a mirror of the membership. The Klan offered a platform of Americanism, militant Protestantism, fraternity, law and order, religious intolerance, and racial purity — a plethora of causes from which a wide variety of men could choose. Charles Alexander, while accepting the middle class explanation, concluded from his study of the Klans in the Southwest that "excluding nonwhites and non-Protestants, the membership of the order was remarkably cross-sectional. Bankers, businessmen, salesmen, physicians, lawyers, ministers, and even university professors donned their white robes and hoods alongside mechanics, farmers, and day laborers. The Klan had something for them all."¹³

¹⁰ Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930* (New York, 1967), 240-41.

¹¹ Hiram Wesley Evans, "The Klan's Fight for Americanism," *North American Review*, CCXXIII (March 1926), 49.

¹² Allen, *Only Yesterday*, 56.

¹³ Charles C. Alexander, *The Ku Klux Klan in the Southwest* (Lexington, Kentucky, 1966), 18-19.

Denver provides an unparalleled opportunity to probe these varying and conflicting conceptions. During the 1920s, Denver was the financial and commercial center of the Rocky Mountain West, unchallenged in a wide trade area extending for 500 miles in all directions. Denver had been founded in 1858 and first served as an outfitting station for miners seeking their fortunes in the mountains. With the building of the railroads and the settlement of the plains, the city had expanded to supply the needs of farmers and cattle ranchers. Denver was primarily a distribution and collection point and never developed substantial heavy industry. Manufacturing was diversified, small scale, and oriented toward local and regional markets. Only 28 percent of the labor force was employed in manufacturing, slightly less than the number engaged in trade and transportation. The city's 256,000 residents were predominantly white and Protestant. Only 6,175 blacks, 37,748 Catholics, and 17,000 Jews made their homes in the community. The Ku Klux Klan came to Denver in the spring of 1921. Within three years the organization had gathered nearly 17,000 members and sufficient political strength to capture control of the municipal government. Klan leaders were able to build the state's strongest organization because they responded to the grievances of Denver Protestants confronted with an actual breakdown in law and order and challenges from minority groups. With city officials seemingly unresponsive, the Klan solution became for many, the only solution. Using lodge, social, and professional connections, Klansmen first contacted Denver's public officials, Protestant ministers, and leading businessmen. Later, in preparation for political action, the Klan broadened its base and welcomed all who sought to enlist. Klan recruiting, after an initial encounter with government authorities, met only scattered resistance. Following a few skirmishes, the path was cleared toward the goal of dictating community policy. The secret society's grip upon Denver became so sure that city officials made no effort to deny hooded affiliations, movement leaders' names and pictures appeared in the newspapers, and the order frequently requisitioned men and vehicles from the police department.¹⁴

Among the artifacts which have survived the movement are the names of the Exalted Cyclops' chief lieutenants and Klan leaders elected in 1924, 1925, and 1926; the official Roster of Members of the Denver

¹⁴ Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, Population, 1920: General Report and Analytical Tables* (11 vols., Washington, D.C., 1921-23), II, 47, 49, 52; Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Census of Religious Bodies: 1926* (2 vols., Washington, D.C., 1930), I, 406-7; Robert A. Goldberg, "Hooded Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Colorado, 1921-1932" (doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1977), 14-63.

klavern; and the 1924 Membership Applications Book. These unique sources open the Klan membership to analysis. To test the long-held observation that early joining Klansmen differed in socioeconomic status from late joiners, the 16,727 knights listed on the roster were divided into three groups: those recruited before January 1923, those between January 1923 and May 1924, and those after May 1924. January 1923 was chosen as an end date for the early joiner group because it closely approximated the Klan's shift from its formative stage to a more aggressive and open involvement in the community. Membership in the early joiner group was determined by examining newspapers, city directories, death certificates, and the resignation, suspension, and banishment dates entered in the roster. The total early joiner population was 1,000 men, from which two names were excluded — one a duplicate and the other a newspaper spy. Those men entering the Klan after May 1924 were designated late joiners. This division was based upon the Denver Klan's decision to open its rolls and launch a major membership drive at the end of May 1924 in preparation for a mayoral recall election. The Membership Applications Book records the names of 13,353 prospective Klansmen and their dates of application from May 27, 1924, to the end of the year. Applicants' names were matched to those appearing in the roster to set the beginning number for the late joiners. More than 1,200 applicants failed to follow up their initial commitment. Also included in the late joiner population were 1,550 men who enlisted in 1925. The late joiners thus numbered 13,735, from which seven duplicate or spys' names were excluded. Three hundred and seventy-five men were randomly selected from the early joiner population of 998 and 583 men from the 13,728 late joiners. No sample was taken from the group joining between January 1923 and May 1924 because the data accumulated would have had little bearing upon the hypothesis under consideration. With a confidence level of 95 percent and confidence interval of plus or minus 4 percent, a sample of 375 is acceptable for a population of 1,000 and 583 for 20,000. Thus, if an indefinitely large number of samples of size 375 or 583 were drawn, the results from 95 percent of these samples would be within 4 percent of the "true" values of the two populations.¹⁵

¹⁵ The list of leaders is complete for 1924, and only the Klexter and Kligrapp are unknown for 1926. Most of the names appeared in the *Denver Express*, April 1, 1924, and May 11, 1926. The other men were either elected leaders in 1925 or members of the Exalted Cyclops' unofficial inner circle. Their names were gathered from a variety of Klan documents and newspapers. Some Klan leaders held more than one office while members. For example, Reverend William Oeschger was Klaliff in 1924 and Exalted Cyclops in 1925; Walter Dubree served consecutive terms as Klokian.

Information about each Klansman was extracted from city directories, vital statistics records, obituaries, biographical dictionaries, military records, and membership lists of various fraternal, civic, and social groups. The resulting collective biography of the 36 leaders and 958 sample Klan members not only produces a sharper socioeconomic picture of the movement but sheds light upon their reasons for joining.

The Klan owed much of its success in Denver to the men who shaped its local identity and charted the course to power. Who were the leaders of Denver Klan #1? What were the backgrounds of those who represented the rank and file, eased factional wrangling, and set priorities upon resource distribution? Age and place of birth information were gathered for twenty-five of the thirty-six leaders. Klan officers ranged in age from 21 to 67 years with a mean age of 42.4 years. Although men in all age groups appeared in the hierarchy, those in the 30 to 39 years (10) and 50 years and older (8) brackets were overrepresented and those in their 20s (2) were underrepresented when compared to Denver's native white male population. While every section of the United States except the Pacific Coast region contributed to the leadership, the largest blocs of Klansmen were born in the Middle Atlantic states (5) and Colorado (6). The sizes of the birthplaces of twenty-one men are known and are primarily towns with a population of 2,500 or less (9) or cities of 100,000 or more people (7). Military service data, available for three-quarters of the men, indicate that twenty never served in the armed forces, one was a Spanish-American War veteran, and four had participated in World War I. It is surprising, considering the youth of many of the leaders, that so few had served in 1917-1918. The Klan's

In 1946, an anonymous Denver Klansman gave *Rocky Mountain News* reporter Lee Casey the Klan's Roster of Members and Membership Applications Book. Casey subsequently donated the material to the State Historical Society of Colorado, where it remained closed to researchers until 1975. The men listed in the roster book bear numbers from 501 to 47,802. Actually, there are only 16,727 Klansmen recorded. Large gaps between numbers inflated the totals, perhaps to impress members with the strength of the organization. Along with the names, residential and business addresses are listed. Members with Denver business addresses and suburban residences were assigned to the Denver Klan. The decision to open the membership rolls is revealed in the District Attorney Philip Van Cise Spy Reports, May 12, 19, 1924, Ku Klux Klan Collection, Western History Department, Denver Public Library. The applications book contains notes which indicate some of the reasons for the failure of more than 1,200 prospective members to follow through: "Says he can't go on account of family," "Bootlegger," and "Short Residence." Herbert Arkin and Raymond R. Colton, comps., *Tables for Statisticians* (New York, 1963), 145 (Table 20).

leaders were mostly married men, with only four remaining single and one divorced.¹⁶

Information concerning length of residence and fraternal affiliations also reflects sharp contrasts. Klan officers resided an average of 14.5 years in Denver before joining. The figure, however, is misleading and hides considerable variation. Eight of the leaders were recent arrivals, having lived in the community three years or less. At the other extreme, long-time residents in Denver, eighteen years or more, constituted one-third of the group. Over two-thirds of the leaders resided in the city for seven years or more. Eighteen, or half of the leaders, had no fraternal membership in a lodge other than the Ku Klux Klan. All but one of the rest belonged to two or more fraternal orders. Of those with multiple memberships, fifteen were Masons, eleven Knight Templars, and eight Odd Fellows. Klansmen were, in addition, active in the Elks, Lions, and Woodmen of the World. The city's elite clubs, such as the Denver Club, Denver Country Club, Cherry Hills Country Club, Lakewood Country Club, and University Club, had no Klan leaders among their members. Four Klan officers belonged to the Denver Athletic Club, which was one level below these organizations. Only one Klan leader was listed in the social register. Three of the five men eligible were members of either the American Legion or the Veterans of Foreign Wars.¹⁷

¹⁶ The breakdown of regions by state was taken from the U.S. Census and is as follows: NEW ENGLAND — Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont; MIDDLE ATLANTIC — New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania; EAST NORTH CENTRAL — Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin; WEST NORTH CENTRAL — Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota; SOUTH ATLANTIC — Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia; EAST SOUTH CENTRAL — Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee; WEST SOUTH CENTRAL — Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas; MOUNTAIN — Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming; PACIFIC — California, Oregon, Washington.

¹⁷ Klan leaders were located in the *Denver City Directory* and traced backward at three-year intervals, from 1925 to 1901. Years of residence is the minimum possible residential period because of time gaps between directories and exclusion resulting from error or youth. In every case possible, information from other sources was used to confirm residential period.

The complete membership rosters of the American Legion, Cherry Hills Country Club, Denver Athletic Club, Denver Chamber of Commerce, Denver Club, Denver Country Club, Knight Templars, Lakewood Country Club, Lions' Club, Rotary Club, United Spanish-American War Veterans, University Club, and the Veterans of Foreign Wars were checked for Klan leaders. Biographic dictionaries, obituaries, and other miscellaneous sources were used to supplement an incomplete list of Denver Masons and to provide data about Eagle, Eastern Star, Knights of Pythias, Elk, Moose, Odd

Although the Klan leaders differed considerably as to age, length of residence, and number of fraternal ties, they showed striking similarity in occupational status. Twenty-six of the men held occupations in the two highest status groups. Only three men were engaged in manual labor. The most frequently occurring occupations were small businessman (8), clergyman (4), lawyer (4), manager of a firm (4), and physician (3). When compared to the occupational distribution for all male Denverites, Klansmen in the high and middle nonmanual categories are vastly over-represented (72 percent as contrasted to 19.2 percent) and all other groups decidedly underrepresented. Unfortunately, the census does not provide the data necessary to compare Klan leaders to the native-born white male population. The men's occupational histories before joining the Klan indicate that twelve were upwardly mobile, eleven were in the same status group as when they first entered the Denver work force, and only one was downwardly mobile. There is little change in these totals when considering occupations held while Klansmen. For some of the men, high occupational status may well have counteracted the detrimental effects of short-term residence and youth upon their chances of joining the Klan hierarchy.¹⁸

Thus, just a rung below the city's elite, the leaders of the Denver Klan were sufficiently attractive — socially and economically — to draw recruits. They were primarily business and professional men whose sobriety and respectability shielded the Klan from charges of irresponsibility and radicalism. Skillfully they exploited lodge and business contacts to lure like-minded men of similar status. As they did, the Klan's reputation was further enhanced. Middle-aged, often with families, they were models

Fellows, Shrine, and Woodmen of the World memberships. Because lists for these groups were not complete, affiliation statistics are minimum numbers. See also *Social Record and Club Annual*, XVII (Denver, 1924), 121-54.

¹⁸ The occupations given are those listed in the *Denver City Directory* for 1922 (early joiners) and 1925 (late joiners). The socioeconomic classification of occupation employed in this study is a modification of the rankings made by Alba Edwards, *A Social-Economic Grouping of the Gainful Workers of the United States: 1930* (Washington, D.C., 1938). Other sources helpful in formulating the occupational classification scheme were Peter M. Blau and Otis Dudley Duncan, *The American Occupational Structure* (New York, 1967); George S. Counts, "The Social Status of Occupations: A Problem in Vocational Guidance," *The School Review*, XXXIII (January 1925), 16-27; Albert J. Reiss, Jr., *Occupations and Social Status* (New York, 1961); Stephan Thernstrom, *The Other Bostonians: Poverty and Progress in the American Metropolis, 1880-1970* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1973).

Interestingly, although the educational histories of only one-third (13) of the men are known, six, or 17 percent, had received degrees from professional or graduate schools.

of decorum — quite convincing in the parental fears they voiced for the future of Denver's youth. The Denver Klan's advantage was obvious — their leaders not only looked the part, they acted it.

"They came from City Hall and from the suburbs," observed a *Denver Express* reporter stationed outside a Klan meeting. "Tall, short, young and old — some well-dressed by tailors and some from Curtis Street second-hand stores."¹⁹ At least visually the Klan rank and file appeared as a heterogeneous aggregation. What do the socioeconomic data collected for the early and late joiner Klan samples indicate?

The Denver Klan was an organization of mature men and not the young. The mean age of early joiners upon entering the Klan was 39.8 and did not differ significantly from the late joiners at 37.8 years (Table 1). The late joiners — 30 to 39 years of age — constituted over 40 percent of their group. Similar proportions of men in their 40s and those over 50 belonged to each Klan group, with the sharpest difference occurring in the 30 to 39 years of age bracket. The late joiners in almost every category more closely resembled the city's native white population. With 85 percent of the early joiners and 75 percent of the late joiners 30 years or older, the movement was hardly an uprising of callow, thrill-seeking young people. Stability is also reflected in marital status statistics. More than 75 percent of both groups were married, 22 percent single, and only

Table 1: Age Distribution of Denver Klansmen, Denver Colorado, 1921-1925, Compared with the Age Distribution of Denver's Native White Male Population in 1920 (Twenty Years and Older) by Percent

Age	Early Joiners	Late Joiners	Native White Male Population
Under 20	—	1.4	—
20-29	15.5	23.4	30.0
30-39	41.4	29.4	26.5
40-49	24.1	24.8	20.1
50 and older	19.0	20.9	23.4
Total	244	286	

Source: Sample data; Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, Population, 1920*, II, 308.

¹⁹ *Denver Express*, April 1, 1924.

1 percent divorced. These figures compared to 58 percent married, 30 percent single, and 2 percent divorced of the adult male population.²⁰

The Midwest, not the South, was the Klan's chief spawning ground. Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and the rest of the states of the east north central and west north central regions furnished the bulk of Denver's Klan population (Table 2). Although one-third of Denver was native to the state, Colorado-born Klansmen comprised less than a fourth of the two sample groups. This discrepancy, however, might only reflect the inclusion of children eighteen years and younger in the census figures for Denver. Curiously, one man born in England, one in Ireland, and two in Germany appeared in the sample. All four were long-time residents and were probably granted admission because of friendship or deceit. Information regarding the size of birthplaces for one-third of the late

Table 2: Distribution of Birthplaces of Denver Klansmen, Denver, Colorado, 1921-1925, Compared with the Distribution of Birthplaces of Denver's Native White Population in 1920, by Percent

<i>Area of Birth</i>	<i>Early Joiners</i>	<i>Late Joiners</i>	<i>Native White Population</i>
New England	3.3	1.0	2.2
Middle Atlantic	8.3	6.4	9.0
East North Central	23.0	25.3	19.3
West North Central	24.0	34.2	21.3
South Atlantic	5.0	4.0	2.5
East South Central	5.8	5.0	3.6
West South Central	4.6	.4	3.4
Mountain (Excluding Colorado)	2.1	.4	2.4
Colorado	23.0	22.6	35.2
Pacific	—	.3	1.1
Foreign Born	.8	.4	—
Total	241	283	

Source: Sample data; Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, Population, 1920, II, 666.*

²⁰ Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, Population, 1920, II, 479.* Because the Klan only admitted those over eighteen years of age, married males in the Census' fifteen to nineteen years of age category were excluded from consideration. Census statistics do not total 100 percent.

joiners (201) and one-half of the early joiners (183) reveals a rural and small-town background. Over 50 percent of the late joiners and 45 percent of the early joiners were born in or near towns with a population of 2,500 or less, 66 percent and 62 percent, respectively, in towns of 10,000 or less. Fewer than one-fourth of the late joiners and one-fifth of the early joiners were born in cities of 100,000 or more.

An overwhelming majority of both early and late joiners never served in America's wars. When the unknown category is disregarded, two-thirds of the early joiners (154) and three-quarters of the later arrivals (203) stayed home during wartime. Seventy-three, or 32 percent, of the early joiners entered the service in 1917 and one man in 1898. The figures for late joiners are even lower: sixty-five men, or 24 percent, served in World War I and one man during the Spanish-American War. In the 1920s, few Klansmen shared their military experiences in either the American Legion or the Veterans of Foreign Wars, comprising just 2 percent and 4 percent of the memberships, respectively. In the ranks, as in the leadership, recently discharged military veterans were noticeably absent. Missing past crusades to save American freedom and democracy, perhaps many saw the Klan as a means to compensate for lost opportunities to serve.

A striking contrast between early and late joiners appears in regard to membership in fraternities other than the Klan. Seventy-six percent (447) of the late joining Klansmen had no known fraternal ties. Of the remaining 136 men, forty-three, or 7 percent, belonged to two or more lodges. Forty-eight percent of the early joiners had no known fraternal ties, but 34 percent were members of two or more orders. The Masons provided a second fraternal home for 85 percent of the early joining Klansmen and 79 percent of the late joiners with at least one lodge tie. Klansmen also appeared in the ranks of the Knight Templars, Rotarians, Lions, Elks, and Odd Fellows but in much smaller numbers. Denver's elite clubs listed only a handful of Klansmen among their members. The Denver Athletic Club contained the most — forty Klansmen, or 3 percent, of its total membership. The notion that early joiners tended to have more fraternal affiliations than late joiners is supported by gamma (+.56), a measure of association. These differences reflect changes in the methods of recruiting between the Klan's arrival and the stage of intensive organizing. Early in the Klan period, the lodge was a prime site for contacting non-Klansmen. Later, as the saturation point was reached in the lodge room, other recruiting techniques were brought into play. A changing membership also indicated a transition in the Klan's meaning and appeal.

Klansmen were both long-time residents and recent migrants to the city. Early joiners resided in Denver an average 13.5 years as compared to 9.5 years for the late joiners (Table 3). Thirty-one percent of the early joiners and 20 percent of the later members resided in Denver eighteen years or more. Fifty-three percent of the later joiners as opposed to 37 percent of the early joiners lived in Denver six years or less; 49 percent to 27 percent, three years or less. The visible impression that early joiners tended to reside in Denver for longer periods is supported by Pearson's coefficient of contingency (.53).

Table 3: Length of Residence of Denver Klansmen, Denver, Colorado, 1921-1925 (Prior to Joining)

Years	Early Joiners		Late Joiners	
	N	Percent	N	Percent
1-3	99	27	242	41
4-6	39	10	73	12
7-9	17	5	40	7
10-13	46	12	28	5
14-17	35	9	53	9
18 and over	117	31	114	20
Unknown	22	6	33	6
Total	375		583	

Source: *Denver City Directory*.

These fraternal and residential data bear directly upon the hypothesis of mass society theorists which ties social movement activism to a weakened network of community groups. According to Lipset, the ranks of extremist movements are filled with "marginal men"—"the personal failures, the socially isolated, the economically insecure, the uneducated, unsophisticated and authoritarian persons at every level of society."²¹ Sociologist William Kornhauser contends, "within all strata, people divorced from community, occupation, and association are first and foremost among the supporters of extremism. The decisive social process in mass society is the *atomization* of social relations; even though this process is accentuated in the lower strata, it operates throughout society."²²

²¹ Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Base of Politics* (New York, 1959), 178.

²² William Kornhauser, *The Politics of Mass Society* (Glencoe, Illinois, 1959), 73.

Early joiner information demonstrates, however, that rather than being divorced from social groups, nearly 20 percent were involved in outside organizational affairs and over one-third were thoroughly enmeshed. It is important to bear in mind for both early and late joiners that these figures are conservative because of the unavailability of complete fraternal membership rosters. Probably, many affiliations remain uncovered. The existing evidence indicates that the majority of early Klan recruits were approached through Denver's network of civic, social, and fraternal organizations. These fraternal and social connections appear to have accelerated the movement's early momentum. On the other hand, a large percentage of early and late joiners seem to fit the mass society stereotype of uprooted and marginal men. Short-term residence and isolation from community affairs did cause many to see the secret order as a beacon of security and stability in an unpredictable environment. But, too much emphasis should not be placed upon what was actually an insignificant and uninfluential minority. Men usually joined the Klan at the urgings of lodge brothers, relatives, or close business associates. Applicants were required to complete a detailed, personal information questionnaire which included the names of five references, preferably Klansmen. Employer and peer pressure, not a lack of self-esteem, carried others into the order. The Klan could also serve as a conduit into the larger community. In the klavern, a Denver newcomer could connect with established figures of outside clubs and fraternities. Finally, a brief residence in Denver and a lack of fraternal ties did not necessarily imply a different motivational or value orientation. Joining the Klan reflected an attachment to the community, a desire to protect it. Protestants of diverse socioeconomic status and background reacted similarly to the Jewish bootlegger, the Italian drug-peddler, and the Jesuit priest.

Mass society theorists have also considered economic depression to be a causative factor in the development of social movements. Historians of the Klan have frequently linked the order's emergence to the deep, but brief, depression that struck the United States in 1920. Economic hard times did not spawn the Denver organization. The Klan came to Denver in 1921, a year of financial collapse. All economic indicators pointed downward: farm prices and livestock receipts had declined, iron and coal production was curtailed, and the number of new business incorporations had fallen off. The Klan, however, was quiescent during the trough; its growth and political victories awaited the return of prosperity in 1923 and 1924. The Denver organization's literature, recruiting appeals, and speakers rarely listed job competition or economic crimes among the

charges leveled at Jews, Catholics, blacks, or immigrants. Moreover, the Klan's first recruits tended to be the more economically and socially prominent members of the society.²³

Historian Jackson's suggestion in *The Ku Klux Klan in the City* that residents in the "zone of emergence" were particularly susceptible to hooded appeals is not applicable to the Denver case. There was no distinct belt of contested neighborhoods in the city because minority expansion was irregular and sporadic. Eastern European Globeville and Little Jerusalem were spatially isolated and not perceived as disruptive of existing residential patterns. Further, Denver, except for the location of its black ghetto, does not fit the ethnic core-middle class rings model of many eastern cities. Thus, while the situational factor of neighborhood transition explains the motivation of some Klansmen, no visible pattern of Klan settlement emerges. Residentially there were four major pockets of Klansmen — north Denver-Berkeley, the area between the Platte River and Cherry Creek, south Denver, and Capitol Hill. One-fifth of the late joiners and 14 percent of the early joiners lived in north Denver-Berkeley, a middle class neighborhood with small, single-family homes and well-kept lawns. The residents of the area, on the western boundary of Little Italy, were especially sensitive to the threat of immigrant encroachment. Another 20 percent of the late joiners resided in the strip of land between the Platte River and Cherry Creek, a densely populated, run-down section of the city. Below Alameda Avenue, in south Denver, were the homes of 13 percent of the early joiners and 17 percent of the later recruits. South Denver was a relatively new area, and like north Denver, populated by the middle class. Capitol Hill, between Seventh and Twentieth Avenues, housed one-third of the early joiners and 14 percent of the late joiners. More affluent than South Denver, Capitol Hill was a heterogeneous area of large mansions, small homes, and exclusive apartments. Other concentrations of Klansmen appeared in Park Hill, downtown Denver, and around the Five Points black ghetto. As expected, the sparsely settled areas east of Colorado Boulevard and west of the South Platte River produced few recruits. The residential distribution is further evidence of the Klan's varied appeal. No neighborhood, whether wealthy, middle class, decaying, old, or new, was off limits to the klavern's klegles.²⁴

²³ "Changes in Economic Welfare, Denver and Colorado," *University of Denver Business Review*, III (January 1927), 21-22.

²⁴ Jackson, *Klan in the City*, 244; William F. Christians, "Land Utilization in Denver" (doctoral dissertation, University of Chicago, 1938), 32-43, 48, 53-62, 73-80; F. L. Carmichael, "Housing in Denver," *University of Denver Business Review*, XVII (June 1941), 10, 17, 19, 22, 42.

Occupational differences between the two groups were considerable (Table 4). Early joiners engaged in high and middle nonmanual occupations comprised 51.5 percent of their group, while just 21 percent of the late joiners shared an equal status. At the same time, 43 percent of the late joiners labored in occupations below low nonmanual as compared to only 16.5 percent of the early joiners. Only in the low nonmanual category do the groups contain similar proportions of men. Within the early joiners sample, the most numerous occupations were: manager of a firm (54), small businessman (42), salesman (23), lawyer (17), office clerk (17), and physician (16). Salesman (48), small businessman (46), and office clerk (38) also predominated in late joiner ranks along with laborer (37), driver (25), and mechanic (20). These occupational differences were significant, with late joiners tending to hold fewer high status jobs than early joiners (γ , $-.56$).

Table 4: Occupational Distribution of Denver Klansmen, Denver, Colorado, 1921–1925, Compared with the Occupational Distribution of Denver's Male Population in 1920

<i>Occupational Status Group</i>	<i>Early Joiners</i>		<i>Late Joiners</i>		<i>Male Population</i>
	<i>N</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Percent</i>
High Nonmanual	58	15.5	15	3	4.7
Middle Nonmanual	135	36.0	107	18	14.5
Low Nonmanual	76	20.3	140	24	22.3
Skilled	32	8.5	110	19	18
Semiskilled and Service	28	7.5	102	17	21
Unskilled	2	.5	40	7	13.5
Unknown	44	11.7	69	12	6
Total	375		583		

Source: *Denver City Directory*; Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, Population, 1920: Occupations*, IV, 1095–98.

The late joiners' occupational distribution was a cross section of the wider Denver structure in all but the unskilled category. Conversely, high and middle nonmanual job holders among the early joiners are heavily overrepresented relative to the Denver population. When the two samples are united, the early joiners, skewed as a result of recruiting bias, disrupt the representative nature of the late joiners. In the combined Klan mem-

bership, the high and middle nonmanual categories are overrepresented, the low nonmanual blocs equivalent, and all blue collar divisions underrepresented. Thus, a larger proportion of men in the upper occupational groups appeared in the Klan than in the outer environment. Semiskilled and unskilled workers were the least likely to share the secrets of the Invisible Empire. The numerical domination of clerical and blue collar workers in the Ku Klux Klan is, therefore, misleading. The Klan attracted a greater number of men holding low nonmanual and manual jobs not because of the alleged intolerance or status anxiety of these groups, but rather due to the character of Denver's economy. There were simply more Denverites in occupations below the middle nonmanual line than above it, and the Klan reflected this distribution. Hence, what at first glance seems to have been a movement of the lower middle and working classes was actually a wider-based organization — a somewhat distorted mirror image of the population encompassing all but the elite and unskilled. A comparison of Klansmen with white native-born males is impossible because the census does not classify occupations by ethnic and racial group.

The pre-Klan occupational mobility histories of 54 percent of the early members and 41 percent of the later arrivals were surveyed. They reveal that before entering the Klan over half of the early joiners were nonmobile, one-third were upwardly mobile, and one-tenth downwardly mobile. Occupationally static late joiners formed 48 percent of their group, upwardly mobile 29 percent, and downwardly mobile 18 percent. There is little change in these percentages when occupations held as Klansmen are considered.

In light of the Klan's initial recruiting techniques, it is not surprising that the early joiners resembled the Denver leadership socially and economically. Klavern officers had first turned to their close friends, relatives, lodge brothers, and business associates when seeking men. There were no significant differences between the early joiners and the leaders as to age, number of fraternal ties, length and place of residence, or occupational status. While similar to the late joiners in age and place of residence, leaders tended to have resided in Denver for longer periods and to hold more fraternal memberships. The leaders were far more likely to have high status occupations than the late joiners (gamma, .79).

Selective recruiting explains much of the socioeconomic variation between early and late joiners. Early joiners were contacted through restricted lodge, business, and professional channels, while the late joiners were conscripted in a mass membership drive. The leaders and early joiners

were economically and fraternally one step below Denver's elite, while the late joiners closely approximated the outer society. Significant differences were observed in length of residence, number of fraternal ties, and occupational status. That is, early joiners tended to live in Denver for longer periods, belong to more lodges, and hold higher status jobs than late joiners. Diversity within the two blocs helped lessen intergroup differences. A sizable bloc of early joiners had lived in the city only a short time before entering the Invisible Empire. Also, men in high and middle nonmanual occupations comprised 21 percent of the late joiner sample. Similarly, common life and generational experiences united the heterogeneous membership. The knights were mature men with families. The majority had roots in the farms and small towns of Colorado and the Midwest. Almost all had remained on the home front during World War I.

The men shared issue interests as well. The Klan's complex appeal, rooted in a common Protestant identity and cache of symbols, was designed to attract men from every station on the socioeconomic spectrum. The result in Denver was a loose coalition of diffuse, unorganized camps distinguished by their particular needs and fears. Distinct groups are discernible although the mosaic is blurred, for few took out membership on the basis of a single feature of the Klan program. Aside from the opportunists, coerced, and faddists whose influence was minimal, several salient groupings can be identified. The Klan contained a small hard core of true believers eager to save the world from marauding Catholics, Jews, and blacks. An allied bloc, less steeped in the rhetoric of prejudice, reacted to immediate threats to their homes and neighborhoods. The lodge men found the mysteries of Kloranic ritual more satisfying than minority baiting. None of these groups alone or combined were sufficient to propel the movement to power. Success came only when the Klan merged their grievances with demands to restore law and order to Denver. Many of those concerned about the spreading lawlessness were not particularly bigoted. They tolerated the rabid passion of fellow Klansmen primarily because of their white Protestant heritage of distrust and the minority's connection to crime. The Denver Klan's law and order emphasis reflected its drawing strength and the needs of its membership. Klan leaders representing the different interests guaranteed, however, that no issue was neglected.

A conscious effort was made in this study to avoid the methodological weaknesses which have hindered the general acceptance of one thesis about Klan membership over another. Unlike other research concerning

the rank and file, data were collected upon a variety of socioeconomic variables. Occupational status, while critical, was only one fragment of information composing a variegated portrait. Moreover, gross classification of occupational information into monolithic white and blue collar categories was rejected for more precise and intellectually defensible divisions. Random sampling provided groups of Klansmen representative of the larger klavern membership. Comparisons to the general population were also undertaken to more fully explore the nature of the Klan phenomenon.

The Denver case supports the conception of a highly diversified membership. Excluding the elite and the unskilled, the Klan rank and file was a near occupational cross section of the local community. Modifications in recruiting methods and issue salience enabled any white Protestant, regardless of background, to find a home in the Invisible Empire. Denver's early joiners were, as a group, prominent men holding high status occupations and multiple fraternal memberships. The later arrival of men more closely resembling the general population did not precipitate a mass exodus of the first recruits. Resignation notations did not fill the membership records because late joiners were welcomed as Klan voters and allies in internal factional battles. Common generational experiences and backgrounds also seemed to lessen disharmony. The young, the elite, and the proletariat were the only groups that could not be accommodated in the Invisible Empire.

Sheltering half of the state's hooded population, the Denver organization, was the center of Colorado Klandom. The Klan's initial objective, Denver also had been the first Colorado community to fall under the sway of invisible government. The Denver Klan's cafeteria of appeals, molded to time and local events, drew strength from governmental inaction and unresponsiveness. White Protestant men from all socioeconomic strata responded to the call to save their homes and community from disruptive groups. The credit for the Klan's success rested with its able leaders, for they attracted and then held this heterogeneous membership together. They made it possible for the movement to be simultaneously an agency for law and order, a fraternal home, and for the newly arrived, a way station bedecked with the symbols of the small town. Operating in an atmosphere of tolerance and unhindered by opposition sniping, the Denver Klan's rise to power was swift.