

## Ku Klux Kulture: America and the Klan in the 1920s

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seen that Betz had spent much of his adult life in the Minnesota National Guard. Betz's 1917 draft registration notes that he had risen to the rank of corporal. He was discharged for degenerating vision in his left eye just as his regiment was being mobilized during the Mexican Expedition. So, in the fall of 1918 Betz was not a volunteer "training to fight amid the trenches and mustard gas," as Brown imagines. A draftee, Betz was assigned to limited military service, which would have placed him out of harm's way. He died in the camp hospital two weeks after being inducted into the army. Instead of exploring the camps and battlefields men like Betz found themselves in, Brown moves on to other "forgotten victims" of 1918. As such, he never fully takes in the tragedy of that fatal year.

*Ku Klux Kulture: America and the Klan in the 1920s*, by Felix Harcourt. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017. 253 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$45.00 hardcover.

Reviewer Brent M. S. Campney is associate professor of history at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley. He is the author of *This Is Not Dixie: Racist Violence in Kansas 1861–1927* (2015).

With several significant studies emerging over the past few years, the Ku Klux Klan in its various incarnations is experiencing a rebirth in the historiography. In *Ku Klux Kulture*, Felix Harcourt contributes significantly to this trend with a fascinating and engaging examination of the Invisible Order in American popular culture in the 1920s. With his focus on cultural history, Harcourt has in many respects done for the Second Klan what Elaine Frantz Parsons did for the first in *Ku-Klux* (2016), her extraordinary cultural history of the terrorist group of the 1860s. With sharp analysis and clear writing, Harcourt has substantially increased our understanding of racism and xenophobia in the 1920s and identified new directions for further inquiry.

Harcourt argues that previous studies of the Second Klan prioritize the issue of membership: how many official members did the group claim in the early 1920s, how precipitously did the membership decline after 1925, and how did Klan leaders attract recruits? Yet, as he demonstrates, that focus minimizes the level of support the organization enjoyed among white Protestant Americans generally. "The Klan wielded broad cultural power that reached far beyond a paying membership," he writes. "If we are to understand that power, the Invisible Empire must be understood not only as a social and fraternal organization, but also as a deeply rooted cultural movement" (6–7). Rising in a period of

stunning change in mass culture, the Klan enjoyed broad success because of its commodification in the popular culture of the age. "What sold in the 1920s, more often than not, was the Ku Klux Klan," he finds. "Rather than a 'bulwark against modernism,' it is more profitable to consider the men and women of the Invisible Empire as thoroughly modern Americans" (9). Harcourt suggests that the Klan's membership rolls provide only the barest indication of the level of popular—or at least tacit—support for the group. "If we approach the Klan as *movement* rather than *organization*, we better appreciate the cultural politics and aesthetic ideology of Klannishness" (9, emphasis in original).

Facing both positive and negative portrayals in the mass media, the Klan saw some of its symbols achieve nearly universal recognition among supporters, opponents, and victims alike, including particularly the white hood and the burning cross. "Through the decade, such signifiers were used to sell everything from newspaper exposés and tell-all memoirs to pulp novels and Tin Pan Alley tunes" (10). Journalists representing the victims of the Klan—African Americans, Catholics, and Jews—often refused to yield space in their newspaper columns for the group's activities in the well-founded fear that, in so doing, they might legitimize and spread its influence. White Protestant newspapers, whatever their attitudes toward the Klan (and they varied widely), more often submitted to the temptation to sell papers through sensational Klan coverage. "The far more common response by newspapers was to compete for readers by lavishing attention on the Klan. 'Dignified silence,' one Klansman noted, 'gets a newspaper nowhere'" (26). Similarly, theatrical performances during the decade "displayed the same commercial hunger for a dash of Ku Klux Klan to add spice. The Invisible Empire was not just featured on the front page of newspapers across the country, but also in *Variety*, alongside stories on George M. Cohan and Mary Pickford" (100).

One gentle criticism of *Ku Klux Kulture*: with its emphasis on national culture, it obfuscates regional valances, mashing together Klans from across the West, the Midwest, and the South into a sort of undifferentiated monolith. However, in fairness to Harcourt, he should not be expected to provide so rich an analysis of the Klan in national culture and then also identify the many differences in the objectives, methods, and enemies of the Invisible Empire in, say, California, Iowa, and Georgia, respectively—and to do so all in the same volume. With his analysis of Ku Klux culture at the national level, the author has created an opportunity for other scholars to explore his findings at the state and regional levels. Readers of the *Annals of Iowa* will be pleased to see that Harcourt has provided considerable attention to the Klans of

the Midwest (including a handful of references to Iowa) that should provide a good starting point for regionally focused studies.

*Ku Klux Kulture* is an outstanding book that will appeal to laypersons and scholars alike. It deserves a wide readership.

*Iowa Barns Yesterday and Today, Including Silos, Corncribs, Homes, and Businesses*, by Karlene Kingery. Omaha: Barnhart Press, 2017. 294 pp. Color photographs, map, glossary, index. \$29.95 paperback.

Reviewer Sally McMurry is professor emerita of history at Penn State University. She is the author of *Pennsylvania Farming: A History in Landscapes* (2017).

*Iowa Barns* represents a gargantuan labor of love stretching back to the 1970s, when the author, Karlene Kingery, received a grant to photograph barns and create a presentation that would help promote public appreciation of Iowa's farming heritage. Kingery completed her photo tour, created her presentation, and then embarked on a five-year odyssey during which she gave hundreds of slide shows to audiences throughout the state. Several decades later she returned to the project and rededicated herself to barn documentation. This book is the result.

The book consists of hundreds of full-color barn photographs, accompanied by individual barn biographies that explain how and when each barn was built, by whom, and for what purpose. Each entry also includes an address. Sometimes period photos are included, or photos of the barn in, for example, 1979 and 2013. The photos are grouped into 15 thematic sections. Some sections are chronological ("19th Century," "Into the 20th Century") while others focus on materials ("Brick and Limestone"), form ("Unique Shapes"); still others refer to uses ("Livestock at Home") or themes ("Institutions and Organizations"). Readers unfamiliar with architectural terms will find the glossary helpful. Although the subtitle mentions "silos, corncribs, homes and businesses," these features together account for fewer than 20 pages.

The barns depicted represent a remarkable range of types and forms, most dating to the pre-World War II era. We can recognize feeder barns and hay barns, for example. Wisconsin-style dairy barns and barns built from catalog designs are also plentiful. There are also quite a few unique or unusual examples, such as circular barns and European-style house barns. Barns in Plain Sect and other communitarian societies are included, although it is not always clear that they are radically different from mainstream barns to the same extent that their creators diverged from mainstream practices in other respects. There is a section on repurposed barns and one on barns with unusual painted decorations.