



KKK Propaganda Photo – Table Mountain 1925



KKK Propaganda Photo

Ku Klux Klan in Colorado – Articles

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Featured Topic: Ku Klux Klan in Colorado and Beyond

For more information on the rationale behind including hateful content in CHNC, see the article [“A Window to History”](#) at coloradovirtuallibrary.org, and CHNC’s [Statement on Harmful Language and Content in Newspaper Collections](#).

The Ku Klux Klan, commonly referred to as the KKK or the Klan, is an American white supremacist terrorist hate group which was first established in Tennessee in 1866 in the wake of the Civil War. During this time of Reconstruction the Klan was not yet active in Colorado, but was most active in the Southern United States. The KKK opposed the rights granted to African Americans in the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments and Klan violence against African Americans and their allies increased during this time.



The influence of the KKK diminished with the passage of the Enforcement Act of 1871, also known as the Ku Klux Klan Act, which protected the civil and political rights of African Americans and made hate crimes a federal offense.



KKK parade in Denver, May 21, 1926. (Courtesy of Denver Public Library Digital Collections, X-21543.)

Around the turn of the century, the KKK underwent a quiet rebirth and a new movement gradually gathered steam that sought to assert white supremacy in America, bolstered by the antiblack policies of Jim Crow. The movie *Birth of a Nation*, which depicted the original Klan as chivalrous heroes, was used by the Klan as a marketing device. The organizers of the “new” KKK realized that, in order to regain the popularity it saw during Reconstruction and recruit members in the Midwest and Rocky Mountain Region, it needed to project an image of the Klan that distanced it from the violent hate crimes that made it infamous throughout the country.



Klan members on Ferris wheel, Cañon City, April 26, 1926 (Found on northerncoloradohistory.com, original image from the Royal Gorge Regional Museum & History Center.)

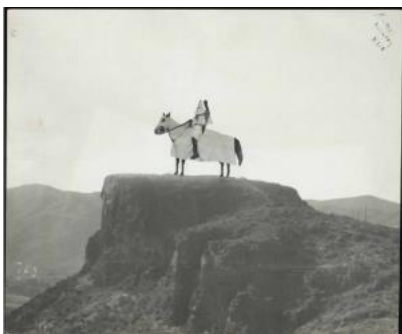
The Colorado Klan of the 1920s held public parades, [picnics](#), and auto shows that attracted huge crowds as part of an effort to appear family friendly while simultaneously appealing to the nationalistic and racist prejudices of whites. The Colorado klaverns expanded on their traditionally antiblack stance to also include (or rather, exclude) Catholics and Jews, feeding on Protestant white fears that their safety – both moral and personal – was at risk to the supposedly unlawful or immoral behavior of minority groups. The Klan promoted a stance of “Law and Order” and proclaimed they were “assisting at all times the authorities in every community in upholding law and order.” It was in 1920 that the new Klan employed a publicity company and membership skyrocketed in states such as Indiana, Colorado, and Oregon.



“Klan Day” at the races at Overland Park, circa July 1925. (Courtesy Denver Public Library Digital Collections, Rh-460.)

Colorado is thought to have had the second highest KKK numbers in the nation at this time. In 1921, the [Denver Doers Club was established](#). This group was the Klan by another name and their members, headed by the Colorado Klan leader, Dr. John Galen Locke, held rituals such as cross burnings and initiations atop the mesas near Golden, CO. There was a concerted effort at this time and in the

coming decades to place Klan members into mainstream politics. Famously, Benjamin F. Stapleton, member of the Denver Klan, was elected Denver’s mayor with the support of the KKK, as was Colorado Governor Clarence J. Morley, and US Senator Rice W. Means, also members, as well as many other elected officials throughout the country. By the end of 1924, the KKK all but “[took possession of \[Colorado’s\] state government.](#)”



Photomontage propaganda image showing a Klan member atop Castle Rock on South Table Mountain near Golden. (Courtesy Denver Public Library Digital Collections, RMN-037-3985.)

Although there are few recorded accounts of violence on the part of the Klan in Colorado at this time, the threat of violence remained a core part of the Klan’s operations. For example, they once sent a threatening letter and [burned a cross](#) outside the office of Dr. Clarence Holmes, Denver’s NAACP president who was pushing for the integration of

Denver’s theaters. Instead, the Klan’s new approach included utilizing the popular media of the time: newspapers. Publications such as [Protestant Nation](#), [Protestant Herald](#), and [The Rocky Mountain American](#) (and the Klan’s own [The Durango Klansmen](#)) showed support for Klan ideology or white supremacy more generally and were key to the Klan’s effort to legitimize and spread its ideology in the 1920s. Some newspapers, however, such as [The Colorado Statesman](#) were openly opposed to the insidious and powerful influence the Klan held in American society, and other Colorado newspapers at this time showed opposition to the Klan’s presence in the state, such as [Denver Jewish News](#), [Fort Collins Courier](#), and [The Steamboat Pilot](#) either through direct criticism or publishing news articles that painted the KKK and its “America First” ideology in a negative light.

KKK members and burning crosses encircle a crowd of people at “Kastle Mountain,” near Denver, Colorado. (Courtesy Denver Public Library Digital Collections, X-21546.)

“When men who now think that patriotism consists in a masked hostility to Jews, Catholics and Negroes, come to see how utterly ludicrous they appear, they will acquire sense and become honest Americans again on their own accord.” [The Steamboat Pilot](#), Nov. 19, 1924



Although Klan members held important positions in the state and beyond, the opposition from officials such as district attorney Philip Van Cise and Judge Ben B. Lindsey, as well as a series of corruption scandals (including an investigation into Dr. Locke's tax records), made any total takeover by the Klan an impossibility. Then, during the Great Depression, the resurgence of the Klan waned as the nation struggled to feed itself.



A burned cross in Clarence F. Holmes' yard in the Five Points neighborhood of Denver, Colorado. (Courtesy Denver Public Library Digital Collections, X-22320.)

The third rise of the KKK began after 1950 (and persists, to some extent, to this day), taking the Civil Rights Movement and desegregation as a renewed call to arms, quite literally. Klan membership would never again reach the levels it saw in the 1920s and members now made no effort to appear family friendly. Gatherings such as parades and picnics were never to be repeated. Instead, the threat of violence and actual violence became a top strategy and acts of domestic terror, such as bombing the houses of Klan enemies, became more and more common in the South, forcing Klansmen further underground. The 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in Birmingham, Alabama, perpetrated by Klansmen, cemented general public sentiment against the KKK. A notable [story from 1978](#) concerns Detective Ron Stallworth of the Colorado Springs Police Department. This black police officer managed to infiltrate the Colorado Springs chapter of the Klan and exposed two klansmen working at the NORAD headquarters in Cheyenne Mountain. This story was immortalized in the Spike Lee movie *BlackKkKlansman*.

The Klan of the 1970s and 1980s, now aligned with neo-Nazis, was fueled by a belief that a race war was coming and minority groups, especially Chicanos and Mexicans, were a threat. Chicano newspapers [La Cucaracha](#) and [El Gallo](#) openly opposed the Klan's white supremacist activities targeting the Latinx communities along the US-Mexico border under the guise of protecting the border from illegal



immigration. Many newspapers, including the feminist paper *Big Mama Rag*, published [calls to organize](#) against the Klan after five protesters marching to support workers' rights activism among mostly black textile industry workers were killed by members of the Ku Klux Klan and the American Nazi Party on November 3, 1979 in Greensboro, North Carolina.

The influence of the Klan both [in Colorado](#) and nationally has never recovered due to the numerous lawsuits brought against their violent actions in the 1970s and 1980s. Although white supremacist groups are still present in Colorado, the days of "one" united Klan are long passed. Now, neo-Nazi and white supremacist groups in Colorado make up just a few of the over 800 organizations designated by the Southern Poverty Law Center as extremist hate groups currently operating in the United States.

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