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The Ku Klux Klan in Canada: A Century of Promoting Racism and Hate in the Peaceable Kingdom by Allan Bartley

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Book Reviews

Autumn 2021

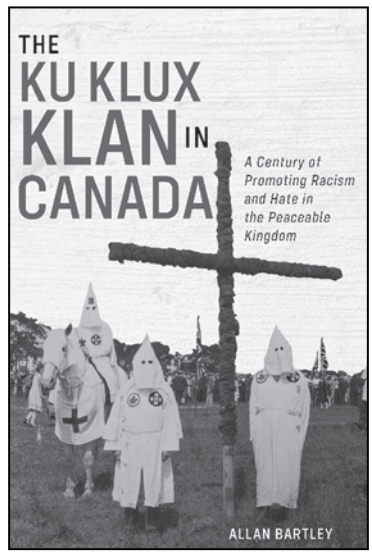
The Ku Klux Klan in Canada
A Century of Promoting Racism and Hate in the Peaceable Kingdom

by Allan Bartley

Halifax, Formac, 2020, 319 pages, $24.95 soft cover, e-book also available, ISBN-10: 1-4595-0613-8 and ISBN-13: 978-1-4595-0613-8, (www.formac. ca)

Allan Bartley in his new book characterizes the Ku Klux Klan as "an organization dedicated to white racial supremacy, the suppression of Black people, Jews, Catholics, Asians, Chinese, eastern Europeans and just about anybody who looked, sounded or seemed different from the white Protestant majority in Canada and the United States" (11-12). His comprehensive survey begins in 1915 with the arrival in Canada of D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, a wildly popular blockbuster movie, which narrated in dramatic style how the original Klan was formed after the Civil War to ensure that newly emancipated Blacks did not achieve freedom and equality. The Klan was an American import into Canada, but that is not the whole story. There was something in Canada that was very receptive to the Klan, and that "something" was racism. The Klan did not bring anything completely new to Canada. It merely repackaged and gave novel expression to what was already here.

It is easy to articulate what the Klan was against, much harder to talk about what it was for, a problem that stalks Bartley's book. The Klan claimed to be a Christian organization with a mission to reform society. It demanded prohibition of beverage alcohol, upheld sexual morality (including attacks on prostitution), and strove to eliminate political corruption. Klansmen saw themselves as knights in shining armor, riding forth on noble steeds to rescue a society gone badly wrong. This righteous



pretension sits awkwardly alongside the brutality of Klan violence, mainly in the United States, but also in Canada to lesser degree. How these two sides of the Klan were able to function together is a question worthy of discussion, but it is not a question that Bartley's book addresses.

There are nine chapters devoted to the Klan in Canada in the 1920s and 1930s, especially in the provinces of Ontario, the Maritimes, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, where it was most prominent. The Orange Lodge played an important role. Like the Klan, the Lodge was committed to the ideal of British Protestantism, but unlike the Klan, it avoided excesses of extremism and violence. Nonetheless, there was some cooperation between the two groups. The first meeting of the Klan in a new area might be held in the Orange Lodge Hall, and sometimes invitations to the meeting were sent to local Orangemen by a fellow Lodge member. On other occasions, the Lodge sought to distance itself from the Klan, especially when the latter attracted bad publicity. Bartley sums up the relationship by saying that the Orange Lodge "served as both a supporter and rival of the Ku Klux Klan in Canada" (29).

As a secret society, the Klan did not leave much of a paper trail of historical records. It seems clear, however, that the organization soared in Canada in the 1920s before tapering off in the 1930s. Recruitment of new members fell to officials known as "kleagles." They were allowed to keep for themselves four dollars of the ten-dollar initiation fee paid by the new members they signed up. Kleagles had certain characteristics in common. They often had previous experience in the military or on police forces; other times they were former evangelical preachers. They tended to have itinerant lifestyles, moving from place to place and from job to job. Sometimes they were married, but since they were on the road a lot, they saw their families but seldom. They had a habit of giving themselves phony titles, such as "Dr." or "Colonel." They affected Southern accents for their incessant patter of ingratiating remarks, folksy humor, and alarmist rhetoric. Bartley refers to them as "chancers and scam artists. (53)" All too often they stole the money they were supposed to be collecting for the Klan.

And yet, despite all this, the Klan did well and recruited thousands of members. Why were they so popular? Bartley suggests that it was because the Klan offered a "structure" for hate (52). But this answer does not satisfy. Here we have the second major flaw of the book—the failure to come to grips in a thorough-going way with the social, political and cultural context in which the Klan thrived. Hate is a universal; it is always with us to one degree or another. What we need is a rich and detailed analysis of why hate took the form of it did with the Klan. Bartley does not do this, but then no one else in Canada has done it either.

The Klan faded out in the 1930s, and revived in the 1980s. By this time, the Orange Lodge had dwindled, and British

Protestantism was passé as a cultural force. Immigrants from all over the world redefined Canada, especially in the big cities, where diversity and inclusion were the new watchwords. This shift triggered a backlash by upstart white supremacist organizations such as Aryan Nations, the Aryan Resistance Movement, and the Brotherhood. The Klan was relegated to the sidelines, a minor player in the new constellation of hate groups. As in former times, the American influence was powerful. David Duke established the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan in New Orleans in 1975 and visited Toronto to spread his message with some success.

The final chapter of the book turns to the twenty-first century and the age of the internet. The worldwide web has proved a boon for white supremacist groups, enabling the easy flow of propaganda and providing direct access to potential supporters in the privacy of their own homes. In this environment the Klan has been overshadowed by its competitors, who are not interested in cross burnings and white hoods. Bartley observes that "by the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century there was no formal organization extant with name of Ku Klux Klan of Canada" (276). He goes on to say that the influence of the Klan is not entirely extinguished. Its "brand" continues to have symbolic power, and it is still the universally recognized shorthand for white supremacy and hate. Bartley makes his arguments convincingly in a reliable, comprehensive narrative of the Klan in Canada. His book is a testament to the power of shining light in dark corners.

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A Mohawk Memoir from the War of 1812

John Norton - Teyoninhokarawen

Introduced, annotated, and edited by Carl Benn

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019. 392pp. Paperback $39.95 ISBN: 9781487523268
(www.utorontopress.com)

Historians are not prone to letting historical documents "speak for themselves" as one of the central elements of historical methodology is to contextualize, analyse, and explain the historical significance or place of a document within a larger narrative. Rarely do historical studies provide the reader with more than a few sentences or paragraphs of the words written by those who may have witnessed some the most significant events in history. In "*A Mohawk Memoir from the War of 1812,*" Carl Benn shows that presenting the words of historical actors, in this case John Norton-Teyoninhokarawen, as they chose to write them adds significant value to our understanding of shared history. Norton, himself, is a fascinating individual who deserves greater attention.

For those familiar with the events of the War of 1812, John Norton's name is easily recognisable. A prominent Indigenous military leader during the War's battles on the Niagara Frontier, his early life in Scotland, his wide-ranging travels and his role in Settler-Haudenosaunee relations have been overshadowed by other Haudenosaunee leaders, or undermined