“I Want Everyone to Know the Shame of the State”

Henry J. Allen Confronts the Ku Klux Klan, 1921–1923

by Patrick G. O’Brien

A vast Ku Klux Klan—the Invisible Empire—deeply implanted itself in Kansas in the immediate post-World War I decade. Whereas the last publicized Klan demonstration in the state (on Martin Luther King Jr. Day of 1993) verged on the laughable—eleven assorted skinhead types from six states—Kansas Kluxers were estimated to have numbered as many as two hundred thousand during the 1920s. Although an exaggerated figure, the Klan included a large portion of the eligible white, male, Protestant population. The strength of the Klan, however, was not based solely on numbers. Its influence also derived from a skillful leadership adept at political manipulation and the unavoidable reality that many Kansans adhered to Klan beliefs, if not always its extreme methods.1

Patrick G. O’Brien is a professor of history at Emporia State University and a past president of the Kansas History Teachers Association. He has published extensively on Kansas and the Great Plains, including his article “Kansas at War: The Home Front, 1941–1945,” published in the spring 1994 issue of Kansas History.

Kansas governor Henry J. Allen possessed greater insight than many of his contemporaries by recognizing the truths about the Invisible Empire when it arrived in Kansas in the mid-1920s. Of the many clashes during his second term of office, Allen's largest was with the Ku Klux Klan.

"I WANT EVERYONE TO KNOW THE SHAME OF THE STATE"
As formidable as the Klan was in the early 1920s, cracks quickly appeared, and it had waned sharply by the end of the decade. The Klan did not sink of its own weight but largely due to its prosecution by anti-Klaxer Kansans. Of those identified as responsible for the Klan's demise, William Allen White has received preponderant credit. According to one popular view, the Emporia newspaper man and Pulitzer Prize winner ran as an independent anti-Klan gubernatorial candidate in 1924 when the Republicans and Democrats unconscionably accommodated the Invisible Empire. He won respect and 15 percent of the popular vote, and the Klan crumbled. Although White's influence should not be minimized, this version of the story grossly exaggerates it.²

² White's typically immodest view of his role was "I got out and challenged it [the Klan] and rebuked it and stopped it from proving its power... and also piling up one hundred and fifty thousand votes... as a protest against the Klan. That protest... broke the back of the Klan." See William Allen White to Ben S. Paulen, November 10, 1926, Correspondence, Ben S. Paulen Administration, Records of the Governor's Office, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society, hereafter referred to as Governor's Records. Devotees of White largely and uncritically have accepted his evaluation, including Frank C. Clough, William Allen White of Emporia (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1941); Walter Johnson, William Allen White's America (New York: Henry Holt, 1947); and

One aim of this article is to set the record straight, particularly with regard to Henry Justin Allen, whose key part in excising the Kansas Klan has been almost studiously ignored. Less deserving of obscurity than many Kansas governors, Allen may have enjoyed the greatest reputation of any newspaper in a generation when the state had a profusion of extraordinary ones. Beginning as a reporter with the Salina Republican in 1891, Allen owned and edited nine Kansas newspapers in his fifty-nine-year journalism career. Probably he was best known as the magnate of the Wichita Beacon, whose masthead modestly claimed it was "Kansas' Greatest Newspaper."

Allen's overwhelming compulsion was politics, however, not journalism or the arts, of which he was an enthusiastic patron. He was already a state political fixture when his religious conversion during a 1911 Billy Sunday evangelist crusade motivated his permanent shift to the progressive wing of the Republican Party. Allen gained national recognition the next year from his strenuous advocacy of Theodore Roosevelt for the Republican presidential nomination. Defecting to support Roosevelt's Bull Moose candidacy in 1912, Allen ran as the Progressive gubernatorial candidate two years later, and rejoined the Republican Party in 1916.

Immediately pardoned for party disloyalty, Allen was the Republican gubernatorial candidate in 1918. As a Red Cross officer in France during World War I, he chided the military for dilatorily notifying families of deceased and wounded soldiers. Feuding with the military made him a celebrity, and the party cam-

Jack Wayne Traylor, "William Allen White's 1924 Gubernatorial Campaign," Kansas Historical Quarterly 42 (Summer 1976): 180-91, which is a standard source on the election.


W.G. Chluzo, Rascals in Democracy (New York: R.R. Smith, 1940), has a perceptive personality study of Allen. For informative accounts, see Wichita Beacon, April 7, 1929; Wichita Eagle, January 21, 1912. For obituaries, see Kansas City Star, January 17, 1950; Wichita Beacon, January 5, 1950; Topeka State Journal, January 17, 1950. Allen's personal papers are in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., and his official gubernatorial papers are in the Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.
campaign waged while he was in Europe resulted in his election by a record 150,000-vote margin.

Enjoying only slight success with his moderately progressive program, Allen's combative personality in the divisive postwar atmosphere ensured strife-filled administrations. Creating the Kansas Industrial Court to deal with industrial disruption through compulsory arbitration of labor disputes earned Allen both nationwide publicity and a bitterly turbulent first term. Although the Klan arrived in Kansas after Allen's first term, the controversy in which he became embroiled over forbidding *The Birth of a Nation* to be shown in state theaters was an ironic backdrop to his second administration.

Of Allen's many clashes during his second term, his largest was with the Klan. Whereas many politicians equivocated on the Invisible Empire, Allen immediately expressed his antipathy when the Klan penetrated Kansas in mid-1921 and organized local klaverns. Allen had every reason to fear the Klan's potential to disrupt government and shatter civility based on the turmoil occurring in states such as Texas, California, and Oklahoma.

With greater insight than many of his contemporaries, Allen recognized the Invisible Empire as "the old A.F.A., plus the antipathy to the Negro, plus the antipathy to the Jew, all wrapped up in the American flag and labeled 'one hundred percent Americanism.'" The American Protective Association (APA) had flourished nationwide during the 1890s by emphasizing the immigrant menace to America, and the Kansas APA branch was virulently anti-Catholic. Although some Kansas Kluxers harbored malice toward a long list of "undesirable" persons from vagrants to wife beaters and Jews, the state Klan's special animus was toward Catholics.

Raking the Klan as "un-American" and perniciously "founded upon racial and religious prejudices," Allen warned that the state would punish any Klan interference with legal processes. Like many Kansas adversaries of the Klan, Allen may have deplored its crude bigotry, but he believed its gravest dangers were in the practice of secrecy and impulse to act extralegally. Kluxers and anti-Kluxers often had common beliefs, and the latter typically found the former less noxious because of the prejudices they fostered than the threat they posed to legal and official processes.

When the profiles of Kluxers and anti-Kluxers are compared, the reason their beliefs often coincided is patently clear. Allen, for example, belonged to the Protestant denomination, the political party, and the religious fraternal lodge from which the Klan derived its greatest strength. Kluxers were not anonymous, shadowy figures to Allen; they were newspaper colleagues, fellow Methodists, Masonic Lodge brothers, and close friends. Not only did Allen's enmity toward the Klan create a formidable political nemesis, but it entailed a high personal cost in strains and ruptures with associates and friends. In contrast to his public Klan bashing, Allen adopted reason and forbearance in private dealings with pro-Kluxers and admitted he had many of the same fears that the Invisible Empire used to snare recruits. Deterioration in cordial relations between Allen and his friends and associates favorable to the Klan was virtually inevitable, but he was the truly offended party in nearly every case.

It was clear even when Allen first warned the Klan in mid-1921 that it would not be halted simply by hostility and threats. The Invisible Empire essentially organized quietly and unobtrusively during its first year in Kansas, and Allen largely limited himself to publicly chastising the Klan and obtaining intelligence. Although Kluxers' furtiveness and stingy state budgets complicated the latter task, he obtained copi-
During the 1920s, Kansas Kluxers may have numbered as many as two hundred thousand. Their membership was assisted by distribution of such pamphlets as this one.

The Truth About
The Knights of
The Ku Klux Klan

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ODERKIND PUBLISHER
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Clous information by employing private investigators and soliciting reports from anti-Klan local officials and private citizens. Probably because the Klan was not highly disruptive during the early recruitment phase and its strength was underestimated, Allen’s personal and official papers disclose no serious covert effort within his administration to devise anti-Klan strategy until well into 1922.

Allen wrestled less with the Klan itself during its first year in Kansas than with the consequences of the bigotry that it both promoted and exploited. The Catholic Register, the weekly newspaper of the Kansas City diocese, ominously had warned readers as the Klan spread northward that Kluxers especially loathed Catholics. This warning was particularly apt as Kansas had displayed a long congeniality with anti-Catholicism, which thrived once again just before, during, and after World War I. Consequently, the Klan had a waiting constituency when it entered the state.

Perpetuating one of the oldest anti-Catholic delusions of a Vatican conspiracy against America, the Klan aggressively campaigned to exclude Catholics from any public posts. Notwithstanding the fact that few Catholics held elective or appointive office far less even than the 9 percent they constituted of the state population, many Kansans were not offended by the Klan and supported efforts to eliminate Catholics from official positions.

In May 1922 Allen jumped into the controversy swirling around the superintendent he had appointed at the Girl’s Industrial School at Beloit. In a speech at Manhattan, Allen rejoined to the charges made against Ella McMahon and answered the demands for her dismissal. He called the accusations against her “false and absolutely without foundation ... tattle-tale stuff magnified by ... meddlesome persons inspired in their opposition to Miss McMahon by the fact that she is a Catholic.” If the agitators succeeded in obtaining her dismissal, Allen certainly wanted to ensure that everybody was informed: “If in this enlightened age the people of Kansas are so bigoted as that,” he emotionally declared, “I want everyone to know the shame of the state.” Acknowledging political realities, Allen shrewdly appointed a commission of three Protestant ministers to investigate the complaints against McMahon.

Allen only selectively interceded on behalf of vulnerable Catholics in public jobs. Education often had been the focus of sectarian strife, and the Klan waged

7. James F. Meeke to Henry J. Allen, March 7, 1922, ibid. This is a nine-page single-spaced report on the Klan in southeast Kansas based on a one-month investigation. It discusses Klan strength and operations and identifies many members in towns such as Caney and Coffeyville. The county attorney of Montgomery County, as one example, supplied Allen with important information. See Donald W. Stewart to Henry J. Allen, July 7, 1922, ibid.

8. Catholic Register (Kansas City, Mo.), August 4, 1921.

9. Although the Klan often raged about Catholics in public posts, only a minimum of correspondence on this subject has survived in the papers of the various governors. A Kansas City klansman and dentist, for example, complained of a Catholic on the State Board of Nurses and “earnestly ask that a Protestant be put on in her stead.” See C.P. Rhoads to Ben S. Paulen, January 30, 1925, Governor’s Records.

Discrimination against Catholic public school teachers is examined in the Catholic Register, July 24, 1924. One extreme example in Lyon County illustrates the lengths to which the Klan and its sympathizers went to remove Catholics from the classroom. When a rural school board, largely for legal reasons, rejected a Klan-organized community effort to dismiss a Catholic grade school teacher, her one-room school was burned down. Although no arson charges were ever filed, the identity of the culpable party was common community knowledge. The episode is described in Perkins, “The Ku Klux Klan in Lyon County, Kansas,” 58–59.

10. Catholic Register, May 18, 1922.
an especially assiduous campaign, for example, to expel Catholic teachers from public schools and colleges. Despite cogent evidence that state college presidents, public school boards, and district superintendents fired Catholics and refused to hire qualified ones on religious grounds alone, Allen stayed aloof. As retaliation of a kind, however, he enjoined supervisors in state government to discharge known Klan members.\textsuperscript{11}

Allen’s first serious clash with the Invisible Empire occurred when it planned to parade and initiate several hundred members at a ceremony in Arkansas City on July 4, 1922.\textsuperscript{12} Arkansas City Kluxers, estimated to number five hundred, claimed it would be the first demonstration of its kind in the state and announced that mounted horsemen in full Klan regalia would lead the procession to a hill north of town to erect a huge fiery cross.

Besides deep acrimony between citizens due to the Klan, Arkansas City was one of many Kansas towns suffering bitter divisiveness from the fractious railroad strike of 1922. The Klan elsewhere typically aligned with the business and property interests in labor disputes, but it took the side of railroad workers and strikers in Kansas. One result was that railroad towns became strongly “Kluxed” (in the lexicon of the 1920s), and the whole Klan issue became entwined with the strike and the Industrial Court controversy.\textsuperscript{13}

Objecting to the Klan demonstration on the grounds that it would menace the peace of the town, Allen notified local officials by telephone that he would stop the parade with troops if necessary and threatened dire consequences if they ignored his orders. The Klan backed down and canceled. On July 5 Allen’s official representative, Major William F. Thompson of the state’s adjutant’s office, began an investigation of both the Arkansas City strike and Klan situation. Three days later, Allen proclaimed wearing masks on Kansas streets to be illegal on the grounds that such displays created an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.\textsuperscript{14}

Although the governor had scored decisively in the first round with the Klan, it quickly became evident that the Klan had not been slowed down perceptibly. The Arkansas City confrontation ended the quasi-truce between Allen and the Invisible Empire, accelerated their clash, and prompted Allen’s administration to reflect studiously on how best to combat the Klan.

The idea of legally banning the Ku Klux Klan came in the wake of Arkansas City when Judge James A. McDermott of the Kansas Industrial Court noticed while in a meeting with Allen that the Klan application blank in the Independence Evening Star included the statement that the Klan was incorporated.\textsuperscript{15} On July 13 the Wichita Beacon ran a short front-page story stating that Allen was considering legal action against the Klan on grounds that it claimed corporate powers but had never obtained the state charter board permit needed by foreign corporations to legally conduct business in the state.\textsuperscript{16} Numerous Kansas newspapers unobtrusively reported the same story the next week.

Although the Klan never officially requested a charter, it made an inquiry in 1921. Both the governor and secretary of state indicated that any application would be rejected. They had a clear precedent for not allowing disruptive organizations to operate in Kansas: the state had rejected the American Protective Association’s charter application in 1893 because of its inflammatory and probable violent nature.

\textsuperscript{11} As one example, Allen recommended firing a deputy game warden in Pratt. See Henry J. Allen to Alva C. Clapp, November 14, 1922, box 448, Allen Papers.

\textsuperscript{12} See, for example, the news stories in the Arkansas City Daily Traveler and the Arkansas City Daily News, July 3–5, 1922. Allen’s view is expressed in the Wichita Beacon, July 9, 1922.

\textsuperscript{13} The first threat purportedly issued by the Klan against Allen was a letter supporting the strikers and warning him “to reform.” See Ku Klux Klan to Henry J. Allen, July 19, 1922, box 448, Allen Papers. See also Topeka State Journal, July 21, 1922. Although some historians believe that the strike was the “direct cause” of Allen’s later decision to legally oust the Klan, neither his official nor private papers concretely support that view.

\textsuperscript{14} Governor Allen to Sheriffs, Mayors, and all other Peace Officers of the State, July 8, 1922, box 448, Allen Papers.

\textsuperscript{15} J.A. McDermott to Richard J. Hopkins, July 13, 1922, box 449, ibid.

\textsuperscript{16} Wichita Beacon, July 13, 1922.
Henry Allen belonged to the Protestant denomination and the religious fraternal lodge from which the Klan derived its greatest strength. Beneath their white hoods at gatherings such as this one at an unidentified location, Klan members were Allen's newspaper colleagues, fellow Methodists, Masonic Lodge brothers, and close friends.

It was a long while, however, before Allen's second mention of expelling the Klan on grounds that it had no charter. One apparent reason for the long interval was that Kansas Attorney General Richard J. Hopkins believed that the Klan did not need a state charter to have meetings and solicit members. He thought that the state had no legal grounds to move against the Klan unless it committed an "overt act." Allen was eager to rid Kansas of Kluxers, but Hopkins's advice may have well influenced him to wait for stronger justification before acting.

The large and militant Arkansas City klavern fortuitously obliged. According to a report Allen received in September 1922, open Klan threats had "made people . . . afraid to go out at night . . . for fear they are to be caught." The klavern clearly crossed legal bounds only days later when it tarred and feath-ered one man, coerced two more into leaving town, and again publicly threatened anyone who criticized its actions.19

Consequently, Allen ordered McDermott to survey Klan strength in southeastern Kansas and investigate Arkansas City in particular. Arkansas City authorities definitely were uncooperative. When Mayor George McIntosh, about whom Allen had received complaints because of his patently pro-Klan sympathies, claimed to have no information whatsoever on the Klan, McDermott named the klavern secretary, where and when the Klan met, and its post office box number. McDermott also told McIntosh that the state would hold the Arkansas City municipal government liable under the Kansas mob law if the Klan injured person, property, or even one's reputation.20 Allen

18. Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway Operating Department to Henry J. Allen, September 27, 1922, ibid.
19. The tarred and feathered kidnap victim described the crime in a letter written on October 9, 1922 to James A. McDermott, ibid. According to the victim, he was punished for allegedly "not living the right kind of life." Based on the context of the letter, the Klan charged him with marital waywardness, probably adultery.
20. Wichita Beacon, October 3, 1922.
thereby served notice to all local officials of the possible legal consequences of merely acquiescing to the Invisible Empire.

The McDermott investigation was widely and accurately perceived as a sign that Allen intended "to do more than make speeches against the Ku Klux Klan" and would "try to drive it from the state."21 After receipt of the judge's report, Allen announced both the start of a statewide investigation to ascertain the Klan's "real purpose" and that the attorney general's office had been ordered to review thoroughly the legal status of Klan organizations operating without a state charter.22 According to Allen, past state inquiries had disclosed "no facts to indicate that the Klan is a benevolent institution which should be permitted to operate without a charter."23 Although this public announcement was significant, Allen really was only expanding and intensifying the executive branch's extant investigation of the Klan and accelerating the evaluation of its legal status. Allen's latest anti-Klan resolve was not simply in response to past events but was motivated by cogent evidence that the Klan was bigger and stronger than had first been suspected. Daily investigative reports, discussions between state officials, and multifarious visitors to the capital confirmed the administration's apprehension of mounting Klan lawlessness and influence, including its expansion into many towns.24

Tensions in different parts of Kansas waxed and waned in exact proportion to the Klan's recruitment and visibility. Allen's fear of public turbulence was not fanciful, as detractors claimed. One journalist explained the realities prompting Allen to act:

Neighborhood after neighborhood, which had been peaceful and friendly... split into hostile groups by the Klan's arrival. Although actual violence was rare... communities lived in a state of uneasiness amounting to terror; and the Klans did not scruple to threaten even when they were too cowardly to execute. Of course the situation... also gave opportunity for easy revenge to those who had private feuds on hand.25

Allen's private files contain heavy correspondence from constituents, with obviously disparate backgrounds and grammatical skills, that affirm strife in towns of every sort throughout Kansas. Widespread reports that Kansans were arming themselves caused Allen both consternation and alarm. One unscrupulous gun dealer advertised easy-to-carry revolvers and automatic pistols for sale at half the pre-World War I prices. Although no shootings between Kluxers and Catholics were officially verified, the former often menacingly displayed guns in public, the latter frequently carried weapons for self-defense, and neither side expressed reluctance to use firearms. "If you could only see the guns and deadly weapons in our custody," a Parsons law enforcement official informed Allen's office, "you would appreciate the importance of disarming all gun toters. If the next legislature does not make it a felony to tote a gun or prevent the sale of weapons, it will have been remiss in its duty towards society."26

While struggling to keep civil order, Allen had to address a new Klan threat when it revealed political strength in the primary election defeat of the third district Republican Congressman Philip P. Campbell, who was affiliated with the regular wing of the party. After Campbell and Imperial Wizard William J. Simmons had "several sharp verbal tilts" during the 1921 congressional investigation of the Klan, knowledgeable persons widely believed that the latter threatened to "get" the incumbent when he ran for reelection. Informed political opinion credited the Klan for Campbell's loss. Klan leaders in Montgomery and LaBette Counties instructed the rank-and-file on how to vote and worked tirelessly on election day to beat...

22. Wichita Beacon, October 11, 1922.
24. See, for example, Abilene Weekly Chronicle, October 18, 1922; Wichita Beacon, October 21, 1922.
25. Robert L. Duffus, "The Ku Klux Klan in the Middle West," World's Work 46 (August 1923): 368. This informative article on the Klan was one of many by the author on the subject.
26. Anonymous Parsons law enforcement official to governor's staff, October 18, 1922, box B48, Allen Papers. Although the official did not sign his name, the letter is clear that he and certain persons on Allen's staff were closely acquainted.

"I WANT EVERYONE TO KNOW THE SHAME OF THE STATE" 105
Campbell—the belief was that "the same situation existed over the whole district."  

Although the Klan may indeed have been culpable, Campbell's defeat probably could be explained by a combination of reasons. He had deeply offended organized labor by voting for the 1920 Esch-Cummins Act, and the animus of railroad workers on this issue alone could have been pivotal, especially as the winning candidate W.H. Sproul, also a regular Republican, "went thru the district with a speech that aroused workers to a fighting spirit."  

Whatever the extent that any particular issue contributed to Campbell's defeat, the Klan had demonstrated that its intrusion into elections might be critical. Wary politicians pondered the Klan, and Allen's own strategy in the upcoming general election campaign was formulated with Campbell's predicament in mind.

Allen's fight with the Klan abruptly escalated to "a declaration of war" on October 16, 1922. On the previous day the Catholic mayor of the Montgomery County town of Liberty, who once had refused the Klan use of a hall he owned, staggered into town with his body a mass of cuts and welts. Kidnapped late at night by thirteen masked men in three cars, Theodore Schierman was driven to a deserted roadside spot, tied to a tree, stripped of the clothes on his back, and flogged with black snake whips. Identifying themselves as Kluxers, his attackers explained they were teaching him to keep quiet about the Klan and warned he would be tarred and feathered if another lesson were necessary.

Calling the crime a "disgrace," Allen bristled "Kansas never has tolerated the idea that any group may take the law in its own hands and she is not going to tolerate it now."  

Promising to excise the Klan because it "is a detriment to legally constituted authority and a treason to our government," Allen pugnaciously remarked, "If I could be convinced that it is proper for me to fight this outfit, I would take off my coat and fight every one I could find."

The kidnapping added urgency to the talks on Klan strategy in the Allen administration that had started earlier in the month. On October 23 he announced that deliberations had concluded and indicated the results would be announced the next week at Coffeyville, the site of his second election campaign speech scheduled throughout the state. Although not himself a candidate for reelection, Allen stated that he had a responsibility as governor to speak out in the campaign on significant issues, and the Klan was of the greatest importance. All informed political observers noted that Allen's campaign position on the Klan could be decisive on the election.

27. Topeka State Journal, August 3, 12, 1922; quotation in August 3, 1922.  
28. Ibid., August 12, 1922.  
29. Wichita Beacon, October 16, 1922.  
30. Catholic Register, October 19, 1922.
Indicative of his newsman’s instincts and combative nature, Allen planned to “beard the KKK lion in one of its largest strongholds,” according to one newspaper. If unaware of the particulars in Allen’s Coffeyville speech, everyone was fully aware he would be implacable. Subsequently, Allen received telephone threats of tarring and feathering for maligning the Klan. Recuperating from serious surgery, Allen’s wife received the first threat at the Allen family’s Topeka residence and his daughter answered second.32

Many Kluxers were waiting in the audience at Allen’s first stop in his speaking tour at Winfield. Consequently, he tweaked the Klan there instead of waiting until the next night in Coffeyville. “I did not come here to attack the Ku Klux Klan,” he told the packed hall, “but I . . . will force every klansman to leave . . . Kansas . . . if I can get the law behind me, for you are un-American.” Hundreds in the audience thereupon stood up and walked out of the hall, and hecklers “jeered, hooted, and cat-called” the governor while he spoke two hours on Klan conditions in Kansas.33 Allen anticipated the disruption as rumors had circulated earlier of a demonstration if he criticized the Klan.

He injected the Klan into every remaining speech in the campaign. The pyrotechnics at Winfield made his Coffeyville speech somewhat anticlimactic, but its bluntness compensated for predictability. The Klan has “introduced into Kansas the greatest curse that can come to any civilized people,” he lamented, “the curse that arises out of unrestrained passions of men governed by religious intolerance and racial hatred.” Although Allen often had criticized the Klan as inimical to constitutional government, this was his strongest condemnation yet. He apprised the audience that the Kansas attorney general had been ordered “to bring an action against the officials of this klan and expel them from this state.”34 Although an important speech, it contained little of surprise, and it stirred markedly less controversy than his speech two nights later in which he injected a new equation.

On October 30 Allen warned the audience at Great Bend that just one pistol shot could ignite a civil war in Kansas comparable to that in Ireland. Chiding the Klan for its part in creating the explosive situation, he exclaimed, “You ought to be ashamed. Honestly, you ought to be ashamed.” He departed from past scripts, however, when he said, “I’m not against your organization because you don’t like the Catholic church,” but “because it suggests terrorism and outlawry.” Whereas Allen had earlier assigned responsibility to the Klan for the civil turbulence, he now split the blame. Allen scolded, “You Catholics should quit saying ‘No man may hold public office by your suffrage unless he is a Catholic.’ Quit saying that,” he expostulated. “It isn’t worthy of an American.”35

Besides accusing Catholics of bloc voting, Allen was “klannish” on the subject of public schools. “I know,” he chided, “that the Catholic church has been guilty of some unwise duties toward the school system because there should be in this country, as the basis of our citizenship, the English language.”36 This criticism was patently untrue because English was the academic language in Kansas Catholic schools, a fact that Allen had no excuse for not knowing.

Upset by rumors that he and his family were Catholic, he certified that he was a Methodist, a thirty-second degree Mason, and a Knight Templar, and stated, “I wouldn’t join either” the Klan or the Knights of Columbus.37 Allen’s anti-Catholic remarks were conspicuously absent from the version of the speech that was reported on the Wichita Beacon’s front page. The Great Bend speech clearly was a watershed, and Allen’s public remarks on Catholics thereafter corresponded to what he earlier had said only in private.

Catholic remonstrance was immediate, candid, and civil. Aggrieved by charges of bigotry, for example, the Great Bend Knights of Columbus offered one

31. Topeka Daily Capital, October 26, 1922.
32. Topeka State Journal, October 26, 1922.
33. Topeka Daily Capital, October 27, 1922.
34. Wichita Beacon, October 29, 1922.
35. Winfield Daily Courier, October 31, 1922.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid.
thousand dollars to anyone who could show that local Catholics refused to vote for a candidate of any party because they were not of the correct religion. The Knights, however, publicly excused Allen for his inappropriate statements on the grounds that "informants" had mislead him.38

Of the influential Catholics who politely and publicly reprimanded Allen, one was the Knights of Columbus state deputy. "I fear you are unduly alarmed," wrote James A. Malone, "there is not the remotest possibility of serious strife insofar as the Catholics are concerned. We stand for law and order." Rejecting the governor’s equation between Catholics and the Klan, Malone gratuitously noted that the "Catholic church and the Knights of Columbus are not political organizations." The Topeka State Journal described Malone’s letter as "mild and charitable. . . . But back of the honeycoated tone is an awful wallop that may have a lot of effect on election returns."39 Despite the Journal’s assessment, Allen was stronger politically after his Great Bend speech than before, and his new Catholic twist was the reason.

Often clumsily and with a tinge of disingenuousness, Allen made gestures to minimize the political damage among Catholics. At least feigning surprise that his speech had caused any controversy, Allen wrote one Catholic associate, "I seemed to have had the misfortune of stirring up the bigots among both the Protestants and the Catholics, but I am trying to keep a straight line of demarcation."40

Resorting to the appropriate political dodge, Allen explained that press accounts had "garbled" and thereby "misinterpreted" his Great Bend speech. Allen clarified some of the anti-Catholic passages in later campaign speeches, interviews, and news releases, but actually retracted little if anything that was derogatory. He speciously explained later in Abilene, for example, that he had not compared Catholics and Kluxers but simply meant that "any Catholic who boycotts a candidate because of his religion places himself on the plane with the klansmen who do the same thing. Such action is unAmerican for any citizen and dangerous to our civilization."41

Catholics publicly agreed with Allen on the principle that voting should not be religiously motivated, but some wrote Allen that they were baffled as to the intent of his remarks at Great Bend. Allen’s private rejoinders often were different from but not decidedly more creditable than his public utterances. In an effort to assuage Senator James A. Malone, Allen confidentially explained that he was attempting to ease the mercurial situation in Great Bend, which was "the worst . . . in Kansas." A widespread belief, even among leading and sensible Protestants, that Catholics were arming themselves with rifles against the Klan was the immediate cause of the local turbulence. Allen, however, contended that a priest in Great Bend was guilty of "religious bigotry."42

41. Wichita Beacon, November 2, 1922.
sequently “partly to blame” for the successful Klan recruitment of Protestants. This did not excuse Klan excesses, Allen tacitly remembered to add.

Allen’s political confidants baselessly feared that he had blundered at Great Bend. Alfred M. Landon, future Kansas governor and 1936 Republican presidential candidate, wrote that according to one informed opinion Allen had consigned himself to political “No Man’s Land” between klansmen and Catholics. Regarding the speech as politically unshrewd, Landon nevertheless praised Allen for “one of the bravest . . . things you have ever done.” Landon’s obviously hurried letter, however, had several gross contradictions and revealed surprising lack of political sagacity. Describing reaction to the Great Bend speech in Independence, Landon said, “Everyone here is talking about it and approves enthusiastically.” Driving to Coffeyville to gauge public response, Landon reported, “It went big.”

Independence and Coffeyville were in Montgomery County, which probably had the biggest Klan population of any county in the state.

The judgment that Allen was in “No Man’s Land” after Great Bend was patently incorrect. Allen’s political instincts and calculations actually were flawless. Although perhaps disconcerted by Great Bend, Catholics absolutely had no recourse except to string along with Allen, and neither his official nor private files reveal any threat of Catholic defection. Of course Allen was not prepared to irrevocably alienate his Catholic political base, which he generously mollified for the rest of the campaign while also dissembling his Great Bend statements. The episode classically illustrated the axiom that a common enemy is the strongest glue between political allies.

Allen also flailed away at the Klan until campaign’s end but nearly always with a qualification such as: “My objection to the Klan is not on account of any particular principle, my objection is to its masked form of government.” From Great Bend to election day, Allen in reality made a crusade and highly astute appeal to those moderate Kluxers with the same anti-Catholic beliefs of the “night-riding” Kluxers but with quails about the latter faction’s tactics of intimidation and vein of lawlessness.

Allen’s strategy was to pry apart the two Klan wings by appealing to one and threatening the other. Indisputable evidence illustrates that the strategy had succeeded, for example, in Kansas City, where droues left the Atlanta-based “night-riding” prone Klan in the spring and summer of 1922 and organized strictly indigenous Kansas Klans. They discarded objectionable Klan features like secrecy and anonymity but retained strident anti-Catholicism. Allen never suffered the delusion that he could win obdurate Kluxers to moderation, but his nod to the law-and-order Kluxers by reciting the litany of Catholic vices at Great Bend could pay big political dividends, which Landon witnessed in densely Klan Montgomery County.

With the obvious exception of Catholics, Kansans typically found nothing remiss in the Great Bend speech. Judged both by displays of approbation and the absence of criticism, Allen’s speech was popular with nearly every Protestant from the “shouting Methodist” to the staid Episcopalian variety and with every politically partisan and ideological species.

Of respectable Kansans, none exhibited greater enthusiasm about Allen’s rebuke of Catholics than the progressives with an anti-Klan mantle. Two years hence when William Allen White ran as an independent gubernatorial candidate, Landon wrote after the campaign: “Frankly . . . if I thought the Klan had the intellectual, unselfish, leadership with real vision to abolish all private schools in the U.S. . . . I would join them in a minute.” The defeated anti-Klan candidate replied, “I know as well as you do the evils of the hierarchy [sic] of the Catholic Church and I would

42. Allen is quoted in Topeka State Journal, November 1, 1922; see also Henry J. Allen to James Malone, November 11, 1922, box B48, Allen Papers; M.J. Foley, November 10, 1922, ibid. Malone was a former state senator and the Knights of Columbus state deputy from Topeka.


44. Rives, “The Ku Klux Klan in Kansas City.”


“I WANT EVERYONE TO KNOW THE SHAME OF THE STATE” 109
not defend those evils any more than I defend the evils of the Klan.” White believed his campaign had demonstrated to politicians that a myriad of votes was available to “the man who will get out and denounce the Klan without necessarily defending the indefensible things on the other side.” The exchange between Landon and White is one more example of many showing that resolute anti-Kluxers did not perform evince any sympathy toward Catholics and Catholicism.

Allen fit the progressive mold. His Great Bend speech not only was politically adroit, but it squared with his beliefs. A Methodist and Mason like many Kansas Kluxers, Allen had mild schizophrenia as an anti-Kluxer who subscribed to many of the popular anti-Catholic sentiments of his generation. Allen did not believe that the Klan had the right to vent its anti-Catholicism, but he had some sympathy with it, as his private files readily attest. Allen was categorically honest when he claimed that he would not have legally prosecuted the Klan had it limited itself to anti-

On October 30, 1922, Kansas Attorney General Richard Hopkins, executing Allen’s promise in Coffeyville of legal prosecution against the Klan, drafted an injunction to stop the group’s recruiting and revealed that legal maneuvers had begun to prevent it from operating within the state.

Catholicism. Along with many anti-Kluxer Kansans, Allen agreed with many of the civil notions and sectarian tenets of Klan men, Klan women (an auxiliary), and Klan youngsters (a junior order), such as only the public schools could satisfactorily instill Americanism.

Allen would have had paroxysms if his daughter had dated a Catholic, and some of his views on Catholics were little more than common prejudices. His criticism of Klan bigotry, however, was not insincere, although one could draw that conclusion. The principle dividing Allen and the Klan was Allen’s belief that the Klan promoted “a condition that cannot be tolerated in a state that believes in law and order.” Extreme bigotry of the kind practiced by the Klan inherently promoted disorder, whereas Allen’s genteel prejudice enabled him to respect the civil rights of those whose religious beliefs he adamantly rejected.

The jumbled 1922 elections altered part of the Kansas political landscape, but even contemporary pundits failed to discern any clear statewide mandate on the Klan. Although a definitive judgment is impossible, Allen’s campaign strategy certainly helped neutralize the Klan. Election of a Democratic governor was the one genuinely anomalous election outcome, but the Klan issue seemed to be only a slight factor. Both the Republican and Democratic candidates, William Y. Morgan and Jonathan M. Davis, respectively, ignored the Klan issue, but some newspapers identified it as one of the vari-

46. William Allen White to Alfred M. Landon, November 24, 1924, ibid.
47. Allen’s correspondence with those who supported the Klan is riveting. See, for example, Henry J. Allen to C.H. McBrayer, July 9, 1922, box 848, Allen Papers; Henry J. Allen to Muriel Berry, November 20, 1922, ibid.
48. Wichita Beacon, October 31, 1922.
ous minor reasons for the election result. The economic squeeze on Kansas farmers and Morgan’s many liabilities probably far outweighed the Klan influence on the vote. Allen himself discounted the Invisible Empire as an important factor, and his summation of the election was “discontent looking for a sacrifice.”

A microview, however, reveals that the Klan figured decisively in a few municipal and county elections, including the defeat both of the unyielding Montgomery County attorney and Kansas City’s intractably anti-Klan mayor. Political observers also almost unanimously noted that the Klan resorted to “the most disreputable practices that have ever characterized a Kansas campaign.” In that regard, however, the 1922 election was only the preliminary to the election of 1924, when the Klan plunged into the campaign motivated by a strong survival instinct.

A lame duck about to exit office after the election, Allen’s last shot at the Klan was at the national conference of state governors in West Virginia. Of the governors present, he probably was the most outspoken on the danger of the Klan. He warned those who were prone to underestimate the Klan that it was “clever, able, invisible,” and not easy to combat. Explaining Klan appeal, Allen observed, “Probably the saddest reflection upon the intelligence of the Americans who are joining this organization is the ease with which they have been exploited by the profiteers who are capitalizing on their religious and racial prejudices.”

On October 30, 1922, Kansas Attorney General Richard Hopkins, executing Allen’s promise in Coffeyville of legal prosecution, drafted an injunction to stop Klan recruiting and revealed that legal maneuvers had begun to prevent it from operating within the state. Allen later met with Klan Exalted Cyclops Judge C.A. Reed but failed to reach an agreement whereby legal action could be averted. On November 21, 1922, Hopkins filed a petition with the Kansas Supreme Court charging the Klan with being a foreign corporation operating in the state without a charter and engaging in civil disruption. When the court rendered its opinion on January 10, 1925, Kansas became the first state to legally oust the Invisible Empire. Even more significant than the court’s ruling, however, was the Kansas legislature’s defeat of a bill the next month that would have compelled granting a charter to the Klan. On February 28, 1927, the U.S. Supreme Court conclusively settled the legal controversy when it refused to hear the Invisible Empire’s appeal.

After Allen’s departure from office in 1923, the Klan flourished briefly in a political environment that was definitely more congenial than the one he had afforded. When the Klan ebbed after 1925, the reason was due less to its legal ouster than vicissitudes within the Invisible Empire itself, both on the state and national levels, and anti-Kluxer enmity and williness in the vein of Henry J. Allen. Whatever criticism might be levelled at Allen, he did not yield on his version of principle when he was personally threatened and the Wichita Beacon was boycotted, and his sense of decency transcended religious pettiness.

51. Winfield Daily Courier, November 6, 1922.
52. Wichita Beacon, December 16, 1922.
53. Ibid., October 30, 1922.
55. On the Klan’s appeal of the Kansas Supreme Court’s adverse ruling on a writ of error in the federal courts, see the briefs and collateral documents related to The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan v. The State of Kansas, ex. rel. Charles B. Griffin, 1925, Records of the District Court.