

Spring 2013

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William Vance Trollinger

University of Dayton, wtrollinger1@udayton.edu

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Hearing the Silence: The University of Dayton, the Ku Klux Klan, and Catholic Universities and Colleges in the 1920s

William Vance Trollinger, Jr.

The "second" Ku Klux Klan exploded into national prominence in the 1920s. While the original Klan was based in the South and concentrated its animus against the newly freed slaves, the second KKK was a national organization that expanded its list of social scapegoats to include Catholics, Jews, and immigrants. Ohio perhaps had more Klan members than any other state, and in the 1920s the Dayton KKK chapter targeted the local Catholic university – the University of Dayton (UD) – with crossburnings and a bombing. While the school's administration avoided confrontation, UD students and the UD football team aggressively challenged the Klan. But while similar events at Notre Dame have received extensive attention from historians, the Klan's attacks on the University of Dayton are absent from the school's institutional histories and are virtually non-existent in the school's institutional memory. A review of histories of Catholic universities in states where the Klan was active reveals a similar silence, even though there are good reasons to believe some of these schools were also targeted by the Klan. As the University of Dayton story indicates, just because institutions and institutional histories are silent does not mean nothing happened. In fact, the silence is deafening.

Wednesday, December 19, 1923 was the first day of Christmas break at the University of Dayton (UD). By the time evening had arrived, fewer than forty students remained on campus. It looked to be a very quiet night.

At 10:30 the calm was shattered by a series of explosions. Students leaped out of their beds and ran out into the night. Outside, they were relieved to discover that it was not a scene of devastation: as would be learned later, twelve bombs had been exploded throughout campus, but all at some distance from university buildings. No one sustained serious injuries and the property damage was minimal; it could have

William Vance Trollinger, Jr. is Professor of History in the History and Religious Studies Departments at the University of Dayton. He is co-author – with Susan Trollinger – of *Righting America at the Creation Museum: Young Earth Creationism and the Culture Wars* (Johns Hopkins, forthcoming). He wishes to thank the University of Dayton Research Council for its support, as well as Sandy Braman, Perry Bush, Una Cadegan, Jake Dorn, Erin Flory, Heidi Gauder, Jim Heft, Justus Hunter, John Jauch, Bill Jenkins, John Nally, David O'Brien, Tony Smith, Sue Trollinger, David Yarosz, and the two anonymous reviewers for *American Catholic Studies* for their assistance. For further comment on this article please contact the author: wtrollinger1@udayton.edu.

been much worse, given that at least one bomb went off near campus buildings that stored guns and ammunition for the university's ROTC program. But what caught the eyes of the frightened students shivering in the cold was a blazing eight-foot, burlap-wrapped, oil-soaked cross on the west edge of campus, which had been lit "simultaneous [to] the exploding of the first bomb." As the UD students ran toward the cross in order to tear it down, they discovered the perpetrators waiting for them. As reported by the *Dayton Daily News*, several hundred Klansmen had filled 40-50 cars, which they very slowly drove in single file "past the blazing emblem," all the while issuing "a volley of threats" to the badly outnumbered students. But the tables soon turned, as "the detonations of the bombs," the "glare from the burning cross," and "the shouts of the invaders" had jolted "hundreds of residents" out of their houses. Angry at losing their sleep, the folks from the neighborhood charged the hooded intruders, yelling their own "menacing threats" as they approached the line of cars in front of the blazing cross. The alarmed Klansmen hit the gas and sped off into the night. The residents returned to their houses, and a "number of the faculty and students," along with the university vice president, "hastened to the cross and battered it to the ground."¹

The Ku Klux Klan and the University of Dayton

While for many, the decade after World War I is best known as the "Roaring Twenties," these were also the years of the Red Scare, Sacco and Vanzetti, the Scopes Trial, and the Ku Klux Klan. Having virtually disappeared in the late nineteenth century, the Klan was reorganized in Georgia in 1915, and exploded into national prominence in the early 1920s. While the original Klan concentrated its animus against the newly freed slaves and their Republican Party supporters, this "second" Klan had an expanded list of social scapegoats that included Catholics, Jews, and immigrants.² Moreover,

1. "U.S. May Hear of Bomb Blast at University," *Dayton Daily News*, December 21, 1923; "Federal Guard May Be Sought by U.D.," *Dayton Daily News*, December 22, 1923.

2. Selected key works in the recent historiography include: Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City: 1915-1930* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); Robert Alan Goldberg, *Hooded Empire: The Ku Klux Klan in Colorado* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981); William Jenkins, *Steel Valley Klan: The Ku Klux Klan in Ohio's Mahoning Valley* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1990); Kathleen Blee, *Women and the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Leonard Moore, *Citizen Klansmen: The Ku Klux Klan in Indiana, 1921-1928* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991); Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux*

while the first Klan was based primarily in the South, this "second" Klan had its greatest numerical strength in the Midwest and West. Indiana was the site of the Klan's greatest achievements, but Ohio may have had more members than any other state in the Union; as David Chalmers – who estimated Klan membership in Ohio as 400,000 at its peak – observed in *Hooded Americanism*, "there was a time during the 1920s when it seemed that mask and hood had become the official symbol of the Buckeye State."³

This certainly fit Dayton. Having recovered from a disastrous flood in 1913 that killed hundreds, in the early 1920s Dayton was a thriving industrial city of over 150,000 residents and such going concerns as Delco and National Cash Register. Dayton's factories attracted immigrant laborers: according to the 1920 Census 28 percent of the populace was either foreign-born or of foreign parentage.⁴ Eighty percent of the foreign-born Daytonians were from central, eastern, and southern Europe, particularly (in descending order) Germans, Hungarians, Russians, Poles, Austrians, Italians, Slavs, Greeks, Lithuanians, Czechs, and Romanians.⁵ Such immigration patterns meant a strong Catholic presence in Dayton. According to the *1926 Religious Census*, 35 percent of reported churchgoers were Catholic, with almost all the rest Protestant (United Brethren and Methodists coming in a distant second and third). According to David Chalmers, this was the perfect setting for the second Ku Klux Klan: a majority of native-born residents, but with a substantial minority of non-Protestant immigrants.⁶ In the early 1920s state Ku Klux Klan

Klan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Shawn Lay, *Hooded Knights on the Niagara: The Ku Klux Klan in Buffalo, New York* (New York: NYU Press, 1995); Kelly J. Baker, *Gospel According to the Klan: The KKK's Appeal to Protestant America, 1915-1930* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2011). For a discussion of recent historiography see: Leonard J. Moore, "Historical Interpretations of the 1920s Klan: The Traditional View and the Populist Revision," *Journal of Social History* 24 (winter 1990): 341-357. For an insightful critique of recent Klan historiography, see Robert D. Johnston, *The Radical Middle Class: Populist Democracy and the Question of Capitalism in Progressive Era Portland, Oregon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 235-238.

3. David Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism: The First Century of the Ku Klux Klan* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 175.

4. If one adds the 5.9 percent of Daytonians who were African American, approximately 1/3 of the Dayton population in 1920 was other than native-born white. United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Abstract of the Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1923), 50, 108-111.

5. *Abstract of the Fourteenth Census*, 312-317.

6. United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *1926 Census of Religious Bodies: Summary and Detailed Tables* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1930), 64-67; Chalmers, *Hooded Americanism*, 112-113, 176-177; Janet L.

officials privately estimated that 15,000 Daytonians were Klan members. Historian Kenneth Jackson confirms this estimate as reasonable, while also noting that some estimates placed the number of Dayton Klan members as high as 40,000.

In short, Dayton joined Indianapolis, Portland (OR), Youngstown, Denver, and Dallas as "the hooded capitals of the nation," i.e., the cities with the highest percentage of its residents as Ku Klux Klan members.⁷ The organization's strength in Dayton was made visible by the huge Klan rallies at the Montgomery County Fairgrounds on the city's south side; in the Klan's peak years (1923-1926) these outdoor gatherings attracted thousands of Klansmen and Klanswomen, as well as boisterous crowds of supporters.⁸ There were also the Klan newspapers published in Dayton – the *Ohio Fiery Cross* and the *Klan Courier* – that devoted much of their space to vicious attacks on Catholics,⁹ and that were funded by advertisements (sometimes gathered into a "Shopper's Guide") placed by local businesses seeking to peddle their wares to Dayton Klan readers.¹⁰

Then there were the cross burnings. Newspaper articles and oral interviews suggest a Dayton illuminated by burning crosses in the mid-1920s. Perhaps the biggest night of cross burning came on May 6, 1924, when the local Klan celebrated the fifty-eighth anniversary of the KKK's founding by burning a "30 foot cross . . . in each of the four districts of the city," attracting supportive crowds of "several hundred

Peterson, "The Ku Klux Klan in Montgomery County" (master's thesis, Wright State University, 1994), 72.

7. Ohio Knights of the Ku Klux Klan records, 1923-1924, microfilm #147, Ohio Historical Society Archives Library, Columbus; Jackson, 165, 236, 239 (quote: 236). Given its status as a "hooded capital," it is a historiographical oddity that so little attention has been paid to the KKK in Dayton. Besides the present article, the only other work to take more than a passing glance at the Dayton Klan is Janet L. Peterson's master's thesis, "The Ku Klux Klan in Montgomery County." Thanks to her advisor, Jake Dorn, for pointing me to this work.

8. For two newspaper reports on rallies from 1924, see: "Klan Aims are Cited in Talk of its Wizard," *Dayton Daily News*, May 27, 1924; "Thousands at Two Meetings Held by Klan," *Dayton Daily News*, July 13, 1924.

9. For examples, see: "Al [Smith] and the Movies," *Klan Courier*, 3 (May 20, 1924): 2; "Priest Fails to Terrify Girl," *Ohio Fiery Cross*, 3 (March 21, 1924): 1; "Says Parochial Schools Produce Most Delinquents," *Ohio Fiery Cross*, 3 (March 7, 1924): 1; "The Menace," *Klan Courier*, 3 (July 18, 1924): 4.

10. Advertisers included B & J Tires, Broadway Dry Cleaning, C. M. Davis Undertaker, C. V. Ellis Men's Clothing, Carl Myers Diamonds, Catalpa Grocery, Jackson's Deli, Klingler's Garage, Lipton and Hill Plumbing, and Nancy Belle Candies. For examples of "Shopper's Guides," see: *Ohio Fiery Cross*, 3 (May 2, 1924): 8; *Klan Courier*, 3 (June 27, 1924): 8.

persons" to each site.¹¹ While only a small percentage of cross burnings in Dayton found their way into newspaper and Klan reports, oral interviews with Catholics who lived in the 1920s help fill out the story. One woman who was a teenager during the Klan's peak years admitted that she was still spooked by the memory of "crosses burning almost every night" near her home; another woman reported that she was "scared green" by the constant cross burnings in the vacant lots in her working-class neighborhood.¹² As one resident of Dayton in those years recalled, the "massive" Klan parades through the city – which took place "two or three times a summer" – along with the burning of crosses, brought home to Catholic residents that the "threat of Klan violence was always there . . . [this was] the big threat in the Catholic mind: what [the Klan] could do to us."¹³



First open Konklave, Dayton women of the Ku Klux Klan, July 24, 1923.
Courtesy of Dayton Metro Library

11. *Dayton Daily News*, January 14, 1923; *Dayton Daily News*, May 26, 1923; *Dayton Daily News*, August 25, 1923; *Dayton Daily News*, July 7, 1924; "Celebration," *Ohio Fiery Cross*, 3 (May 9, 1924): 1; Father Bernard Steuve, interview by David Yarosz, November 15, 1996.

12. Jane Black, interview by David Yarosz, October 2, 1996; Alma Sills, interview by David Yarosz, October 7, 1996.

13. Jack Hickey, interview by Jim Walter, January 27, 1982, in *Come Through Dayton*, ed. Jim Walter, vol. 3, *The Age Of Modernity (1901-1941)* (Dayton: n. p., 1982), 137.

In its harassment of Dayton Catholics, the local chapter of the Ku Klux Klan directed the bulk of its animus against the University of Dayton, the Marianist university at the south edge of the city. Founded in 1850 as St. Mary's School for Boys, by 1923 UD had 280 full-time undergraduates (85 percent of whom were Catholic), 36 law students, and 174 students who took evening classes, not to mention the 560 students who attended the high school on campus.¹⁴ As the Klan saw it, UD served as the headquarters of Catholic subversion in southwest Ohio. A contributor to the October 1923 *Kluxer* asserted that the university "stands like a giant fortress upon a high hill overlooking the surrounding country," with a ROTC program that had been established for the purpose of training a Catholic army to fight religious wars against American Protestants. This Romanist army-in-training (standard fare in anti-Catholic literature) allegedly had the great benefit of a giant underground tunnel that allowed it to practice maneuvers without detection.¹⁵

UD explained its ROTC program in very different terms. According to the 1923 yearbook, the university's mission – reflected in the recently adopted school motto, "pro Deo et Patria" – was to serve both God and country. Given that "it is a citizen's duty to be ever ready and fit to serve his country in peace or war," the university quite "heartily complies with our government's desire that American youth be taught military training." For the yearbook's authors this commitment meshed nicely with the glory years of the church: "The youth of the Middle Age was taught to be ever ready to serve his country in peace or war. The Christian Empire was ever threatened by the Mohammedan Turk and it was only the Crusades that preserved Christianity."¹⁶

The university's name change from St. Mary to the University of Dayton, the adoption of "pro Deo et Patria" as its motto, the patriotic ROTC program, and even the presence of St. Mary College graduate and World War I hero Major-General Joseph Dickman as the 1923 commencement speaker did not dampen the Klan's desire to intimidate UD students and faculty. And the primary means of

14. "Statistical History of U.D. Since Its Incorporation as the University of Dayton" (unpublished manuscript), University of Dayton Archives.

15. *Kluxer* 2 (October 6, 1923), as reported in Peterson, "Montgomery County," 98-99. The Dayton Klan was not only worried about ROTC students. Father Phil Hoelle, a Marianist novice at Mount St. John's in Dayton in the late 1920s (and a UD student in the early 1930s), recounted that one day when the novices were marching outside for exercise, a group of Klansmen suddenly appeared at the edge of the property and began screaming at them for engaging in "papal military preparations." Interview by David Yarosz, November 15, 1996.

16. *Daytonian* (Dayton: University of Dayton, 1923), 1, 22, 23, 27.

intimidation was the burning of crosses. As UD student Jack Brown later recalled, "it [was] their joy and delight to come out on the campus and burn a cross or two."¹⁷ But the students did not passively accept the Klan's harassment. A student at the campus high school later reported that on more than one occasion he and some of his peers raced out of class to chase the Klansmen away, all the while calling on the cowards to "show their faces."¹⁸

The Klan responded to such defeats by lighting crosses in Woodland Cemetery across from the university, as the cemetery fence gave the Klansmen some protection from enraged students.¹⁹ But even there the Klansmen were not safe. On one occasion UD football coach Harry Baujan learned that the Klan was en route to the cemetery to burn a cross. Baujan went "to the halls and called out all my big football players." Gathering them near the cemetery, he instructed the players to wait until the Klansmen got "around that cross" and started to light it; the cross ablaze, he exhorted his players to "take off after them" and "tear their shirts off" or "anything else, whatever you want to do." But the Klansmen saw them coming; as Baujan later lamented, "we never got near any of them," as "they went . . . so fast through that cemetery."²⁰

While University of Dayton students aggressively challenged the Klansmen on or near campus, there was not much they could do about the public rallies at the Montgomery County Fairgrounds. There is little doubt that these gatherings were designed not only to rally and energize the KKK and its supporters, but also to send a message to the Marianist university located a scant two blocks southeast of the Fairgrounds. This surely was the case on September 21, 1923, when the Dayton Ku Klux Klan held perhaps its largest rally. It was an all-day affair, beginning with an afternoon of speeches proclaiming the Klan's determination to ensure that the United States would remain a Christian nation run by "100% Americans." After a picnic dinner the Klansmen headed out on a three-mile march down Main Street (its sidewalks packed with cheering spectators) through downtown Dayton to the Miami River and back again to the Fairgrounds; besides

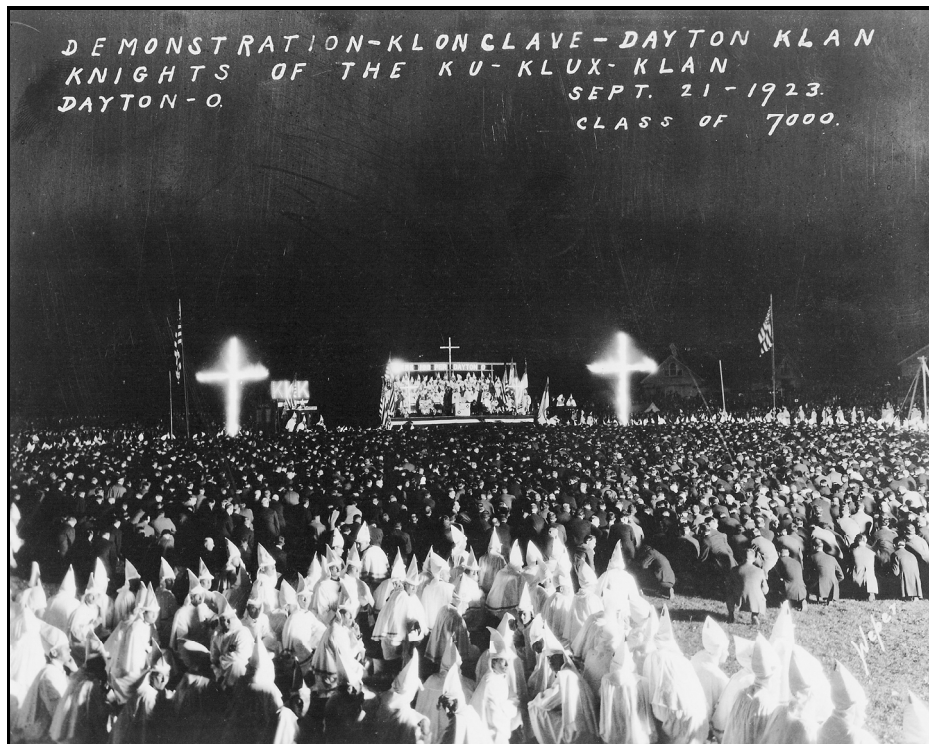
17. Harry Baujan and Jack Brown, interview by Br. Joseph Gaudet, October 03, 1974, Box 1, Folder 3, Oral History Transcripts, University of Dayton Archives.

18. Father Bernard Steuve, interview by David Yarosz, November 15, 1996.

19. Ibid.

20. Baujan and Brown, interview by Gaudet. Remarkably, in this interview Baujan went on to report that "some fellows down at the [Dayton] Noon Luncheon Club" eventually told him that they were among the Klansmen whom his football players chased out of the cemetery. According to Baujan, "one of the best ones" who confessed was Harry Cutler, a referee who regularly officiated UD football games; as Cutler told Baujan, "I was nutty enough to belong to [the Klan]."

thousands of white-robed Klansmen there were brightly-robed Klan leaders on horseback, KKK bands, automobile floats, and an airplane overhead "with a cross illuminated with white electric lights on the bottom of its fuselage." When the marchers returned to the Fairgrounds it was time for the "naturalization ceremony" for prospective Klansmen. Fifteen thousand Klansmen formed a ring around 7,000 kneeling initiates, while 10,000 spectators filled the stands. The ceremony included prayers, songs, and the oath taken by the Klansmen-to-be affirming their "pure American nationality" (i.e., they were white and they were Protestant). Then, celebration. It would have been very difficult for the students and staff on the campus just down the road not to hear the cheering and singing of an estimated 32,000 white Dayton Protestants, not to feel the tremors of bombs being set off, not to see the Klan airplane (now with a cross illuminated with red electric lights) circling the Fairgrounds, not to see the fireworks exploding in the sky, not to see the 100-foot burning cross rising into the sky.²¹



Courtesy Dayton Metro Library

21. "Crowds Throng Streets Where Klan Parades," *Dayton Daily News*, September 21, 1923.

This rally seemed to embolden the Dayton Klan in its campaign against UD. The autumn of 1923 saw more cross burnings on or near university property. But again, these incidents were contested. For example, in early December the Klan planted a cross on campus and set it afire; as the *Dayton Daily News* later reported, this incident "terminated in a clash between a group of students and the alleged klansmen [sic], [who] were outnumbered by the students," and who ran off into the night "before identification could be made." It was an embarrassing failure for the forces of militant Protestantism, and may have motivated the Klansmen to up the ante in their next attack.²²

It seems likely that the Klansmen deliberately chose to set off their bombs during Christmas break, when there would be only a tiny student contingent on campus. Once again, however, the Klansmen were chased off, but this time by angry neighborhood residents. These same residents vented their frustrations to the press, complaining that "they ha[d] made repeated remonstrances to the police in regard to the demonstrations at the university," but to no avail. There were rumors that the police department was filled with Klansmen. The administration, however, had also worked to keep city authorities from responding to the disturbances: as Vice President Reverend Francis Kunnecke admitted after the bombings, the university's plan had been "to cope with the situation without seeking the aid of the police."²³ But the "brazenness" of the December 19 attack led Kunnecke to assert that these "demonstrations directed upon the university were unjustified and unlawful," and thus the university would "do everything in its power to force prosecution." When Dayton police detectives reported (after a one-day investigation) that they "were unsuccessful . . . in finding clews [sic] which would reveal the identity of the invaders," President Reverend Bernard O'Reilly responded by publicly expressing his frustration with the history of Klan attacks on the University, attacks that "forced the students to lose sleep, which greatly handicapped them in their studies." He met with "city officials . . . and asked that immediate action be taken to discover the identity of the alleged klan [sic] members." Both Kunnecke and O'Reilly also threatened the possibility of federal investigation, given the threat posed by Klan attacks to university buildings which housed government issued guns and ammunition;

22. "U.S. May Hear of Bomb Blast at University" (hereafter "Bomb Blast"), *Dayton Daily News*, December 21, 1923; "Federal Guard May Be Sought by U.D." (hereafter "Federal Guard"), *Dayton Daily News*, December 22, 1923.

23. "Federal Guard."

O'Reilly even suggested that "sparks from the burning cross" had actually "blown upon the roofs" of these buildings.²⁴

Three days after the incident, Major E. F. Rinehardt, head of UD's ROTC program, announced that a report of the attack would be submitted to the area army corps in Columbus. Rinehardt backed away from the threats issued by O'Reilly and Kunnecke, asserting that "the action of the alleged klan [sic] members does not [yet] warrant [federal] government investigation." But Rinehardt acknowledged that the Klansmen were "becom[ing] bolder," advancing further into campus with "each renewed demonstration." There was thus a real possibility that these attacks would "reach alarming proportions." If this happened, and military "officers and equipment" were threatened, Rinehardt predicted that federal intervention would result.²⁵

The December 19, 1923 incident was the high point of Ku Klux Klan harassment of the University of Dayton. There were no more bombings. But it does not appear that the Dayton Police Department ever identified the bombers, much less brought them to justice. Moreover, the Klan continued to burn crosses on and near campus, and held more large rallies at the Montgomery County Fairgrounds.²⁶ It was not until late 1926, when the Ohio Klan entered a precipitous decline,²⁷ that the University of Dayton could begin to consider itself safe from terror administered by "100% Americans."

The Ku Klux Klan and the University of Dayton: The Silence

In spring 1996 I was hired as an associate professor of history at the University of Dayton. That summer the provost of the university, Father James Heft, asked me to write a brief article on some aspect of Dayton's religious history, to be distributed to those attending an interfaith Thanksgiving celebration sponsored by the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ).²⁸ Heft was particularly keen on my writing something that would provide historical context

24. "Bomb Blast"; "Federal Guard."

25. "Major to File Report on U.D. Bomb Blast," *Dayton Daily News*, December 23, 1923.

26. Edward Knust, *Hallowed Memories: A Chronological History of the University of Dayton* (Dayton: n. p., 1950), 5; "Klan Aims are Cited in Talk of its Wizard," *Dayton Daily News*, May 17, 1924; "Thousands at Two Meetings Held by Klan," *Dayton Daily News*, July 13, 1924.

27. For discussions of the decline of the Ohio Klan, see Howson, "Klan in Ohio," 72-107; and, Jenkins, 153 ff.

28. Later in the 1990s the organization changed its name to the National Conference for Community and Justice.

for the effort to increase ecumenical and interfaith cooperation in Dayton. It was a daunting assignment; I had very little time, and I knew nothing about Dayton's religious history.

But I did know that the second Ku Klux Klan had been strong in Ohio. That fall I turned my undergraduate American Religious History class – which had just four students – into a research seminar, giving each student the assignment of focusing on religion and religious conflict in Dayton in the 1920s, in the process keeping an eye out for the Ku Klux Klan. It did not take long to discover that the secondary literature on the Ohio Klan was minimal, and that there was virtually nothing on the Dayton Klan. But through careful reading of the *Dayton Daily News* it did not take long to discover that the Klan had been very active in Dayton, and that the University of Dayton had been a target of Klan wrath. With help from the provost, I located a few Marianists who had been on campus as students in the 1920s, as well as a few Catholic laypeople who had resided in Dayton in those years, and I sent out students to conduct interviews. From our two months of intensive research I wrote – giving credit to my student researchers as secondary authors – a very short pamphlet, *Toward a Tolerant and Inclusive Community*, which was distributed at the interfaith celebration in late November, 1996.²⁹

What surprised me most was that virtually no one I talked with at UD knew that the university had been the target of Ku Klux Klan harassment, much less knew that the school had been bombed in 1923. There is absolutely no mention of Klan harassment in either the institutional history written in 1937 (just 14 years after the bombing) or in the history published in 2000 for the school's 150th anniversary.³⁰ Perhaps even more startling, there was – as far as I could tell – no reference to Klan activity at UD in campus publications of the time, either the literary magazine or the yearbook. And the oral history of the attacks seems not to have made it from one generation of students to the next. In response to my paper on this topic at the 2011 meeting of the American Catholic Historical Association, 1951 UD graduate Philip Gleason commented that in his time as a University of Dayton student (nor in the six decades since graduation) he never heard a word about the Ku Klux Klan's attacks on the university.³¹

29. *Toward a Tolerant and Inclusive Community: Dayton, the Klan, and the National Conference* (Dayton: University of Dayton, 1996). The four student researchers were Erin Flory, John Jauch, John Nally, and David Yarosz.

30. There is also no mention of Klan attacks on UD in Christopher Kauffman's insightful *Education and Transformation: Marianist Ministries in America Since 1849* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1999).

31. In the intervening years I have given a few public talks and scholarly papers on the topic, and in 2004 I wrote a brief article for the *University of Dayton Quarterly*:

To underscore this point, I return to the story of Coach Baujan and his football players chasing the Ku Klux Klan away from campus. The story becomes more dramatic when one realizes Harry Baujan's place in University of Dayton athletic history. Having played for Knute Rockne at Notre Dame and for the Cleveland Tigers/Indians in the nascent National Football League, Baujan came to UD in 1922 as an assistant coach, taking over as head coach in 1923. Over the next few decades he created a stellar football program: not only does the UD soccer field (which had been the football field) bear his name, but in 1990 he was posthumously inducted as a coach into the College Football Hall of Fame.³² For all of Baujan's renown, I had heard nothing about his team's encounter with the Klan until the summer of 2011 when I visited the university archives to do research for this article. The archivist on duty mentioned in passing that there was an unsubstantiated rumor that UD football players had confronted Klansmen. With this rumor in mind, I discovered in the archives a transcript from a 1974 oral history interview with Harry Baujan and one of his players from the 1920s. In that transcript I found the story recounted earlier, which the former player prompted Baujan to tell.³³ Given that the interview took place five decades later, it is not surprising that Baujan did not provide an exact date for the incident, and it would not be surprising if some of the details were not quite right.³⁴ This said, it seems almost certain that sometime in the mid-1920s the University of Dayton football team – prompted by its legendary head coach – confronted cross-burning Klansmen and sent them running from campus.

How does an institution "forget" an exciting, even heroic, story such as this? More to the point, *why* did the University of Dayton fail to remember three years of dramatic events that included crossburnings, a bombing, and multiple incidents of students confronting hooded invaders?

"Burn Bright the Cross: The Klan's Crusade against Dayton Catholics," 14 (winter 2004-2005): 20-24. Such efforts have not made much of a dent in institutional memory; at a well-attended April 2012 public discussion of UD's history a long-time and well-regarded member of the university community responded to my comments about the Klan by flatly asserting that the Klan never burned a cross on campus.

32. Baujan was Dayton's only representative in the College Football Hall of Fame until 2011, when long-time UD coach Mike Kelly was also inducted.

33. Baujan and Brown, interview by Gaudet. In this interview Brown also prompted his former coach to talk about a game in Baujan's first year in which Dayton scored 161 points. Brown had a good memory. In 1923 Dayton defeated Central Normal College (IN) 161-0, UD's point total the sixth highest scored by one team in one game in college football history. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_100_point_games_in_college_football.

34. Baujan and Brown, interview by Gaudet.

There is no definitive answer to this question. But there are clues when one goes back to July 1920, when the Board of Trustees voted to change the name from St. Mary College to the University of Dayton, a decision that served to obscure the school's Catholic identity while at the same time publicly linking the school to its home city. While the UD archives do not contain records of the board's deliberations, in October 1920 President Father Joseph Tetzlaff published an article in the *University of Dayton Exponent* (the campus newspaper) explaining and defending the board's decision. Tetzlaff provided three reasons for the name change, the second of which focused on how the term university better fit the "scope" of academic work being done at the institution. But the first and third reasons had to do with the city of Dayton itself. Tetzlaff began with the confusing assertion that making the change from St. Mary College to University of Dayton would "bring home to the City of Dayton" the "work of premier order accomplished" at the school "in the domain of cultural and technical education;" this statement suggested that naming the school for its home city would induce Daytonians to have pride in their local university, in the process implying that city residents had not felt such pride about St. Mary College. Tetzlaff's third reason for the name change was equally ambiguous: "To do honor to the City of Dayton, which has always entertained a kindly interest in its principal school . . . We entertain the fondest *hopes* that the citizens of this progressive community will make permanent this sympathetic attitude" by providing "their further moral and material support."³⁵ If the city had truly maintained "a kindly interest" in the school since its 1850 founding, why the concern that Daytonians "make permanent" their "sympathetic attitude"?

Perhaps the most that can be said for Father Tetzlaff's ambiguous explanation is that it was aspirational, in that he and the board members hoped that "this progressive community" would come to feel pride in its primary institution of higher education. But in the next few years a significant percentage of native-born Daytonians joined or supported the local Ku Klux Klan chapter, which had as one of its primary and ongoing activities a harassment campaign directed against Dayton's "principal school."

Still, UD's administration stayed quiet, perhaps grasping at their "fondest hopes" for the university's relationship with the city. Then came the December 1923 bombing. Silence was no longer an option. But in breaking the silence it is telling what the administration said.

35. Father Joseph A. Tetzlaff, "[July 7, 1920 St. Mary College Board of Trustees resolution]," *The University of Dayton Exponent* 28 (October 1920): 1-2.

Both President O'Reilly (who had become president that year) and Vice President Kunnecke focused their comments on the threat to the ROTC arsenal on campus: because the Klan was now threatening the property of the United States, its attacks on the university must be stopped. It does not appear there was one public comment from either administrator about the Klan's anti-Catholicism, or about how Catholics in Dayton and Dayton's Catholic university were weary of being harassed. To the contrary, the vice president went out of his way to downplay the school's Catholic identity, observing not only that "students of all denominations attend" the university (thus eliding the fact that 85 percent of UD undergraduates were Catholic), but that this interdenominational "student body" has made "a universal remonstrance . . . against the picturesque demonstrations that have been staged" on campus.³⁶ The university administrators did not respond as Catholics; but rather as Americans, and Americans only.

One plausible reading of the University of Dayton's almost instantaneous institutional amnesia regarding the Ku Klux Klan harassment and attacks is that there was some sense of shame that a large portion of the community in which they resided and in whose name they had titled the university did not understand UD as truly American. Given the school's precarious standing in the community, why continue to bring attention to these incidents? But however the silence is explained, there is no question that the faster all of this could be forgotten, the better.

The Ku Klux Klan and Catholic Universities and Colleges

What happened and then was forgotten at the University of Dayton leads to questions about other Catholic universities and the Klan in the 1920s. In *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century*, Philip Gleason argues that the Klan's insistence that Catholics were not truly American led Catholic scholars in the 1920s to assert that America's Founding Fathers drew upon "medieval and Counter-Reformation Catholic thinkers" for their political philosophy, and – in the case of historian Carlton J. H. Hayes – to claim that "every institution and ideal of true Americanism had its . . . 'embryo and antetype . . . in Catholic theory and practice.'" More directly relevant here, Gleason also relates the story of the confrontation between Notre Dame students and the Ku Klux Klan. As Gleason observes, in May 1924 university students "broke up a regional rally and parade in South Bend," an attack followed two days

36. "Bomb Blast."

later by a student march "on the local Klan headquarters in response to rumors that one of their number was being mistreated there." Thanks to "the calming effect of an emotional appeal by Notre Dame president Matthew J. Walsh," the students were "persuaded . . . to return to campus before the second episode got completely out of hand."³⁷

While Gleason's suggestion that this was the only "violent confrontation between Catholic collegians and members of the Klan"³⁸ must be modified, there is no question that if people know anything about the second Ku Klux Klan and Catholic universities, they know about this incident. Historians of American Catholicism have written about it; historians of the Klan have written about it;³⁹ historians of Notre Dame have written about it;⁴⁰ and in 2004 Notre Dame alumnus Todd Tucker published *Notre Dame vs. The Klan: How the Fighting Irish Defeated the Ku Klux Klan*, a loosely historical account whose title gives the author's interpretive stance.⁴¹

But in 1926 there were sixty-nine schools on the Catholic Education Association's list of accredited colleges and universities.⁴² How did the sixty-seven schools other than Notre Dame and UD encounter the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s? A definitive answer to this question will require extensive primary research. For this article the question is much narrower: What do institutional histories of Catholic universities say or not say about their particular school's experience of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s, and what does this tell us?

37. Philip Gleason, *Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 126-130.

38. *Ibid.*, 130.

39. For example: Baker, 198-225; M. William Lutholz, *Grand Dragon: D. C. Stephenson and the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1991), 140-144; Moore, *Citizen Klansmen*, 25.

40. Robert E. Burns, *Being Catholic, Being American: The Notre Dame Story*, vol. 1, *1842-1934* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 292-322; Arthur J. Hope, C.S.C., *Notre Dame: One Hundred Years* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1943), 371-378.

41. Todd Tucker, *Notre Dame vs. The Klan: How the Fighting Irish Defeated the Ku Klux Klan* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2004). In his prologue Tucker notes that he has "taken a great liberty" by creating a "composite character" whose "thoughts and feelings in this story are . . . based, I suppose, on my own experiences as a hotheaded young man at Notre Dame," xxiii.

42. J. W. R. Maguire, "Report on the Commission of Standardization," *Catholic Educational Association Bulletin* 23 (November 1926): 87-123, as discussed in Gleason, 81-85. See also James Ryan, ed., *Directory of Catholic Colleges and Schools, 1921* (Washington DC: National Catholic Welfare Conference, Bureau of Education, 1921), particularly the Appendix, which lists 16 universities and 115 colleges, junior colleges, and academies.

To answer this question, I focused on Catholic colleges and universities in nine northern and western states where the Ku Klux Klan was particularly active in the 1920s: Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.⁴³ I was able to locate twenty-three institutional histories of seventeen Catholic universities and colleges in these states.⁴⁴ The histories of Canisius (NY), Duquesne (PA), John Carroll (OH), Loretto Heights (CO), Manhattan (NY), Saint Bonaventure (NY), Saint John's (NY), and Saint Vincent (PA) make, as far as I can tell, no reference to the Ku Klux Klan; this is also true for two histories of Fordham (NY) and two histories of Saint Joseph's (PA), as well as one of two histories of Niagara (NY) and one of two histories of Xavier (OH).⁴⁵ As regards some of these schools, particularly those located in New York City (where the Klan was weak), it is possible there really were no encounters with the KKK in the 1920s. This seems less likely regarding some of the other schools, particularly Loretto Heights where, according to a historian of Catholicism in Colorado, the Denver Klan chapter burned a cross in April 1924.⁴⁶

43. Klan chapters in the south – while also stridently anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant – were most concerned with keeping African Americans in near-slavery status.

44. Thanks to my graduate assistant, Justus Hunter, for his work in locating and reviewing many of these histories.

45. Mark V. Angelo, O.F.M., *The History of St. Bonaventure University* (St. Bonaventure, N.Y.: Franciscan Institute, 1961); Lee Bennish, *Continuity and Change: Xavier University, 1831-1981* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1981); Charles A. Brady, *The First Hundred Years: Canisius College, 1870-1970* (Buffalo: Canisius College, 1969); Sr. M. Celestine Casey and Sr. M. Edmond Fern, *Loretto in the Rockies* (Denver: Loretto Heights College, 1943); David R. Contosta, *Saint Joseph's: Philadelphia's Jesuit University: 150 Years* (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 2000); Robert I. Gannon, S.J., *Up to the Present: The Story of Fordham* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967); Campion P. Gavalier, ed., *Saint Vincent: A Benedictine Place* (Latrobe: Saint Vincent Archabbey, 1995), which is a collection of reflections; Donald P. Gavin, *John Carroll University: A Century of Service* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1985); J. P. McKey, C.M., *History of Niagara University, Seminary of Our Lady of Angels, 1856-1931* (Niagara County: Niagara University, 1931); Joseph F. Rishel, *"The Spirit that Gives Life": The History of Duquesne University, 1878-1996* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1997); Raymond A. Schroth, S.J., *Fordham: A History and Memoir* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008, rev. ed.); *The Story of St. John's University* (Brooklyn, NY: St. John's University, 1945); J. Stephen Sullivan, F.S.C., *Manhattan College* (New York: Newcomen Society in North America, 1978), which is just a short essay; Francis X. Talbot, S.J., *Jesuit Education in Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's College, 1851-1926* (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's College, 1927).

46. Thomas J. Noel, *Colorado Catholicism* (Denver: University Press of Colorado, 1989), 102.

Nine institutional histories make reference to the Ku Klux Klan. Many of these references are brief. For example, in his history of Xavier University, Roger Fortin tells the story of 1928 Ohio Republican gubernatorial candidate Myers Cooper, whose "association with St. Xavier College and its Catholic identity" – Cooper had led the fund-raising campaign for Xavier's football stadium – provided fodder for attacks by his Democratic opponent. Fortin then provides context for this anti-Catholicism: "In the 1920s the Ku Klux Klan organized hate campaigns against African Americans, Catholics, and Jews, and burned crosses in front of Ohio churches and on the front lawns of some Catholics' homes."⁴⁷ While this is the book's only reference to the Klan, it seems plausible that a few of these crosses were actually burned on the Xavier campus, given that Cincinnati was a Klan hotbed and given the extensive harassment of the Catholic university just fifty miles up the road in Dayton.

Detroit was also a center of Klan activity in the 1920s. In his 1977 centennial history of the University of Detroit, Herman Muller related the story that every Saturday evening in the summer of 1925 Klansmen drove by Gesu Chapel, a church the Jesuits had been "empowered to build" very close to the new campus site of the university.⁴⁸ According to a Catholic resident who lived nearby, the university president, Father John McNichols, "call[ed] for me and my uncle, who was a deputy sheriff," to protect the church: "My uncle had a double-barrelled shotgun and I had a pump gun. One of us stayed in front and one in back. Father Mac did not want them to burn down the church."⁴⁹ But this dramatic story is just an isolated paragraph without connections to anything else in the narrative. There is no reference to Klan harassment of the university, and the Ku Klux Klan is not included in the index.

The story is similar in John Stranges' 2006 history of Niagara University, *The Rainbow Never Fades*. Stranges does report the "resurgence of the nativist 'one hundred percent Americanism' movement" in the 1920s, and he notes that it was most clearly manifested in Niagara Falls by a Klan rally that "attract[ed] some five thousand hooded delegates who boldly marched down [the] city

47. Roger A. Fortin, *To See Great Wonders: A History of Xavier University, 1831-2006* (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2006), 124. In his history of Xavier, Lee Bennish also makes reference to Myles Cooper and anti-Catholicism in the 1928 gubernatorial campaign, but without reference to the Ku Klux Klan. Bennish, 141-142.

48. The football stadium opened in 1922, with the remainder of the new campus opening in 1927. Herman J. Muller, *The University of Detroit, 1877-1977: A Centennial History* (Detroit: University of Detroit Press, 1976), 122-131.

49. *Ibid.*, 128-129.

streets." Stranges observed that this gathering shocked "the Catholics of western New York"; Niagara students interpreted the Klansmen as a "demoralizing blemish" or, more hopefully, a "monster reptile doomed inevitably to extinction." Of course, it seems likely that the Klansmen and Klanswomen marching through the streets of Niagara Falls were disturbed by the presence of a Catholic university, but in *The Rainbow Never Fades* there is no reference to Klan attacks on or harassment of Niagara University.⁵⁰

The Ku Klux Klan received more attention in James Covert's history of the University of Portland, *A Point of Pride*, but it is in the context of Oregon's infamous Compulsory Education Bill. As Covert notes, the "Ku Klux Klan . . . was a motivating force" for this ballot initiative, which made it illegal for "any parent [or] guardian" to "fail or neglect or refuse to send [their] child to a public school," and which was passed by Oregon voters in November 1922. Covert observes that the University of Portland (known as Columbia University until 1935) not only supported the legal campaign to have this decision ruled unconstitutional – which the Supreme Court did in 1925 – but the lead attorneys in this legal effort were "all formerly connected" with the university. Despite the university's prominent role in the fight against the Compulsory Education Bill, despite the Klan's prominence in 1920s Oregon politics, and despite the city's historic "tendency toward anti-Catholicism," there is no mention in *A Point of Pride* of direct encounters between the Ku Klux Klan and the University of Portland.⁵¹

A similar story is found in Ellen Skerrett's *Born in Chicago: A History of Chicago's Jesuit University*. Skerrett devotes a paragraph to the "active participation" of some Loyola students in the American Unity League [AUL], an organization whose *raison d'être* was to "defeat the anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic Ku Klux Klan." Described by historian Kenneth Jackson as Chicago's "most potent manifestation of anti-Klan sentiment," the AUL's primary form of attack was the procurement and publication of Klan membership lists in the organization's magazine, *Tolerance*. Skerrett mentions the involvement of colorful Chicago attorney and Loyola law school founder Patrick O'Donnell, who, according to Jackson, served as chairman and then president of the organization; Skerrett also highlights student Joseph Gauer, who "developed a reputation for fiery anti-KKK speeches at local Catholic parishes," and who was

50. John B. Stranges, *The Rainbow Never Fades: Niagara University, 1856-2006* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 110-111.

51. James T. Covert, *A Point of Pride: The University of Portland Story* (Portland: University of Portland Press, 1976), 53-54, 63-64.

described by classmates as a "stronger and stronger pillar . . . of the American Unity League."⁵² Despite Loyola's prominent role in the fight against the Ku Klux Klan in Chicago, the city with more Klan members than any other city in the United States,⁵³ there is no record in *Born in Chicago* of Klan harassment of or attacks on Loyola University.

On the other hand, in their 1953 and 2007 histories of Marquette University both Raphael Hamilton and Thomas Jablonsky report that the local Klan chapter was prominently involved in the successful campaign to persuade the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors to reject a proposal to sell a square block of county-owned property to the university for purposes of building a health complex. What's curious here is that the Klan's political intervention took place in 1927, at the very time when the Milwaukee chapter of the Klan was, as David Chalmers observes in *Hooded Americanism*, rapidly splintering into irrelevance. While it seems reasonable to assume that in its years of greatest strength (1923-1924) the Milwaukee Klan did not simply ignore the city's Jesuit university, neither Hamilton nor Jablonsky say anything about Klan cross-burnings or other threats against Marquette in these years (although Jablonsky does mention that Father Fox, the president of the university, spoke out against the Klan in 1925).⁵⁴

Finally there is Denver's Regis University. As Robert Goldberg documents in his fascinating study, *Hooded Empire*, the Klan was a dominant force in Colorado politics in the early 1920s. And Denver, with one-third of Colorado's population, was the center of Klan power. According to Kenneth Jackson, by 1924 the Denver Klavern claimed "state representatives, state senators, the mayor, city attorney, manager of public safety, police chief, police inspector, two deputy sheriffs, the Colorado secretary of state, at least four judges, two federal narcotics agents, and scores of policemen," as well as a

52. Ellen Skerrett, *Born in Chicago: A History of Chicago's Jesuit University* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 118; Jackson, 102-103. While Skerrett notes the AUL's success in weakening the Chicago Klan, Jackson points out that the organization was defunct by 1924, thanks in great part to a "barrage of law suits brought by outraged citizens who felt that they had been incorrectly identified in *Tolerance* as members of the Ku Klux Klan." Jackson, 115.

50. Jackson, 236-237.

54. Raphael N. Hamilton, *The Story of Marquette University: An Object Lesson in the Development of Catholic Higher Education* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1953), 214; Thomas J. Jablonsky, *Milwaukee's Jesuit University: Marquette, 1881-1981* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2007), 122-124. Interestingly, neither book includes the Ku Klux Klan in its index.

"klokann" (KKK executive committeeman) who would soon be elected governor of the state.⁵⁵

Goldberg and Jackson say nothing about Regis College. But in his 1955 study of Catholic education in Colorado, William Jones notes that on April 1, 1924 "a large cross was placed on the campus near Carroll Hall and ignited before the faculty or students were aware of the incident." In his 1989 work, *Colorado Catholicism*, Thomas Noel also reports this incident, but gives a different twist on the Regis response: "According to [one source], 'the Jesuits held the boys back inside or they would have torn those Kluxers apart.'"⁵⁶

While neither Jones nor Noel explores the question as to whether there were other attacks – Jones quite explicitly remarks that "nothing further ever came of it"⁵⁷ – it seems probable that this April 1, 1924 incident was not the only cross burning on or near the Regis campus. Remarkably, the two institutional histories of Regis, Harold Stansell's 1972 *Regis: Crest of the West* and Ronald Brockway's 2003 *Regis: Beyond the Crest*, say nothing about the April 1924 cross burning, much less any other acts of harassment.⁵⁸ This silence is particularly striking in *Beyond the Crest*, given that the author does acknowledge that there is "prevalent lore . . . among old-timers" about "faculty and students" in the 1920s "patroll[ing] the [campus] perimeter at night to prevent unfriendly incursions" by "vehemently anti-Catholic klansmen."⁵⁹

One more point about Regis. In April 1921 the trustees changed the college's name from Sacred Heart to Regis. Both Stansell and Brockway see this name change as unrelated to increased anti-Catholicism in Denver – the latter is explicit on this point – explaining instead that school officials were unhappy with how many schools in America were named "Sacred Heart," and were concerned (to quote Brockway) "about the profane use of a clearly sacred name in sports yells emanating from frenzied fans" as well as unhappiness with students corrupting the school's initials (S.H.C.) "into the unflattering

55. Goldberg, 12-48; Jackson, 215-231 (quote, 222).

56. William H. Jones, *The History of Catholic Education in the State of Colorado* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1955), 237; Noel, 102. According to Noel on the same evening the Klan also burned a cross on the campus of Loretto Heights College.

57. Jones, 237.

58. Harold L. Stansell, *Regis: Crest of the West* (Denver: Regis Educational Corporation, 1977); Ronald S. Brockway, *Regis: Beyond the Crest* (Denver: Regis University, 2003). Stansell's book is the centennial history of the college; for the most part, Brockway's book picks up where Stansell leaves off in the mid-1970s, but he does include a chapter that summarizes highlights from the first 100 years.

59. Brockway, 14.

nickname of 'the Shack.'"⁶⁰ Interestingly, in his unpublished 1997 piece entitled "The 'Regis' of Regis University," John Callahan takes a different tack, arguing that another reason for the name change was that Sacred Heart "provided a clear target for the Ku Klux Klan, which was growing quite powerful in Colorado." A less obviously Catholic name would provide cover, and "Regis" was "chosen because John Francis Regis was a Jesuit saint who worked in the mountains. Simple as that."⁶¹

Conclusion

The confusion as to why Sacred Heart College became Regis College in 1921 is indicative of the larger point that there is much we do not know about the Ku Klux Klan and Catholic higher education in the 1920s. We can say definitively that Notre Dame was **not** the only Catholic institution of higher education that had direct encounters with the Ku Klux Klan. The Klan harassed and attacked both the University of Dayton and Regis College. Moreover, and as with Notre Dame, UD, and perhaps Regis, students were not passive victims; instead, they responded aggressively to the Klan attacks, more aggressively than did their school's administrators.

As suggested in the above review of institutional histories of Catholic schools, there are good reasons to believe that historical investigation will reveal other schools that were targeted by the KKK. The University of Dayton's history clearly indicates that it is time to expand the story of the Ku Klux Klan versus Catholic higher education beyond the Klan's attack on Notre Dame. Just because institutions and institutional histories are silent does not mean that nothing happened. In fact, as the adage goes, the silence is deafening.

60. Stansell, 79-80; Brockway, 14.

61. John J. Callahan, "The 'Regis' of Regis University: A Perspective," in John J. Callahan, ed., *Foundations: The Jesuit Tradition at Regis University* (Denver: n.p., 1997), 1.