

ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

The Ku Klux Klan

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Resources

If you can read only one book

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year.
Trelease, Allen	<i>White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction</i> . New York: Harper & Row, 1971.

Books and Articles

Author	<i>Title</i> . City: Publisher, Year.
Chalmers, David	<i>Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan</i> . New York: Doubleday, 1965.
Dixon, Thomas	<i>The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan</i> . New York: Doubleday, Page, 1905.
Horn, Stanley	<i>Invisible Empire: The Story of the Old Ku Klux Klan 1866-1871</i> . New York and Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1939.
Martinez, J. Michael	<i>Carpetbaggers, Cavalry, and the Ku Klux Klan: Exposing the Invisible Empire During Reconstruction</i> . Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007.
Newton, Michael	<i>White Robes and Burning Crosses: A History of the Ku Klux Klan from 1866</i> . Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014.
Parsons, Elaine Frantz	<i>Ku-Klux: The Birth of the Klan During Reconstruction</i> . Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016.

Organizations

Web Resources

Other Sources

Scholars

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Précis

The hundreds of scholarly and popular works on the Ku Klux Klan published since its formation in 1866 have not produced much agreement on the group’s history, motivation, nature, and meaning. Because the majority of the early information about the founding of the Ku Klux Klan was provided by the founders themselves or their close associates, early discussions of the organization reinforced the narrative of the group as a social organization devoted to helping the area’s Confederate veterans adapt to civilian life. Similar organizations also spread throughout the Confederacy at the same time as the Klan. The number of groups engaged in similar activities in the same area at the same time makes it even more difficult to be sure what the Klan itself was responsible for. Klan costumes ranged from lavish gowns and headpiece with matching disguises for horses to pieces of cheap cloth worn over the face. Their costumes and performances were intended for viewing not only by their immediate victims but also by Northerners (who could not be sure if this was all just a show) and white Southerners who recognized the cultural performance as their own. But intimidation was more often in the manner of physical violence ranging from beatings to murders. The organization did have a formal structure. Although the Klan’s secretive nature makes conclusive evidence elusive, former Confederate Major General Nathan Bedford Forrest was likely its first overall leader (Grand Wizard). There were state, district, and county leaders designated as well. Even with a national leader and organizing documents, individual dens were motivated by specific local conditions. The Republican-controlled Congress became increasingly agitated by the success the Klan was having stopping African Americans and their supporters from voting and passed three enforcement acts in 1870-1871 to curb the violence and voter intimidation. Much of the information we have about Klan activity (including the description of specific incidents) is from the thirteen volumes of documents and testimony given to the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States. The report issued in 1872 included testimony from Forrest, other suspected Klan leaders, and politicians as well as witnesses and victims of Klan violence. The original Klan lasted from 1866 to 1872-1877. It was revived in 1915 and remained active into the 1920s. During the Civil Rights movements of the 1950s the Klan once again became active and while not much of a force remains in existence today. There is no consensus on the number of murders committed by the Reconstruction Klan

with estimates ranging from 1,000 to 3,000.
