

The Truth About the Ku Klux Klan, 1921

By Reuben H. Sawyer

This pamphlet, whose title page is shown here, contained an edited version of “*The Truth about the Invisible Empire, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan*,” a pro-Klan lecture presented at Portland’s Municipal Auditorium on December 22, 1921. A showing of the pro-Klan film, *The Face at Your Window*, followed the lecture. The speaker, Reverend Reuben H. Sawyer, was a part-time pastor at Portland’s East Side Christian Church who traveled to Oregon cities to help organize new KKK chapters, or klaverns.

The rally at the Municipal Auditorium, held just six months after the Klan began recruiting in Portland, attracted thousands—the pamphlet claims 6,000—who came to hear Sawyer speak. Sawyer’s speech defended the KKK and its Imperial Wizard, William Joseph Simmons of Atlanta, who had been charged with violence and vigilantism—charges that had triggered a congressional hearing earlier in the year.

Sawyer also spoke about the Klan’s philosophy and how its central tenets embodied a true and patriotic American spirit. He extolled the Klan’s emphasis on patriotism and said that “unqualified allegiance to the U.S. Government, the flag, and Constitution” were essential qualities for a KKK member to attain “100 percent Americanism.” In addition, Klansmen had to be white, native-born, and Protestant—traits that described almost 90 percent of Oregon’s population. Sawyer urged his listeners “not [to] lose sight of the fact that the white race is the ruling race by right of inheritance and that it does not intend to surrender this right or to compromise it with another race—black, red, yellow, or brown.” Given Oregon’s small minority population, Klan organizers such as Sawyer had shifted the emphasis of their attacks based on race to emphasize differences within the white community, focusing particularly on religion. Catholicism and Judaism became the primary targets of these attacks for not being “American.”

Written by Dane Bevan, 2004; revised 2021

Further Reading

Saalfeld, Lawrence J. *Forces of Prejudice in Oregon, 1920-1925*. Portland, OR: Archdiocesan Historical Commission, 1984.

Horowitz, David. *Inside the Klavern: The Secret History of a Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1999.

Toy, Eckard Vance. “*The Ku Klux Klan in Oregon: Its Character and Program*.” M.A. thesis, University of Oregon, 1959.

Oregon History Project

<https://www.oregonhistoryproject.org/articles/historical-records/the-truth-about-the-ku-klux-klan-1921/>