

BOOK REVIEWS

John Craig. *The Ku Klux Klan in Western Pennsylvania, 1921–1929* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 2015). Pp. xviii, 224. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth. \$84.00.

Popular memory of the 1920s as the “prosperity decade” obscures troubles on the farm, traditionalists’ anger about moral decline, and growing anxiety in Protestant America about a loss of its traditional cultural and political dominance. Perhaps no organization in the 1920s better exemplified the rejection of social ferment than the Ku Klux Klan. In this largely persuasive if occasionally disorganized account of the Klan’s growth and influence in western Pennsylvania during its heyday, 1922–1925, John Craig reinforces elements of recent Klan scholarship, notably in highlighting the broad base of its membership, while showing how in key respects the rise and fall of Pennsylvania’s “hooded empire” stemmed from its internal blunders and factionalism.

Pennsylvania Klansmen, Craig argues, lived primarily in areas where agriculture was in decline, industry was increasingly driving the economy, and non-native population was growing. Each of these trends was problematic for the material prospects of men (and later women) who joined the Klan. In this telling the Klan’s prime *bête noire* was not blacks, but Catholics. Aside from posing a perceived threat to Klansmen’s livelihoods, Roman Catholics, some of whom were new immigrants, represented in Klansmen’s minds a dangerous un-Americanism both in their allegiance to the pope and their propensity for intemperance.

Launched in 1922 with a shrewd marketing campaign promising both male camaraderie and an opportunity to intimidate (and if circumstances

warranted, physically abuse) “immoral” elements in the community, the Klan thrived in small towns throughout western Pennsylvania. Craig asserts that the Pennsylvania Klan gained adherents less for its expressed commitment to moral reform than its advocacy of white Protestant supremacy and willingness to use force to impose it. In this sense the Pennsylvania Klan had more in common with the original, Southern-based KKK than has usually been posited.

The Pennsylvania Klan portrayed itself as a patriotic organization, devoted to traditional American values, including law and order. In fact, it grew quickly in western counties (its membership peaked in 1924 at perhaps 100,000 members statewide) primarily through militant behavior—bursting bombs and burning crosses on private property, invading homes to deliver threats, and delivering vigilante justice. As Craig notes, the Klan in western Pennsylvania “promoted disorder and mayhem” aimed at Catholics, Jews, and African Americans. Far from being law abiding, it was “disdainful” of the law (xvi, 104). One key leader, Sam Rich, the Pennsylvania Klan’s King Kleagle, readily admitted to associates that provoking riots was essential to the order’s prosperity.

What program did the Klan advocate? Klansmen had substantive ideas about public policy, including support for strong federal action supporting farmers, taxing unused land, and funding bonuses for all veterans, but there was no Klan “program” beyond raking in dues and other fees. Klan inspired riots sparked arrests of its members (including several key leaders), which generated a raft of negative press attention and put the organization on the defensive. Perhaps most significant, Craig recounts a disastrous decision to establish “charter” Klan organizations, as opposed to those “provisionally” chartered. This meant substantially increased individual dues, some of which would kickback to Klan leaders. These fees dissuaded many would-be Klansmen from joining and led others to drop out because the cost was seen as too much to bear. The “house of cards” (211) that was the Pennsylvania Klan was soon to collapse.

The Klan’s political influence in the 1920s has been a common theme in studies focused on the Klan in particular locales. Klansmen controlled state governments in Colorado and Indiana and elected mayors and legislators in communities across the North, from Portland, Oregon, to Portland, Maine. But in Pennsylvania, as Craig sees it, the Klan’s political influence was never great. Perhaps because its leaders were either focused

on self-enrichment, distracted by legal troubles, or engaged in factional intrigue, the Klan played little role in backing statewide candidates or influencing party platforms. When it did back candidates for local and state offices, it had modest success at best. As scandals ensnared such national leaders as Hiram Evans and D. C. Stephenson, and the Pennsylvania Klan lost its allure as a militant organization, membership declined precipitously beginning in 1925. Any hope that the Klan might reshape Pennsylvania politics disappeared.

So what are readers to make of the KKK in Pennsylvania and John Craig's workmanlike effort to take its measure? Craig's study serves as a reminder that definitive generalizations about the Klan's membership, *modus operandi*, and influence will continue to be elusive, because there were so many variants of an order that represented some of the darker impulses in American political culture, and so many different contexts in which the Klan emerged. There was no "key" to the Klan as avatar of "twentieth-century Americanism," or its rapid flameout.

It is a virtue of Craig's approach to the Western Pennsylvania Klan that he does not draw rigid lines within the state or beyond it, and that he has consulted a large, disparate, and growing body of scholarship on the second Ku Klux Klan. This reader would have appreciated more reflection and comparative analysis, drawing connections between Pennsylvania Klansmen's outlook and those in other states—for example, by taking note of Ronald Edsforth's discussion of the Klan in Flint, Michigan. Edsforth observes that:

the Klan sought moral influence, not real power. . . . Flint's Klansmen had no clear vision of an alternative institutional structure for local society. Nor did they try to create a party of their own capable of challenging the hegemony of the GOP. . . . In this sense, the Ku Klux Klan's brand of discontent in Flint mostly amplified political trends that had been initiated already by the dominant business-class elite, especially superpatriotism and the demand for the Americanization of foreigners, for a stricter enforcement of Prohibition, and for a crack-down on local vice.¹

Edsforth's observations resonate with Craig's and would have provided a natural basis for comparison. Further examples could be drawn from the work of Shawn Lay, Nancy McLean, Leonard Moore, Thomas Pegram,

William D. Jenkins, and others. That said, Craig is to be commended for having dug as thoroughly as he did in previously unexploited newspapers and court records, among other primary sources, and making good sense of what he found. This book makes a valuable contribution to Klan studies.

MICHAEL J. BIRKNER
Gettysburg College

NOTE

1. Ronald Edsforth, *Class Conflict and Cultural Consensus: The Making of a Mass Consumer Society in Flint, Michigan* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 112.

Gilbert W. Fairholm. *Exceptional Leadership: Lessons from the Founding Leaders* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013). Pp. viii, 325, bibliography, index. Hardbound, \$85.00.

In the early years of the United States, John Jay reputedly stated: “those who own the country ought to govern it.” Gilbert Fairholm has a take on this dictum in *Exceptional Leadership: Lessons from the Founding Leaders*. On one hand, he does not think that structural inequality exists in America. On the other hand, he supports the notion of authoritarian leadership.

Fairholm validates his theories of organizational management and his views on the proper relationship between the workplace and political participation. His general argument is that America’s “founding leaders” instituted the principles of American exceptionalism that thrive in modern-day work settings (3). But, he argues, the core values of natural rights, equality, opportunity, happiness, freedom, and fairness must be reinforced. Fairholm examines “founding documents” produced between 1754 and 1831 (8). Each chapter is composed of a particular primary document and an analysis of its managerial significance. Among them, the federal Constitution incorporated both fundamental core principles and many provisions of the Albany Plan of Union and the Virginia Bill of Rights. The lesson posed by the doctrine of judicial review, as introduced in *Marbury v. Madison*, is that bosses should be just in their dealings with employees. Fairholm declares that multiculturalism undermines a community’s cohesion, but